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Spanish as a heritage language in Europe: a demolinguistic perspective

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Abstract: This paper offers an estimation of the number of Spanish speakers in Europe in order to analyze the demographic dynamics according to their migratory backgrounds. This demolinguistic approach allows us to quantify this group of Spanish heritage speakers and outline their demographic and linguistic profiles. Through analyzing specific family, social, educational, and geographic settings, this paper identifies a heterogeneous group of 1.7 million Spanish heritage speakers. Moreover, we discuss the social dynamics involved in the intergenerational transmission of the Spanish language in different contexts: spaces in which Spanish is an official language and in which different geographic varieties coexist, and spaces beyond the national borders of predominantly Spanish-speaking countries. In the latter, the demolinguistic analysis suggests that barely a third have been linguistically socialized in environments favorable to the intergenerational transmission of the Spanish language.

Keywords: demolinguistics; socialization spaces; Spanish as heritage language

1 Introduction

Several aspects of the community of potential Spanish speakers in Europe remain unknown. This lack of awareness lies in stark contrast to the breadth of information about that same community in the United States, which produces a census backed by no small amount of linguistic data, as well as studies on various factors determining Spanish-language usage. With that void in mind, the primary objective of this article is to estimate the number of Spanish speakers in Europe, and how

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many have a migratory background (Section 3). The secondary objective is to quantify the number of heritage speakers and to outline various demographic and linguistic profiles among them. Using population data, we will show how demolinguistics can contribute to the understanding of the social realities of a language (Sections 4–5).

2 Theoretical and methodological considerations

The questions are as simple as their answers are complex. How many Spanish speakers are there in Europe and how many of them are heritage speakers? What are their social profiles and what is their competence in the language? What are the social dynamics influencing whether they maintain the language or not? Providing answers to these three questions requires a demolinguistic study, a necessary step prior to a sociolinguistic study, and one with a no less important question: what shape does the language of heritage speakers take?

When seeking to gain a better understanding of the reality of Spanish in European societies, we have several options. One of those consists in quantifying potential users of Spanish and explaining how said community was formed.[1] Both of these tasks fall under the umbrella of *linguistic demography*, or *demolinguistics*. A demolinguistic study focuses on the composition, structure, and dynamics of a population characterized by the knowledge or use of a language or language variety, and does so by quantifying its components in either a synchronic or diachronic way (Moreno-Fernández 2014, forthcoming). Among other potential applications, demolinguistic studies are key to the analysis of intergenerational language transmission, as languages can be maintained or lost in a wide range of personal and social contexts.

When linguistic demography looks at the speakers of a language in its broadest sense, we see the emergence of a language's *group of speakers* or *potential users*. These concepts are flexible in comparison with others, given that they highlight the ideas of a language's *use* and *functionality*, as opposed to its manner of acquisition (as with the terms *native speaker* and *non-native speaker*, for example) or the identities generated by it.

Demolinguistics allows us to identify different types of speakers. Among them, the heritage speaker is crucial for the study of contact via migration and the intergenerational transmission of languages. Generally speaking, heritage

1 A *European Spanish-speaker* is anyone who knows or uses the Spanish language in any of its varieties within the boundaries of Europe. Given that there are a variety of contexts for maintenance, in this study we will not be factoring in the circumstances that arise with persons of European nationality who reside in Spanish-speaking countries. It is a group so fascinating and complex that it merits a study of its own.

speakers are those who acquire the language of their predecessors in two ways: early on, via communication at home and in immediate social circles, providing them an oral competence nearly on par with that of native speakers; and later, via educational contexts in which they acquire written skills and their initial linguistic input is reinforced. We find this dynamic in people with a migratory background in which they are born or moved at an early age to an environment where the language of at least one of their parents is the minority language and coexists with one or more languages that are dominant in education and communication. Heritage language speakers grow up exposed to both types of language, and their competence will differ considerably depending on the composition of the society they are in and the relationship between the languages present there.

Quantifying, describing, and explaining the social and linguistic reality of Spanish in Europe is not without its challenges. Linguistic information is not typically included in official statistics in Europe. As a result, the researcher has to employ a variety of sources in outlining the profiles of groups of speakers, or in some cases, given the scarcity of data, make estimations (Loureda et al. 2021, 2022; Moreno-Fernández forthcoming). Where that information is available, it is commonly fragmentary and sheds light on only particular linguistic realities of a given environment. At the same time, it is also difficult to undertake studies of wide areas or comparative analyses, due to the diversity of available information and its variable treatments. It can take on an even more disheartening tenor when, beyond quantifying speaker populations, one also seeks to determine the communicative abilities of those populations relative to their sociodemographic makeup.

The data gathered in our study allows us to describe the European geographical area, which includes fifty countries and regions: the EU countries, and the rest of the recognized states on the continent, as well as Kosovo, which has only partial recognition, and the Caucasus region, which includes Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, shaping the cross-border area between Western Asia and Eastern Europe. Additionally, this quantification considers Spanish-speaking countries, with the exception of Puerto Rico, due to a lack of disaggregated data, and Equatorial Guinea, due to the extreme fragmentation of available statistics on migration (if not their total nonexistence). As such, we can assume that the quantified group is somewhat larger than projected, though interpretations with more exact data would in all likelihood not differ too broadly from the information provided here.

