

CHAPTER 8

Phonological features of attrition

The shift from Catalan to Spanish in Alicante

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This paper examines phonological attrition from a variationist viewpoint in an urban speech community where the target language is a marginalized one. This language is Catalan, the major speaking area of which is dominated by Spanish. Fieldwork is based on a sample of 69 subjects representing the small number of speakers born in the city who learnt Catalan by engaging in natural meaningful communication. In the past, the phonological level of the grammar had remained the most faithful to the Catalan heritage in local speech. Recently, however, this component of grammar has become the most affected by attrition, as shown in the vocalic and consonantal systems, which are now converging from Catalan to Spanish.

Introduction

Dressler (1972) and Dorian (1973) were responsible for initiating discussion of *language death*, and since then studies about it have multiplied. The two main perspectives which inform these studies are social status and linguistic structures (Dorian 1989). It is this latter approach which concerns us in the present study, and it involves analysis of the disintegration or *attrition* of the structures of a recessive language (Andersen 1982). An additional theoretical distinction must be made among studies focusing on linguistic structures, as the term attrition is applied as well to aphasic research (Seliger & Vago 1991).¹ However, it is not the individual's health which concerns us here, but the health of the language in a minority situation. This "language disease" occurs in multilingual speech communities where a failure to transmit the former speakers' first language (L1) between consecutive generations gives rise to a new class of speakers with low proficiency

1. There is another trend in the study of attrition: the oblivion of languages explicitly learnt (Lambert 1989; Ellis 1994).

in this language. These are called *semi-speakers* (Dorian 1977), and in nearly all cases their parents did not speak to them in their traditional language (L1) but rather spoke to them in the new dominant language. As a consequence, these semi-speakers only have listened passively to the recessive language, which has remained as their L2 (Andersen 1989:386). In these conditions, as older generations of fluent speakers disappear, the traditional language – as spoken by semi-speakers – is characterized by attrition.

However, attrition starts before semi-speakers have appeared; the process begins among their forebears, who first learnt the dominant language. From this point the initial full range of speech situations that characterized the older language decreases, until *stylistic shrinkage* (Campbell & Muntzel 1989:195) or *monostylism* (Dressler & Wodak-Leodolter 1977:36) is manifested by the generations preceding the appearance of semi-speakers. This implies that the other contextual styles would be implemented in the new dominant language, which is perceived more and more as “their other language,” alongside the traditional one. These conditions favor the massive transfer of units and structures from one language, which we may refer to as higher (H), to another, described as lower (L).² That is to say, bilingual speakers not only use the H language in high styles but also use small integrated pieces of H in their discourse in the L language. Moreover, they sometimes codeswitch (metaphorically or situationally) with great skill when required. In the end, when it is no longer considered necessary to bring up the young with the L language, the first generation without the ancestral language arises. It is at this point that we begin referring to language death and attrition (Montoya 2000:16–18).

Typology of the structural changes

The present study is concerned with phonology, but before we move on to our main area of interest, it will be useful to fix our context with the aid of Dressler (1988), Campbell & Muntzel (1989) and Clairis (1991), who show the variety of ways in which the other main components of grammar are manifested in a dying language.

The morphological component shows the most symptoms of attrition; the inflections show a regularization and reduction of paradigms, and the marking of number, gender, and case tend to disappear. It is in the lexicon that the influence of the dominant language becomes most evident.

2. This distinction is inspired by the similar one proposed by Ferguson (1959).

The syntactic component exhibits the shift from synthetic to analytic verbal forms, the disappearance of the passive voice, elimination of the obligatory SVO order after elimination of the inflection, and loss of subordination.

The structural changes that take place in the phonological component, the most widespread sign of attrition in the Alicante speech community, consistently show the following characteristics among other languages around the world:

- a. The direction of the changes is always from the subordinate towards the dominant language, which results in asymmetrical *convergence* of the two languages involved in the conflict (Poplack 1995).
- b. Consequently, most of the changes are *externally induced* (Seliger & Vago 1991:7), but when they are *internally induced*, this is referred to as analogical leveling, or generalization of the rules affected (Silva-Corvalán 1991:152).
- c. The previous point means that changes tend to be simplifying, implying a reduction in inventories or in the distribution of the units affected, although some authors criticize the validity of the concept of *simplification* (Hollaway 1997:47–48).
- d. The universally unmarked forms are likely to dominate the marked ones (Seliger & Vago 1991:13).
- e. The amount and speed of changes is superior to those in healthy languages. A multiplication of allophones in free variation emerges in contrast to the reduction of allomorphy (Giacalone 1983:496, 501; Clairis 1991).
- f. Some changes may be *nonce loans* in the individuals' speech and so cannot be generalized to the whole community or social group (Sankoff, Poplack & Vanniarajan 1990; Turell 1994).

