
The Valencian retail linguistic landscape in danger: advanced process of language shift and invisibility of the language conflict

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ABSTRACT

The sociolinguistic situation in Valencia is characterised by language conflict and diglossia, with the hegemonic position of Castilian Spanish (henceforth, Spanish) and the subordination of Valencian leading to a diversification of their functions and spheres of use and the ascription of a specific sociocultural status to each language. The purpose of this article is to ascertain the situation of Valencian in retail settings and to describe the retail linguistic landscapes. The approach uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, specifically a survey on the social perception of the presence and use of Valencian coupled with participant observation in retail spaces (small businesses, markets and shopping centres) in six Valencian cities. The most salient results include the profound Castilianisation of the retail linguistic landscape and the existence of multiple linguistic landscapes around the Region of Valencia. Furthermore, this article analyses the convergences and divergences of the results between the social perception of the presence and use of Valencian on the one hand and the participant observation in retail spaces on the other.

1. Introduction

As Rafael Ninyoles diagnosed more than a century ago (Ninyoles, 2017), the sociolinguistic situation in the Region of Valencia is defined by conflict. This conflict goes beyond the language and permeates politics, economics, society and culture. Language is simultaneously an instrument for communication within a community, an instrument of power that defines reality in line with the regime of truth in place (Foucault, 1980), an element of national and identity-based political definition, a part of the collective heritage rooted in the land and indissociable from identity(s) and a dynamic sociocultural construction with successive spaces of transformation in its use and social appraisal. Therefore, when speaking about the presence and use of a language in a specific sphere, in this case retail settings, we have to bear in mind that we are not only talking about language but also about politics, economics, society and culture.

In the case of Valencian, the sociolinguistic reality is defined by the asymmetrical, hierarchical relationship between Spanish and Valencian in a situation of diglossia. In other words, Spanish has a hegemonic position and Valencian is subordinate to it. This linguistic situation of diglossia favours (and restricts) the use of the hegemonic language in the formal and public spheres of use (socioeconomic, professional or commercial areas, among others), and the use of the subordinate language in informal and private spheres (family, neighbours and friends, among others). In Ninyoles' words, diglossia entails an imbalance between two languages, and 'this imbalance points in two fundamental directions: 1) the cultural normalisation of language B [Valencian] or 2) language shift, or the assimilation of the dominant language [Spanish]' (1997: 80). This hierarchisation and imbalance between the languages materialises in the linguistic, social, economic and political inequality of their speakers.

The purpose of this article is to examine the situation of Valencian in retail, based first on the social perception of the presence and use of Valencian in this sphere of everyday interaction, and secondly on participant observation in retail spaces (small businesses, markets and shopping centres). In short, the goal is to conduct a study of the retail linguistic landscape of Valencian from the emic and etic perspectives in order to ascertain the presence of different languages in the same territory (Sciriha & Vassallo, 2001; Kreslins, 2003) and 'to measure the vitality of the language and its coordination with the language policy' (Pons, 2012: 57).

The objectives of this article are to ascertain the social perception of the presence and use of Valencian in retail settings, to analyse the retail linguistic landscape in Valencian territory and to identify the convergences and divergences between social perceptions and empirical observation.

In terms of methodology, in order to meet these objectives, a study was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, specifically a survey of the general public and participant observation in retail spaces. First, 1,114 people living in the territory of Valencian lin-

guistic predominance responded to the survey; the presumed margin of error is $\pm 3\%$, for a confidence level of 95.5%. The survey was administered online and the respondents filled it out themselves. Secondly, participant observation was conducted in a total of 1,856 shops. This observation was carried out in three different settings, according to the type of establishment (small business, municipal market and shopping centre) and in six cities classified as falling within the zone of Valencian linguistic predominance (Alacant, Alcoi, Castelló, Elx, Gandia and València) (in Spanish, these cities are known as Alicante, Alcoy, Castellón, Elche, Gandía and Valencia). In each of the shops, the visual linguistic landscape (the language used on signs, internal signposting and posters with institutional information) and the linguistic soundscape (the language used among workers and by shop staff in conversations started in Valencian) were systematically observed.

This article is organised into six parts. The first outlines the purpose and objectives of the article, as well as methodological notes on the data reported throughout the text. The second focuses on analysing the recognition of language rights and policies in Valencian retail settings. The third examines the social perception of the presence and use of Valencian. The fourth sketches the Valencian retail linguistic landscape by type of establishment and territory. The fifth analyses the convergences and divergences between social perceptions and the retail landscapes observed. And finally, the sixth outlines the conclusions of this article.

