



---

The Current Status of Galician in Spain

Author(s): Jorge A. Marbán

Source: *Hispania*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (Sep., 1980), pp. 560-562

Published by: [American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/341019>

Accessed: 18-08-2014 21:27 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Hispania*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

be used: *El coche* (not \**Un coche*) *es el vehículo más usado de este siglo.*

## THE CURRENT STATUS OF GALICIAN IN SPAIN

JORGE A. MARBÁN  
*The College of Charleston*

Few modern languages have had a history as full of upheavals and have been so affected by changes in political fortune as the Galician language of Northwestern Spain. Two civil wars, one in the XVth century, another relatively recent, have influenced its destiny. Galician noblemen took the side of the King of Portugal against Isabella in the war of succession of Castile. After Isabella's victory, Castilian displaced Galician as the language used in official and religious functions. Galician survived only as the spoken language of the peasants and within the confines of domestic urban life.<sup>1</sup>

Galician came to life as a literary language in the XIXth century with the appearance of a considerable number of poetic works of great quality. In the first half of the XXth century Galician literary prose was created and the field of Galician literature was broadened to the novel and the ideological, philosophical and sociological essay.<sup>2</sup>

Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War erased all the gains obtained by Galician through many decades of constant struggle and achievements. The initial period of brutal repression and open hostility toward regional languages finally gave way to a somewhat more tolerant attitude. In 1951 public use of Galician was still considered an act of defiance against the Government.<sup>3</sup> Yet that year marks the beginning of many significant accomplishments in defense of the Galician language. Galaxia, the most important publisher in *galego* today, began its activities in Vigo. The editorial productivity in Galician has increased tenfold since 1951 and Galaxia has been joined in the last twenty five years by many new publishing houses.

Since 1963 when the centennial of Rosalía de Castro's *Cantares Gallegos* was commemorated, the Royal Galician Academy has been honoring a number of distinguished figures in Galician literature with lectures in their native towns and the publication of critical studies. Since October, 1965, a course in Galician language and literature has become a part of the curriculum at the University of Santiago de Com-

postela. The Institute of the Galician Language created by that University in 1971 has since published several Galician textbooks which have been used to teach thousands of students in elementary and secondary education.<sup>4</sup> According to Prof. Constantino García, courses in Galician are offered today in all high schools and there are nearly a thousand teachers of *galego* throughout the region.<sup>5</sup>

Galician was finally recognized as a vernacular language to be used in masses in January, 1969.<sup>6</sup> In the last few years these masses have come into the countryside and to the Galician emigrant centers in Europe and Latin America. Their number is still small<sup>7</sup> but their existence is a clearly positive sign of official recognition.

An alert minority has been instrumental in obtaining all these concessions and making good use of them. UNESCO's advocacy of the use of regional languages in elementary education in 1951 and the Second Vatican Council's support for Masses in the vernacular tongue in 1965 have been measures of beneficial importance. Another significant factor was the radicalization and political activism of the youth in many parts of the world during the sixties. Children of the Galician bourgeoisie began then and have continued until now to speak the language of the proletarian and peasant masses in an act of solidarity with the underdogs of their region.<sup>8</sup>

The change in the political wind in Spain has been, of course, a decisive and conducive element. The integration of Spain into the Western military alliance brought the first relaxation of the repressive policies of the government. The relative liberalization during the last five years of the Franco regime also resulted in a good degree of tolerance toward the non-official languages in Spain. Article 14 of the Education Law of 1970 states that Kindergarten instruction "comprende juegos, actividades de lenguaje, incluida en su caso, la lengua nativa." Article 17 of the same law includes among the educational activities of Elementary Education "el cultivo, en su caso, de la lengua nativa." Although the

qualifying "en su caso" only amounted to a timid acceptance of regional languages, these articles were a first step forward in the right direction. The following year the Department of Educational Planning issued guidelines that were even more encouraging. They stated that regional languages enriched the cultural heritage of Spain. In order to teach Castilian to those children without previous knowledge of it, the use of their native language was advised. They also authorized the teaching of regional languages on an experimental and optional basis and upon the approval of the Department of Technical Inspections.<sup>10</sup> *Galeguistas* were quick to take advantage of the new situation. In the academic year 1971-72 the teaching of Galician was begun in 13 high schools in the region. Two years later, teaching in grade school was earnestly started in a small but important number of educational centers.<sup>11</sup> Executive Order 1433 of May 30, 1975 authorized the teaching of regional languages in Kindergarten and grade schools,<sup>12</sup> thus making official an activity that had been going on for some time prior to its legal sanctioning. Another Executive Order (No. 2929) of October 31, 1975 gave its principle aim "respetar y amparar el cultivo de las lenguas regionales, dejando a salvo la importancia trascendental del castellano como lengua oficial." Article 2 of this Order further stated: "Las lenguas regionales podrán ser utilizadas por todos los medios de difusión de la palabra oral y escrita, especialmente en los actos y reuniones de carácter cultural."<sup>13</sup>

