

Vitality and use of Valencian at the Local Government offices of Sagunt. Results of the application of the Indexplà Information technology programme

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Abstract

This article deals in some detail with the diagnosis of the use of Valencian and the conclusions drawn after the application of the Indexplà IT programme to a local government organisation, Sagunt Local Council; situated in the Valencian Country, and belonging to the county Camp de Morvedre.

This in fact was an experimental approach in the year 1999, in a specific sociolinguistic situation, to testing the vitality and use of Valencian in the institution closest to the citizens, the local town hall.

To effect this diagnosis, a tool was adopted by the Consortium for Language Normalisation cpnl.cat and Indexplà provides an index of normalisation in an organisation to be able subsequently to develop language planning as and where needed.

Summary

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1. Introduction

The article which we present here is an extract from the research work¹ which was presented at the Faculty of philology at the University of Valencia in September 1999.

We include here the part of the work devoted to the diagnosis of Valencian language use at the Ajuntament de Sagunt (Sagunt Town Hall) using the Indexplà computer programme and the conclusions which were reached².

The idea of carrying out this research came up during the Jornades de Promoció Lingüística (Language Promotion Seminars) organised by the Sagunt Council in April 1998, an event in which policy experts and technicians of the Consortium for Language Normalisation in Catalonia took part.

Arising out of the Seminars and with the collaboration of the technicians who supplied us with the Indexplà programme, we proceeded to research the situation of Valencian in what was a local organisation.

The aim here was to make use of the existing resources and their application, suitably adapted, to the sociopolitical situation in the Valencian Country.

¹ The research contained other sections: review of the sociolinguistic and sociology of language concepts, overview of the sociolinguistic studies carried out up to the year 1999 in the Valencian country and the proposing of a Normalisation Plan by the Sagunt local government.

² Although four years have passed since the data were collected they are still valid.

The Catalan institutions, unlike those of the Valencian Country, both public and private, have for long been working to achieve the "whole"³ recovery of the Catalan language and have the support of the Autonomous administrations, as well as local and county-level administrations.

Our work consisted in establishing the diagnosis based on the Linguistic Normalisation Index (INL) of a public entity, Sagunt Town Hall, underwritten by the Indexplà method.

The objective here with this application was to carry out a prior reconnaissance of the linguistic situation in terms of the use of Valencian, since this preview reconnaissance is an essential step in the realisation of the move toward normalisation of a minority language.

2. Chief characteristics of the Indexplà IT programme

Indexplà first saw the light of day in 1995 when, as a result of a working seminar, the Consortium for Language Normalisation of Catalonia developed this instrument for detecting language needs in all types of situations in Catalonia.

This is an Excel programme which is used to find out if an organisation comes up to a series of requirements that will fit it for guaranteeing the use of Catalan (or in this case Valencian) or indeed any language with minority status in conflict with another (majority) language (Spanish in this case).

It measures the INL (Index of Language Normalisation) or degree of Language Normalisation of an organisation.

The programme is based on a system of indicators grouped by factors.

The factors evaluated are: image and labelling; linguistic ability of the staff, criteria for language use; documentation for external use; exterior communication and internal documentation and communication.

Each factor has a value from 0 to 100 and a weighted average is also obtainable which has a value of between 0 and 100, indicating the level or index of Language Normalisation (INL).

This value, lying between 0 and 100, shows us the degree of overall normalisation of the organisation and allows us to single out different sections of the organisation according to their use of Catalan (Valencian, etc.).

The indicators do not represent the totality of elements with linguistic meaning or significance in the organisation, since, by definition the indicators have as their objective of evaluation the whole from a set of data which are considered representative.

