Conflicting values in contemporary Galicia: attitudes to ‘O Galego’ since autonomy

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Abstract
This paper analyses and attempts to explain conflicting views about the value associated with Galician in contemporary Galicia. It does so by tracing the possible source of these conflicting values historically, from the effects of language contact with Spanish since the fourteenth century, right through to attempts made to revive Galician in the late nineteenth century to the current sociolinguistic situation in the context of the twenty-first century. It explores the reasons why the number of Galician speakers continues to decline despite the seemingly more favourable attitudes towards the language amongst the Galician population.

Introduction
Of Spain’s three officially recognized regional languages, Galician, spoken in the north-western part of the Iberian Peninsula, shows the greatest numerical strength within its own territorial region. Galician, known to its speakers as ‘galego’ is the habitual language of 68.6% of Galicians.¹ This proportion compares to 52% in the case of Catalan² and less than 30% in the case of Basque.³

Peculiarities of the Galician Case
Geographical, historical, economic and political factors have influenced the Galician sociolinguistic situation and caused it to develop in different ways from that of Catalan and Basque. The isolation of Galicia from the rest of Spain, as well as its history of poor economic development has made the region unattractive to Spanish-speaking migrants from other parts of Spain unlike the case of Catalonia and the Basque Country. As Mar-Molinero points out:

Galicia was a backward and traditional society not experiencing the challenges of modernisation or industrialisation that were taking place in Catalonia and the Basque Country. It was also geographically very isolated, a feature that has always helped shape Galician history.⁴

While these factors have for a long time favoured language maintenance in the Galician case, they have had more long-term negative repercussions on the social meaning which came to be associated with the autochthonous language. Along with geographic isolation and poor economic development in Galicia, centuries-long economic and political dependence on central Spain forged a deep-rooted link between Galician and the very factors which had allowed the language to survive, namely economic deprivation, poverty and backwardness.

Key Words
Galician language language attitudes language decline.

The threat of language shift

Despite its apparent strength in numerical terms, the future of Galician is far from secured. The threat of language shift in the Galician case is increasingly evident in the declining number of speakers, especially amongst the younger generation. Decreased use of the language amongst younger Galicians explains UNESCO’s (United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture) 2001 classification of the language as ‘endangered’.5

Trends in language shift away from Galician run parallel to increased institutional support for the language and its presence in the education system, the media and official documents. While such measures have raised the status of what was formerly a low-prestige language, ambiguities about the social meanings attached to speaking Galician continue to exist. Such ambiguities give rise to internal conflict amongst Galicians about the value attached to the language in a modern-day Galician context.

The main source of sociolinguistic data for this study is the Sociolinguistic Atlas of Galicia (Mapa Sociolingüístico de Galicia, henceforth MSG) published in three volumes between 1994 and 1996.6 These data on the language behaviours and attitudes of contemporary Galicians are supplemented by recent qualitative data and the findings of a small-scale study of young Galician groups which was carried out in the Universidade da Coruña during April and May 2000. The latter are however more interpretative and provide qualitative rather than quantitative results.

An historical overview

Before discussing these data, a brief overview of the historical circumstances which led to the social decline of Galician is given. The ideologies of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Galician language revivalists and their influence on current-day beliefs and perceptions about the language will be assessed.

The language contact stage

Language contact in the Galician case coincides with socio-economic and political relations between Galicia and the kingdom of Castile, later emerging as the Spanish State. Up until the tenth and eleventh centuries, Galicia was an independent kingdom. In this context, Galician was the language used by all social classes as well as being the language of administration and judicial systems.

From the fourteenth century, Galicia fell under permanent Castilian domination, leading to the decline of the autochthonous Galician nobility. The creation of the Spanish State and 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 central Spain. Henceforth, the people who represented authority in Galicia spoke Spanish. As Rodríguez puts it ‘xugulación dunha clase dirixente autóctona’7 (‘strangulation of an autochthonous ruling class’) in the fifteenth century and their replacement by Spanish speakers, created a new role model for Galicians built on the culture, language

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5 Taken from Galician weekly, A Nosa Terra, 7-13 March 2002, no. 1024 (Internet version: www.anosaterra.com)


7 It will be noted that two versions of Galician spelling appear in the article. The majority of authors cited used the standard Galician form. However, in quotes from Álvarez Cáccamo, Carballo Calero and Dominguez Seco (footnote 21), Portuguese orthography is used. The two spelling forms used in Galicia constitute an ideological debate between isolationists (those who perceive Galician as a distinct language from Spanish and Portuguese and adopt the standard Galician form) and lucistas (who put Galician dialects at the northern end of the dialectal continuum between northern Galicia and southern Portugal). Lucistas therefore adopt varieties of Portuguese and see the goal of contemporary language normalization in Galicia as the gradual adoption of standard Portuguese as the standard language in Galicia.
and values of central Spain as opposed to those of Galicia.\textsuperscript{8} As a result, those who sought social mobility in Galicia imitated the linguistic behaviour of the new Spanish-speaking dominant classes. In the period that followed, Galician was effectively banished from public affairs and as a written language. 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.

