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Latest language policy proposals in education in the Valencian Country

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Abstract

In this paper, the language policy proposals included in the election programmes of the political parties and coalitions which obtained representation in the Valencian Parliament after the 2011 May elections are analysed. Their consistency and coherence is studied from a sociolinguistic perspective. From a critical discourse analysis perspective, these sets of proposals are compared to the language perception which appears in them.

The comparison of the proposals of the different groups represented in the Parliament complements the study of the past and present Valencian language policy. Although the *real* possibilities to access the government of the different parties are not analysed, by including the parties which now represent the government and the opposition, the maximum and minimum threshold for language policy development in the mid-term are established.

To analyse the Valencian language policy, it is necessary to consider Spanish, the other official language and common to the rest of the Spanish state, and see whether there are direct or implicit references to it. Regarding the educational environment, the presence of English and its importance in the school curricula in a generalised discourse context which advocates for its learning can be determining in the design and use of the teaching languages in the Valencian educational system.

1. Introduction: the Valencian language policy

The linguistic policy implemented in the Valencian Country since the restoration of democracy in Spain can be described as insufficient and counterproductive. According to some scholars, the term infra-planning could be applied to the first period of Valencian government (1983-1995), led by the socialist party, and the term counter-planning, the period driven by the centre-right party, from 1995 to date (Montoya 2006, Pradilla 2011).

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Two facts exemplify this past linguistic policy implemented in the Valencian Country; a) it represents the autonomous territory with an autochthonous language with the least normative development in the entire Spanish State (Bodoque 2009: 234), and b) the levels of language competence and use of the Valencian language point to a clear regression since 1995 (AVL 2005). In this context, the educational environment in which some sustained progress over time can be detected; significant normative development has been accomplished with the bilingual learning programmes. Also reading and writing skills have improved over the past decades due to the educational environment.

A comparative analysis of the proposals for educational language policies presented by the political parties during the 2011 elections form the focus of our analysis, as it will illustrate the mid-term range of possibilities within the Valencian educational linguistic policy. The following table represents the results of this election:

Table 1: The Valencian political parties in Valencian Parliament (Corts Valencianes) according to the 2011 elections.

Political Party	% votes	Parliamentary seats	Ideology
Partido Popular de la Comunitat Valenciana (PPCV)	48	55	centre-right
Partit Socialista del País Valencià-Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSPV-PSOE)	27	33	centre-left
Coalició Compromís (CC)	7	6	nationalism /eco-socialism
Esquerra Unida del País Valencià (EUPV)	6	5	left / nationalism

In the analysis, an additional factor is considered: the use of English as a means of instruction in schools. The need for English language learning is not disputed, but its use as a means of instruction in a bilingual context could prove controversial, since obviously English may be employed to the detriment of one of the other two languages in the community. This raises many issues, such as which subjects should be assigned to each language and what are the social connotations of this.

2. The proposals of the governing party

In May 2011, the PPCV won the elections for the Valencian Parliament for the fourth consecutive time. PPCV proposals must therefore be seen as a continuation of a linguistic policy, which offers projected results. Nevertheless, it is precisely in education, in which the best results on language planning have been obtained, where PPCV presents the most daring proposals. This is in contrast to the proposals stated by the opposition parties, aimed at strengthening education in Catalan/Valencian.

Purely from the quantitative point of view, the difference between PPCV and the rest of the groups is significant: four proposals, easily synthesised into two, compared to an average of fifteen from the other parties and coalitions. These are 1) the freedom for parents to choose the language of instruction in their children's schools between Catalan or Spanish and the implementation of a plurilingual programme which incorporates English as a means of instruction (144; 314 election programme, in bold in the programme).