2. Conflict, diglossia and language rights and policies in retail

The situation of diglossia in the Region of Valencia is legitimised by a certain social and political order instated within society. Valencian's subjugation is backed by the hegemonic regime in place and regulated under the aegis of diglossia, that is, with Valencian's restriction and relegation to certain spheres of use (the private and informal or non-formal spheres) and the supremacy of Spanish in the formal spheres of use. This confers different meanings and social prestige on the two languages. In the excerpt below, Joan Francesc Mira reflects on the reality of the linguistic subordination of the language and the compartmentalisation of its use and denies the possibility that a society can be bilingual from origin. In his words,

I am not aware of a single case—and I have searched to see if I could find them!—in which two languages exist equally and equivalently as vehicles for the same society, that is, for the same people in the same territory. First, this is because only one of the languages can be autochthonous; only one can be the original language of the people-ethnicity in that territory: there is no people that is originally bilingual. This means that the presence of the other in a position of superiority or institutional equality is the outcome of an outside imposition-domination, either in the past or still today. Necessarily. Secondly, this is because the presence of a cultured language imposed or with foreign roots is tantamount to the presence and dissemination of the national culture from which it comes. And the stronger the presence and the space occupied by this foreign national culture, the weaker and more reduced the presence of the original national culture will be. Necessarily: it is a space that can be compartmentalised but not shared. (Mira, 2005: 177)

If we apply this reflection to the Region of Valencia, the autochthonous language is Valencian, while Spanish is the language in a position of superiority (as a result of an imposition). As Mira argues, the Valencian people as a whole are not bilingual either in origin or in practice (not everyone living in the region knows and uses both languages); only Valencian speakers are bilingual. A Spanish-speaker may live their entire life fully in Spanish without having to change language, but today a Valencian speaker does not enjoy this privileged situation.

Not only Mira but other Catalan sociolinguists such as Boix-Fuster and Vila Moreno (1998) reject the concept of bilingualism as they consider it an aphorism that tries to bury or conceal a much more complex political and structural situation from a naïve, acritical and aproblematic perspective which focuses on consensus as an aegis of stability, although this has nonetheless clearly become an unsustainable situation:

counter to what Spanish nationalism said, the Catalans, Basques and Galicians did not enjoy bilingualism but suffered from imposed diglossia, according to which one language—Spanish—was elevated by force to the category of language A, while another was repressed and marginalised as language B. This enabled it to clearly illustrate that the situation at the time had to be overcome. (Boix-Fuster & Vila, 1998: 94)

Diglossia entails the linguistic and social subordination of Valencian and materialises in the Valencian language conflict, which has become a long-term sociopolitical conflict. Furthermore, as noted above, diglossia relies on the fallacy of social bilingualism (Ninyoles, 2017), when in fact bilingualism is a trait of only some Valencians, namely Valencian speakers. This is a typical image of the linguistic schizophrenia caused by the Valencian language conflict and the political battle, which Josepa Cucó (1998) called ‘the unbearable lightness of the Region of Valencia’. In Ninyoles’ opinion, ‘the conflict—beyond personal concerns—is of public interest’ (2017: 30) and is therefore a collective problem. As stated above, language conflict extends beyond linguistics and becomes a sociopolitical conflict associated with the language, a language that is politically instrumentalised by both the Valencian right (*blaverisme*) and left (*Valencianitat fusteriana*), both of which seek to define the identity of the Valencian people (Flor, 2013). The normalisation of the sociopolitical conflict associated with language normalises the language conflict while rendering Valencian and the resolution of the conflict invisible. Part of the success of the right’s normalisation of the sociopolitical conflict lays in secessionist politics, which first confronted the defence of the supremacy of Spanish over Valencian and later evolved with the opposition between Valencian and Catalan as distinct languages.

According to Ninyoles, there are only two ways to resolve the conflict: the normalisation of Valencian or a language shift towards Spanish. The author classifies both alternatives as the real and ultimate terms of the conflict (1975). In contrast, other authors like Francesc Vallverdú (1982 and 2013) state that ‘stable diglossia’ would be possible and even desirable in some zones he deems minority, including the Region of Valencia: ‘While the Catalan language community aspires to the full use of its language and does not view linguistic normalisation as satisfactory,

this aspiration may be utopian in other situations, where it is preferable for the recovered language to fit within a situation of stable diglossic bilingualism' (Vallverdú, 2013: 37).

Retail linguistic landscapes are showing an advanced process of language shift (Pérez, 2021). But should we aspire to stable diglossic bilingualism with the current situation of Valencian retail given this discouraging scene? Despite the Castilianisation of the retail linguistic landscape, the situation of Valencian could be reversed by guaranteeing and fulfilling the language rights that are already recognised, and with an effective language policy geared at encouraging the use of Valencian in retail.