It is evident that the only way to correct the situation outlined above is to combine statistical information of all kinds, from all manner of sources, if we want to construct as faithful an image as possible of the demolinguistic reality of Spanish. Specifically, our analysis of migration and its characteristics is rooted in a variety of sociodemographic data available from statistical institutes in the three principal

environments contemplated here: the data from Spain comes primarily from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (or INE, the Spanish National Statistics Office) and that of the European countries, from Eurostat. The complete list of sources is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Sources and types of data.

Territory	Source and time frame	Type of data
Spain	INE population figures (1998–2021)	Resident population of foreign origin (nationalized or not), according to place of origin, sex, and age.
	INE continual home surveys (2013–2021)	Descendants of foreign individuals.
Europe	Eurostat population figures (1998–2020)	Resident population of foreign origin (nationalized or not), according to place of origin, sex, and age.
	Eurostat nationality acquisition (1998–2020)	Foreign residents who have acquired nationality in a European country, according to the year and country of naturalization.
	Eurostat fertility statistics (2011–2020)	Birthrates according to age and country (which allows an estimation of the second-generation).

This data offers a picture of Spanish-speaking migration up to January 1st, 2020 for two reasons: the first is practical, because it was the last year for which each of the sources consulted had available data; the second is an opportunity, because it allows us to form a picture of Europe prior to COVID-19. When relevant, some considerations are formulated based on data from 2021, where we can begin to see the early effects of the pandemic, allowing us to project certain scenarios. In the case of estimations from the UN, which end on December 31st, 2019, we consider them valid for January 1st, 2020.

Sources of population data allow us to outline linguistic profiles based on the sociodemographic characteristics of migrants. A demolinguistic study fills in blanks where necessary with information from surveys on the population's linguistic knowledge. However, in Europe, these surveys are quite limited and heterogeneous, especially when it comes to migrant languages. The 2012 Eurobarometer, which provides useful information on languages in Europe, looks at a population's mastery of a foreign language without distinguishing between natives and migrants.[2] The European statistical source that provides both sociodemographic

2 Though its primary goal is to study the knowledge of foreign languages in European citizens, in its three modules – 2000, 2005, and 2012 – it includes a question about mother tongues. In the two earlier instances, the questionnaire asked only about mother tongues; in 2012, the formulation was altered to: "Thinking about the languages that you speak, which language is your mother tongue?" As the survey can be broken up by country, its results allow us to make a first estimation of how many

and linguistic data about immigrants is the *Labor Force Survey*, which published specific modules in 2008 and 2014, titled: "The Situation of Immigrants and Their Children in the Labor Force". This source covers every European country, with representative samples of each country's entire population. On the national level, some countries, such as Switzerland, undertake periodic surveys to outline the linguistic knowledge of the immigrant and non-immigrant resident populations (Kabatek et al. 2022). These sources are highly informative, but do not allow for a direct outlining of the profile of Spanish-speaking migrants in Europe, and as such, are only used to support certain quantitative arguments.

Various non-periodical, ad hoc studies about this topic have been undertaken in Spain, for example, the National Survey of Immigrants in 2007. Given the date, it would appear it has lost some of its original value and requires updating. For that, we have turned to the Survey of Active Population (2014), which gathered information about the self-perception of immigrants in relation to their own linguistic competencies (see the module: "The Situation of Immigrants and Their Children in the Labor Force"). To that effect, in reaching certain estimations, we have consulted other more recent Spanish surveys, though they are less exhaustive and contain less representative sample groups, such as the barometers of opinion undertaken by the Center for Sociological Investigation (CSI) and the Health Barometer in 2022.

3 Migration and the Spanish language in Europe today

According to recent estimations, the group of potential users of Spanish in Europe is nearly 90 million, slightly less than 15% of the worldwide Spanish-speaking community of 591 million, rounded up (Instituto Cervantes 2021).[3] In geographic terms, two large groups stand out within this collective: those living in Spain and those living in other European countries (see Table 2).

The number of Spanish-speakers residing in Spain is roughly 47.4 million (Instituto Nacional de Estadística de España 2021). Most have a native mastery of

people have Spanish as a mother tongue in each of the non-Spanish-speaking countries in Europe (cf. Instituto Cervantes 2022).

3 Over the course of the document, we provide approximate figures for ease of reading. Exact numbers can be found in the graphics, figures, and tables.

Table 2: Europe and its Spanish-speakers: Place of residence and mastery of the language (2020).

