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Author:

Henrique Monteagudo
*Instituto da Lingua Galega /
University of Santiago de
Compostela, Spain*

[henrique.monteagudo@usc.
gal](mailto:henrique.monteagudo@usc.
gal)

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Commentary:

Language Policy in Galicia, 1980-2020. An Overview

Henrique Monteagudo

*Instituto da Lingua Galega / University of Santiago de
Compostela*

Abstract

Galician is a minority language spoken in Galicia, an autonomous region in northwestern Spain. This paper will provide some basic data on the evolution of the sociolinguistic situation of Galician. It will consider the dynamics of change and revitalisation of the language and will examine the linguistic policies that underpin them. In 1981, the Statute of Autonomy of Galicia was approved, establishing the co-official status of Galician. In 1983, the Galician Parliament passed the Law on the linguistic normalisation of Galicia, which laid the ground for the language policies of successive autonomous governments. After four decades, there are several symptoms that the language policy is inadequate for promoting Galician, based on a non-confrontational model centred on the teaching and learning of Galician and the promotion of its literary and cultural prestige.

Keywords: *Galician; sociolinguistics; language policy; language planning; Galician studies*

Introduction

Galician is a minority language spoken in the north-western region of Spain. This paper will provide some basic data on the evolution of the sociolinguistic situation of Galician. It will focus on the dynamics of change and revitalisation of the language and the language policies that have underpinned them, from the beginning of the autonomous regime (1981) to the present day. This article draws on the most important recent contributions to the field. Preference will be given to references in English, although, when indispensable, some literature in Spanish and Galician will also be mentioned.ⁱ

1. The sociolinguistic situation of Galician. Some key points

Historically, the Galician linguistic community has been structured on the basis of diglossia, i.e., the subordination of the Galician language and discrimination against Galician speakers (Monteagudo, 2017). Centuries of minoritisation culminated in the policy of annihilation under the Franco dictatorship, which precipitated the dynamic of language shift that had been brewing since the beginning of modern times (Monteagudo & Santamarina, 1993, pp. 119-126; Neira, 2002; Beswick, 2007, pp. 53-74; Monteagudo, 2021a). The Statute of Autonomy of Galicia, approved in 1981, grants Galician the status of official language in the region alongside Spanish. In 1983, the Galician Parliament passed a Law on the linguistic normalisation of Galicia, which covers the linguistic rights of Galicians, the official use of Galician, its teaching and use in the education system and in the media, as well as the authority of the Royal Galician Academy over linguistic norms. On the ground, there is also support for the language from local organizations and advocacy groups that work to preserve and promote Galician culture and language (Monteagudo, 2019b).

Before considering the recent evolution and the languages policies undertaken in the last decades, some of the fundamental features of the linguistic situation of Galician can be highlighted (Berwick, 2007, pp. 161-223; Ramallo, 2018a, pp. 479-483):

1. Strong vitality but low status (Nelde, Strubell, & Williams, 1996; Monteagudo, Loredó, & Vázquez, 2016; Rei-Doval, 2016);
2. Proximity to Spanish and Portuguese (Monteagudo, 2019b);
3. A late and patchy process of linguistic standardization (Monteagudo & Santamarina, 1993; Monteagudo, 1993; Ramallo & Rei-Doval, 2015);
4. Emotional attachment to Galician but low linguistic awareness (Iglesias Álvarez &

Ramallo, 2002; Ramallo, 2014);

5. Rich literary and cultural tradition, but gaps in modern mass culture (Colmeiro, 2014; Gómez Viñas, 2014; Reimóndez, 2014; Ramallo, 2017).

Let us consider them briefly.

1.1. Vitality and status

Galician is the original and usual language of most of the population in Galicia. However, despite being the majority language in Galicia, Galician is a minority language within Spain, so it still faces challenges due to the pressure of dominant (Castilian) Spanish.

