

Catalan in the Classroom: A Language Under Fire

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Abstract

This paper describes the role of Spain's largest minority language, Catalan, in Spanish society, specifically in the classroom. Throughout its history, Catalan has gone through many cycles of oppression and revival. Currently, despite several decades of positive progress in its official role and a growing number of young speakers, Catalan is facing new challenges once again. Some members of the Spanish government believe that the language of instruction in Catalonia should be Castilian, a development which the citizens of Catalonia feel is an attack on their linguistic rights and identity. Catalan is a well-documented example of the tensions which can arise in a country with a minority language or languages. The Catalan case can also serve as a reminder to English teachers that the politics of language are often more complicated than they seem; teachers must be aware of and sensitive to the cultural and political backgrounds of their students.

Introduction

It is a fact that linguistic boundaries and political borders are not a perfect match; nevertheless, most people associate one language with one country. For example, the name Spain, for many people, brings to mind one language: Spanish. However, Spanish, or "Castilian" as it is more specifically called, is not the only language in Spain. There are 15 languages spoken in Spain—one official language and three other "co-official" languages, the largest of which is Catalan, spoken as a "mother tongue" by approximately nine percent of the population, compared to five percent speakers of Galician and a mere one percent who speak Euskera (Basque) as a mother tongue (Ethnologue, 2014; European Commission, 2006, p. 2).¹ In fact, 41.3 percent of Spaniards live in regions with more than one official language, and 29 percent of them live in a Catalan-speaking region (Generalitat, n.d.-b). Catalan is spoken in five of Spain's 17 autonomous communities: Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, Valencia (where it is called Valencian), Aragon, and Murcia. It is also spoken in three other countries: France, Italy, and Andorra (Pradilla, 2001, p. 58).

It is difficult to establish the exact number of Catalan speakers in the world, or even just in Spain. According to Ethnologue's seventeenth edition (2014), there are 3.7 million Catalan speakers in Spain and just over four million in the world. However, Ethnologue's sixteenth edition (2009) reported 11.2 million speakers in Spain and 11.5 million in the world, while the Catalanian² government itself reports six millions speakers in Catalonia and 9.1 million in the world (Generalitat, n.d.-b). Most likely, the actual number of Catalan speakers is somewhere in the middle of these figures, as the larger numbers likely include L2 speakers. For the purpose of this paper, the numbers of Ethnologue's seventeenth edition (2014) and Eurobarometer, both noting approximately 3.7 million speakers in Spain and just over four million in the world, are assumed to be the most accurate count of L1 speakers of Catalan. This paper will focus on Catalan within the Spanish region of Catalonia, which has



Fowler, S. (2014). Catalan in the classroom: A language under fire. *Hawaii Pacific University TESOL Working Paper Series Volume 12*, 104-115.

Website: <http://www.hpu.edu>

the most speakers, and where it has been the most contentious issue, exacerbated by Catalan's connection to Catalan nationalism. While Catalan is in no apparent danger of becoming endangered in the near future, its status continues to cause tension in Spain, especially in education, and maintaining Catalan in education is important for the language's vitality and continued use.

The Catalan example may initially seem unique to its own country, but it should be a lesson for language teachers anywhere. It is easy to make assumptions about students' first language based on their national origin, but in many countries, the linguistic situation is very complex. While many people assume that linguistic borders and political borders are the same, this view is unrealistic and damaging, as many countries are home to a multitude of minority languages. It behooves language teachers to understand the social context of their students' linguistic backgrounds, because something as simple as "What language did you learn in school?" or "What language do you speak at home?" can be a very loaded question for some students, as the case in Catalonia will demonstrate. For example, "Spanish" should more accurately be called Castilian, and teachers should be aware that while Castilian Spanish is the national language of hundreds of millions of individuals in over 20 countries on both sides of the globe, each of those countries has numerous minority languages. Similarly, language teachers must be aware that terms such "Chinese" or "Filipino," while they may reflect a student's nationality, may be inaccurate and even offensive when describing a student's language background. Understanding this is an important part of the intercultural sensitivity that is vital to teaching language learners in any context.

