

Manuel Casado Velarde

Spain, a plurilingual state: Spanish and other official languages¹

Abstract

La Constitución española de 1978 establece que “el castellano es la lengua española oficial del Estado. Todos los españoles tienen el deber de conocerla y el derecho a usarla” (art. 3, 1). En el mismo art. 3, 2, se dice que “las demás lenguas españolas serán también oficiales en las respectivas Comunidades Autónomas de acuerdo con sus Estatutos”. Entre 1979 y 1983 se aprobaron los Estatutos de autonomía de las diferentes comunidades, en cuyos textos, en su caso, se establece la cooficialidad de las correspondientes lenguas con el español en sus respectivos territorios. Las “leyes de normalización lingüística”, promulgadas entre 1982 y 1998, al desarrollar las disposiciones de los estatutos relativas a la lengua, representan las líneas directivas de la política lingüística de las Comunidades bilingües. En la exposición se realiza un balance de la situación lingüística.

1. Introduction

Due to its long and rich history, the fact that the Spanish language was only recently declared the official language of the country may seem surprising.² It was established for the first time in the Constitutive Courts during the Second Republic, in 1931, and it was promulgated in the Constitution of that year (in that text, it is referred to as *Castilian*). But its validity was ephemeral. The Constitution of 1931 was abolished by force, thus Spanish lost – legally but not effectively – its official recognition during the regime of General Franco – established right after the Civil War of 1936-1939. It lacked its official character for the next 42 years.

However, Franco announced his thoughts on Spanish and the rest of the languages in Spain in the first days of 1938 with this early statement (surprisingly coinciding with Unamuno): “The character of each region will be respected, but without detriment to the national unity, which we want to be absolute, with a single language, Castilian, and a single personality, the Spanish one” (apud González Ollé 1995, 52-53, 55).

With the so-called “Democratic Transition” that followed the death of Franco in 1975, the linguistic issue would receive normative treatment in accordance with the cultural situation in Spain. In the Spanish Constitution of 1978, it is established that “Castilian is the official Spanish language in the State. Every Spanish citizen has the duty of knowing it and the right to use it” (article 3, paragraph 1).

In the same article 3, paragraph 2 in the Constitution, it is added that “the rest of the Spanish languages will be also official in the respective autonomous communities according to their statutes”. Therefore, everything concerning these languages is regulated by the aforementioned statutes, and it depends on the autonomous communities (administrative divisions) which compose the Spanish State. Moreover, in the following paragraph of article 3 it is stated that “the richness of the different linguistic modalities in Spain is a cultural heritage that will be especially respected and protected” (3, §3).

¹ This article was translated from Spanish into English by Dámaso Izquierdo Alegría.

² I follow the well-known article by González Ollé (1978) about the officiality of Spanish.

The Constitution of 1978, currently in force, thus represents a legal milestone, that was very relevant historically in the treatment of the Spanish languages. It was a turning point as a result of the consensus between the different political parties. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to overcome outdated conceptions in the right and left wings.

2. The recognition of the co-official character of other languages spoken in Spain

Between the years 1979 and 1983, the different statutes of the autonomous communities in Spain were approved and promulgated. In these texts, the co-official character of the corresponding languages in those territories was established.

The following map shows the bilingual communities: Galicia, the Basque Country, some zones in the Community of Navarra, Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands, with the figure of their population in 2009, in millions of inhabitants:³