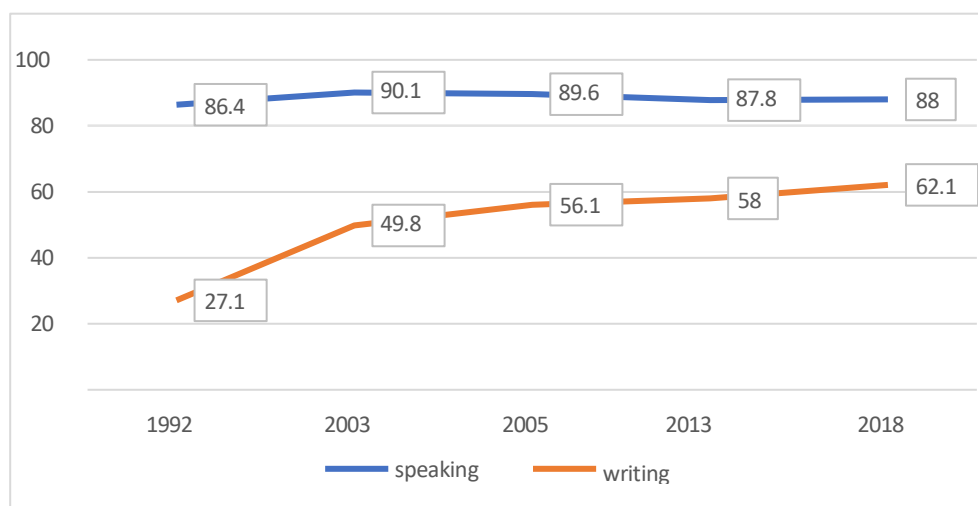


Figure 1. Ability to speak and write Galician among the population aged 15 and over, 1992-2018 (Monteagudo, 2022, p. 319). See also Monteagudo, Loredó, & Vázquez, 2016).

The Galician language enjoys remarkable demographic strength. According to the latest demolinguisic survey, 98% of Galicians claim to understand the language and almost 90% report that they know how to speak it (Figure 1). More than half of the Galician population (52%) declares that in informal communication they speak only or mostly in Galician, and a further 23% state that they speak it occasionally (Figure 2).

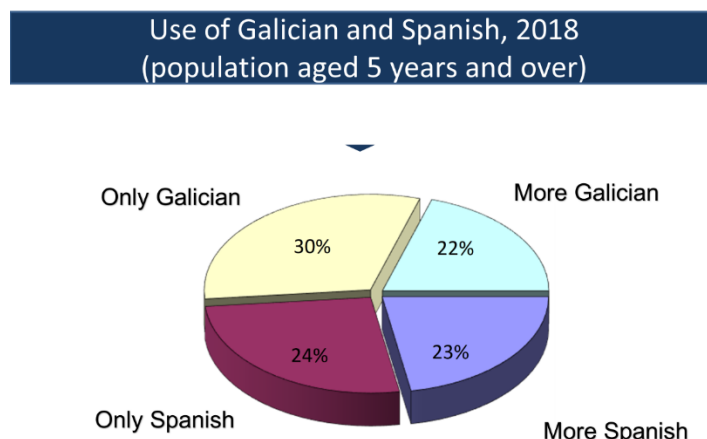


Figure 2. Usual language of the population aged 15 and over, 2018 (Monteagudo, 2022, p. 321).

In overall, the number of daily speakers of Galician may be close to 1,500,000, and around 2,000,000 people use it frequently. Other European minor (but not minority) languages have similar or even lower figures: Estonian has about 1,110,000 speakers, Latvian about 1,500,000 and Slovenian about 2,200,000 speakers. All three are official languages of their respective states and thus of the European Union.

Some Basic Sociolinguistic Data	
➤	Number of inhabitants : Galicia 2,700,000 (5,7%) / Spain 47,600,000
➤	Number of speakers of Galician:
✓	Total: 2,500,000 approx. (?): emigration, neighbouring areas of Galicia
✓	In Galicia: 1,900,000 (75% of Galician population): monolingual (800,000) + Galician speakers bilingual (500,000) + Spanish speakers bilingual (600,000)

Table. Some basic sociolinguistic data. 2018. Prepared by the author.

