From Latin to Castilian: The Origins of Spanish

Abbie McCabe
Overview

• In this project, I focus on how the Spanish language came to be; the focus is both historical and linguistic
• I begin with a general discussion of the Italic language family, then move on to Latin, then talk about Spanish
• I’ve also added a brief section about Romance languages
• I’ve included a “further reading” section at the end of the project with interesting articles, blog posts, etc.
• I’ve tried not to focus -too much- on just Spanish; I wanted a lot of the information to be about Latin since the “older” IE languages are the focus of our class
Indo-European
Spanish is Indo-European.

• As with all other IE languages, Spanish can be traced back to Proto-Indo-European
• Spanish is part of the centum branch of IE languages, meaning the palatal stops that existed in PIE merged with plain velars
• Working backwards: Spanish (Castilian) is a Romance language descended from Latin (Vulgar Latin), which is an Italic language; Italic languages were part of the larger Italo-Celtic family (potentially — there’s some debate about this); & etc.
Phylogenetic tree of Indo-European languages according to Maciamo Hay with Y-DNA haplogroups associated with each branch.
The Italic Family
The Italic Languages

• Italic is a *centum* family of languages consisting of most of the ancient IE languages of Italy
• **Etruscan** was the language of the Etruscans, a tribe originally from northwestern Italy that began to spread along the Italian peninsula
  • Etruscan was influenced by the Greeks (alphabet)
• As Etruscan influence waned, the use of Latin increased
(Italic) Languages of Ancient Italy

circa ~600 BCE
Italic Phonology

• (Fortson 277-278)
  • Since Italic is a centum branch, PIE’s palatal stops merged and became plain velars
  • PIE’s voiceless and voiced stops remain the same
  • Resonants — retention of PIE’s consonantal liquids, nasals, and glides
  • Sibilants — Proto-Italic preserved *s, but it became voiced to z in the daughter languages due to rhotacism
  • Non-vocalized laryngeals were lost, but vocalized laryngeals were preserved
  • Vowels and diphthongs were preserved (except for *eu, which merged with *ou)
  • Overall, there’s not a -ton- of phonological change from PIE to Italic
Italic Verbs

- Verbs were conjugated based on stem-vowels ā, ē, e, and ī
  - Conjugations arose because of sound change
- Tense-aspect system
- PIE imperfect was not preserved in Italic and replaced with the suffix *-ʃ-
- Perfect system combined IE perfect and aorist
- PIE subjunctive became Italic future
- Dual personal ending was not preserved
Latin

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<td>[er]</td>
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<td>[te:]</td>
<td>[u:]</td>
<td>[eks]</td>
<td>[i: 'gra:]</td>
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A Brief History of Latin

- **Latin**: the language originally of Latium; part of the Latino-Faliscan subbranch of Italic
- **Archaic Latin**: the earliest iteration of Latin (from the first known examples up until the second century BC)
- There are two predominant varieties of Latin:
  - **Classical Latin**, which followed Archaic Latin and existed until ~17 CE; associated with literature
  - **Vulgar Latin**, which was a widely-used vernacular; later evolved into the Romance languages
A Brief History of Latin

The Roman Empire
in 117 AD, at its greatest extent

that's a lot of Latin speakers!
A Brief History of Latin

- Latin was spread by the expansion of the Roman Empire
  - From Latium to the rest of the Mediterranean region, as well as other parts of Europe/Africa
- Began to decline with the Roman Empire, but remained in use until a while afterwards
- Vulgar Latin slowly evolved into other languages due to the breakdown of the empire, especially after 800 CE
  - The vast geography of the empire reduced contact between groups; the isolation meant their dialects of Latin eventually became different enough to constitute their own languages
Linguistics of Latin: Phonology

- Word-internal voiced aspirates distinguish Latin from other Italic languages
- Rhotacism — s between vowels became r
- In many environments, *s disappeared or assimilated
- Vowels — PIE’s mobile accent system became a stress system
- Long vowels in final syllables were shortened

Inventory of Classical Latin:
Vowels:
Diphthongs:
Consonants:
**Linguistics of Latin: Cases**

- Latin uses cases to distinguish between uses of nouns.
- Nouns are grouped into different declensions based on their case endings: singular or plural; and nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, or ablative.
- Classical Latin had five; Vulgar Latin had about three.

