

The oral linguistic model: the case of Canal 9 or the unbalanced (linguistic) level

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- *"Industrial" orality presents us with unusual problems that writing had never presented us with, such as naturalness, credibility and genuineness. A point of balance has yet to be reached between phonetic correctness, diction and interpretation. It is vital for professionals, authors and directors of dubbing to collaborate in order to perfect linguistic work, the adaptation of voices and interpretative quality, as well as a referential model in line with current legislation and the specific communicative situation (the programme). We professionals have great responsibility in this respect. But, above all, those in charge of managing Valencian public television.*

Keywords

Language structure, modelling principle, referential model, secondary orality, functionality.

1. Preliminary considerations

"Language is made by people, by school, by television, by poets, by novelists, by newspapers and even by linguists". This was written quite a few decades ago by Joan Fuster and he certainly hit the nail on the head. In no other area of linguistic use is Fuster's quote more evident than on television, a medium that requires language register(s) based on the vernacular-colloquial varieties of the medium's area of coverage but at the same time respecting the language's standard and cultured uses. Television is, by definition, a mass medium. And its language use must be primarily in line with this characteristic of maximum reference in quantitative terms.

The (internal) linguistic structure of languages, as usage itself, is *heterogeneous* (diverse) and *dynamic* (variable). The age of the interlocutors, the social milieu in which they live, their occupation, gender, the purpose of the communication are factors that determine the language variety users may employ, just as much as geographical origin. However, language variation and diversity in the mass media must be "under control". The *modelling principle* implicit in the medium requires this. That's why it's so important for the media's language policy (that referring to its status and also the language corpus itself) is designed by applying strategic criteria that take into account the communicative needs of the whole language community, beyond its specific uses. The *raison d'être* of a standard variety is precisely intercommunication between all speakers in a language community, irrespective of their language area (geographical dialect), their age (historical dialect), their social class or occupation (social dialect), etc. In fact, the standard variety can be defined as a variety that supersedes diversity, the variety that can be used by everyone (by everyone that needs it) at

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the appropriate time and place. But the mass media are, by definition, the place where the (most) common variety or standard language is realised.

In order to fulfil its role as a variety that supersedes diversity, the standard not only has to be known (shared) by everyone but also has to be *accepted* (felt as their own). This is highlighted by the definition of standardisation given by Charles Ferguson: "the process of one variety of language becoming widely accepted throughout the speech community as a supradialectal norm".¹ This will logically depend on it fulfilling a functional role in the speech community, being useful for something for everyone. It must therefore be a *utilitarian common language*.² That's why we tend to repeat that television's language model must be "correct, according to the norm and appropriate for each situation".

2. The early days of Canal 9

Since Canal 9 was first broadcast on 9 October 1989, we professionals working there have always taken into account the fact that language model(s) should not hinder either educational policy or the, shall we say, established literary tradition among Valencians. Quite the opposite: it should reinforce it. Hence those responsible for drawing up the stylebook for Radiotelevisió Valenciana (RTVV)³ and for setting up the Linguistic Advisory Unit responsible for safeguarding the language policy of the publicly owned RTVV, produced a/some reference model(s) for both in-house production and news programmes as well as for dubbing external production, with particular attention to use for children and young people, as these segments of the Valencian population were the only ones to have benefited from formal education in the Valencian language. Professional training was also necessary but not only in language terms, since the indigenous broadcasting industry has grown up in

parallel with television from the autonomous community. Valencian media professionals were few in number and, as is natural, were exclusively trained in producing and/or dubbing audiovisual products in Spanish. One advantage held by TV3 when it started, for example, was the large number of Catalan-speaking actors that had regularly dubbed into Spanish. In fact, very often the same person dubbed the Spanish and Catalan for certain actors from North American cinema, for example, something which has helped viewers identify and accept these actors to a large extent. This was not the case of Valencian television where, all things considered, we had to practically start from scratch, in those early days at the end of the eighties last century, such times full of hope, from different perspectives.

