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Catalan today

Catalan language

Catalan is spoken...

by about ten million people

in 4 European states

across an area covering about 60,000 square kilometres or 23,250 square miles

Most Catalan speakers are (at least) bilingual and Catalan co-exists with three other important European languages —Spanish, French and Italian.

The Catalan language and its linguistic domain

Catalan is an elegant and beautiful language and has long and significant literary and cultural history.

It is a member of the family of Romance languages, and derives from Latin, like French, Spanish, Italian, Galician, Portuguese, Rumanian and Occitane. As a result it has characteristics in common with the Iberian Romance Languages (Castilian, Galician, Portugese) and has close links with Occitan, the language of the South of France.

The formation of the Catalan language was a long process which culminated in the the 7th to 9th centuries, when the language spoken in this part of the Iberian Peninsula was by then quite distinctive from the Latin spoken during Roman times.

Catalan is spoken in the following areas

- The old **Principality of Catalonia** , which, since 1977, has had its own autonomous government, the Generalitat de Catalunya. This corresponds to the Spanish provinces of Barcelona, Girona, Lleida and Tarragona.
- The old **Kingdom of Valencia** (consisting of the Spanish provinces of València, Castelló and Alacant)
- A strip of eastern **Aragón.**
- The **Balearic islands** (Mallorca, Menorca, and Eïvissa [Ibiza])

[Within the Spanish territories mentioned, Catalan has joint official status with Spanish]

- The **Co-Principality of Andorra** , where Catalan is the only official language. However, Spanish and French are also spoken and widely understood.
- The **French province of Rosselló** , the Department des Pyrénées Orientales (also known as Catalunya Nord)
- The city of **Alguer** (Alghero) in Sardinia, Italy.

Catalan and the national character of Catalonia

Any language generates a kind of national consciousness and acts as a marker of collective and personal identity.

Although Catalan is also spoken in other areas, this section focuses on the *Principat* of Catalonia, for it summarises its advances and reverses in the course of history.

Catalan is a dynamic characteristic of Catalonia and one of its most distinctive features - you'll hear Catalan being spoken wherever you go in the region.

People have been speaking Catalan since the Middle Ages, but the integrity of the Catalan-speaking lands and the vitality of the language itself have both been repeatedly threatened over the centuries. Examples of this are the Decree of *Nova Planta* (1716), proclaimed by the Bourbon King Philip V (1683-1746) after the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14), which abolished the ancient regional privileges or *fueros* of Catalonia and banned Catalan in all official contexts and the Nationalist dictatorship of General Franco (1939-1975), under which Catalan language and culture were subjected to unprecedented persecution.

The history of the Catalan language has been a constant process of recovery.

In 1970 the General Law of Education first allowed teaching in Catalan and, in 1978, teaching in Catalan was authorised with some restrictions. The Spanish Constitution (1978) and the Statute of Autonomy for Catalonia (1979) mark the restoration of Catalan, recognising it as the *true language of Catalonia* , and formally establishing it (with Castilian) as one of the two official languages of the region. Consequently, Catalan is now the language of the Generalitat, the autonomous government of Catalonia.

Catalan has an important media presence too: there are two dedicated Catalan TV channels and a Catalan-language national newspaper as well as 5 regional newspapers are published in Catalan.

The Language Act (1983), which was backed by all the political parties in the Catalan parliament, asserts that the recognition of Catalan as Catalonia's own language is a fundamental right and and a duty which can never be given up by the Catalan people.

As a response to the numbers of Castilian-speakers in Catalonia, the 1983 Language Act also initiated the controversial policy of "linguistic immersion", which required children to be taught primarily in Catalan. Despite political opposition to this policiy, it has been highly effective in promoting the understanding and use of Catalan. According to the 1986 census, more than 90% of the population said they understood Catalan, 64% said they spoke it and 31.5% said they could write it.

Familiarity with the language is growing steadily. The *Generalitat* has backed various campaigns to extend the use of Catalan in social contexts since 1983 and finally passed a new Language Decree in early 1998. The consequences of this law, which did failed to meet with the approval of parties at both ends of the political spectrum in Catalonia, are as yet, difficult to determine. The policy of the Generalitat was to promote the use of Catalan in a range of social contexts previously dominated by Castilian by means of positive discrimination. The resulting legislation targets public documents, civil servants and government-funded companies as well as imposing linguistic quotas on cinemas, radio stations and local TV productions. Product labels, place names and street or shop signs must also be in Catalan (except in the Aran Valley, a small region in the Catalan Pyrenees, where the native language *aranès* always prevails).

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