

«I see my language everywhere»

On linguistic relationship between Galicia
and Portugal

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Galicians are interested in a dialogue with Portuguese on linguistic issues. There are official contacts between universities and Portuguese scholars participate in Galician linguistic meetings. Galician scholars have also been invited for meetings in Portugal and for articles in Portuguese journals.

This is the official side. There are also informal contacts, due to the initiative of Portuguese and Galician reintegrationists. 'Reintegrationism' aims to put Galician back in its 'natural context', that's the great realm of Portuguese as an international language. Yet the current Portuguese and Galician political and linguistic establishments don't pursue these aims. Contacts at this level can thus count on no support from authorities. At Portuguese side, only sectors of civil society sympathize with the struggle of Galician reintegrationists and wish to support it. Shall this informal support be enough? Surely not. But, for de time being, it is the only available. There are no bright perspectives that Galician reintegrationism

and Portuguese opinion makers and intellectual elites will start soon a fruitful dialogue. I'll try to explain why I think like this and I'll say what, in my opinion, the conditions for success are. In the meantime you'll get some idea of the interesting language relationship of two lovely countries.

The average Galician reintegrationist reasons more or less as follows: 'If we, Galicians, can remember Portuguese in our common past and adopt Portuguese orthography and vocabulary, they surely will get enthusiastic about our struggle and embrace it at last. By doing so, ancient unity could be somehow restored, beginning with language'. This is the discourse of *unity*. It is based on memory of that great, ancient kingdom *Gallaecia*, which stretched out from the shores of Cantabric Sea up to Coimbra, deep in Portugal.

There is a variant, a troublesome variant, of this discourse that goes something like this: 'If the Portuguese elites prove to be insensitive to our Galician advances, they only show they are unaware – and even unworthy – of their own history. The Portuguese would then forget us, their Galician brothers, and abandon us to misfortune'.

This Galician attitude could create in Portuguese some kind of bad conscience and get mixed with still another unpleasant feeling: resentment of Portuguese opinions

about Spain, opinions that are seen as too much friendly and in fact suspect. All this can only lead to an odd consequence: putting the Portuguese in an annoying position of double loyalty, having to make an embarrassing choice between Galicia and Spain.

Yet, even when Portuguese are not burdened with this 'bad conscience' or a 'double loyalty', things will not be easy. A Galician plea for new esteem of the situation before *our* existence as a nation can hardly make Portuguese enthusiastic. If the Portuguese think about Galicia and Galician (and I'm not sure they often do), they could say: 'O *Galiza*, that part of Spain north of us. Wasn't it the country of that angry lady, the mother of our first king? What a good idea, to become independent'. Indeed, the Portuguese see independence from the North as a founding moment, as essential for their existence as a nation. Everything before is not our History any more. This is the discourse of *rupture*. And as for the language in Galicia... The Portuguese is not particularly preoccupied in the issue. At *El Corte Inglés* mall in Vigo, his poor Spanish happens to be enough.

As a matter of fact, the average Portuguese interprets the speech of a Galician visitor as a praise-worthy effort of 'that Spaniard' to speak our tongue. Trying to be kind in his turn, the Portuguese will free 'that Spaniard' from such trouble by answering in his charming Spanish. Be sure: the regular Portuguese citizen ignores everything

about the language situation in Galicia and about proximity of his own language to that of the Galicians.

In a word: in their contacts, Portuguese and Galicians have more than enough opportunities for misunderstanding and – reasonably or not – for frustration.

I think that both conceptions – the one of *unity* and the one of *rupture* – offer no real perspective. A third conception could be, from my point of view, more realistic: one of *continuity*. I'll try to make it clear by reflecting a bit on language.

Are Galician and Portuguese the same language? Some Galician linguists as well as Portuguese think they are not. They insist on the differences between the specific way of expressing of Portuguese and Galicians. They do recognise a very special kind of closeness between the two modes of expression, a closeness that is essentially different from the one between Portuguese and Spanish. Yet they emphasize the differences that can be found already in Middle Age texts or even affirm that at no moment both sides of the river Minho spoke the same language.