The weighting of each factor in the (weighted) INL for the degree of normalisation of the organisation is as follows:

FACTOR 1: image and labelling:	20 %
FACTOR 2: linguistic ability of the staff:	15%
FACTOR 3: criteria for use:	20%
FACTOR 4: external documentation:	15%
FACTOR 5: external communication:	15%
FACTOR 6: internal documentation and communication:	10%

From this diagnosis of degree of normalisation, Indexplà enables us, as we have said, to establish the typology of the object under evaluation.

According to the INL obtained, there could be:

³ Using the adjective with its basic sense of "containing elements needed to be complete": the recovery of all the social ambits, whether political, institutional, educational, media, etc.

Organisations that attain an INL of between 60 % and 80% (type R). These have a level of normalisation that fits them for attending to the users in the language the latter may choose.

Organisations that attain an INL above 80% (type P). These have adopted Valencian as the language they work in.

Organisations that have factors 1,4,5 (having to do with external elements: image and labelling, external documentation and internal documentation) at an index level of around 60 %.

3. Methodology, identification and characteristics of the organisation under study

The methods we have used in this study, in terms of fieldwork and data collection are direct observation, questionnaires and direct questions. All that was completed in period between February and March 1999.

The municipal offices of Sagunt Town Hall are decentralised in various buildings in two settlements, 5 kilometres from each other.

This territorial factor should be borne in mind. The town of Sagunt (henceforth Sagunt-City) with 20,945 inhabitants is the old historical centre; the port of Sagunt (Sagunt-Port) is the settlement that came into being at the beginning of the 20th century with the growth of the iron and steel industry, where there are 39,886 inhabitants on census.

Having said that, the field under study or defined universe for this work was limited to the administrative offices that Sagunt local council has at the Palau (Mansion) or Main Building, together with the offices close by, all in the old historic centre of Sagunt-City.

It was decided to do things in this way because the council offices located in the building in Sagunt-City are the more representative: it is here that the local government manages its main functions (Mayors office or Town Hall, Operations, Treasury, Secretariat, Tax office, urban planning, etc.). Thus, over the years Sagunt local council has built up a multiplicity of municipal services patterned according to its peculiar urban and geographical distribution.

We have focused on analysing the linguistic situation in the main building, bearing in mind, however, that some of the factors include Departments not found in this building but which are found in the nearby offices in the old centre of Sagunt.

This is the case, for example, with Personnel, with the Municipal Foundation for Culture and the Youth Information Centre. All three are at a distance of approximately 200 metres from the Main Building.

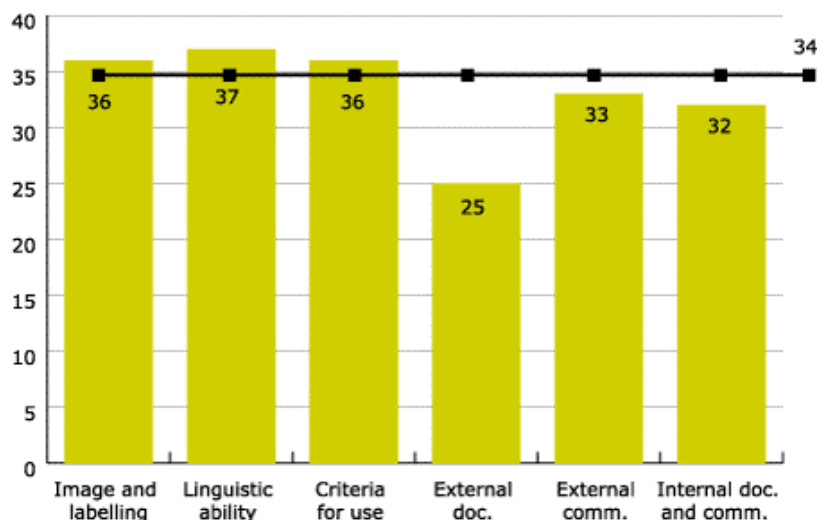
This physical proximity is very important when evaluating the effectiveness that actions intended to increase normalisation or recovery of Valencian might have.

