

## *En català!*



*Us donem la benvinguda al*

## **II Webcongrés Internacional**

*per a la promoció de la cultura en llengua  
catalana!*

*El menú que teniu al costat us portarà a les  
seccions diferents de la conferència.*



The organisers<sup>1</sup> are immensely grateful to the following people and institutions for the selfless contribution of their time, input and expertise:

- 🇪🇺 Teachers and students at participating schools in the Catalan-speaking areas.
- 🇪🇺 Colleagues at educational centres in Europe and North America in particular Dra Katuscia Darico, Dr Hans-Ingo Radatz, Dr James Hawkey, Dr Sally-Ann Kitts, Sr Jon Landa, Dr Robert Davidson, Prof John London, Ms Ola Goclawska.
- 🇪🇺 La Xarxa Vives d'Universitats.

A century after the outbreak of Spanish flu decimated the continent the COVID-19 pandemic curtailed but could not interrupt this webconference which is dedicated to the health workers and carers who strove selflessly against the virus with commitment and expertise.

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Dominic Keown and Dr Rhiannon McGlade (MMLL, University of Cambridge) and Dr Pedro Fernández (University College, Cork)

# En català

## II Online Conference for the Promotion of Catalan

This second pilot project of a webconference directed at the secondary sector in the Catalan-speaking areas

1. STIMULATED interest in the autochthonous language of Catalan to a target audience of teenagers to redress linguistic substitution by Spanish.
2. CONFIRMED the viability of an online conference for related educational purposes among the same cohort in the UK, especially in the field of the promotion of Modern Languages.



*Valentuber Aitor gives a polished account of Catalan in Altea*

### Format

Encouraged by the response from teachers and students, the II Conference was scheduled for early February, 2020, though the start was delayed by illness which proved problematic here and there. Significant changes and modifications, most occasioned by feedback, were as follows:

- Webpace was now provided generously by the Xarxa Vives d'Universitats ([www.vives.org](http://www.vives.org));
- Recruitment was extended to all schools in the Catalan-speaking areas;
- Webinars by international experts were now presented in Catalan for purposes of improving language prestige domestically;
- Greater efforts were made to dovetail seminars with curricular interest;
- The wider aim of promoting philology *in toto* was abandoned as an over-commitment;
- Forums now replaced contact with experts by email and Skype.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Email – overused and often ignored - has proved to be a poor means of diffusion and communication. Its use will kept to a minimum in future editions with alternative web-based avenues employed.



*Jon Landa Diestro reprises polyglossia in Belgium*

## **Recruitment**

Using the good offices of the Departments of Education of Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearics, an immense number of Catalan-speaking centres (all secondary schools, for example, in Catalonia) were contacted by email in the hope of achieving the participation of some thirty colleges with six forms for what would still be considered as a pilot project. In the event – and despite interest from a good number who only failed to follow through at the last moment – there were 15 participating centres. The majority (9) from Valencia were joined by a further three from Catalonia and two from Majorca. Again reticence in this area was to be expected given the intensity of the curriculum and the highly innovative nature of the initiative, whose format was largely unfamiliar to the secondary community though illness was also a reason for last-minute withdrawal.



*Students and staff welcome the Editor to Benimaclet*

A total of 715 students signed up for the conference, more than twice the participants of the first conference, although only 602 completed the first questionnaire. More than half (309 or 51%) completed the survey at the end of the initiative.

Schools participating:

Balearics

IES Bendinat, Bendinat, Mallorca  
IES Joan Alcover, Palma, Mallorca

Catalonia

Maristes Valldemia, Mataró  
IES Palau Ausit, Ripollet  
IES Milà i Fontanals, Vilafranca del Penedès

Valencia

IES Joan Coromines, Benicarló  
IES Francesc Tàrraga, Vila-real  
IES Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia, Valencia  
IES Lluís Vives, Valencia  
IES Isabel de Villena, València  
IES Salvador Gadea, Aldaia, València  
IES Altaia, Altea  
IES Pere Maria Orts i Bosch, Benidorm  
IES La Malladeta, La Vila Joiosa



*Tots som vilafranquins! A video in verse from Vilafranca*

## Conduct and Management

Despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic, the conference was conducted in an entirely correct fashion on the academic side where, as with its predecessor, after viewing webinars students and teachers were able to decide on projects relevant to their curriculum and teaching.

