



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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# Regional and minority language academies

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This paper summarises the role and services provided by a selection of regional and minority language academies around the world, highlighting a number of common features.



## Key Points

- This paper provides a brief description of the activities of a number of minority or regional language academies throughout the world.
- It can be seen from Annex 1 that there are a number of common features to such academies such as:
  - publications (of both a popular and an academic nature);
  - language standardisation;
  - the production and maintenance of dictionaries and glossaries;
  - hosting debates and conferences;
  - language promotion; and
  - research and analysis.
- Some language academies conduct activities which are more unusual, such as:
  - the promotion of arts and cultural expression through the language; and
  - the hosting of language courses, and conducting inquiries into alleged abuses or denials of language rights.



## Executive Summary

This paper provides a brief description of the activities of a number of minority or regional language academies throughout the world.

Annex 1 provides a breakdown of the main activities conducted by such academies. It can be seen from this that there are a number of common features to such academies, such as publications (of both a popular and an academic nature); language standardisation; the production and maintenance of dictionaries and glossaries; hosting debates and conferences; language promotion; and research and analysis.

Some language academies conduct activities which are more unusual, such as the promotion of arts and cultural expression through the language (the Euskal Kultur Erakundea in France), the hosting of language courses (these are usually hosted by other institutions, but the Welsh Language Academy is an exception), and conducting inquiries into alleged abuses or denials of language rights (such as the Welsh Language Commissioner, though the Euskara Kultur Elkargoa in Navarre does carry out a similar role in terms of promoting language rights and highlighting cases where a denial of rights has been prosecuted).



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Annex 1: Summary of the main activities conducted by language academies





# 1 Wales

## 1.1 Welsh Language Commissioner

The Welsh Language Commissioner is an independent body established by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 to promote and facilitate use of the Welsh language<sup>1</sup>. It partly replaced the Welsh Language Board, though some of the functions of this body were transferred directly to the Welsh Government.

The Commissioner is responsible for:

- Any functions relating to Welsh language schemes under the 1993 framework (though these are in the process of being phased out);
- Investigating cases where there has been an alleged interference with a communication in Welsh between individuals in Wales;
- Investigating complaints about the use (or lack of use) of Welsh by organisations;
- Conducting inquiries into any matter relating to any of the Commissioner's functions.

## 1.2 Welsh Academy

The Welsh Academy (Yr Academi Gymreig) is the national society of writers in Wales, representing the interests of Welsh writers and writing within and outside Wales<sup>2</sup>. Founded in 1959, the intention of the Welsh Academy is that it 'maintains the high standard and character of literature in Wales by providing a forum and a collective voice for Wales' writers'. It has around 700 members. The Welsh Academy conducts lobbying, organises events and activities such as debates and conferences. The Welsh Academy is funded mostly from public sources, but is constitutionally independent.

It also provides the Welsh Academy English/Welsh Dictionary (first published by the University of Wales Press in 1995, and now online), and the Welsh Academy Encyclopaedia of Wales (published by the University of Wales Press in 2008). It publishes a Welsh literature journal, Taliesin. Since 1998, the society has acted as a Welsh Language Promotion Agency with funding from Arts Council Wales.

Since 2011, the Academy (along with the Tŷ Newydd Writers' Centre) provides services through the organisation. The activities and projects provided by literature Wales include:

- Wales Book of the Year;
- National Poet of Wales;
- Writers on Tour funding scheme;
- Writing courses at Tŷ Newydd;

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh Language Commissioner: <http://www.comisiynyddygydraeg.org/english/Pages/Home.aspx> Page accessed 22.11.13.

<sup>2</sup> The Welsh Academy: <http://www.llenyddiaethcymru.org/the-welsh-academy/> Page accessed 22.11.13.

- An annual Literary Tourism programme;
- Translators' House Wales;
- Young People's Laureate for Wales and Young People's Writing Squads;
- A team of fieldworkers 'working specifically to develop literature activity in the south Wales valleys and north Wales';
- Other services such as mentoring, writers' bursaries, information and advice and independent manuscript assessment.

