

¿Falas galego?: The effects of socio-political change on language attitudes and use in the Galician sociolinguistic context

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, much discussion in sociolinguistics and the sociology of language has centred on concerns over the survival prospects of lesser-used or minority languages (see Dorian 1989; Woolard 1989; Fase et al. 1992; Grenoble and Whaley 1998). The aim of the research being reported on here was to shed light on one such language case — Galician, spoken in the Autonomous Community of Galicia in the northwestern part of the Iberian Peninsula.

Of Spain's officially recognized regional languages, Galician, known to its speakers as 'galego', shows greatest numerical strength within its own territorial region (O'Rourke 2003: 33). According to census results, an overwhelming majority of the Galician population report an ability to speak the language and sociolinguistic surveys reveal that Galician is the habitual language of over two-thirds of the population. However, despite its apparent strength in numerical terms, as the following pages will show, a closer analysis of the Galician sociolinguistic context highlights a more precarious future for the language.

The minority status of Galician: historical perspectives

According to Nelde, Strubell, and Williams (1996: 1) the definition of the concept of minority by reference to languages does not refer to empirical measures, but rather to issues of power. That is, they are language groups, conceived of as social groups, marked by a specific language or culture, that exist within wider societies and states, but which lack the political, institutional and ideological structures which can guarantee the relevance of these languages for the everyday life of members of such groups. The 'minorization' of the Galician language can be traced historically to its subordinate political and economic relations with its neighbouring kingdom of Castile, which later emerged as the centre of

Spanish political power. Up until the tenth and eleventh centuries, Galicia had been an independent kingdom, and in this context the Galician language was used by all social classes, as well as being the language of administration and judicial systems. However, from the fourteenth century, Galicia fell under permanent Castilian domination, leading to the subsequent decline of the native Galician nobility. The increased move towards the consolidation of political unity by the Catholic Kings in the second half of the fifteenth century further advanced the subjugation of Galicia as a periphery of a Castilian-based centre of power. Henceforth, the people who represented authority in Galicia spoke Castilian¹ and there was a tendency amongst those who sought social mobility to imitate the linguistic behaviour of the new Castilian-speaking dominant classes. According to Santamarina (2000), language shift on the part of the dominant classes had consequences for the general Galician population, making familiarity with Castilian a possibility if not an everyday occurrence. In the period that followed, Galician was effectively banished from public affairs and as a written language. Castilian appeared in formal domains of use, in a diglossic relation to Galician (in Fishman's 1967 sense of diglossia as a functional compartmentalization of codes, regardless of their linguistic relation), and language shift began to take place in some sectors. Although the language continued to be spoken by the majority of the Galician population, its abandonment in the spheres of power led to its devaluation in terms of social prestige. As Recalde (2000: 24) notes, the de-galicianization of the upper strata of Galician society had a qualitative rather than an explicitly quantitative effect on the Galician language.

Geographic, socio-economic, and cultural isolation of Galician speakers helps to explain what can perhaps be considered an unusually long period of linguistic sheltering from an economically and politically dominant contact language. The geographic isolation of Galicia in the extreme north of the Iberian Peninsula, which is also linked to its history of poor economic development, meant that the region did not attract the waves of Castilian-speaking migrants who altered and continue to alter the sociolinguistic contexts of other communities in Spain, most notably those of Catalonia and the Basque Country. Moreover, compared with other parts of Spain, the modernization of Galician society occurred at a much later stage and even by the end of the twentieth

century, according to Monteagudo and Santamarina (1993: 123), 'the substitution of a precapitalist economy based on agriculture for an economy founded on industry was still far from complete in Galicia'. Galician was maintained up until the twentieth century as the primary means of communication of a rural, uneducated, peasant population. Although Galicia's economic and geographical isolation favoured the maintenance of the autochthonous language, such isolation had more long-term negative repercussions on the social meanings which came to be associated with the language. The very factors (isolation, rurality, and backwardness) which had allowed Galician to survive centuries of linguistic dominance as a subordinate of Castilian gradually began to provide the rationalization for many Galician migrants to abandon their language as they moved from the countryside to Galicia's cities in search of work during the second half of the twentieth century. As access to education and the media increased amongst the rural population, so too did exposure to Castilian. Increased contact with Castilian speakers further strengthened the link between Castilian and progress, values associated with the modern world in the minds of many Galician speakers.

