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Galicia is not the same as Spain

Spain is a country with political problems with some autonomous communities. One of these autonomous regions is Galicia. The main objective of this essay is not only learning about Galicia and its traditions, but also understand some of the big differences with Spain.

First of all, it is required to have a basic knowledge of the history of Galicia to be able to understand some facts. In the year 410, it was settled the Kingdom of Galicia. It was composed by what nowadays it is known as: “Galicia, Asturias, part of Castile and Leon and the north and middle of Portugal”[[1]](#footnote-1) (Ramón). They suffered several invasions. In 1090, an area of Portugal becomes part of the County of Portugal, but other areas stayed in the Kingdom of Galicia. This Kingdom spoke the same language: Galician-Portuguese, and around the year 1300, even in all Portugal they use this language. The first decades after the departure of the part of Portugal, the language did not change too much, but then, little by little, the Galician-Portuguese has been differentiated into Galician and Portuguese.

After that, in 1230 the Kingdom of Leon becomes part of the Crown of Castile. Then, even the Kingdom of Galicia is incorporated in the Crown of Castile. Until XVI, the language used in the Kingdom of Galicia was Galician, for speaking and writing. However, Spanish was the official language in the Crown of Castile, and Galician became an oral language, spoken by the rural population and people without education. Spanish was taught in the schools as the correct language and imposed on people who continued using Galician.

During XVI, XVII and XVIII, Galician was used in writing just for popular literature and theatre. In XVIII, there was a change thanks to Frei Martín Sarmiento, also known as Father Sarmiento. He “studied the evolution of Galician language from Latin and set the bases for the first dictionary in Galician”[[2]](#footnote-2) (Wiki). In the second half of XIX, it takes places one of the most important movements for Galician: The Resurgence (in Galician: “O Rexurdimento”). This movement was born with the purpose of defending the Galician language and its culture. Their members set the grammars and dictionaries of Galician and the history of Galicia: “a fundamental role of dynamization of the Galician language to literature, especially in the cultivation of poetry”[[3]](#footnote-3) (Mercedes e Fernando). It is important to mention some of members: Xoán Manuel Pintos, Rosalía de Castro, Eduardo Pondal e Curros Enríquez.

During Franco’s dictatorship, every political or cultural Galician movement was forbidden and Spanish was the only language recognised. The people who continued writing or using the Galician language were murdered or forced to go into exile before being killed: “Francoism authorities gave to the Galician language the designation as dialect, a vulgar and rustic speech,   
inappropriate of well-educated and cultured people”[[4]](#footnote-4) (Xunta de Galicia). So, the social prestige that the Galicia language was achieving declined completely, as people were forced to use only Spanish. Not only there were campaigns to force people to speak Spanish, but also denigratory campaigns against Galician. An example of Francos’ official advertisements is: “Speak well. Be patriotic. Don't be barbaric. It is a gentleman requirement to speak our official language, which is, Spanish. It's being patriotic. Long live Spain and the discipline and our Cervantine language. Up Spain!”[[5]](#footnote-5) (Xunta de Galicia) (A Coruña, 1955).

Because of this context, it was thanks to the exiled people that the Galician process of linguistic and cultural recuperation was still alive. Mexico and Argentina were the capitals of this process, as it was there where many authors could publish their books, magazines and newspapers, could have radio programs, create musical and theatrical companies, do conferences… all in Galician. Then, since 1950 with the last years of the dictatorship, the use of the Galician language has been spread into all the fields. Little by little, some people who were in exile came back to continue with their jobs in Galicia, founding new editorials, theatres, publishing books… They even create nationalist political parties clandestinely, mainly from the left.

So, as it was have seen with the summary of the history of Galicia, the first big difference with Spain is the language. Nowadays, in Spain the official language is Spanish, but there are other three co-official languages: Galician, Basque and Catalan. Because of this, there are many people that do not comprehend why there is a problem with the language and they do not understand why Galician people are still defending the language, as well.

In the education system in Galicia, there is one subject to study Spanish and one subject to study Galician. In 2010, it was approved that half of the subjects had to be taught in Spanish and half in Galicia. Before that year, there were many schools that had just the subject of Galician in the Galician language. Of course, subjects like English and French do not count. French is not compulsory and, in public schools, there is also the option of learning Portuguese, what is not usual in Spain.

