

**MECA: an undergraduate short-term study
abroad research project about Asturian language and
Asturian emigration to America / *MECA: un proyeutu
d'investigación a curtiu plazu nel estranxeru sobre la llingua
asturiana y la emigración asturiana a América***

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Resume: Manuscritos y Ediciones de Correspondencia d'Asturianos ye un proyeutu d'investigación n'humanidades dixitales nel que los participantes d'un programa d'estudios nel estranxeru de curtia duración contribúin a la recuperación y edición de cartes unviaes por emigrantes asturianos a América (el continente) a les sos families que quedaron n'Asturies a final del sieglu XIX y entamu del XX. Los participantes, que son falantes billingües de castellanu ya inglés, comparten colos autores de les cartas la historia familiar de la inmigración, asina como la experiencia de ser falantes d'una llingua minorizada. Estes cartes sirven, al empar, como testimoniu de la presencia de la mestura de códigos y de los múltiples rasgos de la llingua asturiana nel testu de les cartes.

Pallabres clave: pedagogía, asturianu, indianos, peñera de códigu históricu, humanidaes dixitales

Abstract: Manuscripts and Editions of Correspondence from Asturians is an undergraduate Digital Humanities research project in which participants in a short term study abroad program contribute to the recovery and edition of letters sent by Asturian immigrants to America (the continent) to their families back in Asturias in the late XIX and early XX centuries. Participants, who are bilingual speakers of Spanish and English, share with the authors of the letters the familial history of immigration, as well as the experience of being speakers of a minoritized language. Those letters, in turn, serve as a testimony of the presence of code-meshing, as well as that of multiple features of Asturian language, in the text of the letters.

Keywords: Pedagogy, Asturian, Indianos, Historical Code-Meshing, Digital Humanities

1. Introduction¹

Manuscritos y ediciones de cartas d'asturianos / Manuscripts and Editions of Correspondence from Asturias / Manuscritos y ediciones de cartas de asturianos (MECA) is a hybrid pedagogical intervention that seeks to foster a better understanding of languages in contact and also about the situation of minoritized languages in a historical perspective. With that in mind, a group of study abroad US bilinguals (Spanish-English) is provided research access to the Special Collections of the Muséu del Pueblu d'Asturies (Museum of the Asturian People) in Gijón (Asturias, Spain). As part of an undergraduate research project, participants work with XIX and early XX letters from Asturian immigrants in America (the continent).

There are a number of sociolinguistic and pedagogical objectives that we seek with this project. These can be summarized into three main overarching goals: the recovery of the cultural sources represented in the letters, the intentional acknowledgment and reflection of the presence of bilingual and multilingual speakers in the corpus and in the world and, finally, the valuation of undergraduate students as capable, and willing, to create knowledge and to become agents in the creation of knowledge.

By becoming active agents in the process, students acquire a personal investment with the language, the culture and the peoples represented in the letters. At the same time, researchers in different fields will gain access to these letters. Finally, diasporic communities of Asturians around the world will be given the opportunity of (re)connecting with their roots. In a broader sense, it would be possible to examine the experiences and consequences that migration had for Asturian peoples and the Asturian language on a more global scale.

In the pages that follow, we will examine the theoretical framework beyond these assumptions, as well as the methodology used to achieve them. A brief reference to the participants allows for a reflection that centers the idea of migration in both the research participants and the research corpus. After a detailed explanation of the scaffolding of the project, we present the three main results and how they relate to the overarching goals. As a project that is still running, we would also present some ideas for the future and, why not, we would also dream as to how this project could be replicated for other minoritized languages, communities and identities around the world.