The breeding ground of Valencian theatre also helped, albeit to a small extent, given its little consistency in professional terms and the type of theatre, this normally being independent, highly centred on some specific genres and with certain age groups missing. The radio in Valencia, where some voluntary journalists had worked as well as certain actors, could act as a kind of testing ground for the nascent television. For different reasons, the first management team of the public body RTVV, led by the Director General of RTVV, never took these professionals into account. The most scandalous example of this banishment was that of Toni Mestre, doyen of journalism in Valencia for the broadcaster Ràdio Nacional a València, who was never asked to help the general management of RTVV. In any case, at that time the autonomous community of 'País Valencià' had a meagre group of voices in terms of age, intonation and timbre for setting up suitable teams or casts for the highly extensive needs of in-house audiovisual production (reports, fiction, etc.) and for the dubbing required by the new television. The lack of dubbing directors was also notable during those early days, a profession that we have also had to invent ourselves more or less from scratch.

1 FERGUSON, C. (1968) "Language Development". In: FISHMAN, J. A.; FERGUSON, CH. DAS GUPTA, J. *Language problems of developing nations*, New York: Wiley, 1968, 521p.

2 LÓPEZ DEL CASTILLO, LL. *Llengua estàndard i nivells de llenguatge*. Barcelona: Ed. Laia. 1976.

2 I was personally responsible for the first edition of the work *El(s) model(s) lingüístic(s) de RTVV*, which was used as a linguistic reference for setting up RTVV's linguistic policy and for the media depending on this organisation. This work, which only had a multi-copied version, would ultimately be published in a commercial version in MOLLÀ, T. (1992) *La llengua dels mitjans de comunicació*. Alzira: Ed. Bromera.

In such a germinal and uncertain context, the theoretical work of Rodolf Sirera and of a hardworking but minority team of sound and dubbing professionals was more than remarkable. Without their professional commitment and dedication to language standardisation it would not have been possible to begin that formidable adventure that, unfortunately, has only reached halfway. Names such as Vicent Orenge (Estudis Somàgic), Lluís Miquel (Estudis Tabalet), Paco Cano (Estudis TCR-27), Miquel Gil (AC Estudis) and Manuel Miralles (Estudi de Música), among others, dedicate the best of their efforts to an equally huge and inspiring as frustrating task from various points of view. Finally, the lack of translators (and adjustors of scripts on screen) with knowledge of the corresponding languages, in addition to audiovisual registers, meant that we were working in truly difficult conditions. The (re)creation of a referential level of language for television broadcasts and its colloquial specifics according to the sociolinguistic parameters required by television's different formats and genres needed the urgent recycling of many linguistic advisors, also with training that was not very industrial, so to speak. In this context, the work of Heike van Lawik and of Marisa Bolta was decisive, in charge of correcting and adapting hundreds of cinematographic scripts for dubbing films and TV series. As well as the work carried out by Salvador Jàfer, Juli Ortells and Ximo Naval in advising on the locution and studio recording of the first films and in preparing the first in-house programmes produced by Canal 9.

As an anecdote, it is useful to note that the film *Casablanca*, which was first shown on Canal 9 on 9 October 1989, with a translation by Marisa Bolta, was dubbed at the Sonoblok studio in Barcelona, with a cast of Catalan actors and on-site advice provided by Juli Ortells. No-one ever noticed. Amadeu Fabregat, Director General of RTVV, had required us to produce perfect dubbing, linguistically, artistically and technically, for the first broadcasts of regular programmes on the first television channel in Valencian in history. As we have already mentioned, the broadcasting industry was in its early stages in Valencia and the Director General decided we would dub in Barcelona "but without it being noticed". The work and the challenge were twofold: we had to produce a cast of Catalan actors capable of imitating Bogart and company (dubbing is the art of imitation, not the art of acting) as if they were Valencians and Ame-