Although much progress had been made by Galician language revivalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in restoring the language as a written form, for educational purposes and in literature, their efforts reached a peak in 1936 through the proposed Statute of Autonomy for Galicia through which Galician was to be granted co-official status with Castilian. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in that same year and the forty year dictatorial rule under General Franco which followed cut short the positive reinstatement of Galician and postponed Galicia's Autonomous status until 1981, six years after the death of Franco.

Galicia's contemporary sociolinguistic context

In the context of Spain's transition to democracy, regional differences, both cultural and linguistic, which had been denied during the years of the dictatorship, were now officially recognised. According to the new Spanish Constitution of 1978, Galician, along with Catalan and Basque, were given co-official status with Castilian within the territorial confines of their Autonomous Communities. Furthermore, Article 5 of the Galician Statute of Autonomy guarantees the use of Galician and promotes the use of

the language at all levels of public and cultural life. The understood goal of these new laws has been to restore Galician to all domains through appropriate corpus and status planning efforts. This involves the restoration of the language to all administrative and political institutions, to the media, and to education. Through these measures, linguistic policy aims to raise Galician's former status from that of a low-prestige language and to end the discrimination towards its speakers which had developed because of its low status.

While it can be argued that it is as yet too soon to predict whether the language policy implemented since the early 1980s in Galicia has changed the status of the autochthonous language, the data from the Sociolinguistic Survey of Galicia collected in the early 1990s (*Mapa Sociolingüístico de Galicia*, henceforth MSG; see Fernández Rodríguez and Rodríguez Neira 1994, 1995, 1996) provide some indication of the initial effects of changes in language policy in Galicia.

The MSG data on the first language learned by Galicians as well as on habitual use of the language show the continued quantitative dominance of Galician above Castilian. As many as 62.4% of Galicians have Galician as their initial language, with a further 11.4% brought up bilingually, possessing both Galician and Castilian (Fernández Rodríguez and Rodríguez Neira 1994: 39). Active use of Galician is also high, with more than half the sample (68.6%) claiming Galician as their habitual language (Fernández Rodríguez and Rodríguez Neira 1995: 94).

However, Dorian (1981: 65) reminds us of the sociolinguistic naivety of estimating language survival solely on the basis of the number of speakers of a language. She notes that who speaks the language is ultimately more important than how many people speak it. Therefore, a sociodemographic breakdown of figures relating to language use in Galicia provides a more revealing picture of the sociolinguistic reality of the language. According to the MSG report, the percentage of people who speak only or predominantly Galician is higher among those with a lower level of formal education, from a lower social class, and living in rural areas (Fernández Rodríguez and Rodríguez Neira 1995: 94). These data thus highlight the continued association of Galician with rural life, a lack of formal education, and lower social class. Castilian, in contrast, continues to be linked to urban life, higher levels of education, and the higher social classes. The age of the speaker is

also an important distinguishing factor in the Galician sociolinguistic context. The younger generation of Galicians, within the 16-25 age-group, show the lowest levels of habitual use of the autochthonous language with only 23.5% returned as habitual users of the language and a further 23% claiming to use more Galician than Castilian (Fernández Rodríguez and Rodríguez Neira 1995: 94). Intergenerational mother-tongue transmission of Galician from parents to children is also lowest amongst this age group where as many as 43.5% of the cohort have Castilian as opposed to Galician as their initial language (Fernández Rodríguez and Rodríguez Neira 1994: 71). Decreased use of the language amongst the younger generation of Galicians explains UNESCO's 2001 classification of the language as 'endangered'.

