

STANDARDIZING OPINION: PROJECTING A NATIONAL CATALAN PUBLIC THROUGH LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Abstract

The grounds of authority for the Catalan language have shifted from authenticity to anonymity, as Catalan becomes redefined as a public language. The “model of language” of the Catalan press reflects this shift, with an emphasis on neutral, transparent Catalan. This article examines original and published letters to the editor in a Catalan-medium newspaper in Barcelona. I argue that standardization of language, page design and signatures in the letters to the editor erases the social indexicality that attaches the original letters to their socially positioned authors. This process of standardization in linguistic and other semiotic modes allows the published letters to index a unified Catalan national “public” rather than their distinct authors.

Keywords: Language ideologies; Print; Registers; Publics.

1. Introduction

Scholars of publics write of the projection of national identities through the shared consumption of mass media (Anderson 1991; Habermas 1989; Warner 1990, 2002). The homogenization and untraceability of mass-mediated speech makes it appear to emanate from no particular social position and therefore to represent a linguistically and socially homogeneous “public.” Yet, we know that mass-mediated speech does not start out as homogeneous and untraceable; rather, like all speech, it originates with clearly positioned individuals. This article is about the process by which speech produced by someone comes to count as speech produced by “everyone-because-no-one-in-particular” as anthropologist Susan Gal has put it (Gal 2001: 33), that is, as speech belonging to “the public.”

Elsewhere, I have suggested that national publics seem linked to a recursively imagined language that at one level is seen as standard and homogeneous and at a lower level is seen as internally variable (Frekko 2009). In Catalonia, local language ideology describes Catalonia as not quite successful (or “normal”) as a national public, because the erasure of linguistic registers happens at both levels, such that Catalan appears to exist exclusively as a standard language and therefore not flexible enough for use by all people in all situations. Comparing Catalonia’s imagined failure to be a full-fledged

national public with the imagined success of other national publics can help researchers articulate exactly what a national public is and how one is created.

In the current article, I examine a process that permits the erasure of linguistic variability at both recursive levels. When this occurs at the level of contrasting named languages, it fosters the imagination of a national public. When it occurs within a language, it undermines the imagination of a national public, because the language seems unable to account for the full range of people belonging to the projected national public.

Michael Silverstein has critiqued Benedict Anderson's naturalization of named, standardized languages and his assumption that these led naturally to the creation of supposedly homogenous, bounded and uncontested social orders, a.k.a. "nations" (see also Blommaert and Verschueren 1998 on "homogeneity"). In actuality, "Linguistic practice (and symbolic practice more generally) under standardization is an essentially contested order of sociocultural reality" (Silverstein 2000: 124). Therefore, rather than projecting "we-ness" directly from standard languages, as Anderson does, scholars must instead explain how shared national identity emerges in spite of the contestation and heterogeneity inherent in regimes of standardization. One of the goals of this article is to use the Catalan case to propose some ideas about the mechanics of this process.

I examine opinion pages in two Catalan-medium newspapers in Barcelona. The corpus that I address here offers a snapshot of nine days in late 2002 and 2003, and in particular 31 original, unedited letters to the editor that the newspapers provided to me. Zeroing in on a few days' publication allows me to perform a fine-grained analysis that complements the ethnographic and interview data that I collected in Barcelona during my 2002-2003 fieldwork and five shorter follow-up trips between 2004 and 2011. I argue that standardization of language, page design and signatures in the letters to the editor erase the social indexicality that attaches the original letters to their socially positioned authors. This process of standardization in linguistic and other semiotic modes allows the published letters to index a unified, homogeneous "public" rather than their distinct authors and the social variability that they represent. Print capitalism in many places across the globe involves similar processes, and these may be a common factor linking print and national publics.¹ Catalonia is a particularly useful site for studying this process because of what it does not share with other national publics—the sense that its national public is fragile or abnormal. I have argued that in hegemonic national publics, the homogenization of language at the level of contrasting named national languages coexists with the imagination of linguistic variability within the named language. Both because of register reduction in Catalan and the delegitimation of registers that draw on Castilian, Catalonia appears not to have enough linguistic variability to account for all social positions. This in turn results in the imagined fragility of its national public (Frekko 2009).

The standardization processes that I outline simultaneously aid and limit the imagination of a national public. On one level, the homogenization process makes the

¹ This link is of course the product of history rather than of any natural relationship between print and national publics; as Warner (1990) carefully points out, "public-ness" is not inherent to print technology. It is easy to imagine other constellations, for example, one in which print capitalism is the basis not for a monoglot national public but rather for diglossia. Still, a link between print and the projection of a homogeneous national public is common cross-culturally and therefore worthy of theorization.

letters appear to represent the voice of a unified “everyone.” On a lower recursive level, it erases the social complexity of Catalonia, a stratified, multilingual society in which access to standard forms of language correlate highly with age and social class. This second form of erasure ultimately serves to undermine the idea that Catalonia is a full-fledged, socially complex public. This contrasts with hegemonic world languages, for which heteroglossic forms appear more regularly in print and other media forms.

This article examines a set of practices implicated in the erasure of social complexity and the projection of homogeneity: I accomplish this task through an analysis of original letters to the editor and their editing and recontextualization on the printed page. In the next sections, I discuss language ideologies in the mass media and offer some background information on the Catalan newspaper press in Barcelona. I then go on to describe my research and its findings.

2. Ideologies of standardization across semiotic modes in the mass media

Catalan standard language acts as a sign of Catalan national distinctness. This sign relationship is an element of Catalan language ideology, particularly of an “ideology of standardization” (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 19). Several scholars have described the ways that people use language (and standard language in particular) to project imagined (non face-to-face) groups—publics and nations (Anderson 1991; Habermas 1989; Warner 1990, 2002). Print media, the focus of accounts by Anderson, Habermas and Warner, is often mentioned as a site for processes of and ideologies about linguistic standardization. These accounts tend to gloss over the details of linguistic standardization processes, a shortcoming that I address by examining linguistic standardization in the letters to the editor. I go on to argue that not only linguistic standardization but also other forms of standardization contribute to the projection of a national public.

Anderson’s famous account of the birth and spread of nationalism pays close attention to the role of print capitalism in this process (1991). In the 18th century New World, the circulation of newspapers allowed colonists to imagine themselves as belonging to a community separate from the colonial regimes.² Newspapers, for example, “created an imagined community among a specific assemblage of fellow-readers, to whom *these* ships, brides, bishops and prices belonged” (1991: 62). These sentiments culminated in the New World national independence movements of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. These movements then ushered in an “age of nationalism” (67) in Europe that drew on American models and added to them the notion of the distinct national print language (which had not been an issue in the Americas, where colonists used the same language as their colonial regimes). This focus on language inspired a “lexicographic revolution” (72)—a burst of scholarship aimed at studying and standardizing the European vernaculars, which of course then became available as indexes of distinct national essences. The printed material resulting from this scholarship was destined for the expanding bourgeois reading public, who then became “the first classes to achieve solidarities on an essentially imagined basis” (77).

² In addition to newspapers, Anderson also examines novels and the sense of simultaneity they create. Anderson also emphasizes that the circulation of functionaries and of bureaucratic writing (such as that contained in maps, censuses and museums) contributed to the imagination of community.

Habermas (1989) examines the way bourgeois readers developed into a political public sphere (a.k.a. “the public”) in late 17th and early 18th century Europe. He describes the shift from an old-regime publicity of noble representation to a new kind of public that emerged from bourgeois reading groups. When members of the bourgeoisie came together to read about and discuss politics, they appeared to be holding the state accountable for its actions. Moreover, although these readers hailed from a particular, interested, social position, their interests came to stand in for the interests of “the people” at large.

Warner (1990) builds on Habermas’ account (1989). Writing about Revolution-era America, Warner shows that a new ideology of print viewed the medium as “impersonal” and “anonymous,” an understanding that was manifest in features such as unsigned letters and articles under pen names. This definition meant that print (newspapers, broadsides, pamphlets) could disinterestedly represent “everyone” rather than its distinctly positioned authors. The seemingly unlimited dissemination of print brought about a sense of “supervision” of political figures by the reading public and a sense of “society.”