Early Catalan: 9th Century to 19th Century

Catalan is a Romance language developed in the Pyrenees Mountains between Spain and France during the eighth and ninth centuries (Generalitat, n.d.-b). It falls under the Ibero-Romance family and is the only "East Iberian" language. Its closest relative is not Castilian Spanish but Occitan, a much smaller language spoken in southern France (Ethnologue, 2014). In 1137, the Count of Barcelona married the heiress of Aragon, uniting as the Kingdom of Aragon, where the language of the court was Catalan (Anguera, 2003, p. 77). Over the next three centuries, the Kingdom of Aragon expanded to the south and east; by the end of the 14th century it reached Mallorca, Valencia, Sicily, and Sardinia (Rodà-Bencells, 2009, p. 59). The 14th and 15th centuries were a "time of great splendor for Catalan letters," but by the end, Catalan was fading (Sabater, 1984, p. 30).

In the early 15th century, Castilian and Catalan made contact, as members of the Castilian court came to Barcelona (Vila-Pujol, 2007, p. 61). When the last Catalan king died heirless in 1410, the crown passed to a Castilian family (Vallverdú, 1984, pp. 17-18). In 1469, the king of Aragon, Fernando II, married the queen of Castile, Isabel, unifying Spain (Anguera, 2003, p. 77). They saw the rise of Castilian literature, and the growth of Castilian in the court, which moved to Castile. By the end of the 15th century, Castilian had grown even stronger. Although many of the common people still used Catalan, Castilian became the language of culture, tied to social and economic progress (Vila-Pujol, 2001, p. 61).

Catalonia retained its own institutions and some amount of autonomy during the 16th century, but "Castilianization" increased throughout the country, as the Catalan aristocracy and intellectuals increasingly moved in favor of Castilian (Sabater, 1984, p. 30; Vallverdú, 1984, pp. 19-20). The bourgeoisie, the poor, and the rural nobility clung to Catalan, but it did not have the prestige it once held (Rodà-Bencells, 2009, pp. 59-60). The

16th and 17th centuries saw the growth of Castile's power, and soon the country's literature, military, nobility, and diplomacy were all Castilianized (Vila-Pujol, 2007, p. 62).

The 18th century delivered the largest blow yet to Catalan. During the War of Spanish Succession from 1702 to 1714, the Catalans supported the losing side (Vallverdú, 1984, p. 19). Felipe V, the new Bourbon king, punished the Catalan territories by stripping away their autonomy and, for the first time ever, banning the use of Catalan in public (Sabater, 1984, p. 30).

Despite its prohibition and its loss of prestige, however, Catalan did not go away entirely. Whether due to stubbornness or ignorance of the new law, many Catalans did not give up. In the 1840s, visitors to Catalonia remarked on the "people's intense memory of their abolished freedoms and their combative attachment to the language" (Anguera, 2003, p. 79). The churches, told to use Castilian, could not entirely comply in order to reach a population which rejected the new language (Vallverdú, 1984, p. 22). One 18th century writer pointed out that even in the Americas, missionaries were encouraged to learn the local language; the Catalan working class was even lower than "los indios" in the eyes of the Castilian crown (Anguera, 2003, p. 79). The refusal of the crown to allow the church to use Catalan was demeaning and a deliberate attempt to humiliate Catalan speakers and discourage the language.

The first attack on Catalan in education came in 1857 with the Moyano Law, which called for compulsory education across Spain to be in Castilian, putting an end to a period in which Catalan and Castilian had coexisted in education (Anguera, 2003, p.78; Vallverdú, 1984, p. 21). Ironically, this coincided with the beginning of an "awakening of Catalan nationalism" known as the *Renaixença* (Rosà-Bencells, 2009, p. 60). The *Renaixença* in the 1860s was a time of revival for the Catalan language, when Catalan was restored in public and reappeared in literature, universities, and the press, due in part to Catalonia's economic growth at the time and thanks to the literary community and the working class (Anguera, 2003, p. 82; Rodà-Bencells, 2009, p. 60; Sabater, 1984, p. 30).