Changes in attitudes towards Galician

Perhaps more telling of the relative success of linguistic policies and the positive reinstatement of the language in Galicia since the 1980s are the findings on changes in linguistic attitudes amongst the population. The third volume of the MSG report is dedicated to the findings of attitudinal research which was used to measure Galicians' attitudes towards and perceptions of the language, its speakers, and its presence within Galician society. On a five-point scale, where 1 represents most negative and 5 most positive attitudes, Galicians score a 3.6 average in their ratings of the Galician language (Fernández Rodríguez and Rodríguez Neira 1996: 80). Although there does seem to be evidence that deep-rooted stigmas formerly associated with Galician have not been fully eliminated (see González et al. 2003), the MSG report confirms the absence of any explicitly-held prejudices towards the language. The findings of the MSG on language attitudes in Galicia, as Bouzada (2003: 331) suggests, 'point to a weakening, at least at certain levels of consciousness, of those coarser aspects of prejudice and sociolinguistic stigmatisation that have been working against the language for years'.

Although positive attitudes are to be found across all sectors of Galician society, the younger generation (those between 16 and 25 years old) score highest on the attitudinal scale (3.75 on the five-point scale). There is also some evidence of increased support for the language amongst educated and more middle-class sectors of the population. The report, for example, shows that these

groups display most consolidated support for the language, especially in attitudes towards the transmission of Galician to the next generation (Fernández Rodríguez and Rodríguez Neira 1996: 559) and towards Galician as a symbol of identity.

Although the lowest attitudinal ratings towards Galician are to be found amongst business sectors of Galician society and those entering the professions, Bouzada (2003: 330) notes that even in the case of these groups, attitudes towards the Galician language are clearly positive. Indeed, Bouzada and Lorenzo's (1997) survey of a sample of Galician businesses point to increased levels of linguistic consciousness amongst a powerful sector of Galician society, for whom the Galician language has held little esteem in the past. Nevertheless, as the MSG (1994, 1995) report on language behaviour clearly shows, positive attitudes are not being matched by increased language use amongst these sectors of the population. However, given the mediating import of symbolic values (Woolard and Gahng 1990), it might be hypothesised that the more positive attitudes expressed by the younger generation of Galicians as well as certain middle-class educated sectors of Galician society provide an indicator of future linguistic change amongst these groups. Linguistic attitudes tend to be more usefully interpreted as pre-behavioural changes which may not as yet have become apparent through actual language use (see Baker 1992: 16; Woolard and Gahng 1990: 312). The fact that Galician is most highly supported by younger age groups, on whom the future of the language depends, provides an indication of the direction that changes for the language are likely to take. It is also significant that middle-class sectors of Galician society are attaching a high symbolic value to the language and are supportive of the need to transmit the language to the next generation, given that such groups were in the past least supportive of the language.

Exploring the mismatch between language attitudes and language use

The remainder of this article looks at the possible factors which are determining language attitudes amongst these young, middle-class, educated sectors of the Galician population and attempts to explain why a heightened level of support for the language is not being matched by any large-scale changes in language behaviour.

A sociolinguistic analysis of students at the University of Vigo

In the following sections I will report on the findings of a piece of sociolinguistic research which I carried out at the University of Vigo, situated close to the southern coastal city of Vigo, Galicia's largest and most industrial centre.² In linguistic terms the city of Vigo constitutes an area in Galicia in which the use of the Galician language is amongst the lowest. According to Vaamonde et al. (2002), two-thirds of the Vigo population report exclusive or predominant use of Castilian.

In the current study, quantitative sociolinguistic data were collected from a representative sample of undergraduate students attending the University of Vigo during the academic year 2002/2003. The sample was stratified according to the four main academic disciplines offered at the university, which included students pursuing degrees in the areas of humanities, technology, business, and science. A total of 725 respondents completed a self-administered sociolinguistic questionnaire within which were included a range of attitudinal statements and questions on different aspects relating to the Galician language, its speakers, and its use.

As well as the practicalities associated with researching student populations, there were also a number of theoretical considerations which made the choice of this group meaningful for the purposes of this research. The age, social class, and educational level of university student groups mirror the three social categories identified in the MSG as having most consolidated positive attitudes towards the Galician language. Firstly, the age range of the student group corresponds to the 16-25 age category in the MSG, that is, the younger generation of Galicians. Secondly, as university students, this group possesses high levels of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1991) in the form of educational qualifications. Such qualifications can in turn be converted to 'economic capital' through which social mobility can be achieved, gaining these students access to middle class occupational sectors of the labour market.