All three of these authors illuminate the ways in which print language is implicated in the imagination of “the public.” Yet, they tend to focus on the fact of circulation and the referential content of the circulated text (for example, Anderson’s ships, brides and bishops), while overlooking the texts’ form. Anderson’s points about standardization are about linguistic form, but as noted above, these ideas need further development. None of these authors examine standardization in other semiotic modes that accompany linguistic standardization in mass media. After considering linguistic standardization, this article goes on to focus on the visual standardization of page design and signatures, as processes that accompany linguistic standardization in erasing social indexicality and projecting a homogeneous public.

2.1. *Non-linguistic semiosis in written texts*

Several linguistic anthropologists have analyzed non-linguistic semiosis in written texts. Francis Cody’s work on Tamil newspapers (Cody 2009) encourages scholars of language to think not only of the linguistic properties of newspapers but also to think about their materiality, in particular their circulation and their physical appearance. His analysis of the language and graphic layout of headlines of two Tamil newspapers reveal that while one layout makes it possible for readers to glean the story from the headline at a distance and without reading further, the other necessitates reading the article text. Cody shows how these differences articulate with the contrasting ideologies of reading associated with and projected by the two newspapers.

Blommaert (2004) points out that European ideologies of writing and reading erase the visual component of these activities, reducing them to the encoding and decoding of propositional content. Despite this erasure, Blommaert points out that “Every written document is a visual document, and when we write we continuously deploy a wide range of meaningful visual tactics (differences in font and size, lines, arrows, indentation, etc.) Reading, similarly, involves the visual decoding of the document” (655). Blommaert analyzes a document presented by a Burundese asylum seeker to the Belgian authority as proof of his Burundese citizenship. The visual

properties of the document (including evidence of three different hands and orthographic inconsistencies) may make the citizenship claim suspect to Belgian bureaucrats operating with a different view of the relationship between writing and “truth” than the applicant.

The insight that this and other documents are “visual bearers of information” (643) is overlooked in accounts of the relationship between print capitalism and the imagination of national publics. Accounts by Habermas, Anderson and Warner all focus on the transmission of printed content to reading publics, while paying little attention to linguistic and non-linguistic semiosis in functions other than the referential. Indexical linkages are implied but not explicitly explored as such, both in Anderson’s assertion that circulating print points to imagined readers and in Warner’s claim that unsigned text points to supposedly disinterested writers. In this article, I examine the indexical meanings that emerge from printed texts.

Work by Spitulnik makes explicit these sorts of links in her work on Zambian radio (Spitulnik 1998). While this research does not focus on standardization, it shows the importance of non-linguistic semiosis in the projection of a public (in particular, the iconic and indexical value attached to the distribution of air time to language varieties in Zambia). Seven radio languages are thus able to represent and project not only a series of ethnic publics, but also the Zambian public, despite the fact that linguistic diversity in Zambia is much more complex than represented in radio. Spitulnik’s work on the distribution of air time is a good model for thinking about non-linguistic semiosis in other modes, such as the print examples that I address here.

In this article, I take data from the Catalan case to propose some ideas about the mechanics of the imagination of national group-ness in spite of the contestation inherent in regimes of linguistic standardization, paying attention not only to linguistic but also to non-linguistic semiosis. I argue that the projection of a national “we” comes not only from the circulation of propositional content to readers that thereby are able to imagine themselves as belonging to a group. Newspaper staffs do more than just “write” in the narrow sense of encoding propositional content and readers do more than just “read” in the sense of decoding it. To the contrary, meanings are encoded into newspapers in a range of modes, and readers read not only the propositional content but also these indexical meanings. We must look to such processes of encoding and decoding indexical meanings to compose a more complete theory of the relationship between print capitalism and the national public. This article focuses on one phase of the encoding process—in particular the transformation of original letters to the editor and their recontextualization in opinion pages.

3. Examining Catalan in the newspaper

Catalan has suffered long periods of repression by the Spanish state. But in Spain’s 1978 constitution, Catalan became co-official with Castilian in Catalonia. Since 1979, the Catalan government has passed various pieces of legislation to promote the language. Today, regional and municipal administration in Catalonia takes place in Catalan, with individual citizens maintaining the right to address their government and be addressed by it in Castilian. By 2001, 76% of Catalonia’s residents overall reported being able to speak Catalan (an increase from 64% in 1986). For youth ages 10 to 24,

this figure is 91%. This group had similar rates of reading ability and 84% writing ability (Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya 2001). This shift reflects the implementation of language policy in the last twenty-five years, which has made Catalan the main medium of instruction in most schools³ and required the Catalan language for civil service employment.⁴

Linguistic anthropologists have framed “the public” as a folk category that articulates with local ideologies of language (Gal and Woolard 2001). In some sociolinguistic situations, the public is defined negatively in the way that Warner outlines. In others, there is a positive definition, “an authority of authenticity” (7). Woolard (2008) expands on this contrast between the authority of anonymity and the authority of authenticity, noting that hegemonic languages tend to derive their authority from claims to anonymity while minority languages tend to derive theirs from claims to authenticity. Woolard has shown that Catalonia is in the process of shifting from a public whose authority is derived from authenticity to a public whose authority is derived from anonymity. This shift is the result of language policy since 1979 that has succeeded in making Catalan the main language of public institutions in Catalonia.

Part of reinvigorating Catalan as a public language has been establishing a Catalan-medium press. As part of a larger ethnographic research project on the re-emergence of Catalan as a public language after the end of the Franco regime, I carried out ethnographic research at Barcelona’s two major Catalan-medium dailies, *l’Avui* (“Today”) and *El Periódico de Catalunya* (“The Newspaper of Catalonia”).⁵ *l’Avui* was founded in 1976, early in the democratic transition that began after the death of Spanish dictator Francisco Franco in 1975. The Catalan government had partial ownership of the paper until it was bought out by the Girona-based *El Punt* newspaper in 2009 and merged with it in 2011. The *Avui* was associated with the center-right Catalanist politics of the party *Convergència i Unió*. Barcelona’s other major daily Catalan-medium newspaper was the private *El Periódico*, founded in Castilian in 1978 and associated with the center-left *Partit Socialista de Catalunya*. In 1997 it began publishing a twin version in Catalan, aided by the use of translation software.⁶ In addition to performing participant observation and interviews at *l’Avui* and *El Periódico*, I also collected a set of original and published letters to the editor, which forms the focus of this article.

Laitin and Rodríguez Gómez (1992) point out the usefulness of examining newspaper opinion pages for clues to language ideology in Catalonia. They analyze, following Bakhtin, the “canonization” of separate language-specific styles of political

³ In the fall of 2015, debate was still raging over the future of Catalan-medium education, since the Spanish Supreme Court’s December 2010 ruling that Catalonia should end Catalan’s status as sole vehicular language and reintroduce Castilian as a vehicular language in the classroom.

⁴ While for decades, discourse surrounding the future of Catalan focused on the relationship between native Catalan speakers and native Castilian speakers (see Woolard 1989), current debates center on the arrival of large numbers of extra-European immigrants since the mid-90s and the extent to which they and their children are adopting Catalan.

⁵ In 2011 *La Vanguardia*, Barcelona’s largest Castilian-language newspaper began publishing a parallel Catalan version.

⁶ *El Periódico*’s Catalan version had a circulation of 832,275 in 2003 and 610,821 in 2010. *El Periódico*’s Castilian version had a circulation of 1,213,860 in 2003 and 884,982 in 2010. *l’Avui*’s 2003 circulation was 340,417, while its 2010 circulation was 266,417 (Información y Control de Publicaciones 2004, 2011).

discourse for the Castilian and Catalan newspaper presses in Catalonia in 1985. Editorials in the Castilian newspapers (independently of political philosophy) showed an orientation to the Spanish state as the political center and the use of lexical flourishes and innuendo. Editorials in the Catalan newspapers, on the other hand, demonstrated an orientation to Europe and Catalonia as political actors and featured a “matter-of-fact, down-to-earth” style, employing “everyday adjectives with little color or imagination, and that rarely relies on exaggeration or irony to make a key point” (28). The authors link this trait to the *seny* (‘common sense’) that Catalans traditionally claim and celebrate (25). This style also points to scholarly and popular depictions of Catalan as bland, overly standardized and lacking in registers (Frekko 2009; see Cody 2009: 301-302 for a description of a Tamil newspaper that is relatively “monoregister”).