False Hopes (Twice): 1900 to 1939

The early 20th century was a time of triumph for those who had fought to bring Catalan back. Catalan was standardized during these years, first with the founding of the Institute of Catalan Studies in 1907. This was closely followed by the publication of standards for spelling (1913), grammar (1918), and later a dictionary (1932) (Rodà-Bencells, 2009, pp. 62-3). There was also a process of modernizing of Catalan, updating its vocabulary for use in all areas of discourse (Rodà-Bencells, 2009, p. 63; Sabater, 1984, p. 31). These steps were very important in making Catalan the language it is today.

Unfortunately, Catalan's triumph was short-lived, as in September 1923, a military coup installed General Miguel Primo de Rivera as Prime Minister of Spain. Primo de Rivera "permitted an anti-Catalan crusade" which included a decree proclaiming Castilian the only official language of not just Spain, but Catalonia, a move which provoked a strong response (Anguera, 2003, p. 88; "Spain"). The Catalan Cultural Committee, in 1924, issued a statement calling the Catalan language "the expression of our people, which can never be given up" and "the spiritual foundation of our existence" (Shabad & Gunther, 1982, p. 446).

Primo de Rivera resigned in 1930 in the face of mounting tensions in Catalonia ("Spain"). That resignation began the Second Republic, which offered new hope for Catalan. Catalan was already the *de facto* official language in Catalonia, and Parliament approved Catalan as a co-official language in 1932 (Anguera, 2003, p. 88). Catalan made its way back into compulsory primary education alongside Castilian in 1931. Meanwhile, universities

gained back their autonomy and reinstituted Catalan, and the media “Catalanized” once more (Anguera, 2003, pp. 88-89). Overall, Catalan seemed to be on its way to a comeback under the Second Republic. However, the triumph was once again short-lived.

The Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936 between the Nationalists (supported primarily by Castile and the Catholic Church) and the Republicans (fiercely supported by the Catalans and the Basques, who had regained their autonomy under the Republicans). The Nationalists, led by General Francisco Franco, received support from famous neighboring fascists Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. Meanwhile, the French and British governments decided not to intervene, as they feared supporting the Republicans would mean endorsing the dreaded spread of Communism. Their Non-Intervention Committee blocked Spain’s hopes for international aid against the Nationalists. Only Joseph Stalin in Russia would send aid to the Spanish Republicans, and even this aid was limited. While thousands of individuals across Europe and the United States came to Spain to help the Republican army in its fight against fascism, the lack of official international support hurt the Republican cause (“The Spanish Civil War 1936-39”). Ultimately, Franco and his Nationalists won the war in 1939. Franco installed himself as dictator, and so began a bleak period for all of Spain’s linguistic minorities (“Spain”).

Dark Times for Catalan Under Franco: 1939-1975

Franco’s nationalism brought the swift centralization of the Spanish state, which meant the loss of Catalanian autonomy once again (Rodà-Bencells, 2009, p. 60). Early in Franco’s regime, Catalan saw its darkest days. It was prohibited in education, literature, theater, radio, cinema, and even private telegrams and telephone conversations. All official documents were required to be in Castilian, while any in Catalan were null and void. Franco went so far as to rewrite road signs, business signs, and advertising all across Spain (Generalitat, n.d.-b; Vallverdú, 1984, p. 24). Catalonia Square in Barcelona was renamed The Spanish Square or the National Army Square (Generalitat, n.d.-a). Children had to be baptized under Castilian names (Rodà-Bencells, 2009, p. 60). Castilian became the official language by force, but Catalan remained in use in private settings (Vallverdú, 1984, pp. 24-5).

The beginning of Franco’s regime was the worst time for Catalan. Franco and his supporters launched a harsh campaign to denigrate Catalan. “Speak the language of the empire,” “Speak the Christian language,” “Let’s see when you stop barking,” “If you are Spanish, speak Spanish,” and “One flag, one country, one language,” essentially became slogans of the dictatorship, supported by the Real Academia Española, the Castilian language academy (Anguera, 2003, p. 89; Generalitat, n.d.-a; Greene, 2012; Perez-Alonso, 1979, p. 118).