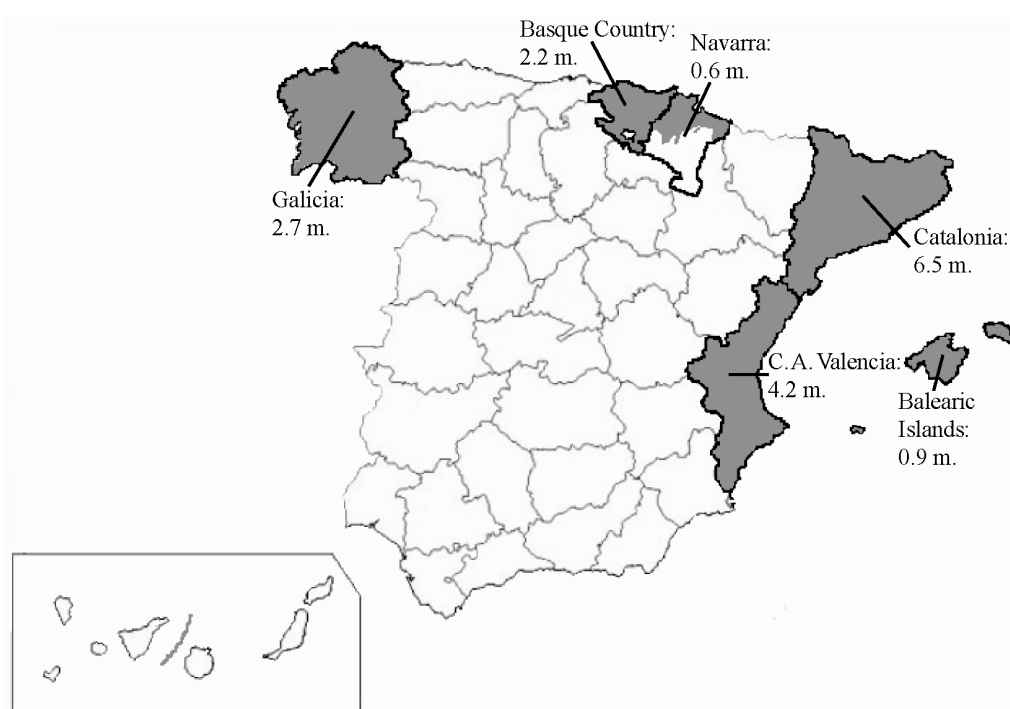


Fig. 1: Bilingual communities in Spain

Except for Galicia, the speakers whose mother tongue is Spanish are the majority in all of the bilingual communities. The rate of the oral comprehension of Spanish is 100% in all of them, and, in the case of oral expression, practically the same percentage (CIS polls 1998; 98% in Galicia).

All the statutes of the autonomous communities reflect some kind of convergence in two essential points: on the one hand, the definition of the regional language as the language proper to the community (“*lengua propia*”),⁴ and, at the same time, as co-

³ This map was drawn by Felipe Jiménez Berrio.

⁴ With the exception of the statute of Navarra. The expression *language proper to the community* (*lengua propia*) has been criticized, since Spanish is also proper to Navarra, even more so than Basque, as will be shown.

official with Spanish; on the other hand, the rights of every citizen to use the language proper to his/her community and not suffer discrimination as a result.

The “laws of linguistic normalization”, promulgated since 1982 to develop the statutes referring to languages, defined the parameters of linguistic policy in the bilingual communities. Their objective was and is to promote the use of the autonomic languages in every social sphere (Herreras 2006, 81): education, administration, toponymy, among others.

3. Evaluation of nearly three decades

It is difficult to evaluate this subject objectively, as it is a process which is on the move, and it is very politicized, since it can be analyzed from different points of view. Even the concept of “linguistic normalization” seems to be vague. *Normalizing* means “making something seem normal”. It was a question of turning the use of specific languages in each bilingual community – which had been abnormal – into something normal. The problem is: at what point can we conclude that normalization has been achieved (Herreras 2006, 331)?

On the other hand, the applications of the “normalization” processes have been different depending on the autonomous communities: the two bilingual communities that have most forcefully carried out “a policy of affirming the presence of their autonomous languages are the Basque Country and Catalonia”, communities that, from the moment of their constitutions until their last autonomous elections, have had nationalist parliaments and governments (Herreras 2006, 332). Nevertheless, they are very different due to the linguistic factor: in fact, Catalan is a sister language to Spanish, which makes it easier to learn than Basque, which is neither a Romance, nor Indo-European language, as is known.

As for the Community of Valencia, it has always been zealous in affirming its uniqueness. The official name of its language reflects this fact. It is called Valencian⁵ instead of Catalan, although without linguistic foundation. Furthermore, there is an “Acadèmia Valenciana de la Llengua”.

Concerning the Community of Navarra, it is predominantly monolingual Spanish, and the Basque-speaking zone is the least populated. And Galician, after its late normalization, is still suffering from idiomatic discrepancies about the acceptance of standard norm among those who use Galician with the sense of correction. Moreover, there are some problems of social consideration.

Even with these differences, it can be stated that in all of the bilingual communities, there has been “a significant increase in the linguistic competence of its inhabitants” (Herreras 2006, 333). If census and municipal registry results are compared, “the most important progress can be appreciated in the written skills (reading and writing)” (Herreras 2006, 334), as the following charts made by this author reflect:

⁵ This autonomous community also wrote an official version of the Spanish Constitution in Valencian.