It is obvious from the data reviewed that the status of the Galician language has improved since the dark years of Franco's first decade in power. Nevertheless, the Galician language still faces considerable difficulties. One unique dilemma stems from the fact that it is the language of one of the three poorest regions in Spain.<sup>14</sup> While Cataluña and the Basque provinces have very strong economies and their claims for linguistic vindication cannot be ignored, Galician requests have often been set aside and could be more easily written off by an insensitive Central government. This situation prevails despite the fact that the Galician-speaking population is five times larger and has a more modern language and greater claim to literary recognition than the Basques.

The Galician language has had to struggle for a long time and is still fighting to overcome two inferiority complexes compounded through several centuries by a

history of Galician subservience to Castile. One is caused by sociological prejudice. Since the time of the Catholic Monarchs, Castilian has been related to power, prestige and culture; Galician, on the other hand, has been thought of as the language of the peasants and the poor, unfit to express the highest intellectual and cultural values of the dominant classes.<sup>15</sup> The peasants and workers who have abandoned their native language in contemporary Galicia have been moved by the long-instilled feeling that by speaking Castilian they are achieving a status of respectability.

The linguistic prejudice, on the other hand, stems from doubts as to the possibilities of the Galician language. The abundance of Galician dialects has been considered an obstacle for propagating the language.<sup>16</sup> Another problem, that of its anarchical spelling, was resolved to a good degree in 1971 when the Real Academia Galega published its guidelines in spelling.<sup>17</sup> The most important contributor to linguistic prejudice still remains its social disrepute.<sup>18</sup> A peculiar situation is created because the Galician language is closer to the language of Portugal, a foreign country, than to that of Spain. Yet its lack of esteem has in fact inspired the Portuguese scholar Manuel Rodrigues Lapa to propose a type of Anschluss in which literary Portuguese would become the language of Galician writers and a shield against the corrupting influence of Castilian. The bait in this case is that Galician writers would acquire a community of tens of millions of readers and the Galician culture the necessary support in a Castilian dominated world.<sup>19</sup> Prof. Rodrigues Lapa's proposal stems from his view of literary Galician as a language "antiquada e contaminada de espanhol," a language that sounds like "um portugues abastardado."<sup>20</sup> His suggestion was rejected in emphatic terms by such prestigious Galician writers as Otero Pedrayo and Ramón Piñeiro.<sup>21</sup> Galicians have to fight their own battle in defense of their language, writes Piñeiro.<sup>22</sup> He also points out the beauty of the language used by Galician writers like Castella, Dieste and Cunqueiro, dismissing Rodrigues Lapa's assertion that *galego* is a language limited and impaired by rural regionalism.<sup>23</sup> Lapa chooses to ignore the significant differences between Galician and Portuguese that prompt David Feldman to say that they are presently two distinct languages.<sup>24</sup>

The last and most important problem facing Galician today is the threat of

advances made by Castilian among classes historically aligned with the regional language. Through the instruments of mass-media (radio, cinema, and television, etc.) and effective literacy campaigns launched during the last few decades, the invasion of Castilian has affected the countryside, the once impregnable bastion of the Galician language. The voice of alarm was dramatically raised by Carlos Durán in an article published six years ago: “. . . o idioma galego pode morrer nista década que estamos a encetar.”<sup>25</sup> According to Durán, the great literary output in Galician might not necessarily prevent the tragic disappearance of the language: “Tamen os intelectuáís europeus seguiron a escribir latín pola Edade Media, mentres o pobo falaba romance.”<sup>26</sup> Xesús Cambre Mariño expounded the point further by saying that the dikes that contained the tide of Castilian were about to break in Galicia: “. . . la acción combinada de la extensión de la enseñanza a una base más amplia de la población y el mejoramiento de las comunicaciones terrestres acabarán con el aislamiento tradicional de las comunidades rurales gallegas. A todo ello hay que añadir la más reciente y deteriorante acción de los *mass media*.”<sup>27</sup>