> "We will establish a **plurilingual model** which **guarantees the balanced presence of Valencian and Castilian** and **incorporates English as a means of instruction**". (144)[1]
> "We defend and support an **integrative** and non-exclusivist **linguistic model**, **based on freedom of choice**, co-officiality, and **equality of rights and duties**" (314)

At present, the School Board selects the linguistic programme considering its immediate environment, its own organisational capabilities, and parental opinion. The choice is between: the Programme of Language Immersion (PIL), the Programme of Education in Valencian (PEV), and the Programme of Progressive Incorporation of Valencian (PIP). The first two programmes take the Valencian language as the first language, and gradually incorporate Spanish. The difference between them being that the first is deemed for students with an L1 different from Valencian, and is based on the well-established methodology of language immersion. The third programme takes Spanish as the primary language, incorporating at least one subject to be taught in Valencian.

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[1] All the proposals and quotes have been translated by the authors.

To give parents the responsibility of selecting the means of instruction employed by the school implies disregard for two crucial aspects: a) pedagogical criteria: the fact that the best results in language proficiency both in Valencian and in Spanish have been obtained under the PEV and especially PIL programmes (Baldaquí 2004), and b) this "problematize[s] the notion of choice" (Pennycook, 1994) since there are all sorts of restrictions, including sociolinguistic or bureaucratic factors, which limit the decisions made with reference to linguistic use.

In this sense, the formula "balanced presence of Valencian and Spanish" seems proof of a *bilinguistic* ideology: it refers to a deceptive balance between the two languages, and is used as an argument against any active language policy. This ideology is based on an obvious ideological manipulation: under the appearance of egalitarian and therefore *fair* consideration, it conceals the actual situation of subordination of one of the languages. By doing so, the aim is to delegitimise the measures for the promotion of Valencian. Evidence of this false balance are for example that yearly only a couple of dozen demands for PIP fail to be met, whereas two thousand demands for PEV and PIL are unaddressed, according to the annual 2010 and 2011 reports of the Ombudsman of the Valencian Region.

Moreover, the plurilingual proposal boasts to be based on the policies promoted by the Council of Europe, which incentivise the promotion of plurilingualism throughout the European Union (Recommendation (98)6). However, the European Council is clear on the point that when developing school curricula, competition between the languages must be avoided. Contrarily, it promotes intensification in language knowledge by means of language competence in the (different) language(s)

3. The proposals of the opposition parties

In response PPCV's plurilingual model, the main civic association for the defence of the Valencian Language, *Escola Valenciana–Federació d'Associacions per la Llengua*, finalised a document with proposals for linguistic policy. Thus, in the document Proposals of Escola for the election programmes (PEVPE)[2], 59 proposals for the different domains where there exists social use of the language (political, administrative, social, cultural, educational, and communication domains) are suggested.

Of these, 18 refer to education. For instance, the linguistic normalisation of the education administration, support for the enhancement of didactic materials in the Valencian language, are proposed. Regarding school organisation, the 5 proposals presented (each one marked below by an asterisk) reflect the preservation and promotion of programmes which take the Valencian language as the base for learning, and the proposed extension of these to the areas in which they are under-represented. The proposals are:

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2 Available at: https://www.escolavalenciana.com/arxiu/upload/propostes-d-escola-valenciana-pels-programes-electorals.pdf

*43. The laws and guidelines for education inspectorates and the teachers' centres and resources will prioritise the educational programmes which take Valencian as the primary language for learning.

*47. Guarantee teaching in Valencian in all educational centres, both State and charter schools.

*48. Guarantee the continuity of the teaching in Valencian for all educational levels, from pre-primary to university education, and for all the modalities taught.

*51. Require the education inspectorate to ensure compliance with the regulations of bilingual education programmes and the correct application of the requirement of Valencian proficiency on the part of the teachers.

*52. Periodically assess language competence in bilingual education programmes, and make the results public.

42. Utilise the document **"Valencian school. A model of plurilingual and intercultural education for the Valencian education system"**, promote and stimulate the smooth running of Bilingual Education Programmes.

44. Increase the promotion of the learning and use of Valencian in the territories where Castilian is the predominant language, to attain the social cohesion of the Valencian citizenship.

