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Occitanism and Catalanism: elements for a comparison with special reference to Provençal and Valencian

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Both Provençal and Valencian (among other cases) are facing a somewhat suprising similar process of possibly becoming 'dialects' of other so-called 'minority languages'. Valencian, the principle subject of this congress, has to face the pressure of Castilian within a usual diglossic system ('a state vehicular vs. a local vernacular') and the pressure of Catalan, a very powerful neighbour. Provençal has to face the pressure of French and of Occitan (a slighty less powerfull neighbour). All the languages involved in these complex processes are romance and thus quite close to each other from a pure typological point of view.

Valencian satisfies the sociolinguistic criteria (including the sociopolitical ones) for being considered as a distinct language (and not as a variety of Catalan). A notable sign of this is the fact that it has been officially and democratically recognised so by the Valencian Community in 1982 and 1983, within the frames of the Spanish Constitution of 1978. Some people and organisms from various fields nevertheless still insist on claiming that it is Catalan, for various well-known and refutable reasons. I will not go further on this item which has already been precisely studied by the specialists of Valencian.

Provençal satisfies the sociolinguistic criteria (including the sociopolitical ones) for being considered as a distinct language (and not as a variety of Occitan). A notable sign of this is the fact that it has been officially and democratically recognised so by the Regional Council of Provence on… 17th October 2003 (see the document in annex), after a few decades of a growing debate against its possibly being considered a variety of Occitan and within the recent context of moderate acceptance of the regional languages

in the French republic. Some people and organisms from various fields nevertheless still insist on claiming that it is Occitan, for various less known and still refutable reasons. I will not go too further on this item that I have already precisely studied and presented two years ago to the specialists of Valencian (at the *1st International Seminar on Lesser Used Languages* that took place in Valencia Ciutat, organised by the Real Academia de Cultura Valenciana in 2002, see Blanchet 2003).

My point in this paper will be to present datas and an analysis of the strategy of a movement called 'occitanism', that have tried to impose its unifying vision of the romance languages spoken in Southern France. A comparison with the catalanist movement (to which it is linked) could help us to understand the way this kind of movement develop and the way they should be taken into account by linguistic policies. The aim of my analysis is theoretical and practical as well. I have to precise clearly that this comparison is only significant as far as things are similar, because there are also important differences between the two situations.

Origins and context of the competition *Occitan (singular) vs. Langues d'Oc (plural)*[1]

The sociolinguistic situation of the Romance varieties spoken in most parts of southern France (i.e., within its current boundaries) has been observed and commented upon predominantly from a particular political and theoretical point of view for the last decades: the occitanist one, that presents them as a unified language called *Occitan*. Yet, the varieties we are dealing with henceforward, which extend from Gascony to Provence, from Limousin and Auvergne to Languedoc, have been known and identified under various names and classifications throughout the centuries: *Provençal, Langue d'oc, Occitan* are the most famous global ones, but *Limousin* or *Southern Gallo-Romance* have also been in use in more specific historical contexts, and more local names such as *Gascon, Béarnais, Rouergat, Auvergnat, Nissart,* or even *patois…* have of course always been the most frequent—and often the only—ones used by the speakers themselves. There has been a much debated exception made for the varieties of Roussillon (around Perpignan city) and the rest of the Catalan domain, now definitely considered to constitute a distinct well-defined language known as *Catalan*.

From the Middle-Ages up to the 19th century, these varieties have mostly been cited by philologists under the form of the literary *'Old Provençal'* of ancient *troubadours*. From the 16th century onwards, such varieties were also noted, here and there, by various observers, as being the local 'dialects' (or even *'patois'*) spoken by most sections of society in the southern provinces that gradually became part of the kingdom of France

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[1] Most of the following lines are borrowed from a forthcoming book *The Sociolinguistics of Southern 'Occitan' France, revisited.*

(see Brunot 1901: books 5, 7, 8). During the 19th century, a new point of view arose, first because of the comparativists and dialectologists who became interested in more precise descriptions of these descendants of Latin. Yet, there was little sociolinguistic consideration in these observations.