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2. Framework

There are three concepts that are being considered together: Jonathan Rosa and Flores' "appropriateness"; the interactions and cultural endeavors involved in study abroad programs; and Agash's idea of enregisterment. Each of them brings to the table one of the elements that, tied together, facilitate the framework behind this project. In addition to that, this study builds upon the pedagogical interventions in Asturian language related to *xestores educativos* (Hevia Artime & González Riaño, 2014), the interactions between autochthonous and non-autochthonous students on Asturian classrooms (Hevia Artime & González Riaño, 2017), the digital means that have been articulated by Asturian cultural networks (Suari Rodrigue, 2020; Álvarez Sancho, 2022), and the multiple possibilities for the pedagogy of Asturian language of employing an inter-Romance language (Llamedo Pandiella, 2020). At the same time, and as Miglio (2017) has stated with regard to Galician, for the context and implementation of this study, examining non-central Iberian languages from the framework of the US Academia "contributes to a more organic integration of center and periphery [...] as well as a critical assessment of concepts such as tradition and identity" (pp. 245-246).

Flores and Rosa (2015, p. 155) define appropriateness as related to "monoglossic language ideologies, which position idealized monolingualism in a standardized national language as the norm to which all national subjects should aspire". This idea of what is appropriate, pertinent or even licit permeates the ideologies about language in the US, affecting the development and linguistic self-esteem of speakers of minoritized languages as well as minoritized varieties of those languages. This project is designed with a set of those bilingual -sometimes also bidialectal- individuals in mind. Since the summer of 2017, a group of students from the University of California Riverside has participated in a research project with the *Muséu del Pueblo d'Asturies* in which they recover and examine letters from Asturian immigrants to America. The students have a history of emigration themselves, either being immigrants to the US or the children of immigrants. That biographical circumstance provides them with a very particular perspective while reading and analyzing the letters from Asturian immigrants.

In parallel, interdialectal empowerment thru short-term study abroad programs has been the focus of recent interest (Schwieter, Ferreira, & Miller, 2018; Cubillos, Chieffo & Fan, 2008; Czerwionka, Artamonova, & Barbosa, 2015; Reynolds, 2013; Schwieter, Ferreira, & Miller, 2018; Lamar Prieto & González Alba, 2020, 2021). It has been already demonstrated that study abroad programs, even those shorter in duration, contribute to a wider understanding of the world, and that they add to the linguistic self-esteem of their participants (Lamar Prieto & González Alba, 2022).



The processes through which a repertoire of linguistic forms (a ‘register’) ‘become differentiable from the rest of the language (i.e., recognizable as distinct, linked to typified social personae or practices) for a given population of speakers’ have been coined as enregisterment (Agha, 2003; afterwards Johnston, 2016). This concept has been mostly employed to indicate dialectal differences but I sustain that, in the context of the Iberian Peninsula, it can be used to shed some light on the differences between speakers of different Romance languages as well. This is related to

These three concepts work together to build a theoretical framework in which the experiences and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006) of the students become part of the research process. Additionally, and by reframing the idea of “migration” in a global context, we’d be shedding light on the linguistic consequences of displacing populations, especially in the case of minority languages

Hevia Artime and González Riaño (2014) examine the idea of *xestores culturales* applied to educational leadership communities in Asturias, and focus their interest in the attitudes and policies regarding Asturian. One of their conclusions states that “La presencia del asturianu nel currículu ye rentable, al marxe del so valir como ferramienta p’algamar una competencia plena nesta llingua, dende’l puntu de vista de la so rellación con otres árees del currículu y como sofitu necesariu na alquisición de les competencies básiques” (2014, p. 168). It can be agreed that scholarly acquisition and the scholastic support to the minoritized language is useful for reasons beyond the language itself: other areas of the curriculum benefit as well. That is the same spirit that motivated the MECA project: beyond the normalization of the use of the minoritized language, which for the participants is Spanish and for the project Spanish as well as Asturian, participants also gain valuable knowledge in different areas of their educational curriculum. Collaboration, co-curricular goals and a project for the whole educational institution work hand in hand. Or, as the same authors (2017) conclude from Verkuyten & Thijs (2010, pp. 139), “les actitúes hacia les minoríes étnico-lingüístiques meyoren, inclusive nel grupu social mayoritariu, cuando se ponen en práutica midíes d’educación intercultural que tengan en cuenta a la llingua minoritaria”.

