

Contemporary Developments in Corsican Culture and Language

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Corsican language has been in decline over the last 250 years (following Corsica's acquisition by France in 1768) and it is now listed as "definitely endangered" on UNESCO's (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) map of the "World's Languages in Danger", published in 2009. Despite this situation, a reverse trend began in the 1960s, when some cultural revival movements appeared, and the language has received a degree of support from the Corsican, French and European governments. These interventions were successful in stimulating a variety of cultural practices that are strongly linked to the Corsican Language. After examining examples drawn from Corsican, comics, cartoons, films and drama, the paper will discuss the significance of new Corsican cultural practices for the language (and island society in general), and the role of local, national and supranational cultural and art policies in the contemporary Corsican experience.

Keywords: Corsican language, corsican arts, art policies

Corsican Language and Its History

Corsica is the fourth largest Mediterranean island whose population is just 300,000. This island is situated near Italian coasts, for example, Liguria, Tuscany and Sardinia; however, Corsica is one of French regions. Historically speaking, Corsican history under France is not so long. The island was under the rule of Roman Empire in the Antiquity and that of Italian cities (e.g., Pisa and Genoa) in the Middle Ages. It was only just 20 years before the Revolution when Corsica was annexed to France.

Corsican geographical and historical situation makes her special linguistic situation. Some sociolinguists explain that situation is diglossic. It means in a situation that two languages exist, and one of which is more dominant than the other language coexisting in a society. In Corsican case, French is the dominant language and the other language is Corsican. Linguistically speaking, the latter is a variation of Central Italian dialects. That is to say, Corsican belongs to Italo-Romance languages.

Before the Annexation, the islanders were speaking Corsican and the notables were writing in Italian. Between the Annexation and the Revolution, Italian and French coexisted as official languages. After the Revolution, Italian was chased away out of the island. However, the islanders were always only speaking in Corsican before the 1950's, although French was officially used.

It was in the beginning of the 1960's, when Corsican started to be remarkably marginalised, young people's avoidance of traditional lifestyle and diffusion of radio and television in French made this marginalisation

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decisive. Lack of university and job forced young people to head toward Paris or Continent, so they had to learn and speak French positively. Corsican stopped to be mother tongue of the islanders in this decade.

In the top of the 1970's, Corsican nationalist movement and groups emerged. Some of them claimed for preservation and school education of Corsican language and the islanders who did not belong to nationalist movement (e.g., teachers, writers, priests, doctors and advocates) followed and supported this claim. In this decade, Corsican was considered *à part entière* in French, that is to say, it was not a dialect but a proper language.

By the grace of François Mitterand's decentralisation policies, Corsican language started to be educated as one of optional subject of modern languages in secondary schools (*collège* and *lycée*) in 1983. After that immersion language class, Mediterranean section and Corsican in primary education (*école* and *maternelle*) were also realised.

Corsican Language in Actual "Endangered" Situation

Unfortunately, we cannot confirm a recovery of Corsican language in a daily speaking level about 20 years' after the commencement of school education. The INSEE, French national statistic institute reported that the percentage of communicating with one's parents in a regional language did not stop to decrease, and concluded that though the regional language was inherited by generation like a foreign language, its practical use was well rarer than the latter.

European level also has the same conclusion. The EBLUL reports that "Corsican is a clear example of a gradual disappearance of linguistic reproduction generation by generation...a decrease of Corsican using number and proportion in the last two decades is evident".

International organisation points out the same situation. UNESCO lists "endangered" languages in the World. "UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger" were published in 1996, 2001 and 2009. Corsican is classified as "definitely endangered", meaning that "children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home" in each version.

In 2008, France revised her constitution with inserting a new article, stating that regional languages are "national cultural heritage". French government seems to feel the necessity to preserve them more positively and the Ministry of Culture launches several policies for promoting the practical use of the regional languages. However, people cannot conclude that Corsican has escaped from endangered situation of disappearance.

