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The Catalan Situation

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The Present Situation

When it comes to the current situation of Catalan in the area of higher education, we should be aware of a few specific factors of the singular Catalan reality:

1. Catalonia has a four decades long tradition of an explicit university language policy, associated with processes of planned change of language use, promoted and led by the universities and the government of Catalonia.

In the second half of the seventies of the twentieth century, when the forty years of the dictatorship and the prohibition of use of Catalan came to an end, the Catalan universities approved linguistic standardization plans, which objective was to promote the use of Catalan to make it a common language at the university, in an environment where the Spanish had been the only language formally recognized. In a parallel manner, the legal frame was developed that made Catalan the official and own language of Catalonia and the Spanish the second official language too.

In this frame TERM-CAT was created to provide Catalan language with specific terms in different fields of knowledge. Since its creation, in 1985, TERM-CAT has published more than 600 multilingual dictionaries, which includes 300,000 concepts. Definitely, the absence of Catalan terminology wouldn't be the reason why teachers don't use Catalan when teaching.

2. The increasing use of English at the Catalan universities is not being seen, -at least, not at the moment-, as a threat, but as an opportunity. It allows students from all over the world to come to the Catalan Universities and also provides the completion of the studies in English to the Catalan students, which consequently gives them a perspective to find a job in foreign countries.

It must be taken into account that the level of knowledge of the English language in the territory where Catalan is spoken, just like in the entire Spain, is slightly lower than in other European countries, even among the university students and research groups. For that reason, every initiative that can foster English is perceived not only as positive but also as necessary.

Making good use of this Catalan tradition of Language Planning and having in mind its will of internationalization, from 2007, Language Plans, approved and agreed on by the highest governing bodies of each University, have begun to be developed in the Catalan universities.

Language Plans

The language plans are tools of the universities to manage multilingualism: the language model is agreed on and the transverse goals and actions are set to extend the knowledge, use, quality

and interaction of languages that are in use at the university. A feature that characterizes the language plans is its cross-disciplinary character: it affects all areas of the University.

Basically, it encourages the use of Catalan as an own language and the promotion of the third languages, especially English, associated with the internationalization, the improvement of competitiveness and the training of students.

The Government of Catalonia promotes achieving of these objectives by means of a policy of economic incentives. Currently, the linguistics goals are:

- linguistic quality of English and Catalan versions of websites of universities,
- improvement of knowledge of Catalan and other languages of the university staff,
- percentage of subjects and groups for which the language of impartment is known prior to the completion of the registration,
- increase of the volume of teaching in Catalan or in a third language,
- and improvement of knowledge of Catalan among students and teachers from outside of the Catalan linguistic area.

As examples of actions contained in the language plans we can mention the following:

- Announcements of grants for language learning
- Announcements of grants for the linguistic review of doctoral theses and teaching materials in Catalan and English
- Level test in English, French, German or Italian for the students from new access
- Linguistic and cultural reception programme for international students
- Resources and activities for the promotion of intercultural competence and skills in effective communication
- Style-sheet in English and trilingual University nomenclature: Catalan, Spanish and English.

The linguistic security: language of impartment

It is worth mentioning that the language plans establish the linguistic guarantees of students: a teacher has the freedom to choose the language of imparting the course, but he has the obligation to make public his choice before the students are registered: this is what is called the student's linguistic security.

This way students avoid surprises at the start of the classes and also situations in which the teacher has to change language of imparting are prevented (mostly, from Catalan to Spanish, because one single student doesn't understand the lecture).

It must be said that, in every case, this freedom of teaching language co-exists in general with the students' freedom to choose the language that they prefer for their interventions in class or to write the exams, which can be different from the language of impartment.

In this figure is shown the data regarding the evolution of teaching languages in both levels, degrees and MA's, in Catalan public university system during the last three academic years:

| Teaching language | CATALAN | | | SPANISH | | | ENGLISH | | | |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | Year | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | 2012-13 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | 2012-13 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | 2012-13 |
| DEGREES | | 75,8% | 77,2% | 75,4% | 18,4% | 15,5% | 16,0% | 4,2% | 5,4% | 6,0% |
| MASTERS | | 67,0% | 61,3% | 56,9% | 21,5% | 20,3% | 20,8% | 11,3% | 18,2% | 22,1% |

It should be highlighted that in the degree level of teaching the preponderance of Catalan is very obvious; however, in the master degree level, the use of English and Spanish is much higher, actually, increases every year.

Options for the future

We believe that language plans, agreed and approved by the governing bodies, should be implemented in a general way at European universities to ensure the use of the national languages in peaceful coexistence with English, that will continue to have a predominant use as a *lingua franca*, especially in a cutting-edge research.

From a terminological point of view, it is necessary to develop terminology resources, at least, bilingual, that allow the correspondence between the English denomination and every correspondent national language denomination of the specialized concepts that are discussed in different fields of knowledge. In this way, the coexistence of teaching in a national language and teaching in English will be possible and the transition from one to the other will be provided to teachers and students. Ideally, a great multilingual terminological database, online and free, consulted on subject and on any language, will permit convey all this information swiftly.

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