Galician was maintained up until the nineteenth century as the primary means of communication of a rural, uneducated, peasant population. Survival of the language in such conditions, however, led to the stigmatization of the language and its association with the very factors which helped maintain it: ignorance, rurality and poverty. Despite the continued use of the autochthonous language by the Galician masses, their linguistic consciousness was Castilianized and as Carballo Calero remarks ‘o galego passou a ser sociologicamente unha forma rústica do castelam em Galiza’\textsuperscript{9} (‘Galician became sociologically a rustic form of Castilian in Galicia’).

\textbf{Language revival}

Attempts to raise the status of Galician and to curb the depreciation of the language did not begin until the nineteenth century. Romantic ideas about cultural identity, which dominated European intellectual life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, underlay the ideology of the Galician language revival movement. Central to these ideas was a rural/urban dichotomy which located in historically, socially and spatially remote societies, such as the Galician periphery, the qualities of community that the emerging urban societies, such as that of central Spain, were deemed to have lost. These polarities inherent in the Romantic system of ideas led to the tendency in Galicia to define Galician culture in opposition to the urban culture of central Spain. Thus, the distinctive character of Galicia was seen by Galician intellectuals to reside primarily in the rural Galician communities. These communities, apart from most clearly contrasting with the industrial, urban developments of central Spain, continued to account for more than 90% of the Galician population up to 1900. These rural areas were at the same time largely Galician-speaking.

\textbf{From repression to democracy}

Much progress was made by Galician language revivalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who succeeded 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 Spanish. 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. 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 recognized. According to the new


Spanish Constitution of 1978, Galician, along with Catalan and Basque were given co-official status with Spanish, 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 education. Through these measures, linguistic policy aims to raise Galician’s former status from that of a low-prestige language and end the discrimination towards its speakers which had developed because of its low status.

**Data of language attitudes and behaviour**

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 which will be explored from the MSG were collected in the early 1990s, just ten years after Galician language policy was put in place.

Before looking at data from the MSG itself, the methodology outlined in the report in obtaining such data will be discussed briefly. Data on linguistic competence, use and attitudes provided in the MSG were collected from a representative sample of the Galician population in which 38,897 subjects over the age of fifteen years completed a 148-item sociolinguistic questionnaire. The main objectives of the study as outlined by Ramallo and Lorenzo were ‘elaborar unha exhaustiva base de datos da relación entre lingua e sociedade en Galicia que permitirá realizar unha descrición o máis completa posible da situación sociolingüística dos grupos linguísticos desta comunidade’ (‘to develop an exhaustive database of the relationship between language and society in Galicia which will allow for the most complete description possible of the sociolinguistic situation of the two linguistic groups in that community’).

Working at a macro-level of analysis, emphasis was placed on defining the distribution of Galicians’ according to a number of linguistic and sociological parameters. Such an analysis allowed for the grouping of the Galician population into a number of defined categories such as social class, age, place of residence, level of education, etc. according to their corresponding levels of linguistic competence in use of Galician and Spanish.

**Language use in contemporary Galicia**

Data regarding the first language learned by Galicians as well as habitual use of the language show the continued quantitative dominance of Galician above Spanish. 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 Spanish. Active use of Galician is also high with more than half the sample (68.6%) claiming Galician as their habitual language. Despite this apparent strength in numerical terms, a socio-demographic breakdown of these figures...
provides a more revealing and less healthy picture of Galicia’s sociolinguistic reality. According to the 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. These data thus highlight the continued association of Galician with rural life, a lack of formal education and lower social class. Spanish, in contrast, as in the pre-linguistic policy phase, 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 Spanish. 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 Spanish as opposed to Galician as their initial language.