45. Creation of the Valencian educational digital platform.

46. Guarantee total language standardisation within the education administration.

49. Bilingual cataloguing of the workplace in Secondary education, following the current existing criteria in place in primary schools for merit-based transfer processes.

50. Design a linguistic profile for the workplace in all university centres.

53. Ensure the appropriate language proficiency of teachers within the continuous education programmes, and launch urgent action plans where necessary.

54. Promote and support teams who elaborate and edit didactic materials in Valencian.

55. Support Student Parent associations (AMPA) and initiatives and actions aimed at promoting a quality, public, a school system of quality in the Valencian Country.

56. Provide the services dedicated to the teaching of Valencian (…) with increased human, material, economic and organisational resources to effectively develop the tasks entrusted to them.

57. Elaborate plans and programmes for beginners in Valencian, and for adult language proficiency and use, with special attention given to migrant groups.

58. Further develop after-school activities, plans and networks to reinforce the learning of Valencian.

59. Provide economic support to migrant associations or entities to help them promote their own languages and cultures.

Fig. 1. Proposals of PEVPE.

In PEVPE no reference is made to English, since it is dedicated to linguistic policy: "Measures for the promotion of a minorised language", and not for the promotion of a global language. In line with the proposals of the Council of Europe; which in 1995 agreed to guarantee the rights of minorities and their idiosyncrasies within their territories, Pascual (2011) recommends the need to promote the student's acquisition of a plurilingual competence in the schooling languages: "ensure that our language becomes, in a progressively multilingual and multicultural context, the language for communication, social integration, and cohesion in our linguistic territory" (Pascual, 2011: 9).

The opposition and some extra-parliamentary left and centre-left parties publicly supported PEVPE. Furthermore, the PSPV and CC literally included most of the proposals in their own election programmes. CC literally takes on —or copies— all of them, with the exception of the first. It is noteworthy that this coalition is the only political party that does not mention plurilingual education anywhere in its programme.

PSPV does not include proposals number 43, 44, 45, 50 and 59. The absence of proposal 43 is a way of not referring to other documents written by Escola Valenciana. Proposal 45 does not strictly refer to the linguistic issue and the content of 59 is partially considered in proposal 57. However, the absence of numbers 44 and 50 represents a major difference: both affect two areas where the use of Catalan/Valencian has made little progress in the last decades, and could prove to be controversial.

Another difference is that PSPV proposes the development of plurilingual programmes that guarantee the learning of English and the universal extension of PIL and PEV throughout the educational system. There difference is crucial between the proposals for plurilingual schooling made by both parties: PSPV states that the plurilingual model must not replace the programmes of education in Valencian, but that plurilingual schools will be organised into their own network, promoting education in Valencian at the same time.

Conversely, the desired objective that students obtain a similar level of proficiency in English and in Valencian or Spanish implies a significant change with regard to the regulation in force, which establishes that compulsory education must guarantee the mastery of official languages and a certain level of proficiency in a foreign language. Moreover, bilingualism of the official languages seems to be subject to the important objective of attaining plurilingualism.

EUPV publicly assumed the document proposed by Escola, but not literally. They propose the extension of the programmes of education in Valencian throughout the education system, and the certification of language proficiency for teachers at secondary school. Greater attention is paid to the linguistic education of migrants, as a tool for integration.

Also worth noting is the "Recognition of the degree of Catalan Philology […] homologation of the certificates of language proficiency issued by the Councils in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands". This implies a positioning in favour of the recognition of Catalan/Valencian as one language in the recurrent conflict related to the name and entity of the language, which CC also acknowledges in its election programme, with the use of syncretic formulae, such as Catalan/Valencian language (Mas 2012) and with a strong symbolic character, but does not represent a direct repercussion on language education. This is diametrically opposed to the ambiguity displayed by the majority parties (Mas 2011, Mas 2012).

