

Ethnopoetic research in universities and digital archives: The Canpop database

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses data, analysis and ideas that have come out of the Canpop project at the University of Alacant. The project has combined ethnopoetic research and university teaching to set up an on-line digital archive comprising the lyrics and audio recordings of 2342 folk songs. The Canpop project has one clear and simple aim: to create a virtual domain in which people can share and distribute not only a collection of folk songs but also the audio recordings of the songs being performed (their ethnopoetic acts). The project has been underway for six years so far, and the results indicate that the resource is useful for raising awareness of our ethnopoetic heritage, and for training teachers and linguists in our universities working in the fields of educational research, dialectological documentation, creating teaching materials, raising awareness of our ethnopoetic heritage, comparative literature, corpus linguistics and, most clearly, oral folk literature.

So, the results of the Canpop project suggest a new direction for the management of on-line digital archives, particularly in the field of ethnopoetic university research.

KEYWORDS

Canpop; ethnopoetics; folk songs; oral literature; literature on line

RESUM

En aquest article s'aporten dades, anàlisis i reflexions sobre el projecte Canpop de la Universitat d'Alacant. Es tracta d'un projecte en què la recerca etnopoètica, vinculada a la docència universitària, s'ha orientat a la configuració d'un arxiu digital en línia amb les lletres i els enregistraments d'àudio d'un total de 2.342 cançons populars. L'objectiu de Canpop és ben concret i senzill: la implementació d'un espai virtual on poder compartir i difondre, a més d'un determinat repertori de cançons populars, el testimoni sonor dels corresponents actes etnopoètics. El resultat, avaluat sis anys després de la creació, apunta a la consolidació d'un recurs no solament eficient per a la divulgació del patrimoni etnopoètic, sinó també útil per a la formació universitària de mestres i filòlegs, per a la investigació educativa, per a la documentació dialectològica, per a l'elaboració de materials didàctics, per a la divulgació del patrimoni etnopoètic, per a treballs de literatura comparada, per a projectes de lingüística de corpus i, òbviament, també per a múltiples estudis sobre literatura oral popular.

Així doncs, l'experiència del projecte Canpop suggereix noves línies i orientacions en la gestió d'arxius digitals en xarxa, particularment dins l'àmbit de la recerca etnopoètica universitària.

PARAULES CLAU

Canpop; etnopoètica; cançoner; literatura oral; literatura en línia

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IN NOVEMBER 2009 the first test version of the *Canpop* database was presented at the fifth meeting of the Grup d'Estudis Etnopoètics [Ethnopoetic Research Group].¹ The first version of the platform included 316 folk songs recorded in the south of Valencia in 2007-08. Six years later, the number of transcriptions and recordings has increased seven-fold, with a total of 2342 songs. Furthermore, the *Canpop* digital platform has served as the basis for a new resource, *Anapop*, a database of oral folk literature (folktales and legends).

This article describes how an application such as *Canpop*² can be useful to ethnopoetic research in particular and cultural studies in general because of its core aim to create a virtual space that can host not just the lyrics of songs but also recordings of the ethnopoetic acts in which the songs take centre stage. My epistemological starting point is the proposal that an ethnopoetic act should be conceptualised as a unit of “comunicació artística interactiva” [interactive artistic communication],³ so we cannot focus solely on the text in isolation; rather, we should also consider the context (and, overall, the whole of the communicative process in which it takes place). In this regard, the traditional practice of collecting the written lyrics of folk songs is methodologically unsatisfactory. Indeed, simply transcribing a text (even if the music is also transcribed) inevitably omits phonetic information, other accompanying sounds, information about the type of context in which the song is performed, specific circumstances of the ethnopoetic act, different tones of voice, sounds, interference, ironic accents, and more.