2.1. International recognition of language rights

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights paved the way for the recognition of the linguistic rights of people and their language communities. But language matters did not come to the fore on the international political agenda until the last decade of the twentieth century. In 1992, the United Nations issued the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*, and UNESCO's *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* was issued in 1996, which is the reference document that even today stands as a framework of action on language matters.

The *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* is still an ambitious UN umbrella that 'promises a future of coexistence and peace thanks to the recognition of the right that each linguistic community has to shape its own life in its own language in all fields [...] (in the) hope that some day a normative body of the United Nations regulating the defence of linguistic rights all over the world will be approved' (1998: 6-7). For this reason, this declaration is only presented as a referent, with the expectation that the states will adapt it to their own regulations but without an executive regulatory capacity in the different language communities today. To clarify, theoretically it is an ethical universal declaration, as it is conceptually well thought-out and goes into great detail, but it is not binding, which prevents it from becoming a real instrument to transform language landscapes and territories.

This declaration outlines the collective rights recognised: the right to education in one's own language and culture, the right to have cultural rights, the right to an equitable presence of the group's language and culture in the media, and the right for citizens to receive attention from government bodies and in socioeconomic relations in their own language. However, it also includes five specific articles on the socioeconomic sphere (articles 47 to 52) which recognise the rights to carry out any socioeconomic activity in one's own language in retailers and private entities, as well as to get information, secure any documents needed, undertake any transaction and have spaces with signs in their own language, among others. Even though these rights are

recognised, there is no way to guarantee them in practice, and constant violations in retail spaces can be found.

TABLE 1

Selection of articles from the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (UN,1996)

Collective rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to receive attention in their own language from government bodies and in socioeconomic relations.
Article 47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to establish the use of their language in all socioeconomic activities within their territory. • The right to have at their disposal, in their own language, all the means necessary for the performance of their professional activities, such as documents and works of reference, instructions, forms and computer equipment, tools and products.
Article 48	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to use their own language with full legal validity in economic transactions of all types, such as the sale and purchase of goods and services, banking, insurance, job contracts and others.
Article 50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right for their language to occupy a pre-eminent place in advertising, signs, external signposting and in the image of the country as a whole.
Article 51	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to use the language proper to the territory in their relations with firms, commercial establishments and private bodies and to be served or receive a reply in the same language.
Article 52	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to carry out their professional activities in the language proper to the territory.

SOURCE: Author, based on https://culturalrights.net/descargas/drets_culturals389.pdf.

The same problem with the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* can also be found with the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (approved in 1992 but ratified in Spain in 2001). It recognises language rights but activates no binding mechanism for the member states which entails regulating and legislating languages. Part III of the Charter includes a list of measures to favour the use of ‘regional or minority languages’ in public life, which must be adopted by the states that ratify the Charter, according to the commitments they thereby take on. The measures focus on guaranteeing the following points: education; access to their language in the administrative bodies (justice system and public services); promoting the regional or minority language in the media (with their autonomy and independence); promoting the language in cultural activities and facilities; avoiding discrimination in economic and social activities (creating documents in the minority language in the fields of finance and economics, providing consumers with information in their own language, among others); and fostering cross-border exchanges. Regarding retail, article 13.2 describes the measures associated with economic and social activities. The measures geared at the socioeconomic sphere are limited to creating doc-

umentation in the ‘minority language’ which both enables users to request, implement and get information on economic actions and promotes the use of the language in this sector. Even though this Charter describes linguistic rights, especially the rights of ‘regional or minority languages’, the measures are based on the minimum requirements that must be met by the states that ratify it, but under no circumstances does it outline how they can achieve this. This obviously detracts from the document’s effectiveness and reach, leaving the states that have adhered to the Charter the authority to regulate languages, launch specific actions and take linguistic decisions.

In Spain, the 1978 Constitution recognises the country’s linguistic diversity but treats both the languages and their speakers unequally. Part of this inequality lies in the territoriality of the languages, as noted by Pardines and Torres (2011): while a Spanish speaker has the right to speak their language throughout the entire state, a Valencian, Catalan, Mallorcan, Galician or Basque only has the right to speak their language in the territory of their autonomous community, as it is a territorially restricted right.

The Constitution allows each autonomous community to recognise and define the functions of its co-official language. In the Region of Valencia, this is regulated by the Estatut d’Autonomia de la Comunitat Valenciana¹ (Statute of Autonomy of the Community of Valencia, Organic Law 5/1982, dated 1 July 1982).² This Statute recognises Valencian as the official language and stipulates the Valencian public administration’s obligation to guarantee the normal, official use of both languages, to adopt any measures needed to ensure knowledge of Valencian, to grant special protection of and respect for the recovery of Valencian and to prevent discrimination on the basis of language.