## 2 Canada: French for the Future

In Canada, the use of French is promoted by the organisation 'French for the Future/ Le Français pour l'Avenir'. The stated mission of French for the Future is to promote 'Canada's official bilingualism and the immediate and lifelong benefits of learning and communicating in French to students from grades 7 to 12 across Canada'<sup>3</sup>. In terms of activities, it is stated that it carries out the following:

- Organises a National Ambassador Youth Forum each year, consisting of an intensive set of activities within a residential context, bringing together pupils from bilingual schools;
- Provides a 'Franconnexion' event toolkit to assist local organisers to promote French within their own school or community<sup>4</sup>;
- Organises a National Essay Contest for those in grades 10 to 12;
- Provides financial awards, such as a President's Award, the John Ralston Saul Award, and Student of the Month;
- Hosts a list of resources for those wishing to take their French learning further, or who wish to promote French further in their own community.

French for the Future is primarily a promotional organisation, and, in contrast to many of the organisations cited in this paper, does not engage in language standardisation work.

## 3 New Zealand: Māori Language Commission

In New Zealand, the Māori Language Commission seeks to 'develop and distribute resources for the protection and promotion' of the Māori language<sup>5</sup>. More specifically, it carries out the following work:

- Promotes quality standards of written and spoken Māori through initiatives such as advanced immersion courses, and the provision of a Māori language checking service;

<sup>3</sup> French for the Future. 'Mission': <http://french-future.org/en/qui-sommes-nous/mission> Page accessed 21.11.13.

<sup>4</sup> Le Français pour l'Avenir/ French for the Future. *Annual Report: Celebrating 15 years! 2012-2013*. Toronto.

<sup>5</sup> Māori Language Commission. 'About us': [http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/english/about\\_e/](http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/english/about_e/) Page accessed 14.11.13.

- Provides guidance on the creation of Māori Language Plans;
- Provides statistics on the use of the Māori language;
- Administers examinations for candidates seeking formal certification as translators and interpreters;
- Researches and formulates policy related to the promotion, maintenance and progression of the Māori language;
- Lexical expansion work including the production of glossaries;
- Other publications such as the Commission's quarterly newsletter He Muka, Te Matatiki a dictionary of contemporary Māori words, and Māori for the Office; assists organisations to become bilingual.
- He Kohinga Kīwaha a monolingual collection of idiomatic Māori sayings.

The secretariat for the Commission also carries out research, provides policy advice, translation checking work, and promotional activities such as Māori Language Day.

## 4 Basque Country

### 4.1 Spain: Euskaltzaindia

The organisation Euskaltzaindia (the Royal Academy of the Basque Language) was founded in 1919 and is the official body responsible for the Basque language<sup>6</sup>. Broadly, its remit is to conduct research into the language, and to safeguard the language for the future.

One of its roles, particularly since the 1960s, has been the establishment of a standard version of 'Batua', or the high Basque used in official publications, in Basque-medium schools, and in broadcasting and newspapers<sup>7</sup>.

This version of Basque comes mainly from the most central dialect, Gipuzkoan, but given that Basque was not commonly written down for much of its history<sup>8</sup>, Euskaltzaindia has conducted a large amount of work in recent decades to standardise Basque orthography (spelling), syntax (how it is structured grammatically), morphology (standardising patterns of word formation) and phonology (how it sounds)<sup>9</sup>.

A Lexicography Commission was set up by Euskaltzaindia in 1981 in order to carry out the following work<sup>10</sup> (overleaf):

<sup>6</sup> Euskaltzaindia. 'Euskaltzaindia': <http://nia1.me/1s1> Page accessed 13.11.13.

<sup>7</sup> Turell, MT. 2001. *Multilingualism in Spain*. Cromwell Press: p92.

<sup>8</sup> As above, p93.

