

From the street to the airwaves: how football in Catalan conquered the radio

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- *A first-person account of the context and conditions in which the first transmission of football in Catalan took place after Franco's dictatorship. The accompanying reflections bring us closer to various considerations, both from the point of view of the transmitter of messages as well as to that of the receiver. Are there reasons to justify the biased involvement of the narrator? We shall also find some observations on country, journalism, the characteristics of radio broadcasts and the evolution of football, sharpened with a critical counterpoint that is inevitable for the author. Basically, people, language and our communicative fabric.*

Keywords

Socio-cultural recovery, language of specialisation, identification, subjectivity, communicative muscle, rhetoric, football narrative, rights of the receiver, radiophonic discourse, football business, Catalan language.

In 1968 I broadcast, on Radio Barcelona, the first football match of my life. I was given this opportunity by director Manuel Tarín Iglesias.¹ I broadcast in Spanish, at that time the only language with access to the media platform in Catalonia. Everyone knows that, at that time, we had to speak Spanish on the radio but we should also remember that, in spite of the obstinate action of Francoism, the Catalan language was still alive and kicking in our country. It could often be heard among pupils in school playgrounds (but not in class), it was the usual language in many of the neighbourhoods in our towns and cities and was used by housewives and farmers at market stalls. Spanish was clearly a minority language among those born in Barcelona but it was the language of the immigrants that had arrived in Catalonia at various times during the 20th century (from Aragon, Galicia and Andalusia, among others, in massive migratory waves). Many of these gradually learned Catalan. Without laws, without rules... nor schools (those that existed had been created for Spanish!). They learned it with the logical naturalness of people who wish to settle down in a place that has its own language that is different from theirs. In general, being in contact with Catalans (for many people here, the concepts of *Catalan* and *Catalan-speaking* were perceived almost identically) and observing how they spoke in their everyday activities were sufficient for many of those who wished to learn Catalan to dare to start speaking it. They did so because it was useful for them, as an opportunity, as a tool for social interrelations, to promote themselves personally, professionally or commercially and especially, of cour-

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Communicator and football commentator

1 Manuel Tarín Iglesias (Barcelona, 1919-2007), director of Radio Barcelona from 1963 to 1973. He tried to maintain the personality of a "doyen broadcaster" given the gradual generalisation of "assembly line" programmes. He is also the founder of the Onda awards.

se, as a way of integrating themselves. Speaking Catalan was a way of stopping being a new arrival. As well as giving their children Catalan names.

At the end of the dictatorship, eight years after my first broadcast and when a new collective horizon could be glimpsed, I decided to make a professional change. The establishment of the Catalan language in the different layers of Catalonia's social fabric, which I have already mentioned, made me believe (without anyone's instructions nor political strategies nor technical dictums) that including this language in the production of mass messages would surely be a good way to earn a living, apart from a modest contribution to the country's socio-cultural recovery. In order to achieve this goal, it was obviously necessary to assess my own skills accurately and to ensure my initial steps were firm. Given its popularity, football was a powerful attraction and the Barça team, as we shall see shortly, brought together social interests from across the spectrum. Right from the start I thought of creating a "winning" production: it has to be consolidated not through the sentimental/championing aspect of the language being used for the message but through our capacity to lead the market. (I have applied this principle both to radio and television and it has always provided me with good results). People listen to you, or watch you, if you're good at what you do and if they like what you do. Based on this principle, I didn't even think of asking for any subvention or of looking for any other protection than that typical of a professional activity. Luckily Radio Barcelona's management was committed to the enterprise and my colleagues helped me (most particularly Jordi Mir in the linguistic department). But the decisive factor was the sponsorship of "la Caixa", because, of course, we could not propose a project to the broadcaster

that would end up making a loss. We therefore had to find a sponsor to finance the production costs. This sponsor had to be prepared to become involved in an unusual initiative (many thought it was an adventure) that had no comparable precedents (the broadcasts by Joaquim Ventalló² before the war were not comparable by a long shot) nor did it offer the usual guarantees. We were working at SER, a private broadcaster located in Madrid, with established work in Spanish and leader in the Spanish market as a whole. The reader will understand that, without the backing of "la Caixa" (it was more patronage than actual advertising) our project would not have even reached the first post. That's why I have always been grateful to them.