Linguistic competence	Census/ Register*	C. A. Catalonia	Barcelona	Girona	Lleida	Tarragona
<i>Understands</i>	1986	90.6	89.0	95.1	96.3	93.2
	1991	93.8	92.8	96.4	98.0	96.1
	1996	95.0	94.3	96.7	98.3	96.6
	2001	94.5	94.0	95.6	97.2	95.6
<i>Can speak</i>	1986	64.2	59.9	80.1	82.8	73.2
	1991	68.3	64.7	80.6	84.4	76.8
	1996	75.3	72.5	84.4	88.5	81.5
	2001	74.5	72.1	81.7	86.4	79.7
<i>Can read</i>	1986	60.7	58.2	70.7	71.5	64.0
	1991	67.6	65.2	76.5	77.4	72.1
	1996	72.3	70.3	79.9	82.2	75.6
	2001	74.3	72.6	80.4	83.1	77.4
<i>Can write</i>	1986	31.6	30.2	39.4	36.9	32.2
	1991	39.9	38.4	49.2	42.9	42.2
	1996	45.8	44.3	53.8	51.2	47.7
	2001	49.8	47.7	58.4	57.9	53.0

Fig. 2: Catalonia (* Population of 2 years and older - 1986: 5,856,433 people; 1991: 5,949,177 people; 1996: 5,984,334 people; 2001: 6,215,281 people)

Source: Herreras (2006, 86), based on the data from Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya (1993): *Cens de població 1991. Vol. 8, Cens lingüístic. Dades comarcals i municipals*. Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya; Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya (1998): *El coneixement del català, 1996*. Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya; and Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya (2003): *El coneixement del català, 2001*.

Linguistic competence	Census/ Register*	C. A. Valencia	Alicante	Castellón	Valencia
<i>Understands</i>	1986	77.1	60.6	90.3	84.0
	1991	83.2	70.4	93.7	88.8
	2001	84.0	73.5	91.0	89.4
<i>Can speak</i>	1986	49.5	36.5	67.0	53.4
	1991	51.0	38.1	68.1	55.3
	2001	47.6	35.2	62.4	52.5
<i>Can read</i>	1986	24.3	13.1	28.7	30.0
	1991	37.9	23.8	46.0	44.8
	2001	46.0	31.3	56.0	53.4
<i>Can write</i>	1986	7.0	4.4	8.7	8.2
	1991	15.1	10.2	19.7	17.1
	2001	23.3	16.7	29.2	26.5

Fig. 3: Community of Valencia (* Population of 3 years and older - 1986: 3,598,528 people; 1991: 3,737,150 people; 2001: 4,022,455 people)

Source: Herreras (2006, 90), based on the data from Generalitat Valenciana (1990): *Coneixement del valencià. Anàlisi dels resultats del Padró Municipal d'Habitants de 1986*. València: Conselleria de Cultura, Educació i Ciència; Institut Valencià d'Estadística (1993): *Dades bàsiques del cens de població. Comunitat Valenciana 1991*. València: Generalitat Valenciana; and Institut Valencià d'Estadística (2004): *Población en viviendas familiares de 3 y más años, según el conocimiento del valenciano y la edad* (Census 2001. Provisional results, 2004).

Linguistic competence	Census/ Register*	C. A. Balearic Islands	Ibiza- Formentera	Majorca	Minorca
<i>Understands</i>	1986	89.4	83.3	89.6	94.5
	1991	88.7	84.7	88.1	94.7
	2001	89.1	86.3	89.0	93.8
<i>Can speak</i>	1986	70.8	61.8	70.4	84.5
	1991	66.7	58.9	66.1	81.2
	2001	62.7	57.2	62.2	75.1
<i>Can read</i>	1986	46.0	29.8	46.7	60.4
	1991	55.0	42.9	54.8	71.1
	2001	62.1	53.2	62.0	73.8
<i>Can write</i>	1986	16.5	12.3	16.0	26.3
	1991	25.8	19.6	25.7	34.8
	2001	38.7	34.5	38.6	45.4

Fig. 4: Balearic Islands (* Population of 6 years and older - 1986: 626,956 people; 1991: 661,306 people. Population of 5 years and older - 2001: 793,506 people)

Source: Herreras (2006, 95), based on the data from Institut Balear d'Estadística (1989): *La Llengua de les Illes Balears*. Palma de Mallorca: Govern Balear; Institut Balear d'Estadística (1993): *Cens de població 1991. VII. Taules sobre el coneixement de la llengua de la CAIB*. Palma de Mallorca: Govern Balear; and Direcció General d'Economia, Institut Balear d'Estadística/Institut Nacional d'Estadística (2004): *Resultados del Censo de 2001*.