While Laitin and Rodríguez Gómez highlight the ability of opinion pages to reflect ideological constellations surrounding the two languages, I examine opinion language not only as a reflection of language ideologies but also as a site of their production. Curiously, the bland style described by Latin and Rodríguez Gómez appears to be the goal of both newspapers’ “*model de llengua*” (model of language). In my interview with l’Avui’s head language editor in 2003, he explained to me that:

- (1) *Com que finalment es tracta [...] que el llenguatge sigui com més neutre i més net possible, si tu no barreges sinònims de registres diferents... És a dir, hi ha una sèrie de coses en el llenguatge en què tu finalment és bo que optis per unes i en rebutgis unes altres. Perquè si les barreges, finalment el missatge té més soroll informatiu. És a dir, perquè el llenguatge sigui net i transmeti bé les coses has d'intentar que les paraules tinguin uns valors molt clars i has d'intentar no fer servir tota la riquesa del llenguatge. Aquesta riquesa és bona per a la literatura, però per a la informació aquesta mateixa riquesa acaba provocant ambigüetats i acaba fent protagonista el llenguatge quan no ho ha de ser. El que has de fer quan vols fer un negoci informatiu és fer un model de llengua. El que has de fer és seleccionar i quedar-te amb el que està més a prop del lector. Formes que no li sobten gens el lector perquè són els més habituals. I intentar dir-ho tot amb aquestes formes, si pots i no a través d'altres formes que també existeixen i també són llenguatge però que no són habituals i per això sobten més.*

‘Because ultimately the idea is [...] for the language to be as neutral and clean as possible, if you don’t mix synonyms from different registers... That’s to say, there are a series of things in the language in which it’s good for you to opt for some and reject others. Because if you mix them, in the end the message has more informational noise. That’s to say, in order for the language to be clean and in order for it to transmit things well, you have to try to make words have very clear values. And you have to try not to use all of the richness of the language. This richness is good for literature, but for news, this same richness creates ambiguities and it ends up making the language the protagonist when it shouldn’t be. When you want to have a news business you have to create a model of language. You have to select and keep the things that are closest to the reader: forms that don’t surprise him/her at all because they are the most habitual ones.’

He also described the sort of language preferred in the paper as “transparent.” This description of Catalan for newspapers dovetails closely with an ideological constellation that allows the Catalan public to derive its authority from anonymity (as opposed to

authenticity). In other words, Catalan should be a neutral medium for the transmission of information, the code of transmission being irrelevant to the information transmitted.

The editor was also fully aware of semiotic forms other than the linguistic in print media. In particular, he spoke of the ability of a newspaper's stylebook to consolidate conventions for journalistic genres such that

(2) *el lector habitual del diari, aquestes convencions les arribi a aprendre i aleshores siguin com signes afegits. És a dir que siguin com una semiòtica que s'afegeix a la del llenguatge. Hi ha d'haver unes convencions que el lector habitual les acabi aprenent i que serveixin per transmetre-li coses més enllà dels propis signes del llenguatge també.*

'the regular reader of the newspaper ends up learning these conventions as added signs. That is to say that they're like a semiosis that is added to that of the language. There have to be some conventions that the regular reader ends up learning and that serve to transmit to him things that go beyond the signs of the language, as well.'

While he is talking about the transmission of information about journalistic genres such as the news story (reportatge) or the chronicle (crònica), the non-linguistic semiosis present on the printed page extends well beyond this type of information. The visual properties of the written page also involve non-linguistic semiosis. In this article, I develop the notion that the standardization of the visual properties of written language and of the recontextualization of letters to the editor on the printed page, signal to the reader that "the national public" is being both addressed and represented.

While mass media are often pointed to as sites for the standardization of language, the Catalan case points to potential complexities in the relationship between media and standardization. Woolard (1998) brought to our attention two ideological strands among proponents of the Catalan language in the 1980s, natively called the "Heavy" and the "Light." The Heavies, traditionally the standard-makers of the Catalan academy, were linguistic purists. The Lights, whose proponents belonged to the mass media, argued for using current-day spoken Catalan as their model. This move involved both an attempt to approximate in print spoken Catalan in order to capture vernacular readership (see Cody 2009 for a similar situation in Tamil newspapers) and also an effort to relax sanctions against lexical borrowing in order to concentrate on avoiding semantic and syntactic borrowing, which proponents of this position saw as more troubling⁷ (Woolard 1998). Seen in this light, it becomes clear that while the newspaper press in Catalonia is a force of standardization, it is not a voice in favor of purism (that is, of strict boundaries between Catalan and Castilian) but rather of the separation of registers within Catalan and of communicative functionality.⁸

My conversations in 2003 with the head language editor of the Catalan version of *El Periódico* in Catalan revealed a strikingly similar orientation. He spoke of his

⁷ As described in Frekko 2006, the "Heavy" and "Light" positions have shifted. In 1995, the Institut d'Estudis Catalans published its new normative dictionary, which incorporated many suggestions from the media. The Institut, formerly the home of the "Heavy" position, began to receive criticism from groups that are "Heavier."

⁸ My work among language professionals at the Catalan parliament and in Catalan television revealed a related feature. Instead of arguing for Catalan purity, they were advocates for the need for non-standard registers of Catalan, in order to make Catalan fully successful as a public language (see Frekko 2009).

newspaper's stylebook as "guaranteeing the homogeneity" of the paper, both in terms of visual properties such as the use of italics and generic conventions such as the format of an interview and in terms of the use of Catalan. He pointed out the necessity

(3)

unificar també un comportament que tant pot afectar que dins de la mateixa normativa doncs hi hagi dues formes igualment possibles i potser n'hagis de decantar per una com en aquells aspectes que en aquí es troben molt en el cas del Llibre d' Estil en Català del Periódico que son aquells aspectes que els diccionaris encara no preveuen i sobre els quals nosaltres ens pronunciem, a vegades a favor i a vegades en contra.

'of unifying behavior related to the fact that within the normativa there might be two equally possible forms and you have to opt for one. Or in aspects that appear a lot in the case of the Periódico's Catalan Stylebook, which are aspects that the dictionaries don't yet contemplate and that we take a stance on, sometimes in favor and sometimes against.'

Each editor described the two newspapers as offering very similar models of language, although l'Avui's editor felt that the fact most of El Periódico was written in Castilian and then translated into Catalan resulted in greater Castilian influence in El Periódico than in Avui.⁹ El Periódico's Catalan editor felt that both the stylebooks and the published products of the two newspapers were overwhelmingly similar in terms of their approach to the Catalan language, an approach that they also shared with the Catalan television company. According to him, the stylebooks of all three institutions share "the desire to move toward the recipient," making "an effort in all cases to resolve the conflict between norm and use." He noted, "All of us are respectful of the normativa but we understand that there are some uses that the media has to spread even though they're not normative yet."¹⁰ He went on to describe the finished products of each outlet as sharing "a very similar style." He concluded, "This is what permits us to think that 20 years after the appearance of TV3,¹¹ a homogeneous model of behavior [...] in the [Catalan] mass media has been achieved."

The Periódico's Catalan editor, who started his career at l'Avui, suggested that one would find more differences between the Avui at the time of its founding and now than one would find between l'Avui and El Periódico in Catalan. Avui's language editor also described the drastic linguistic ideological changes that l'Avui has gone through since its founding in 1976. He portrayed l'Avui's first director as a "heavy heavy." Under his leadership, which lasted until the mid-80s, "It was not the language that was in the service of communication. Rather it was communication that had to be in the

⁹ Another issue worth exploring is the extent to which the automatic translation program used at El Periódico may have contributed to the neutralization of the published Catalan.

¹⁰ La voluntat d'acostar-se molt al receptor tant si és espectador com lector[...] que hi ha un esforç en tots els casos per resoldre el conflicte entre la norma i el ús [...] Tots som respectuosos amb la normativa però hi ha... Entenem que hi ha uns usos que els mitjans han de divulgar i que encara no són normatius. [...] hi ha un estil molt semblant. Això és el que ens permet pensar que 20 anys després de l'aparició de TV3 s'ha aconseguit un model homogeni d'actuació en l'àmbit aquest, dels mitjans de comunicació.