<sup>9</sup> Haddican, W. [no date] 'Standardization and Language Change in Basque'. Penn Working Papers in Linguistics: Selected papers from NWAV 33: <https://files.nyu.edu/wfh203/public/NWAV33.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Azkarate, M. 1999. 'Steps towards the modernization of Basque: Challenges of a standardized lexicon', in G. Spiess (ed) *Modernisierung des Wortschatzes europäischer Regional- und Minderheitensprachen*: Tübingen: pp17–28: <http://nia1.me/1rw>

- Compilation of a General Basque Dictionary (essentially a data bank using all previous dictionaries and a sample of literary texts from the years 1545 to 1970);
- The systematic collection of present-day Basque, covering the period from 1970 to the present day, including a sample of the written language for each year;
- The establishment of lexicological criteria for the adaptation of foreign words into Basque;
- Compilation of a Dictionary of the Standardized Language, including a lexicon of the different dialects to be incorporated into the standardised version of the language.

However, Euskaltzainda took the decision in 1981 that the task of creating terminology (ie technical terms, scientific terminology etc) would be carried out by a separate body of language specialists as it required a more intensive process of discussion and input from university academics.

## 4.2 Navarre: Euskara Kultur Elkargoa

Euskara Kultur Elkargoa (or the Basque Cultural Association) was founded relatively recently, in 1998, with the aim of 'promoting and defending the Basque language and Basque culture in Navarre'<sup>11</sup>. More specifically, the organisation states that it carries out the following:

- Organises events such as seminars for 'debate and contemplation', forums and conferences;
- Publishes papers and books, including both analyses of the modern social and political context of Basque in Navarre, and also works of fiction in the Basque language;
- Provides an online Basque-Spanish-English dictionary;
- Takes part in school-registration campaigns;
- Conducts promotional campaigns such as ARTEKARIA, an initiative which aims to 'recuperate a positive attitude among Basque speakers so that they may use the Basque language...without hang ups';
- Hosts an information network, SAREA, which brings together news sources in Basque.
- Provides links to the relevant legislation clarifying language rights, and advises on how those rights may be interpreted.

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<sup>11</sup> Euskara Kultur Elkargoa. 'Euskara Kultur Elkargoa': <http://www.euskarakultur.org/eng/eke> Page accessed 21.11.13.

### 4.3 France: Euskal Kultur Erakundea

Euskal Kultur Erakundea (or the Basque Cultural Institute) is an association founded in 1990, with the aim to 'contribute to developing the Basque language and culture in the Northern or French Basque Country'<sup>12</sup>. More specifically, it carries out the following activities:

- Advising on, and in some cases leading, Basque cultural heritage projects such as collecting the oral memory of the province of Lower Navarre;
- Promoting and advising on artistic and cultural education, with a Basque theme, in schools;
- Providing support for performing arts projects, for both amateur and professionals;
- Encouraging Basque cultural projects and events at a local level, including cultural weeks, cycles of concerts, series of conferences, etc;
- Strengthening cross-border relations between Iparralde (Northern Basque Country, in France) and Hegoalde (Southern Basque Country, in Spain). This can take the form of organising cross-border contact between artists and exhibitions of work from one territory within another;
- Acts as a Basque 'cultural observatory', gathering and analysing information from language surveys and related research;
- Supports the production of news and other information resources, in both digital and paper formats;
- The Institute maintains a Basque culture portal (<http://www.eke.org>) which aims to 'disseminate and popularise Basque culture'. It contains details of exhibitions and performances, as well as news about developments in the Basque cultural sphere.
- Manages longer term research and promotional projects, such as 'Kantuketan' (1998–2003) on Basque song and music, 'Batekmila' (2004–2008) on the relationship between cultural diversity and Basque identity, and 'Hogei'ta' (currently ongoing) which aims 'to arouse in young people...innovative projects to develop Basque culture in all its diversity'.

## 5 Catalonia

The Institut d'Estudis Catalans is one of the longest-established language academies. Founded in 1906, some of the standard building blocks of language normalisation were formed and published at a relatively early stage such as a set of spelling rules in 1913, grammar rules in 1918, and a dictionary for the Catalan language in 1932.