Country or region of residence	Potential users of Spanish			
	Total	Native mastery	Limited competence	Learners
Spain	47,431,256	43,636,756	3,794,500	*n*/a
Europe (excluding Spain)	42,036,108	2,778,741	30,975,000	8,282,367
All of Europe	91,626,166	48,453,244	34,890,555	8,282,367

the language, concretely, 92%, or 43 million; the other 3.8 million, accounting for the remaining 8%, are individuals whose ability to use the language is limited linguistically (=insufficient mastery), sociolinguistically, or stylistically (=use restricted to certain topics or situations) (Moreno-Fernández and Otero Roth 2006: 17). This limitation of mastery can be found in Spanish-speakers in bilingual communities (for example, those with a native mastery of their own language and a more tenuous command of Spanish), or in bilingual foreign migrants (for example, those with a mastery of their language of origin and not Spanish, for a variety of reasons). This data comes from the report *Spanish, Living Language* (cf. Instituto Cervantes 2021). Also included by this study in the group of speakers without native mastery were second- and third-generation Spanish-speakers in bilingual communities, users of bilingual mixtures, and foreign individuals with mother tongues other than Spanish residing in a Spanish-speaking country.

A calculation of potential users of Spanish in the rest of the continent isn't quite as simple, either demographically or in evaluations of linguistic mastery. Initial estimates suggest roughly 42 million people, of whom the majority, roughly 31 million, do not have native competence (Instituto Cervantes 2021: 11–12) with more than 8 million still in the process of learning (Instituto Cervantes 2021: 15–16).

Among this community of over 91 million speakers, approximately 11.2 million have a direct migratory experience or a migratory background (they are descendants of at least one Spanish-speaking migrant). Here, too, it is worth distinguishing two types of environment: one in which Spanish is the official language, as in Spain, and one where it is not, as in the rest of Europe. In the latter territories, there are an estimated 1.6 million foreigners from Spanish-speaking countries, 1.1 million descendants of migrants, and nearly 800,000 people originally from Spanish-speaking countries who have attained European nationality. There is also a group of approximately 1.8 million people who have returned from Spain to their European country of origin after a migratory experience. To that effect, there are currently 5.4 million Spanish-speakers with a migratory background in Europe (excluding Spain).

Spanish-speaking immigrants to Spain total 5.8 million. This includes various categories: foreigners and nationalized individuals (nearly 2.9 million) and their descendants (approximately 600,000), as well as 2.3 million European immigrants from countries where Spanish is not the official language, who have come into contact with Spanish by virtue of their movement (Figure 1)

Spanish-speaking migrants can be classified by their mastery of the language. "Mastery" is understood as the ability to use the language in the correct form and suited to the communicative context, and manifests in different levels through which the language learner must progress (Moreno-Fernández and Otero Roth 2006). The highest level is the speaker with native mastery, who naturally acquires

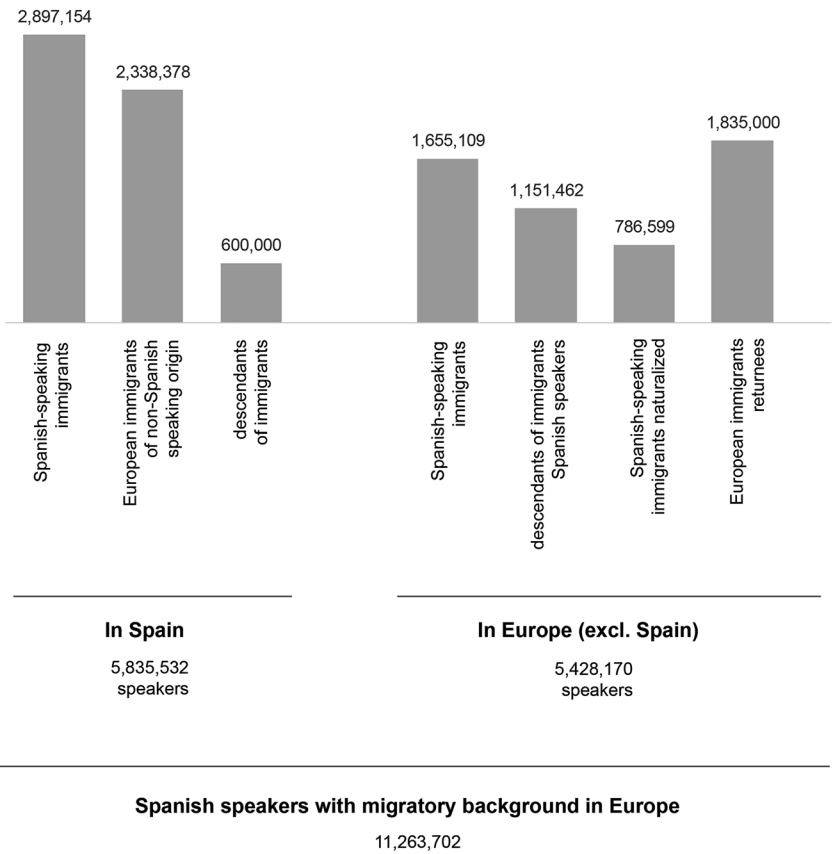

Figure 1: Spanish-speakers with migratory background in Europe (2020).

a specific language between their birth and early childhood, primarily through interaction with their family and with members of their community, as well as through school (Swann et al. 2004 *s.vv. native speaker, language*). Any alternative implies a lesser communicative ability, and people with these social profiles and portfolios are determined to be speakers with limited competence, though there is a great deal of variety within this classification, and further evaluation requires specific research. As stated above, in this study, language mastery is not established by a speaker's ability to correctly produce and understand linguistic expressions in various use contexts, that is, based on psychological criteria; it is established by the deducible communicative repertoire or abilities of – and compatible with – a certain social profile, which is also determined by a group's life trajectories.