ricans at the same time. Ovidi Montllor was in charge of giving voice to the emblematic Sam, the black pianist in the legendary film. The dubbing was fantastic from all points of view, as shown by it still being valid eighteen years later. But the Director General of the company pronounced that the only actor in the cast who "seemed Catalan" was precisely the only one who, in administrative terms, wasn't. He felt that the voices, accents and diction of the rest were totally appropriate. The black mark for this dubbing, according to the strange tastes of the Director General, was the voice of Ovidi, goodness knows why. In spite of the bad taste left by this anecdote, we'll always have *Casablanca* as an example that, in the world of dubbing and television, things can be done well without it being noticed, one of the axioms that must be repeated in this environment and medium in which we work and earn our living.

However, as we know, audiovisual language is a global communicative entity made up of language per se but also of music, dramatic effects and, above all, images. Consequently, the dubbing language is not only accepted as a result of the language model chosen but also due to other aspects involved in the overall dubbing process. And fundamentally to those aspects that make the version in our language become natural and convincing (credible and genuine) using a different language source. In other words, they make something "artificial" seem "natural". I'm referring, as mentioned above, to the artistic aspects (acting, synchronisation, casting quality, suitability of the voices, diversity of voices, etc.) and technical aspects (sound, perspective and editing, fundamentally). Therefore, the consideration *sine qua non* of why dubbing into Valencian should be accepted is that it forms part of good dubbing from the already mentioned points of view and not only in linguistic terms.

We soon overcame a large number of these problems and achieved notable language quality (and artistic and technical) in all formats and genres. The locution classes given by professionals from the Linguistic Advisory Unit both to those working on new production (journalists-editors) and in-house production (scriptwriters, presenters, collaborators, etc.) as well as external productions (actors, translators, adjustors, dubbing directors, etc.) played a highly important role in professionals learning to modulate the different characteristics of all the usual forms of communication on

television and their complexity in accordance with communicative situations. Always, of course, within the logical and gradual maturing of the different broadcasting sub-sectors. The production of *General elocution criteria* occupied the first few months of our work. Its publication helped to establish reference models that quickly became the inevitable guideline for RTVV, production, dubbing and sound recording firms. With the errors and hesitations inherent in any beginning, these criteria continue to be a reference that the present-day people in charge of the linguistic policy of RTVV and the broadcasting industry in Valencia ignore at their peril.

3. Some characteristics of Valencian elocution

Articulation (with particular emphasis on the double open vowel system in general Valencian),⁴ intonation (the correct adjustment between rises, progressions and falls in tone in the prosodic units), rhythm, diversity (of broadcasters) and their attitude to the message precede the production of oral television models (formal and informal) with the consequent grading between elocutions that we considered as mandatory, optional or inadmissible. The establishment of formal registers (neutral or non-spontaneous), clearly differentiated from informal registers (colloquial or spontaneous).⁵ In any case, language informality is always also "controlled flexibility" given that we are referring to an imitated orality. W. J. Ong⁶ called this *secondary orality*. The language of dubbing, for example, had to be as neutral and standardised as possible, as it generally reflects realities in terms of plot and context that are foreign to our cultural sphere and, therefore, it would have been totally

inadequate to mark a character or context with references taken from our own reality around us. The inexistence of a standard language that is accepted and recognised as such by the majority of the population was, ultimately, an obstacle that had an effect on the situation. The population's limited language competence imposed certain restrictions or precautions at the time, which we always took very much into account. At that time and in those specific circumstances, we had to avoid ideological, prejudicial and often compensatory uses of language varieties, as has often been done in certain genres.

