

The history of Spanish

Before the Romans
Latin gets everywhere
Germanic Visigoth and Arabic Influences
Spanish and other Romance languages
Spanish and the languages of the empire
Spanish and English

Narrator:

The history of Spanish in about 6 minutes. Chapter 1: Before the Romans or ‘Ante Pasta’

Though Spanish is a Romance language, evolved from Latin... its history begins before the Romans ever set foot on the Iberian Peninsula.

Back in the Second Century BC – the peninsula had several civilisations and languages. Including Iberian, Basque, Celtiberian, Tartessian and Gallaecian. Though not all these civilisations lasted, many words remain today

From the Celts we probably got the words for beer and shirt. While the Basque language brought us cod and top hat and drizzle – which wasn't quite as welcome.

And if all these civilisations weren't enough then the Phoenicians and Carthaginians turned up – with their own languages founding places like Gadir and Malaca now known as Cádiz and Málaga.

Followed by the Greeks from the East – with great words like 'poem' and 'history' which were certainly not a 'problem' plus words like 'hysteria' which were.

But the main influence of Greek on the language didn't come until later – via Latin - and the Romans...

The history of Spanish in about 6 minutes. Chapter 2: Latin Gets everywhere or 'Don't be vulgar with me'

There are two main types of Latin – Classical – used in writing, politics and poetry. And Vulgar – which was mainly spoken. Spanish comes from Vulgar Latin. We get 'casa' – from the Vulgar for hut, not the Classical for House. But more on that 'mañana' – which is from 'manaena', meaning at the early hour and not from the Latin 'cras' meaning tomorrow.

As their Empire expanded the Romans arrived at the Peninsula around 200BC – and after a couple of hundred years of war – conquered it. Latin was around for centuries, giving us most of the Spanish lexicon. Even Siesta comes from Latin for Sixth Hour - the hottest time of the day.

But remnants of the old indigenous languages still survived mixing with Latin as it evolved.

From 7th Century, the varieties of Latin spoken on the peninsular were gradually becoming very different from that spoken in other areas. But we have to wait until 1492 to see the first grammar of a Romance Language published, written by humanist Antonio de Nebrija

The history of Spanish in about 6 minutes. Chapter 3: Germanic Visigoth and Arabic Influences or 'Do you prefer your goths visi or still?'

In the 5th century several Germanic groups invaded the peninsula before being chased off by another group – the Visigoths. Who stayed for 300 years, but didn't influence the culture and the language much, as they stuck to Roman customs.

But they did leave words, many to do with admin and war. And popularised many suffixes – az, ez, iz and oz that are found on Spanish surnames.

Around the 8th Century - a Muslim army from North Africa, landed and conquered the Visigoths settling in for centuries. Their impact on the Spanish lexicon was enormous.

In the kitchen alone they gave us sugar, oil, noodles, watermelon and alcohol. And for afters dished up around 4000 more words. Many beginning with the Arabic article 'a' or al- as a prefix - like 'al' and 'kuhl' – the classic Arabic name for alcohol.

The Iberian Peninsula didn't just absorb other languages, it also 'spread the words...' When the Sephardic Jews were expelled in 1492 they took their Spanish language to places like Turkey, the Balkans and Greece - where different varieties of Judeo-Spanish are still spoken today, which is more than you can say for Gothic.

The history of Spanish in about 6 minutes. Chapter 4: Spanish and other Romance Languages or Romance is all about give and take

The Romance language of French influenced Spanish in waves – in the 10th Century pilgrimages across the mountains known as the French Way brought Friars, Monks and Priests and jokes about a friar, a monk and a priest walking into a tasca.

Don Quixote was the poster boy for the golden age of Spanish Literature. and while new words from France were appearing like skirting board and napkin, this was a time when Spanish influenced the rest of Europe

The biggest wave of French influence broke in the 18th Century with the arrival of the smartly dressed Bourbon Dynasty with their dapper jackets, snazzy trousers and lots of money. They really were the élite.

And during the reign of the Bourbon King Philip the 5th there was built the Real Academia Española committed to standardising the language, publishing dictionaries grammar books and keeping an eye on Spanish wherever it was spoken.

Other Romance languages also made their mark. The Catalans gave us words like paper and paella Galicians brought homesickness and a rash Italians brought the casino and courting. Because Romance gets everywhere...

The history of Spanish in about 6 minutes. Chapter 5: Spanish and the languages of the Empire or - The Empire Strikes Tobacco.

Christopher Columbus arrived on an island in the West Indies and imaginatively named it La Española - this was the first contact between the Spanish language and more than 2000 languages of the Indigenous Americans.

As colonisation grew and Bourbon reforms enforced the use of Spanish. These 2000 indigenous languages shrunk to around 700.

The Spanish language at the same time grew richer. Languages like Nahuatl give tomatoes and chocolate. From Arahuc we get guava. So today you can eat chocolate and guava, while experiencing altitude sickness (from Quechua).

The Real Academia Española focussed on standardising Spanish as spoken in Spain but nowadays there are 23 academies across the world that work together to promote alternate, equally valid forms of Spanish.

Spanish influence reaches across the globe. From America to Equatorial Guinea where Spanish is an official language. While in Tagalog, the language of the Philippines, the days of the week sound very familiar to Spanish speakers and creole languages like Chabacano are also derived from Spanish...Chabacano itself roughly means 'vulgar' which takes us right back to those Romans.

The history of Spanish in about 6 minutes. Chapter 6: Spanish and English or - Hasta la vista, Alligator.

Though more people speak Spanish or Mandarin as a first language... English is the most popular second language – so it's become a Lingua Franca. Which is - ironically - Italian.

Spanish regularly borrows English words – So it's 'OK' to 'post' 'online' about Fútbol while listening to 'Blues'. Unless you're meant to be doing something else.

Just Latin evolved based on geography, Spanish has also branched out. Llanito Spanish of Gibraltar is so influenced by English they have 'saltipina' and 'Jivas'. And several groups in the US speak Spanglish – a mixture of the two languages. Hasta la vista, baby

In fact, the influence of English has even prompted Spanish to develop words that resemble English ones – but aren't. Like footing [pause] Or puenting -literally 'bridging'

This has been going on so long that we get the Spanish aligátor from the English 'alligator' - which originally came from the Spanish lagarto. Which is a great example of languages chasing their tails and how they never stop evolving.