

Language & Authoritarianism in Estonia & Catalonia

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*Some comrades lean towards national seclusion and do not support the progressive
influence of the Russian language
(Cîņa [1960] as cited in Knowles, 1990:152)*

*If we want to be worthy of that salvation and honour the one who has redeemed us, all
Spaniards must do three things: think like Franco, feel like Franco and speak like Franco
– naturally, in the national language, which his Victory has established.¹
(Galinsonga in La Vanguardia, 3 July 1939, as cited in
ExampleWeb, 2006).*

The Soviet and Francoist regimes are two salient examples of attempts by twentieth century authoritarian states to impose imperialistic linguistic policy as part of their political ideology. The leaders – from both extremes of the political spectrum – attempted to replace the autochthonous varieties in use in areas under their control and replace them with their own languages: Russian in the Soviet case, and Spanish in the Francoist. As part of this campaign of overt linguistic manipulation, existing forms of expression of local varieties were suppressed. The result, upon regaining independence in Estonia, and regional autonomy in Spain, was a high level of diglossia *between languages*. This paper

¹ “Si queremos ser dignos de esa redención y honrar a quién nos ha redimido, todos los españoles debemos hacer tres cosas: pensar como Franco, sentir como Franco y hablar como Franco, que, hablando, naturalmente, en el idioma nacional, ha impuesto su Victoria.”

discusses the current situations of sociolinguistic inequality in Estonia and Catalan-speaking areas of Spain, the role of authoritarianism in their creation, and seeks to explain the rationale of compensatory language policy in favour of these “minorised” languages. A general summary of language policy in the two territories is also given.

Linguistic Inequality

Linguistic inequality can take many forms. Milroy and Milroy (1999:1-23) give an excellent account of how, despite being widely accepted that it is inappropriate to discriminate on social grounds, standard varieties of language maintain a privileged position in society. The fact that these are often those used by members of higher socioeconomic groups, and that non-standard varieties lack the prestige of the standard varieties, allows speakers of the former to be discriminated against. As the authors state, from a linguistic perspective there is nothing superior about standard varieties: non-standard varieties, in their systematic use, are also grammatical. Burridge and Mulder (1998:288) describe, for example, the complexity of the pronominal system of certain forms of Australian Aboriginal English, a widely stigmatised variety in Australian society, citing four variants of the standard English *we*. What this helps to make clear, and as Milroy and Milroy (1999:1-23) establish, all varieties of language can be shown to be more expressive than others in *some* respect: standard Australian English lacks the sophistication of Aboriginal English in this case; Englishes such as Australian, New Zealand and Scottish avoid the use of *shall* thus lack the ability to make a distinction between the use of *shall* and *will*. We could also argue that RP (Received Pronunciation), a highly prestigious accent, is deficient *vis-à-vis* certain rural accents of the UK; as *caught* and *court* are homophonous in RP but not in varieties that pronounce the post-vocalic /r/. The point is that there is no scientific basis for discrimination of the basis of language – inequality is the result of socially constructed attitudes towards specific varieties.

The specific inequalities experienced in Soviet Estonia and Francoist Spain are analysed in this paper within the theoretical framework of diglossia. Spanish-language linguist Azevedo (2005:324) provides a useful and succinct definition of diglossia as a:

relationship in which a low variety (B) finds itself subordinated to a high variety (A) [...] [T]he high variety is used in formal situations and activities considered to be of high prestige, as in parliamentary debates, court proceedings, government business, and activities of high culture including education, high literature [and] periodical publications of high circulation².

