



Majorcan Catalan in San Pedro, Argentina

The Case for an Endangered Heritage Language Variety

Marc Gandarillas

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macmillan

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*Pequeña caracola
peregrina del Mediterráneo:
por tu nácar rajado,
un reguero de almas.
Cascando,
en un solo pie,
la profundidad.
Salteando y saltando,
tirando pequeñas perlas
como en una rayuela,
desde el Mediterráneo
hasta el Atlántico.
(Hasta el río Paraná,
para ser más precisos.)
Atravesaron nueve mundos,
nuevos mundos.
Ya han llegado,
todas.
Se alinean
para la foto.
Sonreír,
aguantar la respiración.
Última vida.
Final de joc.
Todo es ganancia, ahora.
El Paraíso:
al fin.
El Paradís, al cap;
es ahí
donde se vuelven perlas
los granitos de arena.*

(Jorge L. Sagraera, *Vida de una nube*)

To the Majorcan community of San Pedro, Argentina

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About the Author

Marc Gandarillas (Vilafranca del Penedès, Barcelona—1987) holds a B.A. in classics (2009), a B.A. in linguistics (2014), an M.A. in ancient cultures and languages (2011) from the Universitat de Barcelona, and a Ph.D. in Romance languages and Hispanic linguistics from the University of Florida (2022). He concluded his master's degree with a thesis on the specificity of Sardinian regarding Latin lexical heritage. Since 2009, Marc has been a language instructor (Consorti d'Educació de Barcelona, Educational Partners International) and collaborated extensively with textbook publishers and translation companies. In 2018, he was admitted to the Ph.D. program in Romance languages and Hispanic linguistics at the University of Florida, where he specialized in linguistic anthropology and variationist sociolinguistics as applied to Catalan-speaking heritage communities in the Americas, for which he was awarded a Fundació La Caixa scholarship (2020–2022). His interests include—but are not limited to—sociolinguistics, anthropological linguistics, revitalization of minority/minoritized languages, and language ecology and policy within a context of institutional multilingualism (including issues ranging from neology to language standardization in educational settings and the media). He is a member of the North American Research Network in Historical Sociolinguistics (NARNiHS), Grup de Lingüistes per la Diversitat (GLiDi), and Professionals de la Llengua Catalana de la

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Abbreviations and Keywords

ant.	antiquated
Arg. Sp.	Argentinian Spanish
<i>article literari</i>	Definite article used in all written varieties of Catalan (from Lat. ILLE, ILLA, ILLUD “that”), as well as in all oral varieties except Balearic Catalan (e.g., Majorcan, Menorcan). Its forms are <i>el</i> (m. sg.), <i>la</i> (f. sg.), <i>els</i> (m. pl.), and <i>les</i> (f. pl.) “the”
<i>article salat</i>	Definite article historically used in oral varieties of Catalan (from Lat. IPSE, IPSA, IPSUM “himself, herself, itself”), which nowadays is only fully preserved in the popular speech of the Balearic varieties (e.g., Majorcan, Menorcan). Its forms are <i>es</i> (m. sg.), <i>sa</i> (f. sg.), <i>es</i> (m. pl.), and <i>ses</i> (f. pl.) “the”
aux.	auxiliary verb or verb form
Bal. Cat.	<i>see</i> Balearic Catalan
Balearic Catalan	Catalan varieties spoken in the Balearic Islands, especially Majorcan, Menorcan, and Ibizan.
Cat.	<i>see</i> Catalan
Catalan	Romance language that is currently primarily spoken in the eastern regions of the Iberian Peninsula (i.e., Catalonia, Valencian Country, Balearic Islands), Andorra, southeastern France, and Alghero (Sardinia, Italy). The term can also be used instead of <i>Catalonian</i>