2.2. Lack of a retail language policy

The Statute of Autonomy of the Community of Valencia lays the groundwork that makes the language policy for linguistic normalisation possible, although Law 4/1983, dated 23 November 1983, on the use and teaching of Valencian (LUEV),³ truly signalled a turning point in the language policy of the Region of Valencia. The approval and implementation of this law was fundamental in launching the process of linguistic normalisation of Valencian and breaking with the dynamic of language shift. Even though the law aims to promote Valencian in all spheres of social life, in practice the implementation and enforcement of the law has focused exclusively

1. <<https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/1982/BOE-A-1982-17235-consolidado.pdf>>.

2. Later reformed by Organic Law 1/2006, dated 10 April 2006, the Reform of Organic Law 5/1982. <<https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2006/04/11/pdfs/A13934-13954.pdf>>.

3. <https://dogv.gva.es/datos/1983/12/01/pdf/1983_802514.pdf>.

on education and the public administration. The socioeconomic sphere has been left totally exposed, as article 17 only contains a brief direct reference to ‘the right to express oneself in Valencian at any gathering, as well as to use Valencian in their professional, business, work, union, political, religious, recreational and artistic activities’. In the words of Antoni Gisbert, the socioeconomic sphere is ‘what the LUEV did not provide for. Nothing more can be said, nor can it be made clearer’ (Gisbert, 2020: 36). In a similar vein, Gisbert argues that because the LUEV does not mention the economic sphere, this law has no possibility or potential of leading to any regulations in this sphere.

Valencian language policy, specifically the normalisation of the language, has gone through ups and downs, as Bodoque (2009 & 2011) describes it. This fluctuation between progress and backsliding has been heavily influenced by the politics of the party governing at any given time. However, language policy in the socioeconomic sphere has been forgotten (or simply not prioritised) by all governments, even those that have worked towards linguistic normalisation, but especially those who seek language shift.

This laissez-faire attitude in the socioeconomic sphere has led to the situation today, which is characterised by an advanced process of language shift in retail settings, although Valencian does show some oral ethnolinguistic vitality; that is, it is not seen or is seldom seen in retail spaces, but it is heard (Pérez, 2021).

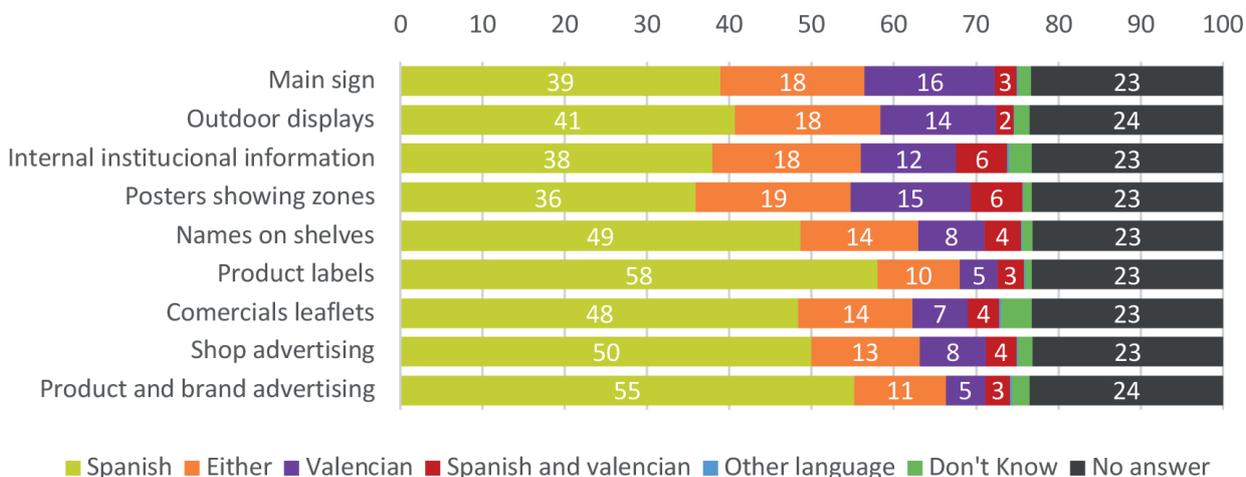
3. Perception of the presence and use of Valencian in retail settings

In this section, we present an examination of the social perception of retail linguistic landscapes from the vantage point of the survey respondents. First we share the results of the visual linguistic landscape (language(s) with a written presence in retail spaces) and then the results on the linguistic soundscape (language(s) with an oral presence in retail spaces).