### Table 1: First, second and third declensions in Classical Latin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st decl.</th>
<th>2nd decl.</th>
<th>3rd decl.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sing.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Nominative</strong></td>
<td><strong>Accusative</strong></td>
<td><strong>Genitive</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tērra ‘land’</td>
<td>tēram</td>
<td>tērare</td>
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<td></td>
<td>lūpus ‘wolf’</td>
<td>lūpum</td>
<td>lūpē</td>
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<td></td>
<td>pānīs ‘bread’</td>
<td>pānem</td>
<td>pānīs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>pater ‘father’</td>
<td>paterm</td>
<td>pater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plu.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Nominative</strong></td>
<td><strong>Accusative</strong></td>
<td><strong>Genitive</strong></td>
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<td>tērrae</td>
<td>tērīs</td>
<td>tērārum</td>
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<td>lūpēs</td>
<td>lūpōs</td>
<td>lūporum</td>
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<td>pānēs</td>
<td>pānēs</td>
<td>pānūm</td>
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<td>patēs</td>
<td>patēs</td>
<td>patrum</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
From Latin to Spanish: Nouns

• Erosion of the case system
  • In late Latin more prepositions were used, reducing the need for an extensive case system; a binary case system was adopted
  • It’s believed that the -s suffix changed from a plural ending to a plural marker, further simplifying the case system
  • Only the accusative case survives in Spanish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Vulgar Latin nominal system</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st decl.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sing.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nominative</td>
<td>['terra]</td>
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<td>Oblique</td>
<td>['terra]</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Plu.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nominative</td>
<td>['erras]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oblique</td>
<td>['erras]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
From Latin to Spanish: Nouns

• Increased consistency and efficiency in gender marking — erasure of Latin neuter nouns (McKenzie 2017)
  • Most first-declension neuters became feminine nouns ending in -a
  • Most second-declension neuters became masculine nouns ending in -o
  • Third-declension neuters were arbitrarily assigned genders
    • This can be confusing to Spanish language learners! I’ve seen the word mar, meaning “sea,” marked as both masculine and feminine; typically, it’s considered to be masculine in contemporary Spanish
From Latin to Spanish: Adjectives

- Similar to nouns, adjectives in late Latin and in Spanish became increasingly gendered
  - First and second declension became masculine -o
  - Altered to match gender of subject
  - Third declension/neuter adjectives were given an -e ending; based on -em from Classical Latin
    - Ex. suave “smooth,”
  - Some were made consonant-final in Medieval Spanish
    - igual ‘same’ < *iguale < aequālem (McKenzie)
From Latin to Spanish: Verbs

- Latin has four conjugations based on stems -āre, -ēre, -ere, and -īre; Spanish has only three conjugations based on stems -ar, -er, and -ir
- The -ere and -ēre stems merged into the single stem -er due to a change in vowel length
- Latin’s deponent verbs, which had both an active and a passive voice, simply use the active voice in Spanish
- Verb stress changed between the tenses of each language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subparadigm</th>
<th>Latin form</th>
<th>Modern form</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imperfect (indicative)</td>
<td>cantābāmus</td>
<td>cantábamos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperfect (indicative)</td>
<td>cantābātis</td>
<td>cantabais</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imperfect subjunctive (-ra-)</td>
<td>cantā(ve)rāmus</td>
<td>cantáramos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imperfect subjunctive (-se-)</td>
<td>cantā(ve)ssēmus</td>
<td>cantásemos</td>
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<td>Imperfect subjunctive (-ra-)</td>
<td>cantā(ve)rātis</td>
<td>cantarais</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imperfect subjunctive (-se-)</td>
<td>cantā(ve)ssētis</td>
<td>cantaseis</td>
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</tbody>
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Spanish
The Languages of Historical Spain

• Before the existence of Spain and Portugal, the Iberian peninsula consisted of a series of small kingdoms/regions, each with its own language
  • **Gallo-Portuguese/Galician**: Spoken in Galicia and Portugal
  • **Leonese**: spoken in León
  • **Aragonese**: spoken in Aragon
  • **Basque/Euskera**: spoken in the Basque region of Spain; a language isolate, not genetically related to any of the other languages of Spain
  • **Castilian**: spoken in Castile
  • **Catalan**: spoken in Catalonia
The Languages of Historical Spain

- **Arabic**: brought to Spain when the Moors, an Islamic group from northern Africa, took over the Iberian Peninsula in 711 CE; not genetically related to Spanish
- Quite a few Spanish words are borrowed from Arabic
  - *el azúcar* “sugar,” *el alfombra* “carpet,” *el algodón* “cotton”
- **Mozarabic** (*el mozárabe*): a group of Romance dialects heavily influenced by Arabic and generally spoken in the southern part of Spain
  - Usage declined as the Moors were gradually forced out by the Spanish
The Languages of Historical Spain
What Even Is “Spanish?”