The proximity of the translation service (currently housed in the Palau or Main Building) and the interconnectedness on the ground of the service means that there is greater fluidity and liaison between the administrators and the politicians.

4. Analysis of the data obtained

The following graph show the results obtained through investigation of the factors and indicators.

Figure 1. Sagunt Local Council



The first evaluation we arrived at, is that the Sagunt Local Council has an overall Index of Language Normalisation (INL) of 34 % (see graphs) and consequently does not fall into any of the established categories in the typology established above.

Since this result falls far short of reaching the established minimum levels that have been set, it cannot be included under the R-type heading nor under the P-type one. It will be recalled that type R reach an INL level of between 60 % and 80 % fitting them for attending to users in the language they may chose (Valencian or Spanish).

Type P have an INL greater than 80 %, such that they have adopted Valencian as the language they work in.

We will now look at the normalisation scores attained, beginning with the highest:

FACTOR 2: LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE OF THE STAFF 37 %

While, intuitively, the term linguistic competence is likely to be understood by any non-expert, we would explain briefly as follows:

With this factor we refer to the way the linguistic knowledge of the staff is fitted for the post they occupy. To know whether the linguistic knowledge of the workers is adequate for the work they do (according to the category or group they belong to, if they have to deal with the public and the functions they carry out) we can provisionally establish preliminary standard linguistic profiles.

We describe the meaning of the term linguistic profile as relation the individual linguistic profile with the post occupied in consonance with the Certificate awarded by the JQCV (Board of Qualifications for Knowledge of Valencian) at the Chancery of Culture of the Generalitat of Valencia:

"When we speak of linguistic profiles we refer to the sum of the linguistic abilities necessary to carry out satisfactorily the range of communicative acts required by a given employment. Accordingly, the more reference points there are in the job description, the easier it will be to identify the linguistic requirements needed.

The formulating of some basic guidelines by which to define linguistic profiles is necessary above all if we wish to have a practical guide with which to orientate the management of a given company when deciding the degree of linguistic competence that a worker needs to occupy a given post.

(...) The profiles require sufficient competence for the demands of the labour market, and this means, often, the need for employees to undergo a flexible cycle of ongoing training and refresher courses⁴.

A proposal for establishing correspondence the levels of Valencian recognised by the Knowledge of Valencian Qualifications Board and the different professional groups is as follows:

Professional Groups	Level of oral comprehension (understand)	Level of written comprehension (read)	Level of oral expression (speak)	Level of written expression (write)	Certificate issued by the JQCV
Personnel who have no contact with the public (groups D-E)	Oral	Oral	Oral	Oral	Oral
Personnel who attend the general public (groups D-C)	Elementary	Elementary	Elementary	Elementary	Elementary
Higher management, middle management, managerial staff (groups B-A)	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium

Thus, 37 % of the employees at Sagunt Local Council do have sufficient linguistic competence for the post they occupy. While this percentage is low, it (the Linguistic Competence factor of the employees) is above the mean established for the organisation as a whole.

Factors where the employees have a direct effect, such as the production of documents for both internal and external use is not quite 34 % overall (mean). On this basis, it could be thought that workers at the Sagunt Local Council do not have sufficient linguistic competence for the work they do.

In part it is true that they do not, in the majority of cases, have adequate linguistic knowledge for the linguistic profile of the posts they occupy. On the other hand, however, we will see that in the case of the linguistic profile for the elementary standard⁵, some 31% of the council staff have sufficient level to be able to speak and write in Valencian.

Thus, despite the existence of local government employees with sufficient ability and linguistic competence, and the fact that this linguistic competence is backed up by technological and human resources (information technology, dictionaries, translation service, etc.) the majority do not use Valencian habitually, in their official writing.

One could put forward as a possible cause the existence of insecurity, diffidence, fear of making spelling mistakes or the general lack of linguistic knowledge. Additionally, there is the absence of specific guidelines for writing in Valencian.