	as a demonym applied to the inhabitants of Catalonia. This use is, however, avoided in the present volume to ensure clarity
Cat. Cat.	<i>see</i> Catalanian Catalan
Catalan-speaking	Region in which Catalan is spoken. May also refer to either a community where this language is spoken or a member thereof
Catalonia	Stateless country that is currently split under Spanish (Southern Catalonia or, simply, Catalonia) and French (Northern Catalonia) administration, where Catalan is spoken as the historical and traditional language
Catalonian	Demonym of Catalonia
Catalonian Catalan	Set of varieties of the Catalan language that are spoken in Catalonia
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare [to]
code-switch	Spontaneous alternation in conversation between two or more languages or varieties within the same language
CS	<i>see</i> code-switch
e.g.	(from Lat. <i>exempli gratia</i> , lit. “for the sake of example”) for example, for instance
Eastern Catalan (E Cat.)	(Cat. <i>català oriental</i>) Linguistic group of varieties of the Catalan language spoken in the eastern provinces of Catalonia (i.e., Barcelona, Girona, Tarragona), southeastern France (i.e., Roussillon, also known in Catalan as Northern Catalonia), the Balearic Islands (e.g., Majorca, Menorca, Ibiza), and Alghero (in the island of Sardinia, under Italian administration)
Eng.	English
esp.	especially
ext. (by)	By extension. Typically used to introduce a meaning of a polysemous word that derives from its original semantic characterization
Fr.	French
f.	feminine
Gr.	<i>see</i> Greek

Greek	Indo-European language primarily spoken in Greece. It is well known as the source of multiple scientific terms in English and other languages
i.e.	(from Latin <i>id est</i>) that is, that is to say, in other words
imp.	imperative
It.	<i>see</i> Italian
Italian	Romance language primarily spoken in Italy and southern Switzerland
inf.	infinitive
Lat.	<i>see</i> Latin
Latin	Indo-European language which eventually evolved into the current Romance languages
lit.	literally
m.	masculine
Maj. Cat.	Majorcan Catalan
Majorcan	Native to the island of Majorca
Majorcan Catalan	Variety of Balearic Catalan spoken on the island of Majorca
Northern Catalonia	(also referred to as <i>French Catalonia</i> or <i>Roussillon</i>) Cultural and linguistic region in current southeastern France in which Catalan is spoken as the historical and traditional language. It encompasses the administrative divisions of Roussillon (Cat. <i>Rosselló</i> , a term sometimes used to refer to the entirety of Northern Catalonia), Vallespir, Conflent, and Cerdagne (Cat. <i>Cerdanya</i>). Prior to the Treaty of the Pyrenees (1659), Northern Catalonia used to constitute a single political entity along with modern-day Southern Catalonia (simply known as <i>Catalonia</i>), under Spanish administration
pl.	plural
Sard.	<i>see</i> Sardinian
Sardinian	Romance language spoken on the Italian island of Sardinia
sg.	singular
sic	(from Lat. <i>sic</i> “like this”) like this, so, thus (esp. used to draw the reader’s attention to a purposefully reproduced error)

xx Abbreviations and Keywords

Sp.	<i>see</i> Spanish
Spanish	Romance language native to Castile, in modern-day Spain, which is nowadays widely spoken throughout Latin America, the Philippines, and a number of regions in Western Africa as a result of colonization processes
Val. Cat.	<i>see</i> Valencian Catalan
Valencian Catalan	Variety of Western Catalan spoken in the Valencian Country and the Carxe (Sp. <i>El Carxe</i>) region in northern Murcia, Spain. Valencian Catalan is typically referred to as <i>Valencian</i> by speakers thereof
Valencian Country	(Cat. <i>País Valencià</i>) Region under Spanish administration where Catalan is spoken as the historical language for most of the territory. In Spanish, the term <i>Comunidad Valenciana</i> is used most frequently
var.	Variety or varieties of a language, especially those pertaining to specific geographical areas. This term has a meaning similar to <i>dialect</i> , which in this volume is mostly avoided due to its potentially derogatory connotations
Western Catalan (W Cat.)	(Cat. <i>català occidental</i>) Linguistic group within Catalan comprising the language's varieties spoken in Catalonia's western regions (e.g., province of Lleida, Terres de l'Ebre), as well as Andorra, the Valencian Country, and the Carxe (Sp. <i>El Carxe</i>) region in Murcia, Spain

