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**Author:** Valencian.org  
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## **BASIC INTRODUCTION TO THE VALENCIAN LANGUAGE**

by Valencian.org

*Translation by I. Abellan*

**1- Legal status:** The Article 7.1 of the Statute of the Valencian Community (*Comunitat Valenciana*), territory that includes the provinces of Alacant, Castello and Valencia, states:

**"The two official languages of the Autonomous Community are the Valencian and the Castilian. Everyone has the right to know and use them".**

The old Kingdom of Valencia was granted the status of an Autonomous Community in 1982, and the Law regarding the linguistic normalisation of the Valencian language was approved on 23 November, 1983 B.O.E. (Official State Bulletin of Spain) 20, of 20 January, 1984.

In 1983 a 'Usage and Teaching of Valencian Act' was introduced to promote and spread the use of the language.

The Valencian has also status of European minority language. In fact it's included in the Spanish declaration of the [European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages](#).

**2- Language:** The Valencian is a romance language spoken in the Valencian Community, which is located on the Mediterranean coast of Spain. The Valencian Community has an extension of 23.305 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 4.692.449 inhabitants, according to the census made in 2005. There are three phonetically distinctive dialects: "Castellonenc" in the north, "Alacanti" in the south and "Apichat" in the center region.

**3- Speakers:** Nowadays the Valencian language is spoken by more than 2 million people spread across the Valencian Community and a small area of the border region of Murcia called "el Carche". 54.5% of the Valencian population speaks Valencian. It is the mother tongue of 39% of Valencians. 88.2% of the population understands it, but only 17.2% can read it properly. (Studies of the CIS n.2228 and 2241, **Centre for Sociological Research** of Spain, Nov-Dec 1996, March-April 1997).

**4- The Valencian linguistic conflict:** The theory that presumes that the Catalan was imported to Valencia and the Valencian is one of its dialects is defended by the Catalan nationalism, however it is a very debatable theory without any real scientific, linguistic or historical bases constructed to favour the expansionist interests of the Catalan nationalism in Valencia.

A proof of what is stated above can be found in the words of the Catalan nationalist politician **Rovira Virgili** who, some decades ago stated, regarding the intentions of the Catalan nationalism in respect to the Valencian language and Valencia;

***"by the unity of the language we will arrive to the political union".***

Therefore what they are aiming is to unify two different languages to then later try to unify two different political realities.

Regarding the Catalan theory that presumes Catalonians imported the language during the reconquest of the Kingdom of Valencia, by the King Jaume I, the recognised Spanish Arabist **Professor J. Ribera** said:

*"cuando las huestes de Jaume I llegan a Valencia se nota un fenómeno que sorprende algo: una gran parte de los nombres de los poblados de la huerta de Valencia son latinos, mejor dicho, romances (..) También los musulmanes valencianos emplearon en su vida familiar la lengua romance hasta tiempos poco anteriores a la conquista del rey Jaume I".*

The Spanish historian **Antonio Ubieto Arteta** said:

*"Pero el romance valenciano se seguía hablando en el siglo XIII, como testimonian los relativamente abundantes documentos que todavía se conservan".*

The Valencian writer **V. L. Simó Santonja** said;

*"Since the XIII century until the XX the Valencian is known with this name, in a period of auge or decadency".*

In 1928 the priest **Lluís Fullana**, the most studious philologist on the Valencian language, occupied a seat as a representative of the Valencian language in the Spanish Royal Academy (RAE).

By the introduction of the Royal Decree of November 26, 1926, the diverse Spanish languages were given access to the **Royal Spanish Language Academy (RAE)**, and among them the Valencian was always considerate

an independent language. Until the year 1965 the R.A.E. gave the following definition of the Valencian in its official dictionary:

*"Language spoken in the major part of the old Kingdom of Valencia. Language of the Valencians".*

After that date strange reasons and pressures (Catalan pressures without any doubt) changed the definition of the Valencian language and has developed to the theory that states the Valencian is a dialect of Catalan. And we question ourselves: Is it possible that it was a language for the RAE for decades and now just a dialect?. Why?. Is it a linguistic miracle?.

We can say without fear that it was an absurd and strange change with no sense and no scientific or linguistic arguments, only based on external political pressures.

During the pre-autonomy years of Valencia (1977-1981) there occurred what the mass media call **"The battle of Valencia"**. There was a very large demonstrations in the streets demanding that the Valencian identity and the Valencian language be made part of the Valencian Statute of Autonomy.

Furthermore, regardless of what some philologists and politicians say about the Valencian language and the Valencian linguistic conflict, the big majority of the Valencians have always said that the Valencian is a different and independent language from any other. And they have always called their language "Valencian" or "Valencian language".

Regarding this fact the Valencian newspapers have run decades some popular surveys over the decades. In all of them around 80-85% of the Valencian people said that the Valencian is a different and independent language. Only around a 5-10% say that the Valencian is a dialect from Catalan. A further 5-10% did not know or did not answer to the question.

In June 13, 1997 there was a massive **historic demonstration** in the streets of Valencia city where 500.000 Valencians (according to the Valencian newspaper "Las Provincias") chanted *"Yes to the Valencian language. Yes to the statute"* in clear reference to the attacks of the Catalan nationalist parties on the Valencian language in the Spanish Courts and in Valencia. A large photo file of this demonstration can be seen in this website: [www.regnedevalencia.com/fotos.htm](http://www.regnedevalencia.com/fotos.htm)

In November 27, 2004 there was a **big Demonstration** with more than 125.000 people in the streets of the city center of Valencia with the slogan; **"In defense of the Valencian Language. Not to the Catalan interferences"** in clear reference to the attacks maded by the Catalan nationalist parties on the Valencian language in the Spanish Courts, with his opposition to the presence of the Valencian language in the European Union. Also the slogan **"The Valencian, a language of Europe"** was repeated throughout the march.