The alert defenders of the Galician language understand that only its full presence in the schools and mass-media can assure its chances for survival against the Castilian intrusion. The vindication of *galego* and its elevation to a literary language have been distinct achievements of the last two generations. Although considerable progress has been made, ultimate success will not be reached until Galician attains the status of an official language and the same rights and respect that Castilian enjoys in Galicia. After surviving with dogged resilience many centuries of official degradation and producing outstanding literature, the Galician language has earned the right to exist. Its survival is a matter of simple justice to a people and a culture so unfairly treated for so long. The prediction of the XIXth-century writer Curros Enríquez deserves to continue to hold true in the years to come: “Mais ti non morrerás, Cristo das lingoas!”<sup>28</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>E. Fernández del Riego, *Manual de historia da*

*literatura galega* (Vigo, 1971), p. 60.

<sup>2</sup>Del Riego, pp. 165-166; Xesús Alonso Montero, *Informe dramático sobre la lengua gallega* (Madrid, 1973), p. 95.

<sup>3</sup>Alonso Montero, p. 103.

<sup>4</sup>Constantino García, “A lingua galega hoxe: A súa situación no ensino,” *GRIAL*, XLIV (April, May, June 1974), pp. 151-56.

<sup>5</sup>Letter of July 21, 1977 of Constantino García, Professor of Romanic Philology at the University of Santiago de Compostela, to the author of this article.

<sup>6</sup>Alonso Montero, pp. 113-14.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>9</sup>Constantino García, “A lingua galega hoxe . . .,” p. 151.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 153-55.

<sup>12</sup>“Decreto 30 mayo, 1975, núm. 1433/75,” in: *Boletín Oficial del Estado* (Madrid), pp. 2127-2128.

<sup>13</sup>“Decreto 31 octubre 1975, núm. 2929/75,” in: *Boletín Oficial del Estado* (Madrid), p. 3670.

<sup>14</sup>Gonzalo Anaya Santos, *La depresión cultural gallega* (Vigo, 1970), p. 16; Amando de Miguel and Juan Salcedo, *Dinámica del desarrollo industrial de las regiones españolas* (Madrid, 1972), p. 337.

<sup>15</sup>Xesús Alonso Montero, pp. 32-34.

<sup>16</sup>Américo Castro, *La enseñanza del español en España* (Madrid, 1959), in: Alonso Montero, pp. 73-74.

<sup>17</sup>Real Academia Galega, *Normas ortográficas e morfolóxicas do idioma galego* (La Coruña, 1971).

<sup>18</sup>Ramón Piñeiro, *As lingoaxe i as lingoas* (Vigo, 1967), p. 27.

<sup>19</sup>M. Rodríguez Lapa, “A recuperación literária do galego,” *GRIAL*, XLI (July, Aug., Sept. 1973), p. 286. (Originally published in No. 13 of *Coloquio-Letras* of Lisbon.)

<sup>20</sup>M. Rodríguez Lapa, “Otero Pedrayo e o problema da lingua,” *GRIAL*, LV (Jan., Feb., March 1977), p. 40.

<sup>21</sup>See letter of Nov. 4, 1973 of Ramón Otero Pedrayo to M. Rodríguez Lapa in: “Otero Pedrayo . . .,” pp. 34-35 and Ramón Piñeiro, “Carta a don Manuel Rodríguez Lapa,” *GRIAL*, XLII (Oct., Nov., Dec., 1973), pp. 389-402.

<sup>22</sup>Piñeiro, “Carta,” p. 400.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>David Feldman, “Consideraciones sobre la identificación lingüística de la lengua gallega,” *GRIAL*, XLIII (Jan., Feb., March 1974), pp. 38-48.

<sup>25</sup>Carlos Durán, “A vixilia da razón,” *GRIAL*, XXXI (Jan., Feb., March 1971), p. 82.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>Xesús Cambre Mariño, “Resurgir o fenecer de la lengua gallega,” *Cuadernos para el Diálogo*, xxx (Extraordinario) (May, 1972), p. 17.

<sup>28</sup>M. Curros Enríquez, *Aires da miña terra* (Madrid, 1881) in: Valentín Pérez Andrade, *La marginación de Galicia* (Madrid, 1970), p. 118.