

Catalan, a unique case in Europe



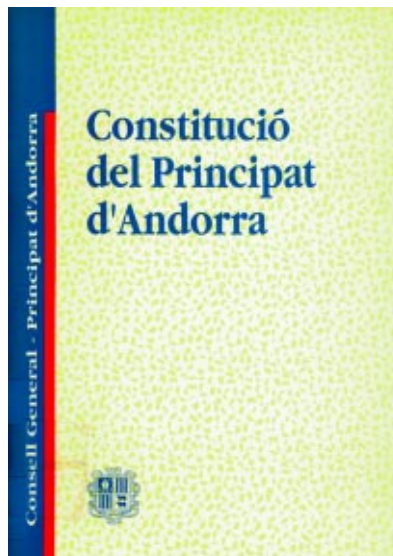
Title page of Euromosaic, a study of the minority language groups of the UE

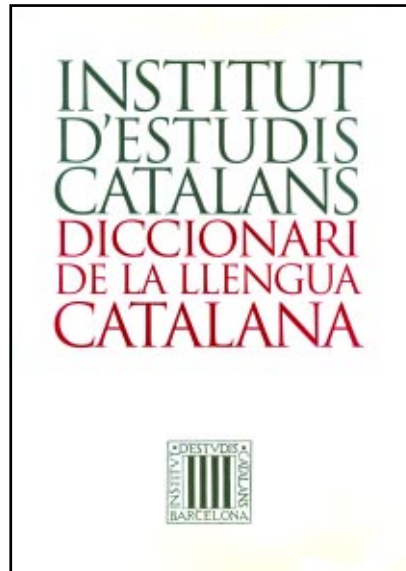
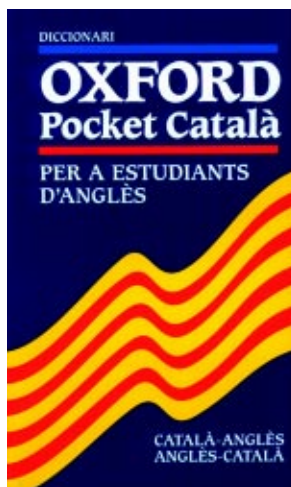
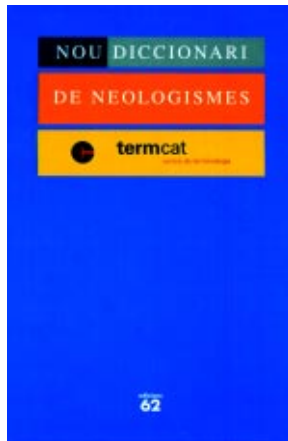
Catalan has some of the characteristics of the so-called minority languages, such as the practical inexistence of monolingual speakers and therefore a bilingual population; the fact that the territories where they are spoken are part of larger states, where the language of the majority is another; and the lack of presence in some sectors of social life.

Despite this, Catalan cannot be considered a minority language since it differs from such languages because of a series of factors which places it among those European languages spoken by a medium-sized population:

- *Because of its legal status.* It is the official language in one sovereign state (Andorra) and together with Castilian it has official status in three Spanish autonomous communities, thus giving it a significant presence in the state apparatus, and its mandatory teaching within the educational system.
- *Because of its demography.* Catalan is the seventh most-spoken language in the European Union. The number of people who speak it is greater than those who speak Finnish or Danish, and it is equivalent to the number of speakers of Swedish, Greek and Portuguese in Europe. Furthermore, according to the Euromosaic report, commissioned by the European Union, in 1991 (using data from this year) the number of Catalan speakers represented more than a third of the speakers of languages considered to be minority ones (33.5%). It is followed, at quite a distance, by speakers of Galician (13%), Occitan (11%) and German outside of Germany and Austria (9%).

The Constitution of Andorra declares Catalan the official language. Likewise, the statutes of autonomy of Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and the Community of Valencia declare it an official language together with Castilian





- *Because of its socio-linguistic situation.* It has not been abandoned by its speakers (apart for a few exceptions) and is passed down from generation to generation. 95% of citizens from Andorra, Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, along with over 80% from the Community of Valencia, understand it. Furthermore, people who settle down to live in these territories traditionally have tended to learn it and use it in public and even in family relationships. This is clearly far from the figures in places such as Occitania or Brittany, where less than a quarter of the population actually speak the language.
- *Because of its linguistic range.* Catalan is a fully codified, regulated and standardised language totally accepted by academics and citizens alike. It has a recognised linguistic authority, and its linguistic resources and studies on grammar, lexicography, etymology, dialectology, terminology, history of the language and onomastics are comparable with those of the great Romance languages. It is endowed with a standard dictionary (by the Institut d'Estudis Catalans) and a great number of other published dictionaries, along with bilingual dictionaries in the most important languages in the world, such as English, Castilian, French, German, Russian and Chinese. Furthermore, Catalan has a great capacity for inventing and spreading the use of all kinds of newly-coined words and phrases and a systematic methodology for their standardisation.