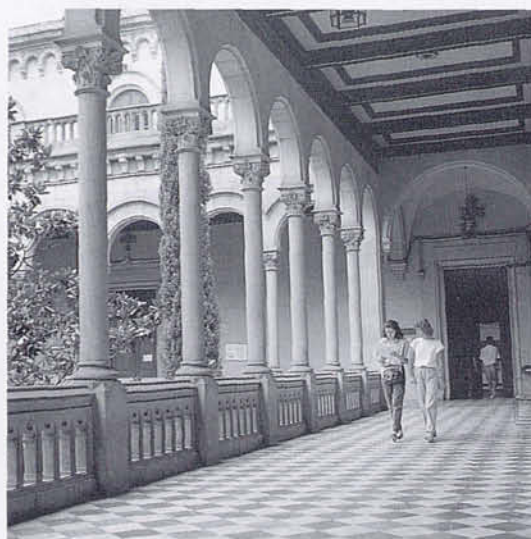


# THE CATALAN LANGUAGE IN THE UNIVERSITIES

TODAY, THE USE OF THE CATALAN LANGUAGE IN THE CATALAN UNIVERSITIES IS BECOMING MORE WIDESPREAD. WE HAVE TO BEAR IN MIND THE EFFECTS DERIVED FROM ITS PROHIBITION, WHICH LASTED UNTIL TEN YEARS AGO.

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**W**ith the re-establishment/recognition of the *official* nature of the Spanish languages other than Castilian within their respective autonomous communities by the Spanish constitution of 27 December 1978 (art. 3.2) and since the promulgation of the Catalan statute of autonomy on 18 December 1979 (art. 3), Catalan, as well as being the *natural* language, is also the official language of Catalonia alongside Castilian. Bearing in mind that Catalan, after the *Nueva Planta* decree of 1716, and except for the brief period during the second republic (1931-1939), was persecuted and prohibited in official use and in teaching (in spite of being the language normally spoken in Catalonia), we can

see that the new legal situation radically changes the linguistic outlook in all its aspects and, consequently, also in the university aspect.

In the universities, Catalan language and culture underwent, logically, the same hardships mentioned above: the attempted cultural genocide started in 1715; resistance and demands for a Catalan university (for example, the *Congressos Universitaris* of 1903 and 1917); the granting of an autonomous structure for the University of Barcelona (1933-1939) during the short-lived second republic, which made it possible to include both Catalan and Castilian languages and cultures on an equal footing; renewed prohibition and persecution

under the dictatorship of general Franco (1939-1975), and, finally, the return of Catalan to the Catalan universities, first merely tolerated and later, with the constitution (1978) and with the *Estatut d'Autonomia de Catalunya* (1979), legally recognized.

The constitution and the *Estatut d'Autonomia de Catalunya*, as well as allowing the modification of the linguistic structure of the Catalan universities, have also altered their overall structure. Today, the universities have a fairly broad system of autonomy and both the state and the *Generalitat de Catalunya* have a say in their running.<sup>1</sup> Within this autonomous framework that the universities now have, under the university reform law (1983), they have





created their own governing statutes. The three Catalan universities that exist today (the University of Barcelona, the Autonomous University of Barcelona and the Polytechnic University of Catalonia) include the question of language in their statutes. Thus, the statutes of the University of Barcelona (1985) state that "Catalan is the official language of the University of Barcelona. The languages in use are Catalan and Castilian, both of which have been declared official in Catalonia by the Spanish Constitution and the Statute of Catalonia." (art. 4.1). The statutes of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (1985) state that "The natural and official language of the Autonomous University of Barcelona is Catalan; Castilian, the official language of the state, will also be official in the university." (art. 4.1). As regards the Polytechnic, the statutes (1985) say, "Catalan is the language of the Polytechnic University of Catalonia, which will make it the normal vehicle of expression. The Polytechnic will accept Castilian, reciprocally with Catalan, on an equal footing..." (art. 8). Also, all three statutes mention the desire to strengthen and encourage the use of Catalan, which, one must remember, is the natural language of Catalonia, although the three statutes guarantee the right of all members of the university community to use either of the two official languages. This right is in turn

protected by law under the linguistic normalization law passed by the *Parlament de Catalunya* in 1983. According to article sixteen of this law, "In centres of further education, teachers and students have the right, in each case, to express themselves, whether in speech or in writing, in whichever of the official languages they prefer."

Catalan is now included in the entry exams of the various university centres in Catalonia, for those students who have studied in Catalonia (Royal decree of 1982). However, since the Catalan universities accept students and teaching staff who come from other parts of the Spanish state, where Catalan is not spoken, and who therefore have no knowledge of the language, the *Llei de normalització lingüística* also stipulates that "The Catalan universities must offer courses and other appropriate means to ensure a knowledge of the Catalan language for those students and teachers who do not understand it." (16.2).

Today, the use of the Catalan language in the Catalan universities is becoming more widespread. We have to bear in mind the effects derived from its prohibition, which lasted until ten years ago. At the Polytechnic of Catalonia, 93.14 % of the students say that they understand Catalan well and only 1.02 % say they understand nothing at all. As regards the language in which

classes are given, the figures point to an almost identical use of Catalan and Castilian.<sup>2</sup> The proportion of classes given in Catalan at the University of Barcelona is also about 50 %.<sup>3</sup> Although there are no figures available for the Autonomous University of Barcelona, we can hazard the guess that the use of Catalan reaches appreciably higher percentages than in the other two universities, since this is a recently created university and this has doubtless meant the appointment of a higher number of native teaching staff.

In the other parts of the Spanish state where Catalan is spoken (Valencia and the Balearic Isles), there are also statutes of autonomy that put into effect the official nature of Catalan alongside Castilian. For this reason, the respective universities (*Universitat de València* and *Universitat de les Illes Balears*) also have statutes that include dispositions regarding the language, similar to those in the statutes of the universities of Catalonia. ●

1. By Royal decree 305/1985, of 6 February, the state administration transferred University matters to the *Generalitat de Catalunya*.

2. UNIVERSITAT POLITÈCNICA DE CATALUNYA, *Dades Estadístiques i de Gestió. Maig 1986*, Barcelona, 1987, p. 109 and 113.

3. According to sectorial figures for the academic year 1985-86, provided by the *Comissió de Política Lingüística* of the University of Barcelona.