¹¹ TV3 is the main Catalan public television channel.

service of the language. The important thing wasn't to communicate but rather to teach Catalan."¹² He contrasted this position with the paper's then current emphasis on functionality, although he acknowledged internal disagreements among the newspaper's staff. He reported arguments in staff meetings about matters of the newspaper's style:

- (3) *Ens barallem perquè dintre de les seccions hi ha persones que els [preocupen?] més l'aspecte simbòlic de la llengua i altres persones que [els preocupa?] més l'aspecte funcional i per tant vulguis o no doncs com que són coses molt emotives i que hi estan en joc coses importants per a la gent, doncs [no és que ens barallem?] però vaja hi ha dificultats a vegades per arribar a acords.*

'We fight because within the sections [of the newspaper] there are people who are more concerned with the symbolic aspect of the language and others that are more concerned with the functional aspect. Therefore, like it or not, since these are very emotive things and important things are at stake for people, so it's not that we fight, but sometimes there are difficulties in reaching agreements.'

These statements reveal the ideological complexity existing within a single institution. The official position of the newspaper is to promote a transparent, functional Catalan that favors communication over national symbolism (authority based on anonymity). At the same time, there are vocal proponents of an ideological position that attributes more importance to the language's symbolic value (authority based on authenticity). Espousing the Catalan-as-neutral position by no means indexes a weaker identification with Catalan-ness. For example, when I asked l'Avui's language editor what he felt himself to be nationally, he responded, "I feel Catalan. What's more, I'm not Spanish. Even if I said, "I'm Spanish," I wouldn't be because I believe that you are what you are. I can't decide what I am. We are what we are, and obviously, I'm not Spanish. I'm not Spanish; period."¹³ These two ideological positions do not contrast on the issue of whether Catalonia is a nation, rather they contrast on the issue of how Catalonia should derive its public authority: Through anonymity or authenticity.

In the next section, I examine the standardization processes that allow letters to the editor to stand for a Catalan national public by means of neutrality and anonymity.

4. Standardizing opinion in a Catalan newspaper

The original letters that I examine in this section belong to a set of 31 Catalan-medium letters published in l'Avui and El Periódico in late 2002 and early 2003. All of the letters conform to some degree to the expectations for the genre "carta del lector" (letter to the editor), in terms of length, subject, and signature. In this sense, the letters are an example of what Blommaert calls "generically regimented text production" (2004: 657).

The letters involve the circulation of texts from individual members of the reading public to the newspaper and their recontextualization on the printed page to be

¹² No era el llenguatge el que estava al servei de la comunicació sinó que era la comunicació la que havia d'estar al servei del llenguatge. L'important no era comunicar-se, sinó ensenyar el català.

¹³ Jo em sento català. I a més a més, jo no sóc espanyol. Encara que digués "Jo sóc espanyol" no ho seria perquè jo crec que un és lo que és. [...] Jo no puc decidir què sóc. Som el que som, i evidentment, jo no sóc espanyol. No sóc espanyol, i punt.

distributed back to the public for consumption. At the same time, the letters reveal the intertextual, lateral circulation of mass-mediated discourse, as writers respond to articles, comment on media events and criticize political actors (see Spitulnik 1997).¹⁴

A simple content analysis of the letters reveals that they perform three basic functions: Responding to non-political media texts or events, responding to political speech, and/or demanding government action. Many of these letters are media texts about media. For example, one writer uses the newspaper to request help in fixing an interference problem between a television station and the VCRs of her village. Taken as a whole, the letters paint a picture of the circulation and recycling of language through newspaper, internet, television and film. Some scholars of publics stress the ability of publics to appear to hold government accountable in a way that serves to legitimate the political status quo (e.g. Habermas and Warner). Other scholars stress that publics create a socio-culturally based sense of shared identity through activities such as reading the same newspapers, and watching the same reality shows and soccer games (e.g. Anderson). These letters clearly do both things. On the one hand, they project a community of readers holding government accountable to the needs of citizens. On the other hand, the letters project a community of readers that share in mass-mediated social identities (see Fraser 1992: 125).

The individual letters need quite a lot of editorial help in order to make this possible. Taken individually, the letters belong to a wide range of social positions; it is hard to construe them as “the public,” because they are so varied in terms of graphic mode (typed or handwritten), content, degree of conformity to linguistic standards, layout and the inclusion of identifying information such as names, addresses and identity card numbers. As a result, these authors do not seem like “everyone-because-no-one-in-particular.” The regimentation of the letters—already begun when the authors attempted to conform to generic conventions—culminates on the editing floor, where the texts undergo visual homogenization, including linguistic standardization. The standardization of language, page design and signatures in the letters to the editor erases clues to the social origin of the authors. This process allows the published letters to index a unified “public” rather than their distinct authors.

¹⁴ This analysis builds on work by Spitulnik (1997) that criticizes theories of the public that focus exclusively on the top-down dissemination of texts from media institutions to media consumers. While she focuses on lateral intertextuality among media consumers, I examine an intersection between vertical and horizontal axes. Here we have vertical dissemination in both directions—from institutions to consumers and vice versa.



Figure 1: visually standardized opinion page

4.1. Standardization of language

It is not surprise that most newspapers, perhaps like most newspapers worldwide, edit the letters that they publish. Like newspapers elsewhere, both newspapers have stylebooks that they use to standardize the language of the publications. This editing process both reflects and reproduces an ideology of linguistic standardization—the idea that variability in language, especially written language—should be suppressed (Milroy and Milroy 1999). In other words, the editing process reveals the deep conviction on the part of the newspaper’s editors and staff (as well as the broader society) that written language should be uniform.

Standard Catalan is distributed unevenly across the population—most notably as a correlate of age and class, as described above. Because of this, the letters vary widely in the degree to which they stray from standard Catalan.¹⁵ Attempting to achieve linguistic correctness in the published texts is important because of generic considerations common to Western-style publishing and also because of the Catalan language’s centrality as a national symbol. It comes as no surprise, then, that all of the letters were edited, and the published versions differed from the originals. In letters in which authors commanded normative Catalan, changes were minimal. When authors did not have command of normative Catalan, as in the case of the hand-written letter below, there were large numbers of changes. Changes covered orthography, grammar,

¹⁵ I take “standard Catalan,” just like any standard language to be a moving target (see Milroy and Milroy 1999). One version of “standard Catalan” is represented in the newspaper’s style guide.

conformity to stylebook (for example, the way that the newspapers handled dates), and adjustments in register and style. Here I offer an analysis of a hand-written letter submitted to l'Avui. This is the letter that strays farthest from normative Catalan and therefore provides examples of the full range of types of changes made to the original letters (see Figure 2).

The published version of Letter 1 letter features multiple grammatical and orthographic changes. For example, “M’agradat l’article” becomes “M’ha agradat l’article.” (I liked the article). The standard version represents in writing the presence of the auxiliary verb “ha” (from the verb “haver.”) Its presence is not detected aurally before a past participle beginning with a. This mistake reveals that the writer is modeling his writing on oral Catalan.

(4) *M’agradat l’article* → *M’ha agradat l’article*

‘I liked the article’ → ‘I liked the article’

In addition to changing non-standard forms, the copy-editors make changes to items that are not identifiably non-standard but that do not correspond to stylistic norms. For example, the hand-written letter features a change in the format of the date from “20/1” to “20 de gener” (20th of January).

(5) *20/1* → *20 de gener*

‘1/20 → ‘20th of January’

Finally, some changes are not traceable either to concerns with correctness or with the stylebook, but rather seem to be adjustments in register. Letter 1 is replete with examples of changes that adjust the text to conform to stylistic norms for the use of journalistic, written Catalan, as opposed to the oral model favored by the letter writer. He writes in praise of a previous author that “arriba a la conclusio de que cal fer que Europa s’ha n’adoni de la existencia de Catalunya i per això s’ha d’enfortir i democratitzar el contingut de l’Unio Europea” (reaches a conclusion on what has to be done so that Europe realizes that Catalonia exists and because of this one has to strengthen and democratize the content of the European Union). This phrase shows a lack of planning that is more typical of spontaneous speech than journalistic prose.

(6) *arriba a la conclusio de que cal fer que Europa s’ha n’adoni de la existencia de Catalunya i per això s’ha d’enfortir i democratitzar el contingut de l’Unio Europea --> arriba a la conclusió de què cal fer perquè Europa s’adoni de l’existència de Catalunya: enfortir i democratitzar el conjunt de la UE*

‘reaches a conclusion on what has to be done so that Europe realizes that Catalonia exists and because of this one has to strengthen and democratize the content of the European Union’ → ‘reaches a conclusion on what has to be done so that Europe realizes that Catalonia exists: strengthen and democratize the whole of the EU’

In the published version, the phrase is streamlined, in accordance with the conventions of journalistic writing: The author “arriba a la conclusió de què cal fer perquè Europa

s'adoni de l'existència de Catalunya: enfortir i democratitzar el conjunt de la UE” (reaches a conclusion on what has to be done so that Europe realizes that Catalonia exists: Strengthen and democratize the whole of the EU).