Not everything, however, is as clear as it appears. On the one hand, the problem of multiple causation makes it difficult to decide whether a change comes from the dominant language or corresponds to an internal rule (Campbell & Muntzel 1989:188; Poplack 1995:Part 3). On the other hand, healthy languages also tend to change to unmarked forms (Labov 1994:17). In general, the Labovian framework of linguistic change, confirmed only in healthy languages, is valid also in the study of threatened languages, but only if we account for some differences, mainly in the independent variable of social class, whose predictive role in variation may be replaced by factors related to language attrition (King 1989:139).

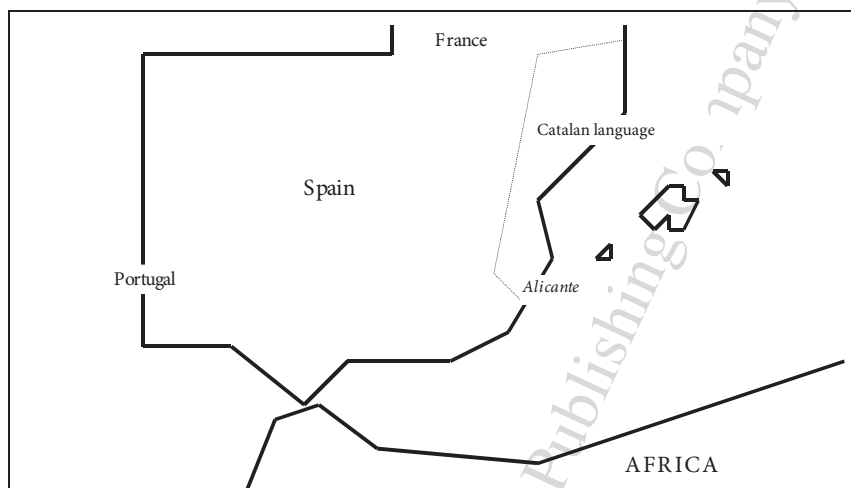


Figure 1. Geographical location of the Catalan language and the city of Alicante

The speech community: Alacant

Contrary to the general rule in case studies of language obsolescence, the speech community which we are discussing is not a rural area where the remains of a language which was more extensive in the past are still to be found (Dorian 1986). Our case study concerns a city in the extreme south of the Catalan-speaking area and the Valencian region,³ Alicante (*Alacant*, in the vernacular spelling and pronunciation), with a population of 269,871 (see Figure 1). Only 27% are able to speak the traditional language of the city, that is, Catalan. In addition, only half of these Catalan speakers use Catalan as their family language. Everyone in the city has high proficiency in Spanish, especially the local dialect of the Murcian region.

The present situation has its roots in the 19th century, when upper class families in the city center began to interrupt the transmission of Catalan to their children. In the present century, that fashion extended to the lower classes and the rest of the city (Montoya 1996). Today Catalan has become a residual and marked language in the city and, moreover, a speech without prestige. In addition, those who do speak Catalan often do not follow the traditional norms of the original language.

3. The other main regions in the Catalan-speaking lands are Catalonia and the Balearic Islands.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork is based on a sample of 69 subjects, representative of the approximately 20,500 Catalan speakers born in the city who had learnt Catalan by engaging in natural meaningful communication, that is, outside academic settings (see Ellis 1994), all of them above 30 years old. The social factors included are sex, age, skill in Catalan, and residential area. Class was excluded because the upper classes are no longer Catalanophones, as noted above. The two different kinds of speakers identified (fluent speakers and semi-speakers) correspond with those studied in the literature of language death, as we have seen. The semi-speakers are differentiated from fluent speakers by the linguistic features explained below, as well as by several morphological features. They are usually defined by the fact that their parents did not speak to them in Catalan during childhood. Younger speakers are usually more likely to be semi-speakers. Table 1 and Figure 2 show the distribution of the sample.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample of speakers.