According to the respondents, the written use of Spanish predominates in the visual language in all the categories analysed (signs, counters, labels, advertising, etc.), with percentages ranging between 35 % and 58 %. The ‘either Spanish or Valencian’ choice comes in second, with values ranging from 10 % to 19 %, and the ‘Valencian’ choice comes in third, with values ranging from 4 % to 18 %. The choice that is a combination of both languages, Spanish and Valencian, yielded very low percentages (between 2 % and 7 %), and there were no responses in the ‘other language’ choice. Of the results worth analysing, what stands out is the strong presence of Spanish perceived on product labels (58 %), advertisements of brands and products in the shops (55 % each) and signs on shelves (49 %). These elements, along with commercial leaflets, show the lowest levels of Valencian.

FIGURE 1

Percentage distribution according to language that the respondents see in their usual retailers

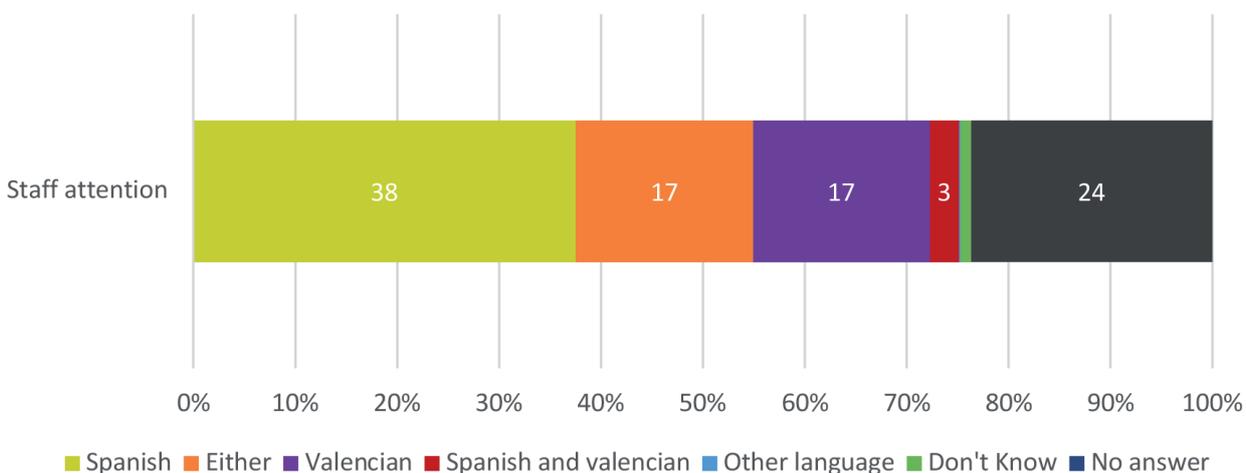


SOURCE: Author based on the survey conducted as part of the thesis 'Presència i ús del valencià en l'àmbit comercial'.

With regard to the linguistic soundscape, the respondents were asked about the language in which they are addressed by shop staff. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents claim that the shopkeepers address them in 'Spanish', 17% say that they use 'either Spanish and Valencian' and another 17% say that they are addressed in 'Valencian'. This reveals the continued linguistic hegemony of Spanish that we saw in Figure 1, although there is a stronger presence of Valencian in the oral language than in the written language.

FIGURE 2

Percentage distribution according to language that the respondents hear in their usual retailers

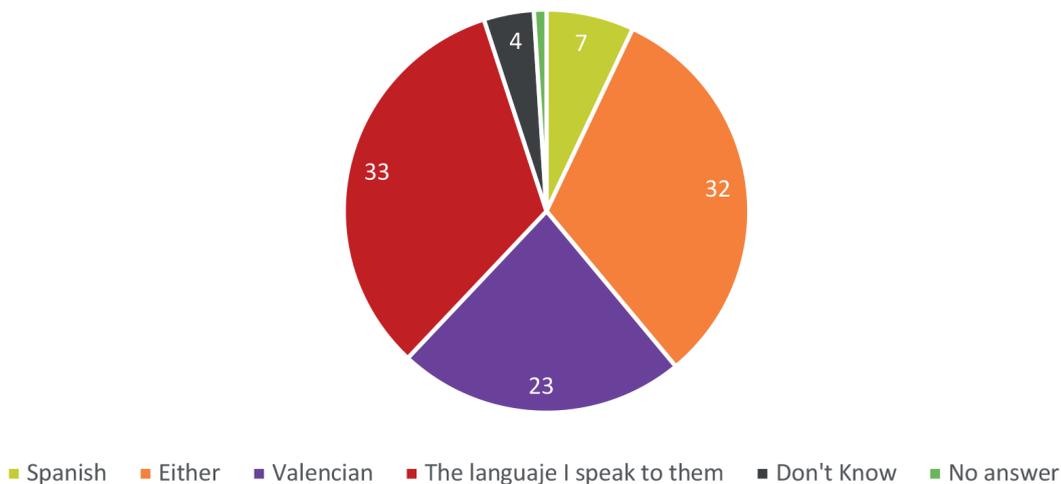


SOURCE: Author based on the survey conducted as part of the thesis 'Presència i ús del valencià en l'àmbit comercial'.