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1

Introduction

1.1 Overview and Research Goals

This volume targets the variety of Catalan that is currently spoken as a heritage language in San Pedro, Argentina, in contact with Argentinian Spanish. My fieldwork in this community has assisted me in shedding light upon the field of underrepresented European languages in bilingual settings in the Americas. Approaching the Catalan variety spoken in the community under study also seems to become a necessity in terms of language documentation. Largely relying on an aging population of speakers, San Pedro Catalan evinces the signs of decline and subsequent endangerment found in comparable speech communities.

Following the passing of its current speakers, San Pedro Catalan is likely to become extinct. Even as the Agrupación Mallorca has traditionally played a significant role in teaching and actively promoting the language, at the time of writing this volume no revitalization efforts appear to be underway for San Pedro Catalan.

Scholarly interest in the field of minority or, often more appropriately, *minoritized* languages has been widespread since the mid-twentieth century, increasing in recent times (e.g., Blommaert & Dong, 2010;

Chini, 2011; James, 2018; Kulick, 1992; Li, 1994; Makihara, 2009, 2010; Haugen, 1969). Still, the community of San Pedro Catalan-Spanish bilinguals has largely flown under the radar of sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists alike, with only a few remarkable exceptions to this being encountered (e.g., Jofre, 1996; Jofre & Montoya, 1997; Montoya & Jofre, 2003; Montoya, 2003, 2017a, b).

The present volume therefore intends to remedy a major gap in the field, it being the case that the Catalan language has rarely been studied beyond the European regions where it is traditionally acknowledged as a historical language or, to cite a common designation in Catalan, *llengua pròpia*. These include Catalonia, the Valencian Community or Valencian Country, and the Balearic Islands, currently under Spanish administration, besides Northern Catalonia, in France, and Alghero, on the Italian island of Sardinia.

For the purposes of the research presented here, a total of 49 participants were recruited from a set of members and acquaintances related to the local cultural institution Agrupación Mallorca San Pedro (henceforth commonly referred to as *Agrupación Mallorca* or, simply, *Agrupación*). All participants were San Pedro, Argentina, locals of Catalan-speaking descent. The following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the anthropological underpinnings that characterize the bilingual Catalan-Spanish community of San Pedro, Argentina?
2. What is the current sociolinguistic status of Catalan in the community under study?
3. What are the salient phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical features found in San Pedro Catalan?
4. Do distributional patterns in the use of the past tenses *perfet perifràstic* and *perfet compost* in San Pedro Catalan differ from those encountered in European Catalan? If so, how may language contact and heritage language attrition account for this variation by comparison with European Catalan?

The first and second research questions are approached in Chaps. 3 and 4, respectively, while the third and fourth research questions are answered in Chap. 5.

For the fourth research question, based on early exploratory conversations (Task 1), participants were initially hypothesized to demonstrate a preference for the *perfet perifràstic* in lieu of the *perfet compost* (e.g., *Aquest matí vaig anar a la botiga*, lit. “This morning I went to the store”; vs. Eur. Cat. *Aquest matí he anat a la botiga*, lit. “This morning I have been to the store”; cf. Arg. Sp. *Esta mañana fui a la tienda*, Eur. Sp. *Esta mañana he ido a la tienda*; for literature on the distribution of these two tenses in Catalan, see Salvador, 1995—for Spanish, consult Ariolfo, 2019; Valls Figuera, 2017; Moreno Burgos, 2015). Also, it was originally presumed that a number of participants would be using the *perfet perifràstic* as an intentional future (e.g., *[Jo] vaig (a) arribar* meaning “I am going to arrive,” instead of Eur. Cat. “I arrived”).