The inclusion of digital tools and technologies in the teaching and learning processes is crucial for minoritized languages, as shown in Suari Rodrigue (2020). The results of their study show that the incorporation of the minoritized language to the general curriculum improves the retention of said language. In order to increase the social awareness of the school members -students, teachers, staff-, carefully organized policies are needed. When those are insufficient, as in the case of Asturian language in Asturias and Spanish language in many areas of the US, well crafted digital initiatives can have even stronger social effects. All the above, however,



needs to be put into the framework of Asturian migration to America (the continent).

2.1. Westward Migration

When Gerbi examines the letters written by Anglophone migrants to America (once again, the continent), he pays particular attention to the window these documents create into the everyday life of everyday people:

The letters of these and other European immigrants of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries probably form the largest archive historians possess of the writings of ordinary people of the historical past. Immigrants produced a tidal wave of letters, which alongside the equally voluminous corpus of commercial correspondence were increasingly commodified into mail, as postal systems throughout Europe expanded into efficient modern bureaucracies to accommodate the ever-increasing flow of domestic and international correspondence. (317)

Between 1850 and 1913, according to Hatton and Williamson, more than forty million individuals migrated from Europe to America (532). Blanca Sánchez Alfonso (2002, p. 1) raised that amount to up to seventy million people in the period between 1830 and 1920. The majority of these individuals were male, single, without family commitments, and with no professional skills. After an extended period abroad, countries in Western Europe will see more of them returning to their original land (Sánchez Alfonso, 2002, p. 3) than other geographical areas.

This transnational movement will benefit by the early establishment of uberlocal and familial networks (Hatton & Williamson, 2001, p. 533). That social structure facilitated the constant flux of new immigrants. Female emigration is scarcer in all Europe, but in the context of Spain it is even more reduced: less than a fourth of all migrants were female (Hatton & Williamson, 2001, p. 535).

There are certain areas in Spain that will endure a higher migratory pressure during this timeframe. The case of Asturias is particularly remarkable, not only in terms of the number of individuals leaving for America, but also if we were to consider the percentage these migrants constitute of the whole population of the region. According to Floridablanca's Census in 1787, Asturias had almost 353,000 inhabitants, out of approximately a population of 10 million for the whole country:



Census	Asturias	España
1787	352.851	10.300.000
1857	524.529	15.500.000
1900	627.069	18.600.000

Figure 1. Comparison of the population of Asturias and Spain on three Censi (1787, 1857, 1900). Source: Self.

In the roughly 70 years between Floridablanca's Census and that of 1857, the population in Spain increased by almost half, from 10 million to 15.5 million. During the same time period, however, the situation in Asturias was reversed: while in 1787 Asturias was a mere 3.42% of Spain, in 1857 it was 3.38%. The following Census, that of 1900, confirms the proportional decrease, with only a 3.37% of the population in Spain being Asturians. It is worth mentioning that the population of Asturias, after a short-lived increase in the 60s and 70s of the twentieth century, has continued to decrease. Nowadays, Asturias represents only 2.20% of the whole Spanish population.

The Instituto Asturiano de Estadística (Juventud asturiana en el exterior) estimates that, in the period of almost a century between 1835 and 1930, approximately 330 thousand Asturian men and women migrated to America. From those, 200 thousand did so during the first third of the twentieth century. That figure represents 9.1% of all Spanish emigrants to America in that period.

While 9.1% does not seem like a concerning percentage, it becomes so if we correlate it with the percentage of the total Spanish population that Asturias represents. As Asturias had regular vessels to America, the same as other regions in the vicinity, it is not impossible to believe that some of these numbers fall short, not taking into account emigrants that might have traveled unregistered or even those from the Easternmost areas traveling through the port of Santander.