Linguistic attitudes amongst Galician students

A preliminary exploration of the data collected in this research revealed that over three-quarters of Galician respondents described their general attitude towards their minority language as favourable. While this figure provided an initial indication of the general

level of support for the Galician language, it tended to conceal the several possible dimensions of meaning within individual attitudinal responses. A more revealing picture of the type of attitudes held by Galician students towards the minority language was contained within attitudinal items and questions on a range of specific aspects relating to the language. From these attitudinal items and questions, the statistical technique of factor analysis³ was used to identify two key dimensions of meaning underlying the response patterns of Galician informants.

The first level of meaning was defined by the extent of reported support amongst Galician respondents for the general societal presence of the Galician language. This attitudinal dimension combined items related to the transmission of the minority language to the next generation with more general issues such as the level of passive support for the language within Galician society as well as direct questioning on the future of the minority language. As an attitudinal dimension it thus represents a broad range of components, incorporating a number of sub-themes which, it was hypothesized, could be considered important determinants in the survival of a minority language. When attitudes towards Galician are interpreted in this way, dispositions towards it tend to be favourable and the results clearly highlight the high level of goodwill towards the Galician language amongst these members of the younger generation. The perceived relevance and importance of Galician in contemporary Galician society is, for example, highlighted in students' overwhelming disagreement with statements suggesting that the maintenance of the language is a waste of time (93%) or that there should be cuts in financial support for efforts to maintain the language (84%). It is also significant that as many as 61% of respondents would like to see a bilingual Galicia in which Galician would be the main language; the number of students who wish to see Galician discarded or forgotten is in fact negligible (less than 1%). Another key finding in this study was the explicitly expressed desire amongst respondents to transmit the Galician language to the next generation. While few opt for a monolingual upbringing in either Galician or Castilian, there does seem to be strong support for some form of bilingualism. The preferred option is one in which both languages are equally present — 69% in the case of the language that should be transmitted in the home and 77% in the case of formal schooling.

The second attitudinal dimension which emerged from a factor analysis of attitudinal items measured the role of Galician as a symbol of group or ethnic identity. The 'integrative' or 'solidarity' dimension of language attitudes which is being measured in this dimension stems from the idea that language binds or integrates people into a community of shared understandings and hence identity. Anderson (1991: 133), for example, suggests that language constitutes an important symbol of identity because of its capacity for generating imagined communities and building on solidarities particular to a group. It was thus hypothesized that some insights into the vitality of Galician could be gained by analysing the degree to which respondents valued the language as a symbol of group or ethnic identity. According to the findings of this study, as many as 86% agreed that '*Sen o galego, Galicia perdería a súa cultura e a súa identidade propia*' ('Without Galician, Galicia would lose its culture and identity') and 78% of students were of the opinion that Galicia would not really be Galicia without a Galician-speaking population. Even more significant is that for the majority (71%) of Vigo students, language constitutes the most important element in the construction of a Galician identity, thus acting as what Smolicz (1995) refers to as a 'core value' in demarcating a sense of Galicianness.

Under the largely voluntary conditions mandated by the official bilingualism permitted by the central Spanish government and promoted by the Galician Administration there has been a change in recent years in language attitudes, especially amongst the younger generation. The analysis of the language attitudes of this sample of students at the University of Vigo confirm the findings of previous research, highlighting the positive effect that top-down language policies are having on the language attitudes of young, educated, and predominantly urban sectors of Galician society. Yet the largely favourable dispositions towards the language are not matched by any marked increase in language use amongst these groups. Over three-quarters of these students report predominant (49%) or exclusive (27%) use of Castilian and just over one-tenth of these Vigo students use Galician with any degree of regularity. Understanding the mismatch between seemingly positive attitudes and use of Galician thus requires a closer analysis of possible variations in the level of support within this sub-group of the Galician population.

Factors influencing Vigo students' language attitudes

Further exploration of the data highlighted that although students at the University of Vigo were generally supportive of the measures to ensure the presence of the Galician language within Galician society, only in the case of less than one-fifth of students were attitudes found to be 'strongly' positive. As can be seen from Table 1, the majority of students expressed a 'mildly' positive or more 'neutral' attitude towards the language.