We note here that a Municipal By-law for Normalisation, agreed to by the politicians and workers' representatives supports the use of Valencian among the workers themselves (at least among the 37% that are able to do so).

⁴ Abril, J.: "Els perfils lingüístics i la política de personal (I)". *Llengua i Ús*, 1996, no. 5, p. 4-8.

⁵ The *elementary* degree or level refers to the certificate awarded by the JQCV at the Generalitat of Valencia. Some 31 % were at the *elementary* level, although each level obtained a diferent percentage. The overall mean gives a 37% overall score for factor 2: workers' linguistic competence.

We now proceed to analyse factors 1 and 3:

FACTOR 1: IMAGE AND LABELLING	36 %
FACTOR 3: LINGUISTIC GUIDELINES	36 %

To evaluate the image and Signs factor, researchers looked at the notices and both internal and external indications, the advertising carried out in informative campaigns and the announcements the organisation publishes in the press.

The score, in the case of the Image and Signs factor, 36 %, is far from attaining the level of an ideal or normal situation where all signs and similar elements are written in Valencian.

The guidelines for language use, also with a score of 36 %, refers to the adoption or otherwise of linguistic guidelines (Valencian or Spanish) in the different activities carried out by the Council.

Both factors are situated above the overall mean for the organisation. However both factors are low precisely because related to the language planning carried out by the institutions.

Even so, the factors that have raised the score here, while still evidently being a low percentage, are the existence of items of linguistic autonomy and back-up, basically dictionaries and grammars, distributed by the Gabinet de Promoció del Valencià⁶ (Office for the Promotion of Valencian).

FACTOR 4: DOCUMENTS FOR EXTERNAL USE	15%
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This factor, defined as printed documents for external use, provides us with the lowest score of all the factors looked at.

To arrive at the percentage, we looked at the documents generated by the Sagunt council for external use. Besides documents, we looked at stamps and seals, the elements that traditionally give the seal of officialdom to the documents produced by local government.

The fact that this is the factor with the lowest score of all is explained by the fact that the stamps and seals had not been renewed or replaced in a long time.

The immense majority of these elements are produced in Spanish so that their renovation and normalisation to Valencian included within a campaign on image for the outside world, is not a priority line of action. It would involve extra spending and in many cases there is no political will for this.

The result is that there is not an overall external image which would give Valencian the "official" prestige it so much needs.

FACTOR 5: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION	33 %
FACTOR 6: INTERNAL DOCUMENTATION AND COMMUNICATION	32 %

In referring to external communication we refer to texts, both oral⁷ and written, put out by the organisation, and not in printed form.

Internal documentation and communication include elements such as internal circulars, calling of meetings, orders of the day and the minutes of meetings, budgets, memorandums, the language(s) used in meetings, etc.

In external communications and internal documentation we find the lowest scores for linguistic competence.

⁶ The Gabinet de Promoció del Valencià was created by Sagunt Town Council in 1997.

⁷ The language used in attending telephone calls, the language used face-to-face with inquirers, in interpersonal speech.

This result is surprising since, despite the fact that the staff have a general score for linguistic competence which is above the mean (37% for linguistic competence, compared with the overall mean of 34 %) the internal documents achieve a score of less than 34 % as a weighted average.

The score on this factor for the workers, 37%, does not match the scores for internal and external communications, 32% in both instances.

5. Conclusions and challenges for the future

After analysing the results of this study we have arrived at the following conclusions. In general there is, at the Sagunt Council offices a fair percentage of workers who could write in Valencian, but they don't in fact do so.

Similarly, Valencian is not used at the same level for interpersonal oral communication (speech between co-workers) nor when dealing with the public.

It could be said, in any case, that a part of the staff at the Sagunt Council are fluent enough with the necessary theoretical knowledge to write and speak in Valencian.

