

1906-1986: DISCUSSION ON A LANGUAGE

ISIDOR MARÍ COORDINATOR OF THE ÀREA DE LINGÜÍSTICA SOCIAL
OF THE II CONGRÈS INTERNACIONAL DE LA LLENGUA CATALANA



The *I Congrés Internacional de la Llengua Catalana* took place in 1906. Eighty years later, in 1986, the *II Congrés Internacional de la Llengua Catalana* was held. This article is a rough sketch of how the situation of the Catalan language has developed between these two congresses, and the similarities and differences to be found between them.

The Catalan language –although it was still, as always, the language habitually spoken by the inhabitants of Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands– had fallen into decay throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century it had practically disappeared as a vehicle of the country's culture.

The economic and social changes which resulted from the Industrial Revolution, and their interaction with romantic ideas, led to the formation of the movement known as *Renaixença*, which during the nineteenth century gradually recovered the use of Catalan in litera-

ture and other spheres of cultural life, especially in Catalonia.

At the end of the century, the aspirations of the Catalan Modernists were not limited to the creation of a regional literature in their own language, but included the intention of making Catalan the vehicle of a European, modern, complete national culture, as opposed to the socio-economic and cultural stagnation of official Spain.

While in the political field these aspirations implied demands for organs of self-government to free the country from the brake that the centralist monarchist system represented, the first linguistic objective soon showed itself to be the consolidation of spelling-rules and grammar, since up till then several criteria had coexisted in the literary language.

The institutionalization of culture and the systematization of the language where, then, the principal preoccupations at the beginning of this century, when the *I Congrés Internacional de la Llengua Catalana* took place, in the au-

turn of 1906. Three thousand people participated, a surprising figure for those times and one that shows the popular feeling that the language aroused.

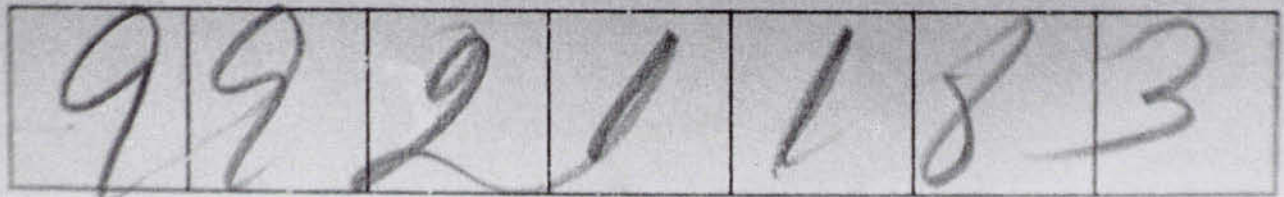
In the following year, 1907, the *Institut d'Estudis Catalans* was founded –virtually a Catalan Academy of Arts and Sciences–, which successively produced the Catalan *Normes Ortogràfiques* (Spelling-Rules) in 1913, *Gramàtica* (Grammar) in 1918 and *Diccionari General* in 1932. Alongside this process of systematization, Catalan society had achieved organs of self-government such as the *Mancomunitat* (1914) and, under the Second Republic and the statute of autonomy, the *Generalitat* (1932). In that same year the linguistic rules of the *Institut d'Estudis Catalans* were accepted by writers in Valencia and the Balearic Islands, where demands for autonomy also began to increase in strength.

The victory of General Franco's rebellion in 1939 cut short this process of recovery of the Catalan national cult-

TARGETA POSTAL PER ABSE TARJETA POSTAL POR AUSE

Dades que ha de facilitar
Datos que debe facilitar

LECTURA G



ure, which was then severely persecuted: not only did it lose its institutional support, but it was banned in administration and education, in the mass media, in all public uses and even, on occasions, in private life.

The importance of having achieved linguistic systematization before this period of persecution was to make itself evident: thanks to the existence of a linguistic unity, Catalan cultural resistance was not fragmented, but it is significant that the first Catalan publications authorized by the Franco regime were reprints of books with archaic spelling from before the unification.

The victory of the Allied Forces in the Second World War forced a progressive relaxation of the Franco dictatorship, while the internal democratic resistance took up the defence of the oppressed cultures such as Catalan. Gradually, Catalan recovered ground in teaching, publishing, journalism, popular music.... all of which, in spite of their limitations, during the sixties and early seventies, even before General Franco's

death, showed the presence and vitality of our culture.

The new Spanish constitution (1978) recognizes the right to autonomy of the different nationalities of the state. Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands have recovered self-government with their respective statutes of autonomy, and in these regions the Catalan language is official alongside Spanish.

For the first time in many years the *Països Catalans* can jointly take on a policy of linguistic and cultural recuperation. But the threat of extinction of the Catalan language does not disappear with this new situation. Only a systematic and resolute joint action can safeguard the future of our national community in a world dominated by a handful of economic and cultural powers.

This is the challenge the *II Congrés Internacional de la Llengua Catalana* has wanted to take up. The idea was not to hold a linguistics congress so much as to study the sociolinguistic situation and plan the right route to normality.

The work was organized in seven sections, in different towns and cities of the *Països Catalans*, between 30 April and 10 May, 1986: 1. Plans and processes for linguistic normalization (Lleida); 2. Sociology of language (Girona); 3. Social linguistics (Palma, Majorca); 4. Mass media and new technologies (Perpignan); 5. Language and law (Andorra); 6. Education (Tarragona/Reus), and 7. History of the language (Valencia).

Some 17,00 people took part in the academic sessions –among them first class Catalan and foreign specialists– and a lot more in the many popular events that took place alongside the work-sessions.

It will now be necessary to give popular and institutional support to the conclusions of the congress, the most fundamental of which proposes the creation of a joint organism for linguistic planning to include all the *Països Catalans*, along the lines of the Netherlands Linguistic Union.

□