## Interactivity

However, there was a slight modification in the ludic element. The participatory **Catalan's Got Talent**, designed to showcase Literature, Music and the Arts was now joined by **Català al meu centre**, focussing on the autochthonous language and culture in the student's home locality.

Both competitions attracted entries of extraordinary quality, not only in terms of content but also sophistication and professionalism in presentation and production. Unfortunately, school closure and confinement due to coronavirus curtailed such collective enterprise after the first week of the conference. It is quite remarkable, however, that by this time some 140 youngsters had already taken part, about a quarter of those actively participating, which indicates that both formats are certainly worth pursuing in future initiatives. Teachers later confirmed the sad fact that many collective contributions were forcibly aborted due to social distancing.

## Academic Schedule: Webinars

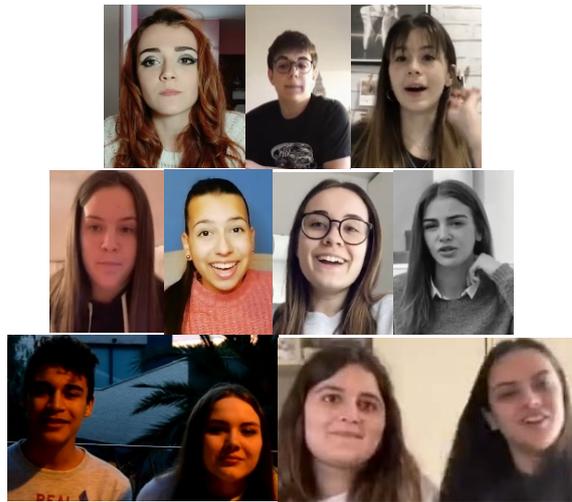
Teachers advised comparative socio-linguistics and set text analysis would provide appropriate material. The webinars were:

### Language:

Hans-Ingo Raddatz (Bamber) Switzerland, Rumansch;  
Jon Landa (Brussels) Belgium;  
James Hawkey (Bristol) France and Wales;  
Robert Davidson (Toronto) Canada.

### Literature:

Ola Goclawska (MEITS, Cambridge) Maria-Mercè Marçal;  
Sally-Anne Kitts (Bristol) *La plaça del Diamant*;  
John London (Queen Mary, London) *El mètode Grönholm*;  
Katuscia Darici (Venetto) *Pell freda*;  
Dominic Keown (Cambridge) *Llibre de meravelles*.



*An embarrassment of riches: language reporters from Ripollet*

### **Success and impact**

Despite the curtailment of collective activity, confinement actually demonstrated the value of the online conference for distance learning. Unlike many of their colleagues, teachers participating were already involved in online learning and were able to continue teaching around the conference despite school closure.

This was further illustrated with reference to the forums. These avenues of academic communication had been set up with a view to assisting students should their interest lie outside the experience of their teachers. During the presential period no query was received. However, once the students were required by confinement to home school, questions to the forums took off within a three-week period (14/03-08/04) with, on the language side, 57 topics of discussion elicited returning 78 replies from webinarists and 29 topics raised on the literature side inviting 83 comments from their colleagues.

