

THE CORNERSTONES OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN CATALONIA

Catalunya is probably the nation without a state (or constitutional region) in the European Union (EU) with the most vigorous vernacular language. The situation of Catalan in Europe therefore represents a statistical irregularity. There is no other language spoken by around nine million Europeans, in a territory where some 12 million European Union citizens live, that is not a fully official language in the eyes of the EU. Nor is there any other language which is used a vehicle for teaching in eighteen universities that is not an official EU language. Nor any other language taught in more than ninety universities on all five continents. The dynamism of Catalan is therefore comparable to languages such as Swedish, Czech or Danish; yet its legal situation, on an international level, is a very different matter.

This is also the case within Spain itself, a state that has not recognized an egalitarian language policy for its country – in fact, quite the opposite: despite the dynamism of Catalan (and also Basque and Galician, official languages in their respective autonomous communities), Spanish is the only official State language. Obviously until this situation is resolved within Spain itself, it is very difficult for the State to instigate, as it should, the international dissemination of the Catalan language.

Despite all these difficulties, Catalonia obviously has its own language policy. Likewise, there is a language policy in Andorra (the only Catalan-speaking territory that enjoys political independence), in the Balearic Islands and in the Valencian Community (which are autonomous Catalan-speaking communities within the Spanish state). Unfortunately, Catalan is not official in the other Catalan-speaking territories (La Franja de Ponent, in the autonomous community of Aragon; Northern Catalonia, in France; and Alghero on the island of Sardinia in Italy).

TOOLS FOR CATALAN

The basic function of the Catalan Government's Language Policy Secretariat is to facilitate the inclusion of every citizen in Catalonia in the Catalan linguistic community. We need to make it easy for people to learn Catalan and provide our citizens with the necessary instruments to help them use the language normally so that everyone can make it their own.

Certainly, we have already achieved a great deal which has allowed us to establish our mission on very solid foundations. Thanks to the work of the Pompeu Fabra University and the *Institut d'Estudis Catalans* (Institute of Catalan Studies), the Catalan language enjoys a well-founded and consolidated regulatory framework. We have a standardised grammar and dictionary and our own language academy. Few nations without a state can boast a national academy such as the *Institut d'Estudis Catalans*, which is totally comparable in every respect to any national language academy in any European country.

It has not fallen upon us to undertake the complex task of standardising the language because that had already been done by our ancestors. Today, however, it is up to us to

update the instruments necessary for teaching Catalan and for the natural incorporation of new immigrants into our linguistic community.

For this reason, we are investing in advanced research centres, in language engineering and in the most modern technologies for teaching and learning the Catalan language.

In this respect, we have a unified language consultancy service – OPTIMOT – where anyone can make an online query about anything concerning the Catalan language – its use, corrective elements, specialized vocabulary, etc. Queries can also be made on any aspect that might be of interest with regard to neologisms. On this subject, there is a consortium in Catalonia – TERMCAT – which is responsible for standardizing terminology on an ongoing basis. It is one of the most advanced terminology institutes in Europe and is constantly connected to all other terminology institutes around the world.

On this same subject, we have various automatic translation tools, all of them two-way (Catalan-English, Catalan-French, Catalan-Spanish, Catalan-German) and we are currently preparing Catalan-Occitan, which is of particular interest given that the Occitan language, which is vernacular to the Vall d'Aran, a small territory within Catalonia, has been official since the new Statute of Autonomy was passed.

We are also in the final stages of developing an online Catalan course which will enable people to learn the language at every level via the Internet (with or without tutorials): this is the *parla.cat* course which we will be launching online next September.

The aim of the Language Policy Secretariat is to provide Catalan society with the most modern language engineering instruments and the most suitable tools to ensure easy access to learning the Catalan language, gearing it as closely as possible to users' needs.

LINGUISTIC INDUCTION OF NEW ARRIVALS

Since 2000, more than one million new immigrants have arrived in Catalonia. If we compare figures, for example, in total numbers Catalonia has received a similar number of immigrants to the whole of Germany. This sector of the population that has recently arrived in our country poses a new challenge for us, yet also represents an opportunity. It is a challenge because it is not easy to incorporate such a large number of people into our linguistic community in such a short space of time. But it also represents an opportunity because if these new immigrants are properly inducted to our linguistic community, the number of Catalan speakers will grow exponentially. And also because we can offer the rest of the European Union, and the world, the example of how a small country, a nation without huge resources available to it, is capable of welcoming an extraordinary number of new immigrants, and doing so not with any friction but with great social harmony.