Sex		Age	
Men	40	30–39	4
Women	29	40–49	9
		50–59	15
		60–69	19
<i>Kind of speakers</i>			
Fluent speakers	25	70–79	18
Semi-speakers	44	80+	4

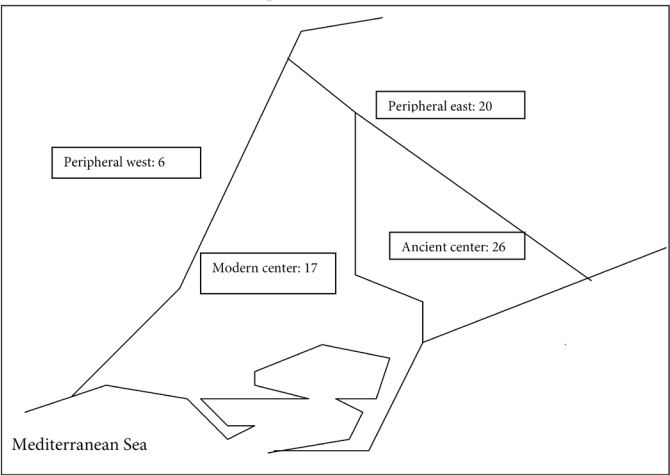


Figure 2. Map of the residential areas of the city of Alicante with the subjects' distribution

The interviews consisted of a life story in which free narratives were produced in order to elicit casual speech, the only style these speakers can manage in Catalan. The statistics program used to count the tokens and then calculate the probabilities of the variable rule was GoldVarb 2.0 (Variable Rule Analysis for the MacintoshTM).⁴

The problem of gathering language data in dying languages⁵

The local Catalan of Alicante has been described repeatedly since the dialectologist Alcover (1908–1909) visited the city for the first time in 1902. Research on local speech continued ~~uneventfully~~ until the end of the sixties, up until the time of the fieldwork for the *Atles Lingüístic del Domini Català* 1967 (“Linguistic Atlas of the Catalan Dominion” [ALDC], Veny & Pons 2001–2006), but subsequent researchers wishing to record interviews had to look for speakers in the rural area surrounding the city. For example, we may draw attention to a statement made by Colomina (1986:299):

In the city of Alicante it proved impossible to find speakers aged between twenty and thirty with Catalan as their mother language, and I had to interview a woman from *el Palamó* who was 49. [translated from Catalan]

The sociolinguistic setting described above suggests that Catalan speakers had become fewer and older. Despite these difficulties, however, a more accurate sampling technique still provided us with a sufficient number of speakers to describe the Alicante linguistic variety (see Montoya 1996).

Changes in the local phonology

The phonological level is the level that has remained the most faithful to the Catalan heritage in the local speech of Alicante during the centuries of bilingualism with Catalan as L1 and Spanish as L2 (Montoya 1996: 41–53). Now, however, this component of grammar has become the most affected by attrition, as described below in detail.

4. The authors are David Rand and David Sankoff (“A Variable Rule Application for the MacintoshTM”), from the *Centre de Recherches Mathématiques, Université de Montréal*.

5. I take this title and the problem set out here from Dorian (1986).

The vocalic system

Catalan has two vocalic subsystems. One, with four degrees of opening, is produced in the stressed position, while the other, which has only three degrees of opening, is produced in unstressed position.⁶ When the stressed subsystem is reduced to the unstressed subsystem, then the semi-open [ɛ] and [ɔ] disappear. Consequently, the monosyllabic (stressed) primitive words *verd* [vert] ('green') and *pot* [pɔt] ('pot, jar, can') change their semi-open vowels to semi-closed ([e] and [o]) when they take a derivative form: *verdura* [ver'ðura] ('vegetable'), *potet* [po'tet] ('a little pot, jar or can'). (See the two vocalic subsystems of Catalan in Figure 3.)

i						u		i				u
	e				o				e		o	
		ɛ		ɔ						a		
			a									

Figure 3. Stressed and unstressed vocalic subsystems of (Alicante fluent speakers) of Catalan

