

Miguel Siguan
Institut de Ciències de
l'Educació
Universitat de Barcelona
Barcelona, Spain

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BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN SPAIN*

A Multilingual Country

Spanish or "Castilian" is the official language of Spain and the mother tongue of the greater part of its inhabitants. It is also the language through which the political and administrative unity of the Spanish state has been established. In spite of this fact, other languages continue to be the mother tongues of an important part of the population on the Spanish territory itself. Although there are no official figures concerning this phenomenon, those which I offer here, though they are only approximate, can give some idea of the importance of these languages.

In Catalonia (6,000,000 inhabitants), a territory located in the northeastern part of the Iberian Peninsula, Catalan (a language derived from Latin just as are Spanish, French or Italian) is spoken. Fifty percent of the population of Catalonia uses it as its mother tongue and another 30% speaks or at least understands it. In Valencia, to the south of Catalonia on its Mediterranean side, a variety of Catalan is spoken. It is sometimes called **Valenciano**. In the Balearic Islands (500,000 inhabitants) still other local varieties of Catalan are spoken. In both these cases, between 50% and 70% of the population can be considered speakers of Catalan as a native language. In the majority of cases, however, Catalan is restricted to a purely colloquial usage. In Galicia (3,000,000 inhabitants), in the northwestern part of the Iberian Peninsula, Galician, another neo-Latin language close to Portuguese, is spoken. Galician is spoken or understood by 80% of the population although its use is mainly rural and colloquial. Finally, in the Basque Territory (or Euscadi), Basque (or Euskera) is spoken. It is perhaps the most ancient language of those spoken today in Europe, and, in any case, it has no known affinity with any of the other European languages. Twenty-five percent of the 2,000,000 inhabitants of the Spanish Basque region currently speak Basque. And in neighbouring Navarre (45,000 inhabitants) 10% of the population also speaks Basque.

Since the re-establishment of a democratic government in Spain, this linguistic plurality has been reflected in an educational system which has kept the different minority languages clearly in mind. It can be considered extremely liberal and advanced. The description of this system is the aim of this article. But before beginning this description, I shall offer some information concerning the historical antecedents of this situation and its socio-cultural factors.

*Original: English

The occupation of the Iberian Peninsula by the Romans at the beginning of our era (second century B.C.) resulted in the substitution of Latin for the indigenous languages in the western part of the Pyrenees where Basque continued to be spoken. Centuries later, the disintegration and transformation of Latin into neo-Latin languages coincided with the invasion of the peninsula by the Arabs (10th century). This left the Christians in control of only a narrow, mountainous strip on the northern coast of the peninsula from which the reconquest, which lasted for five centuries, began. It was in this mountainous strip that various Latin-derived languages were ultimately reduced to three: Galician, to the west; Castilian or Spanish, in the central part; and Catalan, in the east. The development and later expansion of these three languages were determined by both the political fortune of the settlements of those who spoke them and their success in the battle to reclaim the territory from the Arabs.

In the 13th century, the linguistic map of the Iberian Peninsula was already definitely determined. The Basque enclave did not constitute a political entity, and even though its language was maintained, it was not expanded. Catalonia conquered Valencia and the Balearic Islands and introduced its language into them. Galicia did not succeed in establishing political power, but through demographic pressure its language was expanded toward the south to what is today Portugal. The Castilian nucleus, situated in the central part of the peninsula, advanced firmly toward the south, extending itself throughout the southern half of the peninsula.

From the 12th to the 14th centuries, the three languages experienced an important literary cultivation. Galician was limited practically to lyric poetry, and to the 12th century. However, during the 13th and 14th centuries, both Catalan and Galician inspired literary movements of the highest level which were among the most outstanding in Europe.

In the 14th century this balance among the languages was broken. The Kingdom of Aragon, which included Catalonia, Valencia, and the Balearic Islands, was united to the Kingdom of Castille. Although its autonomy was respected, Aragon lost its political leadership. The discovery of America and the imperial forces of Carlos I and Felipe II strengthened the ascendancy of Castilian or Spanish. As a result of these events, Catalan literature entered a period of decadence, and the public use of Catalan was abandoned.

In the 18th century, with the ascension of the Bourbon kings on the Spanish throne, the French model of state, strongly centralized and linguistically unified, was established. The different languages of Castilian were actively repressed, and their use declined and was gradually limited to only colloquial and rural spheres.

Throughout the 19th century, the Romantic movement's exaltation of ancient culture and nationalities manifested itself. The movement had repercussions on the territories which conserved their own languages, but each with distinct characteristics, in the function of each one's history and especially its socio-economic situation.

In Catalonia the reinstatement of Catalan as a literary language occurred in conjunction with an important economic, industrial development which converted Catalonia into the most advanced region of Spain: the joint middle class of this development promoted political catalanismo as a form of defending this progress before the central state. At the beginning of the 20th century, Catalonia attained its political autonomy. Some years later, with the Republic, the experiment is repeated, directed this time from the left. In the meantime, a very important literary and cultural rebirth occurred, and the language itself was modernized (grammar, orthography, dictionary).

In the remaining Catalan-speaking areas (Valencia and the Balearic Islands), which experienced neither industrial development nor a process of political consciousness-raising, the linguistic, cultural movement had effects in different ways. There were repercussions as much outside the Spanish borders as within them (in French Catalonia, for example, which was incorporated into France in the 18th century).

There was an important industrial development in the Basque region, but the middle class which sprung from it identified itself only to a small degree with Basque nationalism. The lack of both a literary tradition and cultural institutions weakened this literary and cultural rebirth. Therefore, in spite of the fact that since the beginning of this century nationalism has been active, and that during the era of the Republic the Basque region has achieved its political autonomy, the hopes that Basque will again become the first language of the majority of the population are small.

