



**Robert E. Vann, *Materials for the sociolinguistic description and corpus-based study of Spanish in Barcelona*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press 2009, pp. x + 263. ISBN: 978-0-7734-4871-1.**

*Materials for the sociolinguistic description and corpus-based study of Spanish in Barcelona* by Robert E. Vann presents an analysis of Catalan

Spanish, the variety of Spanish spoken in Catalonia focusing on Barcelona speech and also providing an introduction to the methodologies for the collection and labelling of spoken corpora. As the author contends, Catalan Spanish has been left out of traditional Peninsular dialectology for a variety of reasons, mostly political and ideological. There is still scarce awareness of the status of Catalan Spanish in the linguistic map of the Peninsula as well as a dearth of empirical descriptions of this variety that the book seeks to cover.

*Materials for the sociolinguistic description and corpus-based study of Spanish in Barcelona* aims at documenting the linguistic characteristics of Catalan Spanish through a sample of the corpus of Barcelona colloquial speech, which was collected as part of the author's doctoral thesis (Pragmatic and cultural aspects of an emergent language variety: The construction of Catalan Spanish deictic expressions, The University of Texas at Austin, 1996).

The book is divided into two parts, Part 1 contains six chapters and Part 2 contains a sample of the corpus. Part 1 is preceded by a 'Foreword', a 'Preface', and a 'Critical introduction to the Vann corpus'. Chapter 1 'Brief history of the political economy of language in Catalonia' and Chapter 2, 'Language ideologies in academic treatment of Catalan Spanish', describe the political economic and ideological background. Chapter 3, 'Spoken language corpora of Spanish in Barcelona', provides a critical discussion of previous corpora of Catalan Spanish. Chapter 4, 'Corpus-based linguistic descriptions of Catalan Spanish', summarizes previous findings about the characteristics of Catalan Spanish. Chapter 5, 'Methods of data collection, digitization and transcription', lays out the methodological

principles of corpora building, from the collection to the digitizing and labelling of the data. Chapter 6, 'Network profiles and select speaker data for the Vann corpus', describes the sociocultural characteristics of the participants.

In his introduction, Vann describes the book's goals and offers a brief overview of the chapters. Vann states that the book is addressed to both an academic and to a professional audience, ranging from business people to educators.

The main aim of Chapter 1, 'Brief history of the political economy of language in Catalonia', is justifying the status of Catalan Spanish as a dialect of Spanish, while exploring the reasons for its long history of popular rejection and academic neglect. The economic and political history of the Catalan territories, since 700 to modern day is succinctly analysed in relation to its impact on the shaping of Catalan linguistic and cultural identity.

Chapter 2, 'Language ideologies in academic treatment of Catalan Spanish', argues that the lack of interest on Catalan Spanish during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was one of the effects of the campaign of cultural and linguistic hegemony promoted by the Francoist government, one of the main tenets of which was that 'Catalan itself was not a language but an underdeveloped, bastardized dialect of Castilian Spanish', thus unworthy of linguistic study, and also by extension, the variety of Spanish developed in contact with Catalan (45). It wasn't until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that Catalan Spanish that dialectologists as Badia i Margarit (1980), Lapesa (1982) Alvar (1996), and started to include Catalan Spanish in the dialectal map of the Peninsula. The nineties saw a surge in dialectal studies on Catalan Spanish (e.g. Casanovas Catala 1996a, 1996b, etc).

Chapter 3 provides a brief introduction to corpus-based linguistic research and a critical description of previous corpora of Catalan Spanish, including Gómez-Molina (Val.Es.Co, 2001, part of PRESEA) and Briz (Corpus de conversaciones coloquiales, 2002) for Spanish in contact with Valencian Catalan, and Vila (2001) and Sinner (2001) for Spanish in contact with Central Catalan.

Chapter 4, 'Corpus-based linguistic descriptions of Catalan Spanish', provides a succinct description, mostly in tabular form, of

some salient characteristics of Catalan Spanish, including pronunciation, vocabulary (borrowings, calques, extensions, archaisms, frequent words, etc.), and grammar.

Chapter 5, 'Methods of data collection, digitization and transcription', describes the methodology, including recruitment of participants, digitizing details, and transcription. Recordings were made by the author during the summer of 1995. Two young women of similar age and socioeconomic status but with different ideology and different use of Spanish and Catalan were identified as representative of two different ideological and linguistic practices and were asked to keep a log of their personal interactions for a week. Each of the two women and their list of personal contacts formed a "naturally occurring social network" which the investigator joined as participant. Finally, 18 groups, amounting to 21.5 hours of conversation were audio and videotaped. (Part II presents 2.5 hours, 12% of the total). During 2002-2003, recordings were digitized and transcribed.