Formation and Development of "Corsican Arts" Based on Corsican Language

Notwithstanding concerning about Corsican language's future, some new "arts" based on this language have been forming and developing since mid 1970's. This decade is called *Riacquistu* there. The word means "cultural revival" or "renaissance" in Corsican. However, it connotes that the islanders, especially young at that time reappraised Corsican culture that had been estimated to be old-fashioned, rustic and shameful. Corsican arts—it is necessary to explain its definition because the term is not more generalised than Corsican language and culture—are what is expressed or formed with or in Corsican theatre, cartoon and movie.

Corsican Theatre

In Corsica, several brilliant theatrical poets, for example, Vattelapesca and Janette Notini existed before the World War II. However, It can be said that after the War, there was a lack of theatrical art in Corsica. There was not any infrastructure for and knowledge about theatre and spectacle art in the Island before the 1970's. It

was Dumenicu Tognotti and his company Teatru Paisanu who changed this situation. This company presented firstly *U Fiatu* in 1973. After that, it created five original pieces in Corsican in 10 years. Ghjacumu Thiers, famous Corsican linguist, writer and scenarist evaluates this company as below:

From the 1970's, a theatre which was more fastidious in aesthetics of the modernity, opened toward contemporary quests and anxious about combining questions on the culture with Corsican society having the problems being offered from the sensibility of the contemporary human. In this period, a company Teatru Paisanu inspired several militant pieces and found its subjects in Corsican history and affirmation of insular national sentiment... Though all of its pieces are strongly marked by nationalist ideology, some of them make a figure of literary, aesthetic and socio-political events. In this theatre, what is remarkable is the recurrent presence of Mazzeru, wizard who crystallises the latent conscience of the people and the tragic volition of the Corsicans faced to the destiny.

Success of Teatru Paisanu induced appearance of several companies in Corsican in 1980's, like *Théâtre Point*, *Locu Teatrale*, *Teatru Mascone* and *U Teatrinu*. *U Teatrinu* is a pioneer in the second stage of Corsican theatre. This company was founded by the former members of the group *A Cumpania di l'Ormu*, one of other Corsican companies formed in the 1970's, like Teatru Paisanu. It is subsidised by Corsican regional council and Bastia City, where the company's strong point is. The aim of foundation in the convention is development and popularisation of theatre in Corsican.

U Teatrinu broke fresh ground of Corsican theatre. One is the presentation translated in Corsican of worldwide masterpieces. Till now *King Lear* (W. Shakespeare), *The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife* (Federico Garcia Lorca) and *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* (Molière) were translated in Corsican. *The Chioggia Scuffles* (Carlo Gordonini) was translated and adapted into *The Bastia Scuffles* (Corsican title is *Baruffe Bastiasce*). Secondly the company diversified Corsican original theatre. Those of the 1970's were mainly tragedies based on Corsican history and society, but however, for the popular islanders, it was very hard to comprehend Teatru Paisanu's pieces. So the companies in the 1980's, like *U Teatrinu* focused on other fields, for example, comedy, improvisation, satire, sketch and theatre for children than the tragedy. Furthermore, *U Teatrinu* works also for training young and adult actors in Corsican and exchanging with Sardinian and Sicilian theatre actors. Its founder and director is Guy Cimino, one of the famous Corsican actors and also main scenarist.

Corsicartoons

France is one of the most developed centres of the "ninth art". However, there were very few pieces where Corsica or Corsicans were drawn (only *Asterix in Corsica* one volume of the most famous French comic series "Asterix" and *Corsican File*, also one of detective comic series "Jack Parmer" by Petillon, who is very famous satiric cartoonist for *Canard Enchaîné*) in comparison with many novels, especially crime fiction which treats Corsicans as criminals, runaways and bandits.

It is in *Grossu minutu* that Corsica and Corsicans were drawn and Corsican language was inserted for the first time. It was drawn by Nicolas Carlotti, Corsican cartoonist. Firstly, it was published on the daily local newspaper *Le Provençal-la Corse* as a cartoon. It was consisted of more than 320 episodes. They were Corsican proverbs, allegories and fables offered from local storytellers and historians.