The so-called "industrial" orality of television presented us with some problems that had been unheard of until then in the use of Valencian, such as those of naturalness, credibility and genuineness that, naturally, written language (and regulations) had never tackled. Two problems added to this situation were orthography-based reading (and/or elocution) and also Spanish-influenced reading often used by some professionals. With regard to the former, there is an obsession to pronounce all the letters we see written down. The consequence is usually that, instead of a natural reading close to the real language, an artificial and "book-type" reading is achieved that is not in line with the tradition and elocution that should be considered correct and appropriate in our language. Above all, the oral system of communication is different from the written, both in structure and in how it is produced. The tenuousness of the oral means that the audience cannot "re-read" it, unlike written language. How orations are organised can't be the same either. The oral also needs a more straightforward syntax but this does not necessarily mean it is simpler: more reduced but not poorer. In the case of Spanish-influenced reading, we reproduce phonetics and reading habits that are not from our

4 The vowels (ɛ) and (ɔ) are extremely open when spoken by most Valencian speakers, especially in the centre and to the south of the region, and that's why they are called "double open" vowels. When pronounced, this must be taken into account since, if they are not pronounced sufficiently open, the listener receives this signal as a contravention of their linguistic system. This feature must not be accompanied by a lengthening, as done by some new speakers who have learned or incorporated this sound into their linguistic system (some dubbing actors, some presenters or journalists), especially those whose mother tongue is Spanish: ferro (f rro), not ('fe:rro), ('porta), not ('po:rta)...

5 See MOLLÀ, TONI (1992).

6 ONG, W. J. (1987): *Oralidad y escritura. Tecnologías de la palabra*. Mexico: Ed. F.C.E.

own language. The typical examples are the systematic closing of open vowels, inexistent in Spanish. In short, the loss of basic differentials with regard to this imposed language. On the other hand, a good oral reading (or a good oral text) should reproduce the particular linguistic phenomena of oral language: open sounds, voicing, elision, assimilation, etc.

4. An induced crisis

Unfortunately, before we had even enjoyed two years of certain "linguistic normality" at RTVV and before a good core of professionals specialised in production and dubbing had been established, the general management of RTVV, still led by Amadeu Fabregat, decided to eliminate dubbing into Valencian and also to impose a register on the rest of the programming that had Spanish-influenced uses grafted onto it, with the old excuse of bringing it "closer to spoken language". The controversy whipped up by this decision (symbolised in a list of over three hundred banned words) obscured the desire to make the broadcasts more "Spanish". As always, the conflicts concerning the form of language or its identity were cultivated to obscure the real conflict. This is the only way we can explain the controversies arising between conservatives and modernisers, or between *heavies* and *lights*, each time language is about to achieve a certain degree of normality. *Patoisation* always reinforces the process of linguistic substitution. In any case, a quality medium requires a functional model and a populist medium imposes one of *folklorisation*. In this respect, giving up a standardised language model implicitly means giving up language standardisation.

The kind of programming on Canal 9 (since that time favouring pretentious and Spanishified pureblood folkloric content) does not endorse the functionality of Catalan but associates it with a comic quality and insignificance. From this point of view, language quality first depends on the rate of use of a language and, of course, on the model of television. We must not deceive ourselves with language-centric

considerations. The kind of programming and the channel's corporate identity predispose the viewer to accept or reject certain language proposals. In the case of a marked anthropological profile of programming, such as some people wanted for our television, language uses are inevitably associated with proposals of a conservative nature, so to speak. For dubbing to be accepted as natural, however, the brand image of the television channel must be modern and up-to-date, contemporary. Which does not mean, naturally, that it cannot be "Valencian". Quite the opposite, it must show that being Valencian is being modern in the autonomous community of the País Valencià. Dubbing represents modernity insofar as it unites the use of Catalan with some issues, contexts and characters that become references at various levels. Logically, in constructing this corporate identity, not only programming and language are influential but also all the other distinctive elements of television: plastic, personal, graphic, musical, advertising, etc. In short, I believe that accepting dubbing into Valencian on RTVV depends on the more generic acceptance of RTVV. And another thing, that Catalan must be accepted (albeit not exclusively) as the language of modernity.

