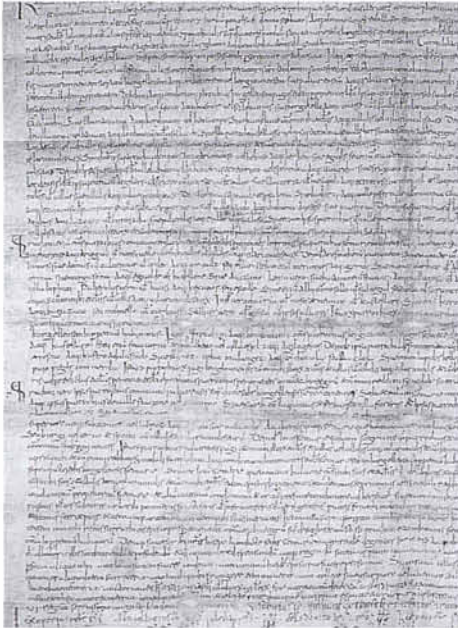


THE CATALAN LANGUAGE IN ANDORRA



DETERMINED ACTION IS NEEDED ON THE PART OF THE ANDORRAN GOVERNMENT IF CATALAN, SUPPOSEDLY THE ONLY OFFICIAL LANGUAGE, IS NOT TO BE REDUCED TO A VESTIGE AND EXCLUDED FROM EVERYDAY USE. IN THIS RESPECT, THE ESCOLA ANDORRANA, ADULT EDUCATION AND THE LINGUISTIC ADVICE SERVICE ARE THREE INSTRUMENTS THAT WILL BE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE IN THE FUTURE.

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The official language of Andorra is Catalan, which exists alongside French and Spanish, so that it is spoken or understood, to a greater or lesser extent, in shops and hotels and by the public in general. This situation is determined by the media (especially television, with two Spanish, one Catalan and three French channels) and the educational system (Spanish, French and Catalan schools). Recently, a new language –Portuguese– has begun to make itself felt with some insistence. The increasing number of workers arriving from Portugal gives this fourth language considerable

weight in certain very specific contexts, usually of a low social level. The theoretical situation of Catalan, then, is very different from the reality. Another factor to be borne in mind is Andorra's geographical location, closed in by mountains and more or less isolated for centuries. Bearing this in mind, we can say that until seventy years ago there had been very few external linguistic influences; relations with her immediate neighbours had always taken place in Catalan, which was spoken on both sides and with very few differences. After the beginning of this century, with

the rapid development of the media, the situation changed radically. The road from Andorra to La Seu was opened in 1913, and the one from Soldeu to El Pas in 1933. The north became more French and in the south, although the locals spoke Catalan, there was an important influx of Castilian-speakers. Contacts increased and with them continuous economic, cultural and linguistic influences. The social rejection of Catalan to the north (anything that is not French is *patois*) and the explicit prohibition and persecution of Catalan to the south meant that Andorra held a privileged

position as regards the language and the Andorrans spoke it with pride. However, there was no equivalent to an Academy of the Language and, as in any other field, without fixed rules doubts arise over certain points.

Catalan, though, is a very uniform language that hardly varies within the area in which it is spoken (Principality of Catalonia, País Valencià, Balearic Isles, Principality of Andorra) and the Institute of Catalan Studies, along with the University of Barcelona, fulfilled this function, albeit with limited means.

It is important that a minority language (11 million speakers) should be cared for and recognized both by the people who speak it and by others. In fact, beside the great majority languages (Chinese, Russian, English, Castilian, etc.) there are hundreds of minority languages (Finnish, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Danish, etc.) that have had to fight to keep alive.

The situation as regards Catalan has changed considerably in the last fifteen years, especially in Catalonia, where Catalan has been made co-official alongside Castilian. Although this continues to favour Castilian, it has also been a considerable boost to Catalan, which is now present in schools, universities, the press and television. Linguistic advice centres have been set up, as well as government departments specializing in particular points concerning the language.

Andorra has benefited from all the research and investigation that has been undertaken in the field of Catalan, and from the new technical means available to this work, but on the other hand this has also meant that it has lost some of its personality.

The Catalan that has always been spoken in Andorra is Western, transitional, Pyrenean Catalan, with its own phonetic characteristics. This typical pronunciation is in danger of disappearing as a result of circumstances: most Catalans who come to work in Andorra and settle definitively speak Eastern Catalan, which is the standard form of the language as taught in grammar books and heard on television.

This change from the local Western Catalan to the newly arrived Eastern Catalan, and the frequent mixture of the two, is further reinforced by a mistaken self-correction which banishes genuine forms to replace them with foreign forms, generating a certain insecurity as



regards the local language and favouring other languages, particularly Castilian but also French.

Andorra today is a country with an economy based almost exclusively on the tertiary sector (catering, tourism and services), which gives rise to a great quantity of unqualified or almost unqualified jobs. This does nothing to encourage either integration or the study of the country's language.

Determined action is needed on the part of the Andorran Government if Catalan, supposedly the only official language and the only one spoken in those sectors that depend on the administration, is not to be reduced to a vestige and excluded from everyday use. In this respect, three instruments have been created that will be of great importance in the future (and already are today): the Escola Andorrana, the Adult Education system and the Linguistic Advice Service.

The Escola Andorrana. Traditionally, Andorra has had Spanish schools (entirely in Castilian), French schools (entirely in French) and congregational

schools: Col·legi Sant Ermengol and Institut Anna M. Janer (most classes in Catalan).

To this offer has recently been added the alternative of the Escola Andorrana, which provides plurilingual teaching whose vehicular language is Catalan. It began with the smallest children and has now reached the age of ten. Each year, a further class is added.

Adult Education comes in two versions: national history and institutions, and Catalan (with five levels, two for non-Catalan-speakers and three for Catalan-speakers). Classes normally take place in the evening, are held in all the parishes of Andorra and are free of charge. This is a fundamental instrument for helping foreign residents (whether Spanish or Portuguese workers, English pensioners or French traders) to become fully integrated in the everyday life of the country in which they have chosen to live. One fact which must be admitted and which the Adult Education programme sets out to change is that foreigners arriving in Andorra, although they know that Catalan is the official language (as stated in the leaflets containing information on the country) speak Castilian for purposes of day-to-day life.

The Linguistic Advice Service, which apart from publishing books and back-up material on a range of subjects offers advice on Catalan for the whole of Andorra's population –and especially for the administrative sector–, promotes campaigns, handles linguistic complaints, etc. and, in general, tries to see to it that the official language is written correctly and is recognized as the official language in all spheres and, especially, that it is a useful means of communication between all the inhabitants of Andorra.

This is no easy task, because, as we said at the beginning, the majority languages tend to dominate –in our case, Castilian, which is spoken by the majority and is present in two television channels and all levels of education.

Luckily, people are beginning to realise the importance of preserving and defending their language and, with the help of the government departments mentioned earlier, Catalan television and the forthcoming Andorran television, we hope to see this tendency reversed and see Catalan in Andorra reach the normal level of development of a language in its own country. ■