Alicante semi-speakers of Catalan, however, tend to lose this reduction rule, and so the trend is towards a single vocalic system, which coincides with the Spanish system. The change is not abrupt, as we have learnt from Labov (1994), because we can observe a range of variability: from the more fluent speakers, who have the complete subsystems, to those at the lower end of the scale, who always lose the two semi-open vowels (in the middle we have the diverse kinds of semi-speakers, those who sometimes lose the semi-open [ɔ]). Rules 1 and 2 below represent this change in course:

Rule 1: (ɛ) → <e>

Rule 2: (ɔ) → <o>

So in the semi-speakers' speech, *verd* and *pot* frequently produced as [vert] and [pot], and consequently the derivative words do not change their vowels: *verdura* [ver'ðura] and *potet* [po'tet].

We can observe a continuum of variants of the semi-open vowels (between [ɛ] and [e] and between [ɔ] and [o]). The more non-fluent the speaker is, the more closed his or her variants are. But while this is the prototype, quantitative analysis

6. This is only strictly true for Western Catalan. In the other dialect, Eastern Catalan, there is one more vowel, the schwa, and the unstressed subsystem is shorter. However, both dialects have in common the possession of a double vocalic subsystem.

Table 2. Probabilities of the close variant [o] of the variable (ɔ) by the kind of speakers and sex

Kind of speaker		Correlated with	Sex	
Fluent speakers	.39	→	Woman	.45
Semi-speakers	.53	→	Men	.52

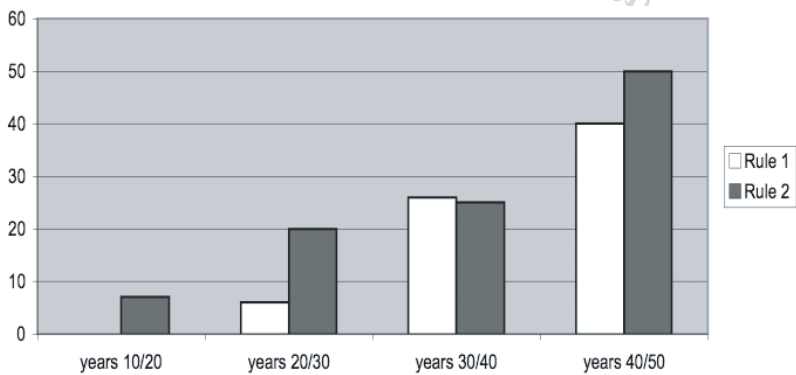


Figure 4. The closing process of the two vowels across the years of socialization of the individuals: Percent of application of Rules 1 and 2 as a function of socialization period (1910–20, 1920–30, 1930–40, 1940–50).

shows that sex and age are social variables which must also be taken into account; the men and the younger individuals have the more closed variants. Table 2 shows the probabilities of these factors for the application of the variable Rule 2 (i.e., realization as [o]).⁷ Figure 4 exhibits the percentages of closing of the two vowels across the years of socialization (i.e., language acquisition) of the subjects. The periods of socialization (1910–1920, 1920–1930, 1930–1940, 1940–1950) show that age is correlated with fluency.

As far as structural aspects are concerned, this rule is only modified by vocalic harmony, perhaps due to functional utility. So, in the case of [ɔ], the more frequent of the two vowels examined, some semi-speakers tend to maintain this vowel in the words affected because of the repetition of the same vowels: *cosa* ['kɔzɔ] ('thing'), *dona* ['dɔnɔ] ('woman'), *obra* ['ɔβɾɔ] ('building site'), *porta* ['pɔɾtɔ] ('door'), *sogra* ['sɔɣɾɔ] ('mother-in-law'), *volta* ['vɔltɔ] ('time, occasion'). But when they do not have this pattern, the [ɔ] may become [o], as in *bo* ['bo]

7. For the variable (ɛ), there were not have enough tokens to calculate probabilities.

Table 3. Percentages of the close variants of (ɛ) and (ɔ) correlated with vocalic harmony

	Words with harmony	Words without harmony
(ɛ) realized as [e]	0 % [0/95]	41 % [111/274]
(ɔ) realized as [o]	6 % [13/235]	38 % [528/1405]

(‘good’), *coses* [‘kozes] (‘things’), *home* [‘ome] (‘man’), *jocs* [‘dʒo^{ks}] (‘games’), *obrin* [‘oβrin] (‘they open’), *pobles* [‘pobles] (‘villages’). See Table 3.

