

Vols aprendre català?

There are plenty of affordable options for learning Catalan.

By Lara Duke

Barcelona's bilingual nature is immediately obvious on arrival in the city. Catalan is spoken by six million people in Spain (in Catalunya, the Balearic Islands, Valencia—known there as Valenciana), and Sardinia. It is an old, academic language with its roots based in Latin.

Although Barcelona has a large Spanish-speaking population, due to mass immigration from other parts of the country, the local education system ensures that children growing up here speak Catalan fluently. The majority of bilingual people will effortlessly switch between the two languages, depending on who they are speaking to, although some are noticeably more at home speaking one or the other.

For the non-Catalan Spaniard or foreigner who wants to learn Catalan there are a number of both publicly funded and private Catalan language centres. The CPNL (*Consorti per a la Normalització Lingüística*) was set up by the *Generalitat* in 1998 to promote the Catalan language. They have a wide variety of classes available for adults. As well as traditional classes, distance-learning courses, media-based study and conversation classes are also on offer. In addition, special administrative, business and judicial courses are available for those with more specific needs.

All levels are catered to, from absolute beginner to proficiency, and classes take place all over the city and beyond. Courses begin in September and February and run throughout the morning, afternoon and evening, depending on the centre and level. As the centres are heavily subsidised, fees are very low, at around €30 per term.

According to CPNL's statistics, the enrolment of students in Catalan classes has grown dramatically since its inception, with the number rising to about 50,000 per year in the second half of the 1990s. Classes are made up of people from all over the world. In general the largest group of participants are from other parts of Spain. However, groups tend to be very international, particularly at beginner levels. A class interviewed at the organisation's centre in Gràcia was comprised of South Americans, Europeans, and students from as far afield as the Philippines and Morocco.

The CPNL follows official certificate courses, beginning at level A (basic) and continuing through to D (proficiency). Level C is generally considered a sufficient level of fluency, unless higher knowledge is specifically required. To gain a level A qualification, assuming you have no prior knowledge of the language, takes three terms, each of which run for around three or four months.

Courses are also offered at the University of Barcelona. They begin in October and



Illustration by Begoña Chezz

cater to a variety of levels, some with a specific spoken or written focus. Although the courses are free for students of the university, students from other universities can expect to pay around €137 per course, while the fees are higher for non-students. The university offers a number of Internet learning courses as well as further learning resources, such as language exchanges. Also, some of the private language schools, for example the Institut Europeu d'Idiomes, or Euro Idiomes have Catalan classes.

Whatever the reasons that someone wants to learn Catalan, there is no shortage of courses, or of people on whom to practise newly-acquired language skills. Mike Harris moved from England to Barcelona three years ago and began learning Catalan last September, once he felt he had a sufficient level of Spanish: "I've just completed the beginner's A-level course (and, although my knowledge of Catalan is still fairly basic, I'm now able to understand a fair amount, as well as handle simple conversations when out shopping or whatever. I've noticed that people, particularly the older people, really seem to appreciate you making the effort and are generally really encouraging." Mari Carmen, from Mexico, is married to a Catalan and moved to the city last summer: "I found it difficult at first, especially the pronunciation, but my husband's family are really supportive and I feel like I'm now making progress. As my in-laws all speak Catalan amongst themselves, I really wanted to be able to join in, particularly in social situations, when friends come over. Learning Catalan has made me feel more at home here and now I've learnt the basics I'm keen to move on and keep improving."

Although Catalan may not be the most useful language on a world-wide scale, for those who are planning on staying in Barcelona on a long-term basis, it is certainly a useful asset. ■

Information:

Centre Normalització Lingüística de Barcelona Quintana, 11

Tel: 93 412 55 00, www.cpnl.org

Universitat de Barcelona Gran Via Corts Catalanes, 585

Tel: 93 402 11 00, www.ub.edu

Institut Europeu d'Idiomes Various centres, Tel:

Euro Idiomes C/ Bailèn, Tel: 93 457 50 56, Rbla. Catalunya: 93 487 01 04

Further information about courses:

cultura.gencat.es/llengcat/aprenecat/index.htm