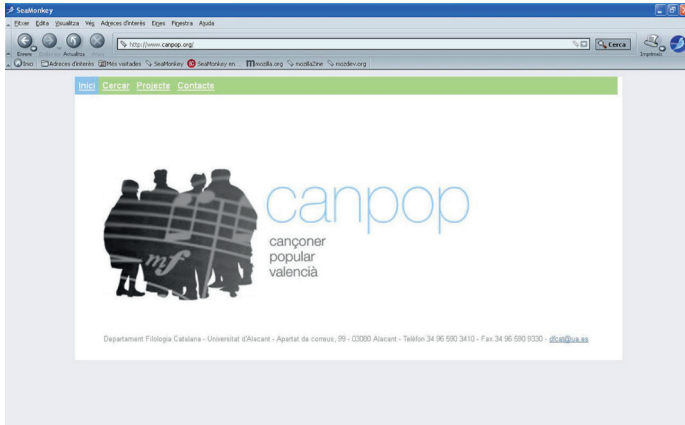
The aim of the *Canpop* repository is, in this regard, as basic as it is methodologically clear: taking advantage of the technological resources now available, we believe that in collecting songs we can dispense with musical notation and directly offer audio recordings of the ethnopoetic acts themselves. To do this, we designed a digital platform⁴ so that users can select and consult recordings as mp3 files together with the lyrics of each song.

1. This article is a product of a line of research on Catalan folk literature funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness through the research and development project FFI2015-64128-P (MINECO/FEDER).

2. The URL of the *Canpop* site is <<http://www.canpop.org>> [Last access: October 2016].

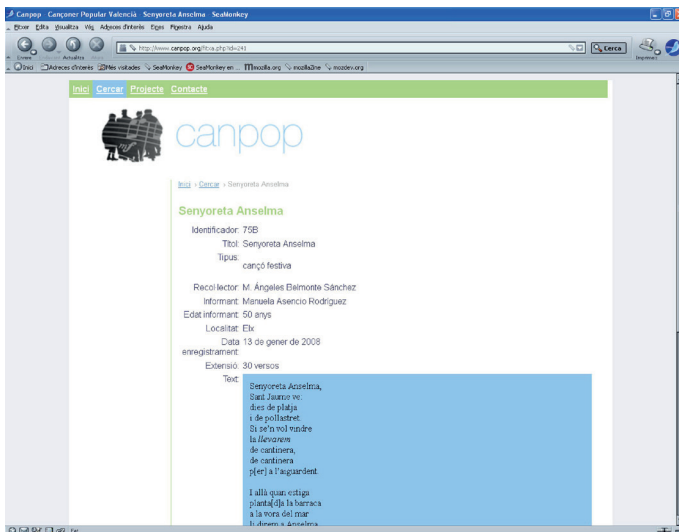
3. In this vein see the contributions of Josep M. Pujol, finally collected in *Això era i no era: obra folklòrica de Josep M. Pujol* (Oriol-Samper 2013: 23-112).

4. The technician entrusted with the task of building the program is the programmer and designer Hector Rubio i Marín.



Home page of the Canpop platform, at <http://www.canpop.org>

The project began with the aim of collecting, recording, digitising, transcribing, cataloguing and digitally processing a database with sound files (the mp3 files of the recordings) and text files (the transcribed lyrics of the songs), tagged with the following information fields: *a*) an identification code; *b*) the title (which, as a general criterion, coincides with the first line of the song); *c*) the type of song; *d*) the full name of who recorded the text; *e*) the full name of who performed the text; *f*) the region; *g*) the *comarca* (district); *h*) the locality; *i*) the date of the recording; *j*) the length of the recording; *k*) observations made by the person who recorded the text or the artist who performed it. This last field has proven to be very useful over time, since it has enabled relevant information to be included about the communicative context of each song in the database.



An entry for a song in *Canpop*

It is difficult to accurately measure the interest that *Canpop* has generated amongst educators, researchers and the general public. We have anecdotal evidence that many school teachers have used *Canpop* as a source for designing and planning modules and projects. And as from September 2012 there was a qualitative leap in terms of public visibility of the project: firstly, there was the full-page report by the journalist Juanjo Payá (2012: 36) for the newspaper *Información*, which opened the “Cultura & Sociedad” (Culture and Society) section;⁵ this was followed in early October 2012 by a report on the midday news of the Valencian TV channel Canal 9: a prime slot at the time.⁶



Screenshots from the Canal 9 report on *Canpop* recorded by RTVV and broadcast in October 2012 for Telenotícies Migdia (Midday News): Josefina Ivorra, informant from the town of Agost; and Joan Borja, director of *Canpop*

As well as attracting interest from the press, the *Canpop* virtual songbook has been academically useful for one of the individual research projects that has emerged from the ethnopoetic subjects at the University of Alacant.⁷ This is a supervised project in which students have to find at least one informant who is willing to perform ethnopoetic texts in Catalan. In this project, students can find, document, record and transcribe songs, legends, contemporary legends, folktales and jokes, amongst other genres.⁸ If students choose to study songs they can, if

5. The digital version of this report can be accessed at <<http://www.diarioinformacion.com/cultura/2012/09/25/voz-pueblo/1297861.html>> and a pdf file of the print version is available at <<http://juanjopaya.es/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/20120924036.pdf>> [Last access: October 2016].