Despite this trend, we may also find harmony with the closed vowel (*dona* [‘dono]) or a lack of harmony: [‘orta] (‘vegetable garden’).

Apart from cases of harmony, the semi-speakers show a majority of closed variants: *astò* [as‘to] (‘this’), *oli* [‘oli] (‘oil’), *ou* [‘ow] (‘egg’), etc, against a few cases of open variants: *nom* [‘nɔm] (‘name’) and some others. The simple alternation of the two *o* is also possible:

pues si que m’anrecorde ([o]) *algunes cossetes* *pero de por* ([ɔ]), *de por* ([ɔ]) *perquè*
io li tinia pues molta por ([o]) *as bombes (...)* *no, no m’ha jubilat: tinc cinquanta-*
nou ([ɔ]) *anys*

[well, I do **remember** some little things but about being **frightened, frightened**
because I was very **scared** of the bombs (...) no, I haven’t retired: I’m fifty-**nine**
years old]

Hypercorrection is additional evidence for the process of closing. In the following example, the word *zona* (‘zone’) is traditionally pronounced with a closed [o], but a semi-speaker pronounces it with an open [ɔ]):

Havia allí una colonia molt gran d’èxa zona ([ɔ])
[‘There was a very big colony from that **zone**’]

The reintroduction of the phoneme /-r/

In Catalan the phoneme /-r/ at the end of the word is phonetically produced in two geographically distributed variants; the alveolar flap [-r] is common in the Valencian region (the continental south) while the phonetic zero (∅) is common in the rest of the territory: *dir* [dir] / [di] (‘to say’), *fer* [fer] / [fe] (‘to do, to make’), *flor* [flɔr] / [flɔ] (‘flower’). Thus the Valencian community coincides at this point with standard Spanish: *decir* [de‘θir] (‘to say’), *hacer* [a‘θer] (‘to do, to make’), *flor* [flor] (‘flower’), etc. But not all the Valencian areas produce this sound. The exceptions are the extreme northern regions that are contiguous with the rest

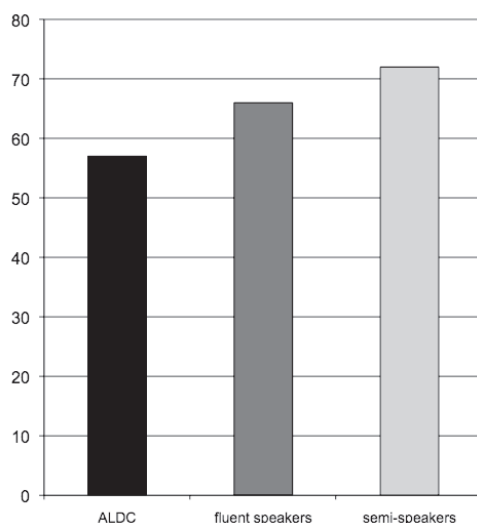


Figure 5. The rising trend of the pronunciation of the alveolar flap, inversely related to the fluency of Catalan speakers: % realized as [-r]

of the territory (Catalonia and the Balearic Islands) and the extreme southwest, near Alicante.

The pronunciation [-r] has always been ascribed to Alicante (Alcover 1908–1909: 276). But according to Veny & Pons (2001–2006) and our own fieldwork, the articulation of [-r] in the local dialect is a variable rule. The hypothesis would be that the trend of variation extends from non-articulation, as in the adjacent Valencian southwest area, to the articulation of [-r], as in the rest of the Valencian region.⁸ The formulation of the corresponding rule will be the following:

Rule 3: (ø) → < r >

Veny & Pons (2001–2006), in their analysis of the 1967 ALDC, show only 57% pronunciation of [-r]. Our results show a significant increase of this pronunciation; 70% occurrences of [-r]. Within our survey, however, we have found a difference depending on the kind of speakers. While our fluent speakers show 66% pronunciation of [-r], a score closer to the ALDC (a quarter of a century before), our semi-speakers have 72%, increasing the difference from the ALDC. Figure 5 shows this increasing trend.