Futbol Club Barcelona is an extremely powerful instrument for bringing people together in a group: "It doesn't matter if we come from the south or the north, now we all agree, a banner makes us brothers" (1974).³ Adapting the title of the book by Paco Candel *Els altres catalans* (1964)⁴ referring to the new "Catalan adoptees", we might say that many of the new arrivals from that time became fans of Barça and became "the other Barcelonans". So, for the first time in history, and massively, people not born in Catalonia became part of the collective social fabric of the football club that Narcís de Carreras had defined as "more than a club" (1968)⁵ due to its sociological dimension and perception as a champion of Catalanism.

A vastly important change had therefore occurred in the club in terms of its type of associates and fans. Our broadcast has always and still takes this fact into account. I myself, as a producer of the discourse, often use references and pointers, the ones I like, that make the commentary more scintillating in a natural way, aimed at a wide range of listeners, obviously including those who are not Catalan

2 Joaquim Ventalló i Vergés (Terrassa, 1899 - Barcelona, 1996), journalist, writer, publicist and politician during the Republic. He is considered to be the author of the first broadcast of a football match in Catalan on Ràdio Associació de Catalunya. He was director of *L'Opinió* and *La Rambla*.

3 Words from the "Cant del Barça", by Josep Maria Espinàs and Jaume Picas. It was first heard on 27 November 1974, during the celebrations for the Club's 75th anniversary. The music was composed by Manuel Valls Gorina.

4 CANDEL, F. *Els altres catalans*. Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1st edition, 1964, 366 pages.

5 Narcís de Carreras (La Bisbal d'Empordà, 1905 - Barcelona, 1991), president of FC Barcelona, pronounced this phrase in his speech to the press when he took over his position on 17 January 1968.

speakers. I also want them to feel involved. (A short time ago, during the programme, we received an email from the Maresme area from an Amazic émigré). We can talk about what is common to us or what interests us all without avoiding mentioning singularities or respecting all differences. The fact that the media where we work have a *lingua franca* (whatever it is) should not make this objective unviable. It should be beneficial for everyone. (Apart from all this, if we didn't work like this, we would surely lose ratings and ranking in the market). In the case of Barça, it's as true as it is paradoxical that the club, at the same time as it was integrating fans who had come from outside Catalonia, was also strengthening its image as a Catalan institution and offered itself as an instrument for nationalist demands in view of the decline of the late Francoism period. The management of Agustí Montal i Costa (son of the former president Agustí Montal i Galobart),⁶ very close to the personage of Jordi Pujol and a supporter of his political leanings, excelled more in this objective thanks to the outstanding activity of the executives Jaume Rosell and Joan Granados (who, by the way, also helped me by granting me access to FC Barcelona's archives) than in its sporting results which, in general, were discretely satisfactory for the time. They brought about actions and popular movements in the stadium championing Catalanism, which were difficult to imagine anywhere else in Catalonia. That said, they did try not to cause any disturbances like those often caused by the students of Barcelona University at the time. I studied Spanish Philology in the old building of this university and, for two years, at the start of the seventies, I worked there as a lecturer in the Humanities Faculty. For administrative and academic reasons, I had to present a thesis which I dedicated to football terminology in Spanish.⁷ (This work,

although very discrete, was useful to me as a reference to produce a preliminary approximation, with the collaboration of lecturer Alfred Badia,⁸ to our language of specialisation in Catalan).⁹ I had also been working for several years by that time, on renewable contracts, for Radio Barcelona where, letting myself be carried away by my passion for language and mass communication, and given the impossibility of working in general as a journalist with a clean conscience, and as a result of the threat of censorship, I specialised in sports broadcasts. There was more autonomy in this field, although certain intellectual elites of the time theorised about a supposed complicit relationship between the dictatorship and football, seen as a kind of "opium of the people". The articles by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán provide the most opportune counterpoint to this.

From emotional involvement to narrative distance

At the start of the seventies I was working in a lot of sports areas for the SER channel, "naturally" in Spanish. I like the Spanish language and have always tried to speak it as well as I can. At that time, when I took part as a correspondent in programmes that, directed and produced in Madrid, required of me the view we might take in Barcelona of a particular fact or news item, I did not restrain myself from explaining the singularities or from pointing out the differences seen from "our" frame of reference and from our symbolic universe. Sheltered by our socio-cultural tradition, I admit that I feel I am responsible for championing this perspective, something that forced me, and also allowed me, to highlight a genuine sensitivity typical of Catalonia. I did so as much for my Catalan listeners, to see themselves reflected in the view of the discourse and recognise it

6 Agustí Montal i Galobart (Barcelona, 1904-1964), president of FC Barcelona, promoted the entity to the extent of notably consolidating it throughout his six years in the position. Under his presidency the team was formed that is known popularly as the "Barça of the Five Cups".