I'm sure those are merely *political* statements. In fact acceptance of the opposite point of view – that states that Galician and Portuguese were and are the same language

– has a lot of consequences. To begin with, your own identity as a Galician or a Portuguese could be challenged. We'll come back to this question as far as Portugal is concerned.

For now, what is *my* opinion on this issue? Well, I state that Galician and Portuguese are *the same language*. I base this opinion on structural grounds. Indeed, *all* important phonological, lexical, morphological and syntactic features of Galician and Portuguese – that is, the features in which they differ from any other Latin language – are common to both.

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Let's start by phonology. Galician and Portuguese have in common two very important vowel oppositions: a first one, between [ɛ] as in *sede* 'main office' and [e] as in *sede* 'thirst'; a second one, between [ɔ] as in *corte* 'cutting' and [o] as in *corte* 'court'. These oppositions are important because they happen to be sufficient for, as we see, clarifying the meaning of words. These two 'full oppositions' create the famous Galician 7 vowels (as Spanish only has 5). By the way, Portuguese has one more full opposition, the one of *para* 'towards' vs. *pára* 'he stops', or *falamos* 'we speak' vs. *falámos* 'we spoke'. But also Brazilians ignore it.

I've been referring to *stressed* vowels. But also outside stress, as in final *a* and *o*, sound Galician and Portuguese alike. Good radio and TV Galician speakers pronounce, just like us, *fico* (with [u]) 'I stay' and *fica* (with [ʌ]) 'he stays'.

Moreover, only Galician and Portuguese possess the nasal diphthongs that are found in *sem* / *sen* 'without' and *som* / *son* 'sound'. This last diphthong doesn't exist in standard Portuguese any more, but is maintained in northern Portugal. It plays a role in achieving a smooth linguistic transition between the two sides of the Minho.

Let's look now at some lexical patterns. Galician and Portuguese have in common the absence of inter-vocal 'l' and 'n'. These sounds disappeared around 800 DC in many hundreds of words. Those 'l' and 'n' are still present in other Latin languages. So for 'to fly' we say *voar* (in Spanish *volar*, in Italian *volare*, in French *voler*) and for 'moon' we say *lua* (in Spanish and Italian *luna*, in French *lune*).

Also there are common the suffixes *-inho* (from Latin 'inius') as in *pouquinho* / *pouquiño* 'a little bit' and *-eiro* (from Latin 'arius') as in *carteiro* 'postman' or *maneira* 'manner'.

Now on to morphology. Galician and Portuguese have the same articles and contractions of articles with

prepositions. They have the same possessive pronouns, like *a minha filha* / *a miña filla* ‘my daughter’, *os teus pais* ‘your parents’ and so forth. Or the use of defined article before proper names (*a Clara, o Carlos*). Or the very special verbal forms of subjunctive future, as in *se eu for* (‘If I go’), *se nós virmos* (‘if we see’). Or the most mysterious personal infinitive, as in *para ires* (‘for you to go’, *até pagarmos* (‘until we shall pay’).

Finally, the syntax. Galician and Portuguese give the same place to the object forms of personal pronouns. Both say *Chamo-me* / *Chámome Clara* ‘My name is Clara’ or *Vemo-nos* / *Vémonos na festa* ‘We meet at the party’.

We can state this: *every structural difference with respect to other Latin languages meets Galician and Portuguese side by side*. In other words: if you do not count pronunciation and some verbal forms, there is no structural difference at all between the two expressions. And perhaps even more significant: differences between Galician and Portuguese are, in importance, about the same as between informal urban Portuguese and Brazilian.

But what are the *differences* between Portuguese and Galician? They can be found in phonology, in some verbal forms and tenses and in vocabulary.

Phonologically, Galician and Portuguese mostly differ in the sound of non-final unstressed ‘a’, ‘e’ and ‘o’. Also in Galician, the sounds [ʒ], [z] and [v] are absent. On the other hand, Portuguese lacks the sounds [θ] as in *cera* or *zero* and [tʃ] as in *chamar*. But here again, there are transition elements, like the absence of [θ] in some dialects north of the Minho and the presence of [tʃ] in dialects south of it. Here again we have a smooth transition.