The MSG as an instrument for predicting linguistic behaviour

As an instrument for predicting linguistic behaviour, research data produced by the MSG show certain inadequacies. In the questionnaire distributed to Galicians, respondents were asked about their use of Galician and Spanish across different domains and with members of their family and community. Because this method of data collection relies on the self-reports of informants, difficulties may occur in controlling its validity. Informants, for example, may have difficulty in recalling which language they use in a given situation or with a given person. They may sometimes be unaware of the language used in a given context, especially in the case of bilinguals who might be expected to engage in codeswitching. The latter can be described as the conscious or unconscious presence of two languages within the same utterance or speech act and is a phenomenon which affects both Spanish speakers and Galician speakers alike. There is thus a difference between what respondents report and what may have occurred in reality. Attitudes towards a language and its relative status in a particular context may also affect responses about language use. If one of the languages has a higher prestige, informants may claim greater knowledge of it (and conversely, lesser knowledge of the non-prestige language) than they actually have. As Calvet points out:

"une enquête par questionnaire ne nous livre pas la ‘vérité’ sur les pratiques linguistiques mais l’idée que les gens se font de leur pratiques. Ils peuvent se tromper, ils peuvent aussi mentir, parce qu’ils considèrent par exemple que telle langue est plus valorisante que telle autre."

(a questionnaire survey does not provide us with the ‘truth’ about linguistic practices but how people perceive their linguistic practices. They can be wrong, they can also lie because they might for example consider this or that language to be more highly valued.)
The ability or willingness of informants to give accurate reports about their language use and behaviour makes it difficult to uncover the ‘truth’ about the way people actually speak and the languages they use. However, the inadequacies of questionnaire surveys in predicting language behaviour outlined above cannot be seen as a criticism of the MSG itself. Indeed, the writers of the report recognize the limitations of questionnaires as a means of analysing the mechanisms involved in language choice and language behaviour:

(a survey is not always an adequate tool in analysing the relationship between language and society especially when analysing diverse sociolinguistic phenomena and those which are semantically and pragmatically complex and non-homogeneous (Navarro 1995). For example, when the objective is to study the network of social relations of individuals and the role of language in the construction of that network of relations a survey does not work. Or if the aim of the study is the construction of linguistic identities in discourse we have to draw on other processes for the creation of data.)

The MSG does not pretend to constitute an end product but a reference point for future research and language planning, ‘de xeito que non só sirva para afondar no seu coñecemento, senón que ademais poida ser de proveito para futuras tarefas de planificación lingüística en Galicia’\(^2^1\) (‘so that it does not only serve as a means of deepening our knowledge but also as a source for future work in the area of language planning in Galicia’).

Indeed the number of sociolinguistic studies on the Galician case working at a microsociological level is increasing and such studies provide insights into aspects of linguistic behaviour beyond the confines of the MSG.\(^2^2\) Instruments such as in-depth interviews, participant observation methods, conversational analysis and face-to-face interaction between speakers cast light on linguistic behaviour which is very often not captured through structured questionnaire methods. These methods, however, because of the emphasis on descriptive detail are for practical reasons obliged to limit the number of people who can be analysed.

**Current linguistic attitudes in Galicia**

While the reported account of language use in Galicia suggests a pessimistic future for the language, data on language attitudes show signs for optimism. Despite the apparent decline in the number of active speakers of Galician, atti-
tudes towards the language are in general favourable, rated at a 3.6 average on a five-point scale where 1 marks the lowest value and 5 is the highest score. Most positive attitudes (3.75 on the five-point scale) are found amongst the 16-25 age bracket who paradoxically, have the least number of active speakers. Given the mediating import of symbolic values, more positive attitudes towards Galician by the younger generation of Galicians could be interpreted as an indicator of future linguistic change rather than a direct measure of current behaviour. Language attitudes and values, as Woolard and Gahng highlight, very often provide useful pre-behavioural changes which may not have yet become apparent through actual language use.

From the sociolinguistic data on language attitudes a possible signal for future change in the linguistic behaviour of the younger generation of Galicians can be deduced from their more positive attitudes towards parental use of Galician with their children. In response to the question: ‘¿Como valora o feito de que haxa pais castelanfalantes que lles falan ós seus fillos en galego?’ ('How would you evaluate the fact that there are Castilian-speaking parents who speak to their children in Galician?'), the younger generation of Galicians show the most positive attitudes towards Castilian-speaking parents who speak Galician to their children. Conversely, in response to the question, ‘¿Como valora que haxa pais galegofalantes que lles falen ós seus fillos en castelán?’ ('How would you evaluate the fact that there are Galician-speaking parents who speak to their children in Castilian?'), the younger generation are most critical of Galician-speaking parents who use Castilian with their children.