Changes of this kind bring about a form of linguistic standardization that is not only about correctness but also about stylistic and register uniformity. The editing process not only standardizes the texts but also erases the differences in the command of written Catalan, which indexes its uneven distribution throughout the population.¹⁶ When my respondents looked at original letters like these, they were able to glean from them information that indexed the social origins and Catalan ability of the letter writers (see below). The edited, homogenized letters erase most of this information.¹⁷

<p style="text-align: center;">Anàlitzar el mot 'democràcia'</p> <p>M'ha agradat l'article d'en Josep A. Duran i Lleida publicat el passat 20 de gener, en què exposa en una panoràmica, un llistat, en què mira i veu i analitza i arriba a la conclusió de què cal fer perquè Europa s'adoni de l'existència de Catalunya: enfortir i democratitzar el conjunt de la UE.</p> <p>Voldria afegir-hi que la democràcia, al meu entendre, hauria d'anar acompanyat d'actes i fets ètics i morals, sempre respectant els drets humans i els dels pobles, perquè "democràticament i per les armes ens van esquarterar la terra": una part per als francesos i l'altra per al que en diuen "la <i>unidad de España</i>"; i com que ells són més nombrosos, doncs el resultat és que ens espolien i a</p>	<p>més pretenen anorrear la nostra identitat. Això sí, molt democràticament.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">.....</p> <p style="text-align: center;">QUIM CATALÀ Barcelona</p> <p style="text-align: center;">=====</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Ball de dates</p> <p>El DDD de l'AVUI del 10 de gener ens diu que <i>Al sur de Granada</i> és un film de Fernando Colomo del 2003. Primer bunyol. Ara ens diu que la producció catalana en castellà <i>Nos hacemos falta</i>, del barceloní Juanjo Giménez Peña, és del 2002, quan el nostre diari ens notificà al seu dia que s'estava rodant la tardor del 2000 i que concursà al Festival de Mont-real l'estiu del 2001. Segon bunyol.</p> <p>Per tant, i abans que perpetrin el tercer bunyol previsible, vull recordar a la secció d'espectacles del nostre diari que</p>
--	--

Figure 3: Letter 1 (published; see appendix for full translation)

¹⁶ See Fenigsen (1999) on the standardization in newspaper accounts of the indexical links between on the one hand, Bajan and low-status people, and, on the other hand, English and high-status people.

¹⁷ What they leave intact are the referential clues to positionality, such as the older writer's attitude towards the Spanish state.

Joaquim ~~Marques~~ (97.11.2.12)
~~17 de febrer de 2003~~ - Barcelona (BUZDU52
 BUZPA31)

AVUI - Secc. Bustia BUJ216

≡ Actualitzar el mot "Democràcia" ≡ 602

M'agradat l'article d'en Josep A. Duran i Lleida i publicat el prop-passat 20/01, en que exposa en una panoràmica, un estat, en que mira i veu i analitza i arriba a la conclusió de que cal fer que Europa s'ha d'adonar de la existencia de Catalunya i per això s'ha d'enfortir i democratitzar el contingut de l'Unió Europea.

Volria afegir-hi, que als conceptes de la "Democràcia", al meu entendre, haurien d'anar acompanyats d'actes i fets ètics i morals, sempre respectant els drets humans i els dels pobles, perquè "democràticament i per les armes ens van esquarterar la terra; una part pels francesos i l'altra part, la van afegir en el que en diuen, "la unió d'Espanya" i com que ells son més nombrosos, doncs el resultat es que ens espelien i a mes a mes, pretenen anoverar-nos la nostra identitat, això si, molt democràticament.

Quim Catala

Figure 2: Letter 1 (original; see appendix for full translation)

4.2. Standardization of page design

The linguistic changes described in the preceding section come as no surprise to readers or scholars of print; in addition to undergoing linguistic changes such as the ones seen in the two sample letters shown in section 4.1, the letters are also made to conform to a standard type and recontextualized in a standard page layout. In this way the newspapers' opinion pages share generic features with many newspapers worldwide. Here, I offer one example that suggests the way that disparate letters can come to suggest a specifically national public. In the page shown in Figure 4 (2 February, 2003, l'Avui), the letters form a ring around the newspaper's "Cyber-survey." At the top of the shaded box is the "question of the week": "Ten years after the first web page in our

country, who has done the most on the internet?" Because in Catalan publications, Spain is usually referred to as "the state" rather than "our country" and Catalonia is often referred to as "a country," it is clear that "our country" refers to Catalonia. In this way, the survey claims to represent a particularly national Catalan public; and the letters' encircling of the survey suggests that the letters should similarly be read as indicators of Catalan national opinion, no matter what scale of public the individual letters purport to represent.

4
• OPINIÓ •
AVUI
DIUMENGE
2 DE FEBRER DEL 2002

BÚSTIA

Sóc un tribal

No puc fer-hi més, pertanyo a una tribu. Ho ha dit José M. Aznar, "juntos y tribus". La gravetat és que es referia a catalans, bascos i gallecs. Segur que volia ofendre'ns. Mireu per on, ho ha aconseguit! A més, s'hi han afegit les afirmacions de Manuel Jiménez de Parga, president del Tribunal Constitucional. Segons ell, cal suprimir de la Constitució espanyola el concepte de nacionalitats històriques. (No es deu tractar d'una campanya mediàtica per guanyar vots? En canvi, no es comprèn que davant de la greu situació hi hagi tan poques reaccions en contra. Si que hem vist que dirigents del PPC amaguen el cap sota l'ala per dissimular les seves vergonyes, però fora d'aquestes comunitats sembla que ho veuen força bé.

Hom ha estat de sort, Òmnium Cultural no ho ha fet veure clar. Segons l'entitat, els catalans hem quedat alliberats del pacte constitucional. Això ha fet que hagi pogut descarregar la meua consciència, no sols per haver votat la Constitució espanyola, també per haver-ne fet la campanya a favor. Gràcies, moltes gràcies, Òmnium Cultural!

JORDI CAMPS I DOMÈNECH
Berga (el Berguedà)

Gràcies, Van Gaal

Com a soci del FC Barcelona i com a català, sento vergonya pel tracte que s'ha donat al Sr. Louis Van Gaal. Des del seu retorn al club ha estat objecte de tot tipus d'atacs, moltes vegades injustificats, especialment dels mitjans de comunicació. El Sr. Van Gaal ha procurat treballar amb les possibilitats econòmiques que el Barça té en aquests moments, no ha exigut res i en cap moment ha fet esment de la mala sort que ha tingut per les lesions dels seus jugadors.

No sóc cap incondicional ni de la seva tàctica ni de la seva llibreta, crec que en el futur vindran entrenadors que tècnicament podran ser pitjors, iguals o millors que ell, però del que estic segur és que molt pocs el guanyaran en qualitat humana i en fidelitat al club.

JOSÉ MARI SERRATEJ
Barcelona

Informar i divulgar

La clonació terapèutica "llegeixo" farà que les cèl·lules mare derivades de cèl·lules humans guareixin milions de pacients. La medicina reparativa "segueixo llegint" ne-

trilitzarà l'erosió que amb l'edat desgasta els nostres òrgans i ens farà, si no perèntim, resistents al pas dels anys.

Si suposa una millora per a milions d'éssers humans; si es guareixen diverses malalties, ens hem de preguntar si arribarà a tothom. També si n'és creïble el resultat o darrere hi ha interessos socials i econòmics, empreses que es proposen explotar-los i obtenir guanys.

S'iniciarà amb un procés d'investigació, de producció del fàrmac i, finalment, l'aplicació d'una teràpia que gairebé ni gué podrà permetre's pel seu cost.