When in 1880 Clarín wrote the prologue to Gómez Velasco's *Tipos y bocetos de la emigración asturiana tomados del natural*, both their opinions about the damage emigration was causing were clear. Gómez Velasco points out the intensity of the problem, while Clarín goes further: "Estamos muy enfermos; uno de los peores síntomas es la emigración, efecto de muchos errores y vicios jurídicos y económicos, causa de innumerables males". He even indicates potential responsibilities for the phenomenon. Multiple elements would coalesce to create a perfect storm: a population increase, an orography that makes it difficult for large-scale (pre) industrial agriculture to thrive, the existence of a compulsory military service and, to crown that pyramid, the voices of those making a living on the other side of the Ocean.

Notwithstanding the perspective on migration, it is abundantly clear that it



deeply affected the Asturian population, as well as the economic and social capital of those at home and abroad. It is reasonable to believe that the transmission of Asturian culture and language would also have been affected.

This situation, not uncommon of locations on the sending end of migratory paths, can be seen as parallel to that of certain areas of Northern Mexico in contemporary times. Young men, and also women, chose to migrate from those areas in search of a wealthier future, or at least one with more stability. Among the reasons that are equivalent to those of the XIX Asturians, they'd commit to leaving to avoid (para)military situations, also because both the agriculture and the orography are not directed towards feeding the masses and, more importantly, because of the stories of success of those that left before. Those siren calls are sometimes true stories of success, such as the ones that filled the Asturian landscape with *casas de indianos*. Some others, one can only imagine how many, might not have been equally successful.

The parallelism between those two situations informs and vertebrates the content of the MECA project. It is developed around the topics of forced economic migration, uberlocal and familiar networks, and finally memory and cultural transmission. However, it also plays with the links to home language and how it is manifested in culture.

3. Methodology

3.1. *Undergraduate researches*

Ishiyama's case study demonstrated that "early participation in undergraduate research promotes academic development among social science and humanities students (2002, p. 385)". In the case of minority students, especially within Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in the US, these high-impact educational practices and opportunities are not always as successful as intended and, in fact, they could even perpetuate inequality (Greenman, Chepp & Burton, 2022, p. 268). With that in mind, what we propose is an undergraduate research project that departs from the life experiences of the participants and provides them with an opportunity to use their community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) as an active asset in the research process. In parallel to what Murphy and Smith (2017) concluded: "Undergraduate students migrating to the DH field bring with them skills and methodologies from their home disciplines; these are used as a starting point for the acquisition of Digital Humanities (DH) skills and DH-inflected critical perspectives" (paragraph 24), we aim to bring that community wealth experience to the DH world.



The undergraduate researchers that participate in this project take part as well in a study abroad program that stays for four weeks in Spain. They take classes in Digital Humanities and in Culture of Spain. As members of the program, they have the opportunity of joining the MECA project, which was established in collaboration with the Muséu del Pueblu d'Asturies. At the Muséu, they are given privileges as researchers, which grant them access to the Special Collections. There have been four iterations of this project, to a total of 56 undergraduate researchers, plus four graduate researchers.

This project is conceived as a summer research undergraduate program. The participants establish connections with the location but at the same time are given the chance to reflect on their own position and positionality at home. All of the participants have been native bilingual speakers of English and Spanish, with different degrees of academic proficiency, who were raised in California in families in which Spanish, or Spanish and English, were languages of communication. Languages in contact, and frequently diglossia, are part of their personal experience and that of their families. From their perspective as bilingual speakers and, frequently, migrant speakers of a minoritized language at home, they contribute to the recuperation of the sociocultural and linguistic history of Asturian migrants. In that delicate balance, they bring to the table skills and perceptions that are inherent to the way in which they were socialized as minoritized speakers.

3.2. *A Corpus*

The resulting product will be, when completed, a digital corpus of historical documents. These documents -which are as a majority, letters- were written by Asturians and intended for other Asturians. This merits some further explanation. The documents being examined were sent to Asturias from Asturians abroad. We can assume that some other letters and documents might have been sent back as response, but those are not available. The available documents, for the most part, are those that families in Asturias received and kept.

