WHAT IS CATALAN?

Catalan is a Romance language, part of the Occitano-Romance branch of the Romance language family.

There are over 10 million speakers of Catalan.

It is spoken in Spain, France, Italy, and Andorra.

Catalan was derived from Vulgar Latin.

Catalan is often mistaken for being a dialect of Spanish but Catalan is its own language.

Catalan is also mistaken for being a mixture of Spanish and French but this is also not true.

It is most spoken non-state language in Europe.
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CATALAN

Catalan originated in the 9th century from Vulgar Latin in the Pyrenees Mountains.

The language first gained momentum in the early middle ages – spreading to Catalonia, Valencia, Balearic Islands, and Alghero (in Sardinia) by the 13th century.

The first attested writings in Catalan were thought to have been in an 8th century manuscript but it has since been lost – so the actual first writings are from the 11th century.

By the 9th century, multiple documents in maraonic Latin started to show elements of Catalan.
Catalan had its golden age during the Late Middle Ages when Valencia was a center of social and cultural dynamism – it was the sociocultural center of the Crown of Aragon, a medieval monarchy that was very powerful in the 14th and 15th centuries. Catalan was extremely present all through the Mediterranean because of the many ports in Catalan-speaking communities.
In the modern era, the use of Spanish became more prestigious than Catalan, so Catalan literature became influenced by Spanish; literary classes also became bilingual.

In 1659, the Treaty of Pyrenees resulted in Spain ceding the northern part of Catalonia to the French and soon after France was declared the only official language of the region. This is one of the first official instances of suppression of the language.
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CATALAN

After the French revolution, the use of Catalan in any way (even official) was prohibited – other languages such as Basque, Occitan, and Flemish were also discriminated against with similar policies.

The decline of Catalan in Spain continued through the 16th and 17th centuries. The War of Spanish Succession led to a series of laws that imposed the use of Spanish in all legal documentation all over Spain – including in Catalonia.
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CATALAN

However, in the 19th century, there was a literary revival of Catalan that has only been continuing on to this day. It started with Aribau’s Ode to the Homeland published in 1833.

Between 1931-1939, many restrictions against Catalan were lifted by the Spanish government.
After the French captured Algeria, the region houses many Catalan-speakers that brought the language over. However, after the independence of Algeria in 1962, almost all of these Catalan-speakers fled back to Northern Catalonia.

Since Spain transitioned to a democracy in 1982, Catalan has been finally recognized as an official language in certain regions of the country. It is also now a language of education and mass media. These efforts have helped increase the prestige of the language.
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CATALAN

According to the Statistical Institute of Catalonia, the Catalan language is the second most commonly used language in Catalonia, after Spanish, as a native or self-defining language. So while Catalan is making a comeback, the Spanish influence is still felt.

In a 2003 study for adults, 5% of Catalonians identified equally with both languages, 44.3% identified with Catalan, and 47.5% identified with Spanish.

To promote the use of Catalan, the government promotes the use of Catalan in Catalonia and other Catalan-speaking communities.
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CATALAN

In the Northern Catalan area of France, the majority of its native speakers are 60 or older. Catalan is studied as a foreign language by 30% of students in primary education and 15% in secondary.
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE STATUS

Catalan is spoken in various countries but only has official language status in the country of Andorra.

Catalan is recognized as a minority language in Italy, Spain, and France.

Three Catalan-speaking communities in Spain do have it recognized as co-official – Balearic Islands, Catalonia, Valencia.

Many want for Spain to give Catalan official language status, but the country currently has no plans to do so.
CATALAN LANGUAGE FAMILY

Catalan is a Western Romance language. It belongs to the Occitano-Romance branch.

The Occitano-Romance languages belong to a branch of Romance languages that encompasses the Occitan and Catalan languages spoken in certain areas of France and Spain.

Image credit: Koryakov (2001)
CATALAN LANGUAGE FAMILY

The Gallo Romance languages belong to a branch of Romance languages that include French, Occitan, and Franco-Provençal languages.

The Western Romance languages are Portuguese, Spanish, Asturian-Leonese, Aragonese, Catalan, Galician, Gascon, Provencal, Gallo-Wallon, French, Franco-Provençal, Romansh, and Ladin (according to linguist David Dalby).

Image credit: Koryakov (2001)
There are variations in Catalan phonology within each dialect. But a feature of standard Catalan is vowel reduction – wherein certain vowels appear as a schwa when they occur in unstressed syllables. Other notable features are the lack of diphthongization of Latin short ė and ō, the marked contrast of vowel pairs /ɛ e/ and /ɔ o/, many diphthongs with /w/, and many monosyllabic words that can include consonant clusters.

We can be confident that the phoneme /a/ underlies schwa in the roots for sing, bathe, and win because schwa in these forms in (5) alternates with [á] in the related nouns for ‘singing’, ‘bath, bathroom’, and ‘profit, gain’, where stress falls on the root vowel /a/. These forms are presented in (6).
For Western Catalan, the endings for verbs in 1st person present indicative is -e in verbs of the 1st conjugation and -∅ in verbs of the 2nd and 3rd conjugations in most of the Valencian Community, or -o in all verb conjugations in the Northern Valencian Community and Western Catalonia.

For Eastern Catalan, the endings for verbs 1st-person present indicative is -o, -i, or -∅ in all conjugations.
The word order of Catalan is SVO (subject-verb-object).

Similar to other Romance languages, Catalan has complex verb inflections.