6. Canal 9 and the whole of the Valencian radio and television corporation (RTVV) have now been closed down by the Valencian government, and with this their on-line archives are no longer available –including this report, which was recorded in Agost. However, a copy is available on YouTube at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6ZwJb-sLqM>> [Last access: October 2016].

7. Specifically, this is the case of the following subjects: Popular Catalan Literature I (code 8645, in the curriculum of the *Llicenciatura* in Catalan Studies); Popular Catalan Literature and Culture (code 30024, in the *Grau* in Catalan Studies); Workshops in Popular Catalan Literature (code 17556 in the primary education teaching qualification) and Workshops in Verbal Creation in Catalan (17556 in the primary education teaching qualification).

8. As well as these ethnopoetic genres, students can also choose other options in fields of popular culture such as popular games and superstitions, which are not the object of study

they wish, publish the results as part of the *Canpop* database. This is doubly beneficial: on the one hand, the students have the incentive that their research is put to specific and evident use; on the other, *Canpop* is ensured a continuous supply of new recordings and new transcriptions.

Student evaluations rate these projects very positively overall and satisfaction is high. It is not uncommon for students to be surprised when they see their own grandparents' generation participating in the folk culture of Valencia, remembering songs and contexts from a world that is utterly alien to the students themselves. Nor is it unusual to hear students saying that their ethnopoetic research has broken sociolinguistic constraints and enabled them to spontaneously recover Valencian⁹ as a language in which to communicate with their grandparents' generation.¹⁰ Those students who come from traditionally Spanish-speaking areas¹¹ are encouraged to interview people who have Catalan as their first language, and these are often family members of their classmates from traditionally Valencian-speaking areas. Overall, the experience helps students to better understand the sociolinguistic reality of southern Valencian districts, and gives Spanish-speaking students the opportunity to use the language they have studied in the classroom.

Furthermore, the simple exercise of understanding and transcribing the lyrics of recorded songs stimulates students' metalinguistic reflection, and gives them greater knowledge of dialectal diversity and how the language differs in the southern areas where Catalan is spoken. Also, the folk songs clearly provide a model of the language that has real educational value, midway between the vivacity, diversity and spontaneity of colloquial registers and the functionality and formality of the written standard. So, the *Canpop* database, alongside strictly ethnopoetic considerations, has shown itself to be a valuable resource in the linguistic and cultural education of university students learning Catalan as their second language.

With 2342 entries, *Canpop* provides the education system, especially at pre-school, primary and secondary levels, enormous possibilities in many different areas. In this regard, we should highlight research such as that carried out by Alícia Castelló de León, one of the main collaborators in the *Canpop* project over

of ethnopoetics but have fertile links with the field. For example, think about the rhymes used in many children's games, or how phraseological units are linked in popular magical thinking, and so on.

9. Valencian and Catalan are two different names for the same language.

10. This is especially true in the cases of cities such as Alacant and Elx, where Spanish has mostly displaced Catalan, and the intergenerational transmission of the language has largely been broken between students' grandparents and parents (see Montonya 1996). Although younger generations have studied Valencian as a subject throughout their schooling (and some subjects have been taught in Valencian), they often come to university with serious difficulties in expressing themselves fluently and efficiently in what is Valencia's own language. The challenge, then, lies in 're-vernacularising' the language (Montoya-Vila-Gomàriz 2010). In this context, then, there is strategic interest in activities that build (or enable) bridges between what is learned in educational institutions and the effective, colloquial, free, genuine and spontaneous social use of the language undergoing a process of linguistic normalisation.

11. This is how the situation is described in Law 4/1983, of 23rd November, on the Use and Teaching of Valencian, with reference to those places where Valencian is not spoken.

the past few years. In her student dissertation, she combined ethnopoetic and educational research and analysed how the material already collected could be used in teaching and learning. Her study, *Recull etnopoètic de Mutxamel: recopilació i aprofitament didàctic* [Mutxamel's ethnopoetic texts: collection and uses for teaching]¹² earned the highest grade of *matricula d'honor* (distinction) and after an exhaustive consideration of teaching practice concludes that resources available on *Canpop* “poden ser emprats pels mestres com eines molt valuoses a l'hora de treballar transversalment” [are valuable tools for teachers when they work across disciplines]. One of the outcomes of this work consisted of studying Valencian phonetics through folk songs, with strategically designed exercises, which produced highly satisfactory results.