Interestingly, data on the initial language of the younger generation within the 16-25 age group show the lowest incidence of Galician across all age groups. Data on the initial language of these younger informants show a marked decline in the intergeneration transmission of Galician by the parents of this age group. Most favourable attitudes towards the use of Galician by parents, therefore, come from the very group which would have been least exposed to language use in the home. Many of these young Galicians, within the 16-25 age bracket, would in fact have been brought up through the medium of Spanish (43.5%) despite the fact that their parents were themselves Galician speakers. Since the 16-25 age group of Galicians show the most positive attitudes towards the ‘Galicianization’ of parental speech habits, as representatives of the next generation of Galician parents we would expect this group to be more disposed to speaking Galician to their children than their own parents were in the previous generation. Thus, the positive attitudes expressed by the younger generation of contemporary Galicians may be suggestive of a reversal in current linguistic trends leading to an increase in language use amongst the future generation of young Galicians.

Variations in the strength of positive attitudes also occur across different socio-economic groups and across those with different levels of education. The higher the socio-economic class and the higher the level of education of the respondent, the more favourable the attitude towards parental use of Galician with their children. Ironically, as was the case amongst the younger generation of Galicians, these two social categories are most strongly associated with

26 MSG, 1, 1994, p. 71.
27 ibid.
Spanish-speaking homes and use more Spanish than Galician as their habitual language. Positive attitudes on the part of these two social groups could therefore lead to an increase in the use of Galician amongst higher social classes and those with higher levels of education, a trend which has been until now uncharacteristic of the Galician sociolinguistic context.

In the section which focuses on the relationship between language and a Galician collective identity, respondents were asked to comment on the statement: ‘Se se deixase de fala-lo galego, a cultura e identidade de Galica perderianse/manterianse’ (‘If Galician ceased to be spoken, the culture and identity would be lost/maintained’), the most consolidated response in favour of Galician is again to be found amongst the three previously identified social categories: the younger generation, those with higher levels of education and from higher social classes. These results show that Galician is most valued as a symbol of identity by those who use the language least. Here again as in the question on parental use of Galician, the positive correlation between the language and Galician identity could be interpreted as a signal for future change in the sociolinguistic behaviour of these social groups, leading to the eventual conversion over time of positive attitudes to actual language use.

Based on the assumption that linguistic attitudes can predict future linguistic change, the positive attitudes shown by the Galician population in general and the three previously discussed social groups in particular paint a fairly optimistic future for the Galician language. Nevertheless, the fact still remains that, even ten years after these data were collected, experts report further language shift away from Galician. In 2001, UNESCO published a report on the Galician case reducing the survival prospects of the language from its previous classification as a ‘potentially endangered’ language to an ‘endangered’ language. The UNESCO report also coincides with the results of a sociolinguistic survey on the language attitudes and behaviour of school-going Galician groups, carried out by the AS-PG (Asociación Socio-Pedagógica Galega). The results of this survey, like those reported in the Sociolinguistic Atlas of Galicia, point to precarious trends in the actual use of Galician, despite the high value which informants attach to the language and very positive attitudes expressed towards it.

This raises the question about our ability to predict linguistic behaviour from attitudes. The Irish case, which covers a longer period of linguistic history (language policy has been in place since 1922), highlights a case in point where strong feelings of goodwill and support for the Irish language have not been translated into language use. According to most recent survey reports on the Irish case, as many as 61% of those living in the Republic of Ireland agree with the statement, ‘Without Irish, Ireland would certainly lose its identity as a separate culture’. The same report shows that active use in Irish is as low as 5% with a further 10% claiming to use the language but less regularly. However, beliefs and feelings about Irish as a focus of ethnic or national identity constitute but one, albeit an important dimension of meaning connected with the Irish language. Less favourable are, for example, Irish people’s perceptions about the future survival of the language. Significant proportions of the population believe that the language has gone beyond the stage where it can be
realistically revived, or that it is irrelevant or has become unattractive to most people. As many as 41% of those surveyed in 1993 agree that ‘most people see all things associated with Irish as too old-fashioned’ and 31% believe that ‘Irish is a dead language’.  

Similar mismatches between positive linguistic attitudes and low levels of language use in the Galician case need to be explained more fully so as to determine why positive attitudes towards Galician are not being converted into actual language use.