Of course, a citizen of a Spanish-speaking country doesn't necessarily speak Spanish, let alone with a native competence. Methodologically, the linguistic competence of immigrants cannot be determined based on a supposed parallelism with a plurilingual situation of origin, but based on the characteristics of migratory flows. For this, it is important to consider social profiles of immigration. Viewed this way, demographics reveal that Spanish-speaking immigrants in Europe, who represent approximately 6% of the population on the continent, are on the rise, although larger flows from other regions mean that Spanish-speakers have a lesser relative weight. This fact gestures at the current state of movement, mostly effected by Spaniards, by women and young people, and by people who move to well-located spaces (alongside Spain, Italy, France, Germany, and the UK). Work, training, or family (basically, the construction of family units) seem to be the predominant motives for migration, and these facilitate group renewal. We can see this in the fact that over half of the movement to Europe has occurred since 2010.

Another group of Spanish-speaking immigrants we must address are those who have been nationalized in their host countries in the past few decades: 786,599 immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries between 2002 and 2019. They share social and demolinguistic characteristics with other immigrants, and it can be assumed that the majority are native speakers. However, the group is more heterogeneous from a demographic perspective as it includes different migratory experiences, from first-generation immigrants who acquire a European nationality to their descendants. These dynamics of naturalization reflect patterns of social integration and are linked, almost without exception, to the full acquisition of the language of the host country.

A quantification of the group of migrants and a determination based on their linguistic mastery can be found in succinct form in Figure 2. This image distinguishes various profiles that serve as a basis for a broad sociolinguistic study of the Spanish of Europeans.

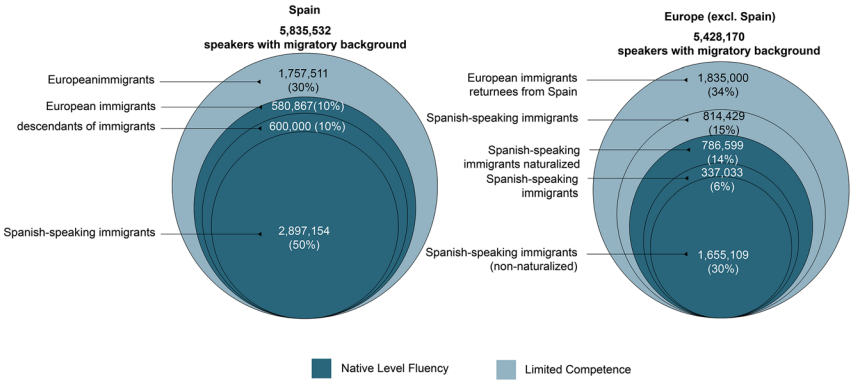

Figure 2: Spanish speakers with a migratory background based on territory and linguistic abilities (2020).

As can be seen in the graphic, a significant number of speakers show a limited competence, in accordance with their profile. These are mostly Europeans returning from a brief migratory experience in Spanish-speaking countries and descendants of Spanish speakers who reside in European countries. The diversity of sociolinguistic settings and the multiple modes and levels of acquisition of a language do not always lead to a competence on par with that of a native speaker. When this is the case with heritage speakers, an "incomplete competence" is assumed (Montrul 2015), though the term carries serious problems from a sociolinguistic perspective: the competence of a heritage speaker is neither complete nor incomplete in and of itself, but rather suited to a variety of conditions and needs that manifest in variable, dynamic ways. As such, we prefer to use the term "limited competence" (Moreno-Fernández and Otero Roth 2006) when speakers of a language are linguistically limited, lacking all the resources that a speaker of native competence would have, or when they are sociolinguistically and/or stylistically limited because their use has been restricted to certain types of interactions or communicative settings. In that sense, we can consider as speakers with limited competence those heritage speakers who have reduced or nearly abandoned their use of their family language, students of a language who haven't reached a competent level, and bilingual immigrants whose primary language is distinct from Spanish.[4] In that respect, it is important to reiterate that simply

4 One example of this last group are Spanish immigrants in Switzerland and Germany who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s. Labor migration to these two destinations included a notable proportion of people from the Spanish region Galicia (in Germany it was the second largest regional group of origin, see Leib and Mertins 1980). The linguistic profiles of this population – most of whose members are

because a language or variety can be seen as a mother tongue, as is the case with heritage languages, this does not preclude linguistic, sociolinguistic, or stylistic limitations.