The general notion of diglossia as a sociolinguistic phenomenon, is owed to the American sociolinguist Charles Ferguson, who established it in 1959; the scope of Ferguson's concept, however, was limited to situations in which two different varieties of the *same* "language"³ are used in different social domains (Blas Arroyo, 2005:396-400, Wardhaugh, 2006:94-95). The concept used in the present analysis, however – extending to the situations of Estonia and Catalonia – is that of Joshua Fishman of 1967, who widened it to include cases between *different* languages (Blas Arroyo, 2005:396-400, Wardhaugh, 2006:98-99). Ferguson's initial

² "relación en que una modalidad baja (B) se encuentra subordinada a una modalidad alta (A) [...] [L]a alta se usa en situaciones formales y actividades consideradas de alto prestigio, como los debates en el parlamento, los trámites en los tribunales, los negocios del gobierno, y las actividades de alta cultura, entre éstas la educación, la alta literatura, [y] los periódicos de gran circulación"

³ The division between language and dialect is of little (socio)linguistic relevance as it is usually politically constructed (Wardhaugh, 2006:25-57, Hudson, 2001: 20-69). In discussion of diglossia, it cannot, however, be ignored that the division has been taken to exist: at best it has been an intuitive method of distinguishing between linguistic varieties; at worst a simple reflection of popular, or folk, linguistic beliefs.

elaboration encompassed the Arabic-speaking world, the German-speaking areas of Switzerland, Greece, and Haiti: local colloquial varieties in each case are used (in the case of Haiti it is actually a creole⁴) in everyday life, by the population in general, but classical Arabic, High German, Katharévousa, and French respectively pertain only to formal and international domains (Azevedo, 2005.; Wardhaugh, 2006.; Blas Arroyo, 2005).

It is not always the case in diglossic situations, that the B variety is socially inferior: if those that speak B as a native language have the opportunity to learn A, *and*, if B is not considered to be of low social prestige (Azevedo, 2005:324-328). Of the examples cited thus far, it is surely in Haiti that linguistic inequality is most clearly in existence: many Haitians never learn to function fully in French and thus remain permanently excluded from the domains of prestige (Wardhaugh, 2006:83-84). In Catalonia and Estonia, the diglossia experienced in the twentieth century has certainly resulted in disadvantage for the languages and their native speakers.

⁴ A creole is a former pidgin – a simplified variety used as a *lingua franca* in the strict (socio)linguistic sense, that is, the native variety of no one – which has become a first language (L1) of a community, and has expanded its fields and possibilities of expression and usage (Platt, Weber and Ho, 1984:1-12).

The Development of Linguistic Inequality in Estonia and Catalonia

Cannot the language of this land then

In the wind song

Rising towards the heavens

*Search for an eternity for itself?*⁵

Estonian poet, Kristjan Jaak Peterson (1801-1822)

The Estonian poet, Peterson, already in the early nineteenth century, had an appreciation of the fact that a language needs to be used across the range of sociolinguistic domains in order for it survive in the modern world. As the sociolinguist, Jacques Maurais (1998:221), a Quebecer, asserts: “a language spreads (or disappears) according to its functions and to its domains of usage⁶”. Language planners in both Estonia and Catalonia on emerging from authoritarianism were faced with significantly *asymmetrically* bilingual societies. Estonians and Catalonians, through necessity, required at least a functional knowledge of the language of the regime, whereas individuals of other ethnicities rarely spoke the autochthonous languages well.

According to the census of 1989, only 14.9% of non-Estonians – and at that time these ethnic groups made up 38.5% of the population (Järve, 2003:75-105) – could speak Estonian fluently (Kolstø, 1996:610-639). Russian had been the *lingua franca*⁷ of the Soviet Union: already in the 1950s Communist Party Secretary Khrushchev introduced the notion of “*iazyk mezhnatsional’nogo obshcheniia*” (language of international communication) and Russian emerged as “one of [the

⁵ “Kas siis selle maa keel

Laulutuules ei vői

Taevani tõustes üles

Igavikku omale otsida?”