The study of San Pedro Catalan remains relevant on multiple fronts like sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, since it demonstrates the potential to provide insightful clues on how language shift operates in bilingual settings featuring a minoritized language. The linguistic outcomes of language contact typically encountered in such settings therefore become a major potential focus of interest.

While the earliest approach to the community dates to the first quarter of 2020, all tasks were conducted between the fall of 2021 and the spring of 2022. Due to COVID-19 travel constraints, all experiments were held remotely, primarily over *Zoom*. Task 1 consisted of an open meeting, providing an early approach to the community in a relaxed environment, as well as basic clues on the overall ties of early recruited participants ($N = 19$) to their heritage language and culture. This instrument also facilitated so-called “snowball recruitment” (see Tagliamonte, 2006), thus expanding the initial participant pool for the subsequent experiments.

For Task 2, recruited individuals ($N = 49$) participated in individual 60-minute sociolinguistic interviews based on a number of preestablished questions. These interviews were primarily conducted over *Zoom* and audio-recorded for transcription purposes and subsequent analysis. Task 3 featured a peer collaborative task, specifically an elicitation experiment targeting Catalan past tenses *perfet perifràstic* (e.g., *vaig arribar* “I arrived”) and *perfet compost* (e.g., *he arribat* “I have arrived”). Participants for this experiment were recruited from the pool previously established for Task 2. Primarily, those individuals were selected that had

been assigned a PLC₁ or ‘fully bilingual’ score (for detailed information on PLC levels, refer to Sect. 2.2.3).

In terms of analysis, thematic analysis was conducted of Task 2 interviews to establish a number of emic categories, regarding—respectively—the anthropological (RQ #1; Chap. 3) and sociolinguistic (RQ #2; Chap. 4) characterization of the community under study. Specifically for the anthropological underpinnings of the community (Chap. 3), nine overarching categories were identified: (1) history of the San Pedro Majorcan community (including local institutions dedicated to heritage preservation); (2) Argentinian-Majorcan biculturalism; (3) professions; (4) naming peculiarities; (5) gastronomy; (6) heritage celebrations; (7) traditional dances; (8) games and entertainment; (9) revival attempts of the Majorcan heritage.

In terms of sociolinguistic characterization (Chap. 4), this analysis revealed a total of eight emic categories: (1) Catalan-Spanish asymmetric bilingualism in the community under study; (2) status of the heritage language in terms of cross-generational transmission; (3) current use of Majorcan Catalan in the community; (4) San Pedroans’ perceived future of their heritage language; (5) speaker and non-speaker attitudes toward Catalan as the heritage language in the community; (6) popular preservation of the heritage language (e.g., in idiomatic expressions, lexicalized phrases, swearwords, riddles, nursery rhymes, or popular songs); (7) linguistic self-identification; (8) public and institutional presence of Catalan within the community (i.e., media, education, literary and non-literary documentation).

As for the third and fourth research questions, these are answered in Chap. 5. The first part of this chapter provides an overview of the linguistic characterization of San Pedro Catalan (RQ #3) in terms of phonology, morphosyntax, and lexis, based on the sociolinguistic interviews conducted for Task 2. The second part of Chap. 5 is dedicated to a (socio)morphological case study (RQ #4).

Specifically, an elicitation experiment (Task 3) was conducted to target San Pedroans’ use of Catalan past tenses *perfet perifràstic* (e.g., *va menjar* ‘s/he ate’) and *perfet compost* (e.g., *ha menjat* ‘s/he has eaten’). From the beginning, the aforementioned tenses—which in European Catalan tend

to occur in complementary distribution¹—were hypothesized to demonstrate certain variation in San Pedro Catalan as compared to European Catalan varieties, based on cross-linguistic contact of the former with Argentinian Spanish and the advanced state of obsolescence and attrition that appears to characterize the minoritized language in the community under study.