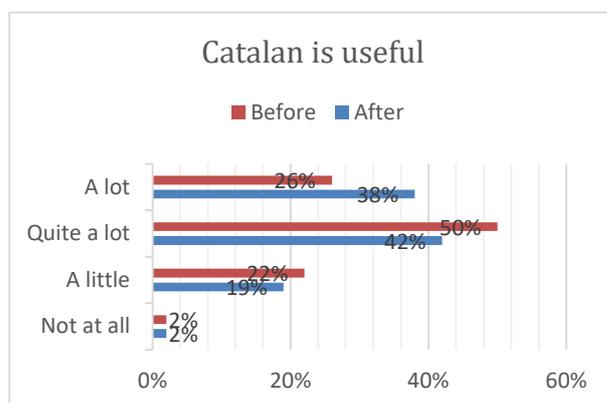


*A badge was awarded for top contributions*

## Analysis of questionnaires

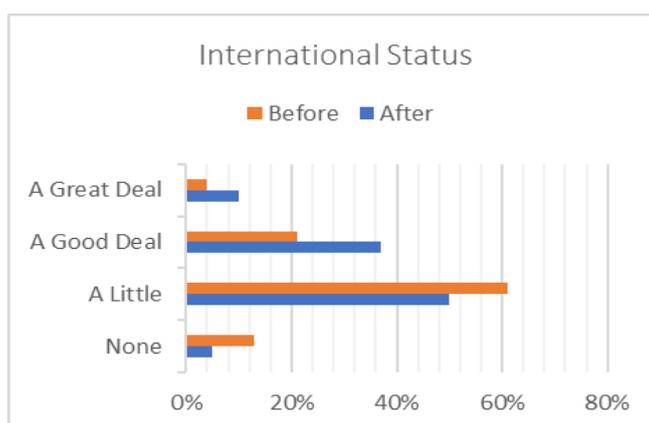
In terms of impact, a comparison of questionnaires taken before (602 respondents) and after (288 respondents) the conference was to determine the success of the project as regards the prime objectives of improving the perception of the autochthonous language and culture among teenagers.

The first question (*Is Catalan useful?*) dealt with the practicality of Catalan:



As previously, the conference produced a slight but discernible improvement in perception of the relevance of the language as a preference towards a higher value emerged. (80% recorded in the upper options of the second survey was four points higher than the first.)

The second question (*Does Catalan have any international prestige?*) related to appreciation of the status of the language outside Spain.



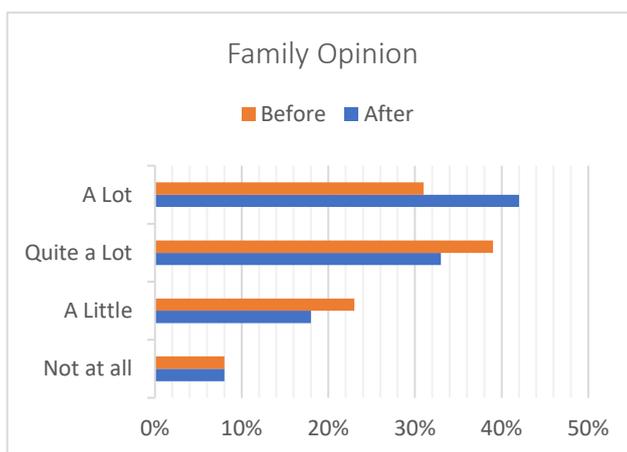
And, as might be hoped from an event of this nature, involving so many global seats of learning, it was gratifying to see a significant improvement (around 10%) in all constituencies in the international appreciation of Catalan. Indeed, if the top two categories are taken as a whole, the swing experienced in the course of the conference towards enhancement of the position of the language on the world stage is of some 19% (25%-44%), exactly the type of prestige building

we would hope to see in an event of this type.

The third strand (*In your opinion, is a good knowledge of Catalan a positive thing?*) addressed the topic of language esteem in an applied sense. The response was affirmative with a combined total of 85% considering knowledge of Catalan positive or very positive before the conference. In the final questionnaire the confident posture was emphasised slightly as the figure appreciating rose to 89% with the majority, now in the highest category, rising significantly from 41% to 50%.