Fins aquí podríem parlar de la divulgació que s'ha fet a través dels mitjans de comunicació. Però també s'hauria de demanar una informació més íntegra adreçada als que no hi podem aprofundir més. I aquí hi ha la funció de les universitats a través dels seus departaments d'humanitats biomèdiques. El departament de biotècnica, de biologia molecular. Volem la informació de científics que estimen l'ésser humà com a portador d'uns altres valors. A tots aquells que responen i asseguren que primer de tot la persona ha de ser preuada, tractada amb dignitat. A tots aquells professionals que defensen l'atenció primària especialitzada i no volen jugar amb l'esperança que puguin tenir els malalts. Als que ens assurem que en un futur les pròpies cèl·lules podran ser utilitzades per regenerar teixits danjats i no el seu clon.

Aquesta si que és una altra visió de l'ésser humà, perquè no tot el que és tècnicament possible és moralment lícit.

MARIA LAFRANC
Castelló

Carta oberta a TMB

Sóc un usuari del metro barcelonès i m'agradaria formular diverses preguntes als responsables de l'empresa TMB.

- 1) És lícit accedir a les instal·lacions del metro sense pagar el corresponent bitllet, ja sigui saltant-se el torn d'accés o fent servir les portes de sortida?
- 2) És permès firmar a passadissos, andanes i vagons del metro?
- 3) És normal pujar al metro en companyia de gosset (a excepció dels gosset pig-i)?
- 4) És correcte picadolar, vendre i actuar a les dependències del suburbi?

Si, com m'imagino, la resposta a totes aquestes preguntes és negativa, voldria saber què fan i on són els encarregats de fer complir les normes que regeixen a TMB.

Cal dir, i això és constatable, que els ciutadans creiem ja gran majoria, que respectem la normativa, a més de perplexos, ja n'estem farts i demanem solucions.

LUIS BARRA I ENCARNAI
Barcelona

PSC i dependències

Que el PSC no depèn del PSOE és una afirmació que de del socialisme català s'ha repetit una i mil vegades. Sembla com si a força de repetir-ho volguessin canviar la realitat. El cert és que el PSC ha tingut moltes ocasions per marcar diferències respecte del PSOE, però desgraciadament rares han estat les veus del PSC que han discrepat dels socialistes espanyols. Des que el PSC va perdre el seu grup parlamentari al Congrés de Diputats la seva veu ha quedat relegada una vegada i una altra. No em referiré a la llunyana LOAPA, tan sols fa pocs mesos que hem tingut exemples molt clars en qüestions tan importants com la devolució del paper de Salamanca. El que ara no val és que Pasqual Maragall reivindicui, per interessos electorals, l'independència del PSC del PSOE.

CARLES COLOMER LÓPEZ
Barcelona

Sobirania

La sobirania de Catalunya està en contra de la voluntat de

LA CIBERENQUESTA

AVUI Des d'avui fins dijous a la mitjanit, els lectors de Vilaweb i de l'AVUI poden participar en la Ciberenquesta des de les portades dels dos mitjans: <http://www.avui.com> i <http://vilaweb.com>. Diarumge que ve, els resultats finals en aquestes pàgines.

LA PREGUNTA D'AQUESTA SETMANA

Deu anys després de la primera web al nostre país, qui ha fet més per internet?

- ▶ Les administracions
- ▶ Les universitats
- ▶ Iniciatives personals
- ▶ Xarxes ciutadanes i ONGS
- ▶ El sector empresarial
- ▶ Una mica tothom

EL RESULTAT DE LA SETMANA PASSADA

Per què ha augmentat la virulència del PP contra els nacionalismes?

Entre 1000 vots

Perquè és la seva ideologia. No necessiten excuses	82,61%
Perquè d'aquí a poc hi ha eleccions i el PSCOE guanya terreny	7,83%
Per tapar el cas 'Prestige'	7,39%
No hi ha virulència, són simples opinions diferents	2,17%

No poden fer altra cosa

ORIOL G.

En els règims no democràtics ha calgut sempre facilitar al poble "pa i circ", i això es va expressar, explícitament, en temps de l'Imperi Romà. Actualment, i en règim nominalment democràtic és governat per una facció al servei dels interessos del gran capital espanyol i secundada ideològicament en l'ultraliberalisme i el patriotisme ranci. Ara mateix, el fracàs del vessant ultraliberal, combinat amb una astoradora falta d'habilitat en la gestió de la crisi del Prestige i altres qüestions, ha menat a una situació econòmica delicada i a una situació social conflictiva. En cap d'aquests aspectes, el govern del Partit Popular no pot facilitar una resposta coherent i es despenja excitant antipaties visceralment entre els votants potencials i llançant als lleons els que ha escollit com a víctimes propiciatòries. Es tracta d'una reedició de la situació que li va valer la majoria absoluta en les darreres eleccions.

Figure 4: National context on an opinion page

The pie chart above strengthens this interpretation, in revealing the results of last week's question, "Why has the Popular Party's virulence against nationalisms augmented?" (and by that they mean the internal nationalisms of Spain, such as Catalanism). This graphic, which quite explicitly claims to represent national Catalan public opinion, is encircled by the visually standardized, homogenized letters to the editor, a juxtaposition which reinforces the idea that the letters represent voices of "the Catalan public," rather than the opinions of idiosyncratic individuals or the opinions of representatives of publics scaled at another level, such as the city or Europe.

Like the linguistic standardization that I've already discussed, the standardization of page design that I have described has many visual aspects—including the color, shape, size and positioning of text and other objects. It converts what is otherwise a group of texts that differ from each other in multiple socially meaningful ways into an object that is visually uniform. This process further removes indexical information from the letters.

4.3. Standardization of signatures

A third form of standardization in the letters involves the signature lines (see Figure 4). As Derrida (1972) pointed out, a signature links a written text to the person inscribing it, acting as a sort of guarantee once the writer and the text become separated from each other. Throughout Catalonia and Spain, ordinary writers develop highly particularistic signed versions of their names. Most of the letters in my collection conclude with such a signature, in addition to the full name of the writer. Moreover, many of the authors provide additional personal information. For example, one typed letter appears on letterhead that positions the author as a holder of a degree in philosophy and letters. Another letter identifies its writer as "secretary, mother and grandmother." Such descriptors—which are removed in the published versions—make clear that these authors hail from very particular social positions.

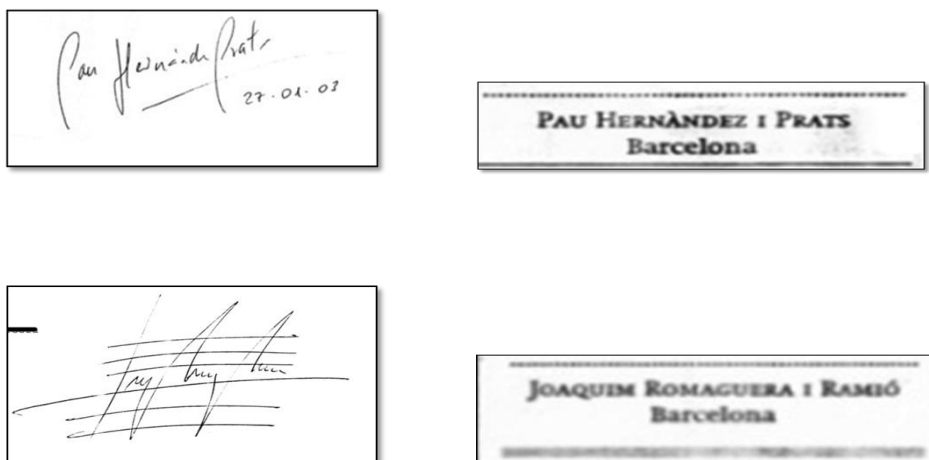


Figure 5: Heterogeneous original signatures and corresponding homogenized published signatures from l'Avui

The reduction of personal signatures to printed names and the elimination of other socially identifying information is a standardization process that reduces authors to uniformity. The lack of anonymity in the letters is notable, given the arguments about the role of anonymity in the creation of a national public (Warner). However, standardization of by-lines provides uniformity, if not anonymity. This process is highlighted in a maneuver by the author of the hand-written letter. Although he gives his full name at the top of his letter, he signs the letter “Quim Català,” combining the shortened version of his own first name “Joaquim” and the generic last name “Catalan,” a pen name that emphasizes his role as a generic Catalan reader and writer—a Catalan “anyone” (see Warner 1990). This impression is reinforced by the fact that the signature looks bland, generic and unusually legible in comparison to the other signatures in the corpus (see Figure 2).