After the intensity of the prohibition during the previous two decades, Catalan benefited from an increased “Catalanist consciousness” in the 1960s (Perez-Alonso, 1979, p. 112). During this time the language made its way into the classrooms once more, albeit against the rules (Groves, 2012, p. 308). At the same time, a “clandestine Catalan culture” emerged as Catalan authors published from exile, or falsified the years or locations of their publications to place them outside the ban. Catalan periodicals were also published from exile, especially from the Americas; nearly 200 of them were in publication at some point or another (Anguera, 2003, p. 90).

The 1970s brought poor health to Franco and greater freedom to Catalan. A 1970 campaign to bring Catalan back to the schools, supported by over 2,500 organizations, helped bring about the approval of the 1970 Law of Education, which recognized instruction in the “native tongue” in elementary education – a huge advance for Catalan and

the other minority languages in Spain (Anguera, 2003, p. 90). In the same year, 97 percent of people surveyed in Catalonia wanted their children to learn Catalan, despite only 56 percent using it as a first language (Anguera, 2003, p. 91). Beginning with the lower classes and the students and spreading to the upper classes, a “re-Catalanization” brought the revitalization of Catalan, which regained its status as the language of the people (Perez-Alonso, 1979, p. 119).

Following a lengthy illness, Franco stepped down as head of state in 1973 and died in November 1975. The next year power was handed over to young politician Adolfo Suárez González, who was officially and democratically elected as president in June of 1977, ushering in a new era of political consensus (“Spain”). This new era would bring huge victories to Catalan.

Steps toward Progress for Catalan: Post-Franco to 2000

After Franco’s death, Spain took many steps toward becoming a democratic nation once more, undoing decades of dictatorship. In 1978, the Spanish Constitution was signed, a document which officially recognized the linguistic plurality of the nation. The constitution declares Castilian as the official language, which all Spaniards have the “duty” and the “right” to know and use. However, it also declares that Spain’s minority languages may be co-official, and calls its various languages “a cultural heritage which will be the object of special protection and respect” (Generalitat, n.d.-b). The following year, Catalonia passed its new Statute of Autonomy, declaring Catalan as the native language of Catalonia. The Statute also proclaimed that the Government of Catalonia, the Generalitat, would “ensure the normal and official use of both languages” and “take the measures necessary in order to ensure knowledge of them,” as well as “create the conditions making it possible for them to achieve full equality” in Catalonia (Rodà-Bencells, 2009, p. 64). Thus, the legal framework was in place to support Catalan in a process of “Catalanizing” without “de-Castilianizing” (Sabater, 1984, p. 37).

At the same time, Catalan in education became one of the foremost issues in the region. A royal decree in 1978 called for three to four hours per week of mandatory study of Catalan (Shabad & Gunther, 1982, p. 465). The language of instruction (LOI) overall, however, was left up to parents to decide in the elementary school system, a policy which many protested for creating two linguistic communities and further separating the people of Catalonia (Shabad & Gunther, 1982, p. 466). The Law of Linguistic Normalization in 1983 focused mainly on education and promoting Catalan’s usage and improving its legal status (Rodà-Bencells, 2009, p. 65; Sabater, 1984, p. 37). While both native Catalans and immigrants in the early 1980s in Catalonia could switch between Catalan and Castilian in conversation, most people were only literate in Castilian (Esteve, 1984, p. 48). The *Escolas Catalanas*, private language academies which had been maintained even under Franco, gradually became incorporated into public education during the 1980s, a crucial development in establishing education in Catalan. The 1983 law, however, still allowed families to choose the LOI for their young children, but established that all students needed to be proficient in both languages by the end of their education and made it a requirement for teachers to know both languages (Huguet, 2007, p. 19).

From 1983 to 1993, there were three models of education available in Catalonia. The first model, “maximum Catalanization,” used Catalan as the LOI, with Castilian offered as a language course and used for instruction in one other course (the legal minimum). The second model, “medium Catalanization,” began elementary education in Castilian and gradually moved to equal use of the two languages among older students. The third model,

“minimum Catalanization,” used Castilian as the LOI and only the minimum obligatory amount of three to four hours per week of Catalan. In 1993, it was decided that the first model would be the only one used in public education in Catalonia (Rodà-Bencells, 2009, p. 67). While this policy drew protests from some Castilian speakers in Catalonia, in 1994 the Spanish Constitutional Court ruled that citizens had the duty to *know* Castilian, but they did not have the right to be *schooled* in it (“Spain’s Supreme Court insists,” 2014). While the right to request Castilian for the initial LOI was upheld, only 79 out of 248,000 children eligible actually did so in the 1994-1995 school year, and fewer than 25 families removed their children from school in protest of the increased use of Catalan (Rees, 1996, p. 316).