Finally, in Galicia there has been neither industrial nor economic development, which is why it continues to be a poor territory where a large part of the population is forced to emigrate. The rebirth of Galician has been exclusively literary; it has not achieved political force, and Galician remains an exclusively rural language.

The government of General Franco, set up at the end of the Civil War (1939), exalted Spanish unity and not only eliminated the autonomous areas but also cut back on the use of languages other than Spanish. Although there was a clear evolution in this sense, from downright persecution in the first years to a broad tolerance in the final ones, the exaltation of Spanish unity was maintained and so was the distrust toward those who defended linguistic and national plurality. Naturally, these defenders were always found among the most active of anti-Franco activists.

When the democratic government was instituted following the death of General Franco, the situation changed completely. The new Spanish Constitution (1978) affirmed that the Castilian language or Spanish was the official language of the state but that the plurality of languages which existed on the Spanish territory was a common good which had to be preserved and promoted.

At the same time, the Spanish state was organized into a group of autonomous regions, each with a relatively broad statute of autonomy, which included the existence of a parliament, a

government, and - in the autonomous regions with their own languages - the possibility that their languages be co-official with Spanish, the official state language. Consequently, since the autonomous regions were assured the administration of the educational system, the possibility that their own languages would occupy an important place in instruction also developed.

In fact, even before the statutes of autonomy went into effect, the Ministry of Education of the Spanish government issued a legal document called the Decree on Bilingualism (1979), which established that on the territories with their own languages all levels and grades of Basic General Instruction (6 to 14 years old), should allocate to this language a minimum of 3 hours per week, and that this minimum could be increased in centers of instruction at their request.

Throughout this transitional stage, from the promulgation of the constitution (1978) to the implementation of the statutes of autonomy, the Decree on Bilingualism was the axis of all the linguistic changes in the educational system.

Afterwards (1981), when the statutes of autonomy had already been put into effect and the regional governments had, therefore, assumed management of the educational system in their respective territories, the Ministry of Education of the Spanish government issued some recommendations concerning this subject, which read as quoted below.

As has already been stated, in the territories with their own languages, the school system must propose as its objective that students, upon completing their compulsory education program, possess a command of both languages, which means that they should be able to use both correctly and effectively, in any situation and for any purpose. To attain such an objective, it is necessary:

1. That the programs, at all levels, include instruction of both languages in the measure needed to assure the attainment of this objective.
2. That, in addition, both languages be used as languages of instruction in the school curriculum. The beginning and the degree of utilization of each language as a language of instruction ought to be determined in each case according to a set of factors which influence both learning and linguistic knowledge, as for example, the degree of each one's use and the environment or domain in which it is used. The diversity of these factors calls for a great flexibility on this point, provided that the final objective of full command of both languages be maintained.
3. If, as a result of this flexibility, in some territory there might exist schools with different language models, then parents would be able to choose between them as far as this might be possible.
4. In the beginning, the initiation of instruction will be done in the student's mother tongue for the sake of a gradual introduction of instruction in the other language. However, in

cases that are feasible and with the parents' approval, the mother tongue can be used to introduce the other language from the very beginning of schooling. In this case, students should be familiarized with both languages already by the second year of Basic General Education.

5. The attention paid to the mother tongue should not mean the establishment of a double educational system based on the language origin of the students. Any first-level school should be prepared to admit children no matter what their mother tongue might be.

6. Bilingual education should not forget that during this period of their schooling the students need to acquire, in addition, a foreign language, as legislated.

7. It is necessary to undertake experimental studies which will permit objective evaluation of different teaching and organizational approaches used for attaining a command of both languages, studies which should be adapted to the specific real-life situations.

8. In areas in which the language spoken by the indigenous population is different from that of the autonomous community of which it is a part, a democratic principle demands that bilingualism as the final objective be kept in mind, and that if this objective is to be achieved, it is necessary to act with tact and flexibility through both long- and short-term planning.

Catalonia

I have already indicated some of the characteristics which make Catalan a singular and privileged case within the panorama of minority languages in Europe. Catalan is a language that is supported by an old and important literary and academic tradition, is fully normalized with a system of rules - vocabulary, grammar and orthography - accepted without dispute. Furthermore, at this time it can rely on strong political backing which assures its public use together with wide popular support.

This extremely favorable situation, however, does have its limits with regard to its co-existence with Spanish and the greater weight of the Spanish language. This occurs not only because Spanish is the official language of the state and therefore the language of greater political and economic powers, but also simply because the number of Spanish speakers in Spain and outside Spain is much greater than the number of Catalan speakers.

In spite of the efforts of the autonomous government of Catalonia in favor of Catalan culture through the mass communications media, the volume of written and audiovisual products produced and consumed in Catalonia (books, magazines, journals, newspapers, radio, TV, films) in Spanish is greater than those produced and consumed in Catalan.

In addition to its industrial and economic development, Catalonia has attracted immigrants from other regions and especially from the south of Spain in such quantity that currently nearly half of

the inhabitants of Catalonia were born outside Catalonia. Moreover, the great majority of these immigrants are, of course, Spanish-speaking.

It is well known that when, in the same territory, there exist both a politically and socially strong language and a correspondingly weaker minority language, a hierarchy is usually produced. This phenomenon is known as diglossia. In Catalonia, however, the social stratification of the two languages is unique. In relation to Spanish, Catalan is a minority language and therefore weak and in a subordinate situation. But at the same time, Catalan is the language of a large part of the bourgeoisie and of the intellectual middle class, and also the language of local political power, while Spanish is the language of the immigrants and of the lower strata of the population. Consequently, even if in principle Spanish is the stronger language, from certain perspectives it is also the language of less prestige.