On the other hand there are attitudes among the population⁸ (and we need to include the Town Hall workers of Sagunt in the latter) in favour of the fostering and promotion of Valencian: the population and their institutions are predisposed to the use of Valencian to increase in all ambits.

All in all, and despite the above, the impression produced by the Indexplà results at the Sagunt Local Council is one of dispersion and incoherence owing to the lack of unification of linguistic criteria or guidelines, or we could actually say the absence of such criteria or guidelines.

Looking at the Indexplà results, it is surprising that the linguistic ability of the employees should be the highest-scoring factor despite the fact that it still leaves much to be desired.

Our evaluation is that the factor which presents the lowest percentage of normalisation, external documentation, would be the least costly to adapt to Valencian. It would constitute a first step forward toward a change of image as well as an incentive for the workers.

It would be possible, at this very moment, to co-ordinate and direct the group of town hall workers who have sufficient linguistic competence to write in Valencian.

Recall that at the present time there are already enough information technology tools to enable this step to be taken. There is an internal computer network, there are dictionaries and vocabularies that can be adapted to the new situation.

The comments made by Marc Leprêtre in his article on the language situation in the País Valencià (Valencian Country) continue to be pertinent.

We are totally in agreement with the causes he suggests for the slow progress (we would say absence of progress) towards language normalisation in the Valencian Country:

"Catalan apparently has a high degree of legitimisation in the region (Valencian Country) since it is supported by a considerable amount of legislation. Despite that, the weak institutionalisation of the language in the community does not permit the homogeneous extension of progress in all sectors. In effect, the extension in the social use of Catalan in day-to-day life is less than what we find in more formal ambits, for example in the school system. (...)

⁸ We extracted this hypothesis of the favourable attitude of the population from the Sociolinguistic study coordinated by R.L. Ninyoles: *El valencià al Camp de Morvedre, coneixement i ús social*. Sagunt, 1998 (mimeo).

Within this context, the 1983 Act (LUEV. the Use and Teaching of Valencian Act) presents very patchy results depending on the ambit of application. Thus, a considerable amount of effort has been invested in education (...) while the use of Catalan in the Autonomous Government (Valencian Government) and private companies leaves much to be desired. Thus these latter seem to be acting in favour of language shift away from Catalan, which will be irreversible if a set of language policy strategies are not immediately set in motion"⁹.

The absence of a language policy process in the Valencian Country leads to poverty, in the quality and quantity of the sociolinguistic studies of our territory. Not just in the area of the Autonomous government (government of Valencia), but also in other seemingly more accessible areas such as the local or county levels of government (town halls and county halls).

The main characteristic of the few studies we have found is the lack of a clear diagnosis and adequate solutions.

This dearth of research, probably, is very much related to the absence of a co-ordinated language policy, co-ordinated by the institutions of the Autonomous government (the Generalitat of Valencia) and by the Valencian Universities.

Indeed, in the Valencian Country, it is not possible to overlook the fact that the linguistic conflict has not yet been resolved.

Because of this peculiar situation, the institutions are continually looking for individual and local solutions to maintain the use of Valencian.

The situation of the use of Valencian at the Sagunt Town Council according to the results of the Indexplà analyses is still far from offering the minimum capacity for guaranteeing the normal (co-official) use of the Valencian language by the employees and by the institution. The upshot of the results is incoherence and dispersion. Destructured and uncoordinated action by the local politicians at the Sagunt Town Hall (the political will for normalisation) is evident from the fact that the highest normalisation score is the factor of the staff's linguistic competence. We would refer here to the period of time when there was a Valencian Promotion Office organising Valencian classes for the Town Hall workers.

At all events what has been done until now has proved insufficient and Sagunt Council has not been able to reach minimum levels that would guarantee the full and free use of the two languages, Valencian and Spanish.

It would not be too exaggerated to say that the Sagunt Council, as an institution, is assisting the process of language shift to Spanish.

