

13 Sport, media and identities in the era of globalisation

The role of football broadcasts in consolidating the Catalan language

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Introduction

Sport is a phenomenon that forms part of the lives of thousands of people, whether as players, fans or simply spectators. At the same time, it is often presented as a paradigmatic element of globalisation which alters local cultural practices (Rowe, 2003). This creates tensions with national identities, even more so in the case of stateless nations. Such is the case with Catalonia, where national identity is closely linked to the local language, Catalan (Guimerà and Fernández, 2014). Sport, and football in particular, has a strong symbolic component in Catalonia because it has often been a way of expressing an identity and a culture that have been persecuted at various times in history (Xifra and McKie, 2012). The media play a very important role in this relationship. Since the end of the 1970s, sports broadcasts in Catalan have been fundamental to the recovery and more widespread use of the language. In the context of today's society, where democracy prevails and the use of Catalan has become a normal occurrence, the language no longer faces a threat from political regimes. It does, however, face other challenges deriving from the inherent tendencies of globalisation.

This chapter studies the contribution of football broadcasts in consolidating the Catalan language after four decades of democracy and language normalisation in Catalonia – the concept of “language normalisation”, which is used throughout the text, refers to the policy of recovering the Catalan language and returning it to standard everyday use after the stage of imposing Spanish had passed. The aim is to analyse whether 40 years after the end of the Franco

dictatorship the use of Catalan has become a purely professional issue or whether sports broadcasters still act as guarantors of the language in a country where the use, maintenance and dissemination of minority languages carry great political weight.

The study follows a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews. The sample comprises broadcasters responsible for Catalan commentary on FC Barcelona, RCD Espanyol and other Catalan teams, both on radio and television, and in the public and private media. Given that the academic literature has previously discussed the work done by pioneers of broadcasts in Catalan (Faura, 2007; Ginesta and Tresserras, 2016; Martí, 2007), we have narrowed the sample down to professionals born in the mid to late 1970s, between the end of the Franco dictatorship and the beginning of democracy in Spain. Therefore, they experienced the normal use of Catalan in their schooling.

Along with this, we have also taken audience data into account to determine the list of interviewees who have developed their career in the media with the largest audiences, in both radio and television. In Catalonia, the two most listened to talk radio stations are regional and in Catalan: the public Catalunya Ràdio and private RAC1, totalling 1,615,000 listeners and 11.8 per cent of share. In the television sector, the public channel TV3 is leading the audience in Catalonia, with 1.6 million daily viewers (AIMC, 2019). Following these criteria, the final sample comprises the following journalists:

- Ricard Torquemada, for many years right-hand man to pioneer Joaquim Maria Puyal on Catalunya Ràdio's *La Transmissió d'en Puyal* (TdP) and currently leading broadcaster on the Catalan public radio station with *La Transmissió d'en Torquemada* (TdT)
- Bernat Soler, in recent years responsible for football broadcasts on Televisió de Catalunya and Torquemada's colleague on Catalunya Ràdio's TdT since the beginning of the 2018–19 season
- Àlex Castells, football commentator for Televisió de Catalunya
- Jordi Sunyer, local commentator on Catalan football for Televisió de Catalunya

- Joan Maria Pou, director of FC Barcelona broadcasts on the private radio station RAC1, *El Barça juga a RAC1*
- Eduard de Batlle, director of RCD Espanyol broadcasts on the private radio station RAC1, *L'Espanyol juga a RAC1*.

Prior to the analysis of modern-day broadcasts, we address the context in which sports media coverage is integrated, the interdependence between the various actors that make up the global sport media complex and the challenges for local identities, focusing on the case of Catalonia.

