

Spain's Other Languages

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Content:

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Euskara Batua (unified Basque)

Definitely the most interesting language in Spain, Euskara is widely spoken throughout the Basque region of Northern Spain. The majority of Basque speakers live in Spain with a smaller percentage living over the border in Pyrenean France. The Basques are a fiercely proud people and have an extremely developed sense of regional identity. Despite having a large amount of political and cultural autonomy, there is still a strong movement for complete independence from Spain and the terrorist group ETA have been terrorising the nation for 30 years in the hunt for complete self rule for the Basque country. The language itself has 600,000 speakers on both sides of the Franco-Spanish border with about 75% of those hailing from the Spanish side. The language has always proved to be something of a mystery to linguists as it has not been proven to be related to any other language. Euskara bears no relationship to the indo-European family of languages which includes all of the other languages of Europe. Some linguists have started to propagate the theory that the language bears a similarity to the Georgian language from the Caucasus region but conclusive proof has yet to be uncovered. The language itself has been standardised over the past couple of decades – being mainly a rural language, Euskara is subject to several regional variations, however a standardised version, Euskara Batua, has been established for use in the media and in schools.

Catalan

A romance language, Catalan is spoken not only in Spain but also in parts of Andorra (where it is the national language), and also in isolated areas of France and Sardinia. There are roughly 4 million speakers worldwide who use it as their first language and probably about the same amount who use it as a second language. As a language it is often said to resemble a cross between French and Spanish, although linguists point out that the language bears more in common with Italian in terms of grammar and syntax. Obviously spoken throughout Catalonia there are also several other dialects of Catalan, most notably Valencian. Many in the –Paï Valencià– still claim it is a separate language and this has been the source of much political and linguistic debate over recent years.

Galician

Lying in the extreme north western tip of Spain, Galicia is one of Spain’s more isolated regions. Yet to be penetrated by mass tourism, the region is subject to some of Spain’s worst weather and is also home to its third largest language. Galician is spoken by 3 million Spaniards in Galicia itself and also in the neighbouring regions of Asturias and Castille-L on. The language bears strong similarities to Portuguese, a factor that is explained by the close proximity of the region to Portugal. The Portuguese language did in fact develop originally in Galicia and Northern Portugal, before a political split in the 14th century separated the two areas allowing the languages to develop and grow independently of each other. The native Galician will be able to understand most Portuguese - similar vocabulary and word order can be seen across both languages and there is fierce debate once more as to whether they are languages in their own right, or dialects of the same language. Again much of it has to do with the perceived independence of the region that is, in many ways, symbolised by its language. Like Catalan and Euskara, Galician now has an official status and is taught in schools adding weight to the strong social movement to protect and preserve the language.

Mike McDougall has five years experience working as a travel writer and marketer. He is currently working to provide additional content for [Babylon-idiomas](#), a Spanish language school with an excellent presence in Spain and Latin America.

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