8. We follow the hypothesis of Colomina (1985: 127–137) that the presence of [-r] in the Valencian region was reintroduced at the beginning of the modern period, having been lost one or two centuries before. So this reintroduction would still be in process in Alicante.

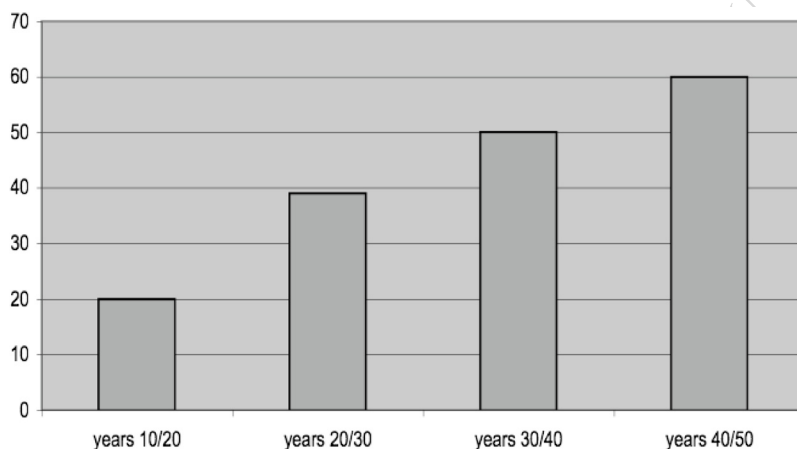


Figure 6. Relation between years of socialization and articulation of the alveolar flap: % realization as [-r]; years of socialization given in the following increments: 1910–20, 1920–30, 1930–40, 1940–50

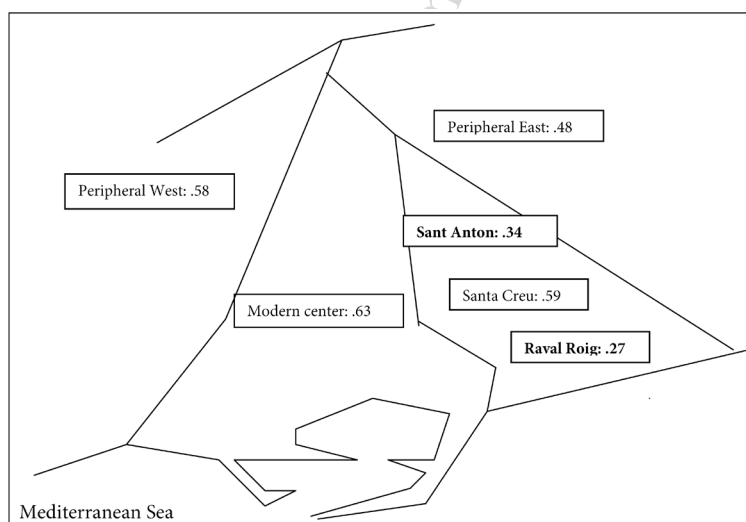


Figure 7. Probabilities of the articulation of [-r] in the different urban areas of the city of Alicante

As in the analysis of the vocalic rules above, the semi-speakers are mainly younger than the fluent ones; this points to generational stratification and indicates the future trend of the variable rule (see Figure 6).

Similarly, the urban areas first hispanized in the city (the modern center, *Santa Creu* (in the ancient center) and the Peripheral West (Montoya 1996))

present higher indexes of [-r] articulation. On the other hand, urban areas where the Catalan transmission was interrupted in more recent times (the Peripheral East, *Sant Anton*, and, especially, *Raval Roig*) maintain the more traditional pronunciation without [-r]. See the Figure 7.