Sport, globalisation and identity in stateless nations

Sport, and especially certain events, entities and sportspeople, have reached a dimension far beyond their territorial boundaries. Moreover, the emergence of competitions that transcend the national sphere, the growth of international sports structures and organisations, the global evolution of the sports business, and the comparison of rules and regulations seem to point to a the progressive dissolution of particular local and national features in favour of a process of homogenisation (Maguire, 2005). The question is what impact globalised sport is having and what tensions it is generating. It is worth bearing in mind that sport is closely linked to local cultures and traditions. At the same time, however, it is a cultural manifestation in which certain values are transmitted through long-term processes that go beyond national frameworks, especially in the media. As Maguire (1999, p. 3) stated, “these processes – involving an increasing intensification of global interconnectedness – appear to be gathering momentum and despite their ‘unevenness’, it is more difficult to understand local or national experiences without reference to these global flows”.

According to Maguire, then, it is advisable to take globalisation processes into account when observing sport in its local or national dimension, since these entail their own values and cultural models. However, it is also necessary to consider the different effects that globalisation has at the local level, which might raise question marks over the theory of homogenisation. In sport, opposing trends can occur simultaneously, some towards universalisation and others towards a greater particularisation. In short, “globalisation is marked culturally by

processes of ‘glocalisation’, whereby local cultures adapt and redefine any global product to suit their particular needs, beliefs and customs” (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004, p. 554).

The sociology of sport has highlighted resistances to the globalisation process. For Rowe, there is sufficient evidence of resilience in the national, the local and the particular which cannot be attributed only to certain limits or mismatches when it comes to translating global recipes to the local:

Deeper consideration might be given to the lineaments of the institutional formation of sport itself, and to the analytical possibility that sport may do more than exhibit and resist different elements of globalisation. Sport’s compulsive attachment to the production of national difference may, instead, constitutively repudiate the embrace of the global.

Rowe, 2003, p. 292

Among these resistances, the idea of nation stands out, which “in the case of sport (especially that of an international, competitive kind), is simultaneously problemised and mobilised by globalisation” (Rowe, 2003, p. 228). In the academic sphere, there is consensus that sport influences the shaping of the concept of nation as an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991, pp. 6–7). The mediatisation of sport contributes to the construction of collective and personal identities, such as the national identity (Bernstein and Blain, 2003), which are expressed in sporting events and through identification with a certain team. A confrontation of nationalities is established (Hargreaves, 1986) in which the individual becomes part of a “we” through identification with the team and the community. As Hobsbawm (1990, p. 143) points out, “the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people. The individual, even the one who only cheers, becomes a symbol of his nation himself”. This phenomenon is especially relevant in the case of stateless nations such as Catalonia. In fact, despite the difficulties of enjoying political and cultural recognition as a nation among the international political powers, public Catalan paradiplomacy and nationalist organisations have managed to symbolically articulate Catalonia’s national identity through sport (Xifra and McKie, 2012).

Above and beyond global events, however, as the world's most popular sport, football is a key element in the construction of local, regional and national imagined communities (Giulianotti, 1999). The confrontation of identities has been very present in Spanish football for decades. As noted by O'Brien (2013, p. 316), "the introduction and development of football at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries served as a fulcrum for existing Centre-Region tensions between Barcelona and Madrid, Catalonia and Spain", in such a way that the rivalry between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid has been framed within a set of political and cultural tensions that are characteristic of the relationship between Catalonia and Spain. According to Xifra and McKie (2012, p. 820), FC Barcelona has exercised the role of "national ambassador of Catalonia", in a paradigmatic example of Nye's concept of soft power (Nye, 2004), linked in this case to sports prestige. At the same time, the symbolic weight of Barça (as the club is popularly known) contributes to "create or recreate the national community, strengthen its cohesion and bestow a transcendental facet upon it" (Xifra, 2008, p. 197).

The global mediatisation of football: a challenge for local identities and cultures

Mediatisation is a key factor in understanding sport in modern society (Bernstein and Blain, 2002), to the point that sports and the media have become a very relevant interdependent couple. Sport constitutes strategic content for the media business and the media industry is fully involved in a sector in which power relations are played out (Boyle and Haynes, 2009). Sports and the media form part of a network that several authors have described as a sport media complex, in which it is not possible to understand "the dynamics of sports organisations without considering them within a complex network that includes the media, commercial organisations and public administration" (Ginesta and San Eugenio, 2013, p. 3).