4 Demolinguistic approximation of heritage Spanish speakers in Spain

A major problem for the demolinguistics of Spanish-speaking migrants in Europe is the frequent absence of accounts or censuses of people with migratory backgrounds, that is, non-first-generation migrants. The farther we move from this first generation, the more difficult speaker characterizations become.

In fact, the concept of "generation" itself is not as clear-cut as it might appear. Linguistic analysis of successive generations has led to the introduction of various concepts. One, already noted, is "heritage speakers", a label which corresponds to all those in the second-generation or beyond. Another concept is the "1.5 Generation", which refers to the descendants of first-generation migrants who arrived in their host country as children. But many other labels have been introduced since (Lessard-Phillips et al. 2017; Waters 2014).

The scarce attention paid to speakers of learned heritage languages in the field of language demography has largely to do with the difficulty of establishing objective markers of competence in these languages. In other words, the challenges are epistemological. But they are not the only challenges; ideology can be a roadblock as well. In the realm of language acquisition and learning, there is a clear conceptual predominance, almost an idealization, of the figure of the *native speaker*. Holliday (2006) has discussed "native speakerism" to reference the weight we tend to give to native mastery, and, more concretely, to native speakers as language teachers. We find this same notion in other fields, including demolinguistics, where native speakers are considered central for research purposes, and non-native speakers are seen as peripheral, if not non-existent. Native or mother tongues and their speakers have been the focus of most ethnographic, anthropological, political, and demolinguistic studies, leading to the marginalization of other types of speakers, such as heritage bilinguals or language learners. Additionally, native or mother tongues remain the key factor to determining a refugee's

now retired – are linguistically characterized by asymmetrical relations between German, Spanish and Galician. In many cases, because these speakers' primary language is Galician, they have limited active Spanish competence, a situation inherited from the sociolinguistic context at origin, though contact with other Spanish migrants in Germany helped improve their communicative skills in Spanish (Estévez Grossi 2016, 2020).

origin (Cambier-Langeveld 2010) and to creating language revitalization processes (Doerr 2009), completely neglecting multilingualism and superdiversity (Blommaert 2010), with all the resulting sociolinguistic implications. This enormously complicates the task of identifying languages, varieties, and speakers, a complication which only grows larger when the coexistence of languages in a single person is not seen as the presence of two parallel competencies, but as a single, complex, and "translinguistic" competence (García and Li 2014).

Despite these realities, demolinguistic quantification of the descendants of migrants is of profound interest for further sociolinguistic studies. We can make a rough estimate of the number of descendants of Spanish-speaking immigrants using the concept of "second generation", defined as the population of individuals with parents originally from a Spanish-speaking country. The statistical source in Spain that provides this data offers a disaggregation based on the parents' origin country, but that by itself does not suffice, as can be seen in Table 3: they only look at descendants of foreign mothers, therefore excluding instances of foreign men who have married a person with Spanish nationality. Nor do they factor in third-generation descendants; most often, this group is systematically blended into general European population statistics. As such, the figures generated are minimums, and it is highly probable they will rise with the inclusion of new information.

Table 3: Immigrant generations (Lessard-Phillips et al. 2017: 27–28).

Label	Content
First generation	People who migrated as adults (18 years or older)
Generation 1.25	People who migrated as teenagers (13–17 years)
Generation 1.5	People who migrated as children (6–12 years)
Generation 1.75	People who migrated as young children (0–5 years)
Second generation	People who were born in the host country with two migrant parents
Generation 2.25	People born in the host country with a single migrant parent
Third generation	People born in the host country to parents born in the host country, with one or more migrant grandparent
Fourth generation	People with parents and grandparents born in the host country

Considering that 90% of all immigrants from the Americas are Spanish-speaking, the number of second-generation descendants is probably somewhat lower than the 641,000 listed below, closer to 580,000, though the number may be higher for various reasons. This second generation is still quite young, and over two-thirds are 15 or under (Table 4). This figure may be somewhat higher since

Table 4: Residents of Spain who are children of mothers born in the Americas, 2020 (in thousands of people).

	Total	15 or under	% under 15
Ecuador	127.9	94.5	73.9
Colombia	84.9	63.0	74.2
Bolivia	53.9	48.5	90.0
Rest of the Americas	374.3	236.1	63.1
Total Americas	641.0	442.1	69.0

immigrants from other American countries such as Brazil or the U.S. may also include Spanish speakers.

In the case of Spanish-speaking immigrants residing in Spain, we can assume a native mastery of Spanish: their communication at home, their socialization, and their obligatory participation in the country's educational system favor the conservation of Spanish. This remains true in both monolingual and bilingual communities (Álvarez Mella 2019).

The Spanish that is preserved and developed, however, is another matter, and is worth a more profound sociolinguistic analysis of its own. In general, varying environmental conditions give rise to an assimilation of traits of the dominant variant of the region where migrants are socialized. However, based on her own observation of the production of Peruvian speakers in Spain, (Caravedo 2014: 307–308) claims that, effectively, the first generation does not reproduce any patterns of the Madrid variety of Spanish, while the second-generation reproduces them in a more or less systematic way, depending on their age (Sancho Pascual 2014). Concretely, the author alludes to the "seseo", the divergent trait that speakers themselves are arguably most conscious of.