These figures make Galician the regional minority language in Europe with the highest proportion of speakers in relation to the region's population. However, this vitality is hindered by its low prestige, due to the persistence of discriminatory social and functional diglossia and a marked sociolinguistic polarisation according to socio-economic status, level of education, and place of residence. Spanish remains the language of social progress and integration, both in urban society and in the most significant parts of the labour market.

Galician is still considered by some sectors as a vulgar sociolect rather than a “real” language, while the process of language shift has accelerated in the last decades so that the use of Galician is rapidly decreasing among the younger generations (Beswick, 2007, pp. 205-223; Monteagudo, Loredó, & Vázquez, 2016; Monteagudo, Nandi, & Loredó, 2021).

1.2. Proximity to Spanish and Portuguese

Spanish and Portuguese are languages which are widely spoken internationally; Galician is a bridge language which allows easy passage between these two languages, but which, for the same reason, runs the risk of dialectalisation through the assimilationist pressure of the dominant language and the renunciation of its own identity vis-à-vis its big sister. Comprehension between Galician and Castilian is spontaneous but asymmetrical and facilitates “bilingual encounters” which encourage communication and coexistence, although at the same time it discourages the use of Galician by Castilian speakers (Del Valle, 2000). Galician competes with a widely-spoken language which, moreover, is the dominant language in countries that have received a large number of Galician migrants (Monteagudo & Reyna Muniain, 2019). There is also mutual intelligibility between Portuguese and Galician, but the diffusion and knowledge of the sister language in Galicia is much lower, both quantitatively and qualitatively, than could be reasonably expected (Beswick, 2007, pp. 108-138; Monteagudo 2019b).

1.3. Linguistic standardisation

The lack of a standard linguistic variety facilitates permeability towards Castilian and encourages dialectalisation, which manifests itself in a strong tendency towards hybridisation of popular speech. This point is further developed below.

1.4. Attitudes

Most Galician citizens express a dual identity, while at the same time associating the language with Galician identity in a nebulous way. On the one hand, since the second half of the nineteenth century, the Galician people had emigration on their horizon, which has facilitated the acceptance of Spanish as the language of education, since it has perceived as useful for integration in the host countries, which were mainly Spanish-speaking. On the other hand, unlike Catalonia and the Basque Country, Galicia did not experience the pressure of strong immigration, which fostered a sense of a distinct identity that contrasted with that of the

foreign arrivals. Castilian is not primarily associated with foreigners, but rather with urban life and social status. Galician cities have developed slowly, gradually assimilating the Galician speakers who have settled there. Nevertheless, pro-Galician activism has a vigorous urban presence, as evidenced by civic mobilisation and popular responses to some advertising campaigns (Beswick, 2007, pp. 188-223; Monteagudo, 2019a).

1.5. Literary and cultural tradition, modern mass culture

Few European languages have such a medieval literary tradition as Galician, as well as such a brilliant literary culture in modern times. From music and song to popular festivals, indigenous cultural traditions remain fertile and are increasingly appreciated. There is a thriving publishing industry which disseminates high-quality and up-to-date literary production, yet which fails to reach a large market. There is a great deficit in mass culture, media, and audiovisual products in Galicia, so creative production only circulates in restricted spheres (Colmeiro, 2014; Gómez Viñas, 2014; Reimóndez, 2014; Ramallo 2017; Casares & Monteagudo, 2021).