7 PUYAL ORTIGA, J. M. "Terminología futbolística", thesis. Unpublished manuscript. Universitat de Barcelona, 1972.

8 Alfred Badia Gabarró (Barcelona, 1912-1994), translator, essayist, poet and lecturer of the Catalan language.

9 PUYAL ORTIGA, J. M.; BADIA I GABARRÓ, A. "Vocabulari del futbol". [Barcelona]: Unpublished manuscript, 1976.

collectively as their own view, as to pass on this view to the rest of the audience, in general steeped in a homogenising Spanishness. It should be noted that I could do this, and very easily, because we were "only" talking about football. When, on *Hora 25*¹⁰ José M. García said to me "*today your Barça has lost again, doctor Puyal*", the association he was making between the club and myself didn't bother me (although what did bother me was the fact that they had lost!), but not so much because I am a died-in-the-wool Barça fan but because of everything positive the identification entailed. (The trend of the time was the opposite. As if those of us who talked about football, in order to do the job well, could not be in favour of any team, apart from the Spanish squad. If that were the case, how could we have become fans?) At that time I learned that, in communication, identifying yourself with something has clear advantages and is surely good. Yes, I'm a Barça fan. This declaration allows me a biased viewpoint (seeing things from the point of view of a Barça fan). But it does not stop me from respecting the principle of honest subjectivity (describing things as they appear before my eyes). If a Barça player gives away a penalty, my status as a fan allows me to get annoyed, to get sad, to lower the intensity of the broadcast, to imagine the rage of the listeners (most are Barça fans like myself and those who aren't, as they know which team I identify with, are already aware of the sensitivity of our communicative territory) and to interpret the fans' distress in first person, if I want to. I call this emotional involvement. But it does not give me the right to lie. Not even to dissimulate. None of this takes away my obligation to explain the play as it was (as I saw it). I have to be able to see the reality separately from the colour of the shirt and, if there's a penalty, I have to say so clearly, with all the details. Although it may hurt them, I cannot allow the listeners to be in any doubt. It's a penalty! I call this narrative distance. Being partisan in a professional is not like smoke that clouds the vision. This seems clear to me. And it also

has another advantage. The receiver can only know which perspective the communication is coming from if the broadcaster declares his or her leanings. When someone presents themselves formally as independent or say they are free (!), they encrypt their (inevitable) views and deny the receiver the basic keys to understanding the message correctly and to interpret it legitimately. It's clear that, as an intermediary of communication, trained in the profession of seeing and explaining things and sharing emotions with receivers, I could simulate the involvement required for each circumstance, according to whom I am responsible for describing the reality. It's evident that, if necessary, I could "get excited on air" at a goal by Madrid. And it would be permissible. I don't say it isn't. Ultimately, if it's done well, that's what the profession is about. And this is an unbeatable argument if we're talking about professionalism. Or is it perhaps the case that all those who worked as journalists on the radio, in the press or on television during Franco's dictatorship, were absolute devotees of Franco? The most important football commentator of Argentina is from Uruguay.¹¹ What must he feel inside when an Argentina-Uruguay match is broadcast? That's a mystery. However, does what he feels inside matter to his listeners if he's capable of carrying out a faithful, high quality broadcast that stirs and satisfies them? Whatever the answer, nothing invalidates what we have said. The reason is simple: if you don't want to, you don't identify yourself. And that's that. No one is forcing you. Nor do you have to "confess" more identities than you want to publicly reveal. However, from the position of the receiver, understood as people (the only ones who ultimately matter), I believe that when we consume communication, and even more so when more important things are being explained to us than football, it would be useful to know more about what the producers identify with (and to be able to identify the production models more clearly) in these discourses. This would allow us to get closer to the "barcode of the messages" and to

10 General information programme on the SER channel. The sports journalist José M. García achieved great popularity thanks to the ratings success of his section which, since 1972, made sports news popular at midnight on Spanish radio.

11 Víctor Hugo Morales (Cardona, Uruguay, 1947), Uruguayan radio presenter who worked on Radio Oriental in Montevideo until 1981, when he moved to Argentina. His commentary on Maradona's goal against England has become popular, in the Mexico World Cup in 1986.

know them better. As we do with the information provided with medicines or with labels when we buy packaged food.

