

Critical book reviews

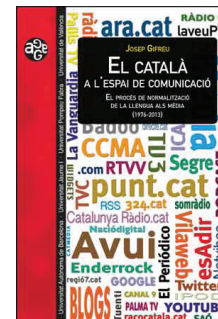
GIFREU, J. *El català a l'espai de comunicació. El procés de normalització de la llengua als mitjans (1976-2013)*.

Barcelona, Castelló de la Plana, Valencia: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Universitat Jaume I, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Universitat de València, 2014, 272 p. Col·lecció Aldea Global, no. 29 ISBN 978-84-490-4349-9 (UAB), 978-84-15443-03-2 (UJI), 978-84-370-9292-8 (UV)

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The road towards the standardisation of Catalan in the media after the end of Franco's regime

Since the 1980s Josep Gifreu has been a leading author in examining communication in Catalonia and the Catalan-speaking areas (Països Catalans) as a genuine national system. In fact, we essentially owe the very concept of a *Catalan communication space*, or the equivalent of a *national communication space*, demarcated by the scope of historical ties established related to the Catalan language (in its different versions and names), to Josep Gifreu, currently professor emeritus in Communication Theory at Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona.

Very early in his long, renowned and influential university work, Gifreu started to emphasise the structural and systematic nature of the workings of the communication ecosystem and, consequently, the importance of policies affecting it. This was the focus of interest of his first important contribution in 1983, resulting from his doctoral thesis, in which he studied how the communication sphere developed during the last few years of Franco's dictatorship and the early years of the Transition towards democracy: *Sistema i polítiques de la comunicació a Catalunya. Premsa, ràdio, televisió i cinema (1970-1980)*. Barcelona: L'Avenç.

Such interest in communication policy has been a permanent focus that has provided Gifreu's writings with continuity and coherence, underlining the importance of all his work. He's concentrated on the more general aspects of the development of the Catalan communication system and the public policies involved such as the nature of the goals of public initiatives, investment in the industry, the extent of the business fabric, regulations implemented, the presence and coverage achieved by the media within the Catalan market in both geographical and language terms, the mission of public service, international distribution, policies by Spain against the Catalan system and the tools used to subordinate and weaken it. But the author's attention and interest have also focused on more specific and concrete aspects of the system and related policies: from the

terminology of analysis and conceptual frameworks to policies for dubbing and subtitling films; from support for fictional audiovisual products to measures to stimulate the presence of Catalan online; or from style books and the quality of the language used by the key media to the difficulties encountered by these media in accessing the language domain as a whole and the need to overcome the market's regional fragmentation.

This examination of the centrality of policy and Gifreu's desire to evaluate its intent and effect on everyday communication constitutes the starting point of thoroughly descriptive, analytical and propositional work that culminates in this recent and to some extent conclusive book: *El català a l'espai de comunicació*.

This book covers and largely summarises the author's whole career, incorporating an update of his contributions, lines of analysis and main proposals. And it offers a very complete summary of the situation with the inclusion of comparative information and references and a wealth of data and tables that illustrate the status of Catalan and justify each diagnosis and step of interpretation explained. All this forms the basis of the intellectual and political stance taken up by Josep Gifreu and its end result at the culmination of his academic career. In spite of the complexity of the subject being tackled, this book is very ordered, clear and simple in its presentation. The issues are described and approached with great precision and the arguments proposed undeniably solid and indisputable. The result of all his years of teaching, personal research, of directing research groups and actively taking part in academic and public debates on issues related to communication and language and their policies are condensed in this mature, insightful work full of ideas and inducements to take action.

In the introduction, Gifreu explicitly states his intention to write a book that's halfway between an "essay on cultural history" and a "political chronicle" so as to examine "the evolution of the overall standardisation of the Catalan language in the media ecosystem in the end of the 20th century and early 21st" (p. 18). The book starts with the first chapter exploring the relationship

between languages and power to explain the adoption of a perspective related to the ecology of languages and the central role played in this by the media. In this same initial block he also defines the emblematic concept of *communication space*.

The second section reviews the common threads running through research into the standardisation of Catalan in the media and the third notes the legal and political frameworks deployed by Spain and Catalan institutions.

The fourth chapter then describes the historical evolution of the presence of Catalan in the different traditional media and in audiovisual production as a whole while the fifth section is dedicated to evaluating the place of the Catalan language on the internet and new media and networks, seeing Catalan (and by extension any other language) as the factor most capable of marking out a specific territory in cyberspace. The sixth chapter tackles the question of standard language and the media's language models. And finally the seventh chapter is a kind of summarising and concluding essay, including a list of challenges and noting some proposals for action.

El català a l'espai de comunicació is a book that's accessible to anyone interested in a good historical overview of the ups and downs of the Catalan language in its own primordial medium, namely communication, since the end of Franco's dictatorship. And it is undoubtedly the first reference book that is essential for students of sociolinguistics, journalism, sociology, recent history or research into communication policy who wish to find out about the status of Catalan and the singular situation of its language in relation to the media. This book provides the keys to the paradoxical circumstance of a national communication system which is constantly being thwarted by the state that should be protecting it. And also of its distinctive language that, in spite of it being still an object of intense Spanish policy to reduce the status of Catalan and prevent it from becoming widespread (effective especially in the Balearic Islands and the autonomous community of Valencia), is showing such signs of life that, for certain uses and types of production and consumption, it is at the forefront of ecosystems and languages of similar size.

El català a l'espai de comunicació provides the academic community and public at large with the result of the efforts of an author who, thanks to his academic platform and his intellectual and political commitment, has been highly influential in the communication policies effectively implemented in Catalonia over the period in question. Within the concept of so-called "national communication policies", legitimised in 1980 with the dissemination of the doctrine by UNESCO (guidelines of the MacBride report), Gifreu was one of the most active people in formulating proposals for action in the Catalan area. And he was also personally both a collaborator and critic in asking successive Catalan governments to prioritise communication policies (including language policies) as much as possible because they represented, and still represent today, the cornerstone of cultural policy and the possibility, after Franco's attempt at eradicating Catalan culture, of a resurrection and a new completeness.