These broad outlines must in turn be seen in the context of the economic, social, cultural, and political evolution of Galicia in modern times: its late industrialisation and urbanisation, the low standard of living, the importance of the primary sector until a few decades ago, the enormous importance of emigration, and the low average level of educational qualifications. However, in recent times, Galician society has undergone a radical metamorphosis, which has led to a radical change in the sociolinguistic dimension: the concentration of the population in the urban conglomerates of western Galicia, the rise in the standard of living and educational qualifications, the rapid de-ruralisation and massive increase in tertiary industries, the transformation of the migration profile (including a large amount of highly-qualified young people) etc. And, of course, all of this must be also considered in the context of the transformations that Spain, Europe, and the whole world are undergoing, with an extraordinary impact on the ecology of languages including the worldwide expansion of English, the erosion of the status of old nation-state languages and, at the same time, an accelerated reduction in humanity's linguistic and cultural diversity.

2. The late standardization of Galician

In 1980, Galician lacked a written standard variety and spelling rules, although foundations had begun to be laid in Ricardo Carballo's *Gramática elemental del gallego común* (1966),

the first *Normas ortográficas e morfolóxicas* issued by the Real Academia Galega (RAG) (1971), and the *Bases prá unificación das normas lingüísticas do galego* (1977), promoted by the Instituto da Lingua Galega of the University of Santiago de Compostela (ILG). All of them follow an autonomist approach, on the basis that Galician is conceived as an independent language. At the end of the 1970s, a so-called reintegrationist current began to take shape, advocating the integration of Galician into the Portuguese language area (Monteagudo, 1993; Monteagudo & Santamarina, 1993, 151-165; Beswick, 2007, pp. 75-94 and 125-138; Herrero-Valeiro, 2003; Dayán & O'Rourke, 2020). The joint approval by the RAG and the ILG of the *Normas Ortográficas e Morfolóxicas do Idioma Galego* (1982), made official by the Xunta de Galicia, meant a qualitative leap forward. As mentioned above, the Law on the linguistic normalisation of Galicia gave the RAG the authority over linguistic norms, so this institution started to become a language academy and to incorporate an increasing number of professional linguists in its ranks. Thus, since 1982, Galician has had an official standard that has been used as the basis for the further development of grammars, dictionaries, textbooks, terminological glossaries, and style manuals. This standard is used in all official and institutional bulletins, in administrative forms, in most of the media, in the majority of the prolific publishing production in Galician and, of course, in the educational system. Standard Galician has evolved over the last few decades to an advanced level, although there are still some important gaps such as the lack of a reference grammar and of a comprehensive and modern dictionary (Ramallo & Rei-Doval, 2015).

However, some particularly problematic issues have emerged in the process. There is a certain carelessness in audiovisual media and in the public use of Galician, both on the part of some professionals as well as public figures, and its servitude to Castilian is sometimes evident. As for written Galician, the debates on spelling have not yet ended, although in recent decades this has been expressed in much less confrontational terms than in the past. Lastly, among native speakers there is a general feeling of a certain degree of alienation from standard Galician, which has led in some cases to a retreat towards the vernacular and dialectal (Roseman, 1995; Loureiro-Rodríguez, Boggess, & Goldsmith, 2012; O'Rourke, 2018; Recalde, 2021). Also noteworthy is the phenomenon of the emergence of an activist urban sector of Spanish-speakers who have adopted Galician as their habitual language (*neofalantes* or new speakers) (O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2013). In short, standard Galician is making its way with deficits in elaboration (lack of codification tools such as a complete normative grammar or a comprehensive dictionary) and socialisation (lack of means of disseminating the norm in

society, such as a significant presence in the audiovisual media and the written press), in a complex dialectic in which dialectal tendencies, interference from Castilian and transfers from Portuguese play a role.

3. Language policies in autonomous Galicia. A short account

Spain's linguistic diversity was explicitly recognised in the drafting of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 which is the basis of the current official language regime. Article 3 of this Constitution states that Castilian (i.e., Spanish) is the official language of the State, that all Spanish citizens have the right to use it and the duty to know it, and that “the other Spanish languages shall also be official in the respective Autonomous Communities, in accordance with their statutes”. Despite this important recognition for Galician and the other “peripheral” languages of Spain (i.e., Catalan and Basque), the constitutional status of the latter is relatively weak since the former is stipulated as the only official language of the State (i.e. of its central institutions, such as the Government, the Parliament, the High Court of Justice, etc.), and the personal principle of officiality (which benefits Spanish) is applied without restrictions to all citizens, whereas a restricted principle of territoriality (“in the respective Autonomous Communities”) is provided for the other co-official languages (Ramallo, 2018a).