Commitment to football on the radio

I have already said that the idea of broadcasting matches in Catalan did not have a political origin nor did it follow any business strategy. Right from the start, the head of Sport, Francisco Peris¹² (a vocational journalist closely connected to Gandia), and head of programming, Joan Castelló Rovira¹³ (an extraordinary radio professional from Lleida, a real expert, wasted by Catalonia for reasons that are not relevant here), they were committed to a project that made headway with a series of claims that could be surmised but that, most of all, ran the risks inherent in forging a path. Moreover, there was, of course, the unenthusiastic indifference (and even ridiculing mockery) of those who believed Catalan to be an instrument incapable of articulating mass messages (perhaps we should remember that, in August 1976, days before our first broadcast, the president of the Spanish government declared in the magazine *Paris Match*¹⁴ that classes in nuclear chemistry could not be given in Catalan). When the director of Radio Barcelona telephoned the top management of the SER channel in Madrid to get their approval to broadcast football in Catalan, their response was: “*Will they understand it yet?*”. The lack of knowledge of our reality among Spaniards as a whole was huge. (In this respect, three decades after the end of the dictatorship, we are still stuck over the same point). Well, in this context, when all the broadcasts of Barça in Catalonia were carried out in Spanish, we decided to stand up for

football in Catalan. In our favour was all the potential of the Catalan language: all the resources and validity, vitality and functionality of the whole referential, symbolic and metaphorical world that a language is capable of constructing in a collective universe. Against us were my limitations and a lack of confidence that impaired me. I hadn't studied Catalan (that's why Mir was so important). For me it was the language of my family and relations with friends but I had never had the remotest possibility, or need, to use it as a media instrument. So I just got down to it, without anyone asking me to and driven in particular by my intuition. Perhaps from a contemporary point of view those concerns may seem a little ridiculous. Perhaps. But they were there. Was I wrong when I thought that the Catalan language's access to mass communication, which I saw as normal, was or had to be normal even when it was in no way usual? (Seeing something as normal when it's not usual has often happened to me in my life). As everyone knows, at that time (September 1976) there was no radio broadcaster (Ràdio 4 started to broadcast in December) nor television broadcaster (TV3 was born in 1983) that habitually used Catalan. Moreover, no-one in the circle of real power saw the need or acknowledged the lack of a “Catalan communication area”¹⁵ (as the dear lecturer Josep Gifreu proposed when this concept was labelled). This can clearly come as no surprise to anyone if we remember that the president of the Generalitat was still in exile at that time...¹⁶

Luckily, the director of Radio Barcelona (the doyen radio station that formed part of the SER chain), Manuel G. Terán, was a man of clear democratic convictions, believed access to Catalan on the station should be supported and had progressive ideas. In addition to all this, he was also an

¹² Francisco Peris Vidal (Castelló de la Plana, 1931 - Barcelona, 2000), was head of Sports for Radio Barcelona from 1974 to 1979, a position from which he trained many professionals.

¹³ Joan Castelló Rovira (Castelló de la Plana, 1939 - Arenys de Munt, 2002), a brilliant radio presenter and creator of successful formats such as *Noche de ronda*, *Directo*, *En punta*, *Hora 13* and *Hora 25*. This last programme was adapted by Manuel Martín Ferrand when *Hora 25* was born in 1972 on the SER channel.

¹⁴ The interview appeared on 28 August 1976, in number 1422.

¹⁵ GIREU, J.; COROMINAS, M. (ed.) *Construir l'espai català de comunicació*. Barcelona: CIC, 1991.

¹⁶ President Josep Tarradellas did not return to Catalonia until 23 October 1977.