To this point, the corpus consists of 359 different documents, most of which are personal correspondence and a comparably smaller amount are business documents and transactions from Asturian entrepreneurs in America. The first document, chronologically, is from 1884, while the last one is from 1940. The Spanish Civil war, and more specifically the dictatorship that ensued for 40 years made communications more difficult, especially for the first decade.

Most of the documents (332) are handwritten, with only 27 typed. The total of words comes to 119,320, making it one of the most abundant corpora of documents



from diasporic Asturians to this date. There is the expectation that the corpus will continue to increase in number of documents, as well as in volume of words.

Even when migration was more intensively a male endeavor, nearly one fourth of the letters are written by female-named individuals and/or addressed to female-named recipients. The letters were chosen randomly, with no intention of evening out the gender spaces or creating a balanced representation. Some conclusions can be drawn, then, from the fact that one in four has a female-named person involved. First, that means women knew how to write, and maybe how to read. By 1887, and according to the Censi data gathered by Gabriel Fernández (1997, p. 220), 19.16% of children 6-10 and 38.02% of adults 26-30 were alphabetized. The bulk statistic skews the presence of women: 23.29% of boys versus only 14.95% of girls, and 51.40% of men versus 25.91% of women.

Writing can be viewed as a form of resistance and community building, but it also can be deemed as one more of the responsibilities of care that fall upon female-identified individuals, especially within the stressful context of migration. Maintaining communication is a privilege because it implies knowing how to write, as well as having the means for writing -paper, ink, stamps. However, it can also be an exercise of translational emotion-matching: how to continue being readable, both metaphorically and in real life, within the new context.

If we were to refer to the content of the documents, the vast majority of them can be placed in four different categories: family news, family businesses, land quarrels and identity reflections. The first one is expected: baptisms, weddings, anniversaries, funerals, and the untranslatable *cabos de año*. Family business refers not only to material capital but also, and more importantly, to human capital: the requests, formulated from both sides of the Atlantic for the movement of young adult males. Elder brothers request their families to send younger members of the family to work with them; brothers and sisters negotiate which ones within the boys will be sent to America, and when; fathers connect with cousins and extended relatives in search of what can only be referred as placement opportunities for the next generation. There are debates about the fortune -or misfortune- of émigrés, the success of their business and the potential flaws of their character.

A third group involves property boundaries, property line disputes and all kinds of inheritance quarrels. More frequently than not, those that had been successful had a personal or even collective vested interest in bettering the living and social conditions of their families, extended families and hometowns both in America and back in Asturias (Llordén Miñambres, 2008). With that in mind, it is not infrequent to find requests and offers for money, land or inheritances. While some take a more sour tone, the general familial context of the letters falls frequently on the continuum between gossip and plain emotional manipulation. Finally there are some



letters, a minority, that refer to the identitarian reflections of the immigrants. Those will be examined in a forthcoming publication.

3.3. Undergraduate researchers and corpus building

The crowdsourcing nature of the project implies that all materials are examined and then re-examined again by different members of the research team. Each individual has their own individual and group responsibilities so that the redundancy protects the materials from potential mistakes. At the same time, the digital ecosystem is intentionally solidary, in an effort to make everyone aware of the potential, and the need, of establishing solid collaborative relationships.

Four sets of documents are selected for every iteration of the project. These have belonged to the same family, but also to different familial archives, depending on the availability and interest of the materials. Each of the four sets is assigned to a team of four individuals. Within each team, every member is responsible for one fourth of the work. In practical terms, that implies different amounts of archival documents. The conditions for that are decided on a case by case basis, and are conditioned by different elements, such as the visibility of the ink, the clarity of the handwriting, the size of the documents and the density of the writing.

Each group receives daily training and guidance as to how to proceed with the digitalization and transliteration of the documents assigned to them. Within the four person groups, each individual will contribute by peer reviewing the work of one of the other three members as well. When all has been reviewed by the team and corrections have been made, there is an additional review to ensure consistency.