It was then with the rise of the first political supporters of linguistic issues and the rise of political supporters of certain languages, such as French imposed as the symbol of national unity from the 1789 Revolution on, or Breton and Provençal supported in opposition to the French monolingual policy by local intellectuals from the mid-19th century onward, that true social or political considerations started to be made. But it is only from the 1970's, when rigorous sociolinguistic studies started to develop in France, which coincided with the first generation of French monolingual southerners starting to become a majority, that the sociolinguistic situation and problems of these varieties were at last analysed, referred to, and became internationally known through scientific and political reports.

The ideological context of the time in France and western Europe had a profound influence on these developments. The end of colonialism engendered and promoted the idea of the rights of people to self-determination, together with the idea of the protection of minorities. More or less Marxist and left-wing liberal ideas (we mean here 'liberal' in its English meaning) were in the air after the French little 'revolution' of 1968. In Spain, the return to democracy allowed Catalan nationalists and Catalan sociolinguists to organise the rebirth of Catalan after decades of domination by Castillian in Catalunya under Franco. And Catalan happens to be a close neighbour of the varieties spoken on the French side of the border, around Toulouse and Montpellier… From the 1950's, a gradual limited evolution of French authority, first tolerating then 'promoting' in a limited way the regional languages, created a few opportunities for action and a few fields of symbolic power, including posts in the various administrations (mostly in education). There occurred a growing competition between supporters of different language policy options. The conflict was —and still *is*— very difficult in southern France, because (i) different options had already been clearly dividing activists from various regions under the shadow of the inevitable Provençal F. Mistral; (ii) it is the largest collection of 'regional' linguistic zones in France (in space, in speakers, in prestige, etc.); (iii) language shift was now operating rapidly and dramatically threatening the use and survival of the local varieties. In such a historical context, the affiliation with certain fashionable political 'liberal' ideologies could seem to some of the activists to be efficient strategies—and sometimes coherent, especially when they were sincere. Pretending that somebody was a *conservative* or simply *not demanding* enough, was an efficient strategy of exclusion. Moreover, the recent joyous victory over Pétain, Hitler and Mussolini (later on against Franco), and the subsequent waves of 'witch hunting' that occurred (with many people

showing a new face and trying to have their recent past forgotten), the gradual fall of comparable dictatorships in Greece and Portugal, had all provided certain people with an easy way of knocking their competitors out of the way: accusing them of collaboration with the *fascists* was also terribly efficient, even when it was absolutely false. All of these battles have been fought, and all these strategies have definitely been used at one time or another in the field of the sociolinguistics of southern France.

The rise of *Occitanism*--between sociolinguistics and political action

The history of *Occitanism* (as 'the movement of actions and lobbying in favor of *Occitan*') has already been written from various points of view (Nelli 1978; Barthès 1987; Jeanjean 1992; Fourié 1995; Lafont 1997; Abrate 2001), although the skeletons in the closet, recently discovered, are still known only by a few specialists (see hereafter). This history is not the subject of this volume. Yet, it seems necessary to point out the fundamental confounding of both sociolinguistic studies and militant ideas that is characteristic of the widely distributed and well known papers and books published about 'Occitan' by occitanists from the 1950s (e. g. Lafont 1951 1954 1967 1971a/b 1973; Bec 1963; Armengaud et Lafont 1979; Kremnitz 1981; Sauzet 1988; Boyer 1991 and 2001…). This vicious circle of an ideology-driven sociolinguistic research and a research-supported political activism was clearly identified by Kremnitz (1988a: 5, 7, 27-28), quoting R. Lafont (1972a: 19) himself:

> *'We must clearly say, for us and for the other people as well, that our work is bathing in an occitanist ideology: the search for an existence of Occitans as such'*[2].