• The language that we think of as “Spanish” is technically Castilian; it’s named for the medieval kingdom of Castile (Castilla) located in what’s now the middle of Spain
• King Ferdinand of Castile married Queen Isabella of Aragon and the couple began to unite the Iberian Peninsula into a single kingdom
• Castilian became the “official” language of Spain
Linguistics of Spanish

• Phonetic inventory
• Vowels: [a], [e], [i], [o], [u]
• **Semicsononants**: [j] and [w]; “…a kind of approximant, i.e. a consonant-like sound that is articulated with loose approximation of the articulators and no audible friction” (McKenzie)
• Consonants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stops</th>
<th>Bilabial</th>
<th>Labiodental</th>
<th>Dental</th>
<th>Alveolar</th>
<th>Palato-alveolar</th>
<th>Palatal</th>
<th>Velar</th>
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<td>[b] ambos</td>
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<td>[d] lindo</td>
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<td>[g] vengo</td>
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<td>[b] lobo</td>
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<td>[θ] caza</td>
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<td>[x] caja</td>
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<td>[θ] caza</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[β] lobo</td>
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<td>[m] enfermo</td>
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<td>[θ] caza</td>
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<td>[θ] caza</td>
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<td>[r] carro</td>
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*This is the IPA transcription of consonants — I couldn’t think of a good way to switch them over to Fortson’s version. Also, some of them vary by region/accent, but for the most part this is pretty standard.*
Linguistics of Spanish: Verbs

- There are three verb endings, -ar, -er, and -ir, that are conjugated differently in each tense
- Verb tenses
  - **Past perfect** - completed past actions
  - **Imperfect** - repeated past actions
  - **Present perfect** -
  - **Present** - facts, habitual actions, routines (think “I walk”)
  - **Subjunctive** - expresses desire or doubt; present or past
  - **Future** - action that will be completed
Linguistics of Spanish: Nouns

• As mentioned in the “Latin to Spanish” slides, each noun in Spanish has a gender — masculine or feminine — that typically corresponds with its ending
  • Ex. *el libro* “the book,” *la silla* “the chair”
• Nouns related to Latin’s third-declension/neuter case are gendered, but their gender doesn’t necessarily correspond with their endings
  • Ex. *la flor* “the flower,” *el mar* “the sea”
• Words that begin with “a” are typically masculine no matter the ending to avoid repeating the vowel
  • Ex. *el arma* “the weapon” vs. *la arma*
    • I’ve seen the plurals of some words like this written as feminine (“las armas”) on occasion, but they’re more commonly written as masculine
Linguistics of Spanish: Adjectives

• It’s also mentioned in the “Latin to Spanish” slides, but adjectives correspond with their nouns in gender and number
  • Ex. *la mujer* “the woman,” *las mujeres* “the women”
Languages of Spain Today

• The official language of Spain is Castilian
• Many of the other regional languages are spoken, but to a lesser degree; a large percentage of Spaniards are bilingual, speaking both Castilian and their regional language (and/or English!)
• For some Spaniards, speaking Basque or Catalan has political implications; both Catalonia and the Basque country are pushing to secede from Spain
The Romance Languages
Spanish is a Romance Language.

These are the “major” Romance languages that are widely used today. As of 2017, Spanish has the second-most native speakers out of all the world’s languages (behind Chinese).
The Impact of Latin and the Romance Languages on English

- Words borrowed from or rooted in Latin and the Romance languages constitute a large portion of English vocabulary.
- Though English is Germanic in structure, inflection, and lineage, its vocabulary comes from a wide variety of linguistic sources.
- English has borrowed some words from Spanish: “corral,” “flotilla,” “junto,” “guerrilla,” and many state names (Colorado, Montana, Nevada...).
- When the Normans occupied England in the 11th century CE, many French words were adopted into English, especially legal terms.
Further Reading:

- https://abagond.wordpress.com/2016/06/20/vulgar-latin/
- https://es.slideshare.net/yourkamden/claudius-i-and-the-etruscans
- www.staff.ncl.ac.uk/i.e.mackenzie/
Works Cited


Image Credits

Title Slide: https://historiaespana.es/edad-antigua/hispania-romana
Italic Language Tree: https://www.jesterbear.com/Aradia/tree.html
Etruscan Script: https://www.omniglot.com/writing/etruscan.htm
Illustrated Etruscan Script: https://crewsproject.wordpress.com/2019/08/29/learning-etruscan/
Languages of Ancient Italy (black & white): Fortson pg. 276
Latin Alphabet: https://www.omniglot.com/writing/classicallatin.htm
Roman Empire Map: https://www.thegreatcoursesdaily.com/language-evolution-one-language-became-five-languages/
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Flags of Spain: Wikipedia (Creative Commons)