Today, it carries out a significant number of functions<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, the institute has a somewhat wider remit than some other language academies in that it not only deals with language promotion and normalisation, but also a wider system of support for

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<sup>12</sup> Euskal Kultur Erakundea. 'About us': <http://www.eke.org/en/basque-cultural-institute/about-us> Page accessed 21.11.13.

<sup>13</sup> Institut d'Estudis Catalans. 'L'Institut': <http://www.iec.cat/institucio> Page accessed 20.11.13.

academic studies not just of, but also through, the Catalan language. For example, the institute has a number of major thematic units (such as history and archaeology; science and technology; philology; biological sciences etc). Each thematic unit has a set of academic fellows for those subject areas, and links with a number of formally affiliated societies and universities throughout Catalan-speaking areas.

The institute has a significant publishing arm, which produces books, collections of monographs and serials promoted by sections and subsidiaries.

In common with other languages in that region, there are some differences of policy and approach across the different provinces in which Catalan is spoken. For example, while the institute's official sphere of action covers all of the areas where Catalan is spoken, Valencia has tended to act somewhat independently from the Institut d'Estudis Catalans. The Generalitat Valenciana (the Valencian autonomous government) refers to the language instead as Valencian, and continues to use a non-standard dialect in broadcasting and official publications<sup>14</sup>.

## 6 France: Occitan

The Institut d'Estudis Occitans has existed since the Second World War; it provides information on the language of Occitans, and assists in its promotion<sup>15</sup>. In particular, it carries out the following activities:

- Publishes a news magazine, *Anem Occitan!*;
- Disseminates publications in, and on, the language;
- Hosts and organises conferences, book fairs and other events;
- Provides a translation service between French and Occitan;
- Conducts research into place-names in order to facilitate bilingual road signs;
- Makes films to illustrate the history of Occitan and how the language may be used today;
- Supports a number of summer schemes.

In 2009, the Institut d'Estudis Occitans created the Académie de la Langue Occitane. The purpose of this second body is to play an advocacy role, particularly in (a) disseminating information about the language through media outreach and (b) gaining greater political recognition for Occitan.

The Institut d'Estudis Occitans appears to play no active role in supporting Occitan dialects outside France, such as Aranese in the Spanish Pyrenees which instead relies for promotion on its own young people's movement Joenessa d'Aran<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Àngel Pradilla, M. 2001. 'The Catalan-speaking communities', in MT. Turell (ed) *Multilingualism in Spain. Sociolinguistic Aspects of Linguistic Minority Groups*. Multilingual Matters 120: pp58–90.

<sup>15</sup> Institut d'Estudis Occitans. 'Nos mission': <http://www.ieo-oc.org> Page accessed 13.11.13.

<sup>16</sup> Suijs, J. & Huguet, Á. 2001. 'The Occitan speech community of the Aran Valley', in MT. Turell (ed) *Multilingualism in Spain. Sociolinguistic Aspects of Linguistic Minority Groups*. Multilingual Matters 120: pp141–164.

The Institut d'Estudes Occitans is separate from the Conselh de la Lengua Occitana (or the Occitan Language Council) which was founded in 1996 and is responsible for developing the standard variant of the Occitan language.

## 7 Spain: Asturian

The Academia de la Llingua Asturiana (Academy of the Asturian Language) has among its principal objectives investigating and normalising the Asturian Language, developing a dictionary, and promoting its use<sup>17</sup>.

More specifically, the Academy is responsible for the following:

- Produces and maintains publications, such as Orthographic Norms and Verb Conjugation, Asturian Language Grammar, and the Asturian Language Dictionary;
- Publishes two bulletins: one with literary and linguistic studies about the Asturian language, and another with anthropological studies about Asturian culture;
- Publishes book collections, such as Escolín (producing student and children's literature), and Cartafueyos de lliteratura escaecida (notes on forgotten literature, ancient works in the Asturian language);
- Occasional other publications, such as works on science and technology, in the Asturian language<sup>18</sup>;
- Organises a conference each year: Dia de les lletres asturianas (Day of Asturian Letters).
- Maintains a body of statistics on use of the language, such as the uptake of school classes in Asturian<sup>19</sup>.