This subjective position was confirmed by an important French sociolinguist, a specialist in Corsican and in French linguistic policy outside the occitanist circles, as early as 1979 (Marcellesi 2003: 111, reprint of 1979):

> *'The fact that there is only Occitan, instead of Auvergnat, Provençal, Languedocien, etc. (…) is an element of the present representations within the social groups that impose their cultural hegemony'.*

Most Occitanist sociolinguists and linguists (Camproux, Bec, Nelli, Gardy, Giordan, Boyer, Boisgontier, Ravier, Lagarde, Sauzet…) belong(ed) to militant Occitanist organisations, mainly the *Institut d'Estudis Occitan* (e. g. R. Lafont was a president of the IEO).

The audience of the Occitanist position, due to an efficient political strategy (see hereafter) and to the absence of any other important centre of sociolinguistic research in southern France until the 1980s[3], was so wide that many people, including sociolinguists and minoritologists in various countries, used these works as major sources of

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[2] All quotations translated by Ph. Blanchet with the help of H. Schiffman from the University of Pennsylvania.

information and reference (e. g. Schlieben-Lange 1971; Kremnitz 1981; Ager 1990). They themselves contributed to the spread of these positions, such that they became more and more taken for granted. Yet, the Occitanist discourse produced more performative political and theoretical postulates than true sociolinguistic observations, another reason for that being the scarcity of field work that was carried out. The very existence of 'Occitan' as a single distinct language, presented as a linguistic fact in most cases, with very little discussion, in the Occitanist works, has always been contradicted by independant scientific sources (e. g. Soutet 1995: 38; Grimes 1996; Francard 2000: 9; Wurms 2001…), by South-French (socio)linguists outside the Occitanist circle (e. g. Marcellesi 1979 and 2003; Laffite 1996; Blanchet 1992 and 2002a; the contributors hereafter), by various linguists at least as far as Gascon is concerned (Chambon and Greub 2002 for an overview), by the basic data, and even by Occitanists supporters like Kremnitz himself:

'It does not seem possible to end up with a consensus about the spelling system neither to define an acceptable referential variety (…) As long as a consensus among the speakers of Occitan about such fundamental issues as the name of the language, its geographical domain, its social and communicative functions does not seem possible, one should not expect an end to the debates' (1988b, 8)

'We obviously have to admit that the very fact of recognising the existence of an Occitan language[4] *rests upon an ideological postulate'* (2001: 22)

Conceptual and ideological options of Occitanism

To be very brief, the Occitanist project rests upon the following options:

-They adopted the Catalanist definition of *diglossia* (Aracil 1965; Ninyoles 1969): *diglossia* is held to be a symptom of a historical conflict between two national communities which will be solved only by the victory of one language and one community against the other one. If it is the dominated one that wins, a process of *normalisation* makes the use of the language 'normal' again in every social situation and rejects the former dominating one; if it is the dominant one that wins, a final language shift will eliminate the dominated one (Gardy and Lafont 1981; Boyer 1986 & 1991; see Kremnitz 1998a: 12-13, 18 and 1987 for a good survey). Bilingualism (especially under the form of a relatively stable diglossia) and such 'interlanguages' or 'code-mixings' as regional varieties of French (now the most spoken and the most reliable marks of identity for the southern French) are rejected and accused of reinforcing diglossia, consequently helping the dominant community to overcome (hence the concept of 'francitan').

-They adopted the Catalanist model of

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[3] Except individual researches, such as L.-J. Calvet's in Paris, the only other centre was at the university of Rouen, in the north of France.

 (i) national affirmation as it was elaborated between 1850 and 1950,

(ii) linguistic norms (Occitan-adapted standardisation and spelling) as it was elaborated by P. Fabra, and finally,

(iii) language policy as it was elaborated and applied in Spain from the 1970s onward, after the return to democracy .

The first Occitanist activists, such as Perbosc, Estieu, and Alibert, tried before World War II to create a 'Great Occitania' including Catalunya and making use of its strength: they even raised funds from the Catalanists to publish the first Occitanist journals (*Occitania, Oc*) and founded the *Societat d'Estudis Occitans* that later became the *Institut d'Estudis Occitans* on the model of the *Institut d'Estudis Catalans* (Giordan 1983; for overviews see Barthès 1987: 315-377; Boyer 1991; Kremnitz 1988a: 8-9).