There is an exception to this distribution: the science subjects have to be taught in Spanish. This is not a difficulty in Primary School because children do not have options. But it is a problem in Secondary Schools, where children can already choose some subjects. Some of these subjects are from sciences and others from literature. So, for many children from 12 to 16, the hours of Galician and Spanish are not equal. There is still a question that many Galician people ask that was never answered: are science subjects harder to study in Galician than in Spanish? A few people who always speak Spanish could believe it, but they should think that there are also people who always speak Galician. There is not a language for science subjects, as it is a discrimination for the other language.

In Spain and in Galicia, education is compulsory until the age of 16. After that, to continue studying, there are two options: vocational training or baccalaureate. With the regulation of the language, there is also a problem with both of these options. The problem is that each institute is the one that has to do the distribution. Vocational training and baccalaureate are full of options, and the majority of students have different subjects, so the equal distribution of the hours in Spanish and in Galician is practically impossible.

There is another important reason why is still important to continue defending the Galician language. As it was said before, Galician is a co-official language. Nowadays, the only way of learning Galician without being in Galicia is online. Also, if a person who usually speaks Galician travel around Spain, that person needs to change to Spanish due to the fact that Spanish people do not understand them, because they do not usually make the effort of trying to understand Galician. In the opposite scenario, if a Spanish person who usually speaks Spanish wants to travel around Galicia, Galician people use Spanish to communicate with them. There is one interesting fact, that is that people who learned Galician in the school or people who usually speak in Galician are able to understand Portuguese. Even though the communication is not perfect because of some different vocabulary, they are able to communicate. Also, many Portuguese people affirm that they understand Galician better than Spanish. Of course, we have to take into consideration, that this phenomenon is successful if both parts want the communication.

To finish with the topic of the language, there are some words in Galician that do not have a direct translation to Spanish or English. There are many words, but one of them is “morriña”, which means having a melancholic and depressive feeling because of the nostalgia of being in Galicia. Another word is “sentidiño” and it is used as a sentence. The speaker does not use this word with unknown people because it means being worried about the other person and demands on the receptor common sense and good behaviour. The last word is “ruliña” or “ruliño” which is usually used by old people as a term of endearment directed towards young people that they really love. There is also a fact that Spanish people always highlight about Galician people, which is also applicable when they speak Spanish: they do not usually answer a question directly. Their common answer to a question is another question or the answer: “it depends”.

As we have seen, what is related to Galician is significantly different to Spanish, but it is not the only thing. The next difference is gastronomy. When people think about Spanish gastronomy they usually mention: paella, tortilla (Spanish omelette), gazpacho… Then sometimes it is mentioned the Galician octopus but remarking that it is Galician.

In Galicia, there is different gastronomy and the dishes are not the same as the Spanish ones. In Spain, the Galician gastronomy is known as diverse and with a big amount of food. The first one, as it was already said, is the Galician octopus. Galicia is placed in the north of Spain and above Portugal, which means that Galicia is half surrounded by the sea, so the quality of the octopus and the fish is very high.

But Galicia has more famous dishes related to the sea. They have the seafood meal, which is wide-ranging. Some of them are: edible crab, Galician crab (there is not a direct translation to this animal, in Galician would be: “nécora” which is not the same as a crab), prawns, shrimps, lobster and scampi. Goose barnacles are also very known. In Galician, they are called “percebes” and the people that collect them are called “percebeiros”. These people are extremely respected and admired in Galicia due to the fact that it is a dangerous job, as goose barnacles are places in the rocks that big waves hit, and many of these people die from drowning or being washed away against the rocks.

Mussels are also very typical. But what catch the eye about mussels is the way that they are raised. If people go to a beach with a view of the open sea, they will probably see a wood construction floating in the distance. This construction is called “batea” in Galician. They are platforms made of wood that float on the sea and where some ropes are tied at this platform and sank. The small mussels are on the rope, they grow there and then the ropes are taken to collect them.

Then, Galicia also has “Cocido Galego”, which would be Galician stew with pork, sausages, beans and boiled potatoes. “Lacón con grelos” (the shoulder of the pork with turnip tops) is also a classic dish. The “empanada” (not exactly like a pie, but similar) is also famous, and it can be from mussels, small scallops, “raxo” (pork loin cut in small pieces and spicy sauce)… On the other hand, the quality of the vegetables, fruit and ingredients related to the land, are diverse and of good quality.