The Academy also seeks to cater for related dialects such as Asturian Galician. In 2007, the Asturian Language Academy published Spelling Standards for Asturian Galician, based on earlier proposed orthographical and morphological standards by the Government of Asturias in 1993. These standards are generally used in written Asturian Galician, for example in place names. However, a prescriptive dictionary has not yet been developed for Asturian Galician<sup>20</sup>.

The Academy does not appear to organise popular events such as festivals, nor does it publish popular magazines. Instead, these tend to be organised through local *consejos* (local groups or councils) and the wider *Conseyu Bable*.

<sup>17</sup> Academia de la Llingua Asturiana: <http://www.academiadelalingua.com> Page accessed 18.11.13.

<sup>18</sup> Anadón, R & González-Taboada, F. 2013. *Ciencias: Cambéu Climaticu n'Asturies*. Academia de la Llingua Asturiana & Universidá d'Uviéu.

<sup>19</sup> Committee of Experts (as above): p26.

<sup>20</sup> Committee of Experts. 2012. *Application of the Charter in Spain: Third monitoring cycle*. Council of Europe: European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: <http://nia1.me/1s4>

## 8 Netherlands: Frisian

The Fryske Akademy is a research centre dedicated to ‘carrying out scientific research in the fields of the Frisian language, culture, history and society’. More specifically, its objectives regarding the Frisian language (or Fryslân) are described as follows<sup>21</sup>:

- Enhancing knowledge of the Frisian language, history, culture and society by means of research and making the results available to a national and international public of experts;
- The Fryske Akademy publishes academic books, articles and reports on the Frisian language, culture, history and society;
- Organises lectures, conferences and symposiums;
- Creating and maintaining the Dictionary of the Frisian Language (which consists of 21 volumes so far);
- Publishing a news magazine, *Ut de Smidte*, and an academic periodical, *It Beaken*.
- Producing online publications, CD-ROMs and software, such as the Frisian Language Help CD-ROM, which provides help in writing Frisian texts, as well as the Children’s Frisian Language Help.
- Endowing chairs at the universities of Leyden and Amsterdam, the Fryske Akademy allows for academic education and research in the fields of Frisian language and literature, and the medieval history of Fryslân.
- The Fryske Akademy operates a ‘Taalburo’ (‘language desk’), advising private individuals and government organisations on ‘proper Frisian’, and also providing help on drawing up specialised texts such as deeds, other official papers, or technical documents.

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<sup>21</sup> Fryske Akademy. ‘The Fryske Akademy’: <http://www.fryske-akademy.nl> Page accessed 13.11.13.



Annex 1: Summary of the main activities conducted by language academies<sup>1</sup>

	Welsh Commissioner	Welsh Academy	French for the Future	Māori Language Commission	Euskaltzaindia (Spain)	Euskara Kultur Elkargoa (Navarre)	Euskal Kultur Erakundea (France)	Institut d'Estudis Catalans	Institut d'Estudis Occitans	Academia de la Llingua Asturiana	Fryske Akademy	TOTAL
Language schemes/legislative advice	✓			✓		✓						3
Investigating complaints	✓					✓						2
Conducting inquiries	✓											1
Publications		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	6
Language standardisation				✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	6
Dictionaries/encyclopaedias/glossaries		✓		✓	✓	✓					✓	5
Debates and conferences		✓	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	6
Language promotion		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓		✓	6
Courses		✓										1
Awards and medals		✓	✓									2
Translation				✓					✓		✓	3
Research and analysis				✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Summer/residential schemes			✓						✓			2
Funding provision		✓									✓	2
Resource hub			✓				✓					2
Arts and cultural expression							✓					1

<sup>1</sup> This table is produced on the basis of a best estimate from the information made publically available by each institution; it should not be regarded as a definitive list.