4.4. Reading unedited letters

As part of ethnographic fieldwork in Barcelona, I conducted semi-structured interviews with four Catalan newspaper copy editors and 13 students in an advanced-level Catalan-for-adults class (which contained both Castilian and Catalan native speakers, as well as a few native speakers of other languages). In the interviews, I showed participants ten prompts, each of which was a photo or photocopy of a naturally-occurring written Catalan text. The texts included two original letters to the editor, two hand-painted protest banners, an informal email, a restaurant business card, an advertising flyer, a commercial letter, a paragraph from a novel, and a published newspaper column. Participants read the prompts, and I asked them what kind of text each was, what kind of person had written the text, and to whom each text was addressed. I also asked them if there was anything in each of the texts that they would change. The purpose of this exercise was to understand the nature of the ideologies of standardization surrounding Catalan.

Responses about the two original letters to the editor reveal the great extent to which social information is legible from the unedited letters. The copy editors and the students agreed about what kind of person had written the letters. Letter 1, a hand-written letter, offered much more indexical information, and respondents tended to focus on indexical meaning—deviations from normative Catalan, handwriting style, and writing style. All of these elements are, of course, erased in the published versions of the text, leaving referential meanings as the only clue to the social origins of the letter. Interestingly, for Letter 2, which is typed and which conformed much more closely to normative Catalan, respondents focused on the content of the letter for clues to the identity of the writer.

While I do not have direct biographical information about the writers, a strikingly consistent portrait of them emerged from my interviews. Here is a selection of answers to the question, “What kind of person do you think wrote this text?”

4.4.1. Writer 1: An older person not educated in Catalan? (see Figure 2)

Again and again, respondents noted that the writer was probably an older person. The text's disorganized, oral-sounding nature pointed to the fact that the writer was not familiar with writing conventions and therefore had not received much formal education. The text's complete failure to conform to Catalan orthographic and grammatical norms indicated that s/he had probably received no education whatsoever in Catalan.

- (7) *Aquí m'imagino una persona gran que evidentment ha viscut la Guerra Civil Espanyola i que encara té molt ressentiment per, tant per la guerra i com, segur, pel franquisme i per la repressió franquista. És evident. És un tipus de discurs molt típic, sobretot pel tipus de català que es veu que m'imagino, que m'imagino que és una persona que no ha pogut tenir una educació en català. I llavors inevitablement no pot escriure igual com una persona jove que ha tingut la sort d'aprendre en la seva llengua.*

'Here I imagine an old person that evidently lived through the Spanish Civil War and still has a lot of resentment both toward the war, and surely, toward Franquism and the Francoist repression. It's evident. It's a very typical type of discourse, especially because of the type of Catalan that you see and I imagine that, I imagine that it's a person that wasn't able to have an education in Catalan. And so inevitably s/he can't write the same as a young person that has been lucky enough to study in his/her language.' (David, male copy editor)

- (8) *(Sigh). És que...o sigui tant pot ser algú de 60 anys que es pensa que pot escriure en català com algú jove que sap uns mínims però té moltes confusions i moltes idees equivocades. O sigui que no ho tinc massa clar. Ja et dic tant pot ser algú gran que ha fet els seus, que es pensa que en sap o bé algú jove que això que, no ho sé. [...] La meua mare m'ha deixat alguna vegada notes per avisar-me d'alguna cosa quan no hi és i a::: t'esgarriques perquè no en sap i clar, t'ho escriu tal com sona.*

(Sigh). 'It's that...that is it could equally be someone who's 60 years old who thinks s/he can write in Catalan or someone young that knows that knows the minimum but has a lot of confusions and a lot of mistaken ideas. That is, I don't have it that clear. I'm saying that it could equally be someone old that has done his/her, that thinks s/he knows or someone young that, I don't know. [...] My mother has left me notes like this to let me know about something when she's not there and a::: it's scary because she doesn't know, so of course, she writes it the way it sounds.' (Sandra, female copy editor)

- (9) *Fa faltes d'ortografia (laughing). Això a mi... [...] Pel tipus de lletra, és una dona. Jo crec que és una dona d'uns 40 anys, 40-45. I no té gaire formació, o almenys no ha tingut formació en català. No, i en castellà tampoc, perquè això de repetir suposo que també ho faria. [...] Són manies meves de no repetir coses, però a mi no m'agrada que es repeteixi.*

'S/he makes orthographic mistakes (laughing). And as far as I'm concerned...[implying that this is unacceptable]. [...] Judging by the handwriting, it's a woman. I think it's a woman of about 40 years, 40-45. And she doesn't have a lot of education, at least she hasn't had education in Catalan. No, not in Castilian either, because this thing of repeating I suppose she would do it [in Castilian], too. [...] It's my own obsession, not

repeating things, but I don't like repetition.' (Miriam, Castilian- and German-speaking Catalan student)¹⁸

- (10) *Home jo penso que és mes aviat gran pel tipo de lletra. Si és original, pel tipo de lletra. Aquesta lletra és d'una persona que ja té anys. [...] Doncs, si dic això de que és una persona gran, doncs igual a lo millor en la seva època jove doncs no va estudiar o no va estudiar del tot. O va fer els estudis més endavant. I sobretot que valora molt la democràcia i està assabentada del tema d'Europa.[...] De fet, tinc una meva tia que és del 46, i va anar a una guarderia i va estudiar i tot i el tipo de lletra que ella fa és molt semblant.*

'Well, I think it's an old person because of the kind of handwriting. If it's original, because of the handwriting. This handwriting is from an older person. [...] So, if I say it's an old person, well maybe s/he didn't study or didn't study all the way. Or maybe s/he studied later on. And above all s/he values democracy a lot and is informed about the topic of Europe. [...] Actually, I have an aunt who was born in '46 and she went to preschool and she studied and all and the type of handwriting that she has is very similar' (Neus, female, Catalan-speaking Catalan student)

While David noted the letter's referential content (the author's anger toward the Franco regime), other responses focus on indexical information provided by the letter's form. Interestingly, not all of the Catalan students I interviewed were able to pick up on the indexical cues offered by the form of this letter. For example, Javier, who was a Castilian speaker studying Catalan for the first time, missed the cues relating to linguistic form, perhaps in large part because he himself did not command the rules that the writer broke. For example, when I asked what kind of person wrote it, he responded, "doncs, no ho sé. No ho sé, eh? Per la lletra no ho sé. És molt possible que sigui una dona." He continued that the person probably had at least a secondary school education or higher and that his/her signature indicated that s/he was probably an outgoing person. He read indexical information from the letter's form, but, unable to decode the social information that is legible from the text, he moved on to build a psychological profile that did not draw on social information or claim social significance. This difference in legibility—who can read what social information—is therefore also erased when the letters are homogenized. Neus was also unable to read clues offered by the lack of linguistic standardization of the text, although she could interpret the social meaning of the handwriting. The difference in Javier's and Neus' social knowledge from that of the other respondents becomes invisible. They become a homogeneous public.

¹⁸ This student was in her early twenties, so to her a person in her early- to mid-forties might have seemed quite old!

De: Karles [k .com]
 Enviado: martes 28 de enero de 2003 10.01
 Para: cartalector
 CC: c
 Asunto: carta atemptat

ATEMPTAT VAN GAAL

Per sort no veig la televisió gaire sovint. Per sort. Perquè cada cop que la conecto hem sorprèn més. Ahir sense anar més lluny. El meu pare estava escarxofat al sofà mirant la sèrie Plats Bruts de TV3. Fins aquí normal. Però de sobte, tallen l'emissió per fer un avanç de notícies. Quina sorpresa! En comptes d'informar-me sobre una tràgica notícia, com fan de costum, com per exemple en els casos d'atemptat, m'informen sobre la possible destitució d'en Van Gaal. Que cadascú ho jutgi com vulgui, però, hem preocupa molt cap a on anem.

Karles 4 -A Castelldefels

Figure 6: Letter 2 (original) (see appendix for full translation)

4.4.2. Writer 2: A young “no-one-in-particular”? (see Figure 6)

The respondents described the language of Letter 2 as “normal,”¹⁹ “informal,” “colloquial,” and “correct.” The language professionals and some of the students noted minor errors, such as the mistaken use of the auxiliary verb “hem” (we have) in place of the first person object pronoun “em.” The following examples are responses to my question, “What kind of person do you think wrote this text?” When necessary, I prompted them to think about factors such as age, sex and academic training.