The co-official status of Galician was established in the 1981 Statute of Autonomy of Galicia, which in Article 5 declares Galician to be “the language of Galicia”, determines its official status and the right of Galicians to know and use it. It also establishes the duty of the public authorities of Galicia to promote its use “at all levels of public, cultural and informative life” and to facilitate its knowledge, as well as enshrining the principle of non-discrimination on the grounds of language. In 1983, during the first legislature of the autonomous region, the Galician Parliament unanimously approved a Law on the linguistic normalisation of Galicia. It should be borne in mind that “linguistic normalisation” in Galicia means the process of extending the use of Galician in all areas of social activity from which this language had historically been excluded, such as the education system, the local administration, and the media. This law established the legal framework for the official and public use of the language. At the same time, within the Xunta de Galicia a Language Policy Office was created, which was responsible for its implementation as well as other initiatives and regulations undertaken in the following years (Beswick, 2007, pp. 161-187; O’Rourke, 2014; Monteagudo, 2019a).

The vitality of the language itself and the recognition of its distinct cultural tradition and

a differentiated Galician collective identity were fundamental factors in legitimising the autonomous regime. While the overt goal of the LNLG was to provide the legal framework for language promotion policies, at a more general level, the covert purpose was to strengthen the legitimisation of Galicia's autonomy. During the first years of autonomy, language policy was given a boost under both centre-right (1981-86) and centre-left (1986-89) governments. The creation of autonomous institutions triggered a dynamic of strengthening Galician identity and the promotion of the language was associated with the whole current of social, political, and cultural change at the time. The Galician language is promoted by the regional government through various measures which include provisions for its use in the following domains:

- *Public administration*: Knowledge of Galician is required for access to civil service positions, especially in education as well as local and regional administrations;
- *Education*: Galician became a compulsory subject in schools alongside Spanish, both in primary and secondary education. A bilingual education system was slowly designed at the elementary and middle school levels (Vila, Lasagabaster, & Ramallo, 2017);
- *Media*: Investments were also made in the media, with the creation of a television channel in Galician (*Televisión Galega*, TVG) which started broadcasting in 1985 (Ramallo, 2017);
- *Cultural production*: promotion of literary and, to a lesser extent, audiovisual production in the Galician language.

However, the degree of support has varied depending on political priorities and budget constraints. As stated before, after the LNLG was approved, a Language Policy Office was created within the Regional Ministry of Education of the Autonomous Government, which was the most important institutional agent in this field. Following the codification of the standard variety, the compulsory teaching of Galician led to the creation of a large body of specialised teachers, the expansion of the reading public, the emergence of a nascent book market, and the consolidation of a flourishing publishing industry.

In the 1980s, an extraordinary effort was made to provide language training for teachers and civil servants through courses in Galician. In addition, language normalisation departments were created in different bodies and institutions – the Xunta and Parliament, Galician public radio and television, regional councils, universities, courts of justice – which

played a very important role in facilitating the official use of Galician.

A 1983 decree made the teaching of the Galician language compulsory in all elementary and secondary schools. In 1987, another decree made it compulsory to teach at least one subject in Galician in addition to the Galician language. In 1995, it was established by decree that Galician should be the language of instruction for at least one-third of the subjects taught as part of compulsory education. The policy of creating chairs and centres of Galician studies in foreign universities also began.