The younger generation which was raised by *Grossu Minutu* created new Corsican drawing. Batti Manfruegli is a typical cartoonist of the new generation. When he was a child, he used to read everyday *le Journal de Mickey* and *Grossu Minutu*. He started his career of a cartoonist in Corsican in 1975. It is like Carlotti drawing for a local newspaper. However Batti Manfruegli extended Corsican ninth art to many fields.

He published several albums in Corsican for language education in a school by a support of cultural association and local education authority. Corsican famous tales and history are main motive. He tries socio-political caricature. Its target is not only for contemporary Corsica, but also France and the World. One of his typical drawings is a scene where three men are drawn. One is Uncle Sam drinking Coca-cola, stepping on the second person, with saying "We all speak in English!" The second is resisting being stepped on by the American and saying "*Nous parlons en français*" (Let's speak French). However, the second also is stepping on another person. He is also resisting being stepped with saying "*Parlemu corsu*" (Let's speak Corsican). This masterpiece does not criticise only danger of cultural globalisation, but also that of nation-based anti-globalisation.

Corsica and Corsicans in the Movie

In the long and glorious French cinematographic history, Corsica and Corsicans used to be always stereotyped. People can see an anthology about French movie treating Corsicans or filmed in the Island and say that it was the image formed always through Tino Rossi.

This image was changed by the islanders themselves from the beginning of 1990's. By the second devolution operated in 1991, Corsican regional government (*Collectivité Territoriale de Corse*, Corsican Territorial Collectivity) has the authority for projecting and executing original cultural policies. It stresses on filmmaking, including TV programme. For that, the government launched mainly three projects. One is opening a new type of movie museum. It was realised as *Casa di lume*, complex of a movie archive and a film commission. The archive is for the films where Corsican actors like Tino had appeared or whose location was gone in the Island and the commission aims at inviting and facilitating movie and other audio-visual filming from Continental France and foreign countries.

Training programme is for movie staff. A course of audiovisual and multimedia was created in the College Institute of Technology at Corte City. This course also is unique in France and its feature is that students cannot learn only technological side, but also dramatic one. Furthermore, in this Institute, students being able to speak Corsican are admitted, unless they have to learn it there. So people can expect that the movie staff including script writer, actor and director will have the ability of Corsican in the future.

In 1999, the first television drama that several casts talk partially in Corsican appeared. Its title is *Anna in Corsica* (*Anne en Corse* in French). The director and script writer is Carole Giacobbi.

It is a story of a Corsican-born-young hairdresser woman whose name is Anna. She was working in Paris with her fiancé. Unfortunately, his sudden death in a traffic accident made Anna quit Parisian life and go back to her birth home in a Corsican small village. At last, she rebounded from her depression through her family and their neighbours in the village. We cannot grasp the biographical detail of the director Carole Giacobbi. However, the family name Giacobbi is typically Corsican. So it is probably that the director was born in the Island or her father or mother was born in Corsica. There are several scenes where Anna's parents or their neighbours are talking each other in Corsican. But in this film, the insertion of conversation in Corsican means aged inhabitants' slanders toward the homecoming young people who do not understand this language. Only extras speak in it.

In 2004, two films' motif is homecoming of young people born in Corsica or whose parent was insular born appeared: *The Silence* (*Le silence* in original title) and *Elena's Gift* (*Le cadeau d'Elena*). Their directors are Corsicans. That of *The Silence* is Orso Miret, whose mother was born in Asco Valley of Corsica. That of

the latter is Frederic Graziani born in Bastia City. The plot in the two films is also resemble. The story begins at the scene that a young man living in the Continent arrives in the Island. Each young lead of two stories were involved in a criminal incident. It can be said that two films show the specialties of modern Corsican society. Firstly, it is young people's homecoming into the island village. Secondly, the films draw several psychological conflicts that this homecoming gives him his surroundings. Because the young leads are rootless whether they were born or were not born in Corsican village, keeping traditional and pastoral life and values even now. Thirdly, the crimes picked up in the movie are only a catalyst for standing out the conflict. The two films projected in 2004 are more focused on Corsican society than *Anna in Corsica*. Scene casts talking in Corsican increases relatively in *The Silence* and *Elena's Gift*.