Football has always had a commercial dimension, but this aspect has intensified in the era of new media and digitization, characterised by media systems that are increasingly oriented towards instantaneousness and globality

(Boyle and Haynes, 2004). As the football business has evolved over recent decades, the clubs have turned into football companies. In the Spanish case, FC Barcelona and Real Madrid are not only key players in the global media-sports complex, but, as Ginesta points out, also diversify what they have to offer to become multinational entertainers:

In addition to football being a spectacle (exported and mediatised worldwide), these organisations structure a range of products that complement this spectacle (including communicative products), which are launched on an international market and allow fans to show their passion for their colours in all areas of everyday life.

Ginesta, 2011, p. 163

This global mediatisation relativises cultural identities. Giulianotti and Robertson (2004, p. 561) refer to elite football clubs as “TNCs [transnational corporations] with strong glocal dimensions, that have retained strong legal, financial and symbolic ties to their home cities and surrounding cultures while building competitive success and supporter markets internationally”. Mediatisation makes global fandom possible. In the case of Spanish football, this contrasts with the traditional support of the local fan clubs as a factor in maintaining cultural and sports identity. As noted by O’Brien (2016, p. 8), “the postmodern blurring between tradition and the global occurs at the Camp Nou or the Bernabeu, when the global fan fuses with the local supporter to manufacture the pastiche of the mega-spectacle”.

In spite of everything, even in an era of globalisation, local cultural particularities still matter, because “the values and norms of a society continue to shape the footballing culture that it produces” (Boyle and Haynes, 2004, p. 162). Although the big clubs have a brand with a strong global capital that facilitates the marketing and sale of their diverse range of products, at the same time they also maintain certain cultural ties with their community. In this context, language is an element that establishes and preserves identity, through its use by both the club and the media.

Football, identities and minority language media: the case of Catalan

The analysis of media systems has traditionally focused on countries, but hardly on national realities within states. Globalisation requires research beyond the nation-state, which is surpassed by both the impetus of transnational realities and the resistance of stateless nations (Livingstone, 2003). This is the case of Catalonia, with its own media system that has been developed since the 1980s and in which the Catalan language plays a key role. Catalonia is one of Spain's autonomous regions, with a population of over 7.5 million inhabitants, 16 percent of the State total (Idescat, 2019). Ninety-five percent of the population understands Catalan, Catalonia's own language and the joint official language with Spanish; 73 percent can speak it, 78 percent can read it and 55 percent know how to write it. However, around 50 percent of the population use Spanish as their everyday language, while 36 percent use Catalan and 8.6 percent use both languages. This situation has been made possible due to the legislative and executive powers' policy of "normalising" the Catalan language.

It is essential to note that during the Franco dictatorship Catalonia lost its right to self-government and the Catalan language was banned and persecuted. After the democratic institutions were recovered with the restoration of the Autonomous Government of Catalonia (Generalitat) in 1977, the Parliament of Catalonia approved the Normalisation Act in 1983. Alongside the 2006 Statute of Autonomy, a legal framework was set up that would be decisive in the recovery and consolidation of Catalan as the language of Catalonia (and joint official language with Spanish, which is the official language of Spain). In fact, Catalan was considered an essential component of the national identity of Catalonia, an idea shared by the different political factions in Catalonia.

In the Catalan case, the idea of nation is closely linked to its cultural dimension. Language policy in Catalonia has been oriented towards developing the media in Catalan and so-called language immersion – the use of Catalan as a vehicular language in schools – which has resulted in an improvement in the status of the language (Guimerà and Fernández, 2014). At the same time, communication policies have aimed to consolidate the media system in Catalan,

a key factor given that, from a constructivist perspective, the mass media can be understood as a “socialising institution that is often used as a tool for fostering national belonging” (Castelló, 2009, p. 315).

Not only are national identities debated in the political arena, but the nation-building process has also become an everyday concern in social environments, and here the media greatly influence how national identity frameworks are shaped. The communication policies implemented by the Catalan government since the 1980s have been successful because they have consolidated a private and public media system in Catalan, strengthened the capacity for self-government and increased the supply of media products in Catalan (Guimerà and Fernández, 2014). In practice, these policies have proved key in shaping the supply of media products, which has had a positive response from the audience, especially in the audiovisual sector.