The mismatch between positive attitudes and language use - towards a hypothesis

It could be hypothesized that while linguistic policy since the 1980s has succeeded in instilling more positive attitudes amongst sectors of the Galician population where language use is lowest, this policy is perhaps failing to raise the status of the autochthonous language as a viable mode of communication. This possible deficiency in language policy might therefore explain why the more positive attitudes expressed by contemporary Galicians are not being converted to actual language use. The findings of the Sociolinguistic Atlas of Galicia show that former prejudices towards Galician no longer exist but highlight underlying prejudices about the appropriateness of the language in certain contexts. According to these data, a significant minority of Galicians (33.1%) agree with the following statement: ‘O castelán é más axeitado có galego para falar na cidade’ (‘Castilian is more suitable than Galician for use in the city’). The majority of respondents (79.7%) agree with the statement that ‘O galego é máis axeitado có castelán para falar na aldea’ (‘Galician is more suitable than Castilian for speaking in the village’). These findings show that while Galicians may not explicitly express such prejudices, they continue to exist in a more subtle and implicit form.

These implicit prejudices are further highlighted in responses which were collected in April and May 2000 from a sample of Galician undergraduates in the Universidade da Coruña, one of Galicia’s three main universities. The age, social class and levels of education of the sample mirror quite closely the three social categories identified in the Sociolinguistic Atlas of Galicia as having most consolidated positive attitudes towards parental use of Galician with the next generation and Galician as a marker of identity. 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 third-level students, members of this group possess the highest societal levels of what Bourdieu refers to as ‘cultural capital’ in the form of educational qualifications. Such qualifications can in turn be converted to ‘economic capital’, allowing such students to access the most prestigious and best-paid jobs at both local and national levels. Subsequently, we would expect these student groups to constitute the future dominant middle-class in Galicia.

Preliminary insights into the language behaviour and attitudes of young middle-class Galicians were collected through a short exploratory sociolinguistic survey which was distributed to 54 second- and fourth-year students within the Department of English Philology. A series of in-depth interviews with 18 students produced a wealth of data which could be cross-referenced with the student’s socio-economic background. These interviews showed that 33% of the Galician students expressed a preference for the use of Galician in formal contexts, such as in the classroom or in formal social situations. These findings are consistent with the findings of the Sociolinguistic Atlas of Galicia, which showed that Galician is more suitable than Castilian for use in formal contexts. However, these findings also revealed that 67% of the Galician students expressed a preference for the use of Castilian in informal contexts, such as in the home or in informal social situations. These findings are consistent with the findings of the Sociolinguistic Atlas of Galicia, which showed that Castilian is more suitable than Galician for use in informal contexts. These findings highlight the complexity of language attitudes and use in contemporary Galicia.
of the students allowed for further insights into student perceptions of the 

social meanings attached to knowing and speaking Galician and Spanish in 
contemporary Galicia.

Comments offered spontaneously by this group of young Galicians and in 
reply to open-ended questions tap into the implicit prejudices which continue 
to exist towards Galician. As a means of testing the importance of Galician in 
the strategies that might be adopted to maintain or improve their material 
status, students were asked to comment on the importance of transmitting the 
autochthonous language to the next generation of Galicians. In response to the 
question ‘¿En que idioma daríaslles [os nenos] a educación?’ (In what language 
would you educate them [the children]?), it was found that although the majority 
of the student group (80%) expressed positive attitudes towards the prospect 
of educating their children in Galician, bilingualism in Galician and Spanish 
was favoured above Galician monolingualism. Of more interest for our pur-
poses here were the explanations provided in the open-ended questions which 
followed in which respondents were asked to comment on why they would 
choose either language. The reasons for ensuring a knowledge of Galician dif-
fered from those given in relation to Spanish where students tended to ‘weigh-
up’ the value attached to knowing each of the community languages according 
to different sets of criteria. In their responses students repeatedly made reference 
to the local value of Galician compared to the national or international 
value of Spanish.37

R1: ‘Intentaría que fosen bilingües porque considero que ambas dúas 
linguas son necesarias, o galego para comunicarse na nosa comunidade, e 
o castelán para facelo no resto do país.’

(I would try to make them bilingual because I consider both lan-
guages to be necessary: Galician, as a means of communication within 
our community and Castilian for the rest of the country.)

R2: ‘Soy gallega y es mi lengua pero también soy española y el español está 
más extendido.’

(I am Galician and it is my language but I am also Spanish and 
Spanish is more widespread.)

R3: ‘Está ben que os nenos galegos aprendan a lingua da súa terra, pero 
tamén que aprendan a do resto de España.’

(It is good that Galician children learn the language of their own land 
but they should also learn the language of the rest of Spain.)

R4: ‘Porque me parece importante que se sepan desenvolver en dos 
linguas: la utilizada por toda España y la propia de nuestra cultura, el 
gallego.’