Linguistic competence	Census/ Register*	C. A. Basque Country	Álava	Biscay	Guipúzcoa
<i>Euskaldunes (basque-speakers)</i>	1981	21.5	3.9	14.9	39.5
	1986	24.6	6.7	17.5	43.7
	1991	26.3	8.6	18.9	45.9
	1996	30.9	14.6	23.7	49.7
	2001	32.3	16.2	24.9	51.4
<i>Quasi- euskaldunes</i>	1981	14.5	9.5	13.4	18.1
	1986	17.4	16.8	17.8	17.0
	1991	19.8	20.0	20.5	18.6
	1996	19.7	19.6	20.8	17.9
	2001	23.1	24.6	24.8	19.7
<i>Erdaldunes (Non-basque- speakers)</i>	1981	64.0	86.6	71.8	42.4
	1986	58.0	76.5	64.7	39.4
	1991	53.9	71.4	60.5	35.5
	1996	49.4	65.8	55.9	32.2
	2001	44.6	59.1	50.2	28.9

Fig. 5: Basque Country (* Population of 2 years and older - 1981: 2,081,461 people; 1986: 2,089,995 people; 1991: 2,068,927 people; 1996: 2,062,525 people; 2001: 2,033,247 people)

Source: Herreras (2006, 99), based on the data from EUSTAT (1994): *Euskera 81-91*. Vitoria: Gobierno Vasco; and EUSTAT: *Censos de Población y Viviendas 1991-2001* and *Estadística de Población y Viviendas 1996*.

Linguistic competence	Census/ Register*	C. Foral Navarra	Basque-speaking zone	Mixed zone	Non-Basque-speaking zone
<i>Euskaldunes</i>	1986	10.1	59.3	6.1	0.7
	1991	10.2	60.8	6.4	1.0
	1996	10.9	60.4	7.3	1.5
	2001	12.1	62.3	9.5	2.2
<i>Quasi-euskaldunes</i>	1986	5.2	8.0	5.4	1.1
	1991	6.3	9.3	6.0	1.4
	1996	7.4	13.4	9.1	3.2
	2001	8.4	13.2	10.9	3.5
<i>Erdaldunes</i>	1986	84.5	32.7	88.5	98.1
	1991	83.4	29.8	87.6	97.5
	1996	81.7	26.2	83.5	95.2
	2001	79.4	24.5	79.6	94.3

Fig. 6: Community of Navarra (* Population of 2 years and older - 1986: 501,989 people; 1991: 500,250 people; 1996: 511,898 people; 2001: 536,989 people)

Source: Herreras (2006, 104), based on the data from Gobierno de Navarra (1986): *Distribución de la población navarra según el nivel de euskara (Padrones municipales de habitantes al 1/4/86)*, Pamplona; Gobierno de Navarra (1995): *Datos sociolingüísticos del euskara en Navarra*. Pamplona: Dirección General de Política Lingüística; Instituto de Estadística de Navarra (1996): *Estadística de la población de Navarra. 1996*. Pamplona; and Instituto de Estadística de Navarra (2004): *Censo de Población y Viviendas 2001*.

Linguistic competence	Census/ Register*	C. A. Galicia	A Coruña	Lugo	Ourense	Pontevedra
<i>Understands</i>	1991	97.0	96.7	98.0	97.7	96.6
	2001	99.2	99.0	99.6	99.5	99.0
<i>Can speak</i>	1991	91.4	90.5	95.2	94.2	89.8
	2001	91.0	90.4	95.5	94.4	88.8
<i>Can read</i>	1991	49.9	51.5	51.5	46.4	48.9
	2001	69.0	71.9	77.0	63.4	64.3
<i>Can write</i>	1991	34.9	35.1	38.7	33.1	33.6
	2001	57.9	60.0	66.2	51.9	54.4

Fig. 7: Galicia (* Population of 3 years and older - 1991: 2,649,084 people. Population of 5 years and older - 2001: 2,587,407 people)

Source: Herreras (2006, 108), based on the data from Instituto Galego de Estadística (1993): *Galicia en cifras. Anuario 1993*. Santiago: Xunta de Galicia; Instituto Galego de Estadística (2003): *Población de 5 años y más. Datos provisionales del Censo 2001*.