Four years later, the Linguistic Policy Act of 1998 was passed. It dedicated a large section to education and declared, among other things, that Catalan would be the language of instruction “at all levels and types of schooling” in Catalonia, but maintained that families could choose the LOI for their children until they reached the age of seven, at which point all public education continued in Catalan. This freedom to choose the LOI for young children was only allowed provided that all students were competent in *both* languages upon completion of compulsory education, which in theory meant that the study of Castilian was still necessary (Rodà-Bencells, 2009, p. 66). With this, Catalan’s role in education seemed firmly established. However, in recent years the debate has flared up again.

21st Century Catalan: A Few Steps Backwards?

The apparent goal in Catalonia is “balanced bilingualism,” and indeed testing over the years has routinely shown that Catalonia’s students score just as well as – and sometimes even better than – their counterparts in the rest of the country on Castilian Spanish literacy tests (Rodà-Bencells, 2009, p. 58; “Spain’s Supreme Court insists,” 2014). Nevertheless, the Catalanian model of teaching has, in the 21st century, faced a new round of challenges.

The latest round of problems with Catalan began in 2006, when Spain’s conservative and nationalist governing party, Partido Popular, took the newest version of Catalonia’s Statute of Autonomy to the Spanish Constitutional Court, despite its approval by the Catalanian and Spanish Parliaments and a binding referendum in Catalonia. The Court passed down its ruling in 2010, declaring 14 articles of the new Statute unconstitutional and reinterpreting 27 more (114 out of the 223 articles were originally appealed). Among the main items modified or struck down were the recognition of Catalonia as a nation and the naming of Catalan as the “preferred language” in administration, media, and public schooling. This news sparked protests as many Catalans felt the national government had overstepped its boundaries (“Catalonia answers back,” 2010).

A controversial court case spanned a similar timeline. In July 2006, three families petitioned a local court for the right to have Castilian as the LOI. The local court turned down the claim, and the families appealed to the Supreme Court of Catalonia in December 2008. In December 2010, the Supreme Court ruled that the families had the right to instruction in Castilian, and pressured the Generalitat to adopt whatever measures were necessary to provide such instruction, but offered no guidelines. By May 2011, the families complained that the Generalitat had showed no signs of compliance; the Generalitat did not respond, but in July the Education Ministry in Catalonia announced that, due to lack of knowledge of Catalan, it was necessary to educate in Catalan. The courts gave the Ministry two months to comply, but the decree was suspended when the Generalitat appealed. In March of 2012, the appeal was accepted by the Court, and the Catalan immersion model of education was upheld (García, 2012).

This ruling, however, was not the end of the controversy; in February 2013, one of the families appealed the Catalanian Supreme Court's decision, taking their appeal to the Spanish Supreme Court. The appeal was rejected, and the Spanish Supreme Court ruled that the Generalitat did not need to change their entire educational model. They simply had to honor petitions on a case-by-case basis by making Castilian the LOI in the classes of the children whose families petitioned, but only to the extent that it was "convenient" to the Generalitat. In the 2012-2013 school year, only 0.025 percent of new families (12 out of 50,000) requested that their children be taught in Castilian, so very few schools were affected by this decision ("The Spanish Supreme Court validates" 2013). The Catalanian government appealed again, and this was rejected in January 2014 when the Supreme Court ruled that at least 25 percent of core subjects for an entire class must be taught in Castilian when a single family requests Castilian. Catalanian Education Minister Irene Rigau quickly announced that the Ministry would appeal that decision as well ("Courts request Catalan schools," 2014). The Ministry was given one month to implement the new policy (Vallespín, 2014). In March 2014, the five schools the ruling applied to directly were given permission to join the Ministry of Education in another appeal of the decision ("Catalan Education Minister believes," 2014).