On the other hand, in 1994, the children's programme *Xabarán Club* started broadcasting on TVG, with a great impact on its audience and soon afterwards several Galician-produced television series were launched, which were very well-received by the public. A fully-fledged audiovisual industry began to emerge. The 1990s also saw the explosion of “rock bravú” (independent rock bands that sing in the Galician language), which had a considerable impact on the young public. The first newspaper written entirely in Galician appeared (*O Correo Galego*, later to become *Galicia Hoxe*), as did the first stable digital media in Galician (*Vieiros*).

At the same time, the publication of the Sociolinguistic Map of Galicia in 1994-1996 raised alarm about the extent of the abandonment of Galician as detected in the linguistic practices of the younger population. In 2000, the Spanish parliament ratified Spain's accession to the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, committing the state to the highest standards of protection for Galician, Basque, and Catalan. However, the Committee of Experts, responsible for monitoring the fulfilment of the commitments acquired by the States, has identified serious shortcomings with regard to Galician, particularly in the key areas of education and the administration of justice.ⁱⁱ The inclusion of Galician in the UNESCO list of endangered languages (2002) led to a reflection on the need to strengthen support for this language. The approval by the Real Academia Galega of the reform of the official orthographic and morphological rules (2003) helped to appease the controversy about linguistic standardisation. Since then, the debate on the relationship between Galician and Portuguese has taken on new perspectives, with a positive focus on the teaching of Portuguese and initiatives to strengthen relations with Portuguese-speaking countries.

On the other hand, following the unanimous approval in the Galician Parliament of a General Plan for the Normalisation of the Galician Language in 2004, the level of political consensus in favour of the normalisation of Galician reached its peak. Thus, the 21st century began with considerable momentum.

This dynamic continued after the electoral victory of the left in the 2005 regional elections and the formation of a coalition government between socialists and nationalists.ⁱⁱⁱ In 2007, the Xunta de Galicia approved a new decree for Galician in education, which provided that Galician should be used as a vehicular language in compulsory education for a minimum of 50% of the time. This was opposed by the right-wing Partido Popular, while an intense public dispute arose over language policy with the emergence of discourses against the ‘imposition’ of Galician and in favour of ‘language freedom’. This dispute continued during the 2009 regional election campaign, which was won by the Partido Popular.

Summing up the objectives of successive governments until 2009 (both centre-right and centre-left), it can be said that the Xunta de Galicia has tried to promote the knowledge and use of Galician, avoiding conflicts and responding to the wishes of the majority of citizens, and seeking a balance between the social demands of the majority and the most pressing demands of cultural elites and activist minorities. Therefore, efforts have been concentrated on improving normative skills in Galician and the linguistic attitudes of the population, as well as on increasing the prestige of Galician through the promotion of cultural production and on encouraging its use in certain public and institutional spheres. This is what was meant by the policy of “promotion without conflict”, a policy that found its emblematic approach in the formula of “harmonious bilingualism” which presented the normalisation of Galician in gradual, non-imposed, and convivial terms. However, this formula has also been criticised for being ambiguous and indecisive, as a thinly disguised kind of benign neglect (Nandi, 2017).

In 2009, the discourse of ‘language freedom’ was imposed. This discourse was articulated by the centralist intelligentsia, widely disseminated by the main Spanish media, and actively sponsored by right-wing and centralist political forces. Its basic tenet is denouncing the policies for the promotion of Spain’s peripheral languages as impositions against the freedom of Spanish speakers. These discourses enjoyed a certain vogue for a while in Galicia, and they have strongly influenced the weakening of the Galician government’s language policy since the return of the Partido Popular to power in Galicia (Monteagudo, 2021b).

Thus, in 2009-2010, a series of measures aimed at promoting Galician that had been in place until then were repealed or scaled down. This regressive policy was met with strong political and social protests, including a series of mass demonstrations denouncing the lack of protection for Galician. The most emblematic and contested provision was the 2010 decree

on multilingualism, which reduced the presence of Galician as a language of instruction. At the same time, the economic crisis hit the Galician-language press, both digital and print, and led to the disappearance of most of the titles. Neoliberal language policy in Galicia took the guise of a *laissez faire* approach, with disastrous consequences for the weak process of Galician's recovery. In 2013, the publication of data on the knowledge and use of the language collected by the Galician Institute of Statistics sounded the alarm by revealing a sharp decline in Galician among children and young people.