In parallel, the four research teams are provided with a relational database designed for this project. The four members of each team share the access and the work, and collectively define each of the documents on their set with a unique ID. That is linked to the other IDs of all other documents in the project, but allows for the singling out of a particular piece of information, be that a letter, an envelope or any other element.

In addition to that ID, the teams process “title”, “description”, “creator/date”, “contributor”, “relation”, “coverage”, “addressee”, “original image”, and “transcription”. The categories on the relational database are directly linked to the same categories on a dataset on Omeka. This way, the Excel document resulting from the database can be directly transferred to an Omeka upload. The final step of this project will be the creation of a digital exhibition based upon the repository of documents hosted in Omeka.



4. Results

There are three main results that have been observed so far: a linguistic empowerment of the undergraduate researchers, which is attested thru a questionnaire about their time abroad; the compilation of the letters, and the projected digital exhibition; and, finally, the creation of a corpus of letters that partially document the language that was written in the XIX in Asturias. Each of them, that will be examined individually, contribute to the overarching goal of re-centering the idea of migration as a human phenomenon, while focusing on the specific consequences - being those cultural, social, linguistic, economic- that migration has for particular communities.

4.1. *Linguistic empowerment*

In parallel to the undergraduate research project, students become participants in a mixed-methods research project. It follows and documents their experiences as speakers of a minoritized language in a context in which that minoritized language they speak is the mainstream one and, in turn, contributes to the minoritization of a different language.

All of them report a higher level of confidence in their linguistic abilities. They self-declare that they have increased their range by being in contact with speakers of a different variety of Spanish. When asked if their perspective about “Spanish from Spain” has changed during their time in the country, a participant states: “Spanish from Spain varies from different parts of the country. And I recognized that it was important to be open minded to new languages”. They seem to have moved from a monolithic idea of national languages into a more advanced comprehension of the topic. After having visited cities in Northern, Central and Southern Spain, more than one of the participants is aware of this phenomenon. In turn, the results show that this awareness created a wider understanding of their own variety of Spanish as equally valid to others.

When asked about the public and commercial signage available in the streets, and how the participants were able to relate to it, there was unanimous consensus as to the ease of understanding Peninsular Spanish, as well as the advantage that it was being a Spanish speaker. However, there was also space for the acknowledgement of Asturian as a different language. One participant responded that: “It felt primarily the same (unless it was Asturiano)”.

It was apparent to this participant, and to others who made similar observations, that their language was not the only language in use in Asturias. They were attuned to register and semantic nuances, as well as to geographical variation. However,



they felt the need to make an additional point: while their Spanish had served them well for all communicational opportunities in the US, in different regions of Spain and in most cases in Mexico, Asturian presented different challenges.

That line in the sand that separates one language from another developed organically in the participants. A brief interaction about the word “puxe” was particularly interesting. A puzzled student stared at a door for some seconds and then, with a smile, proceeded to say “Ah, they want me to push, que le puje”.

The presence of Asturian language in the linguistic landscape of the Asturian cities was not only negative, but created a positive effect on the participants, as shown in the examples above. On one side, it allowed for a better understanding of their own dialect by validating the scope of what is Spanish and what is not. On the other side, the presence of Asturian improved the linguistic intercomprehension and strengthened the possibilities for mutual understanding.

4.2. Digital exhibition

One of the objectives of the project is the creation of a digital exhibition in which both the importance of the documentation and the work of the student researchers can be showcased. The first iteration of the project is the classification and archiving of the materials, followed by a first round of transcription. That is a crowdsourced task, in which teams gather to peer-edit. After that phase, there is a second one of correction, edition and normativization. That normativization is agnostic to uses of language, and refers exclusively to transliteration premises: what to do when there is a hole in the paper, or when time has erased words.

We are currently working on the annotation of the letters. When that is completed, all the documents will be available in an online digital exhibition. We expect the next phase to be completed by 2024.