Another interesting result is that 33 % of the survey respondents believe that shop staff should linguistically adapt to the language used by customers. In contrast, almost another one-third (32 %) believe that shop staff can use either Spanish or Valencian regardless of the language that the customer uses. Furthermore, 23 % believe they should answer in Valencian, and only 7 % believe they should do so in Spanish.

FIGURE 3

Percentage distribution of the sample according to the language that the survey respondents think shop staff should use to communicate



SOURCE: Author based on the survey conducted as part of the thesis 'Presència i ús del valencià en l'àmbit comercial'.

With regard to the linguistic adaptation of shop customers, 69 % of respondents claim that they respond in Spanish if the conversation in the shop starts in this language, and 77 % claim that they respond in Valencian if the conversation in the shop starts in this language. These figures show high customer adaptation to the language used by the shop staff.

TABLE 2

Percentage distribution of the sample according to the linguistic adaptation to the language used by the shop staff to start the conversation

	The shop staff starts the conversation in Spanish	The shop staff starts the conversation in Valencian
Spanish	69 %	15 %
Valencian	19 %	77 %
Either	8 %	4 %
No answer	4 %	4 %

SOURCE: Author based on the survey conducted as part of the thesis 'Presència i ús del valencià en l'àmbit comercial'.

In short, the respondents believe that the retail linguistic landscape is Castilianised, the visual language more than the soundscape, as they perceive that the oral presence and use of Valencian is slightly higher than its written use. The respondents' attitude is highly favourable to linguistic adaptation, which generates a positive assessment of the oral presence and use of Valencian in retail spaces.

We should note that while the visual linguistic landscape is more static over time, the linguistic soundscape tends to be more dynamic. That is, the aesthetics, signage and written information are fixed in the space for a certain period of time, but the spoken language can vary according to the capacity and desire for linguistic adaptation of the shopkeeper or staff in the same retail space. Therefore, these spaces tend to be visually Castilianised, but the use of Valencian may increase with the oral presence of Valencian.

4. The Valencian retail linguistic landscape observed

In this section, we present a description of the main results of the participant observation in 1,856 shops located in six cities in the zone of Valencian linguistic predominance. These data enable us to examine the linguistic reality in Valencian retail settings based on immersion in Valencian retailers. To facilitate the description of the retail linguistic landscape as comprehensively and complexly as possible, the results are presented on the presence and use of Valencian by type of establishment (small business, market and shopping centre) and by territory (Alacant, Alcoi, Castelló, Elx, Gandia and València).

In order to conduct a comparative analysis of the presence and use of Valencian by type of establishment and by territory, and to thus ascertain the places where Valencian is more common physically and orally, a simple scale was created which shows the intensity of the presence of Valencian, both written and spoken, according to the percentage obtained on the variables analysed in the participant observation. This scale is comprised of the following ranges: very low (less than 20%), low (between 20 and 39%), medium (between 40 and 59%), high (between 60 and 79%) and very high (between 80 and 100%).

By type of establishment, we found notable differences in the presence and use of Valencian in the retail visual linguistic landscape and retail linguistic soundscape. Comparatively, markets are the establishments with the highest presence of Valencian (both oral and written), although its written presence is very low (only 13.9% of the signs are in Valencian) and its oral presence is low (25.7% of the conversations between the stall staff and the customers are in Valencian). Small businesses come in second in this classification, where the written presence of Valencian is very low (only 6.3% of the signs are in Valencian) and its oral presence is low (23.3% of the conversations between the shop staff and the customers are in Valencian). Finally, shopping

centres are highly Castilianised, as both the written and oral presence of Valencian is very low (0.8% of signs are in Valencian, and 7.6% of the conversations between the shop staff and the customers are in Valencian).

In summary, the data analysed provide evidence of the scant presence of Valencian in retail in general and reveal that its presence is much lower in writing than orally. This shows that even though these spaces are highly Castilianised, and even Americanised due to the high written presence of English in some establishments, Valencian is used as a language of spontaneous communication among workers and customers (oral ethnolinguistic vitality). In short, we have found a visual retail linguistic landscape that is heavily Castilianised, with an increasing presence of English, and a retail soundscape that is Castilianised but with an occasional presence of Valencian.

