



History of Spanish

By now, you probably know a couple of words in **español**: **hola**, **adiós**, **¿dónde está la biblioteca?** However, have you ever thought of where Spanish comes from? Did it just pop up one day in Spain, or is there more to it? Today we're going to explore the history of Spanish because it didn't just magically appear! Language is more of a living creature that evolves with the passage of time. People are the vehicle of language, and language is what gives us humans the ability to communicate our inner worlds in such a detailed fashion! It's a win-win situation! Join me today as we trace back the history of Spanish language!

History of Spanish and History of Spain

The history of the Spanish language is closely tied to the history of Spain. As groups of people moved through what is now recognized as the country of Spain, multiple languages came and went! Some of them left a big mark, while others barely brushed through. These migrations have always taken place - humans have constantly moved through territories and "secure borders" (like we now have) were certainly not a thing 5,000 years ago!

Let's start with some useful vocabulary! In Spanish, there are two ways to refer to the Spanish language:

- **Español**: term mostly used in America
- **Castellano**: term mostly used in Spain*

*The literal English translation of **castellano** is Castilian. However, the English term refers to specific varieties of Spanish only, not to the Spanish language as a whole. The Spanish **castellano** can refer to either the Spanish language as a whole or to specific varieties. The term comes from **Castilla**, the region in Spain where Spanish came to life!