As for verbal tenses, Portuguese uses composed forms as *tenho lido* ‘I read and keep reading’ and *tinha lido* ‘I had read’, unusual in Galician. Also has Portuguese a much wider use of *ir* (for instance, *vou ler* ‘I’m going to read’) as an auxiliary of the future. Still about future: the Galician form *lerá-se* ‘people will read’ is not allowed in Portuguese. We could say *ler-se-á*, which is a fairly cultivated form, but normally we say *vai ler-se* or *vai-se ler*.

As for vocabulary, there are also interesting differences. First of all, because some words only exist in Galician, like *agarimo* ‘affection’, *liorta* ‘quarrel’, *ledícia* ‘gladness’. Or only in Portuguese, like *aliás* ‘besides’ and *gajo* ‘chap’.

Other differences are due to influence of Spanish on Galician, like *folga* ‘strike’ inspired on the Spanish *huelga* (Portuguese uses a galicism, *greve*) or *salsa*

‘sauce’ (in Portugal this means ‘parsley’). Or instead because of the influence of Spanish on Portuguese. The Portuguese word *castelhano* is in itself a ‘castilianism’, as Galicians say *castelán*.

A little note on the margin. Galician (reintegrationists or not) mourn about the many castilianisms in Galician and dream about Portuguese as a pure, authentic language. This is an illusion. Portuguese has at least as many castilianisms as Galician. Also for us, Spanish has for a long time been a ‘norm of correctness’. During several centuries, if Portuguese had no term for a thing or idea, they took it simply from Spanish.

There is another kind of difference between Galician and Portuguese: in the case a given word means something else (or mostly something else) in the other territory. For example, the word *retranca*, which means ‘irony’ in Galicia and in Portugal ‘suspicion’. Or *desfeita*, which means in Galicia, first of all, ‘destruction’ and in Portugal only ‘insult’.

But the interesting thing is that, in compensation, lots of words are exclusively Galician and Portuguese. Think of nice daily verbs as *afastar* ‘to remove’, *aturar* ‘to endure’, *cheirar* ‘to smell’, *esquecer* ‘to forget’, *lembrar* ‘to remember’, *teimar* ‘to get obstinate’. And you’ll find as well many substantives, like *alicerce* ‘foundation of a building’, *luar* ‘moonlight’, many adjectives, like *morno*

‘tepid’, *parvo* ‘idiot’, and a lot of adverbs, like *cedo* ‘early’, *de vagar* / *devagar* ‘slowly’.

There are more coincidences, and more differences (like the dative of solidarity as in *éche o que há / hai* ‘that’s what there is’), but that can be enough for a demonstration. I think that, if you can *prove* something in this matter, all the items I have gathered here prove that Galician and Portuguese are the same language.

The crazy thing now is that even this fairly modest exercise of language comparison I have just done, has never been done before. As far as I know, never, in tens of years of discussion, in hundreds of texts about this matter, did anybody perform this exercise. Why? I suppose most people *want* Galician and Portuguese to be the same language, or *do not want* that. You could also suppose this: that Portugal and Galicia lack grammarians interested in – or able to – make this exercise. Particularly reintegritationism, which has got great lexicographers and sociolinguists, produced after Carvalho Calero no one good grammarian.

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I referred to a smooth language transition over the south Galician border into Portuguese territory. Indeed, on dialectal level, you can see over there a linguistic *continuum*. This is not simply a curious question, this is a

significant state of things. Here, we have the living remainders of an old situation, when no language border existed at all. But more important: from A Corunha up to Faro, 700 km south, an uninterrupted linguistic line still exists today. This situation can be, of course, found elsewhere, also in Europe. But the spectacular thing – really unique in Europe – is that a citizen of A Corunha and a citizen of Faro, speaking as they do every day, can talk with each other without any problem. And, if they have a problem, they can solve it by speaking as they normally do.

So *continuity* is, I think, the most important aspect of the whole issue. The river Minho is no linguistic border. As I said before: on a small, dialectical scale, a smooth transition can be observed. Quite remarkably, Xavier Alcalá speaks, in an interview to *Agália*, of a ‘gradient of portuguesation of Galician’. He states that, should Porto, and not Lisbon, be the capital, there wouldn’t be Galician *and* Portuguese, but just one fairly homogenous language on the entire western strip of the Peninsula.