Other projects from the field of education that use *Canpop* are: *Malandia*, a website for learning Valencian and English through translations;¹³ a project by the bell ringers of Valencia Cathedral;¹⁴ and the educational project *Sotavent. Cançoner popular d'Altea* [Leeward: Folk songs from Altea] (Borja 2015). *Canpop* has clearly been useful in the field of ethnopoetic research. For example, Anna Francés Mira and Maria Jesús Francés Mira (2011),¹⁵ in their work “Dansa i cant al poble de Bocairent” [Song and dance in Bocairent], highlight geographical variation that is of interest in analysing the folk songs of Bocairent. As a second example, the work “Erotisme i tabú en les formes picardioses del cançoner popular” [Eroticism and taboo in the picaresque forms of folk songs] (Borja 2013) focuses on a corpus provided by *Canpop*. The *Canpop* database has even proved to be useful as a tool for documentation and support in comparative literature: this is the case of the article by Laia Climent and Aina Montferrer (2013), “Cos femení, sexe i relacions filials en la poesia de Vicent Andrés Estellés: una comparació amb M. Mercè Marçal” [Female body, sex and filial relationships in the poetry of Vicent Andrés Estellés: a comparison with M. Mercè Marçal].¹⁶ It can also be used for philological research and is a source for projects in corpus linguistics.¹⁷

12. This work, published in the University of Alacant Repository (RUA) is available at <<http://rua.ua.es/dspace/handle/10045/38550>> [Last access: October 2016].

13. See <<http://malandia.cat/tag/canco-popular-valenciana>> [Last access: October 2016].

14. <<http://campaners.com/php/textos.php?text=6923>> [Last access: October 2016].

15. Maria Jesús Francés Mira was an important collaborator in the early stages of *Canpop* as the beneficiary of a grant awarded by the University of Alacant.

16. When they deal with the personification of death in the work of Vicent Andrés Estellés and refer to his daughter (who died aged just three months) they state that: “Aquesta metaforització té lligams directes amb l'experiència personal del poeta, així com amb la fraseologia popular catalana, ja que el poema es construeix sobre una ‘cançó de bressol’ tradicional valenciana, i justament aquest és el seu títol (*La nit*)” [This metaphor is linked to the poet's own personal experience, as well as Catalan folk phraseology, since the poem is based on a traditional Valencian lullaby with the same title (*The night*)]. At this point, in a footnote, they say: “Vegeu <<http://www.canpop.resolt.net/llista.php>>. Aquesta adreça electrònica pertany al projecte Canpop, dedicat a la recuperació del cançoner popular valencià. A hores d'ara, hi ha penjadades set versions diferents de la cançó popular *la meua xiqueta és l'ama*” [See <http://www.canpop.resolt.net/llista.php> This URL belongs to the Canpop project, dedicated to the recovery of folk songs from Valencia. At the time of writing, there are seven different versions of the folk song *My girl is the boss*] (Climent-Monferrer 2013: 610).

17. My colleague from the University of Alacant, Jordi Antolí, has related these applications as part of the project DIGICOTRACAM (GV, ref.: PROMETEO-2009-042).

In any case, the interest raised by the *Canpop* project in its first six years has led to a parallel site, *Anapop*, being set up with the collaboration of Vicent Vidal. It makes use of the same digital application developed for *Canpop* to create a repository of audio recordings and written transcriptions of folk literature. This new database aims to classify, catalogue and offer digital recordings and transcriptions of folktales, stories, legends, contemporary legends, enigmas, events, anecdotes, personal experiences, and so on.

Much work has still to be done, gaps to be filled, and elements to be improved – despite the wide range of excellent work described, for example, in Borja and Francés (2010) and Borja (2016) –, yet the *Canpop* platform is beginning to address Valencia's need to have a useful, interactive and accumulative database, with digital texts and recordings that can become a fundamental tool for ethnopoetic research and its dissemination. In this regard, at the end of the day, I believe that *Canpop* is a project that can be exported and extrapolated – and adapted where necessary – to other languages and cultures.

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