Meanwhile, on a national level, there was an uproar following a pronouncement in October 2012 by Spanish Education Minister José Ignacio Wert that the education ministry's interest in Catalonia is to *españolizar* ('Hispanicize') Catalan students, suggesting that pro-independence feelings were encouraged by Catalan in schools ("Demonstrations throughout Catalonia," 2012). Wert stirred further indignation with a law proposed in December 2012 and passed in May 2013, which compels the Generalitat of Catalonia to provide a stipend to parents who wanted to send their children to private schools to be educated in Castilian (Blitzer, 2012).

In addition, the reform gave greater curriculum control to the central government, which meant that Catalan history and culture would not appear on standardized tests, which many in Catalonia took to mean that their history and culture were made "secondary" ("Madrid to oblige the Catalan Government," 2013). The law produced a great deal of outrage, and was met with resistance by the Catalanian Education Ministry. The Spanish government has stated that the law will be implemented in all of Spain—including Catalonia—in September 2014. Catalanian Education Minister Rigau refused to attend working group meetings about the reform due to provisions that Castilian be implemented as an

instructional language in Catalan schools (“Catalan Education Minister believes,” 2014). The Generalitat is still fighting the new law.

These related sets of events—the Statute ruling, the judicial hearings, and the education reform—would all mean serious change for the current system of education in Catalonia, which has been in place for over three decades. The conservative Spanish nationalist Partido Popular, which is presently in power with an absolute majority, seems determined to see Castilian restored in the classrooms of Catalonia (“Catalan Education Minister believes,” 2014). The Spanish nationalists feel that Castilian is “threatened and marginalized” in Catalonia, although it remains easier to live in Catalonia without speaking Catalan than Spanish (Rodà-Bencells, 2009, pp. 69-70). However, the Catalan government and people are fighting back, not ready to see their language, which truly has been marginalized and threatened over the centuries, relegated to second place.

How Well Do People Speak Catalan? Speaker Statistics in Catalonia

Despite its history of marginalization, Catalan is a remarkably robust language. It is the ninth most common language in the European Union, with 7.2 million speakers (L1 and L2 combined)—more than Finnish or Danish, and just as many as Swedish and Czech (Generalitat, n.d.-b). In 2010, the Generalitat of Catalonia issued reports that show that although Catalan has made impressive gains in recent decades, it by no means completely dominates Castilian in the region. Over 15 percent of the adult population reported that they have some difficulty understanding Catalan, and 34 percent have some trouble speaking Catalan (Generalitat, 2010, p. 240).

When asked how they would rate their ability in all skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) only 45.1 percent of Catalonians reported that they felt they had a high level in all areas in Catalan, while 87.9 percent felt that they had a high level in all skill areas in Castilian. Similarly, 20.2 percent of the population reported that they felt they could speak Catalan well but had low reading and writing skills, while only 7.2 percent felt the same way about Castilian, showing that literacy and fluency are higher in Castilian than Catalan. These results contradict the belief that Castilian is marginalized or threatened in the region (Generalitat, 2010, p. 241).

The age group with the highest levels in all skills in Catalan was the 15 to 24 year old group, which is, not coincidentally, the first generation to have been educated completely in Catalan. This suggests that the Catalan educational model has, been successful in revitalizing the Catalan language despite decades of repression (Generalitat, 2010, p. 244). In general, the younger generation seems to be moving away from Castilian, and toward either bilingualism or Catalan. Children who have at least one Catalan-speaking parent tend to identify as either bilingual or Catalan-speaking (Vila-Pujol, 2007, pp. 65-67).

There is also evidence for increasing language transfer, as more families use Catalan to speak to their children; 41.9 percent of families speak Catalan to their children, while only 25.1 percent report using it with grandparents. The increased use of Catalan with the new generation could result in more Catalan speakers in later generations. Indeed, more and more people in Catalonia are identifying themselves as Catalan speakers, regardless of their initial language. While only 31.7 percent of people surveyed reported that Catalan was their initial language, 37.2 percent claimed it as their “identification language.” At the same time, 55.1 percent of the population reported Castilian as their initial language, while only 46.5 percent

claimed it as their “identification language.” This illustrates an impressive shift toward Catalan and away from Castilian (Generalitat, 2010, pp. 242-4).