In this year, there were other two films whose location were organised in the island. One is *Corsican File* that cited in the paragraphs about Corsicartoons. It was produced by the Gaumont Company, one of the greatest moviemakers in France, and casted by Jean Reno and Caterina Murino, who are worldwide celebrities. However, almost of other casts and extras are islanders or the actor of *U Teatrinu*, and there is a scene where Reno and Murino talk each other in Corsican.

The other is *The Three Little Girls* (*Les 3 petite filles*) whose main casts are Gerard Jugnot and Adriana Kalanbou. It can be said that this year is a turning point of Corsican movie.

In 2007, Corsican filmmaking was more developed. In *Sempre Vivu* (means *still alive*) whose director is Robin Renucci, and the main casts are islanders and almost of all conversations are in Corsican without a few supporting roles supposed came from the Continent. So this work is subtitled in French from the beginning to the end. Though its theme is "dead or alive", this story is not drama but comedy. A border between the dead and the alive is one of Corsican legend and mythology, and the two films in 2004 also treat this theme.

Local, National and Supranational Cultural Policies for Corsican Arts

Of course, we can not forget an existence of French national cultural, policies for example the Ministry of Culture and its regional branch DRAC (*la direction régionale des affaires culturelles*, Regional Direction for Cultural Affairs) for bringing up and developing visual arts based on Corsican language in spite of strong anxiety about its future risk of extinct. However, we have to say that Corsican arts owe their development to devolution of national cultural policies to Corsican regional government in the beginning of the 1980's and 1990's. So the centre of cultural and artistic policies in Corsica is essentially in Corsican Territorial Collectivity (CTC). By the decentralisation operated in 1983, the FRAC (*Le fonds régionaux pour les arts contemporains*, Regional Funds for the Contemporary Art) are created and CTC, the Ministry of Culture invest for them and it is CTC that projects, executes and reports the policies for contemporary arts.

In 2005, Corsican Assembly voted a strategic cultural and artistic project that installs an organisation called "Cultural Kit (*Outil Culturel*)" in the CTC and gives mainly three missions to the "Kit". The missions are (1) centre of human resources (information, databank, education and council), (2) support for cultural activities (technical assistance, skill-up assistance, exchange promotion and film commission), and (3) support to the regional cultural policies (council, research and evaluation). Thus the CTC emphasises the improvement of art infrastructure and the integration of information and human resources. One of fruits from this project is realisation of *Prumitei* (meaning Prometheus in Corsican), a complex of crafts exposition, spectacles show and tourism, and Corsican Polyphonic Art Centre aiming for creating new styles of audiovisual arts based on fusion between Corsican polyphony and other visual arts.

Also in transnational level, Corsican arts benefit from mainly European cross-border policies. From the year 2000 to 2006, Corsica and neighbour Italian regions (Tuscany and Sardinia) were selected as a recipient of the Interreg Programme of the European Union (Interreg III A, III B and III C), for accelerating cultural and artistic exchanges, especially among the young people. For example, two Italian movie festivals held in the Island at Bastia and Ajaccio have enjoyed this programme's aid. From 2007, the Interreg was replaced by new cross-border programmes the Cooperation in the Heart of the Mediterranean including newly Liguria, and ENPI-CBCMED (Cross-border Cooperation in the Mediterranean by European Neighbourhood Policies and Partnership Investment) which promotes multilateral exchanges in all Mediterranean regions including non-EU countries.

Conclusion

On one hand, we are witnessing that a field of Corsican Arts is successfully going to be made. On the other hand, linguistic success for Corsicans, it is said that, has not be realised yet. We can observe two cultural phenomena which are contrast each other. Incidentally what means the success of Corsican arts ? By the mid-1980's, we can say that the revival of old-fashioned Corsican culture meant Corsican national movement against French Jacobin centralisation and colonialism. However, from the beginning of the 1990's, aggressive nationalist assertion through artistic activities faded away gradually, and self-reflection on characteristics and originalities of contemporary Corsican culture or society pursuit for solidities between Corsicans and other ethnic minorities or islanders, and for alternative universality based on cultural diversities.

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