To facilitate the induction of new arrivals around the country, we have a fundamental instrument which is the Consortium for Language Normalisation (CPNL). The CPNL has 22 Language Normalisation centres around Catalonia. It employs more than one thousand people (including Catalan teachers and language motivators) and currently provides a service for more than 100,000 users.

The CPNL mainly specialises in organising Catalan language lessons for adults. However, it also has an important facet as a social motivator, acting on institutions and organised collectives within society (associations, political parties, trade unions, etc.). The CPNL also organises language support for town councils and associations in terms of the use of the Catalan language.

One of the CPNL's key programmes is the Language Volunteers programme (VxL), which is being heavily implemented around the country. This programme consists of organising 'language pairs' whereby someone who knows Catalan well is paired up with someone else who doesn't speak it but wants to learn in a series of meetings to converse in Catalan and support the learner in the process of acquiring the language. This year more than six thousand language pairs have already been organised, and we believe the figure of nine thousand is absolutely achievable. The programme has been operating for five years and its success is already evident: we now have a considerable number of volunteers who were once learners. The programme also enjoys considerable popularity because well-known people from the worlds of politics (the president of the Catalan parliament and the vice-president of the government), the media (the presenter of the most popular comedy programme on Catalan TV) and culture (some of the country's leading writers) are all involved as volunteers. The programme was recognised by the European Commission as one of the most successful initiatives for teaching languages to new immigrants.

CIVIC ACTION FOR LANGUAGE NORMALIZATION

When it comes down to it, the Catalan language has managed to survive through lengthy periods of dictatorship (which have always tried to suppress it; very notably the most recent one, Francoism), thanks to the fact that its people have continued to use it in spite of any restraints. It has been Catalan society itself that has kept the language alive when everything else was against it.

Today, the process of normalising the Catalan language also needs a strong contribution from society. Our language is being marginalised, interpolated – for the most part – in an inequitable State which recognises plurality (at least nominally) yet does not recognise equality (in the case of Northern Catalonia, in France, the situation is even worse, obviously). We therefore do not have the necessary elements to completely guarantee the full process of normalising the use of the Catalan language.

In this context, a civic network to uphold the language continues to be absolutely necessary. All over the Catalan-speaking lands there is a proliferation of all kinds of associations and organised groups who strive to ensure that Catalan holds a more worthy position in society as a whole. In Catalonia there are some powerful associations, such as the Platform for Language and the Coordinator of Language Associations (CAL), which organise complementary activities. While the Platform takes on a more activist role, calling for full recognition of the linguistic rights of Catalan speakers, and demanding the use of Catalan in areas where our language is not habitually used, the CAL takes a more educational approach with language training tools (ranging from conversational groups for new arrivals to workshops teaching Catalan speakers how to keep the language alive, how to speak up on behalf of Catalan

and how to convince other people to join our linguistic community). Along with these more activist groups there are associations such as the *Òmnium Cultural* which for many years has been working on recovering the country's language and culture. In the Balearic Islands, the *Obra Cultural Balear* has a similar function to the *Òmnium* in Catalonia, and in the Valencian Community this task is performed by *Acció Cultural del País Valencià*.

In the Valencian Community, where the situation is more sensitive and the educational system takes a rather less rigorous approach to the Catalan language, a powerful movement has emerged in favour of the Valencian school: the *Federació Escola Valenciana*, which works towards achieving teaching in Catalan and establishing it in Valencian society.

Obviously, the institutions in Catalonia (and also in the Balearic Islands; not so much in the Valencian Community) give their full support to the associations that generate civic action towards normalising the Catalan language.

We believe that a good combination between political action, setting up the necessary mechanisms for integrating the whole population in social and linguistic terms, and supporting civic movements that uphold the language, will together provide the framework that will enable us to look to the future with confidence.

BERNAT JOAN I MARÍ, Secretary of Language Policy at the Government of Catalonia.