The language is gendered and also has the formal and informal versions of personal pronouns.
The indicative verb tenses of Catalan are present, past imperfect, past perfect, past periphrastic perfect, future, and conditional.

The subjunctive verb tenses of Catalan are present and past.

There is also the imperative tense.
SIGNIFICANT SOUND CHANGES

In Old Catalan, the /(d)z/ that resulted from a merger of Proto-Western-Romance, became a /w/ finally or before a consonant, but remained as /(d)z/ between vowels.

In later Old Catalan, the /(d)z/ is lost between vowels.

Secondary development of double resonant consonants—such as /ll/, /mm/, /nn/, and /ʎʎ/. This was done through borrowing from Classical Latin - many Western Romance languages have this, includes Italian, Aragonese, Spanish, etc.
DIALECTS

There are 6 dialects of Catalan – Alguerese, Baleric, Central, Northern, Northwestern, and Valencian.

The four eastern dialects are Northern, Central, Balearic, and Alguerese; the two western dialects are Northwestern, Valencian.

One major phonological difference between the western and eastern dialects are that the eastern dialects only allow [i], [ɛ], and [u] to appear in unstressed syllables.
The Alguerese dialect of Catalan is more like the older version of the language and it has a little bit of Sardinian and Italian mixed in it. It also often called the “archaic” dialect since it is similar to the 14th and 15th century versions of Catalan.
The Baleric dialect of Catalan is different because it has 3 variants – Mallorcan, Menorcan, and Ibizan.

The Mallorcan has eight stressed vowels /a θ e i ɔ o u/, reduced to four [θ i o u] in unstressed position.

The Western Menorcan system has eight stressed vowels /a θ e i ɔ o u/, reduced to three [θ i u] in unstressed position.
The Eastern Menorcan and Ibizan system has seven stressed vowels /a ɛ e i ɔ o u/ reduced to three [ə i u] in unstressed position.

The vowel /a/ is central [ä] in Ibizan (as most Catalan dialects), while it is front [a] in Mallorcan and Menorcan.
The Central dialect has the highest number of speakers and it has the most densely populated areas such as Barcelona.

Within this dialect, there is variation from the Barcelona dialect to the smaller fishermen’s dialect – for example, the fishermen’s dialect has an inversion of personal pronouns. This fishermen’s dialect is generally understood by all Catalan speakers.
The Northern dialect, similar to the Balearic, does pronounce the final /a/ in words ending with /ia/ if the stress is before the penultimate syllable.

This Northern dialect also has a lot of French borrowing due to its location along the border.
In the Northwestern dialect, the verbs ending in 1st-person present indicative are -e in verbs of the 1st conjugation and -∅ in verbs of the 2nd and 3rd conjugations in most of the Valencian Community.

There is also an -o in all verb conjugations in the Northern Valencian Community and Western Catalonia.
The Catalan speaking community in Valencia does not say that they speak Catalan or even a dialect of Catalan, they instead insist that they are speaking Valencian, an entirely different language. However, they are in fact speaking the Valencian dialect of Catalan, which does have some differences from standard Catalan but not enough to truly be its own language. Valencians also argue that Valencia should be independent from the rest of Spain.
Catalan uses the Latin script, with a few added symbols – it has 26 letters and some letter-diacritic combinations that aren’t explicitly in the alphabet.

Catalan orthography is systematic and phonologically based.

Due to ongoing suppression, Catalan language was finally coded in 1907 and published in 1913 through the Institute of Catalan Studies.

The first publication was called Spelling Rules (Normes ortogràfiques) and was published in 1913, the second publication was the Spelling Dictionary (Diccionari ortogràfic) in 1917, and finally the Catalan Grammar (Gramàtica catalana) was published in 1918.
CONTACT INDUCED CHANGES OVER TIME

One contact induced change is borrowing, mostly from Spanish, English, and French.

Many of these changes were brought on by rule from both the Spanish and French at different times. As well as simple contact induced changed with other languages.

According to Ethnologue, the lexical similarities of Catalan with Italian is 87%, with Portuguese 85%, with Spanish 85%, and 75% with Sardinian.
CATALONIAN IDENTITY

The Catalan language has extremely strong nationalism ties.

The Catalan speaking community, especially in Catalonia, is very passionate about Catalan pride and has, for decades, called for a succession.

The Catalan people want to become a separate state and the movement has only gained more fuel since the 2008 financial crisis.
This Catalan identity has been around since the first instances of Catalan repression in Spain, as the Catalan speaking community felt singled out and separate from the rest of the country. People will refer to themselves as Catalonians before Spaniards.
CATALAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

This movement has roots in Catalan nationalism and wants the independence of Catalonia from Spain and the independence of Northern Catalonia from France— as well as all other Catalan countries.

This movement began in 1922 when Francesc Macia founded the political party Catalan State. Macia also claimed there was a Catalan Republic but the Catalan autonomy was abolished in 1931 because of Macia’s many political disturbances.

The modern movement got traction again in 2010 when the Constitutional Court of Spain ruled that some articles of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy were unconstitutional—many saw this ruling as an opportunity to demand independence.
CATALAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

After this, many Catalan communities started holding protests. In 2013, to begin the independence process, the Catalan government added a new parliament which adopted a Catalan Sovereignty Declaration, which said that Catalan people had the right to decide their own future.

However, the Spanish government said that this was illegal since the Catalonian government has a majority of independent representatives.

However, not many other countries support Catalonian independence and this movement had led to intense violence and protests.


