

## The activities of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (Institute of Catalan Studies) for the standardization of Catalan geographical names

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### Abstract

With more than one hundred years of history, one of the core activities of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (Institute of Catalan Studies) since its foundation has been its work as academy of the Catalan language. This activity also has included the standardization of Catalan geographical names, in accordance with the law. The present study describes the main activities of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans related to the standardization of Catalan geographical names since the foundation of its Office of Toponymy at the end of 1921 to current time. The Institut is a member of the Comissió de Toponímia de Catalunya (Commission of Toponymy of Catalonia), which is the organ for advice, inquiries and proposals for official standardization of Catalan toponyms. Its main project has been to carry out the *Nomenclator oficial de toponímia major de Catalunya*, a gazetteer requested by the Catalan government that standardizes more than 54.000 Catalan geographical names.

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### Introduction

Spain is a multilingual country in which Spanish is presently the official language of the entire state. Catalan is the natural language of region of Catalunya (Catalonia) and it is official in this area along with Spanish and Aranese. Catalunya, like Euskadi (Basque Country) and Galicia, is one of the bilingual autonomous regions of Spain. Autonomous regions are administrative divisions of the Spanish territory and they have local governments. These local governments have jurisdiction over specific areas. In Catalunya and some other bilingual autonomous regions, local governments also have jurisdiction over toponyms.

The Institut d'Estudis Catalans has become the academy of the Catalan language and it is responsible for the regulation of this language. Today it is known almost exclusively for this role, which has been legally recognized since 1991. Starting in 1998, the institute assumed the responsibility of standardizing Catalan geographical names in accordance with the law (with the exception of names of municipalities and populated areas that have a special legislation in the entire territory).

### Origins of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans<sup>1</sup>

The Institut d'Estudis Catalans was founded at the beginning of the 20th century. The institute was created to organize the Catalan scientific community and to achieve international scope. The idea was first mentioned in 1906 during the celebration of the First International Congress of Catalan Language and Literature, which had an attendance of approximately 3000. The objectives of this Congress were to reinforce Catalan culture, promote scientific research in Catalunya and to support the Catalan language.

In 1907 the president of the Diputació de Barcelona (Barcelona Provincial Council), Enric Prat de la Riba, founded the Institut d'Estudis Catalans. During that period, the main activity of the institute was the historical research and preservation of the Catalan Romanesque art of the Pyrenees. In addition, the institute created its own library to support Catalan researchers.

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<sup>1</sup> More detailed information about the history of IEC can be found in: Balcells *et al.* (2008a) and Balcells *et al.* (2008b).

In 1914, following a request of the Catalan government, the library was finally opened to the public and became the Biblioteca Nacional de Catalunya (National Library of Catalonia), which is still active today. During its first decade of existence, the institute promoted research and several scientific activities.

The activities related to the Catalan language and Onomastics were initiated in 1911, when the Philological Section of the institute was founded to regulate the Catalan language. In the years to come, several milestones were achieved to reach this goal under the leadership of Pompeu Fabra. In 1913 it was published the *Normes ortogràfiques*, which forms the foundation of modern spelling regulations for the Catalan language and is still in use today. Among the notable works that followed, are the *Diccionari ortogràfic* in 1917, the first official Catalan dictionary, the *Gramàtica catalana* in 1918, the first official Catalan grammar, and the *Diccionari general de la llengua catalana* in 1932, which established Catalan as a modern and cultural language. Little by little, the Institut d'Estudis Catalans consolidated its function as an academic, scientific and cultural institution. Having attained maximum public recognition of its academic role, and having established a policy of linguistic normalization, the institute became a member of the International Academic Union in 1922.

### Office of Toponymy and Onomastics

From the start, Onomastics and, particularly, Toponymy, were very important subjects of this institution. The Office of Toponymy and Onomastics was founded at the end of 1921. The director at this time was Josep M. de Casacuberta, who despite the young age of 24 possessed a solid linguistic education.

As can be read from a memo written by Casacuberta one month later, the main objective of the new office was to prepare the *Diccionari de toponímia i onomàstica catalanes*, a large dictionary in which to record toponyms pertaining to Catalan as well as those from the trans-boundary languages, Occitan and Aragonese. Also mentioned in this memo was the need to standardize the names of Catalan municipalities listed in the official gazetteer, the *Nomenclàtor de les ciutats, viles i pobles de Catalunya*, published in 1918 by the Catalan government, the Mancomunitat (Moran 2011).

The office was active about two years before the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera began. During these two years the main activity of the office consisted of work on several aspects of the toponymic dictionary. The field work to collect oral forms through questionnaires and the search of ancient documents in archives, contemporary studies and maps, were the main sources of information for this project.