(Because I think it is important that they know how to use the two 
languages: the language used throughout Spain and Galician, the lan-
guage of our own culture.)
R5: ‘Teñen que estar preparados para todo. Se tivesen que vivir fora de Galicia teñen que saber defenderse ben en castelán.’
(‘They have to be prepared for everything. If they have to live outside Galicia they need to be able to speak Castilian.’)

R6: ‘Porque o galego é moi importante en Galiza pero tamén o é o castelán se por exemplo tes que ir fora de Galiza.’
(‘Because Galician is very important in Galicia but so is Castilian if for example you have to move outside Galicia.’)

R7: ‘Aínda que gústame a idea de defendelo galego e chegar a súa total normalización, o castelán e un idioma mundial e que de momento tes máis prestixio que o galego.’
(‘Although I like the idea of defending Galician and that it might become a ‘normalized’ language, Castilian is a world language and for the moment it is more prestigious than Galician.’)

In the interview series which involved more in-depth discussion with 18 students similar dichotomies were found. Students were asked to comment on the importance of possessing a knowledge of both Galician and Spanish. ‘¿E importante ter buen coñecemento das dúas linguas?’ (‘Is a knowledge of both languages important?’)

R1: ‘Creo que si. Para ir fuera está muy bien conocer el castellano.’
(‘I think so. To move outside Galicia, it is good to know Castilian.’)

R2: ‘En Galicia sí. En el ambiente escolar como asignatura de literatura y lengua gallega. En cuestiones de trabajo, algo relacionado con la Xunta, para trabajar como profesor, piden conocimientos del gallego, en oposiciones. El castellano es muy importante, aparte de ser en el conjunto de España, para comunicarse con otra gente de fuera.’
(‘In Galicia, yes. In the school context as a subject in Galician literature and language. For work, something related to the Xunta (regional government), public examinations. Castilian is very important apart from being part of Spain, to communicate with other people from outside.’)

R3: ‘Para relacionarse con la gente de la aldea, la familia, el gallego. El castellano porque es muy internacional.’
(‘To speak with people from the village, the family, Galician. Castilian, because it is very international.’)

R4: ‘Si, el gallego es la lengua de nuestra cultura, y la cultura siempre te liga algo. El castellano tiene más fuerza, no lo sé, no es más importante pero se utiliza más. En el pasado el castellano tenía más prestigio y el gallego fue desprestigiado.’

Conflicting values in contemporary Galicia
‘Yes, Galician is the language of our culture and with culture there are always certain ties. Castilian has more strength, I don’t know, it is not more important but it is used more. In the past Castilian had more prestige and Galicia had low prestige.’

The qualitative responses given by these informants highlight the underlying conflicting values and ambiguities associated with the autochthonous language. This set of student responses seems to reflect the traditional set of values associated with Galician, namely, its link with rurality and lower social functions. Comparatively, respondents associate Spanish with modernity and progress. The bipolar value system on which these young Galicians would appear to be operating can be further illustrated in the following set of comments made by students during the course of the in-depth interview:

R1: ‘En la aldea uso gallego y castellano en Coruña.’
(In the village I use Galician and Castilian in Coruña.)

R2: ‘Con mis amigos de pueblo uso gallego y con los amigos de la universidad, castellano.’
(‘With my friends from the village I use Galician and with my friends at university, Castilian.’)

R3: ‘Con chicas que no son de Coruña hablo gallego.’
(‘With girls who are not from Coruña I speak Galician.’)

R4: ‘Hablo más gallego que mi hermano porque (yo) pasaba más tiempo en la aldea.’
(‘I speak more Galician than my brother because I spent more time in the village.’)

The findings from this exploratory study show consistency across student responses in both the open-ended questionnaires and the spontaneous responses given during more informal interview sessions. The results suggest that despite the fact that attitudes are not explicitly negative, underlying prejudices about the appropriateness of Galician in certain contexts and Spanish in others continue to exist. There is what Cáccamo describes as ‘a assimilaçom parcial ao espanohl: non necessariamente como unha renúncia a unha (indefinida) identidade, senom como unha identifiçom com novos valores, que som, en moitos casos, interpretados polos falantes como valores de “progresso”’ (‘a partial assimilation to Spanish: not necessarily a renouncing of an (indefinite) identity but rather an identification with new values which are frequently interpreted by the assimilated speakers as “progress” values’).

This dichotomy between Galician as the language of the ‘aldea’, rurality and the values associated with that lifestyle and Spanish as the language of a...
‘modern’, ‘progressive’, ‘young’ and ‘urban’ lifestyle reflect the former linguistic divide between the two languages prior to the implementation of language policy. The dichotomy would also seem to reflect the same rural/urban polarities used to distinguish Galicia from the rest of Spain, underlying the ideology of the Galician language revival movement in the late nineteenth century.