-Following this strategy, the dominated language should then be

(i) conceived in its broadest possible definition to make it as strong as possible,

(ii) linked to a national identity, and

(iii) provided with all the characteristics and tools of the vehicular dominant
    language (in order to replace it).

The Occitanist linguistic and graphic standardisation was based upon a *'central'* Occitan (i. e. 'Languedocien') mixed with medieval 'Occitan', and attempting to resemble Catalan as closely as possible reducing the strong divergences of the various 'dialects' but ended up being so strange and complicated that ordinary speakers could not even recognise nor read the language that was supposed to be their own. An important part of the 'national awareness' they tried to create was based upon the following :

(i) the History of the *Troubadours* and of the French Crusade against the Albigensians by which the French king took the County of Toulouse in the 13th century (e.g. Sède 1982 and Lafont 1971a: 180; see also Barthès 1987: 88-91; Kremnitz 1988a: 6) although this distant religious event only concerns a small part of 'Occitania'; and

(ii) the constant mistaken use of *Occitan* (as a cultural or national identity) for 'Occitan speaker' that soon led to the creation of the concept of *'Occitania'* (as a country or a nation, hence the notion of 'Great Occitania' —e. g. Lafont 1971a; Armengaud et Lafont 1979; Anghilante 2000— on the model of so many nationalist imperialisms), and the regular erroneous use of *Occitan* for 'Occitanist' (e. g. Kremnitz 1988; Boyer and Gardy 2001, among others).

These confusions in the speeches and texts produced the impression that all the speakers of the varieties gathered under one 'Occitan language' in fact possessed the feeling of *being Occitans* (a sort of national or ethnic identity —e. g. Armengaud et Lafont 1979), that they lived in a sort of united *country* called *'Occitania'*, and that they shared

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[4] In French: 'langue Occitane'.

the ethno-nationalist Occitanist point of view about their language, culture, people and country!

-The so-called *Occitans* who do not feel 'Occitans', i.e., the speakers who neither know nor accept the 'unity of the language', are considered to be in a state of some kind of 'mental disorder' because of their diglossic situation. They are said to have become strangers to themselves and to their language because their identity has been perverted by French domination: this is the theory of 'ethnic alienation' (Lafont 1965-67; Kremnitz 1988a: 14-16; Castela 1999) and of 'diglossic neurosis' (Lafont 1984a). One of the principal aims of the Occitanist action should then be to 'decolonise' Occitania (Lafont 1971b; overview in Barthès 1988: 399-402 and Bayle 1973) and 'disalienate' the Occitans (Lafont 1970; Lafont 1971a: 125-130 and 225-227; Kremnitz 1988: 15-16). This goal has been targeted by all political means, i. e. by political manœuvres, for three main reasons:

    (i) because a very large majority of French southerners actually *refuse to accept* this program (when they *know* it exists); the Occitanists make up only a tiny group of very active militants and intellectuals: their principal association, the *Institut d'Etudes Occitanes* has been counting an average of only 1000 members for the last twenty years (Marti 1995: 116; Jeanjean 1992; see Marcellesi 2003: 119 *'in the case of Occitan, the dream of uniformisation is shared by a very small minority'*);

    (ii) because Occitanism encounters powerful opponents such as other intellectuals, other researchers, other associations and institutions, even official local representants of the people (see Bayle 1973; Mauron's 1983 reply to Giordan's report; the introduction by the Mayor of Pau in Moreux and Puyau 2002)[5], and simply objective facts (the French situation is at the same time much more varied and vastly different from that of Spain);

    (iii) because it is often part of certain kinds of nationalist ideologies and belief systems to hold that they are right no matter what, then to try and obtain what they aim at by non-democratic or incoherent means, to 'make people happy against their (distorted) will'

Political manœuvres

Let us cast a strong light here on three fundamental axes of the Occitanist political manœuvres.

