

2017

Review of Kathryn Woolard, Singular and Plural: Ideologies of Linguistic Authority in 21st Century Catalonia

Andrew Dowling
Cardiff University, andavis@astate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs>

Recommended Citation

Dowling, Andrew (2017) "Review of Kathryn Woolard, Singular and Plural: Ideologies of Linguistic Authority in 21st Century Catalonia," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 42 : Iss. 2 , Article 25.

<https://doi.org/10.26431/0739-182X.1272>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs/vol42/iss2/25>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* by an authorized editor of Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. For more information, please contact jesus@udel.edu.

Woolard, Kathryn. *Singular and Plural: Ideologies of Linguistic Authority in 21st Century Catalonia*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2016. xix +365 pp.

From appeals made to the Spanish king in the 1880s (*Memorial de Greuges*), to proto-autonomous and autonomous institutions through the 1930s, the role and status of the Catalan language has been central to the broader culture. Until the 1930s, the official status of the language greatly lagged behind its public usage with 80 per cent of the population continuing to use Catalan as their primary means of communication through the 1920s. In one sense we can say that Catalanism has been built around two principal goals: obtaining institutions and achieving a parity of status for Catalan. The marginal position of the Catalan language, which has varied from exclusion to suppression in the public sphere and faced challenges due to demographic change, has ensured that the language has been an agent for mobilization. Some minor advances in its status were achieved under the *Mancomunitat* (1914 to 1923) and with greater impact, under the Spanish Second Republic (1931 to 1939), which saw the creation of a full educational infrastructure. By the 1930s, Catalan-language publications were numerous, and the language had a presence in the school system, administration, and the media of mass communication. The Franco regime's attempt to erode the Catalan language transformed its status within wider society.

We can locate a general sense of optimism in Catalan political culture. The transition to democracy, return of Josep Tarradellas, and restoration of autonomy represented a victory for Catalan society. However, the language itself remained in a complex position. By the late 1960s, the last monoglot speakers of Catalan who had little or no contact with Castilian Spanish in the countryside died out. Those who used the Catalan language as their principal means of communication were a social minority in the greater Barcelona and metropolitan areas. By the 1970s, vast internal migration produced social changes in Catalan life that remain relevant today. The impact of this migration inevitably impacted the intellectual community engaged in reconstructing the postulates of Catalanism for a new era. Social superiority and expressions of nativism have not been absent in the historical development of Catalanist ideology. Amongst the Catalan middle classes and upper echelons of society, anxiety was expressed at the construction of a 'red belt' in the greater Barcelona area that was beyond their control. Concern at national erosion was principally expressed by nationalists whilst the left and communists sought to mobilize this social sector against the regime. Whilst the Catalan interior was much less disrupted by this social change, by 1970, 47 per cent of the inhabitants of the city of Barcelona had been born elsewhere.

It is here that Woolard's study enters, building on her previous work on the position of Catalan through the close observation of the fluid status of language and identity in the context of the turn to independence. With only around a third of Catalans using the Catalan language as everyday means of communication, the sovereignty movement has been forced to address the Fichtean postulates so often found within the language promotion movement. This has produced phenomenon such as the *Súmate* collective and Castilian speakers in favor of independence. Yet the nativist element is still visible within the nationalist movement, most notably with the *Koine* manifesto of January 2017, which referred to Spanish speakers (more than half of Catalonia's population) as colonizers. The romantic dream of a monolingual Catalonia retains important support. What the author terms ideologies of linguistic authority leads the

reader through this complexity as Woolard examines social perceptions of the language. Catalan is the only minority language in Europe that has maintained social prestige. With the reconstitution of the Generalitat, the program of linguistic 'normalization' was initiated with the stated aim of making Catalan the normal language of the public.

Woolard's study provides a rich seam of analysis to consider the changing dynamics of status, role and perception of Catalonia's two languages: Catalan and Castilian. The principal aim of normalization was to achieve the cultural integration of Spanish speakers. The Catalan model has attained broad success in television and radio but above all in the education system where it is hegemonic. However, ensuring that the language learned in the school is actually consistently used outside of it has proven to be greatly lacking. This gap that had become ever more visible by the mid-1990s saw the adoption of a new law of Language Normalization in 1998. Catalan has restored its status as the language of use in the administration, and has produced important increases in levels of understanding. However, real social usage has shifted little over the decades in spite of the language's institutional strength. Diglossia has been the most common description of the Catalan language territory. In 2003, a Generalitat survey demonstrated this clearly. It showed that those young people born between 1974 and 1988 and almost all educated in Catalan had a lower usage of the language, 44.4 per cent, compared to those born between 1959 and 1973 who had a usage figure of 47.7 per cent. Some 80 per cent of Spanish speakers in Catalonia continue to use Spanish as their principal means of communication. These apparent failures of public policy have ensured a continuing space for the social activism of language movements. As such, the 'top down' nature of language planning at an institutional level is no guarantee of lasting success. Yet amongst the young, one focus of this study, there is a growing sense that language use is no longer as politicized as it once was. We can anticipate that that the role, authority and status of both Castilian and Catalan will continue their battles for dominance, irrespective of whether an independent Catalan state ever emerges.

Andrew Dowling
Cardiff University