In the current context in which Galician society has undergone socio-economic and structural changes, the reconstruction in the nineteenth century of a Galician identity, representing a rural peasant population, no longer fits the changes which have occurred over the past century in Galicia. There has been a decline in what had been a predominantly rural population, constituting 90% of all Galicians until 1900. More recent figures now show that less that 60% live in rural areas and continued urbanization is leading to a further decline of the Galician hinterland. As Fernández puts it ‘Galicia está dejando de ser básicamente rural, y el proceso de concentración de la población en las ciudades, en la costa y en las cabeceras de comarca, ya muy intenso en los últimos quince años, probablemente se intensificará todavía más en los venideros’ 39 (‘Galicia is becoming less rural and the concentration of the population in the cities, coastal areas and headlands (a trend which has intensified in the past fifteen years) will probably intensify even more in the future’).

Structural changes have also occurred in Galicia with a decline in agriculture and an increase in industry. Statistics for 1990 show that 29% of the active population worked in agriculture and fishing; 15% in manufacturing industry, 9% in the construction industry and 41% in the service sector.40 More recent reports shows that the numbers involved in agriculture were halved over the six-year period from 215,815 in 1995 to 114,000 in 2001.41

Social and geographical mobility such as is evident in the Galician context is said to decrease visibility of people’s social origin. Third-level student groups are particularly vulnerable to such mobility, exposed to the more national and international forces of the labour market. From the exploratory piece of research involving a sample of third-level Galician students it would seem that while Galician continues to be present in certain aspects of Galician life its visibility in Galicia’s new social context seems to be fading. As the sample of individuals surveyed was not designed to be representative these data do not allow for statistical analysis and therefore the scientific testing of a hypothesis. Given that these data were collected from students within the Faculty of English Philology, we cannot discount the possibility of differences amongst student groups taking other third-level courses. An additional bias entered into the results as the majority of students surveyed were females reflecting a general gender bias associated with language courses such as English Philology. A more socially revealing and representative report of student groups in Galicia will ultimately provide a stronger basis for judging the significance of the underlying linguistic prejudices identified in the exploratory study.

Sociolinguistic data interpreted within the broader social framework

The sociolinguistic data explored in this article are more readily understood when placed within the broader historical, socio-economic and political Galician context. In this context, the continued, albeit implicit association between Galician and backwardness and rurality can be traced historically to the non-modernizing ideologies of Galician revivalists in the nineteenth century. Linking Galician identity to the very identity from which many Galicians wanted to escape might explain why Galician is unattractive to potential speakers in Galicia’s modern-day context. Moreover, Spanish continues to be the language of higher social groups and Galician remains the language of the lower socio-economic sectors of Galician society. Outside of public sector employment, Spanish remains the dominant language and is more valued as a means of accessing the job market. This job market is not limited to Galicia itself but must be looked at in the context of the Spanish State and Galicia’s part of that State. Economic dependence on central Madrid continues to be strong, despite the political autonomy granted to Galicia in 1981. The carrying over of a stigmatized language based on historical relations as an economic and political subordinate of central Spain and the now outdated symbols on which Galician identity was constructed, can thus be seen as a possible source of conflicting values associated with the autochthonous language in contemporary Galicia. Subsequently, while linguistic policy has perhaps succeeded in changing attitudes towards Galician, the removal of the former stigma attached to the language is proving more difficult in Galicia’s current socio-economic context and is leaving the language openly exposed to further language decline.

Language survival or language death?

In reaction to UNESCO’s 2001 report on the Galician sociolinguistic situation and its classification of Galician as an ‘endangered’ language, Francisco Fernández del Riego, promoter of the language and former president of the Real Academia Galega, said in an interview with the regional Galician newspaper *A Nosa Terra*, ‘O galego resistiu catro séculos de desatención ¿que parvada é esa da morte do idioma?’42 (‘Galicia resisted four centuries of indifference, what is this nonsense about the death of the language?’) It can indeed be considered an achievement that Galician survived almost six centuries of pressure from the dominant language, Spanish. Compared with languages such as Irish, Basque and Breton, where language shift has reached a more advanced stage, Galician is something of an anomaly given the continued numerical strength of the language right up to the present day. However, the pressures facing Galician now are much greater than in previous centuries. The speed at which social and economic change has taken place in Galicia over the last half-century and the transformation of Galician society from a predominantly rural to an increasingly urbanized community are leaving the language openly exposed to language shift. The impact of such macrosociological factors on geographically isolated language communities such as the Galician case has been well documented in the literature on language maintenance and shift. Gal