Table 1. Distribution of Galician responses on the 'Support for the presence of the minority language' dimension

Strongly positive attitudes (score 5)	13.3%
Mildly positive attitudes (score 4)	64.2%
Neutral attitudes (score 3)	18.5%
Mildly negative attitudes (score 2)	3.9%
Strongly negative attitudes (score 1)	0.1%

The effect of different distinguishing background variables such as place of origin, ethnicity, linguistic practices, etc. on student attitudes was determined using techniques of analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results of the ANOVA tests showed that most positive attitudes were to be found amongst those who define their sense of collective identity in terms of a Galician, as opposed to a Spanish, collective identity. This strong sense of 'Galician-ness' was also closely related to support for the Galician Nationalist Party (*Bloque Nacionalista Galego*), as opposed to support for Galician branches of the two main political parties, the centre-right Popular Party (*Partido Popular*) and the centre-left Spanish Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) or amongst those students who did not support any particular political ideology. Finally, a strong identification with a Galician national collective was found to be related to higher levels of use of Galician, with those who defined themselves in terms of a Galician ethnic identity generally reporting Galician as their habitual language. Therefore, it would seem that the crucial step towards behavioural change amongst certain young Galicians requires more consolidated support for the language similar to the 'strongly positive' attitudes expressed by less than one-fifth of the students in the current sample.

Sociolinguistic data interpreted within Galicia's broader socio-political context

The findings of this study would seem to suggest that increased language use as a result of more consolidated positive attitudes is influenced by bottom-up language movements which are tied up with the ideologies of Galician nationalism. The ethnic symbolism of the Galician language which has emanated from these ideologies would therefore appear to be assisting in the recruitment of some new Galician speakers amongst respondents from non-Galician speaking homes and amongst the younger generation. The findings also indicate that this recruitment seems to be taking place amongst certain younger, middle-class, educated sectors of Galician society, social groups who, as Woolard (1991: 63) points out, are both socially and psychologically situated to 'make a leap in identification' and in establishing a strong Galician identity through their new language behaviour.

Such changes in linguistic practices are possibly being stimulated by dissatisfaction with the top-down attempts of the Galician Administration to increase the societal presence of Galician and to curb the ongoing shift to Castilian. Linguistic policies since the 1980s have promoted the increased presence of the Galician language in Galician society. While on the one hand these policies can be viewed as an attempt to secure the loyalty of the Galician population to the new political framework of the Galician Autonomous Community, on the other hand, a key objective of the Galician administration has also been to avoid language policies which might provoke social conflict. Official language policy in Galicia has promoted the idea of 'harmonious bilingualism', that is, the non-conflictual co-existence of Castilian and Galician within the community (see Regueiro-Tenreiro 1999 for a fuller discussion of the concept). Such a policy, according to Monteagudo and Bouzada (2002: 68), has reflected a political agenda which has sought to maintain the support of powerful sectors of Galician society, the majority of whom were Castilian speakers and amongst whom support for the autochthonous language has tended to be lowest.

The more cautious language policies of the Galician Administration also reflect the dominance of bi-party politics in Galicia, which has oscillated between Galician branches of Spain's two main political parties — the centre-right Popular Party (*Partido*

Popular) and the centre-left Spanish Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) — with the former attracting most support amongst the population. Since 1993, however, support for the politics of the Galician Nationalist Party (*Bloque Nacionalista Galego*) has significantly increased, thus bringing a third party into the political arena in and adding a new dynamic to language issues in Galicia.

In contrast to the official discourse of 'harmonious bilingualism', Galician nationalists tend to view the language contact situation between Galician and Castilian as conflictual and as one in which Galician speakers remain in a dominated socio-economic position. Galician nationalists therefore tend to be highly critical of official language policy, which they see as being largely inadequate in reversing the process of language shift towards Castilian. In reaction to such criticisms, proponents of official language policy in Galicia condemn what they perceive to be a largely radical approach to resolving the Galician language problem on the part of Galician nationalists.