During the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, between 1924 and 1930, the use of Catalan was prohibited. The Office of Toponymy and Onomastics was inactive during this time and the Lexicographic Office of the Philological Section of the institute survived in precarious conditions (Moran 2011). However, some of the activities of the Office of Toponymy and Onomastics were continued externally. In 1927 Emili Vallès, who was an ordinary collaborator of the Lexicographic Office, published a dictionary named *Pal·las*, which contains a list of Catalan municipality names as well as the most significant Catalan exonyms. This is noteworthy because the list already contains the standardized forms for the Catalan municipality names, which were probably obtained from the institute.

After the dictatorship ended in 1930, the institute resumed its regular activities. At this time, Joan Coromines joined the Office of Toponymy. He would gradually replace Josep M. de Casacuberta since, by that time, Casacuberta had already started his own publishing company (Moran 2011).

In 1931, the Catalan government, the Generalitat, made one of its most important commitments to the institute. They requested the Philological Section of the institute to standardize the names of the Catalan municipalities so that the next official gazetteer of the Catalan government could use them. The people in charge of this project were Pompeu Fabra, Josep M. de Casacuberta and Joan Coromines. The complete list of standardized names was published in 1933. The criteria for this standardization were the same as those used for the toponymic dictionary: etymological research, collection of forms from old documents and collection of genuine oral forms (*Llista dels noms* 1933: 6). Starting in 1935, the above mentioned people, along with Manel Sanchis Guarner, visited Valencia to begin to work on a similar list for the names of Valencian municipalities (Balcells et al. 2008a: 300). This list was published in 1938 (Rosselló 2004: 181).

During the period before the Spanish Civil War, activities related to the toponymic dictionary continued. As with other projects in the institute, these activities profited from a very common practice in Catalunya at that time consisting of scientific excursions. Among others, the Club Excursionista de Catalunya, the Club Excursionista de Gràcia, and later the Societat Catalana de Geografia, regularly carried out field work using questionnaires prepared by the office. Along with the collection of data to elaborate the dictionary, the office continued working on the standardization of toponyms, since the Catalan government had transferred its cartographic department to the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, and the Philological Section was requested to collaborate in the standardization of names for the official maps (Balcells et al. 2008a: 276-277).

After the Spanish Civil War and during Franco's regime, the use of Catalan was again prohibited. Especially during the first years of this period, the institute was forced to operate under very precarious conditions. Luckily for the Office of Toponymy and Onomastics, the responsibility of the main project of the office, the toponymic dictionary, was personally assumed by Joan Coromines while in exile.<sup>2</sup> He was able to preserve all material collected by the institute over the period of almost a decade. And this material would be the seed of his *Onomasticon Cataloniae*, published between 1989 and 1997.<sup>3</sup>

### Continuation of normal activities in IEC

In 1976, the Institut d'Estudis Catalans was legally recognized as an academic, scientific and cultural institution. This was a public recognition of the scientific research in several fields promoted by the institution, with special emphasis on the Philological Section and its prominent role in the establishment of the current linguistic normative of Catalan.

The legal recognition of the institute with respect to its responsibilities for regulating the Catalan language was granted in 1991 via a law passed by the Catalan government. That same year, under the direction of Jordi Carbonell, the former Office of Toponymy and Onomastics, was reestablished, now simply named Office of Onomastics. The primary

<sup>2</sup> Detailed information about the management of the project carried out by Joan Coromines in exile can be found in the correspondence between Joan Coromines and Josep M. de Casacuberta at Ferrer *et al.* 2005.

<sup>3</sup> As a tribute to his mentor, Joan Coromines added the following mention in the title page of each volume: "Obra fundada per Josep M. de Casacuberta" [Work founded by Josep M. de Casacuberta].

activity of this office was the standardization of the Catalan toponyms displayed on road signage. This project was promoted by the Catalan government through the Departament de Política Territorial i Obres Públiques.

More specifically, the project's main objective was to verify the spelling of the names and additional information displayed on Catalan road signs. For several years, the office prepared reports to correct misspelled or incomplete names. At the same time, linguistic criteria for road signage was published in order to distribute information related to the standardization of geographical names, as a way of providing assistance to individuals or institutions in charge of this activity (*Criteris lingüístics*: 1992). By the end of 1990's, the Office of Onomastics had obtained a high level of credibility with regards to the standardization of Catalan toponyms.

### **The Comissió de Toponímia de Catalunya (Commission of Toponymy of Catalonia) and the *Nomenclàtor oficial de toponímia major de Catalunya* (Official gazetteer of Catalan geographical names)**

A significant milestone with regards to the standardization of geographical names was a law passed by the Catalan government which indicated that toponyms located in Catalunya are to be standardized only in Catalan and according to the linguistic normative of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, with the exception of those located in Val d'Aran, which are in Aranese and are subject to the linguistic regulation of the Conselh Generau d'Aran.

During the same year, the Catalan government ordered the creation of a commission to elaborate a gazetteer which would include the major toponyms of Catalunya. This commission consisted of several departments of the Catalan government, the Institut d'Estudis Catalans and some additional entities. In 2001, this commission was consolidated to form the official Comissió de Toponímia de Catalunya.