Also culturally, the border of Galicia and North Portugal is a thin one and could become still thinner. All kinds of contacts can be developed and have been developing, from researching university scholars to singing children. At this very moment, a ‘Galician Week’ is taking place in Braga with conferences, movies, music, theatre and culinary.

As you can see, I say almost nothing about *spelling*. Not because spelling is a secondary question – which is not – but because it is not essential. Written in the official, phonetic way or in a more Portuguese, etymologic spelling, Galician changes by no means structurally.

But orthography *does* contain a political message. Just an example. Officially, Galicians write nowadays with ‘ll’ and ‘ñ’ like in Spanish. This underlines the ‘Hispanic’ character of their language. But, should they wish so, Galicians could tomorrow decide to write ‘lh’ and ‘nh’, like many millions of people do. Who knows, the football shirt of Ronaldinho Gaúcho could play a role in it in the future. A prestigious shirt can make a spelling prestigious.

As a matter of fact, official Galician standard has been changing recently and every change brings it closer to Portuguese. More generally: the more authentic Galician is, the more it approaches Portuguese.

Still I’m sure Galicians will *not* decide tomorrow to adopt ‘lh’ and ‘nh’. The Galician political and linguistic establishment will not take soon such a huge step. I mean by that the *whole* Galician establishment, which includes Nationalists. Of course, Galician Nationalists recognize, mostly with pleasure, the quite close relationship between Portuguese and Galician. But adopting ‘lh’ and

‘nh’ could give things a momentum that would be hard to manage. That change would make clear, as no other, that Galician and Portuguese *could be* the same language. And this would be – I didn’t invent it myself – a direct challenge to the unity of Spain. Because the problem is: if one of the regional languages of Spain happens to be an international language – or, in *Spanish* nationalist terms, if one part of Spain speaks a foreign language – how united, how solid still is Spain?

This is a huge problem. Not just *one* huge problem, but two. Don’t forget the *Portuguese* side of it. The Portuguese see their country, even more than Spaniards, as a perfect unity. There is in Portugal no traditional ethnic minority, no traditional religious minority, no traditional linguistic minority (apart from some ten thousand speakers of Mirandese), no traditional territorial entity other than the entire territory itself. The Portuguese political border, the most ancient existing political border in Europe, is also, as you can see, the most perfect one. So you can imagine the Portuguese surprise if there were a leakage, a linguistic infiltration somewhere. How perfect then is our country? It would not only be a surprise but a direct cultural threat to discover that there are *other owners* of the language, not on the other side of the ocean, like in Brazil, but just across the river.

Was I too pessimistic when I spoke about misunderstandings between the Galician reintegrationists

and the average Portuguese? That's possible. There was at least one successful experience in the near past. During the years 1997 until 2001, an informal yet close contact developed between Portuguese and Galicians citizens in a newsgroup on internet. They met in Terràvista ('Land In Sight'), at that point a quite popular portal. Their conversation proved the existence, in Portugal, of a concerned ear for Galician longings about language. It even proved (as one of the participants had a spectacular conversion) that initial rejection can change in enthusiastic support. In the last months, I've been editing this long conversation (which I was offered just one year ago) and I hope a book, *Uma Conversa a Ocidente*, can be published in Portugal and Galicia soon.

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In the last hundred years a huge bibliography on Galicia has been accumulating in Portugal. I'm gathering it and I have already made a first version of it accessible on the web (in the portal PGL). This shows that Galicia could become an issue among us. But this amount of attention on the paper could be somehow deceptive. There are many clamorous silences as well.

I give three recent examples. A voluminous study, *Os espanhóis e Portugal*, by José Freire Antunes, a famous historian, contains in its several hundreds of bibliographical entries not one text of a Galician author.

