

## Social networks and language use in Spain's Occitan-speaking Aran Valley

The focus of this study is the role of social networks and the significance of age on the use of Aranese Occitan. The main objective is to describe ways in which language use of the young members of the Aran Valley speech community differs from that of older members.

The theoretical framework for this study is based on an adaptation of Social Network Analysis developed by Milroy (1980). The categorical analysis of networks includes indicators such as kinship, density and multiplexity, both in work networks as well as family and friendship networks. The success of other studies which used social network analysis to explain language maintenance and shift and variation and change in small, rural communities (cf. Gal 1980, Gumperz 1982, Lipp-Green 1989, Putz 1991) makes this model all the more attractive for the case of the Aran Valley.

In order to better understand the restructuring of the social networks in the Valley, socioeconomic changes are also considered as possible causation. These changes include heavy immigration of non-Aranese speakers into the Valley; rapid development of the service industry (i.e. tourism); and improved conduits of communication and mobility, including highway infrastructure, transportation, and innovations in technology.

This pilot study reports on data of nine L1 Aranese speakers ranging in age from 18-70. Only L1 speakers were used in an effort to control for the frequency of use in L2 speakers who may have proficiency deficiencies that could result less use.

Initial results indicate that there has indeed been an generational shift in the structural components of local social networks. The direct result of this is less frequency of use of Aranese in different social domains. The reasons for this shift, this study argues, come from major socioeconomic changes which have taken place in the last 50 years and caused the break-up of traditional social networks.

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