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[5] F. Mistral himself, observing the first steps towards occitanism, wrote in 1905: *'Estieu and Perbosc have just fallen on the side there were bound to fall: they have become Catalan within the "Occitania" that follows "Mont-Segur"*[a medieval battle when the Catholics and the French killed many Albigeois from the County of Toulouse]' (Barthès 1987: 336). In 1913, discovering the first texts written in an sort of occitan spelling by Estieu, he wrote *'their archaic spelling makes their whole language archaic itself'* (Mauron 1993: 327).

(i) One of the most important is rooted in a systematic opposition to Provençal intellectuals and language promotors (including the associations), opposition to the Provençal renaissance from the 19th century onward, and its related characteristics (spelling, writings, linguistic norms, activities…), and even more, to Provençal language and identities themselves. Evidence of these can be found as early as Lafont 1954, who started to spread a vision of a Mistral who was supposed to be 'conservative' and with far less talent than was usually believed, in order to try to get rid of this embarrassing ancestor (see also Lafont 1971a: 137; Armengaud et Lafont 1979: 775; good overview of anti-Mistral positions in Bayle 1975: 137-139). Mauron's objective and serious biography of Mistral (1993) has corrected this much later. On a wider scale, Mistral's famous organisation, the *Félibrige*, was constantly attacked and accused of being only a group of traditionalist *bourgeois* (Lafont 1971a: 137-151; Pasquini 2001; overview in Barthès 1988: 415-416) whose language and actions were presented as more and more distant from the people (Garavini 1970: 144; Pasquini 1986: 109-110 and Pasquini 2001). They were said to have chosen their own very local Provençal 'low' dialect, much influenced by French, to make it the reference norm for the whole *Langue d'oc,* and their spelling system was presented as merely an adaptation of the French one, thus impossible to apply to any other dialect (e.g. Bec 1963: 107; Pasquini 2001; Kremnitz 2001: 30-31). Mistral himself, because his glory could be useful, was said to have preferred a sort of Occitanist spelling first and to have been forced to adopt this other system by his master Roumanille (Lafont 1972b: 18; Armengaud et Lafont 1979: 884; Kremnitz 2001: 30; see Barthès 1987: 201-205 and Mauron 1993: 104-105 for corrections).

The very fact of feeling 'Provençal' and not 'Occitan' was pointed out as a betrayal that was a result of the French 'breaking' of Occitan unity… (e.g. Lafont's last word in Boyer and Gardy 2001: 468). Minimizing the position of the Provençal language, orthography and cultural strength has also been a constant Occitanist strategy. Sibille (2000: 36) writes that *'A radical fraction of the Provençalist movement refuses the consensus* [with the Occitanist movements] *and goes on maintaining polemics about these questions'*. The so-called 'fraction' turns out to be a great majority, in fact (see Blanchet 2002a). Lafont (1972b: 5 and 20) affirms that the Occitanist spelling reform *'has succeeded in attracting the new Provençal writers (…) the majority of them aged less than fifty being Occitanists'*. It is a regular argument of the Occitanist side, to wish to appear 'modern' and 'triumphant', but this rests on no basic data: on the contrary, when one collects objective data, it is revealed that as many as 90% of the Provençal associations operating in 1990 and 95% of the Provençal contemporary writers (including the youngest ones) have chosen the Provençal 'mistralian' orthography (Blanchet 2002a: 16-20 and 117). More than this, some of the rare and famous Provençal writers using the Occitan spelling ended up turning back to the 'mistralian' one (e. g. S. Bec 1980).

Many rigorous (often recent) studies have proved all this to be mostly wrong (see Barthès 1987; Duchêne 1982 and 1986; Mauron 1993; Calamel and Javel 2002; Blanchet 1992 and 2002a for overviews). This strategy of stigmatisation can be explained as having two main reasons:

(i) Mistral and his *Félibrige* were so famous that it was necessary to destabilize them in order to replace them;

(ii) the Provençal 'exception', with its already adopted spelling system, its dictionaries and grammar books, its famous writers, its network of associations (even if not linked to the Félibrige), its strong feeling of regional identity alongside its total acceptance of its French side, and its original linguistic policy principles, constituted—and still constitutes—the principal obstacle to Occitanist propaganda and action.