Another significant aspect is that linguistic assimilation does not automatically take place in every element of language. Various studies have shown that Ecuadorian immigrants generate a lexically elevated communicative identity: for example, they dispense with words from their own variety (like *vereda* or *carro* – 'sidewalk' and 'car', respectively) and instead use those of Madrid (*acera* and *coche*). Yet this convergence is almost nonexistent in matters of linguistic courtesy: Ecuadorians use the formal *usted* in spaces where Spaniards use the informal *tú*, don't generally use the imperative in requests, show a preference for periphrastic formulas (*¿Podría usted ponerme un café, por favor?* 'Could you give me a coffee, please?' rather than *Ponme un café*, 'Give me a coffee'), and use diminutives (*voy ahorita* instead of *voy ahora*, for 'I'm coming now'). Phonetically, the convergence is even less present: Ecuadorian immigrants maintain the *s* in place of

the lisped *z* ((/sa 'pa to/, instead of /θa 'pa to/) in Madrid, for example, where that is a feature (Sancho Pascual 2014)).

Sharing a linguistic and cultural variety also appears to play a decisive role in the creation of networks in communities of migrants from the same place. This, in turn, gives rise to geographical groupings where language varieties of origin are maintained and assimilation is less prominent.

Bilingual Spanish territories have their own dynamics. It can be eye-opening to study analyses of educational integration of Spanish-speaking immigrants in Catalonia: mastering both official languages has positive effects for integration and favors social mobility (Parella and Alarcón 2015). In the case of Catalan, there is an extraordinary push for its value as well as its symbolic value, as its mastery is a marker of belonging to Catalan culture and allows access to contact networks and positions of power in certain social spaces (Pavez Soto 2015).

Further, the sociolinguistic integration of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the Catalan educational system has two characteristics. The first has to do with the initial advantage of Spanish-speaking migrants. As Lapresta-Rey et al. (2015) show, these migrants achieve higher results in Spanish-language materials than other migrants. However, their advantage dissipates once non-Spanish-speaking migrants have lived in the country sufficiently long to reach a native mastery of Spanish. At this point, non-Spanish-speaking migrants gain higher reading and writing and academic language competencies in the dominant variety than Spanish-speaking migrants. The latter do not have the incentives of other migrants to invest extra time, effort, and resources into learning the dominant variety of Spanish, as their original varieties are effective for communication and participation in social life.

The second characteristic of Spanish-speaking migrants in Catalonia has to do with learning Catalan. Among migrants of Spanish-speaking Iberoamerica, whose linguistic proximity via Spanish will make it easier for them to learn Catalan, the language learning process moves more slowly than for other groups of migrants. This can be seen in their valorization of Spanish as a language of identity, and above all, in their use of it as a language of socialization (Lapresta-Rey et al. 2015). Descendants of Spanish-speaking migrants possess different attitudes than their parents, with a more positive valorization of Catalan as the language of integration, and thereby develop multilingual identities (Pavez Soto 2015). This attitude can also be seen in other second-generation migrants from other parts of the world, who don't tend to find contradictions in their original ethnic identities and the incorporation of cultural patterns and values from the host community, including language (Trueba 2001: 20).

5 Demolinguistic approximation of heritage Spanish speakers in Europe

In the rest of Europe, we can assume the existence of at least 1.1 million descendants of Spanish-speaking immigrants, or second-generation speakers, who are capable, albeit to a lesser degree, of acquiring the language of their predecessors. Due to the lack of data, the challenges in quantifying this group are enormous. We have reached the figure above through a calculation based on demographic birth data of the European population (1.6 children per mother, see Eurostat 2021). That number is the closest approximation we can make with the available information, lacking specific accounts or studies. Later generations can also acquire Spanish competencies in similar contexts, but it is a difficult group to quantify as it is largely made up of national citizens whose migratory background is lost in population statistics.

In non-Spanish-speaking Europe, descendants of migrants form a distinct collective from a linguistic point of view. Their level of Spanish mastery can vary in relation to a variety of factors determining intergenerational transmission, primarily the use of Spanish in at-home communication and in personal relationships or professional environments, and the attendance of bilingual or Spanish heritage educational programs, among others. Given this diversity of factors and permutations, the individuals in question are not as linguistically homogeneous as their first-generation migrant predecessors.

As for household structures, Spanish-speaking migrants live in households where the residents have a variety of origins, particularly in Germany (where 62% of migrants have mixed marriages) and Switzerland (where 44% of naturalized Spanish-speaking immigrants belong to mixed families that include individuals of non-Spanish origin). In these contexts, descendants have less exposure to Spanish than in households formed by Spanish-speaking couples, with the acquisition of Spanish being limited to certain linguistic domains (De Houwer 2007; Pauwels 2016: 88–89; Place and Hoff 2011). The improvement of competencies, especially in written communication and communication with specific purposes, can only happen through educational programs.