Sports represent the most important strategic content for the media in Catalan, and especially that linked to FC Barcelona. Throughout its history, TV3 has achieved record numbers thanks to broadcasts of Barça games, and sports programmes in Catalan on the radio have far exceeded their Spanish counterparts’ ratings. The Catalan language is a singular and differentiating element for the media in Catalonia. Even in the case of radio it has been a factor of commercial standardisation because it has acted as a way of attracting audience (Fernández-Quijada, Sellas and Bonet, 2013). However, despite the fact that the media’s relevance to minority languages is generally accepted, their influence is closely linked to other factors, such as institutional policies, the role of the audiovisual public service and symbolic elements linked to language (Cormack, 2007). These diverse aspects come together in the role that sports broadcasts in Catalan have played in “normalising” the language.

Football broadcasting in Catalan as a tool for recovering and “normalising” the language

The public media were created in Catalonia at the beginning of the 1980s. Catalunya Ràdio began broadcasting on 20 June 1983, and TV3, Televisió de Catalunya, on 10 September of the same year, that is, eight years after the death

of Franco. Despite being a key instrument in the recovery of the language, the Catalan public media were not pioneers in the subject that we are dealing with – football broadcasts in Catalan – as the first Catalan games were broadcast by private broadcasters. The first Catalan broadcast of an FC Barcelona game after the Franco dictatorship was on 5 September 1976 and took place at Radio Barcelona, a station belonging to Cadena SER, led by Joaquim Maria Puyal. It was a match between FC Barcelona and Las Palmas, which ended 4–0. Beyond the broadcast of the match itself, these first commentaries played a fundamental role in normalising the Catalan language. Puyal himself reflected on the role that these programmes had in recovering the language, and their determined commitment to broadcast football matches in Catalan: “In that context, when all Barça broadcasts in Catalonia were in Spanish, we made a commitment to football in Catalan. We had all the potential of the Catalan language in our favour: the symbolic and metaphorical world that a language is capable of building in a group universe” (Puyal, 2007a, p. 57).

Joaquim Maria Puyal began Catalan broadcasts of FC Barcelona matches in a context where the Catalan media space was not yet as we know it now, and years before the use of Catalan became standardised in the sphere of communication. To do those first broadcasts, and throughout his career as a professional in the field, Puyal sought a model of the Catalan language that could connect with as many of his audience as possible, i.e. one that was natural but at the same time respected the rules of the language. It was a question of introducing a standard that was “intelligent due to it being functional, and solid due to it being normative” (Puyal, 2007b, p. 118). Thus, beyond looking for new ways of broadcasting the games he was commentating on, Puyal created a standard for the commentaries that ended up impregnating his fellow professionals with a language that was rigorous in its correct usage and the creation of a new lexicon, because the use of sports language in Catalan had disappeared from the media after 40 years of Franco’s dictatorship.

As Ginesta and Tresserras (2016, p. 41) note, the first football commentators in Catalan after the dictatorship, with Puyal at their head, exhibited “a militant attitude towards the normalisation of Catalan on the airwaves”. The use of Catalan in the first sports broadcasts of FC Barcelona

games was key to the language's recovery and normalisation. Through media coverage of football, use of the language extended to the social and popular fields. This is a key fact for experts, because to attain validity a language must be used in various aspects of personal and collective life (Martí, 2007).

Thus, the broadcasting of football matches on the radio was an important element for the normalisation of Catalan following the Franco dictatorship. In this regard, Faura (2007) maintains that with the return of communication in Catalan after the dictatorship, it was audiovisual media, and especially the radio, that were responsible for re-creating a terminology in the language associated with the world of sport and especially football, and that played a key role in its recovery. Along the same lines, Bassols (1999) emphasises that the first radio broadcasts of FC Barcelona games played a fundamental role in the normalisation of Catalan due to the social influence acquired by the terminology used in these programmes and its adoption for everyday use by Catalan society, given that "the discourse of football directly influences the conceptual structure we then project on the world and the symbolic universe" (p. 101).