(ii) Another important Occitanist political manœuvre can then be observed in its discourses about political parties and its links with the administration. For various reasons, including their active strategy and their centralist views, the 'Occitan' supporters have always succeeded in being heard by the French central administration in Paris. Concurrent with the 1951 famous 'Deixonne Law' (now replaced by another text) that made it possible to teach the 'local dialects' in the French schools, the very name of *Occitan* was used for the first time: the new *Institut d'Etudes Occitanes* (IEO) then succeeded in presenting itself as 'born out of the Resistance' and in presenting the other movements —mainly the Provençal *Félibrige*— as a conservative organisation guilty of having more or less 'collaborated' with the régime of Pétain in Vichy and therefore with the Nazis (but see 'the skeletons in the closets' hereafter). This tendency of accusing any contradictory person or organisation of being 'allied with the extreme-right political ideologies and parties' has always been much used by the Occitanists (and spread, see Ager 1990). Lafont and Armengaud (1979: 865) claim that by opposing the Félibrige, the IEO is opposing *'those nostalgic of the regime of Vichy'*. They add (1979: 868 and 901) that *'Courses of Occitan were given by members of the Félibrige to the German agents of the security services*, with absolutely no proof of this claim, of course. The same kind of accusation regularly appears: Sumien (2000: 6) mentions a *'brief and mysterious period when Mistral belonged to the Action Française'* (Maurras's right-wing nationalist party that supported Pétain), which is entirely false. In 1988, while it was organising its annual festival in Gap, the important Provençal movement called *Unioun Prouvençalo* had to deliver a communique: it was publically accused of being linked with the *Front National* (a French fascist party) by local Occitanist militants, which is also a complete misrepresentation.

The French admnistration has not always followed the Occitanist information (e. g. the ministry of education spoke about *'les langues d'oc'* (plural) in an official 1976 text and still speaks about *'la langue provençale'* (among the other *langues d'oc*) in the 1988 official programs for the teaching of the regional languages in the secondary schools). But most of the time, the French central administration tends to favour the Occitanists: Deixonne Law, Giordan's 1983 report (under a left-wing government) and other recent official reports; an Occitanist intellectual was named *General Inspector* in charge of all the regional languages by the Ministry of Education in 1995; the technical counsellor of the French Minister of Culture in charge of the *European Charter* was the president of the Parisian section of the IEO (1998-99, see Sibille 2000); the two people in charge of the regional languages at the *Délégation Générale à la Langue Française et aux Langues de France* (office of the Ministry of Culture) from 2002 are linked to the IEO (see Cerquiglini, Alessio & Sibille 2003)…

At another scale, the *European Bureau for the Lesser Used Languages* (EBLUL), a non-profit association funded by the European Union and acting as its Office for the Minority Languages, is in fact an assembly of member-states associations considered like national committees of the EBLUL. The French sub-committee has been organised by militant associations with absolutely no transparency, no call for participation, not even the advice of any official democratic institution (neither national nor regional). The Occitanists have joined the French committee from the beginning. When, in 1997, the most representative Provençal association, supported by the President of the Region, officially asked to be admitted to the committee in the name of Provençal (and not Occitan), it was rejected out of hand, although this action was illegal according to the statutes of both the French committee and the Bruxelles bureau of the EBLUL (Blanchet 2002b).

Many other examples could be given. In such ways, the Occitanist views dominate the sources of information and manage to get themselves taken for granted.