4.3. Language in XIX Asturias, by XIX Asturians

Education was one of the main concerns of the Asturian emigrants, as Uría and López have shown. Individual immigrant Asturians, and sometimes groups of immigrant Asturians, financed schools both in their new countries and back in their hometowns. That benefactor spirit had to do both with the advancement of their communities, but also with the own interest of the indianos to recruit capable younger individuals to work in their business overseas (Uría).

The Plantel Jovellanos, created in the Casa de Asturias in Habana and that survived long after, is one of those examples. That benefactor spirit has left a mark in the literature of the time. Antonio Fernández writes in “Al otro mundo”, the first of



the short stories included in *Pinceladas* (1892), that the young Periquín, before departing for America, had: “había ido a la escuela con asiduidad durante el verano y sabía leer bastante bien, escribir no tan bien, y contar un poco peor; pero en fin, llevaba los gérmenes de una educación intelectual, lo que no era tan poco” (Fernández, 1892, p. 3).

However, the question of the language in which those individuals would be alphabetized is important. Were they conscious of their bilingualism? Were the teachers in those schools, particularly those abroad, aware of the relationship between Spanish and Asturian?

While the corpus of letters from Asturians is crucial to understand that wave of diaspora, it might not be completely accurate as to the uses of language of the individuals writing the documents. Potentially alphabetized and schooled in a standardized variety of Spanish, their Asturian might be suppressed in writing. Further proof of that narrow perspective on written language comes from the lack of elements of the local varieties of Spanish, being that any feature of Cuban Spanish, Argentinian Spanish or any other.

Even with these two caveats in place, Asturian language still appears under the surface of the documents, not only in terms of lexicon, but also at the syntactic level, with multiple examples of clitics conforming to non-Spanish rules, and a widespread use of simple, not compound, tenses.

There are multiple examples to that respect that can be found in the correspondence. On March 23, 1913, Sebastián Ruiz wrote to his parents in Cue de Llanes. He uses paper with a business letterhead from Restaurant *La unión española* that reads: “Comodidad para familias y pasajeros. Se reciben pensionistas a precios módicos. Servicio esmerado. A una cuadra de la estación”. A trip down memory lane discovers new buildings at the address of San Martín, 636, but the train station is still there. Since 1884, that train station was the catalyst to transform the port city into the entryway for immigrants and the exit of grain from Patagonia. Its location close to Buenos Aires, and the ever increasing number of Europeans, contributed to the emigration of multiple Asturians, among many individuals of different origins.

A fragment of one of the letters that Sebastián sends back home discovers the existence of a community of Asturians, probably a community of Llaniscos, in Bahía Blanca and its surroundings:

Bautista no está mas / con Venancio está con / Grihines donde yo esta / va antes.
/ Cuando salió de / con Venancio le descontó el / pasage. Nosé como será estan / do
ella / anda mal ninguno / de la familia me parece Vena / que Venancio tiene hidea /
de ir apasal el verano en / esa en tonces voy hahir / para alla con el me escri / vio
hace 8 dias que fuera / yo le dije mientras estea ella / no conviene.

Manuel no puso negocio / y salio mal con los Lleras.



It wouldn't be out of reach to assume that this young Sebastián might have had access to the same education that Periquín, the character in *Pinceladas*. However, even if the teachers in Asturias or the potential teachers in America had taught him a standardized variety of Spanish, there are features of a syntax that is not from the Spanish language (“salíó de con Venancio”), verbal morphology endings that show ultracorreptions (“*estea*”, from “*tea*” vs. “*esté*”), and ossified contractions that transpire into Spanish (“*apasal el verano*”). These are just the tip of the iceberg of the trove of historical Asturian that can be found in the documentation, even in those letters that, on the surface, seem to be written in Spanish. The objective of this paper is not the examination of the features of the Asturian language that can be found, hidden in plain sight, in the Spanish of these emigrants: that is a different work in progress. For the time being, we are interested in the presence of what we would like to describe as historical code-meshing.