Communication in the home is a decisive factor for the maintenance of descendants' origin language. Studies on bilingualism show that the input produced at home is crucial for children, and that acquisition is determined by the need to satisfy basic communication (Silva-Corvalán 2014). As such, family plays a fundamental role, even more so if the adults communicate in the same language. In these cases, parents or tutors frequently adopt family strategies to reinforce the home language, particularly if that language is a minority in the host community (Grosjean 2010).

It should also be said that the geography of Spanish in European education is quite complex and neither favors the study of the language at early ages nor its complete acquisition. In most cases, Spanish is the third foreign language option, rather than the second, and as a result, reaches fewer students and is studied for fewer years. Following from that, in countries with fewer offerings, we see an extraordinary increase in private classes or extracurricular courses: academies, courses abroad, exchange programs, etc. The programs of Spain's "exterior action", such as the Instituto Cervantes, are nonetheless a small, selective offering; other programs such as Aulas de Lengua y Cultura Españolas (ALCES; 'Classes in Spanish Language and Culture'), especially oriented towards the conservation of Spanish by descendants of migrants, are found in very few countries (primarily Switzerland and Germany). As such, the development of linguistic abilities comes, in the best of cases, late. A sizeable number of heritage speakers make the decision to attend classes for Spanish as a foreign language in school, where they acquire intermediate oral and written competencies (B1–B2), as is the case with other European spaces of Spanish-speaking migration, such as Germany (Loureda et al. 2022), Italy (Bonomi and Sanfelici 2018), and Switzerland (Sánchez Abchi 2018). This group is difficult to identify due to the lack of statistics on students of foreign languages in the German education system.

Finally, another way of outlining the degree of Spanish conservation by direct descendants of immigrants consists in observing the geographical and social spaces where they are socialized. The size and density of a location's Spanish-speaking population, as well as the symmetry of its potential relationships, traceable to a common origin or to shared sociodemographic characteristics, are factors that can reveal the existence of linguistic and social settings favorable to the conservation of the language. To that effect, Spanish-speaking migrants are concentrated in urban areas with populations of 500,000 or greater, with 30% residing in five cities (Milan, London, Paris, Berlin, and Zurich). These cities are not solely destinations of the past, but are capable of attracting new flows of migrants thanks to their opportunities for personal and professional development. This means that they quickly create interrelated groups of significant size, which in turn become a high priority for political and administrative action.

Without further sociolinguistic data (see the criticisms of Extra (2017) and Adler (2020)), one way of approaching a classification of these speakers is to determine favorable and non-favorable environments based on the combination of two criteria: the use of Spanish as a language of communication in and around family, and the existence of educational support systems. These two criteria are worth some justifications. A favorable environment involves the positive combination of both criteria, as is the paradigmatic case with Germany: approximately 30% of immigrant households use Spanish as a primary language of communication, and there are educational opportunities for language conservation: specific courses for heritage

speakers, bilingual centers in early stages of education, and a wide range of courses for Spanish as a foreign language in secondary and unregulated education (Loureda et al. 2021: 73–77). We assign countries with similar structures, or *favorable environments,* the same intergenerational maintenance percentage of native mastery,