The main function of the commission is the coordination of all the institutions involved in the standardization of toponyms. Additional activities include proposition of criteria for toponym usage in road signage, cartography, publishing and news media, according to the linguistic normative of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans and the Conselh Generau d'Aran. In addition, the commission proposes criteria for the standardization of municipal toponymy.

A major project carried out by the commission is the *Nomenclàtor oficial de toponímia major de Catalunya*, the official gazetteer of Catalan toponyms. The purpose of this publication was to standardize a considerable amount of Catalan toponyms and to publicize normalized and official names. This *Nomenclàtor* has been prepared by following the United Nations recommendations on standardization of geographical names.

The gazetteer is based on a scale of 1:50.0000 and thus far consists of two editions. The purpose of the second edition was to complete the scale and to add some improvements. This edition consists of two volumes and one index. The size of each volume is larger than the first edition, thus allowing the use of a better cartography. Catalan toponyms are displayed via maps of municipalities. Each map includes the etymology of the municipality name. In addition, a major improvement of the second edition is the replacement of the statistical information that appears in the first edition by a list of toponyms displayed on the map.

One of the recommendations made by the United Nations is the collection of the oral forms of toponyms to encourage the correct pronunciation of the names. For this reason, the second edition of the *Nomenclàtor* includes a phonetic transcription of the names of municipalities and populated areas, according to the system of the International Phonetic Association. The transcriptions of the names correspond to the local spoken forms. In addition, the local spoken forms were recorded and they are available at the official web site of the *Nomenclàtor*. We hope that this information will help professionals in the television and radio media to correct common mistakes in the pronunciation of geographical names.

With respect to the oral forms of Catalan toponyms, the establishment of criteria for the phonetic transcriptions was not always a trivial task since, occasionally, more than one oral form of a given toponym was encountered. In a normal study, one would simply collect the forms, but in this case, only the one most appropriate for an official gazetteer could be included. The level of formality and the dialectological traits are the main criteria to determine the most appropriate form. However, typology is complicated and it was necessary to consider every case individually.<sup>4</sup>

During the preparation of the *Nomenclàtor*, the task of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans was to establish the linguistic criteria for the standardization of Catalan toponyms and their application. The institute was also in charge of coordinating the work of the *Consorti per a la Normalització Lingüística*, which itself was responsible for the field work. The Office of Onomastics of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans provided the technicians of the *Consorti* with the necessary training to perform this field work and held a series of meetings to supervise progress.<sup>5</sup>

**Other projects: *Criteris per a la toponímia d'àmbit municipal* (Linguistic criteria for the road signage) and *Nomenclàtor toponímic de la Catalunya del Nord* (Gazetteer of Catalan geographical names of Northern Catalonia)**

One of the most important secondary effects of all this work has been the increasing interest in the standardization of toponyms in several additional contexts. One example was the increasing demand for criteria to standardize municipal toponymy. Since every municipality is individually responsible for this task, the Office of Onomastics promoted the publication of a book to provide assistance for this activity. These criteria were published in 2006 by the Comissió de Toponímia de Catalunya and have been widely accepted (*Criteris per a la toponímia: 2006*).

In 2007, in collaboration with the University of Perpignan, the Institut d'Estudis Catalans published the *Nomenclàtor toponímic de la Catalunya del Nord*. Northern Catalonia is a small geographical area in France that was part of Catalunya until the 17th Century, at which time it was ceded to France by the Treaty of the Pyrenees (1659). In 2007 Catalan was recognized as an official language in this zone. This area still contains an abundance of Catalan names and it is the intention of the *Nomenclàtor* to publicize the standardized forms of these names. It is notable that this is the first gazetteer that includes the phonetic transcription of Catalan names. It also includes an appendix containing the Occitan names of this region.

<sup>4</sup> For more detailed information about the criteria concerning the phonetic transcriptions see Rabella, Joan Anton: 2010.

<sup>5</sup> More detailed information about the criteria used for the standardization and the process of elaboration of the *Nomenclàtor* can be found at Moran, Josep; Rabella, Joan Anton: 2004.

To conclude the description of the activities of the institute related to the standardization of Catalan geographical names, I would like to mention that the institute is a member of the Comisión Especializada de Nombres Geográficos, which is the Spanish commission for the elaboration of the national Spanish gazetteer, which allows us to monitor the use of official Catalan names in the official Spanish cartography and also to share our experience with other members of the commission.

### **Summary of the main activities of the Office of Onomastics regarding the standardization of Catalan geographical names**

- Establishes the criteria for the standardization of geographical names of Catalunya according to United Nations recommendations.
- Counsels on standardization of names of municipalities and populated places.
- Counsels on standardization of municipal toponyms.
- Currently works on the criteria to standardize exonyms.
- Offers special training to people working for mass communication, college students or any company or institution that needs information about the public use of Catalan geographical names.

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