5. Historical Code-Meshing, as a conclusion

In the context of the contemporary US, classrooms have been described as spaces in which the ideologies about dominant languages modify, condition and alter the presence of minoritized languages (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Looking back, these concepts could be retroactively applied to our understanding of the past. In that sense, I propose the notion of historical code-meshing as a combination of three different elements: the idea of “national language”, the notion of parallel coactivation and, finally, Labov's uniformitarian principle.

In the US, classrooms have been identified as one of the locales in which to develop practices and strategies to give value to multilingual experiences, coming either from faculty or students (García, 2009). This process brings to the surface of the conversation a dynamic that was frequent, or even socially acceptable, in times and spaces before the imposition of the idea of a national language. Indeed, the coexistence of a national language and multiple multilingual areas necessitates an understanding of the period before State-declared monolingualism.

A more in depth investigation on historical archives and documentation could contribute to nurture these practices for current and future generations, while underlying the historical anomaly that is monolingualism. Following Labov's uniformitarian principle, we could understand that language structures in the past -in this case, Asturian in contact with Spanish- have suffered the same pressures that they suffer in the present. The existence of multiple linguistic codes in the historical documents as well as in the contemporary documents represents a variety of interactions and interferences between both languages. This is by all means not incompatible with the idea of a single linguistic repository in the mind of the bilingual.



The third element of this theory is linked to the above: parallel coactivation. The two or more languages that a speaker/writer uses are permanently active in the mind of that individual (Kroll, 2006). Bilingual individuals do not act as two individual monolinguals (Kroll & Tokowitz, 2005). On the contrary, they exert a dynamic control mechanism over the two languages. Historical code-meshing, then, encompasses the three elements above and provides additional data to understand the contemporary perspectives upon the topic.

The historical part of the concept is two folded: it implies the recovery of historical documents, and with those the language present in the texts. But it also requires a careful examination of the historical contexts and circumstances in the societies that produced those texts.

From the perspective of the history of the Asturian language and its peoples, we aim to recover the written testimonials of those that migrated to America. Those letters represent a repository of late XIX and early XX language difficult to match, especially considering that the letter writers, the migrants, were generally from lower income and rural backgrounds.

Every speaker of a minoritized language is one more link on a longer chain of maintenance, resilience and resistance. The careful analysis of the more fragile of those links is crucially important. In this case, there is still more work to be done to understand what were, and still are the consequences for the Asturian language of the population disruption of the late XIX and early XX centuries. A closer analysis of the documentation might, we expect, bring to the forefront a code-meshing variety of Asturian, thriving under the surface of forced schooling in Spanish.

Transcribing the letters will allow for a detailed study of the daily lives of these Asturian immigrants, focusing specifically on historical, cultural, and linguistic perspectives. As these three are necessarily entangled, we expect that a more profound analysis would garner a more precise documentation of how Asturian and Spanish permeate each other in the documentation. That, in turn, could generate synergies and opportunities for collaboration with both researchers of migration and diaspora, and researchers focused in Asturian Studies. On a different but related line, the design of the project could be scalable, and it is replicable, with different groups and/or archives. In that sense, replicating this project with a different group of students -from different linguistic varieties, different languages, or even with Asturian students, would bring to the forefront different, and likely contrastable, elements of judgment or consideration. Heritage speakers, native bilingual speakers, L2 speakers even of different minoritized languages can both learn about the target language as well as gain a wider and proudful understanding of their own language(s).



All in all, the project problematizes the spaces and locales of interaction, as well as structures traditionally accepted within the epistemic frontiers of the Iberian Peninsula. By deliberately shifting the focus to the experiences of Asturian migrants in America, we expect to explore new dimensions of their liminality in the years to come. Humbly, I'd like to propose coining "historical code-meshing" as "peñera de códigos históricos": the minoritized language, as with a sieve, gets filtered. That can happen as a choosing, but it also can happen after forced alphabetization in a different the language. Whatever the case, the linguistic remains are solid, visible, and quantifiable.

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