Since 2012, the polemical tone of the linguistic controversies has tended to diminish. In recent times, less confrontational attitudes have tended to prevail. The current de-escalation may pave the way for broader political and social agreements, which are essential to set Galicia on the road to the future. However, so far, the party with the electoral majority in Galicia continues to stick to a policy of benign neglect (Monteagudo, 2022).

4. Language policy in Galicia in the last decades. A brief assessment

The revitalization of the Galician language faces several challenges, including:

- *Competition with Spanish*: Spanish remains the language of social progress and integration, both in urban society and in the labour market. As stated before, mutual understanding between Galician and Spanish is easy and enables the "bilingual encounter", which favours communication between speakers of each language, although at the same time it discourages the use of Galician by Castilian speakers. The Spanish central state keeps imposing Spanish as the only "national language", and most of the mainstream media in Spain foster negative attitudes towards the minority languages (Galician, Catalan, and Basque).
- *Faltering official support*: The role of government and official institutions in supporting minority languages can have a significant impact on their revitalization. The challenge of normalisation was taken up without any historical experience of language revitalisation policies and with very limited know-how. This has been compounded by the weak political will, which has resulted in policies that are more propagandistic than effective.
- *Low social prestige and scant value in the labour market*: Galician is still considered by some sectors as a vulgar sociolect rather than a "real" language. The use of Galician is sometimes associated with low social status and is not seen as desirable in some professional or social contexts.

- *Language shift and lack of intergenerational transmission:* The process of language shift has accelerated in the last decades, so that the use of Galician is rapidly decreasing among the younger generations. On top of this, Galician is not being passed down to the younger generation at the same rate as in the past, leading to a decline in its use and a decrease in the number of speakers (Monteagudo, Nandi, & Loredó, 2020).
- *Media representation:* The representation of minority languages in the media and online can help increase their visibility and reach.
- *Technological advancements:* The growth of digital media and communication technologies has facilitated access to and promotion of the Galician language, increasing its visibility and reach, but it has also increased the overwhelming dominance of Spanish, especially among young people.

The challenges faced in revitalizing the Galician language have evolved over time, reflecting changes in the political and social landscape of the region. Some of these changes include:

- *Changes in attitudes:* Over time, a considerable amount of conflict has surfaced around the promotion of Galician, fuelled both by the mainstream Spanish media and by a very belligerent Spanish nationalist current mostly from the right and extreme right.
- *Declining official support:* In the hands of the conservative Partido Popular, the regional government has reduced its support for the Galician language in recent years.
- *The growing pressure of English* in the education system as well as in information and communication technologies, which can be added to that of Spanish. Learning Galician is presented not only as competing with and detrimental to acquiring Spanish, but also to learning English.

The main challenge is to rearticulate the Galician linguistic community on a fair and equitable basis, thus reinforcing its cohesion. Some current priorities include:

- *Equal and mutual bilingualism between Galician and Spanish:* This implies a greater willingness on the part of Spanish speakers to use Galician rather than waiting for Galician speakers to switch to Spanish.
- *Intergenerational transmission:* Ensuring the intergenerational transmission of minority languages is important for their preservation and long-term viability.

Encouraging the transmission of Galician from one generation to the next is critical to its revitalization.

- *The promotion of Galician among the younger population through education:* Providing access to education and resources in minority languages is a key factor in promoting their use and revitalization. Ensuring that children and young people have access to Galician language education and resources is a key priority.
- *The presence of Galician in the media and on the Internet:* The presence of Galician in the media and on the Internet is vital to increase its visibility and reach.
- *Value in the labour market:* It is essential to increase the value of Galician in the labour market, not only in public administration but also in private companies.
- *Engaging the community:* Community engagement and involvement in language revitalization initiatives is crucial for their success.
- *Celebrating culture:* Promoting minority language culture through events and initiatives can increase appreciation for the language and its cultural significance.
- *Overcoming negative attitudes:* Addressing negative attitudes and beliefs about minority languages and challenging stereotypes can help promote their revitalization.