Chapter 6, 'Network profiles and select speaker data for the Vann corpus' offers qualitative sociocultural observations and detailed descriptions of linguistic practices and ideologies.

Finally, Part II, contains the transcription of two conversations, one in each of the two social network.

The volume succeeds in engaging the reader's interest, regardless of whether s/he is familiar with the variety under study. It is well suited for both an academic and a lay audience and is so beautifully written that is a joy to read. One of its major strengths is the well researched historical contextualization presented in chapters 1 and 2; it will appeal to readers of different backgrounds, from cultural studies to corpus studies. However, to fully appreciate the book, a good knowledge of both Catalan and Spanish language and linguistics will be essential. Although Vann gives a brief introduction to linguistic structure of Catalan Spanish in chapter 4, where he describes some key features of this variety, this exposition will not equip the reader to grasp the whole extent of the mutual linguistic influence of the two language varieties in contact. The reader would appreciate a comparison of Catalan Spanish to both Catalan and Spanish linguistic

systems to understand whether the linguistic features described are truly innovative or are a transfer from Catalan.

A point of criticism is thus lack of commentary or elaboration on linguistic data. The audience with a linguistic training would appreciate a more detailed discussion of the language variety under study, Catalan Spanish, which is barely covered in the mere 14 pages of chapter 4. Chapter 4, is too succinct; the description is presented in tables which are not commented or elaborated any further. Most of the attention is given to vocabulary, while pronunciation and grammar are presented in two short tables without further elaboration. For instance, Table 3 'Innovative pronunciations documented in Catalan Spanish' (78) lists in alphabetic order 12 features, from alveorization of <c,z> ('Barcelona' as Barce[s]lona), to voicing assimilation. The reader would appreciate a more structured approach. For instance, this reviewer feels that it would be advisable to address separately the vocalic and the consonantic systems, and the different phonological processes in each.

Indeed, one of the main differences between the phonological systems of Spanish and Catalan concerns the vowels. While Central-Northern Castilian Spanish only has five vowels, Central Catalan, the variety of the Eastern dialect spoken in and around Barcelona, has seven peripheral vowels (/i, e, ε, a, ɔ, o, u/) in stressed position and five (/i, ε, ə, a, o, u/) in unstressed position and displays a pattern of vowel reduction similar to that found in Portuguese and in Italian. This involves the merging of pairs of mid-vowels of different heights (/e, ε/ > /ə/; /e, a/ > /ə/; /o, u/ > /u/), which in the process lose their height contrast (see Recasens 1991, Mascaró 2002, Wheeler 2005). Thus, the closing and opening of 'e' and 'o', together with neutralizations of 'e' and 'a', are more likely to be transfers from Catalan rather than innovations of Catalan Spanish.

The same applies to the consonantal system: Catalan has more consonants than Spanish (30 consonants in Central Catalan) and these are affected by different phonological processes, among them voicing neutralization and assimilation in coda position, a phenomenon that has been widely discussed in phonetic and phonological studies (e.g. see Solà et al 2002). In Catalan, coda obstruents agree in voicing with

a following onset consonant, as for instance, in *ètnic* [ɛdnik], ‘ethnic’. Similar patterns of voicing assimilation are also observed across words, such as in (e.g. *pots ajudar* [tz], ‘(you) can help’).

Likewise, some analysis of the questionnaire data presented in chapter 6 would be appreciated. The audience may want to know how the questionnaire was elaborated, why certain items were chosen (whether participants like bullfighting, whether they like certain TV show popular at the time, etc.) and what is the author’s interpretation of the answers.

Another point of criticism is that Part II is very disconnected from Part I; none of the analyses and arguments presented in Part I make direct reference to the data presented in Part II. Although English translations are provided in Part I, there is no translation of the text in Part II. Also, it would have been very useful if the speech data presented in Part 2 were also provided in a CD or made available on an accompanying website.

Finally, on a minor note, the map of the Barcelona neighbourhoods under study presented in Figures 1 and 2 do not provide any useful information, as for instance, where these areas are situated in relation to the centre of Barcelona or to recognisable landmarks.

Despite the series of points raised above, from the perspective of a more advanced understanding of linguistics, there is no denying the interest of the volume provided by Vann and also its value as a first point of call on the road to the appreciation of the much understudied field of the Spanish spoken in Catalonia.

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