In all of the bilingual communities, “normalization” has made progress in the Administration, autonomic institutions, and toponymy, among others, although with remarkable differences between communities.

In the level “can speak”, there is a noticeable difference with regard to the ones who speak the language effectively or just in particular spheres (e.g., familiar, professional).

4. The educational system

The most sensitive point in the linguistic “normalization” concerns the use of official languages in the educational system. In fact, it is very common to see this subject in the headlines. Three phases can be distinguished in the incorporation of co-official languages into education:

- a) Firstly, an *initial phase*, starting in 1975 with the facultative learning of the regional language in the educational system.
- b) Secondly, an *extension phase*, with the promulgation of decrees establishing bilingualism. In this phase, the learning of the co-official language of the community becomes compulsory for all of the preschoolers, students in elementary education and first grade professional training, with a timetable of at least three hours a week, regardless of which is the mother tongue. Students could also receive instruction in other subjects in the proper language (“*lengua propia*”) of the community, at the behest of their parents. The full application of these decrees of bilingualism was achieved in 1985-86.
- c) Finally, an *intensification phase*, starting with the promulgation of laws of linguistic “normalization”, aimed at intensifying the presence of the proper language, in order to promote a balanced presence of both co-official languages.

In Catalonia, the goal was to accelerate the process with the generalization of the so-called “Programs of Linguistic Immersion” (“*Programas de Inmersión Lingüística*”, PIL), compulsory since the 1993-94 academic year. This is why Spanish-speaking parents protested: they demand schooling in Spanish for their children. Actually, the most affected by these “Programs of Linguistic Immersion” – which is an early complete immersion in the proper language of the community – are Spanish speakers, generally from lower social and cultural level, who have a high rate of school failure.

José Carlos Herreras, in his study *Lenguas y normalización en España (Languages and normalization in Spain)*,⁶ wrote that

the model chosen in Catalonia not only puts at risk the learning of Spanish, but also does not offer a guarantee of obtaining good results in Catalan [...], thus endangering the educational and employment prospects of a great part of the population whose mother tongue is Spanish. (Herreras 2006, 349-50)

In the other communities, the development of the intensification phase is being implemented more slowly, as in Valencia, Balearic Islands and Galicia. In the two latter communities, Programs of Linguistic Immersion are being prepared, but they will be completely voluntary.

⁶ After all I have exposed, I do not need to consider how I have benefited from him.

5. Final

The promotion of the co-official autonomous languages has caused, in the last years, some social movements in defence of the common language in the State, that is, Spanish or Castilian, as can be ascertained by reading the newspapers.⁷ The Spanish speakers affected appeal for the Constitution and the human rights so as to demand as a right to provide schooling to their children in their mother tongue.

Moreover, it cannot be ignored that political changes in the central and autonomous governments cause remarkable fluctuations in the linguistic policy of both spheres. Nevertheless, as Pericay affirms, “in Spain, since the beginning of democracy, the State has never exerted itself in the matter of linguistics” (Pericay 2007, 15).

6. References

- González Ollé, F. (1978): El establecimiento del castellano como lengua oficial. In: *Boletín de la Real Academia Española* 58, 229-280.
- González Ollé, F. (1995): El largo camino hacia la oficialidad del español en España. In: Seco, M./Salvador, G. (coord.): *La lengua española, hoy*. Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 37-61.
- Herreras, J.C. (2006): *Lenguas y normalización en España*. (= Biblioteca románica hispánica 3, Manuales 86). Madrid: Gredos.
- Pericay, X. (2007): Introducción. In: Arteta, A. et al.: *Políticas lingüísticas y nacionalismos en España*. Madrid: FAES, 9-23.

⁷ There are some organizations that propose the defence of institutional bilingualism and the freedom of choice in bilingual communities, such as the Asociación por la Tolerancia (Catalonia), the Círculo Balear (Balearic Islands), Galicia Bilingüe (Galicia), the Plataforma por la Libertad de Elección Lingüística (Euskadi) or the Plataforma Valenciana por la Libertad Lingüística (Comunidad Valenciana). These organizations tend to argue that “citizens, not territories nor languages themselves, have linguistic rights. That is: citizens speaking any co-official language have the right to receive education and to be attended by the Administration in that language, but languages themselves do not have the right to achieve speakers under duress, nor to impose themselves as a priority in education, information, public signs or institutions, with detriment to Spanish” (*Manifiesto por la Lengua Común en defensa de los derechos de los castellanohablantes en las comunidades con lengua cooficial*, announced on 23 June 2008).