accredited radio professional and had been promoting innovative and audacious programming for some time, using his position of authority. With the help of his team, he gathered around him, in addition to the best professionals of the time, renowned as figures from the world of radio, a group of young men and women (some just starting out in the business) that probably went to make up the best team of young radio professionals ever in history: Marga Blanch, Constantino Romero, Eduard Boet, Armand Balsebre, Jordi Costa, Xavier Ubach, Josep Cuní, Àngel Casas, Fermín Bocos, Rosa Codina, Rafael Manzano, Àlex J. Botines, Maruja Torres, Jaume Figueras, Isabel Bosch, Núria Ribó, Manuel Borrell, Antonio Moñux, Alfons Quintà, Albert Viladot, Rafael Turia, Andrés Astruells, Adelina Castillejo, Pitu Abril, Àlex Martínez Roig, Manolo Bernardos, Antoni Bassas, Josep Ll. Merlos, Pere Ferreres, Lluís Canut, Santi Carreras, Isabel Gemio, Inés Ballester, Jordi Beltran, Pepe Gutiérrez, Petra M. Secanella, Manolo Oliveros, Pere Palacios, Mercè Remolí, Jordi González, Marisol Castillo, Pepe Navarro, Rosa Badia, Jordi Hurtado, Ramon Pellicer, Josep M. Balcells, Xarli Diego...¹⁷ I apologise for tiring the reader with this long list like a stream of consciousness, and I ask those colleagues that I have unjustly forgotten to forgive me, because I have surely left someone out, but I think it's a spectacular list. We can't talk about the radio or television of the last twenty or thirty years without mentioning these names! Could so much communicative muscle not be capable of developing the sum of skills held by those people, so young for our profession? While I write this, remembering these names moves me. And I am doubly affected by the memory because, throughout my subsequent life, I have often missed, in the professional and production environments, often connected with the public firms I have worked with, some of the principles, the attitudes and work methods that could be observed in that broadcaster's building in Carrer Casp in Barcelona, during the so-called period of transition. I'm also reminded of a recurring question: if Catalonia is the origin of so many professionals (we can add names to the previous list that are so well-known and present in the minds of all of us who

have worked and currently work in our media; obviously, and we could even add all those other colleagues who, trained in Catalonia, have joined production teams for Spanish programmes), if our country has had, therefore, this magnificent breeding ground, how is it that we've not been able to take more and better advantage of this talent in favour of the Catalan communicative fabric, which is so weak nowadays? Surely this question, which, if I am honest, I ask with a feeling of disappointment and impotence, with a sideways glance at the political and business classes, we could also ask about other activities and at other times in our history. The answer that occurs to me also pains me doubly: because of Catalonia's incapacity to capitalise on its resources, knowledge and heritage for its own benefit (as I see it, one of the causes, albeit not the only one, for the current decadence) but also because of the amount of talent we have launched, placing it at the service of trained people who have taken Spanish TV programming to where it is today. The added problem, for us, is that this trend also affects our production, which is affected by the distortion caused by this programming in a market that includes both.

From narrator to communicator

Let's go back to where we were. From a discourse analysis point of view, I must clearly state that my first attempts at commentary in Catalan followed the model that had become accredited in Catalonia in Spanish. I didn't want to run any more risks than the unavoidable ones and I opted (without thinking because, on the other hand, neither did I have the technical capacity nor experience at that time to formulate an alternative proposal) to do a broadcast in Catalan following the established rhetorical guidelines for the classic narration that was being performed in Barcelona. Moreover, it was a pattern I already knew from the broadcasts I used to carry out in Spanish. Some of its characteristics must still be remembered by the listeners tuning in. Although there was only one commentator, the narration had little individual involvement. For example, I always used to use the first

¹⁷ FRANQUET, R. *Ràdio Barcelona: setanta anys d'història (1924-1994)*. Barcelona: College of Journalists of Catalonia, 1994 (Col·lecció Vaixells de Paper).

person plural instead of using, when it might have seemed more appropriate, the first person singular, as I often do and have done for some time. I interpret this as resorting to the radio customs from the time of Franco. Although alone at the station, presenters used to start by saying "we greet you from the football ground [...]", "we believe it's an indirect free kick", "we wish the brave centre forward a rapid recovery [...]" It was not a royal "we" but an institutional one that represented more the voice of the established order than the poor bloke who was going to scream himself hoarse for ninety minutes, talking all alone non-stop. To broadcast for two hours, often in the open air, quite loudly and setting a good narrative pace you have to have a certain amount of technique and be in tolerably good physical condition. (By the way, at Radio Nacional de España in Barcelona, a benchmark station for sports broadcasts at that time, they had tried, in the fifties, to have two commentators: one for the first half and another for the second. I remember having heard, in this function, Joan Viñas Bona¹⁸ in tandem with other colleagues). With this "we", it was more the Broadcaster (**B**) speaking than the broadcaster (**b**). The commentator's free speech was limited to canons that restricted narrative ambition: instead of being a communicator capable of creating a discourse, it was rather a narrator aware of the limits (which he had perhaps learned not entirely consciously, or by intuition or deduction). Perhaps no-one had ever actually said to him "do this and that, and don't do this or that, or don't say this". There was no need. The radio orator had been disciplined in the discipline. A sports commentator too. That Barcelona-based and Barcelona-biased broadcast, as far as it was permitted, was formally strict. Narrative distance ruled the day, at the service of a neat aesthetic: diction, vocalisation, intonation, prosody, well-constructed phrases, good manners, formal elegance, a rather gentle pace... It was highly sober and, when the predictable rhetoric was in danger of becoming boring, as there was no other way of knowing how your team was