(iii) The Occitanist movements and intellectuals, although presenting themselves as liberals, and often imbued with left-wing or more or less Marxist ideas, have in fact been welcomed by governments from both sides of the aisle. In the 1970s and the 1980s, they were closer to the left wing indeed (Jeanjean 1992). But starting with the 1990's, they associate with any administration, from whichever political side it might be ruled. The administrative region called 'Languedoc-Roussillon' (around Montpellier) has been ruled by a coalition of traditional right-wing parties together with the *Front National*. The IEO and the *Calandretas* (private bilingual schools organised by Occitanists) have cooperated with this administration to create in 1999 a *Centre Inter-régional de Développement de l' Occitan* (CIRDOC) in the city of Béziers, which has a right-wing government (see the

CIRDOC public document of presentation). In 2001, R. Lafont and X. Lamuela, both Occitanist university researchers, gave their support to an Occitanist organisation founded in Piedmont (Italy) and to their founding father F. Fontan, whose Occitan nationalism was based on a mixture of racism and fascist Marxism (see Blanchet 2002c for a precise study).

This leads us to the final climax: the skeletons in the closet. The IEO pretends to have its roots in the *Résistance* (to the Nazis), in the very first line of its official documents, as is constantly and regularly repeated by its militants (Kremnitz 2001: 35; Martel in Boyer & Gardy 2001: 374 or Petit 1983: 19) ; and they also claim to substitute a new form of action, based upon a new liberal ideology, for the non-Occitanist preceding one, supposed to be *nostalgic for the regime of Vichy* (Armengaud & Lafont 1979: 865). Yet, L. Alibert, the founding father of the Occitan system actively collaborated with the Vichy regime and the Nazis, and was sentenced to prison and life 'national indignity' for that collaboration. The *Société d'Etudes Occitanes* (SEO, the Occitanist organisation at that time) was attracted by the Vichy regime's manipulation of 'folklore' , sent letters to Pétain to support it (Fourié 1995) and did no better than the *Félibrige*. On the contrary, after the war, the *Félibrige* disbarred those of its members who were condemned for collaboration with the enemy (notably Charles Maurras, who was celebrated in the SEO journal *Oc* in 1943 as Fourié 1995: 25 demonstrates) whereas the Occitanists went on celebrating Alibert and concealing his background as long as they could (the affair was only revealed in special journals between 1995 and 2000! see *Lo Lugarn* 69 1999 and 71, 2000. Bagnols-sur-Cèze: Parti Nationaliste Occitan, with an important testimony of R. Lafont). And it is the same people, or at least some of them, who transformed the SEO into the *Institut d'Etudes Occitanes* (IEO) in 1945 (Fourié 1995: 34-35 and *Lo Lugar* 67 1999), which can be confirmed by the fact that the SEO publications used the name IEO as early as 1926 (see *Lo Lugarn* 1995).

All this can also explain why the Occitanists pursued such a vigorous and efficient strategy of denouncing abusively the other proponents of the linguistic revival of southern 'Occitan' France: it was a good way of deflecting scrutiny away from the IEO. And this strategy was effective, resulting in the monopolistic spread of the Occitanist analysis.

The failure of Occitanism

The Occitanist intellectual system, analysis and strategy did not interrupt, or even diminish, but rather accelerated an ongoing language shift, because it did not have any forceful effect on people, with the exception of a few groups of militants in very local situations. It did not reach people, because it did not take into account the true sociolinguistic situation, the speakers, the attitudes of the people, or the possible realistic

goals for this language revitalization: people could not even recognize that it was *their* language that was supposedly being dealt with, because of the strange name ('Occitan'), the strange spelling, the strange ethnonationalist ideology, that were so different from what they were living and wanting (e. g. see Dompmartin-Normand 2003 and Blanchet 1999, about the teaching of Occitan). The worst part of it is that, wherever occitanism had a little success (mostly in Languedoc), it created a *double diglossia* alongside with French : people got convinced that their own day-to-day language was worth being abandonned, because it was not even acceptable compared to the 'official' standardised regional language promoted.

None of the six first steps of language revitalization identified by Hinton (Hinton and Hale 2001: 6-7) was really activated; only the last three steps (7 to 9) were tried, in a top-down strategy that was bound to fail: using the language as the primary one among a few very small groups of militants and schools, expanding its use into (symbolic parts of) public domains and outside the community. All this could not revitalize the language because it was not grounded on actual speakers and actual social perceptions, or on a mass program of second language learning and the enhancement of cultural practices that encourage the use of the language. But all these actions were rejected by the Occitanists, because it would have meant having to accept the reality they were fighting against (local dialects, no sense of language unity and common identity, influence of French within a bilingual society, loyalty to the local French variety of language and to France, status of 'second' language and not of 'first' one, traditional activities, etc.).