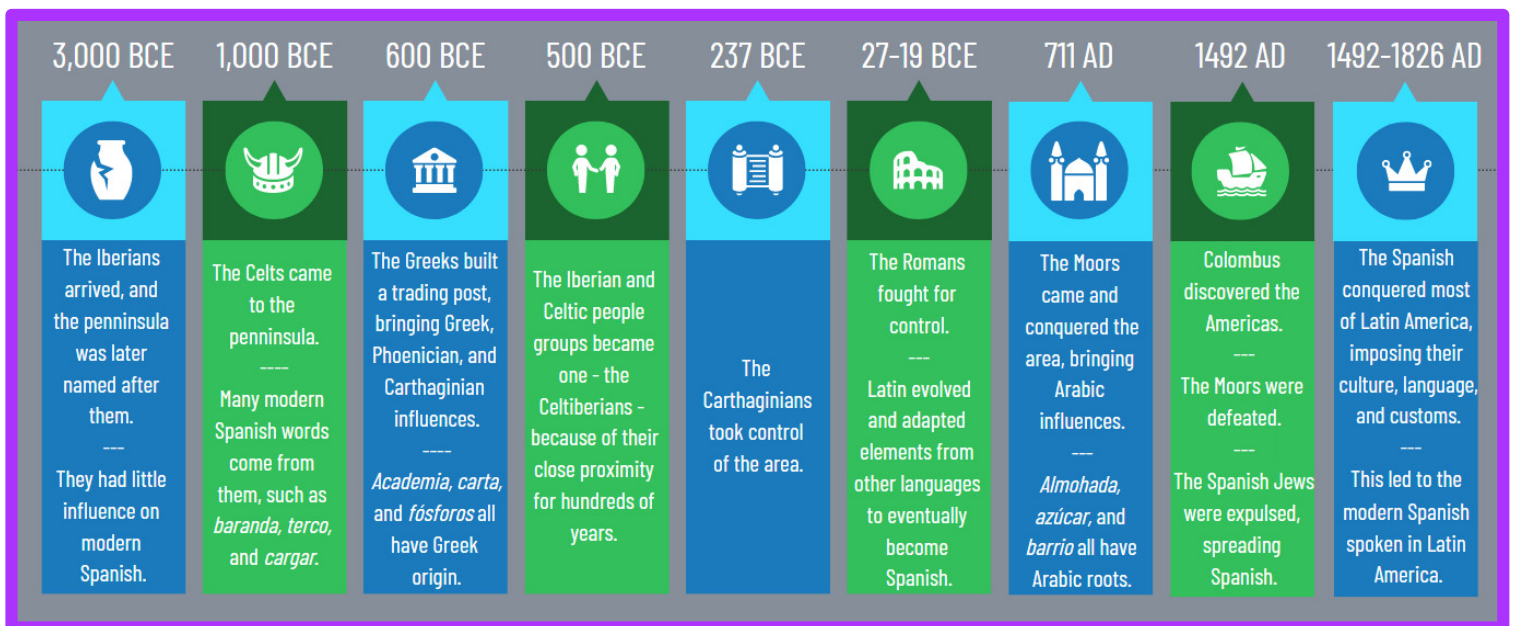
History of Spanish: A Jigsaw Puzzle

When we think of Spanish - or any language - we see a whole: **a language!** Or maybe we think about the elements we learned when studying it: words, grammar, pronunciation, spelling. For today, we'll think of Spanish as a **historical jigsaw puzzle** with interchangeable, multicultural pieces that come in various sizes.

Just think about it: there was a time when the Spanish we now know didn't exist. However, all the pieces of the puzzle were already scattered all around the world. They eventually found their way to one another, and so created a beautiful and diverse mosaic of language.

Join me to in this journey to learn more on the history of Spanish and how this jigsaw puzzle came to be!

Timeline: The History of the Spanish Language





Putting Together the Pieces of the Puzzle

A *long long* time ago

Iberians



3,000 BCE

IBERIANS

The Iberians arrived, and the peninsula was later named after them. They had little influence on modern Spanish.

5000 years ago, the ancient indigenous peoples of (now) Spain, the Iberians, spoke their own Iberian language. This language even had its own script and many of the inscriptions they wrote still survive today! This piece of the puzzle is a really tiny one as their writing system disappeared with the conquest of the Roman Empire some 2000 years ago, and very few words can be understood now. As you may have guessed, the Iberian Peninsula (now Spain and Portugal) owes its name to its first inhabitants, the Iberians!

Celts



1,000 BCE

CELTS

The Celts came to the peninsula. Many modern Spanish words come from them, such as *baranda*, *terco*, and *cargar*.

3000 years ago, the Celts started to make their way south to the northern part of the Iberian Peninsula. They came with their own Celtic language (also called Common Celt or Proto-Celt)! Nowadays, there are still 6 Celtic languages that evolved from that one Celtic language from a long time ago: Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Manx, Welsh, Cornish, and Breton. Some of these languages are in danger of becoming extinct, just as it happens in Guatemala with Mayan Languages. Many words we use in Spanish are of Celtic origin, so this piece of the puzzle is a little bit bigger! Some examples are:

bruja (witch), *gancho* (hook), *carro* (car), *añicos* (smithereens)



Celtiberians



500 BCE

CELTIBERIANS

The Iberian and Celtic people groups became one - the Celtiberians - because of their close proximity for hundreds of years.

The Iberians and Celts coexisted in Spain until the Celtic people changed so much because of the Iberian influence that Celtiberians came to existence. Celtiberians spoke the Celtiberian language and used the Iberian script that they borrowed from the Iberians, but they were considered Celts.

Languages from a *long long* time ago

Language	Status
Iberian <i>ibero-ibérico</i>	Dead
Common Celt <i>celta común</i>	Dead <i>Its descendants are the Celtic Languages: Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Manx, Welsh, Cornish, and Breton</i>
Celtiberian <i>celtíbero</i>	Dead





A long long time ago

Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Greeks



237 BCE

CARTHAGINIANS

The Carthaginians took control of the area.

Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Greeks all came to the Iberian Peninsula between the 15th and 4th century BCE to found colonies. While their impact on agriculture, economy, and mining was substantial, their influence on language wasn't.



600 BCE

GREEKS

The Greeks built a trading post, bringing Greek, Phoenician, and Carthaginian influences. *Academia*, *carta*, and *fósforos* all have Greek origin.

