

THE RECOVERY OF THE GENERALIZED USE OF CATALAN IN CATALONIA



MOVEMENTS TO REVIVE CATALAN HAVE ALWAYS DEMANDED ITS NORMAL USE IN ALL FIELDS OF PUBLIC LIFE, BOTH AS THE INSTRUMENT OF EDUCATION OR IN LITERATURE AND THE PRESS, AND IN POLITICS, WORK AND CULTURE GENERALLY.

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The future of a language depends mainly on its use as the normal vehicle for communication in the principal public functions: the media, teaching, financial and commercial activities, etc.

This is something the Catalans are only too well aware of, even if they are not experts in socio-linguistics: throughout history, the various attempts made by Spanish rulers to destroy the Catalan language have always consisted of restrictions or prohibitions of its use in public, from Philip V's decree of "Nueva Planta" (1715) to the Franco dictatorship, and even in more recent times.

Inversely, movements to revive Catalan have always demanded its normal use in all fields of public life, both as the instrument of education (starting with the work of Baldiri Reixach in the 18th century) or in literature and the press (the aim of 19th century writers), and in politics, work and culture generally, as part of the national project which the Modernist intellectuals put forward at the end of last century and which has dominated the wole of the 20th century. From the moment of General Franco's death in 1975, the use of Catalan in society started to spread at a remarkable rate, since social aspirations no

longer had to overcome the opposition of the authorities, but, as these became democratized and decentralized, actually began to receive their support.

Official and Administrative Use

Although Catalan did not formally recover its position as an official language until the promulgation of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy (1979), many Catalan institutions used it before this in their political and administrative activities, as did the *Generalitat* itself following its provisional restoration (1978). When the Linguistic Normalization Law stated in 1983 that Catalan, as the offi-

cial language of Catalonia, was to be the normal language of the local and autonomic administrations, it not only reflected popular feeling, but also the general tendency in all the Catalan administrations.

The Catalan Parliament holds its sessions in Catalan, and Catalan is the normal language in the vast majority of the local authorities of Catalonia (from a large city such as Barcelona to the smallest rural town council) and in the autonomous administration, always respecting the right of citizens to use the other official language, Castilian.

It is quite true that there are still a large number of civil servants who do not have a very good knowledge of Catalan, and official documents are often issued in Castilian through inertia, rather than because a member of the public has requested it. But in the last ten years, Catalan has undoubtedly become the official language of Catalonia. Even the state administration's delegations in Catalonia, as well as the judicial system, have followed processes of adaptation to the new juridico-linguistic framework and have gradually reached the stage where they can attend the public in Catalan should citizens wish to make use of this right. However, the process is slower in these institutions and there are still very few cases of judicial processes taking place in Catalan or of the public's being able to use Catalan in their dealings with the police. The state administration's collaboration with linguistic normalization is still insufficient.

Education

Between 1970, when the General Law of Education first allowed the teaching of Catalan, and 1978, when teaching in Catalan was authorized with some restrictions, our language had been gaining ground at all levels of education, though its presence was still very limited.

It was the *Generalitat's* educational policies, once it had taken over full responsibility in this field, that provided the decisive boost, especially in primary education, with the collaboration of parents and teachers.

At present, according to figures from the Department of Education, teaching takes place in Catalan in more than 20 % of primary schools, and another 40 % are in the process of increasing the vehicular use of Catalan to the point

where it becomes generalized. Out of the total number of schoolchildren, 42 % attend schools which work principally in Catalan (with a few subjects taught in Castilian). In the other schools, Catalan is not taught just as another subject, but is also used as the vehicular language in various subjects, so as to ensure a sufficient degree of familiarity. In secondary education, the vehicular use of Catalan is growing, though more slowly: 40 % of schools teach at least two basic subjects in Catalan: in the rest, teaching in Catalan is more limited, though Catalan is always a compulsory subject.

We are still a long way from realizing the objective of the 1983 Linguistic Normalization Law, which is that Catalan should be the usual language throughout the educational system, but there is no doubt that each year Catalan is used more extensively as the vehicle language in non-university education.

The situation in the Catalan universities is much the same: Catalan is used in all studies as the teaching language and the language of research (in proportions close to 50 % but generally lower), so that there is no doubt as to its viability in all specialist fields. It seems safe to assume that the arrival of students who have used Catalan throughout their schooling will allow its use to become generalized in further education, without, of course, excluding the use in universities of other, international languages.

The Media

At the moment there are two national and three regional newspapers in Catalan (one of the latter just appeared recently), though their circulation is lower than that of the newspapers in Castilian. In local magazines, on the other hand, Catalan is clearly predominant. The presence of Catalan on the radio has increased considerably over the last few years, largely due to the audiences achieved by the *Generalitat's* new stations (Catalunya Ràdio, RAC and Catalunya Música) and, on a local level, the municipal stations (of which there are over a hundred).

As regards television, the appearance of TV3 –the *Generalitat's* channel– in 1984, with programmes entirely in Catalan and broadcasts of normal quality and duration, was a real revolution in communications. Not only did it achieve a wide audience in a short time, but it

also forced the official Spanish television (TVE) to pay more attention to Catalan. It is significant that half of the broadcasts on the second channel of TVE are now in Catalan.

As well as this, the second Catalan autonomous channel, "Canal 33", started broadcasts recently, so that now, at least half of all television broadcasts in Catalonia are in Catalan. However, the outlook for the future is disturbing, since the Spanish government has just authorised three private television channels, with a legal framework which encourages their exclusive use of Castilian. On top of this, it is unlikely that satellite or cable television will speak Catalan.

Amongst the other communications media, the endless rise in publishing (from 918 titles in 1977 to 4,145 titles ten years later) contrasts with the small proportion of films or videos in Catalan. These are forms of communication which have not yet become adapted to the new linguistic situation.

The Socio-economic World

To end this brief summary, I shall describe the situation in the sector which is probably the most decisive of all: that of work and business. It is absolutely essential that Catalan should become the usual language here if it wants to see its future assured, but at the same time there is no doubt that it is the most difficult and the most delicate sector in society: on the one hand, the Catalans will never be able to exercise their full linguistic rights so long as they cannot work in Catalan or be attended in Catalan at any commercial establishment or company; on the other hand, how can one expect people to work in Catalan if they have never had the chance to learn it?

Progress in this field is therefore slower. The public service companies (public transport, water, electricity or gas companies, banks and savings banks, etc.) have been the quickest and the most comprehensive in their use of Catalan in their relations with clients. Shops, commercial centres, supermarkets and hypermarkets make more and more use of Catalan in their labelling and their dealings with customers. Publicity in the media and in the street are also gradually progressing in their use of Catalan. But there is still a long way to go, and growing European multilingualism makes complex demands on all companies and professionals. ●