

INTRODUCTION

Catalan, the language of eleven million Europeans

Origins, territory and population

Catalan, part of the Romance group of languages, was formed between the 8th and 10th centuries in the heart of the Pyrenees in the territories of the Carolingian Empire that made up the counties of the *Marca Hispanica*. During the 12th and 13th centuries, it spread southwards and eastwards following the territorial conquests of the Catalan-Aragonese crown, and the linguistic frontier being established at the end of the reign of Jaume I.

Europe and the Catalan speaking territories



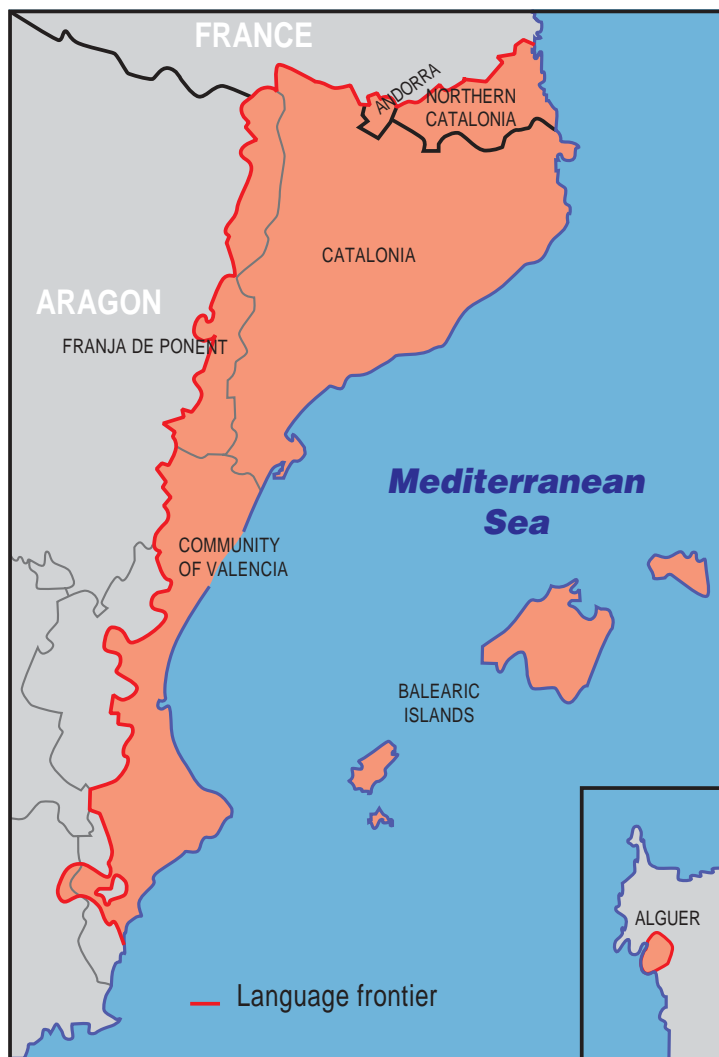
The linguistic domain of the Catalan language is spread over 68,000 Km² inhabited by 11,380,000 people (see table 1). At present, it is divided into seven territories distributed over four states: Andorra, Spain (where the majority of the population and land surface is located), France and Italy.

Table 1. Distribution of territory and population of the Catalan language (1996)

TERRITORY	STATE	SURFACE (Km ²)	POPULATION
Andorra	Andorra	468	64,311
Catalonia	Spain	31.895	6.090.040
Balearic Islands	Spain	5.014	760.379
Community of Valencia	Spain	23.291	4.009.329
Franja de Ponent (Aragon)	Spain	3.672	50.000
Northern Catalonia (France)	France	4.166	369.476
Alguer (Sardinia)	Italy	224	38.316
TOTAL		68.730	11.381.851

The linguistic domain of the Catalan language

SOURCE: Spanish territories, population statistics for 1996. Andorra, government statistics for 1994. Alguer and Northern Catalonia, Enciclopèdia Catalana 1994 figures.



As with the majority of languages, Catalan has a range of distinct geographical varieties: North-western, Valencian, Central, Northern or Roussillonais, and Balearic, along with Alguerese. In the Balearics, it is commonplace in popular terminology to call the Catalan which is spoken there after each of the islands (Majorcan, Minorcan, Ibizan and Formenteran); while in the Community of Valencia the popular term has been officially recognised by the Statute of Autonomy: Valencian.

The level of knowledge of Catalan

The level of knowledge of Catalan in the territories where it is used as a mother tongue is uneven because of the different historical and political circumstances. The censuses and registers of 1986, 1991 and 1996 have been used in order to obtain data on the degree of linguistic knowledge. From this information it can be seen that the total number of people capable of speaking Catalan is 7,300,000 and the number of people who, without

speaking it can understand it, is over 9,800,000. In addition, outside the territories where Catalan is spoken there are more than 200,000 people distributed around the world in Catalan and Balearic communities who have kept Catalan as their language within the family.

Table 2 presents this information in a more detailed fashion. In order to understand the figures correctly, it should be taken into account that the featured percentages do not correspond directly to population totals: in Catalonia they refer to people older than two; in the Community of Valencia, older than three; and in the Balearic Islands, older than five.

In addition, while the figures for Catalonia are taken from the 1996 official population survey, those of the Community of Valencia and the Balearic Islands were obtained by applying the percentages of language competence from 1991 over population figures for 1996.

Table 2. The knowledge of Catalan by territories (1996)

TERRITORY	POPULATION	SPOKEN BY		UNDERSTOOD BY	
Andorra	64,311	49,519	77.0%	62,381	97.0%
Catalonia	6,090,040	4,506,512	75.3%	5,683,237	95.0%
Balearic Islands	760,379	473,322	66.7%	629,641	88.8%
Community of Valencia	4,009,329	1,969,703	50.6%	3,199,085	82.1%
Franja de Ponent (Aragon)	50,000	45,000	90.0%	47,250	94.5%
Northern Catalonia (France)	369,476	125,622	34.0%	203,211	55.0%
Alguer (Sardinia)	38,316	17,625	46.0%	20,000	52.2%
TOTAL	11,381,851	7,187,303	63.1%	9,844,805	86.5%

SOURCE: For Catalonia, IDESCAT. For the Balearic Islands and the Community of Valencia, language census of 1991 and population of 1996. For Andorra, Government survey, 1994. For Aragon and Alguer, estimates. For Northern Catalonia, survey Médial-Pluriel (1997). Own research.