Lafont wrote (1971: 58): *'a language* [une langue] *is nothing more than the spoken form of a sociological situation. The rebirth or not of Occitan is linked to the will of the society of Occitania to present itself as existing as such'*. The sociological situation never was and never became favorable to the existence of this language: the society of Occitania never existed nor came true, and thus the rebirth (or rather the birth) of Occitan never really occurred (except as a virtual unified language seen by intellectuals divorced from reality.). And fairly recent studies have finally demonstrated that even purely linguistic features cannot prove the existence of Occitan, because the romance varieties that are supposed to constitute this single language only share one specific feature in common (the evolution of Latin *-tr / dr-* to *-ir-* as in *patre > paire*). As a consequence *'Occitan was never born'* (Chambon and Greub 2002: 491).

This is the reason why, and also because it appears more and more divorced from the evolution of the sociolinguitic situations, a linguistic policy inspired by the occitanism must absolutely be avoided as far as Provençal and the other true *langues d'oc* are concerned.

Let's now try and see why Catalanists insist so much on annexing Valencian and, most of all, what is the best linguistic policy (i. e. the most adapted to the situation) to satisfy the Valencians'demand for their own language, alongside the languages of other people living in the Community, altogether with Castillian and other international language, because multilingualism and mutual understanding are the keys for the future.

This policy should take place within a solid scientific and democratic frame, with the spirit of an efficient humanism.

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Document

Région

Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur

<u>Plenary Session of October 17, 2003</u>

**Request of the Regional Council of
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur concerning the Provençale Niçoise regional
languages of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur**

Given that the territory of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur happens to be included in the linguistic area of the Provençal and Niçois languages;

Given the fact that the Provençal and Niçois languages are necessarily connected to their respective linguistic area, and that consequently they should not be relegated to any particular human grouping which would subordinate them to some higher or exclusive superordinate category (such as 'Provençalophones' or 'Niçardophones');

The Regional Council Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur

solemnly affirms :
- that the Provençal and Niçois languages are the regional languages of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region;
- the Provençal and Niçois languages are the expression of the cultural richness of their respective geographic area, the common patrimony of all the inhabitants without distinction of origin according to Article 1 of the French Constitution ;

declares :
- that all the varieties of the Provençal and Niçois languages are of equal value;
- that each of their varieties is the expression of the Provençal language and the Niçois language in their own geographic areas;
- that the full dignity thus given to each variety of the Provençal and Niçois languages attests to the fact that there is no hierarchy among these varieties;

engages itself :
- to develop a support system for the preservation of these varieties and for the promotion of the Provençal and Niçois languages; and to contribute, in cooperation with the State, to the generalization of course offerings for the Provençal and the Niçois languages in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur.

requests :
- the French Prime Minister to intervene on behalf of other ministers, departments, and state bodies concerned with assuring that the Provençal and the Niçois languages will be included as such in the list of regional languages of France;

- that the President of the European Union Commission intervene with the concerned delegations, in particular, the Office of Education and Formation, and of the European

Bureau of Lesser Used Languages, so that they act to include the Provençal and Niçois languages in the list of lesser-used languages of the European Union.

Report of the Debates :

This request has been presented by the socialist group and its affiliates (to which the President of the Regional Council belongs) and the communist group and its associates, that is to say, the parties of the left.
The UMP and UDF groups, (of the right) have asked that this request be presented in the name of the Regional Council, to be voted on. The Socialist group refused, so the UMP and UDF groups decided to abstain.
The motion, when submitted to a vote, was adopted with the following results: the groups of the left voted yes, the UMP and UDF groups abstained, and the Front National group (extreme-right) voted against.