

Darrera versió del manuscrit acceptat per a la seva publicació: Trenchs-Parera, M. Preface. En Byrne, Steven. *Independence, Language and Identity in Modern Catalonia*. Sussex: Sussex Academic Press. 2021. 978-1-78976-071-2.

## **PREFACE**

October 1<sup>st</sup> 2017. Never before but for the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona had Catalonia become such a trending topic worldwide. International newscasts opened headlines picturing thousands of Barcelonans queuing up to cast clandestine votes in a referendum forbidden by the national Spanish government but organized officially by the regional secessionist one. The plebiscite was a much expected landmark for pro-independence Catalonians and it became a turning point because of thwarted expectations and lingering political consequences: mostly for their secessionist leaders —now in prison or exile— but also for a Spanish state that stretched the limits of police actions to unsuccessfully prevent the plebiscite from taking place.

In this book, Steven Byrne, as if a patient photographer, accompanies a group of pro-independence Catalans during the months before that referendum in order to understand this secessionist movement. He does so by focusing his camera lens on their language attitudes, inextricably linked in Catalonia to politics since the Francoist dictatorship marginalized and forbid the Catalan language in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Byrne's photographs are actually the transcribed talks he held with those Catalans before that October 1<sup>st</sup>. With them, the researcher provides us with a rich case in point, an insightful analysis of how Catalan is still being constructed as a distinctive identity trait —though not an exclusive or necessary one— that may simultaneously index local identity, openness to plurality and cosmopolitanism. Byrne does more than just disclose both language attitudes and identity positionings: he explains local ideologies in relation to the wider context of globalization and transnational migration that has recently turned Catalonia into a multilingual multicultural society.

While reading, one feels that Byrne is showing us photographs in which many of us Catalans, whether secessionist like his protagonists or unionist as the relevant characters that appear in backgrounds, recognize ourselves. Framing a photograph is always a matter of choice and, therefore, subjectivity. However, Byrne reveals himself as a reflective researcher taking a fruitful stand: the well-informed participant observant looking in and

looking out. His methodological apparatus allows for an exploration of the minds —and hearts— of his protagonists. His approach skilfully balances disciplines (sociolinguistics, social psychology, political analysis) and provides a well-informed succinct historical report on the relationship between Spain and Catalonia as political subjects of changing nature.

His analytical prism consists of concepts that are essential to understand present-day sociolinguistic phenomena: language-as-a-resource, language-as-a-problem, authenticity, anonymity, de-ethnicization, cosmopolitanism, particularism, linguistic authority, glocalisation, or commodification of language. The book can so be read as a compendium of thought-provoking photographs illustrating these concepts and many others. From this perspective, the localized case in point becomes humanity and, beyond any secessionisms, helps us understand linguistic, social and political issues experienced worldwide in the complexity and fluidity of present times.

Barcelona, December 28<sup>th</sup> 2020.