

Andalusian: language, dialect or linguistic modality?

The Andalusian is commonly known as a dialect of Spanish. It is called “andaluz” and it is spoken in Andalusia, Gibraltar, Melilla, Ceuta and parts of southern Extremadura. It is perhaps the most distinct of the southern dialects of peninsular Spanish, differing in many respects from northern dialects as well as from Standard Spanish.¹ By referring to Standard Spanish we are saying that “This is actually an idealized variety, but exists for most people as the version that is accepted as the official language of their community or country.”²

Before we continue we may explain the terms language and dialect. We may describe a language as a “human vocal noise used systematically and conventionally to interact within a group of people” whereas dialect is described as “a variant of a language.” This variation has to do with different geographical locations (regional dialect) or social classes where the language is spoken (social dialect).

In the Spanish Constitution, article number 3, it is said that: “El castellano es la lengua oficial del Estado. Todos tienen el derecho de conocerla y el derecho a usarla. La riqueza de las distintas modalidades lingüísticas de España es un patrimonio cultural que será objeto de especial respeto y protección”³ and the “Decretos de Enseñanza de la Comunidad de Andalucía”⁴ say that it should be an objective for the student to identify the Andalusian linguistic modality as a Spanish language variety. Said that, we may rule out the term dialect to refer to “andaluz” since the Spanish law itself rejects that term. Anyway, it seems a matter of neutrality since with the use of the term “variety” it is tried to avoid the ambiguity of terms like language or dialect, since it is difficult to establish univocal criteria to decide when two varieties must be considered like the same language or dialect, or different languages or dialects.

¹ Adapted from http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Andalusian_Spanish

² From *The Study of Language*, George Yule (page 194)

³ “The Castilian is the official language of the State. Everybody have the right to know it and the right to use it. The wealth of the different linguistic modalities of Spain is a cultural patrimony that will be object of special respect and protection”

⁴ “Andalusian Education Decrees”

There is another point of view referring to the Andalusian; it is the one who says that Andalusian is a “Pidgin” of Mozarabic language, *Alyamía*⁵ [ˈaʝamiyah] and Castilian; a legacy from the Arabs living in *Ál-Ándalus*.⁶ Anyway, that theory is relatively new and adopted by the more nationalist Andalusian people who are not too many of the Andalusian global population.⁷

At the end of the essay I am discussing why Andalusian could be described as “much more than a simple dialect” but, now, I am going to focus on the sociolinguistic’s implications of speaking Andalusian in Spain.⁸

From the very beginning of the creation of Spain, as we know it today with the conquest of *Ál-Ándalus* from the Castilian troops leaded by Fernando III, Andalusia was considered a bit too uneducated for Castilian people. May be, the best example would be that the first Castilian Grammar which was published by Antonio de Nebrija, a Sevillian linguist, in 1.492, was considered by Juan de Valdés, defender of the toledana norm,⁹ as little less than offensive than an Andalusian, “with his vitiated way to speak” would dare to undertake so arduous and worthy task.

The biggest point on why Andalusian is not considered to be at the same level as Castilian may be settle on their “ceceo” and “seseo” features. We refer to “ceceo” when the speakers of Spanish use the sound Z when they must pronounce the letters, s, c, z. They are people who say “ziete”, instead of “siete” by seven. The “ceceo” occurs in many zones of Andalusia. It is, without doubt, the most original and own characteristic of the dialect Andalusian. The history of the “ceceo” has its origin in the transformations that began to undergo the Castilian language by the 10th century. Spanish language had four sibilants sounds: one was dental voiceless, sounded like /ts/ and was represented by “ç”. Another one was dental voiced, sounded /dz/ and was represented by “z”: “to dezir” /dedzir/. Soon there were two alveolar sounds, a voiceless one, represented by “ss” that sounded similar to our present s: “passar” /pasar/ and another voiced one represented by letter “s”: “rosa” /roza/.

⁵ Arab characters of the Romance languages spoken by the “andalusies” during the time of *Ál-Ándalus*.

⁶ Territory of the Iberian Peninsula under Muslim control during the Middle Ages, between years 711 and 1492.

⁷ Adapted from http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialecto_andaluz

⁸ The sociolinguistic implications related to Language Planning, Prestige and Social Markers are much more developed in Spain since a perfect Spanish speaker may find more distinctions between Andalusian and Castilian than people outside Spain.

⁹ The School of Toledo was a prestigious centre for linguist all across Spain.