TABLE 3

Summary of the results on the presence of Valencian by type of establishment

	Written presence			Oral presence	
	Shop name and signs	Outside signposting	Inside signposting	Language among workers	Language with customers
Small businesses	Very low 6.3%	Very low 2.4%	Very low 1.3%	Very low 13.4%	Low 23.3%
Markets	Very low 13.9%	Very low 4.4%	Very low 7.7%	Very low 18.3%	Low 25.7%
Shopping centres	Very low 0.8%	Very low 2.6%	Non-existent	Very low 1.6%	Very low 7.6%

SOURCE: Author based on data collected as part of the participant observation in the thesis 'Presència i ús del valencià en l'àmbit comercial'.

On the other hand, the analysis of the linguistic landscape in the different cities studied reveals that there are major territorial differences in the presence of both written and spoken Valencian. Therefore, we can posit different retail linguistic landscapes in the Region of Valencia as opposed to a single retail linguistic landscape.

Regarding the written presence of Valencian, all the cities showed very low figures; specifically, fewer than 12% of the shops have signs or signposting (internal or external) in Valencian. The cities where the highest percentage of written Valencian was found in retail settings are Gandia and Alcoi (between 11% and 12% of the shops have some type of sign or signposting in Valencian), and the cities where the least written Valencian was observed in retail are Elx and Alacant (around 2%). The cities of Castelló and València fall in the middle (between 7% and 7.5% of shops have some kind of sign or signposting in Valencian).

The analysis of the oral presence of Valencian in retail settings were classified into cities with a low or medium presence of Valencian, and cities with a very low presence of Valencian. The first group includes Alcoi, Gandia and Castelló. Alcoi is the city with the strongest oral presence of Valencian in retail, as 34.9% of the conversations recorded among the shop staff were in Valencian, and 54.1% of the shop staff responded in Valencian when they were asked a question in this language. Secondly, in Gandia 23.7% of the conversations observed among workers were in Valencian, and 21% of the shop staff responded in Valencian when they were asked a question in this language. Finally, in Castelló, 12.7% of the conversations observed among workers were in Valencian (very low percentage) but 45% of the shop staff responded in Valencian when they were asked a question in this language (this percentage is the second highest, after Alcoi).

The second group, comprised of the cities where there is a lower presence of oral Valencian, includes the cities of Elx, Alacant and València. The language used by the majority of workers is Spanish; in all three cities, the percentage of workers who speak to each other in Valencian is under 6.6%. Particularly worth highlighting is Alacant, where no conversations in Valencian among shop staff were observed. Spanish is also spoken by the majority of shop staff when a conversation is started in Valencian: only 4.3% in Elx, 7.4% in València and 10.3% in Alacant responded in Valencian. It is surprising that more shop staff responded in Valencian in Alacant than in the city of València.

TABLE 4

Summary of the results on the presence of Valencian by territory

	Written presence		Oral presence	
	Name and signage	Outside signposting ⁴	Language among workers	Reaction to question in Valencian
Alacant	Very low 2.1%	Very low 2.1%	Non-existent	Very low 10.7%
Alcoi	Very low 9.7%	Very low 11.9%	Low 34.9%	Medium 54.1%
Castelló	Very low 7.1%	Very low 1.4%	Very low 12.7%	Medium 45%
Elx	Very low 2%	Very low 1.2%	Very low 4.4%	Very low 4.3%
Gandia	Very low 11.2%	Very low 5.9%	Low 23.7%	Low 21%
València	Very low 7.5%	Very low 4.1%	Very low 6.6%	Very low 7.36%

SOURCE: Author based on data collected as part of the participant observation in the thesis 'Presència i ús del valencià en l'àmbit comercial'.

4. The values on the external signposting is a sum of signposts in just Valencian and in both Valencian and Spanish.

The participant observation also recorded the shop staff's linguistic adaptation to a conversation started in Valencian. In only 20 % of the conversations in which the shop staff were previously speaking in Spanish with other customers or colleagues did they change to Valencian to adapt to a conversation started in Valencian. This figure is quite negative: only one out of every five retail workers linguistically adapt to a conversation in Valencian when the customer is speaking Valencian. The shop staff's reactions to these intentional dialogues were classified according to their attitude when asked to change languages: a respectful attitude (the shop staff do not understand Valencian, apologise and kindly ask to change to Spanish), a functional reaction (the shop staff do not understand Valencian and ask to change to Spanish to maintain effective communication) and an inflexible reaction (the shop staff do not understand Valencian or understand it but refuse to use it in the conversation and ask to change to Spanish within a conflictive situation).

5. Convergences and divergences between social perception and empirical observation

In this fifth section, we will outline the convergences and divergences observed regarding the presence and use of Valencian in retail settings between what the survey respondents perceive and the results of the participant observation in the shops.

