

## **The History of the Spanish Language**

The Spanish language is the most widely spoken Romance language, both in terms of number of speakers and the number of countries in which it is the dominant language.

There are more than 500 million Spanish speakers worldwide. Pronunciation and usage of the spoken Spanish language naturally vary among countries, but regional differences are not so great as to make the language unintelligible to speakers from different areas. There is no such thing as a single “Spanish.” There are different Spanish dialects because of the evolution of Spanish in different regions.

The history of the Spanish language in Spain and the origin of the dialects of Spain begin with the linguistic evolution of Vulgar Latin.

The history of the Spanish language in America starts with the colonization of America at the end of the fifteenth century. At this point, the Spanish language was already firmly consolidated in the Iberian peninsula.

Besides being spoken in Spain, it is the official language of: all of the South American republics except Brazil and French Guyana; the six republics of Central America and Mexico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico.

Additionally, the Spanish language is spoken in the Balearic and Canary islands, in parts of Morocco and the west coast of Africa, and also in Equatorial Guinea. In the United States, it is widely spoken in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, New York City and southern Florida.

## **The History of Spanish Language in Spain**

The history of the Spanish language in Spain and the origin of the dialects of Spain begin with the linguistic evolution of Vulgar Latin.

The Spanish Language can be traced back to the Indo-European language family. Around 2000 years before the birth of Christ, Celtiberians spoke an early Celtic language.

The inhabitants of this region, an area later referred to by scholars as Hispania, started learning Latin from the Romans. The combination of the Celtic language and Latin evolved into what is referred to by many as Vulgar Latin. Vulgar Latin was an adapted form of Latin that used phrases and words that were different from traditional Latin.

When the Visigoths took over the region called Hispania, Latin remained the dominant and official language of the region. This continued until the Moors, an Arabic-speaking group, conquered the region. Arabic became the dominant language, except for in certain regions dominated by the Christians. In such regions, Vulgar Latin remained the official language. As the Christian groups started to reclaim Moorish Spain, Vulgar Latin returned as the dominant language in every region.

## **Castilian Spanish Dialect**

While Vulgar Latin was dominant, it took on a different form, integrating Arabic and forms of a related dialect called Mozarabic. It is estimated that approximately 3000-4000 words in today's Spanish are derived from Arabic.

Castilian dialects of Spanish started to take form around the 13th century with King Alfonso X, referred to as the Learned-King of Castile and Leon. Toledo became the cultural epicenter for the King and his scholars. In Toledo, these scholars created works in Castilian Spanish and then began a series of translations of the various works of science, the law, literature, history, etc. into Castilian Spanish. These translations became the basis for the dissemination of information in a significant part of Western Europe. The King soon declared Castilian as the official language for government documents and decrees.

The dominance of the Castilian dialect continued to grow as the Catholic kingdoms took over most regions of Spain. Isabella and Ferdinand declared Castilian Spanish to be the official dialect. Soon thereafter appeared the Art of the Castilian Language, a work that helped shape and standardize the Spanish language.

Castilian Spanish then quickly became the official language for all educational materials and official documents in all of Spain. Certain regions maintained different dialects, most notably Andalusian, spoken in and around Seville.

## **The History of Spanish Language in Latin America**

Understanding the origin of the Spanish language is essential to recognizing the subtle differences in the Spanish spoken in different regions. In the 15th century, Christopher Columbus sailed to the Americas and brought with him the Castilian Spanish language. As a result of what scholars refer to as "hispanización", Spanish was established as a primary language in the region.

During the early stages of what is referred to as "hispanización", there were many challenges, as the local languages were starkly different, making communications difficult. Until the Catholic Church stepped in, it was unclear whether Spanish would survive in the region. Hence, the Catholic Church was instrumental in the expansion of the use of Spanish in the region. In particular, the Jesuits and Franciscans established learning institutions to teach children Catholicism in Spanish. As the children and adolescents grew, the Spanish language started to spread and expand. As Catholicism grew, so did the use of the Spanish language as the primary form of communication.

Despite the efforts of the Spaniards to impose the language on the natives, the sheer dominance in numbers caused the language to blend with the local dialects. In particular, Mexican and Peruvian natives were able to significantly influence the language spoken today in Latin America.

Certain influences from Spanish explorers from Andalusia helped shape the pronunciation of Latin American Spanish versus Castilian Spanish. This is why certain words in Castilian Spanish and Latin American Spanish sound quite different even with identical spellings. The combination of all of these historical and sociological events has caused the evolution of the distinct form of Latin American Spanish spoken today in Central and South America.

### **Latin American Spanish**

In Latin America, the Spanish language has variants or dialects in the different zones it is spoken because of the magnitude of the territory, as well as different histories. We can observe the development of different variants of Latin American Spanish in the different geographical areas: Amazonian, Bolivian, Caribbean, Central American, Andean, Chilean, Colombian, Ecuadorian, Mexican, Northern Mexican, Paraguayan, Peruvian, Puerto Rican and Argentine.