Discussion and conclusions

For centuries, the Galician linguistic community has been structured on the basis of social and functional diglossia; i.e., the subordination of the Galician language and discrimination against Galician speakers. Under current conditions, this type of diglossia is no longer sustainable, so the options that remain are:

- a) the complete substitution of Galician and imposition of monolingualism in Castilian;
- b) the promotion of Galician in order to achieve a bilingual, egalitarian, and cohesive community;
- c) building a monolingual society in Galician.

After the brutal experience of the dictatorship, the majority of citizens opted for the second option. Reshaping the Galician linguistic community on a more balanced basis remains a costly and extremely complex task, as it involves overturning entrenched privileges, eliminating prejudices, overcoming inertia and changing deeply internalised routines. However, proposals to split the Galician community into two opposing monolingual communities have been rejected by the majority of citizens as a deeply unpopular option. At

the same time, the majority of the Galician-speaking community is in favour of a self-identified Galician language which is aware of its kinship with Portuguese, but does not want to be subsumed into it.

The challenge of normalisation was taken up without any historical experience of language revitalisation policies and with very limited know-how; moreover, circumstances changed at a rapid pace along the way. When Galicia received autonomy, no one had any idea about the rise of new information and communication technologies, and no one could suspect how radically computers and mobile phones would transform the global environment and everyday experiences: the term ‘globalisation’ did not even exist. In the heyday of this phenomenon, no one foresaw the global economic crisis or the explosion of the global COVID-19 pandemic, two cataclysmic events that have plunged humanity into uncertainty, disrupted the international order, and forced many aspects of civilisation to be rethought.

The continuing widespread phenomenon of language shift in favour of Castilian and, equally alarmingly, the breakdown of the intergenerational transmission of the Galician language could be taken as symptomatic of how indecisive language policies have been inadequate for the promotion of Galician. It has been argued that Galician’s numerical strength may have led to a somewhat distorted view of the sociolinguistic reality of the language, failing to recognize the heavy legacy of history. The powers of the Spanish state and the larger part of Spanish society have still to reckon with the deep furrows that a markedly centralist and supremacist centuries-old language policy has left on the linguistic attitudes of the population, especially during the Franco dictatorship. This includes its main consequences, namely the dialectalisation of the Galician language and the unequal distribution of power and resources between Spanish and Galician speakers.

Whatever the case, while assuming the hegemony of Spanish in the economy, the media, and mass culture, the non-conflictual model focused on the teaching and learning of Galician and the promotion of its literary and cultural prestige has been revealed as ineffective (O’Rourke, 2014). After all, this model ends up maintaining the status quo and thus implicitly accepts Spanish as the most value-neutral language. After overcoming centuries of marginalisation, do Galician and its speakers not deserve an assured future of normality?

Notes

ⁱ For an overall picture, see Monteagudo 2001, 2019a, and 2022; Monteagudo & Santamarina, 1993; Beswick, 2007; O'Rourke, 2011 and 2014.

ⁱⁱ See States Parties to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and their regional or minority languages in: <https://rm.coe.int/november-2022-revised-table-languages-covered-english-/1680a8fef4>. Reports and recommendations regarding Spain, with specific references to Galician: [https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/reports-and-recommendations#{%2228993157%22:\[20\]}](https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/reports-and-recommendations#{%2228993157%22:[20]}). See also Ramallo, 2018b.

ⁱⁱⁱ PSdG: Partido Socialista de Galicia (Socialist Party of Galicia). BNG: Bloque Nacionalista Galego (Galician Nationalist Bloc)

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