During the time this system collapsed, and in the Castile of century XVI the sonorous sibilants disappeared, and it was only used the two voiceless. Thus, the spellings “ç-z” happened to represent the same voiceless dental sound and the spellings “ss-s” the same voiceless alveolar sound. In the Andalusia of centuries XV to the XVI the transformation of the sibilants was not the same that the one that was happening in Castile at the same time. In the south of Spain they continued to distinguish between voiceless and voiced sibilants, and those that disappeared were the alveolar ones. So one they have a voiceless dental sound represented by the spellings “ç-ss”: “plaça”, “passar”. And other two, “z-s”, to represent a sonorous dental sound: “dezir”, “rosa”. In some years, the difference between voiceless and voiced also disappeared and all happened to be voiceless. Thus, from the four primitive sibilants phonemes of the Castilian, Andalusian people only conserved one. For that reason, nowadays, there are Andalusians who use a unique dental sound S that is represented by the spellings “s-z-c” (seseantes) or a unique interdental sound Z represented equally by the spellings “s-z-c” (ceceantes).

The “ceceo” was adopted in the rural world, whereas the “seseo” was considered more “refining” and it was used mainly in the cities, especially in the metropolis of Seville. As the rural world never has enjoyed in Spain of much prestige, little by little the “ceceantes” began to be treated as ignorant people. Some authors of the Renaissance considered little to the ceceo less than a defect of diction and others attributed a gypsy origin to him, ethnic group who also traditionally has been marginalized in Spain. At the present the greater degree of prestige shows the distinction between “c” and “s” sound. The “seseo” is for any Spanish a sign of regionalism too. Those that use “seseo” are Andalusian, Canary, Murcian, or Hispano-Americans. To distinguish between s-z is the most neutral accomplishment, less the most marked dialectally. And also the less socially marked.¹⁰

Nowadays, Andalusian continues to be seen as used by low level class and, in terms of prestige, Standard Spanish is much more advanced than Andalusian because of some historical reasons as the one explained above. Even some Andalusian people try to change their accent and way of speaking in order to feel better when they travel outside Andalusia. A clear example is Antonio Banderas; he is from Málaga, in Andalusia. He

¹⁰ Adapted from <http://www.analitica.com/Bitblilio/lcdiaz/ceceo.asp>

tries to speak with his Andalusian in interviews but, each time he is acting in a movie, he changes and speaks a more Standard Spanish language.

Although, not everything is lost in terms of trying to take back the Andalusian prestige. If we look at South America, we found lots of similarities with Andalusian, most concretely with Sevillian accent. This is due to the discovering of America because all the ships coming over there were departing from Seville so, the great majority of people who went to America to colonize the new continent were coming from Seville. As we already mentioned above, one of the similarities are the no distinction between the “s-c-z” sound; but this is not the only feature that we may compare between South American Spanish and Andalusian; a very common Andalusian feature includes also the pronunciation of the /j/ sound in a very soft manner, like in South America; or the use of “ustedes” instead of “vosotros”... It seems that, nowadays, the world is being fair with Andalusia after five hundred years of humiliation.

To sum up, I would like to say that; it is clear that, from a diachronic point of view, Andalusian is a dialect of Spanish; but if we look it from a synchronic point of view; nowadays, and following the definition provided for language, Andalusian may stand as language... I know it is a very daring affirmation but if we think of a Standard language as the one who is broadcasted on TV, appears on the Media, etc... Andalusian would have more importance, due to the Latin American factor than Standard Spanish; of course not in Spain, but worldwide...

Anyway, language or not; I think that, at least, and following the definition by Yules about “creole”: “When a pidgin develops beyond its role as a trade or contact language and becomes the first language of a social community, it is described as creole”¹¹, Andalusian could be considered a “creole” when America was discovered but, due to historical reasons, nowadays, if you speak Andalusian in Spain you are still considered as low class. Besides that, there are some Andalusian grammars on the net¹² and even a translator.¹³

¹¹ From *The Study of Language*, George Yule (page 202)

¹² http://andalu.wikia.com/wiki/Gramatica_Andaluza <http://www.andalucia.cc/adarve/Propuehta.htm>

¹³ <http://oreneta.com/kalebeul/2008/06/16/traductor-castellano-andaluz/>

In a world where everyone wants to maintain their identity for not being devoured by globalization, it seems that speaking “differently” is not good for everybody... Anyway, as I always said:

“I consider myself Sevillian in Andalusia (we have our own accent), Andalusian in Spain (I study in Madrid and love to keep my accent and being recognized as an Andalusian guy) and Spanish in the World (don’t like stereotypes as “Playa, Sol, Paella, Toros & Sangría”; Spain is much more but, I agree with the general definition; it is just Marketing... just the thing my language, Andalusian, lacked of...).

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