In modern Spanish, however, there are a lot of words that come from Greek! Greek didn't really have much impact on the puzzle of Spanish when the Greeks came to Spain, but Latin and Arabic had already been greatly influenced by Greek. So the great amount of words with Greek origin in Spanish has more to do with the influence of Greek on Latin and Arabic, and less to do with a direct adoption of Greek words by the indigenous Spanish people. Some examples of Greek origin adopted through Latin are:


academia (academy), *carta* (letter), *diamante* (diamond), *fósforos* (matchstick)



Languages from a *long* time ago

Language	Status
Phoenician <i>fenicio</i>	Dead
Carthaginian (also named Punic, a Phoenician dialect) <i>púnico</i>	Dead
Ancient Greek <i>griego antiguo</i>	Dead <i>Next to Latin, one of the two most important extinct languages. Now exists in the form of modern Greek, the language spoken in Greece.</i>

Romans



27-19 BCE

ROMANS

The Romans fought for control. Latin evolved and adapted elements from other languages to eventually become Spanish.

The Romans arrived in the Iberian Peninsula some 2200 years ago. They got there because they were at war with the Carthaginians, who had already occupied a significant part of Spain. After a lot of back and forth that included three wars, known as the Punic Wars (that lasted over 100 years), the Romans finally defeated the Carthaginians. 200 years later, they conquered the whole of Spain! As such, the Iberian Peninsula became a part of the Roman Empire.

The Romans brought along their culture and language, which was Vulgar Latin (vulgar means common - Common Latin, like the Common Greek). Romans were all about individuals having rights, so they never violently forced their language on the inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula. They did, however, encourage them to learn the language through other more effective means: creating documents only in Latin and opening Latin schools for people to be able to learn.




The Romans occupied Spain for 700 years. In this extended period of time, Latin was greatly influenced by the languages that were spoken in the peninsula when the Romans arrived. By the first century AD, the modified version of Latin was spoken throughout the entire Iberian Peninsula! Latin is by far the biggest - and central - piece of the puzzle! Every other piece connects around this one.

Latin is the language that evolved and adapted elements from other languages to eventually become Spanish!

Languages from a *long* time ago

Language	Status
Vulgar (Common) Latin <i>latín vulgar</i>	Dead <i>Next to Ancient Greek, one of the two most important extinct languages. Its descendants are the Romance languages: Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, and Romanian</i>

Moorish Invasion



711 AD

The Moors came and conquered the area, bringing Arabic influences. *Almohada*, *azúcar*, and *barrio* all have Arabic roots.

MOORS

The Moors came to Spain in the year 711. They conquered Spain and stayed until 1492, the same year Christopher Columbus discovered America! They arrived in Spain because there were (again) some wars. They were called by some friends in Spain to help with the wars but ended up staying and occupying the territory for almost 800 years! As the Romans did before them, the Moors also brought along culture and language!

The language of the Moors was (and still is - yay to our first still living language!) Ḥassāniyyah Arabic, a dialect of Arabic. In the 781 years that the Moors occupied Spain, the modified Latin (that will soon turn into Spanish) started adopting A LOT of Arabic



words. The Moors also introduced the Arabic numerals and the numbering system, and they contributed greatly to the fields of architecture, religion, agriculture, and education.

Almost 800 years of occupation are more than just brushing through. Arabic’s piece of the puzzle is rather significant when compared to the other languages we’ve talked about before **Latin became THE LANGUAGE of Spain**. Moors brought along with them many new things. All of them had no name in Latin because you don’t have a name for something that doesn’t exist in your world. Some examples of Arabic words that eventually made their way into Spanish are:

almohada (pillow), **azúcar** (sugar), **ajedrez** (chess) **barrio** (neighborhood)

Interesting fact: During the Moorish occupation, all the cultures - and religions - coexisted peacefully, and some temples were used both for Christian and Muslim services. The marriage between Christians and Muslims was also common and gave birth to a new culture: the Mozarabs. As we’ve seen multiple times, with culture comes language: the Mozarabic!

Languages from a <i>long</i> time ago	
Language	Status
Ḥassāniyyah Arabic <i>árabe hassaniyya</i>	Living <i>Spoken in Mauritania, a country in Africa</i>
Mozarabic <i>mozárabe</i>	Dead





1492 and the History of Spanish



1492 AD

COLOMBUS

Colombus discovered the Americas. The Moors were defeated. The Spanish Jews were expelled, spreading the Spanish language.