(11) *Una persona normal²⁰ que veu la televisió i que es queixa d'un fet concret relacionat amb la situació de la televisió, amb la política dels informatius d'una cadena televisiva.*

‘A normal person that watches television and complains about a concrete fact related to the situation of the television, to the politics of newscasts on a television station.’ (Pau, male copy editor)

(12) *Una persona que està molt tipa del futbol (laughing). I:: ostres, és molt difícil de dir el tipus de persona. Realment una cosa així em sembla que la poden escriure moltes persones, moltes menes de persona.*

‘A person who is really fed up with soccer (laughing). A::nd, jeez, it’s really difficult to say what kind of person. Really, something like this it seems to me that lots of people could write it, many types of people.’ (David, male copy editor)

¹⁹ On the word “normal” see Frekko 2009 and Woolard 1986.

²⁰ Note the use of the adjective “normal.”

- (13) *Doncs, jove, perquè “el meu pare,” “el meu pare,” no? Deu ser una persona jove, sí, entre 20 i 30. [...] M’imagino que, dedueixo que si el pare es mira ‘Plats Bruts’²¹ no és gaire gran. Llavors la persona no pot ser excessivament gran. Vaja no em veig un iaio mirant els ‘Plats Bruts’; no ho sé. Llavors, potser això entre 20 i 30 i:: ja està.*

‘Well, young, because “my father,” “my father,” no? It must be a young person, yeah, between 20 and 30. [...] I imagine that, I deduce that if the father watches Plats Bruts he’s not very old. So the person can’t be that old. I mean, I can’t see a grandpa watching Plats Bruts; I don’t know. So, it could be that, between 20 and 30 and that’s all.’ (Sandra, copy editor)

- (14) *L’edat? 30 anys, 30-35 anys, més o menys. O inclús una mica més jove també, eh? Aquest conec²² molt bé el català. [...] I les idees són clares, i després els accents estan tots ben posats (laughing). I després té una certa cultura.*

‘The age? Thirty years, 30-35 years, maybe even a bit younger, too, eh? This one knows Catalan really well. [...] And the ideas are clear, and then the accents are all in the right place (laughing). And then he has a certain amount of culture.’ (Javier, male, Castilian-speaking Catalan student)

Note that all of these responses focus on the referential content of the letter for clues to the identity of the writer. Unlike in Letter 1, Letter 2’s form offers little indexical information because it largely conforms to conventions for standard written Catalan.²³ The link between standardization (both linguistic and visual) and the “voice from nowhere” becomes particularly obvious in David’s statement that “Lots of people could write this, many types of people.” In other words, this text is not identifiable with a particular kind of person.

No matter how much indexical information is present in the form of the original letters, by the time they are published, that information is erased, so that content provides the only potential clues to the social origins of the letter. Whether the original letters portray authors who are “someone” or not, the published letters present authors who are “no one in particular.”

5. Conclusions

The research I have presented provides insight into the relationship between print, homogenization, the erasure of social information and the projection of a national public. Through the three standardization processes I have described—linguistic standardization, page design standardization and signature standardization—the letters are transformed visually from indicators of individuals’ opinions to signs of “public opinion.” This is a homogenization process that also allows the letters to project a

²¹ A hip sitcom that was currently in production by the Catalan public television company.

²² Javier had only recently begun using Catalan orally and here he misconjugates the verb *conèixer* (‘to know’ supplying the first person singular instead of the third person singular *coneix*).

²³ Lemon (2002) shows that standard national languages tend to be ideologized as transparent and referential, while minoritized languages tend to be ideologized as indexical. Here we see this contrast occurring within a single language—respondents construe instantiations of non-standard Catalan as indexical whereas they construe instantiations of standardized Catalan as referential.

specifically national public, even though the letters address a range of differently scaled publics. Anthropologists have long noted a link between the standardization of language and the projection of a national public. This analysis points out the necessity of considering language standardization alongside other forms of standardization that occur in print media. The visual properties of the opinion pages analyzed above are key to the process by which heterogeneous letters to the editor can project a homogeneous national public.

The standardization processes I describe here are widespread cross-culturally. However, their indexical meanings will vary depending on local language ideologies. In the case I describe (at least) two overlapping and/or conflicting language ideologies are in play. The dominant one, or at least the official institutional ideology, holds that Catalan is primarily a tool of communication (and only secondarily a sign of identity). For this reason, both *l'Avui* and *El Periódico* favor “neutral,” “transparent” and “functional” Catalan. The subordinate ideology (at least within these media institutions) holds that Catalan is primarily a sign of identity (and secondarily a tool of communication). Although at first glance, the dominant position may appear to be less Catalanist than the subordinate one, in fact both positions are completely compatible with Catalanism—holders of the dominant point of view think that a Catalan whose symbolism carries more weight than its functionality is doomed. The effort to reduce complexity and make written Catalan approximate spoken Catalan is an attempt to ensure the functionality, and therefore the future, of Catalan. This practice shifts the grounds of authority for the language from authenticity to anonymity. In the process, the authentic Catalan Civil War survivor ends up looking in print just like the young television viewer.

Both newspapers' language editors spoke to me of the importance of respecting the boundaries between registers in Catalan. They also spoke of selecting only a narrow range of linguistic material from the full array of possible forms; in short, of using only a certain register (or registers) of the language rather than its full array of registers. While this approach is consistent with the genre and the institutional goals, the predominance of institutionally-regimented Catalan in the mass media (as opposed to the heteroglossic forms that appear more regularly in mass media for larger languages) may have given non-experts that impression that newspeak is in fact the only register of Catalan (see Frekko 2009). This ideology makes Catalan seem hyper-anonymous and not authentic at all. This trait may contribute to the sense that I have described elsewhere (Frekko 2009) that Catalonia is an “abnormal” national public. The case of an “abnormal” national public permits scholars to contemplate the contours of “the public” more broadly. The erasure of variability such that a standard register can stand for the national language as a whole and such that disparate authors can stand for a generic “everyone” fosters the imagination of a national public. At the same time, if this homogenization is not balanced by the imagination of variability within the national context, the imagination of a national public seems to be limited.

Appendix

* Underlining represents material that differs between original and printed versions.

Letter 1: original

Letter 1: printed version

Joaquim Last Name

Address Barcelona

Avui—Letters to the Editor Sect.

Update the word “Democracy”

Analyze the word ‘democracy’

I liked the article by Josep A. Duran i Lleida and published the past 1/20 in which he details in panoramic, a list in which he looks and sees and analyzes and reaches a conclusion on what has to be done so that Europe realizes that Catalonia exists and because of this one has to strengthen and democratize the content of the European Union.

I liked the article by Josep A. Duran i Lleida and published the past 20th of January, in which he details in panoramic, a list in which he looks and sees and analyzes and reaches a conclusion on what has to be done so that Europe realizes that Catalonia exists: strengthen and democratize the whole of the EU.

I would like to add that the concepts of “Democracy,” as far as I’m concerned, should be accompanied by ethical and moral acts and deeds, always respecting human rights and the rights of peoples, because “democratically” and by force of arms they divided up our land, one part by the French and the other part, they added it to what they call “Spanish unity” and since there are more of them, well the result is that they deprive us and what’s more, they try to annihilate our identity from us. That’s right, very democratically.

I would like to add that democracy, as far as I’m concerned, should be accompanied by ethical and moral acts and deeds, always respecting human rights and those of peoples, because “democratically” and by force of arms they divided up our land: one part for the French and the other part, for what they call “Spanish unity”; and since there are more of them, well the result is that they deprive us and what’s more, they try to annihilate our identity. That’s right, very democratically.

Quim Catala (signature)

QUIM CATALÀ
Barcelona

Letter 2: original

From: Karles [last name] [email address]
Sent: tuesday January 28, 2003 10.01
For: letterstotheeditor
CC: c

Subject: letter about attack

VAN GAAL ATTACK

Luckily I don't watch television very often. Luckily. Because every time I turn it on, I'm more surprised. Just yesterday. My father was lounging on the sofa watching the show *Plats Bruts* ('Dirty Dishes') on TV3. So far so good. But suddenly, they interrupted the show to do a news preview. What a surprise! Instead of telling me about some tragic news, like they usually do, for example in the cases of a [terrorist] attack, they tell me about the possible resignation of Van Gaal [then head coach of Football Club Barcelona]. Everyone can think what they want, but I'm very worried about where we're headed.

Karles [last name]

[national identification number]

Castelldefels

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