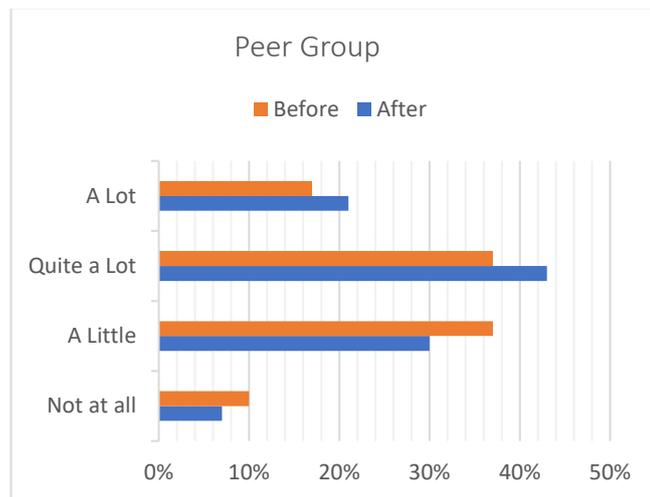
Interestingly, the percentage of those who judged Catalan to be of negative value fell similarly from 19% to 11%. The return is not dissimilar to the first conference which supports the hypothesis that, if the individual participant is so positive about the language and, as will be seen subsequently, sees their own opinion as more affirmative than family members or peers, the explanation for linguistic substitution may well be found in issues of a more external sociological nature rather than personal choice.

In the socio-linguistic environment the pressure from family, but especially peer group, is fundamental to the issue of language choice. Accordingly, the final two questions address the respondent's impression regarding the opinion of Catalan of these two key groups. First of all the family (*In your family's opinion, is a good knowledge of Catalan a positive thing?*)



Here the improvement followed the same tendency as elsewhere with a moderate but noticeable fall in the negative pair of answers, from 31% to 26%. At the same time, though appreciation in the top two brackets rose in line with this 5% differential (70%-75%) the top tier now outstripped its moderate rival, an appreciable swing, in terms of positivity, of some 17%.

A similar return (from 54% to 63%) was registered in the question relating to peer group (*In the opinion of your friends, is a good knowledge of Catalan a positive thing?*)



Here an appreciable rise of 10% (54%-63%) is manifest in the more positive brackets though this would be reflected hierarchically as 42% (Quite a Lot) and 21% (A Lot) respectively. A corresponding decline of 10% characterised the more negative elements with a fall from 47% to 37% registered as 30% (A Little) and 7% (Not at all).

These figures as a whole are encouraging as they indicate, in first place, that the conference can have a noticeable effect on teenagers' impression of the status of the language amongst those around them. However, the generally positive showing of Catalan and its value amongst this age group suggests that substitution, when it occurs, is not due primarily to personal choice but by pressures of a more external, institutional or social nature.<sup>3</sup>



*Biographies of major cultural figures proved popular*

<sup>3</sup> In his splendid language snapshot of Altea, Valentuber Aitor Muñoz bemoans the virtual absence of Catalan from the media, especially in the written word of the press. (<https://youtu.be/h-kDbVYJRM>)

## Feedback from Teachers

Once again, teachers rose to the challenge magnificently adapting, with their expertise and professionalism, material conceived and created thousands of miles away. What follows is a synopsis of many interesting comments of which our selection is a representative few.

The conference opened with the usual excitement among students and the prestige effect of foreign academics delivering webinars in Catalan was consistently underlined, as was the surprise at the standing the language evidently enjoyed globally (IES Francesc Tàrraga). The same positive group dynamic was evident in the interactive section encouraging dynamism, research and imagination in the collective projects: “pupils discovered facts about their college they were unaware of and started moving around Mataró to report on these in their vídeo.” (Maristes Valldemia)



*Poetry was also a major player in the interactive sections*

After barely a week, however, momentum was halted by the pandemic. Particularly affected was the completion of joint projects for the ludic element. However, at the request of the teachers the conference was extended *sine die*. In certain cases, later recourse to material complied better with the school timetable and preparation for university entry examinations. Or, more importantly, it was found that the relevant work filled the gap left immediately after school closures and before the local distance learning systems were up and running. To this effect, students benefitted greatly as they were able to continue with their work uninterrupted.