5. The linguistic policy of 'matalafer': 'fer i desfer' (doing and undoing)

On the other hand, the low incidence of Catalan in RTVV programming makes it impossible, as we have already said, to ensure the professionalism of the process and of its scriptwriters, journalists, translators and script adjusters for dubbing, actors, etc. It therefore makes this impossible, depending on the different levels of quality required. Consequently, as we have already written elsewhere,⁷ "it is particularly serious that the mass media should not be up to the standard of the language policy that people attempt to apply in other areas, such as schools".

In effect, the policy of 'matalafer' (doing and undoing) is a falsely eclectic solution that always disfavours the inferior language community. The only real possibility for the future

7 MOLLÀ, TONI (1991): "La llengua dels mitjans de comunicació (1) and (2)". In: *Levante-EMV*, Valencia. Now in MOLLÀ, Toni (2007). *Quina política lingüística?* Alzira, Ed. Bromera.

lies in building a communicative network that reciprocally reinforces all areas involved in standardisation. In this respect, the "construction of a self-sufficient cultural market" and the "consolidation of audiences-market", as stated by Miquel de Moragas, are conditions *sine qua non* to socially legitimise the project of standardisation. Large media are the instrument of social universalisation for a project that will otherwise become sterile. RTVV + CCRTV + IB3 + RTVE + public digital terrestrial channels should build up a terrain of cultural, linguistic and also economic understanding that is mutually reinforced and constructs the apparatus of a "possible and normal" country that lives, laughs, cries and makes love (not war) in Catalan. I am not sure that our respective governments are up to the task, but I believe that this is a pragmatic and possibilist policy, a mechanism of *cultural exceptionality* that is vital in order to blend global communicative flows and strictly business-driven outside interests. The reciprocal nature of broadcasts between television frequencies proposed by the governments of Catalonia and País Valencià, for example, should be merely the first step in a more ambitious strategy. The creation of a "common communication area", already demanded by Josep Gifreu twenty years ago, must not be a chimera but a growth strategy. Technology, for once, plays in our favour.

Clearly, without the television and radio industry (production, dubbing, etc.), the Valencian language has no future. But, be careful: without Valencian, this industry doesn't have much of a future either. On the one hand technological and economic development, and language standardisation on the other, are currently complementary requirements; two sides of the same phenomenon. Another error that we should also rectify is that cultural industry is not synonymous with foreign production. Or, put another way, the cultural industry from here can be as outstanding and original as that from any other place in the world. The rhetoric of the European challenge and competitiveness would also endorse a commitment to indigenous development. At the same time this also represents a realignment of relations, in their broadest sense, between the public sector and private initiative. Public sector administrators must be sufficiently clear-headed to understand that the deployment of an indigenous cultural industry is an unavoidable need, not only to structure a country they claim to represent but also to establish its own

institutional system. For their part, private firms should not be blinded by the short-term gains provided by the Spanish language. This is a temporary situation and is even a poisoned sweet that buys a certain silence. The identity of the Valencian cultural industry, its corporate distinction, depends on work in Valencian, at least in terms of the issue of reducing authority.

In this respect, I am not sure whether the Valencian public mass media, with Canal 9 at their head, have done so much for the development of an indigenous industry, in accordance with the needs of production and consumption of a country that wishes to be modern and European. I rather believe that they have been the instruments for the mass dissemination of messages alien to our social, cultural, linguistic and economic reality, and even the means of recovering the most rank and conservative mentalities and ideologies. Indeed, cultivating the most ridiculous clichés and the most militant anti-intellectualism have been the resources of a harsh popularism that has almost totally saturated our media. This situation becomes particularly pathetic when language itself becomes the object of mockery and, correlatively, illiteracy is presented as a venerable condition. This is also the pinnacle of "identifying with the powerful" and self-hate, as lucidly stated by Rafael-Lluís Ninyoles more than twenty years ago now. The (Spanish) one-act farce would be a historical precedent for this.