If we compare the Indexplà results with the results of the most recent sociolinguistic study (1998), Ninyoles' thesis is confirmed - that theoretical knowledge of Valencian is increasing (reading and writing), but spoken use of the language is decreasing.

In Sagunt-City the use of Valencian is decreasing according to the local census for the years 1986, 1991 and the 1998 study. At the same time the use of Valencian in Sagunt-Port is increasing.

What is proposed now is multisectorial sociolinguistic planning or intervention which would include both action by the politicians and action carried out by the social movements seeking change in language behaviour and ideas.

Political power has a great effect on shaping overall social linguistic behaviour. The ideological orientation of the centres of political power will have a transcendental impact on the sort of measures that the institutions will adopt and the overall development of the sociolinguistic situation.

In the Valencian Country sociolinguistic planning should now be initiated that would consciously seek to change the situation of Valencian. In this way the ecology principle "think globally and act locally"¹⁰ would become a reality.

⁹ Leprêtre, M.: "El País Valencià. La situació sociolingüística als territoris de llengua catalana (IV). *Llengua i Ús*. (1996), no. 7, p. 62-67.

¹⁰ Bastardas, A.: "Persistència i canvi en el comportament lingüístic: la planificació sociolingüística". *III Jornades de Sociolingüística*. Ajuntament d'Alcoi (1994), p. 11-25.

Both governments and local movements would do well to try to understand the complex interrelations of the social dynamic behind changing behaviour, in this case linguistic behaviour.

"No quantity of descriptive data will solve the problem of knowing which are the efficient techniques that will bring about the desired change."¹¹

Albert Bastardas i Boada in the talk he gave at Alcoi during the III Jornades de Sociolingüística / III Sociolinguistic Seminars, summed up very clearly the steps that have to be taken, and the need to have the imagination to achieve success in the sociolinguistic planning needed by the Valencian Country:

*"Theoretical imagination and knowledge of the reality become essential to successful language planning: ongoing observation, dispassionate and objective observation of situations, research into causes and dynamics, the evaluation of real experience and the reformulation of strategies and concepts are fundamental, ineluctable tasks that should be properly understood and informed with theory"*¹².

As we see it, having obtained the analysis of the linguistic situation at Sagunt Council, the immediate language policy to apply would be a Language Normalisation Plan (thinking globally and acting locally).

We conclude this article by pointing to the following challenges for the future:

1. In the Valencian Country, the legal framework exists for the recovery of Valencian and for achieving a situation of equilinguism (full and effective equality between the two official languages, Valencian and Spanish).
2. The initiatives for planning the different linguistic policies have to come from the institutions and their political representatives elected by the people. They will play a fundamental role in succeeding in making Valencian, the mother tongue and language habitually used by large sections of the population, finally achieve the social status which it deserves so that it becomes the prestige language in communication.
3. It should not be forgotten that language is an element that provides cohesion for all of the community, and is, therefore, a form of expression of the culture of a people; language is our best cultural heritage.
4. All the social, political and economic agents need to take on board the commitment to continue and improve the work of recovery and promotion of Valencian in all ambits of the Sagunta Council and indeed in all spheres of everyday life. The legal mechanisms to do so are within reach of all via the objectives spelt out in the Pla municipal de normalització lingüística (Municipal Plan for Language Normalisation) for the Sagunt Local Council¹³, in the future Reglament de Normalització Lingüística (Language Normalisation ordinances) of the Municipality of Sagunt, and finally in the Use and Teaching of Valencian Act.
5. This study, in its application of the Indexplà methodology, could provide a model for proceeding to be followed by other institutions; local government offices, deputations (local delegations of central government), universities, etc. In fact, in the last few years, many Catalan organisations (both public and private) have had the Indexplà diagnostic carried out, before applying a Language Normalisation Plan.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ The original research, which was presented at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Valencia, contained a Linguistic Normalisation Plan for Sagunt Local Council.

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