Online learning networks were not immediately available (...) and while we waited a few weeks for them to be fully up and running my students continued accessing material and activities from the webconference. As such, their education has not suffered a single day's interruption. (IES Altaia)



*Cool versions of numbers by Els Catarres and Billie Eilish*

In educational terms, the socio-linguistic menu proved most successful. Many schools serve non-Catalan-speaking constituencies; and linguistic snapshots of other countries impressed on pupils that a monolingual experience is not necessarily the norm but that diglossia and polyglossia are global social phenomena. Catalan-speakers felt, likewise, less marginalised and were impressed by the international attention. The awareness afforded both sectors first-hand sociological insight to enrich academic study.

As such, the positive aspect was to relate the socio-linguistic aspects of distant lands and other languages with socio-linguistic concepts we apply to Catalan (...) We were grateful for the tone these teachers used in their webinars as they gave a certain degree of “normality” to what we cover in class, about the situation of Catalan, which our students scarcely experience or share in their everyday lives. We selected the videos purposefully so as not to cause any rejection and also so that the few Catalan-speakers we have felt no discomfort (...) Initial reserve slowly changed into curiosity about the surrounding world. (IES Bendinat)

The crucial topic of the value of linguistic diversity, a key part of the syllabus (IES Malladeta & IES Milà i Fontanals) was thus duly appreciated. “The webinars we showed in class were well received by students, especially those referring to socio-linguistics which aroused their curiosity.” (Orts i Bosch) Pupils from immigrant families took the opportunity to prepare relevant projects on their family’s country of origin, thus gaining in self-esteem and becoming more understanding the value of learning Catalan.

A pupil whose father is from Algeria produced an essay entitled “The socio-linguistic situation of Arabic” (...) a student of Chinese origin wrote a piece of work on “Minority languages in China” where he told of the diglossia he experienced in childhood (...) There were more examples which I feel must have enhanced pupils and their families’ linguistic self-esteem (in some cases a minority experience) allowing them to better appreciate the situation of Catalan and the value of learning it at school. (IES Ferrer i Guàrdia)



*Alexia offered us, from Alaquàs, her linguistic family tree*

The literary side also displayed clear relevance to the curriculum and webinars were used widely and to good effect. This element of the initiative, however, is still a work in progress; and, if it aspires to serve the pre-university cohort effectively, more attention needs to be paid to intellectual level, content and presentation to make the end-product wholly user-friendly.

With their many suggestions, thoughts and criticisms — but particularly with their enthusiasm and commitment — teachers on the ground are keen to take part in a third edition next year. And an anecdote from one of the schools underlines, in a nutshell, how the aims of this initiative can and are being realised despite the freshness of the experiment. The episode exemplifies the ability of the target audience to assimilate, digest and respond to the linguistic and cultural stimulus set before them whilst appreciating fully the wider, contextual issues involved:

After working through the webinars of Goclawska, Landa i Kitts, a pupil said out loud that she was amazed by the lecturers’ standard of Catalan. Another stated that what attracted her attention was the interest that Catalan inspired beyond its linguistic frontiers: “perhaps it’s valued more outside Spain than inside Spain!”, he said. A few days later, when we were working on Marçal, a student recalled a sentence spoken by Goclawska (“Marçal sought a transnational and extra-temporal complicity with other women writers”) and linked to the interest which her work had aroused in Goclawska herself; she concluded that Marçal had achieved her objective, even after her own death. (IES Joan Alcover)



*Badges arrive at Bendinat*