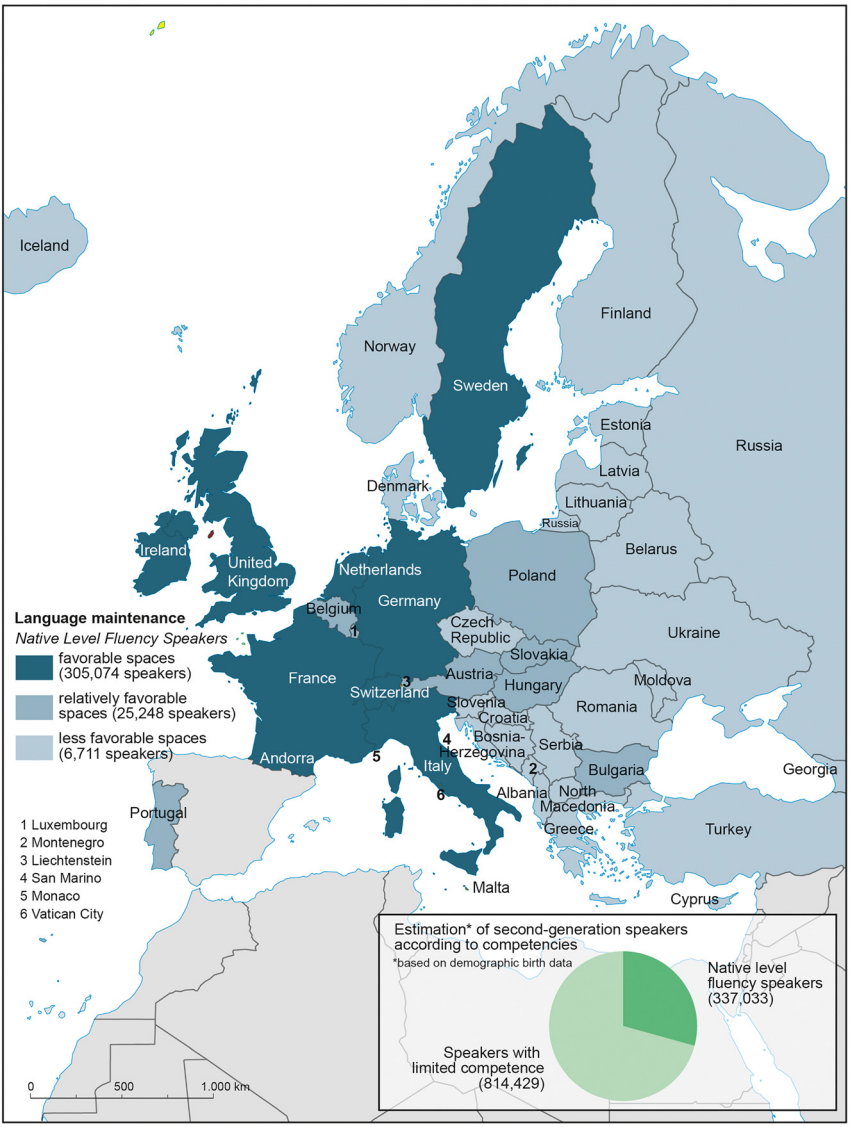

Figure 3: Second-generation Spanish-speakers in Europe (excluding Spain) (2019).

30%; *relatively favorable environments* are assigned a value of between 20 and 30%; and *less favorable environments*, with more precarious educational programs and smaller Spanish-speaking communities, are assigned below 20% (see Figure 1).

According to our estimations, in European environments favorable to the intergenerational conservation of Spanish, there are approximately 300,000 descendants of immigrants with a native mastery of Spanish; in relatively favorable environments, roughly 25,000; and in less favorable environments, just over 6,000 (Figure 3). The rest of the Spanish-speaking population with a migratory background, over 800,000 people, is designated as having a limited competence in Spanish, as there are no definite criteria to attribute them a greater mastery of the language. This is not a positive dynamic, as it means that 2 out of every 3 Spanish-speaking people with a migratory background is in a risk scenario for the conservation of the language. These risks can lead to a precarious mastery of their language of origin, or in the worse of cases, its loss.

6 Conclusion

When the acquired language is a family language, or a part of it, and is the minority language rather than the vehicular or predominant language, we begin to see the phenomena of heritage languages emerge in the family social environment. However, heritage languages are not a special form of language, they are a manner of acquiring or using a native language where oral interaction skills are on a par with native speakers, but where writing skills never develop, or develop late, in school settings. In this sense, heritage languages are an instrument of family communication, a marker of origin or cultural identity that coexists with the acquisition of a majority or vehicular language in the social environment where an individual develops.

Traditionally, heritage language speakers have not been an object of demolinguistic research. That is largely because the concept was not brought into the linguistic panorama until recently (Valdés 2001), but also because of certain difficulty to overcome research obstacles: if a speaker orally inherits one language, a minority, in the environment of another, a majority, it is difficult to discover up to what point they are able to maintain their heritage language, if they do so at all. Much like the difficulty in accessing the black box of the learning brain, it is likewise difficult to delve into the privacy of every home to learn how the multilingual interplay is handled. Nonetheless, this study has attempted to calculate the number of heritage speakers in a community, making deductions based on indirect information: the prevalence of educational instruments to support maintenance of the heritage language, the presence of community initiatives to

promote minority identity, or the close-up knowledge of the environment for the use of the heritage language (Loureda et al. 2021).

A demolinguistic study must offer criteria to label groups of speakers as having a competence on par with native speakers, or a more limited competence. These criteria are based on data about language use in a given space, particularly the home and the residence, as well as information about specific educational programs that support the maintenance of the language.

Among heritage speakers, the degree of fluidity will depend on the need to communicate in the heritage language, but above all, on the quality and quantity of linguistic input received in their childhood. This is why we generally see greater fluidity not in the heritage language but the majority language of their environment, which is also the one they need most in daily communication outside the family. Meanwhile, in speakers of a second, or additional language, fluidity will generally be higher in their native language than in their learned language (Montrul 2015). This does not mean there are not heritage speakers with native fluidity in their minority family language.

From a demolinguistic perspective, this paper has demonstrated that Spanish is the heritage language of at least 1.7 million speakers in Europe. The group is heterogeneous in its members' linguistic skills, their backgrounds, and the contextual conditions for the maintenance of Spanish. One-third are residents in Spain who have descended from Spanish-speaking immigrants (mostly individuals of Ecuadorian, Colombian, and Bolivian origin); they have native fluency in Spanish, and they are engaged in processes of convergence or divergence with the major varieties of peninsular Spanish and with regard to various linguistic phenomena. The remaining 1.1 million are descendants of Spanish-speaking immigrants residing in European countries beyond the national borders of Spain, mainly in the main urban areas of five countries: Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Switzerland. The analysis of specific family, social, educational, and spatial settings suggests that barely a third have been linguistically socialized in environments favorable to the intergenerational transmission of the Spanish language.

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