However, EUPV indirectly refers to plurilingual programmes; there is not a particular direct proposal to establish English as a means of instruction, but we can find sound criticism of the way in which experimental plurilingualism is being carried out, either because it does not guarantee the learning of other languages (p. 89), or because it is being implemented "to the detriment of programmes of education in Valencian" (p. 95). This last notion is coincidental with the proposal of PSPV to strive to avoid the possibility of plurilingualism signifying a danger or an obstacle to the learning of the community language.

In this account, multilingual programmes are a very sensitive issue which needs to consider the sociolinguistic context, the situation of the languages in contact and the actual conditions of the society where implementation is planned. Cenoz and Jessner (2009) state that multilingual education can be very challenging, since it assumes different forms depending on the sociolinguistic context in which it occurs and has to account for the relative status and use of the languages involved. It seems to be essential in the implementation of these multilingual programmes that special attention is paid to community languages, (Cenoz & Jessner, 2009:123).

Also, Alidou et al. are concerned about the effect these programmes may have on minority and dominant languages, and insist on the importance of guaranteeing the correct implementation of multilingual programmes, so that they are effective to achieve quality learning (Alidou, Glanz and Nikièma, 2011: 533): "Not all bilingual education programmes promote quality learning."

4. Conclusions

In a context of severe subordination, with indicators of a process of language substitution of Catalan/Valencian by Spanish (Pradilla 2011), the limited presence of linguistic issues during the electoral campaign was voiced around the use of English as a means of instruction in the Valencian education system. Although all the proposals more or less rhetorically "guaranteed" education in Valencian, the so-called plurilingual proposals clearly reduced the scope of the rest of proposals: the emphasis was no longer set on improving the use of the autochthonous language.

PPCV dominates the discourse and the agenda with this single proposal. It involves the main party in the opposition (PSPV) and EUPV, which assume the internationalist and modernising values related to the use of English as a means of instruction –although they introduce proposals aimed at ensuring that plurilingualism is not applied to the detriment of Valencian.

Paradoxically, although these three parties assume it as the only possible model, the use of English as a means of instruction at school has experienced limited expansion within Europe; if we look at the broader European context, the use of English for teaching is only found in very specific contexts; in either Northern European countries with linguistic conflicts or in English ex-colonies, and only common in private or semi-private schools; "international schools" or "bilingual schools" (Cenoz and Jessner, 2000).

CC, a coalition with an important nationalist component, is the only party that assumes the entire set of proposals signed up to by PEVPE and disregards plurilingual education. As is the norm in societies where language planning

for minority languages is implemented, the proposals of this party are ~~more~~ concerned with the promotion of the community language and the rights of its speakers. This clearly contrasts with PPCV, which disguises the implementation of plurilingualism by guaranteeing the language rights of *everybody*, misleading that the speakers of Spanish might have the same problems in the use of their language as the speakers of Catalan/Valencian.

Finally, the actual steps taken from Election Day to the present, since PPCV became the governing party. On May 30th, 2011, a decree on plurilingual education establishing 33% usage for each language was announced, implying the elimination of the PEV, PIL and PIP programmes. However, these do not appear to concur with the electoral programme; it seems that the plurilingual model is not designed to replace the existing models, but as an alternative to these, as a kind of fourth model. Otherwise, the second proposal or reference to a "network of plurilingual centres" (p. 144) would not make sense.

This caused a strong social disapproval, provoking a shift in nature and a disposition of the government to negotiate with the education-based social agents. At last, a Decree was published on August 17th; the bilingual programmes were not eliminated and plurilingualism was just promoted on the base of these programmes.[3]

PPCV defends nowadays incoherent policies regarding language immersion; on the one hand, they oppose this in Catalonia, while, they have tolerated it in the Valencian Country for almost two decades. Moreover when language immersion is growing in popularity, since it obtains the best results for language proficiency, although there are no institutional campaigns to support this option. The role and the influence of civic and cultural associations, led by *Escola Valenciana*, which tries to compensate for the shortcomings of the regional language policy, as well as good electoral expectations of parties in support of the language, provide a small flicker of hope for the Catalan language in the Valencian Country.

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