The Language Policy Report went on to identify five language groups in Catalonia:

1. predominantly Catalan speakers (22 percent of the population);
2. habitual Catalan speakers (21 percent);
3. alternate Catalan/Castilian speakers (14 percent);
4. predominantly Castilian speakers (35 percent); and
5. foreign language speakers (8 percent).

The predominantly Castilian speakers still outnumber the Catalan speakers, but when the number of habitual Catalan speakers is added in, the story changes (Generalitat, 2010, p. 248). Most people agreed that in situations where there is a non-Catalan speaker, conversations are in Castilian, according to “language etiquette.” Meanwhile, in situations without a non-Catalan speaker, most people maintain Catalan as the language of conversation (Generalitat, 2010, pp. 247). Additionally, the vast majority of people reported that they continue a conversation in whichever language they are responded to with, regardless of which they began using (Generalitat, 2008, p. 7).

Overall, speaker statistics in the past 10 years seem to suggest that Catalan has been making gains, due in large part to the coming-of-age of a generation educated in Catalan. However, it is somewhat unclear whether the trend is an outright gain for Catalan or whether it is simply a move toward bilingualism within Catalonia. Either way, it is clear that, statistically, Catalan is gaining speakers, and seems poised to continue to do so in the future. Nevertheless, the recent attempts to change the education system in Catalonia may set Catalan back once more.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Over its thirteen centuries of existence, Catalan has gone through several cycles, from the language of power to an oppressed language and back again. Each time, it seems that the existence of the united Spanish state is threatened by the prospect of Catalanian nationalism, and there are attempts to attack the issue by cutting off Catalan at its roots—in the area of education. While Spain’s Constitution promises to protect and respect the country’s linguistic minorities, lately there have been a number of actions that seem to threaten Catalan. Is Catalan entering another period of decline, soon to find itself ousted from education in its own region? Or will the 2015 elections bring a different party to power and reverse the trend? Either way, it is clear that education in Catalan has historically played a significant role in sustaining the language, and could continue to be an area of conflict.

As English teachers continue to move abroad to teach, they must be cognizant of the culture and context they are facing. An English teacher in Barcelona will confront a very different context than an English teacher in Madrid, and being prepared for that is a crucial aspect of intercultural sensitivity. This does not just apply to teaching in Spain, either; it is wise for language teachers to remember that Catalonia is not alone in its inextricable ties between language, history, and politics. All around the world, English teachers must be prepared to confront the sociolinguistic realities of a multilingual world, where there will always be minority languages and conflict. Even teachers who remain in the United States may soon find themselves confronted by the tensions between the English-speaking majority

and a fast-growing, non-English speaking minority population, as immigration in the United States continues to change the face of the nation. How will we handle our own linguistic minorities in the classroom?

Endnote

¹The Spanish Constitution and the Statutes of Autonomy of the Spanish Autonomous Communities of Catalonia, Valencia, Basque Country, and Galicia recognize four co-official languages: Euskera (Basque), Catalan, Gallego (Galician), and Valencian (Congreso de los Diputados, 2003). However, the European Union does not recognize Valencian as a separate language; it is considered to be a variety of Catalan. Linguists agree that Valencian is, in fact, a variety of Catalan rather than its own language. Ethnologue (2014) recognizes that Catalan is “Valencian in local laws” and alternatively known as Valencian and Catalan-Valencian-Balear, and that Central Catalan is 90 to 95 percent intelligible to speakers of Valencian. For the purposes of this paper, then, Valencian will be considered Catalan. By that logic, there are three co-official languages in Spain.

²Although many sources use the terms “Catalonian” and “Catalan” interchangeably, there is a difference for the purpose of this paper. “Catalonian” will be used to refer to something specific to the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, e.g. the Catalanian government. In this paper, “the Catalanian people,” refers to the people of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, regardless of which culture they identify with. “Catalan” will be used to refer to the culture, language, and people, which extend outside of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia.

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