We can now examine the behavior of the rule distributed in the following linguistic contexts with some examples, with and without [-r], elicited from the interviews:

1st context: infinitive plus clitic pronoun		
<i>dir-li a una persona</i>	[dirli a una per'sona]	'to tell a person'
<i>educar-los</i>	[eðu'karlos]	'to bring them up'
<i>alçar-me</i>	[al'same]	'to get up'
2nd context: infinitive inside a phrase		
<i>quedar viuda</i>	[ke,ðar'viwða]	'to be left a widow'
<i>anar a escola+</i>	[a,nar as'kɔla]	'to go to school'
<i>llegir el periòdic</i>	[le,ðʒil pe'rjɔðik]	'to read the newspaper'
3rd context: infinitive at the end of a tone group phrase		
<i>pegaven a volar</i>	[pe,ɣaven a vo'lar]	'they left'
<i>me se va morir</i>	[me se ,va mo'ri]	'he died'
4th context: not verbs (mainly nouns)		
<i>darrere del sopar</i>	[da,rere ðel so'par]	'after dinner'
<i>alredor d'ell</i>	[alreðe,or 'ðeɿ]	'around him'
<i>el carrer Major</i>	[el ka,re ma'dʒo]	'High Street'

Table 4 shows the percentages for each linguistic context both from ALDC and from our survey, whose speakers are classified as fluent speakers and semi-speakers.

There does not appear to be a regular trend between the columns (especially in the 1st and 4th environments), but the percentages hide the fact that higher frequencies of occurrences are found in the 2nd and 3rd contexts. The 2nd context offers the most regular trend to be observed in the table because there are constant and significant increases between one group and the next (from 25% in

Table 4. Percentages of pronunciation of [-r] in Alicante according to each source

Linguistic contexts	ALDC	Our survey:	
		fluent speakers	semi-speakers
1st	19% [3/16]	5% [2/37]	22% [22/98]
2nd	25% [2/8]	68% [135/200]	83% [315/378]
3rd	65% [30/46]	84% [42/50]	86% [103/120]
4th	84% [16/19]	79% [62/78]	66% [118/178]

the ALDC up to 83% in the semi-speakers). And in the 3rd context, we can see the highest indexes in the reintroduction of [-r]. Since this higher use of [-r] reduces the contrast between Catalan and Spanish, we can relate this increase as a new sign of Catalan attrition.

Consonantal reduction

The semi-speakers show several forms of consonantal reduction following the Spanish pattern in general and, in particular, the Murcian sound pattern, a Spanish dialect closer to the Catalan of Alicante. This reduction shows two main trends:

- a. Loss of items of the Catalan inventory (preceded by a reduction in their distribution)
- b. Approximation to Spanish phonotactics in the syllable coda

The loss of items of the Catalan inventory affects the labiodental /v/, the alveolar /z/ and the palatals /ʎ/ and /dʒ/. Although the change from /v/ to /b/ is already extended to most of the Catalan speaking areas, Alicante had previously been an exception to this trend. Some instances are *vella* ['beja] ('old', fem.), *volem* [bo'lem] ('we want') and *vam vindre* [bam 'bindre] ('we came'). The loss of /z/ implies a shift to the corresponding voiceless /s/, a shift which occurs more frequently in the link between words, as in *dos anys* [do 'santʃ]⁹ ('two years'), than within a word, as in *mesureta* [mesu'reta] ('little measure'). Both are voiced in traditional Catalan, respectively [do 'zantʃ], [mezu'reta].

However, the most important reduction in the inventory of Catalan phonemes occurs in the palatal subsystem, where, out of the six phonemes of the fluent Alicante speakers (the very palatal /ʎ/, /j/, and /ɲ/, and the postalveolar /dʒ/, /ʃ/, and /tʃ/), the semi-speakers only have four, leaving out /ʎ/ and /dʒ/ and retaining only /ʃ/ of those which do not exist in Spanish. The result is that the distribution of /ʎ/ and /dʒ/ in the vocabulary is replaced with /j/ in both cases, as can be seen schematically in Rule 4.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{Rule 4: } (\lambda) & & \\ & \rightarrow & <j> \\ & & (dʒ) \end{array}$$

9. The final /-s/ becomes [-tʃ] after [ɲ-].

Table 5. Probabilities of linguistic factors on the delateralization of (ʎ)

At the beginning or in the middle of the word	.73
At the end of the word	.13
Preceding the plural morpheme	.02

Instances of the reduction of (ʎ)¹⁰ are more common: *cistelles* [sis'tejas] ('baskets'), *filla* ['fiʎa] ('daughter'), *dilluns* [di'juns] ('Monday') (instead of [sis'teʎes], ['fiʎa], and [di'ʎuns]). However, they are constrained by both the position in the end of the word (*ell* [eʎ], 'he'; *conill* [ko'niʎ], 'rabbit') and preceding the plural morpheme (/s/ palatalized in [-tʃ]): *ells* [eʎtʃ] ('they'), *fills* [fiʎtʃ] ('sons, sons and daughters'). Table 5 displays the probabilities of the delateralization of (ʎ) depending on the linguistic factors.