1.2 The Community of Catalan-Spanish Bilinguals in San Pedro, Argentina

The town of San Pedro, located in the Argentinian province of Buenos Aires, has a population of 47,452 (2010 census). It is located along the Paraná River, slightly over one hundred miles northwest of the capital city of Buenos Aires. In San Pedro, a colonial language encounter is primarily found between Catalan and Spanish, although there also remain a few heritage speakers of Italian.

Catalan speakers of various origins have been present in the San Pedro area for many decades. These include Catalonians² (especially from some of the rural areas in the province of Lleida, such as Vilanova de la Sal, and coastal towns along the Costa Brava, including Blanes), as well as—reportedly and to a lesser extent—Ibizans. A small number of participants in the present study have Catalan as their heritage language, even

¹In virtually all Catalan varieties, the traditional use of these tenses remains distinct, thus not typically overlapping in any given context. This poses a contrast to their functional counterparts in Spanish, generally known in the United States as *pretérito* (e.g., [*yó*] *comí*, lit. “I ate”) and *presente perfecto* (e.g., [*yó*] *he comido*, lit. “I have eaten”). While in some European Spanish varieties both tenses can be used rather interchangeably (e.g., *Esta mañana he ido / fui a comprar*, lit. “This morning I have gone / went shopping”), Latin American Spanish tends to resort to the former for most contextual needs.

²Since *Catalan* can be both a demonym for Catalonia natives and the name of the language spoken in Catalonia and other regions, I have chosen to keep the distinction between *Catalan*, to designate the language, and *Catalonian*, as the demonym for an individual from Catalonia. Such differentiation is not possible in either Catalan or Spanish, which use the same term for both (i.e., *català* and *catalán*, respectively). The identification between these terms and the toponym *Catalonia* is likely at the root of a linguistically unsustainable controversy by which some speakers from areas other than Catalonia claim not to speak Catalan but their own variety of the language (e.g., Majorcan, Menorcan, Ibizan, Valencian).

when their ancestry is not connected with the island of Majorca.³ It might be relevant to note that most Majorcan-descent San Pedroans appear to hail from the town of Felanitx, as well as—to a lesser extent—Petra, Manacor, and Palma.

San Pedro Catalan is currently undergoing a process of steady recession in favor of Spanish, which serves as both the majority language and the lingua franca of the community (Montoya, 2017b: 37–72). A current estimate of local Catalan speakers is difficult to establish, since no previous language censuses exist that might be used for reference or estimative purposes.

1.2.1 History of the Majorcan Community of San Pedro, Argentina

To date, documentation on the history of the Majorcan community of San Pedro remains scarce. Early Majorcan settlers most likely arrived in the San Pedro area in the late 1850s and early 1860s. This inaugurated a migratory wave that would eventually conclude in 1899 (Montoya, 2017b: 12–15). Two additional migratory waves would soon follow, roughly matching the 1900–1939 and 1940–1960 periods (Jofre, 1996: 35–37; Jofre & Montoya, 1997: 103; Miralles & Jofre, 2009: 24–25; Montoya, 2017b).

In the 1918 and 1929 population censuses of San Pedro, 141 male Majorcans are listed among the town's residents (Montoya, 2017b: 14; Miralles & Jofre, 2009: 454 *et seq.*). The fact that only male residents are referenced in these censuses likely indicates the role of these individuals as heads of their respective households. Consequently, the actual number of Majorcan immigrants at the time (i.e., including women and children) would have been considerably larger.

Montoya (2017b: 14–17) recounts how local Italian-descent historian Américo Piccagli mentioned to him firsthand that, by 1910, the San

³ Throughout the volume, the reader will consistently encounter the term *Majorcan Catalan*, since the vast majority of Catalan speakers in San Pedro are Majorcan descendants. It is, however, important to keep in mind that a small number of San Pedroans—including some of the participants recruited—hail from Catalan-speaking regions other than Majorca.