doing (matches with Barça, Espanyol and Sabadell were broadcast indistinctly, when they were in the first division), you still listened in. When I was young, I used to listen enraptured with my ear stuck to the radio. It wasn't very creative, of course, and therefore not very risky. The artistic indicator was, at best, tepid. It was crammed with common ground, internal codes that had been totally fixed, repeated clichés and untouchable rules, such as the shout for a goal. This consisted of saying the word "goal" three times and then repeating it but lengthening the "o": "*gol, gol, gol, goooooooool del Barcelona*". Now, honestly, I don't remember ever having heard anyone at that time doing it any other way here. The commentary was vaguely descriptive, discrete (with room for improvement) in its assessment in sporting terms and not entirely accurate in translating what was happening on the field into sound. Suffice to say that the positions for commentators have never been good enough (not then or now) and invention was used to cover the gaps in adverse circumstances and also, obviously, in the commentator's limitations. An explicable fact. Unlike now, traditionally the person watching the game could not hear it at the same time on the radio. This meant that the commentator could enjoy some licence and, without the risk of being found out, used the profitable support of his imagination. If there was no other way, then free rein. The description of Zarra's goal in England (1950),¹⁹ narrated in the Spanish style of the mid-20th century, has found its place in history and in the Spanish imaginary of the time without anyone ever having thought of checking its accuracy. There's no need. And it's the same with the commentators from here. Taking into account the circumstances, I think it's understandable. In professional circles people talk of the case of one commentator who, forced by a physiological need halfway through a match, arrived back at the broadcast position when the players were going to kick off again after a goal scored by the visiting team just at the start of the second half. That man thought that the kick-off was

¹⁸ Joan Viñas Bona (Girona, 1918 – Barcelona, 2002), commentator and former head of programmes at Radio Nacional de España in Barcelona, became very popular as head of the *Campaña Benéfica*, together with his colleague Emili Fàbregas, who took the role of Mr. Dalmau.

¹⁹ The forward for Athletic de Bilbao, Telmo Zarraonaindía, scored a goal at the Maracanã stadium that meant the Spanish team got to the semi-finals of the World Cup in Brazil in 1950. Matías Prats Cañete commented this game.

for the start of the second half and broadcast the rest of the match completely unaware of the goal. True or not, a fact like this would have been perfectly possible up to the seventies. I would not dare accuse that professional of bad practice. In my early radio days (free rein, still), I experienced the weakness of a commentator, alone, in a cabin, broadcasting without any playback (we had started working with microphone lines with two wires), without being able to compare anything with anyone, without having any confirmation that the commentary was reaching the aerial correctly, without being able to clarify any doubt and, due to trade union rules, I could not tell the listeners that I did not know what had happened or that I wasn't sure who had scored or, simply, that I hadn't seen anything because the whole crowd had stood up in front of me and had blocked my view of the play. At that time, I can assure you that the support of the imagination is as opportune as having removed any physiological needs before starting the job.

Leaving to one side the political impositions that limited them in general, my predecessors were very good commentators when broadcasting matches. In my opinion, technically, they had greater mastery of the voice than those of today. For them the voice was an instrument that needed to be tuned. They had worked on it and knew how to make the most of it. It had a good timbre and they had got rid of any local phonetic particularities in their speech, a condition imposed by the rules of the time. Many of them were professional dubbing actors. Nowadays, I don't know of any commentator who is and it shows. For some time now in Madrid football commentary the trend has been to shout (a lot) from the first minute, not to modulate very much and to talk almost non-stop. This is the jump, so to speak, made by the SER from the style of Pepe Bermejo (along the lines of Matías Prats Cañete and Juan Martín Navas, with variants) towards the style of Héctor del Mar. This is surely a consequence of the desire to bring the narrative tension of the Brazilians, Argentineans, Chileans, Uruguayans, etc. who, in their own way, are very good. This trend started in the last quarter of the last century and has gradually taken over the broadcasting model I associate with the voices of Miguel