Catalan football broadcasting in a globalised world: still a matter of militancy

At present, the range of media in Catalan differs hugely from that offered at the end of the Franco dictatorship. If then there were no audiovisual media using the Catalan language, nowadays there is a well-established media sector, with public and private media on offer on both radio and television. Sports broadcasts, which began with football and FC Barcelona matches, have now been extended to other clubs that play in the Spanish First Division (RCD Espanyol and Girona FC), and matches involving Nàstic de Tarragona and Lleida Esportiu have also been broadcast when they played in the First Division. Aside from football at different levels, we also find Catalan broadcasts of other sports, such as basketball, handball and roller hockey, to name but a few. Regarding which media offer these, beyond the public media of the Catalan Broadcasting Corporation (Televisió de Catalunya and Catalunya Ràdio), there is also a range of private media that broadcast in the Catalan language.

According to interviewees, those professionals who broadcast in Catalan currently do so from a dual perspective: as journalists, of course, but also as professionals aware that their working tool is a minority language. Their point of reference is Joaquim Maria Puyal, who all of them acknowledge as a pioneer. In this regard, Joan Maria Pou states that “Puyal is the reference and we feel like his inheritors. His work was fundamental. There are ways of talking about situations in the game that we only knew when we started out because Puyal introduced them” (personal communication, 22 June 2017). And Bernat Soler adds:

I always say that he invented the chair, that is, four legs, a place to sit and a backrest. And from there, some of us have made it out of leather, others have made it out of plastic ... but in the end the chair, which is what we use to sit on, was invented by him. I believe that all those who broadcast in Catalan are Puyal’s inheritors, and to deny this is to deny reality.

Telephone interview, 14 December 2018

All of the interviewees are aware of the importance of using accurate Catalan, although it is not an aspect that applies only to commentary. According to Ricard Torquemada, they don’t have any training in that respect, but they do monitor what they say (personal interview, 22 June 2017). Just as they see themselves as inheritors of the first football commentators in Catalan after the dictatorship, the current ones believe their role is to ensure the correct use of the language, despite being in a more “normalised” social and political environment than 40 years ago. Thus, Àlex Castells considers that their specific job in the media is to defend the integrity of the Catalan language, as any other media expressed in any other language would do (telephone interview, 13 December 2018). And Jordi Sunyer adds that, despite his Catalan-speaking education, they “must continue to be alert, there’s no doubt about that. We have this role, we must continue to take the utmost care in our use of language, that is sacred” (personal interview, 20 September 2017). He admits that there is a pressure on the public media professionals because they play a role as prescribers of the language. And all the professionals consulted, both public and private, explain that while their media companies have language departments that monitor the

correct use of Catalan, individually they also try to use Catalan as well as possible to do their job.

All of these journalists work in an environment where, although “normalised”, Catalan is a minority language. Most of the audiovisual content on offer in Catalonia is dominated by Spanish-speaking media, even if it is the Catalan media that are the audience leaders. With respect to this, Bernat Soler states that they have a large audience, but the media environment is dominated by Spanish-speaking media, so “the truth is that we are a little bit alone” (telephone interview, 14 December 2018). The commentators still believe that their language work is very important. Eduard de Batlle, for example, states that he feels like a “militant” in the use of Catalan, because “those of us who work with language, in this case, Catalan, as a vehicle for our work, and those of us who basically dedicate ourselves to communication and speaking in Catalan, we are militants” (telephone interview, 13 December 2018). In this way, they maintain the link with the first commentators on games in the Catalan language, who also considered themselves militants in ensuring the correct use of the language in their work. Ricard Torquemada goes further and warns that the language is in danger, so media professionals must protect it. And Joan Maria Pou summarises it: “We have the responsibility to use Catalan correctly. Does this turn us into militants of the language? Doing journalism and radio, this is what has to be” (personal communication, 22 June 2017).