A large list of photo files of the march on 27 November 2004 can be seen here: [www.elpalleter.com/actualitat/politica/noticies/27112004.html](http://www.elpalleter.com/actualitat/politica/noticies/27112004.html)

It's the second time in the last years that the Valencians demonstrate with a big demonstration in the streets the popular will about the independence of his language, the Valencian.

In 2002 the Valencian newspapers published that the Catalan Government had spent more than **6 million euros** in the last years to support the pro-Catalan campaign in the Valencian Community and to pay the "pro-Catalan" minority groups, publishing houses and publications in Valencia.

**5- Literature:** The first texts in Valencian are the "**Harches Valencianes**". They belong to the X, XI and XII centuries. These were strophes in Valencian romance inserted inside Arab religious texts, in order to make the mentioned Arabic texts understandable to people in general. **Ibn Sida**, a Muslim wise man who died in Denia in 1066 wrote:

*"I Excuse my Arabic evil since I have to coexist every day with people who speaks "gabble".*

These Arabic texts were discovered by the philologist **Stern** (and his collaborators) in 1.948, and studied by the eminent Spanish Arabist **J. Ribera**.

The Valencian writer **Jaume Roig** (XIV century) refers in his works to *"the algimia or Latin speech of the former men of Paterna, Torrent and Soterna"*.

The Valencian language has an old long tradition of brilliant literature. Its literary Golden age was the first Golden age in literature of a Romance language together with the Italian.

The "**Tirant lo Blanch**" (1490) of **Joanot Martorell** was considered by **Miguel de Cervantes** *"the best chivalrous novel in the world"*. Cervantes also wrote that the most beautiful languages were Portuguese and Valencian.

The Tirant lo Blanch is one of the most important testimonies of the Valencian language:

*"en vulgar **valenciana**, per ço que la nació d'on jo só natural se'n puixa alegrar e molt ajudar..."*.

Other very relevant authors of the Valencian literature were **Ausias March** and **Jaume Roig** with his famous "**L'Espill o llibre de les dones**" as well as the mystic poet **Sor Isabel de Villena**.

**Joan Roig de Corella** in the XV century, with his prolific production always mentioned he wrote in Valencian language;

*"trellada de lati en **valenciana lengua** ".*

The first translation of the Bible into a Romance language was made to the Valencian in 1478 by **Fra. Bonifaci Ferrer**. Nowadays only the last page of this work remains in the Spanish Society of New York. In this colophon we find the reference;

*"de la llengua latina en la **nostra valenciana**...per lo molt reverend micer Bonifaci Ferrer".*

In 1707 the "Decree of Nueva Planta" was put forward by the Spanish king Felipe V in which the Valencian rights, and therefore the usage of the Valencian language, were prohibited. This fact led Valencian language to a period of decadence.

During the XX century **Miquel Adlert**, **Bayarri** and the poet **Xavier Casp** has been the most relevant figures of the Valencian literature. Nowadays the Valencian literature is going through a revival with the appearance of new young writers and the creation of new publishing houses and magazines.

However we cannot forget the harsh reality. The Valencian and its literature lives under pressure due to the advance of the Spanish language and the strong political and linguistic attacks of the Catalan. Two strong pressures that the Valencian language and its literature try to overcome with effort.

**6- Publications:** There are a few very active publishing houses that edit in Valencian. The main publishing houses in Valencian are L' Oronella, Accio Bibliografica Valenciana, Real Academia de Cultura Valenciana, Lo Rat Penat and Del Senia al Segura.

The **Magazine of Valencian Philology** is published by **Accio Bibliografica Valenciana**. This magazine was created in 1994 and so far 15 issues have been published. Its objective is to spread the studies of philology and Valencian linguistics from various specialists from national and foreign institutions participate in it with their scientific collaborations.

Since 1996 **L'Oronella** publishes a monthly magazine in Valencian, "Lletraferit". It includes articles on Valencian culture and literature issues. They published in 2001 the book with full texts in English, Spanish, German and Valencian; **"The Valencian, a language for the XXIst century"**.

The digital magazine **"El Palleter"** presents the news and the present time of the Valencian language & culture. Its web site is updated every day.

\*(Please find more information of these three publishing houses on [www.valencian.org](http://www.valencian.org) > "Valencian Publishing houses" section).

**7- The Valencian in Expolingua:** The Valencian language has been represented in the last ten years in Expolingua (the international linguistic convention) in Lisbon, Berlin and also in Madrid, by the **Royal Academy of Valencian Culture** (RACV).

**8- Education:** The introduction of Catalan in the Valencian schools and universities has been very strong since 1982. This situation has developed into a strong politicisation of the Valencian language classes where arguing the official dogma that states the Valencian is a dialect or the facts

surrounding the Valencian linguistic conflict may lead to academic problems. The Valencian universities are under the control of pro-Catalan intellectual groups.

Valencian books, magazines, writers, intellectuals, philologists that stated that the Valencian is an independent language from Catalan are "prohibited" in the Valencian universities as well as in all the Valencian schools and some of the Valencian public TV & radios.

**9- Public administration:** Valencian has a limited presence in public administration. The administration commonly uses Catalan or Spanish and it rarely uses Valencian.

**10- Mass media & Cinema:** The use of Valencian in the audio-visual media is limited. In 1989 the regional government set up a public television channel (**Canal 9-RTVV**), however many productions are still broadcasted in Spanish. The Valencian public radio (**Radio 9**) and other local radio stations broadcast all their programs in Valencian.

The film production in Valencian has been very poor for the last twenty years. The main reason for this is the small economic subsidies from the Valencian Government to the Valencian audiovisual enterprises and generally to productions in Valencian.