Ángel Valdivieso, Enrique Fernández, José Félix Pons, Juan Antonio Fernández Abajo, Joan Lluch, Agustín Rodríguez and Pedro Ruiz, among others, listening to whom I learned the first rules of this business. I regret the oblivion into which these names have fallen. You can interpret this sincere reminiscence as my modest acknowledgement. I liked how they worked and, as I have already mentioned, I based myself on their approach in order to start to evolve broadcasts in Catalan.

Towards the “great jump”

More than thirty years have passed. It's difficult for the young people listening today to any broadcast to realise what it was like when we started. Football has changed (and the clubs), the fans have changed (and the listeners) and radio has changed (and the formats). At the beginning, football was an activity of sportsmen. Later, it became entertainment for associated groups (at the very start of the 20th century, Barça used to play wherever it could, the managers, players and supporters working hard to remove stones, get rid of shrubs, level the ground and mark out the lines on the plots of land where they ended up, whether it was where Domènech i Muntaner ended up building the Hospital de la Santa Creu or whether it was on that remote plot of land on the Horta road, where Futbol Club Barcelona played until they moved into the city of Barcelona). By the middle of the last century, football had become a significant social phenomenon. When the large stadiums arrived, capable of holding masses of fans, football was already a show. Television accentuated this dimension and turned the ball into one of the most important sources of business of the present day: image copyright, broadcasting fees, fees to be present in the stadium, fees to hold interviews, fees for a specific language, for a territory, etc. Where will it all end?²⁰ (I think we should consider whether the rules that have gradually been imposed by clubs and federations should restrict access to content and areas of informative interest, which are purely treated as commercial goods. Apart from

20 ORTA, J. M. “Dictadura televisiva de la Champions”. In: *La Vanguardia*, 28 June 2007, *Vivir*, pg. 11.

interfering with the work of journalists and the quality of information, they might also bring into doubt essential rights in the communication systems of our democracies). With so many fees and royalties, I miss (as I have already said) the rights of the receiver. A kind of civil right which no-one talks about. Receivers are the viewers, the members, people. Now large clubs want to have a lot of members. But what if, in order to be entitled to enter the stadium, they had to pay separately? They agree to play the match at variable times, decided by the TV channels, and if the associate feels that the time established is unsuitable, he or she frees up the seat and pays again to watch the match on television. The middle-men for all these royalties and fees, the audiovisual producers, television channels, owners of clubs that are limited companies, federations, professional associations, the clubs, the players and their representatives, the sponsors... Everyone has to make their own business.

But who owns football? The members? In the large clubs, the revenue from membership fees only accounts for twenty or thirty percent of the entire budget: who owns football? Players have to be signed who, apart from quality, are also media-friendly. Clubs also need fans in America and the Far East. In other words, they have to break into new markets. Nowadays, a fan is a client. The large clubs know that they'll be leaving a door open for their rivals if they don't become a benchmark for globalism. But who is the opponent? For Barça seventy years ago it was Espanyol, and afterwards it was Madrid. Soon it might be Manchester United. It could even end up being an NBA team, a multinational sportswear firm, an investment group or a multimedia holding. Taking advantage of new technologies, the growth in football has burst out of its classic structures. During the first half of the 20th century, the identification of members and fans with their respective clubs came about through geographical closeness. At first, people from Santander supported Racing, those from Bilbao, Athletic, and those from Gràcia, Europa. This relationship gradually changed and, coinciding with the start of matches being broadcast on television (also highly responsible for the boom in African footballers) and the organisation of competitions between European sides, the "giant leap" came about: the emergence of clubs we call large. Then a new kind of supporter came about. Many fans opted to identify with a club at a distance (in many cases also supporting their local

club) so that they could also belong to a large club. This phenomenon is the seed that, with the fertiliser of emigration and physical distance, has flourished in the appearance of fan clubs in places increasingly further away. Now even this stage has been superseded from the audacious view required by exciting strategic objectives. Now the club's profile has to be consolidated as a global sports-economic-media icon. The future is now.

Now everything's different. Actually, everything. Now it's a matter of course that all Barça broadcasts for Catalonia are carried out in Catalan.