The year 1492 is a special year for Spain. Three major events occurred that greatly affected the course of history:

- The fall of Granada, the last Muslim stronghold in Spain. Subsequent expulsion of the Moors.
- The expulsion of the Spanish Jews (Sephardic Jews) after they had lived in Spain for centuries.
- Christopher Columbus discovered America.

Fall of Granada

In 1469, Prince Ferdinand, heir to the crown of Aragón, and Queen Isabella of Castile married. Their united forces helped achieve the fall of Granada, the last Muslim stronghold in Spain. This brought to an end the 700 years of Moorish invasion. Language: Due to the importance of their union - and the territories they had together - the dialect spoken in Castile became the official language of Spain. The name of the dialect spoken in Castile was Castilian. *El dialecto de Castilla era el castellano.* Thus, Classical Spanish came to life.

Expulsion of Sephardic Jews

Jews that had peacefully lived and coexisted for centuries with Muslims and Christians were forced to choose between staying in Spain and converting to Catholicism or leaving Spain, their homes, and wealth behind. Language: Many Jews chose to leave Spain and settled in the Ottoman Empire. They took with them the Spanish language, as it had been their language for centuries. Eventually, the Spanish they brought along combined with Hebrew, Turkish, Aramaic, Bulgarian, and Greek elements became Ladino or Judaeo-Spanish.



Christopher Columbus discovers America

In August 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed from Europe with three ships and accidentally discovered America while trying to find a better and faster route to Asia. The colonization of the New Continent by the Spanish Crown of Castille begins. Language: As colonization began, Spanish spread throughout North, Central, and South America. **The fact that we speak Spanish in Guatemala is a direct result of that!**

The Spanish in America

The infographic consists of a purple circle containing a white crown icon, positioned to the left of the text '1492-1826 AD'. To the right of this is a green rounded rectangle containing the word 'SPANISH' in white capital letters. Below these elements is a blue horizontal bar containing the text: 'The Spanish conquered most of Latin America, imposing their culture, language, and customs. This led to the modern Spanish spoken in Latin America.'

As we noticed before, the Spanish were not necessarily accepting of other cultures and religions. The Moors were completely expelled from Spain after the Fall of Granada. The Jews were given the option to convert into Catholicism or leave the country. What was bound to happen after the discovery of America in that same year? Take into account that the indigenous people of America didn't share culture, language, or religion with their conquerors!

When the Spanish came to America, they put a tremendous effort into eradicating the culture, religion, and language of the indigenous people. Unlike the Romans who accepted individual freedom and didn't impose language or religion on their conquered land, the Spanish enslaved the indigenous population and used force to impose their religion, language, and culture. This is sad news for history lovers, as many manuscripts of older civilizations were lost to the hands of the Spanish who were unaccepting of another religion and view of the world.

What happened to the Spanish language in America? Each region contributes a tiny little piece to the puzzle!!! This is the reason why Spanish all throughout America has so many diverse accents, words, structures, and sayings! How and why did this happen? Remember our Chanin blog post where we talked about Guatemala having 24 official languages? Now imagine that amplified throughout the **entire continent!** Each country



has several cultures spread and all these different cultures have a language of their own. Each and every one of these languages influenced Spanish!

Take away

This puzzle of the Spanish language isn't finished yet! Nor do I think that it will ever be. To me, it's more of a never-ending puzzle that humanity will keep building piece by piece. **Humans and society keep changing, and as we change, so does language!**










Exercise

Let's practice what you've just learned!



History of Spanish

Instructions: Fill out the blanks on the History of Spanish Language timeline!

	3,000 BCE	<input type="text"/>
	1,000 BCE	<input type="text"/>
	600 BCE	<input type="text"/>
	500 BCE	<input type="text"/>
	237 BCE	<input type="text"/>
	27-19 BCE	<input type="text"/>
	711 AD	<input type="text"/>
	1492 AD	<input type="text"/>
	1492-1826 AD	<input type="text"/>



Answer Key: History of Spanish