⁶ “une langue se diffuse (ou disparaît) selon ses fonctions et selon ses domaines d’utilisation”

⁷ In the general (non-linguist) sense: simply a common language.

regime's] strongest hallmarks" (Clachar, 1998:108). Estonian lost many vital and basic sociolinguistic functions within Soviet society, with a definite language hierarchy having emerged: "in many everyday situations, the Balts [sic] were forced to speak Russian [...] The result was [...] the superior position of the Russian language" (Nørgaard et al., 1996:178). As Adrey (2005:458) states, "Russian was the exclusive dominant language in official spheres, i.e. state government, transport, industry, military, and in highly qualified employments and higher education, while Estonian [...] essentially channelled informal social communication". There was the prevailing mindset of many Russian-speakers that they had "the right to be monolingual no matter where they live and work [in the Soviet Union]" (Ozolins, 1999:181).

In 1975 the proportion of Catalan-speakers was 60% in Catalonia, 55% in Valenica and 75% in the Balearic Islands (Hooper, 1995:405-418); in Catalonia at that time there were 2,265,000 inhabitants *without* the capacity to speak Catalan (McRoberts, 2001:140). The restricted use of Catalan as a written language during the Francoist regime – that is, its complete absence from official domains and the media – brought about a situation in which many people could understand the language but did not know how to write it; many others had no experience, and indeed difficulties, in reading Catalan as they were accustomed to an official written world which was completely Castilianised (Hooper, 1995:405-418, May, 2001.; Fishman, 1991:297-298, Strubell, 1996:262-275, Strubell i Trueta, 1982:70-84, Keating, 2001:141-198). In 1979, among individuals born in Catalonia, only 19.2% were able to write in Catalan; the figure for people born outside of the region was a miniscule 1.7% (McRoberts, 2001:140). Very few people were able to teach the language and civil servants had no experience whatsoever in its professional use (Strubell, 1996). Furthermore, the home language of many Catalan-speakers was not Catalan: in cases in which Catalan-speakers were married to Spanish-speakers, the couple often used Spanish, given that both individuals could speak

Spanish, but quite often the Spanish-speaker did not have a solid command of Catalan (Hooper, 1995:405-418), this being particularly the case in Valencia (Strubell i Trueta, 1982:70-84). Catalan, is not however, generally difficult for Spanish-speakers to learn (provided they have the motivation to do so) and many “immigrants”⁸ to the region have at least a passive knowledge of the language (Mar-Molinero, 1994:106-113, Mar-Molinero, 1995:336-342), as opposed to the Estonian case, where Estonian and Russian are not even of the same language family.

It should be made clear, nonetheless, in neither of the cases presently discussed, is it possible to speak of a low level of self-esteem of the speakers in regard to their native language, and it is precisely *because* of the solid language-based identities that these varieties were able to survive under authoritarianism (Doersam, 1977, Conversi, 1997). Sánchez and Dueñas (2002:280-305) assert that the linguistic minorities of Spain in general even achieved a certain prestige of their own as symbols of resistance to the authoritarian state. Blas Arroyo (2005:408-9) asserts that Catalan “did not suffer a significant linguistic loss despite the long Francoist interruption [...] either amongst native speakers or [...] the immigrants of Spanish-speaking origin”⁹. The fact that Catalan continued to be used during the dictatorship, albeit informally and unofficially, by people of higher socioeconomic groups has contributed to the association of the language with economic success, at least in Catalonia itself (Blas Arroyo, 2005:, Spolsky, 2004:196-197).

⁸ The usage of the term immigrant in the Catalonian case under Franco refers to people that moved to the region from other parts of Spain, who were, to a large extent, monolingual Spanish-speaking.