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points to the effects of urbanization and industrialization in the process of lan-
guage shift from Hungarian to German in the Austrian town of Oberwart.43
Similarly, Dorian’s case study of East Sutherland Gaelic highlights the effects of
such macrosociological factors in the shift towards English.44 In these and other
cases, demographically stable language communities have been eroded. As
Dorian points out:

In terms of possible routes towards language death, it would seem that a language
which has been demographically highly stable for several centuries may experi-
ence a sudden ‘tip’, after which the demographic tide flows strongly in favor of
some other language.45

The sociolinguistic data discussed in this article do indeed indicate that the
‘demographic tide’ is flowing strongly in favour of the dominant language,
Spanish. While Galician may be a long way from language death, the final stage
in the process of language shift, the symptoms of language decline outlined by
Fishman, are becoming more evident in the decreasing number of younger
speakers and intergenerational transmission of the language within the home.46
The findings of the MSG indicate that the younger generation of Galicians
shows the lowest levels of habitual use of the autochthonous language with less
than a quarter returned as habitual users.47 Intergenerational mother-tongue
transmission of Galician is also lowest amongst younger Galicians where almost
half of the cohort has Spanish as their initial language.48
As Hermida points out, comparisons based on MSG data between the first lan-
guage of the older and younger generations of Galicians show a 43.9% drop of
Galician potential speakers over the past fifty years. As far as the habitual lan-
guage of the speaker is concerned, the loss amounts to 38.2% of speakers for
the same period.49

As is frequently documented in the literature on language maintenance and
shift, numerical strength alone does not guarantee language survival. Who
speaks the language is ultimately far more important than how many speak it.50
A socio-demographic breakdown of Galician speakers provides a more reveal-
ing picture of the Galician sociolinguistic context. In general, Galician speakers
come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, are poorly educated and live
in rural areas. Spanish speakers, in contrast, although numerically weaker, are
socially and economically dominant.

These socio-economic differences between Galician and Spanish speakers
seem to go unnoticed and are concealed behind a legal framework which on
the surface promotes equality between two languages rather than two language
groups. Linguistic policies which ignore the underlying social tensions between
language groups in contact and which fail to address the socio-economic
grievances of the minoritized groups themselves beyond language issues are
destined to fail. Language itself must be looked at as a symbolic system through
which social hierarchies are established and maintained and ultimately it is only
by moving behind language itself that the sources of inequalities can be identi-
fied and tackled. As Ó’Riagáin notes:

45 ibid., p. 51.
46 Joshua A. Fishman, ‘What is reversing language shift (RLS) and how can it succeed?’, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 11: 1-2, pp. 5-36.
47 MSG, 2, p. 94.
48 MSG, 1, p. 71.
While the impulses which bring language policy on to the public agenda in minority language situations may result from ideological orientation of ethnonational movements, the extent to which language policy impacts on target populations has also as much, if not more to do with the manner in which that policy is embedded in economic and social processes as with ethnicity. Language policy cannot be treated as an autonomous, independent factor.  

The legal framework on which language policy is based ignores the social inequalities which exist between Galician and Spanish speakers within the Galician Autonomous Community itself and in the broader context of the Spanish State. Article 3 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution grants Galician co-official status with Spanish but only within the territorial confines of the Galician Autonomous Community. In the context of the Spanish State and Galicia’s position as part of this State, Spanish remains the only official language and all Spanish citizens, including Galicians are obliged to know and use the language. Galician, in contrast, is a right not an obligation, and is restricted to the territorial confines of Galicia itself. This new legal framework seeks to create a climate which favours balanced bilingualism between both languages spoken in Galicia. However, given the political conditions in which regional power to Galicia is constrained and controlled by the institutions of the centralist Spanish State, the possibility of achieving balanced and harmonious bilingualism in which Galician and Spanish speakers are equal has to be questioned. Given the unequal distribution of wealth and power between Galician and Spanish speakers within Galicia itself and in the broader context of the Spanish State, measures of positive discrimination towards Galician, as the subordinate language, are perhaps necessary if the language is to survive. As Canada’s Official Language Commissioner, Dyane Adam, has pointed out - equality does not necessarily mean equal treatment of the two languages in the contact situation. Especially in the case of minoritized languages such as Galician where social and economic inequalities continue between Galician and Spanish speakers, more pro-Galician measures are needed before any real sense of equilibrium can be effectively brought about.