Logically, the mass media require mass consumer products. But no-one should set these products against culturalism, which is also required. Quite the opposite: the only media that make sense in public media are those that take into account the different audiences that go to make up Valencian society. And only plural media in Valencian fulfil the social integrating function required by language standardisation. I say this with sadness and desperation, but an observer must realise that we are talking about the most mystifying media we Valencians have ever had. The only explicit objective seems to have been to destroy the particular identity that had been developing since the sixties and to criminalise the cultural enterprise represented by what we call "Catalanism".

6. Production in Valencian. Final considerations

Of course this does not mean that there is no quality production on RTVV from a language point of view. The creation of Punt 2 and Canal Comunitat Valenciana⁸ (1995) improved the demand for products in Valencian and, therefore, increased the quantity and quality of broadcasts. However, the disappearance of the Linguistic Advisory Unit for RTVV, in retaliation to the opposition of most of the linguists⁹ to the list of prohibitions from the general management, meant that the models proposed did not have any kind of coherence but would depend on the will of the professionals involved, the antithesis of professionalism. Without doubt, the key problem is mastery of a language is not a criterion for hiring someone. The "level" of language at RTVV is consequently an "unbalanced level", alien to any kind of quality control, something that leads to stylistic inappropriateness, in addition to certain specific problems:

- *Vocalism*: confusion of vowel timbres. In general Valencian open vowels are double open.
Persistence of vowel harmonies that should be avoided in formal and neutral speech.
No-linking vowels.
- *Consonantism*: improving the distinction between voiced and unvoiced alveolars between voiced and unvoiced palatals.
Perfecting the //l/.
Achieving velar resonance in the phoneme //l/.
Linking consonants.

Certainly, a point of balance has not yet been achieved between phonetic correctness, diction and interpretation. In this respect, it is once again vital to collaborate between

language advisors, information professionals, authors and directors of dubbing and/or production in order to perfect language performance, the appropriateness of voices and acting quality. At present, news programmes are the only ones that maintain a certain degree of language coherence on RTVV thanks to the professionalism of most of the current language advisors, as well as the content offered by the different corporate websites for RTVV and the international channel. In this kind of programme, the role of editor and presenter has always been "complemented", so to speak, by that of "language advisor". And also, we must not forget, by an always restrictive policy regarding certain language uses and certain forms on the part of the news management, from the very beginning of broadcasting up to the present day. And this always in line with a strong disparity of criteria, most of which are based on the simple illiteracy of some company directors. The functional criterion ("suitable for each situation"), based on understandable sociolinguistic reasons, has often been interpreted as a blessing for dialecticism and interference.

It is therefore vital to update a reference model (of a non-dogmatic but referential nature) to be employed by all direct users of the language: journalists, actors, translators, scriptwriters, etc., in line with the following parameters: a) current regulations and b) the specific communicative situation (the kind of programme, basically). And we professionals involved have a great responsibility in this, in the process of producing and broadcasting a product. But, more than us, this responsibility falls to those in charge of managing the public television of Valencians and, when all is said and done, the official policy of the government of the País Valencià.

8 Later the name changed to TVVi (Televisió Valenciana Internacional).

9 This persecution reached such limits that befitted only a paranoid mind. The linguistic correctors of the News Department of Canal 9 had their computer system modified so that, in each text, the name of the specific person would appear who had allowed a very dangerous *amb* to pass, a vulgar *nosaltres*, a betraying *vegada* or an always suspicious *gaudir*. The linguists Francesc Esteve, Daniel Pérez, Cèsar Aparicio, Àlvar Banyó, Salvador Jàfer, Marisa Bolta, Heike van Lawik and Josep Pérez Blesa were dismissed. I myself, team coordinator, was condemned, for more than four years, to a windowless office for having opposed the language policy of the Director General of RTVV. We were simply an obstacle to a specific language policy, approved no less by the Socialist Party of País Valencià. It was 1991 and the city was Valencia, in Europe.