⁹ “sufrió una merma significativa de prestigio pese el largo paréntesis franquista [...] tanto entre los hablantes nativos como [...] entre los inmigrantes de origen hispanohablante”

Nonetheless, as Conversi (1997:117) asserts, “[i]n the 1950s there was a moment of real danger that Catalan would become a family language, extinct in the public sphere”. Similarly, Hooper (1995:416-7) claims that when, “Franco died, the Catalan language had entered a crisis [which] [...] if allowed to continue would sooner or later finish it off”. Evald Mikkel, an Estonian political scientist (personal communication, 2006) has stated that the Estonian language, in the 1980s was verging on the “point of no return”: Estonian-speaking parents had begun to send their children to Russian-medium schooling in the belief that it would be in their future best interest. If independence had not arrived when it did, and this trend had indeed continued and become consolidated, Estonian may have very well entered into an extremely precarious process of linguistic endangerment. During the Francoist era, Catalan-speaking parents in Valencia would often *speak to their children* in Spanish; in that part of Spain the local variety had come “to be seen as mark of rurality and of people without culture”¹⁰, which has naturally affected its intergenerational transmission (Blas Arroyo, 2005:409).

Minorised Languages and Compensatory Language Policy

Both Russian in the former Soviet Union and Spanish in Spain enjoy a prestige by which many native speakers of the previously imposed language believe they have the right to continue to be monolingual, or to use that language even if they know the local language; Catalans and Estonians, furthermore, often feel obliged to use Spanish and Russian, respectively (Strubell, 1996:262-275, Lauristin and Heidmets, 2002:19-30, Vihalemm et al., 2004:57-73, Druviete, 2003:, Strubell i Trueta, 1982:70-84, McRoberts, 2001). In a 2003 survey, 16% of ethnic Estonians reported that they had used Russian with sales or service staff during the previous month; 8% had used it with civil servants (Vihalemm et al., 2004:57-73).

¹⁰ “interpretarse como marca de ruralidad [...] y de gentes sin cultura”

Only 13% of Russian-speakers in Estonia claim not to be able to speak Estonian *at all*, yet 27% say they *never use it* (Vihalemm et al., 2004:57-73). Despite being *public servants*, a 2002 EU report found that there are still some police officers in Tallinn who “have virtually no command of Estonian” (Ozolins, 2003:27).

In a 1995 study, 87.3% of respondents born in Catalonia of Catalanian parents stated that they use Catalan in shops when the native language of the assistant is unknown; 77.9% of individuals born outside of Catalonia and 54.4% of individuals born in Catalonia of parents born outside of the region – more than half in both cases – reported using *Spanish* (McRoberts, 2001:227). As Blas Arroyo (2005:407) points out, in Catalan-speaking areas of Spain, and especially in the so-called “Eastern Fringe of Aragón”¹¹, an area bordering Catalonia, Catalan can, “in switching to more formal domains as well in conversation with strangers, be abruptly substituted by Spanish”. Of those that today speak the Valencian variety of Catalan, as many as one-third do not use it in a wide array of public domains including shops, hospitals, and sport and recreational venues; in a study on the use of Catalan in the Eastern Fringe of Aragón in 1995, more than 80% indicated that they do not use the language in domains related to health and the church (Blas Arroyo, 2005:431, Boix i Fuster and Vila i Moreno, 1998:213-269). Indeed, in present-day Catalonia, a rather peculiar and perhaps surprising type of linguistic behaviour exists: two native-speakers of Catalan can speak to each other in Spanish without realising that the other speaks Catalan – a situation that has arisen due to the fact that the majority of Catalan-speakers speak unaccented Spanish, and they, in presuming that the interlocutor is a native Spanish-speaker, automatically choose that language (Strubell, 2001). Druviete (2003:5) terms the same phenomenon of automatic use of Russian, the language of prior prestige in

¹¹ From the Spanish “Franja oriental de Aragón”

present-day post-Soviet Latvia, “minority complex”, attributing it to the “high level of linguistic tolerance” moulded by the authoritarian Soviet system.