The reduction of /dʒ/ is more frequent among the younger semi-speakers. Examples include:

major [ma'jor] 'main, larger' (instead of [ma'dʒor])
fregit [fre'jit] 'fried' (instead of [fre'dʒit])

Another reducible trend in /dʒ/ is also possible: the change to [tʃ]. But this is more uncommon, contrary to what might be suggested by other Catalan zones such as Central Valencia, where this change occurred three centuries ago (Sanchis Guarner 1936). Examples of this change in the speech of some Alicante semi-speakers are *germans* [tʃer'mans] ('brothers, brothers and sisters') or *ajuden* [a'tʃuðen] ('they help').

The approximation to Spanish phonotactics in the syllable coda shows, on the one hand, a convergence with the Spanish Murcian dialect, where the final /s/ is weakened, aspirated or lost, and, on the other, a simplifying process of plosive consonants and consonantal clusters in the non-plosive position. The first case is manifested in the following continuum: /s/ → [-s] → [-h] → [-h] → Ø, the last being the rarest. Consider this utterance from a non-fluent speaker:

és per una des coses que més m'ha agradat
[e^h per una ðes koze^h ke me^h mayraðat]
'it is because of one of the things which I most liked'

There are four realizations of /-s/: three semi-aspirated and only one maintaining the habitual [-s] in Catalan. We also find the related phenomenon of hypercorrection. Another subject said *deus* instead of *deu* ('ten') and *taxis* instead of *taxi*:

10. The only ones of this section that we are going to analyze quantitatively.

*per axó dic que as **deus** anytx ya estava trebayant (...) el xiquiyo ahora s'ha possat a trebayar en un **taxis***

'that's why I say I was already working when I was ten (...) now the child has begun to work as a taxi driver'

The process of simplification of consonants in the implosive position weakens or elides the plosive consonant at the end of the word, particularly the /-t/: *edat* [e'ða^t] ('age'), *amistat* [amis'ta] ('friendliness'), *marit* [ma'ri] ('husband'), *no pot ser* [no po 'ser] ('it couldn't be'). With regard to clusters in the same position, the units affected are the final consonants of the words inflected in the plural, again weakened or elided: *jocs* [dʒo^ks] ('plays'), *poblets* [po'ble^ts] ('villages'), *amics* [a'ɛ mis] ('friends'), *reunions* [reu'njos] ('meetings'), etc. Some semi-speakers maintain the /-s/ of the plural morpheme as a way of showing a minimal awareness of this grammatical marker. However, other semi-speakers lose the plural morpheme instead of the final consonant of the lexeme, which has no morphosyntactic value: *tots es anys* [tot e 'saŋ] ('every year'), *unes mans que tenia* [unez maŋ ke te'nia] ('the hands he had'), etc.

Conclusion

A particular case has been considered, one of many, in which the features of linguistic attrition clearly appear. The grammatical component examined here, phonology, is the one which most clearly shows the signs of attrition in the dying language of the Alicante speech community. The three general features reviewed in the non-fluent Catalan spoken in Alicante (the 7 units of the vocalic system which tend to be reduced to 5 units, the increasing reintroduction of [-r] against the local norm, and consonantal reduction) match perfectly with the typology of structural change which has been reviewed in global terms:

1. The direction of the changes is always from the subordinate language (Catalan here) towards the superordinate one (Spanish), which represents a convergence between the languages involved (from Catalan to Spanish). All the cases studied show the same direction.
2. Most of the changes are externally induced (from Spanish) or involve simplification (vocalic and consonantal reductions) and generalization (the rule of reintroduction of /-r/).
3. Unmarked forms are prevailing over marked forms (the vocalic system of 5 units instead of 7 units and the change from the syllabic pattern CVC(C) to CV are both more common in the languages of the world).

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