

The Birth of Experimental Phonetics in Spain. Pere Barnils and his Barcelona Laboratories (1913-1933)

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Pere Barnils (1882-1933) can be considered the major figure in Catalan linguistics during the first third of this century and the leading experimental phonetician in Spain for the same period of time. He introduced experimental phonetics in this country by founding its first laboratory to develop that new linguistic science together with the edition of its outstanding journal of phonetics. Barnils set up the basis of Catalan phonetics as a science and he was the first to apply experimental techniques in order to correct speech and voice disorders.

He had studied for three years at the German University of Halle an der Saale (1908-1911), where he took his doctorate in Romance Linguistics in June 1912, before he had the chance of meeting l'Abbé Rousselot in Paris.

Pere Barnils was in Paris (November 1911 - May 1912), sponsored by the Barcelona provincial council ruled by the great Catalan nationalist Enric Prat de la Riba so that he could follow Gilliéron's lectures at the École de Hautes Études and above all those of Rousselot, whose worldwide reputation had reached Barnils in Halle. Our Catalan linguist learnt how to make artificial palates and to interpret kymographic tracings at the Institut Catholique and at the modest laboratory of the Collège de France, close to La Sorbonne, directed by Rousselot and assisted by his best known disciple Joseph Chlumský of Prague. The interest in experimental techniques aroused 'chez l'Abbé' continued throughout his career. In 1913, once back in Barcelona, he edited the first journal of Catalan linguistics, which turned out to be the first periodical of modern linguistics that was published in Spain: *Butlletí de Dialectologia Catalana*.

At the same time he started to organize what would become the first Laboratory of Experimental Phonetics in that country (1913-1921). It was set up at the Institut d'Estudis Catalans in Barcelona and began to work satisfactorily in 1915 and full-time from mid 1916 up to the end of 1917.

In April 1914 Barnils represented Catalonia at the First International Congress of Experimental Phonetics held in Hamburg and was elected as the representative of Spain to the newly born International Association of Phonetics. For a few weeks he worked with Panconcelli-Calzia at his laboratory set up at Hamburg Colonial Institute so that the young Catalan phonetician could get acquainted with the recent experimental techniques developed in Europe.

During World War One, which broke out the following summer, Barnils' laboratory became accidentally the leading center in experimental phonetics in Western and Southern Europe. He developed it into a major scientific center of research with an interdisciplinary approach: in addition to the studies of Catalan descriptive phonetics by experimental means, he worked with laryngologists and speech therapists and welcomed all sort of researchers – native as well as foreign – whose interests were related in some way or other to phonetics.

In the summer of 1917 his magnificent first - and last - volume of *Estudis Fonètics* appeared, which included the works carried out at the laboratory, such as studies on the articulations of /k/ and /g/ in Majorcan Catalan, vowel nasality, alveolar roll vibrations and articulatory force in voiceless plosives (to cite only those by Barnils on Catalan phonetics). Unfortunately he had to leave his experimental work because of both political reasons and conflicts with the management. As a result his first laboratory was ultimately closed down in 1921, after three years of inactivity.

His interest in the disorders of speech and voice led to the founding of his private 'Laboratori de la Paraula' (1914-1933) and his taking charge of the Barcelona School for Deaf-mutes (1918-1930) to whom he devoted almost all of the rest of his life. There he founded his third Laboratory of Experimental Phonetics and edited its journal *La Paraula* (1918-1921). At the moment of his death Barnils was the editor of his third phonetics journal: *El Parlar* (1931-1932), while he directed his private 'Laboratori' and School for the deaf-mutes, which he had just founded. Although they were short-lived periodicals they attained a high degree of quality which was up to the standard of similar works in Europe and America.

Barnils was an active participant in international congresses: shortly before his death he read papers on speech pathology at the Second International Congress of Linguists (Geneva, 1931), at the First ICPhS (Amsterdam, 1932) and at the Fifth International Congress of Logopedy and Phoniatics (Vienna, 1932).

We must also point out that our phonetician always showed great interest in popularizing the phonetic sciences, practically unknown at the time, by means of newspaper and encyclopedia articles, which together with his phonetic journals and other works made him the greatest contributor ever to Catalan experimental phonetics.

Other Barnils' phonetic publications include: 'Sobre fonètica catalana. Vocals' (*Bolletí del Diccionari de la Llengua Catalana*, Palma de Mallorca, 1911); 'Études de prononciations catalanes à l'aide du palais artificiel' (*Revue de Phonétique*, Paris, 1912); 'Études de prononciations catalanes' (*Ibid.*, 1913); 'Les consonants dites semi-sordes' (*Estudis Romànics*, I, Barcelona, 1916); 'Sobre la quantitat de les vocals tòniques' (*Ibid.*); 'Comentaris a un fragment recitat' (*Estudis Fonètics*, Barcelona, 1917); 'Notes fonètiques disperses: I-Sobre el parlar judeo-espanyol. II-Sobre el grec de Corfú' (*Ibid.*; *Treballs realitzats durant l'any 1917* (Barcelona, 1918); 'A propòsit de l'apa-

rell de Franz X. Rötzer' (*La Paraula*, Barcelona 1918); 'Un archivo fonográfico' (*Ibid.*); 'El timbre de la vocal neutra del català' (*Ibid.*, 1919); 'Un donativo a nuestra escuela: el Phonoscope Lioret' (*Ibid.*, 1920); 'Pathégrafo' (*Enciclopedia Espasa-Calpe*, Barcelona, 1920); 'Fonética' (*Ibid.*, 1924); 'Sordomudo' (*Ibid.*, 1927); *El Laboratorio de la Palabra* (Barcelona, 1928); *Defectes d'el parlar* (Barcelona, 1930); 'Articulacions alveolars condicionades' (*Miscel.lània A.M. Alcover*; Palma de Mallorca, 1932).