Typical Galician gastronomy also includes desserts and alcoholic drinks. About the desserts, the most important ones which are different from the Spanish ones are: “tarta de Santiago”, “orellas” and “filloas”. The first dessert is the only one that people can eat all the year. “Orellas” and “filloas” are desserts for the Carnival. What is so interesting about them is their preparation. When someone prepares this dessert, the amount of “orellas” and “filloas” is huge. This is the reason why in Carnival different generations prepare together these desserts while talking, and because of this, the tradition of preparing them also contributes teaching the youngest generations how to prepare them, because it is not an easy job.

All of these traditional dishes are very common in Galicia and Galician people feel proud of them. Some of the autonomous communities tried to imitate them but, because of the quality of the Galician raw materials, the flavour is different. Again, this is not the only difference, because it is missing one important part of the Galician tradition.

The Galician folklore is completely different from Spanish. About the general culture in general, the first important thing is the “hórreo”, it would be translated as “raised granary” but it is not like it. When tourists go to Galicia, they usually believe that they are little houses. “Hórreos” are rural constructions with rectangular shapes, places on columns and with many openings in the walls to facilitate ventilation, because they are normally made of stone. It is mainly used to store corn and other agricultural products.

Galician people used to have a lot of oral literature when the Galician language was forbidden, and nowadays, they still preserve some. Some of this literature are myths. One of the most famous ones is: “A Santa Compaña” which is “a procession of dead people or souls in torment that during the night walk around the forests and close to the villages”[[6]](#footnote-6) (Félix). Before the appearance of the “Santa Compaña”, people would hear the chains and see the candles. They would also feel a cold wind coming from nowhere and after, they would continue smelling the wax of the candles.

About the music and the dances, Galicia has also a tradition different from Spain. The traditional music with its traditional dance is called “muiñeira”. The music has 3 basic compounds: the Galician bagpipes (in Galician: “gaita”), the “pandeireta” which is a percussion instrument and the “aturuxo”. The “aturuxo” is like a long shout at the beginning or in the middle of the “muiñeira” that not even all the Galician people can do. The dance is also completely different from any dance in Spain.

To sum up, even though Galicia is part of Spain, they are quite different. With all the information above, and if it is not clarified that nowadays Galicia is part of Spain, it looks like they are different countries. The language is so different and the Galician language has been suffering since a long time ago. The gastronomy and the folklore are not similar to the Spanish, but Spanish people do not know about these traditions. The defence of the Galician language because of Spain started when Galicia became part of Spain, but, as one of the most important Galician writers said: “if we are still Galician is thanks to our language”[[7]](#footnote-7).

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1. “Ocupaba la actual Galicia, Asturias y el norte y centro de Portugal” (Ramón Jimenez). Translation by Alba Chouza Cruces. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Quien estudió la evolución del gallego desde el latín y preparó las bases del primer diccionario de gallego Gallego-Portugués” (Wiki). Translation by Alba Chouza Cruces. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Un papel fundamental de dinamización da lingua galega a literatura, sobre todo o cultivo da poesía” (Mercedes Boga Sans and Fernando Pazos García). Translation by Alba Chouza Cruces. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “As autoridades do franquismo non lle conceden ao idioma galego máis valor e condición que a de “dialecto”, fala vulgar e rústica, impropia de xente ben educada e culta” (Xunta de Galicia). Translation by Alba Chouza Cruces. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Hable bien. Sea patriota. No sea bárbaro. Es de cumplido caballero que usted hable nuestro idioma oficial, o sea, el castellano. Es ser patriota. Viva España y la disciplina y nuestro idioma cervantino. ¡¡ Arriba España!!” (Xunta de Galicia). Translation by Alba Chouza Cruces. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “Una procesión de muertos o ánimas en pena que por la noche (a partir de las doce) recorren errantes los caminos, los bosques, las cercanías de una parroquia o un pueblo” (Félix Casanova). Translation by Alba Chouza Cruces. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *“Se aínda somos galegos e por obra e graza do idioma.”* (Alfonso Daniel Manuel Rodríguez Castelao). Translation by Alba Chouza Cruces. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)