Normalisation – to borrow the term of the present official Catalan language planning programme – of the use of autochthonous languages required a policy that gives preferential treatment to the “minorized [sic]” language (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000:642): the language that has at one time enjoyed a degree of autonomy, but on being incorporated into a larger state has lost both prestige and power. Language planners needed to consider the claim “that under unequal power relationships, equal treatment produces unequal conditions” (Druviete, 1997:181). Maurais (1997:144), explaining the rationale for the language policy of Catalonia, Estonia, Quebec, and other similar cases, cites the work of Catalan sociolinguist Puig, who maintains that “freedom of choice [of language of instruction in school] is the best system for perpetuating cultural and linguistic inequalities”. Maurais (1997:144) continues: “[b]ut it is actually more than that: seen from a historical perspective, freedom of choice paves the way to etholinguistic assimilation”. We can therefore speak of normalisation, including its recent implementation in Estonia and Catalonia, as consisting of:

three tasks... a) to empower minority [or minorised] languages in order to make it possible for [them] to satisfy the communicative needs of a modern society; b) to increase the number of speakers/users and increase the communicative competence of current users, and c) expand the geographic scope of the language within a given area (Mar-Molinero, 2000:80).

The so-called “bilingualists” (Strubell, 1998:168) in Catalonia that oppose the method of using protectionist measures in order to normalise the use of Catalan essentially, therefore, “are [...] arguing for the right of [...] (Spanish) language speakers to remain monolingual” and “what we see here are simply two versions of nationalism, a majoritarian Spanish one and a minority Catalan one (although

only the latter is termed as such)" (May, 2003:139). Bastardas i Boada (2000:165) similarly notes that

[w]hile biculturalism promoted by the state is imperialist in nature, as it adopts political representation [of a particular language/culture] and may even aim to replace one ethnic group with another, bilculturalism promoted by a host ethnic group with immigrant ethnic groups is not characterised by the elimination of cultures in its maintenance efforts, but rather specifically promotes cultural integration as, in any case, immigrant ethnic groups continue their existence in their original territory independent of the position they hold, and the historical role their individuals play, in the territory of other ethnic groups.

As Ozolins asserts, regarding Estonia's language policy, "[t]he concern was not to monitor *individual use* in interactions, but to ensure *capacity* for communication in the national language at an appropriate level, so that the doctor or shopkeeper could in fact speak the national language if required".

There is no doubt that there has been an improvement in recent years in the sociolinguistic health of both languages: in Estonia according to the census of 2000, 38.3% of Russian-speakers confirmed proficiency in Estonian, an increase of more than 100% in 11 years (Statistical Office of Estonia); in Catalonia according to the linguistic census of 2001, 74.5% of the population could speak the autochthonous language (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2003). It is clear nonetheless, that language policy must give preference to the minorised language in order to compensate for the existing asymmetry in use of the languages.

In terms of specific policy, after Franco's death in 1975, Catalonia declared Catalan as co-official language of the region (the Spanish constitution requires Spanish to be official throughout the state); it has made a certain amount of Catalan-medium education compulsory in primary and secondary schooling, and all teachers must have competence in the language; all public media funded

by the regional government is in Catalan and there are quotas in place for minimum Catalan requirements for other media; public servants must speak the language, and customer service must be available from private companies in Catalan (Secretaria de Política Lingüística).

Already before achieving independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Estonia had declared Estonian the sole official language of the territory; as in Catalonia all public officials must be able to speak the language but there are no regulations on private enterprises except in cases of “justifiable public interest” (Ozolins, 2003:223). Immigrants who arrived in the country during the Soviet occupation and wish to become Estonian citizens must naturalise, a process which includes an Estonian language exam.

Conclusion

The minorised languages Estonian and Catalan suffered at the hands of authoritarian regimes which left their usage, power and prestige greatly reduced. During the periods of authoritarianism, the language of the minorising regime, Russian and Spanish respectively, took the place of Estonian and Catalan as languages of official, public and prestigious usage. Despite regained control in both territories over much linguistic policy, it is certainly still possible to speak of cases of diglossia – as in the more recent elaboration of the term by Fishman. Compensatory language policy allows for the inequality of prestige and power to be rebalanced – equal treatment of the autochthonous and imposed languages would not allow normalisation of usage of the former as long as linguistic inequality continues to exist in the societies concerned.

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