Playing as defenders and prescribers of the language, these football commentators also act as socialising agents, allowing listeners to feel as members of a national community and even helping them to improve their linguistic skills. Ricard Torquemada states that they do appreciate the benefits for the audience and gives the examples of people outside Catalonia who have learnt Catalan thanks to their broadcasts, or foreigners who use radio to learn the language in Barcelona (personal interview, 22 June 2017). Eduard de Batlle highlights that

we do know that we address to a specific community, that of Catalans who want to follow their team’s matches in Catalan, wherever they are. We are aware of who we are addressing to. This is a relationship

that we cannot give up. And we do not want to do it either. We are what we are.

Telephone interview, 13 December 2018

Therefore, football commentators in Catalan see themselves as guarantors of a tradition within a particular cultural framework. This explains a usual situation that happens when FC Barcelona matches are broadcast on a Spanish television channel and the Catalan audience turn down the volume of the television and turn on the radio to listen to the broadcast in their own language. As Jordi Sunyer points out, this action reflects a pattern acquired over time that goes beyond football:

A lot of people in this country have received, by inheritance, by family transmission, not only a certain language, but a certain culture, a certain way of seeing the world and things, and a certain way of acting accordingly, which is the Catalan one. Therefore, in the same way that all of this is transferred to many other areas of behaviour and society, it also moves to the consumption of sports through the media, even more in the case of Barça, because for many people Barça still keeps this hereditary function.

Personal interview, 20 September 2017

Concluding thoughts: the context changes, the challenge remains

Sport, and especially football, constitutes strategic and successful content in the Spanish media. It is a product that determines programming strategies, especially in the audiovisual media, which have large investments allocated to them (sports broadcasting rights) due to their being a factor that generates and attracts loyal audiences, and therefore appeals to advertisers. This link can be understood for economic reasons, but it also has a sociocultural dimension, given that the media play a major role in shaping modern sports culture. For Catalan language and

culture, football broadcasting is a key element that goes beyond commercial strategies.

When taking into account the idea of a nation as an imagined community (Anderson, 1991), football broadcasts in Catalan may be seen as a vital factor for the sense of belonging to the nation. As several interviewees pointed out, this is the case of Catalan people living abroad. For them, to follow the FC Barcelona matches listening to Catalunya Ràdio or RAC1 or watching them on TV3 through the Internet is a way to uphold the link with the community and hence with the nation. Therefore, this is a way to keep the national identity alive. Football broadcasts are not isolated programmes within a TV or radio programming grid, but a cultural production framed within a particular culture. There is a certain mental framework, with its own values, in this case a Catalan mental framework, and a cultural model in which language is a central factor. Here, media are socialising institutions that foster national belonging (Castelló, 2009).

Research on globalisation of sport has shown how it creates tensions with national identities and alters local cultural practices. However, we may consider football broadcasts in Catalan as a factor of resistance in face of the forces of homogenization (Rowe, 2003). In this case, the language is a resource to preserve the Catalan identity. According to Giulianotti and Robertson (2004), opposing trends can occur simultaneously when sport faces globalization dynamics. This is the case of the media coverage of FC Barcelona. While the club is turning into a global football brand and becoming a multinational entertainer (Ginesta, 2011), broadcasts in Catalan act as a counterweight, still keeping the liaison between Barça activities and the Catalan community, both inside Catalonia and abroad.

As explained before, the aim of this chapter was to study the role of football broadcasts in Catalan, taking the commentators' perspective into account. We wondered whether the use of Catalan has become just a professional issue or if broadcasters still act as guarantors of the language in a country where it is strongly linked with the national identity. The first professionals involved in Catalan football broadcasts were militants of the language. More than four decades after, the current ones, inheritors of those pioneers, share the same feeling. When starting to broadcast in Catalan, football commentators had to be

militant in order to build a linguistic model of their own for a particular professional activity; now being a professional is also a way of being a militant. In other words, being a **militant of** the language is also a way to be excellent professionally, and professional excellence is a way to contribute to the strength of a language that is core in Catalan national identity.

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