The convergences found between the social perception and the linguistic landscape observed are first the existence of a Castilianised retail linguistic landscape (both visual and sound), and secondly a higher presence of oral than written Valencian, that is, greater ethnolinguistic vitality in the oral than the written language. In other words, the retail space is Castilianised, and 'Valencian is heard more than seen'.

On the other hand, we also find divergences between the information drawn from the survey and the data collected in the participant observation. The first and most striking of these incongruencies is the amount of Valencian perceived versus the amount actually observed in the retail landscape. The oral and written presence of Valencian perceived by the respondents is much higher than the presence and use of Valencian observed in the retail spaces. The possible causes behind this divergence may include the impact of the social normalisation of diglossia and language conflict, which distort social images while ignoring the problematic sociolinguistic situation and creating a more naïve image of reality (the results of the survey resemble the respondents' wishes more than to the sociolinguistic reality). The high percentage of non-responses on the questions reveals part of the problem: language conflict normalises diglossia and renders it invisible.

A second observable divergence is the invisibility of English in the survey respondents' responses despite the importance of this language in the retail linguistic landscape observed. On the survey, the 'other language' choice is practically non-existent (percentages under 1.1%), while English is more prominent in the shop signs in the visual landscapes observed than Valencian is. This divergence may be conditioned by the usual shops where the respondents go (small businesses and markets versus franchises and shopping centres), the areas where they go shopping (in more or less touristy areas) or the questionnaire's possible effect by creating a kind of dichotomy between 'Spanish or Valencian', which renders other options invisible.

The third and last divergence is related to the shop staff's linguistic adaptation to the customers and the customers to the staff. In both situations, the respondents believe that linguistic adaptation to Valencian is a common reaction; however, in the participant observation it was found to be a minority practice. The results of the survey show that almost three-quarters of people change to the language spoken by the shop employee (69% in the case of Spanish and 77% in the case of Valencian), while in the observation only one-fourth of the employees adapted to the fictitious customer's Valencian (25%).

We should add that the fact that linguistic adaptation does not occur does not necessarily mean that the lack of adaptation forces Valencian speakers to change languages, because if the Spanish-speaking person is competent in Valencian and has a positive attitude towards the minoritised language, the conversation could keep going interactively in both languages simultaneously (Valencian and Spanish). This is yet another symptom of the Valencian language conflict and its normalisation in Valencian society, that is, an ambivalent symptom of the good and poor linguistic health of València (Valencian speakers do not necessarily need to change languages, although the tendency is to change and adapt to the language that both people know how to speak, in this case Spanish, as the hegemonic language).

6. Conclusions

Despite the recognition of language rights, the rights of Valencian speakers are not guaranteed in practice. This linguistic inequality materialises in the social, economic, political and cultural inequality of the speakers of the minoritised language. The language policies implemented to date have focused on education and the public administration, but they have failed to intervene in the socioeconomic sector. The Valencian language conflict, the situation of diglossia and the lack of a retail language policy, among other precipitating factors, have led to an emergency where the survival of Valencian in this sphere is endangered.

The Valencian retail linguistic landscape is in an advanced process of language shift, where Spanish is hegemonic (and even English is in certain retail spaces) and Valencian is subordinat-

ed in both the visual landscape (written language(s)) and the soundscape (spoken language(s)). Both the results of the survey and the participant observation lead to the conclusion that Valencian is more present orally than visually, that is ‘Valencian is not seen (or barely seen) in retailers but it is heard’. This points to a fairly normalised situation in the Region of Valencia, with a higher oral use of Valencian and a lower (or non-existent) written presence of it. This situation is a consequence of diglossia and a practical materialisation of the Valencian language conflict. Yet it also offers an opportunity for language recovery and normalisation in that if we hear people speaking Valencian, it means that it is a language with some degree of ethnolinguistic vitality.

We cannot talk about a single ‘retail linguistic landscape’ in the Region of Valencia as a homogeneous phenomenon but instead of ‘multiple’ linguistic landscapes around the territory, and sometimes heterogeneous linguistic scenarios even within the same city depending on the zone and type of establishment. In the cities observed, the strongest presence and use of Valencian was found in Alcoi, Castelló and Gandia. In contrast, the cities with the most Castilianised retail landscapes are Alacant, Elx and València. This diversity of landscapes is no coincidence but instead the outcome of longstanding political, economic and sociocultural conflicts and dynamics in which language, as an identity marker, has often been used for social, economic and cultural distinction in the Region of Valencia.

Finally, we should highlight the fact that the social perception of the retail sociolinguistic reality is more positive than the actual retail linguistic landscape observed. This difference between what the survey respondents think and what has been empirically observed is evidence of the internalisation and normalisation of the language conflict, which renders the conflict and therefore the possibilities of resolving it invisible.

See bibliographic references in the Catalan version of the article.