A second example. A well documented, splendid photo-biography of Teixeira de Pascoaes, by António Mega Ferreira, a public figure and a writer, includes not one reference to the poet's important Galician contacts. One last example: the great Gulbenkian Foundation published a book, *As origens de Portugal. História contada a uma criança* ('The origins of Portugal. A story told to a child'), by Rómulo de Carvalho, the civil name of the excellent poet António Gedeão. It's a magnificently conceived and written book. A bit before the middle of the book we read: «Here ends the story of what happened in our country before it was called Portugal». Until that moment no word at all about Galicia. Some pages later, Galicia happens to be a fairly empty place where the first king of Portugal had some amazing battles.

Politically, things are not much better. There is simply no Portuguese politics about Galicia or Galician. And there has never been. The only occasion ever that a Portuguese leader took a position about any kind of relationship between Portugal and Galicia was an article by Prime Minister Sócrates and his future Galician colleague Touriño, which appeared in June 2005 in the Galician newspaper *La Voz de Galicia*. As a matter of fact, it concerned just economic and some cultural relationship of Galicia and *Northern* Portugal. No word about a common, or even close, language, no word about a relationship of Galicia and Portugal as a whole.

I understand impatience of reintegrationists. Galician is losing speakers to Spanish. This is a very threatening situation. Reintegrationists believe that adopting a Portuguese standard would give Galicians a feeling of speaking an important language and, in addition, would stop 'hispanising' of Galician. If nothing else, it would make apparent in Spain and in the world how different Galicia is.

I repeat: I understand this. But there is also reason for preoccupation. Adoption of a Portuguese standard at this moment could cause, as I said, some cultural trouble in Portugal, but also in Galicia, where it would find a tremendous rejection from many conscious and surely as much motherland loving Galicians as reintegrationists are. As a matter of fact, implementation of a more international language model is important, but the most urgent of all is achieving Galician and Portuguese adhesion to the reintegrationist cause.

The Portuguese know very little about the individuality of Galicia as a Spanish region and, more generally, about the peculiar form of the State in Spain. Never do Portuguese have any idea about what struggling for your mother tongue is. For many Portuguese the understanding of the Galician issue asks for nothing less than a mental revolution. A global 'Portuguese' strategy must be developed by Reintegrationism and close and enduring contacts must be laid with Portuguese

population and opinion making elites. At the moment that Galicia signifies something in cultural and political Portugal, the language model issue can then be presented in all its magnitude and will surely get much more chances.

There are besides other linguistic urgent tasks. Start (as I say to my Galician friends) mapping all Galician peculiarities on lexicon, on idiomatic constructions, on phraseology, on pragmatics, which are found in everyday authentic speech in those superb writers in Galician. Make full use of it, save it from disappearing in contact with Spanish *and* with Portuguese. Look as well, if it can inspire you, at the language of the Portuguese. Study how, in a systematic way, terminology can be taken from Portuguese if an original Galician form is not desirable. Study how you can influence Galician daily speech and writing with authentic terminology and phraseology, whether taken from Portuguese or not. You've got some time for it. Chances aren't going to fall tomorrow from heaven. Don't react blindly, don't despair. Salvation comes only if you prepare it efficiently.

And don't imitate us too much. Think of yourselves after all. We are not going to imitate you, Brazilians are not going to imitate us, we are not going to imitate Brazilians. There are authentic Brazilian vocabulary, idiom, phraseology, pragmatics. We are proud that *they* are so rich, as we are proud that *we* are rich too. So hold

in honour your patrimonial Galician language. In a word, don't *submit* to Portuguese standard, the accidental form we've been giving to an ancient language. Be sure: the most Galician keeps its recognisable expression, the most it will be interesting too for us. And the other way around: the most Galicians try to look like us, or try to loose themselves in our expression, the less interesting they will become.

Dear friends: Galicians and Portuguese have an exalting task in the future. We may dream, from now on, of the day 'Galician' and 'Portuguese' will be official names of just one language, that beloved language of all of us. That's a wonderful dream. For the time being, I am already happy to see the wide smile of a Galician friend during a visit to Portugal as he read, in our streets, all kinds of signs, newspaper titles and shop fronts. «I see my language everywhere», he said. Be sure: I'll never deny him this pleasure. This is also *my* pleasure.

Cork (Ireland), March 21, 2006

Mil primaveras mais.