In the sociolinguistic data collected from the students at the University of Vigo there were examples where, because of the link between speaking Galician and a nationalist ideology, use of the language in certain contexts was considered deviant behaviour. It would seem that the use of Galician amongst the younger age groups in what have up until recently been regarded as Castilian-speaking spaces, such as the city or a job interview, for some students continues to constitute a form of marked or deviant behaviour, associated with a political ideology and support for the Galician Nationalist Party. For example, the stereotypical image of the neo-Galician speaker is one which would seem to be held by the majority of students at the University of Vigo. It is significant that almost three-quarters (72%) of students queried in this study agreed that young people who speak Galician in an urban context are labelled Galician nationalists. Therefore on the one hand, although a nationalist ideology seems to be prompting increased use of Galician amongst some young people brought up in Castilian-speaking homes, on the other hand, the link with nationalism may be deterring less ideologically minded Galician speakers from using the language or at least using it in social contexts where Castilian was traditionally seen as the more 'acceptable' language (O'Rourke 2006).

Emerging socio-political changes in Galicia

Since this research was conducted there have been a number of significant changes in the socio-political environment in Galicia and Spain which are likely to have an impact on future trends in language attitudes and behaviours in the Galician sociolinguistic context. In the 2005 Galician elections, the long-standing centre-right political party which had dominated the political arena in Galicia for the past two decades was defeated. While the party has supported the Galician language programme, such support has tended to be lukewarm. Therefore, it may be that the coming to power of the left-wing socialist party in coalition with the Galician Nationalist Party, whose pro-Galician language ideologies form a key part of their political agenda, will provide new hope for the future prospects of the Galician language.

Socio-political changes in Spain's northeastern region of Catalonia may also have a positive effect on attitudes towards Galician and ultimately on its future survival prospects. In November 2005, Spain approved proposals to grant greater autonomy to Catalonia, and following a referendum in Catalonia in June 2006 in which the majority of Catalans voted in its favour, the new Statute became effective in August of the same year. As well as granting greater autonomy to the region, the new Statute proposes changes in the status of the Catalan language. Like Galician and Basque, the Catalan language has held co-official status with Castilian within its Autonomous Community in accordance with Article 3 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution. However, in the context of the Spanish State and the position of Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Country as part of that state, Castilian has remained the only official language and all Spanish citizens (including Catalans, Galicians, and Basques) have been constitutionally obliged to know and use the official language. Use of Catalan, Galician and Basque, in contrast, has been a constitutional right, not an obligation, and their use has been restricted to the territorial confines of their respective Autonomous Communities. Given the political conditions in which regional power for these regions has been constrained and controlled by the institutions of the centralist Spanish State, the possibility of achieving equal status for the languages of Spain has of course been questionable. However, given that a key proposal of the new Statute for Catalonia is that a knowledge and use of Catalan will become a legal obligation for

all those living in the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, the possibility of reaching true equality for Catalan in its contact position with Castilian are enhanced. Such proposals on the part of their Catalan counterparts thus set new trends for changes in language policy which Galician nationalists are likely to follow.

Concluding remarks

As I have shown in this article, the Galician sociolinguistic context has been extensively examined from various perspectives, and several findings of the more recent piece of research which I conducted at the University of Vigo confirm those of previous investigations. However, given the ever-changing socio-political and socio-economic climate in which languages such as Galician find themselves, the monitoring of the emerging sociolinguistic changes constitute an ongoing endeavour. While the internal and external changes in Galicia's socio-political climate will certainly have some effect on Galicia's sociolinguistic context, it will most certainly be of interest to measure the extent of this effect on possible changes in attitudes towards Galician and ultimately on the use of the language over the coming decade.

Notes

1. When comparing the language with the languages of other states, Spanish people tend to refer to their language as 'español' (Spanish) but refer to the language as 'castellano' (Castilian) when comparing it with other languages within Spain. The latter convention is adopted for the purposes of this article.
2. For a more detailed description of the study, the methodology used, and findings see O'Rourke (2005).
3. Factor analysis is a statistical technique used to examine the inter-relationship among attitudinal variables and to reduce the original set of items to a smaller number of dimensions or factors.

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