



Academic Event Report

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Symposium: The Galician Interdisciplinary Studies Symposium

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Hosted and coordinated by Dr María Alonso Alonso with words of welcome from Professor Robert Dunbar and colleagues from the School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures at the University of Edinburgh, *The Galician Interdisciplinary Studies Symposium* took place on 8th March 2018, running parallel with a UK-wide strike by lecturing staff in relation to pay and pensions. Despite this setback and in the absence of many colleagues based in the United Kingdom, this one-day symposium continued unabated at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities.

It is clear from the diversity of the panels offered at this symposium that Galicia continues to be an area rich in cultural, political and social complexity warranting continued attention from research scholars, particularly those interested adopting an interdisciplinary stance. Such approaches enable researchers to redefine interrelationships between society and language, politics and the humanities as well as Galicia's place in Spain and beyond by offering new perspectives on traditional themes and issues. Such a stance not only attracts new allochthonous researchers to the field but also demonstrates the contemporary relevance of Galician Studies and its robustness as an area of scholarship that employs paradigms and approaches more common to larger, traditional areas of study.

As a consequence of this interdisciplinary approach, the symposium achieved its primary aim of exploring how Galician Studies is engaging with newer avenues of research. This interdisciplinary stance offered professionals and students alike the opportunity to broaden their horizons through exposure to subfields of research that are distinct to their own. The diverse range of topics on offer included language planning and education, geo-history and literature, translation studies and language normalisation, explorations of Galician diaspora in literature, and archaeology and anthropology. The symposium concluded with a review of the work that has been achieved by a team of Galician and Irish researchers

working in the realm of Ecocriticism; a project to which Dr Martín Veiga, the Head of the Irish Centre for Galician Studies at UCC, has made major contributions. The symposium was less successful in accomplishing its secondary aim of reaching out to a broader audience of students and researchers beyond Galician specialists. Perhaps this was an unfortunate consequence of the industrial action in March. As such, despite the interdisciplinary nature of the symposium, there was a lack of an outsider's point of view, which perhaps would have contributed more to broadening the interdisciplinarity of the event.

The contributions on offer in the first panel focusing on language policy allowed delegates to reflect on language planning outcomes in Galicia. Since the end of the Spanish dictatorship, liberal democracy and extensive devolution have allowed the more populous linguistic minorities in the Iberian Peninsula to implement extensive language planning policies in order to codify, promote and, ultimately, ensure the perpetuity of their autochthonous languages whilst coexisting with Castilian. Despite many early successes in the 1980s and 1990s, language planning in Galicia has been fraught with difficulties to the extent that today the number of speakers is dwindling. The three papers constituting this panel offered a number of different perspectives charting the early successes and current failures of language planning policy.

My own paper, which I presented in this panel, explored the strategic role of those involved in the dubbing industry in the early 1980s as bottom-up language planners; that is, social agents that perform roles which promote a particular linguistic variety from a lowly position of authority as opposed to politicians or law makers. Dubbing is an audiovisual technique that is often associated with language planning in minority communities as a method to model, promote and disseminate a particular language variety to a community. It is a technique that is often disparaged for its potential role in censorship; nonetheless, my paper painted a very positive picture of the role of dubbing and its professional community across Galicia in the 1980s in the dissemination of the language, which was well received by attendees—many of whom remembered the series translated and dubbed in this process. The paper offered a new perspective on the different agents involved in the dubbing process in Galicia as a means to interrogate their agency. This discussion uncovered and explored the duality of their role not only as artists *par excellence* but also as strategic communicators who held a key role in the promotion of Galician.

In stark contrast to the positive image of language planning policy in 1980s television dubbing in my paper, Brais Romero Suárez (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela) dealt with the issue of the decreasing number of Galician films available in the public domain. Like dubbing for television, films produced in Galician as well as dubbed films from other

languages are integral to the promotion of Galician as a dynamic linguistic variety and are financially supported by central government. Nonetheless, in recent years, the visibility of such films in the public domain has diminished significantly. However, the sporadic, unstandardised and, often, deceptive nature of existing data related to film production and screening makes it difficult to pinpoint the extent to which Galician film availability is diminishing. Using a variety of innovative statistical analyses to triangulate varying existing evidence, this paper sought to explore the complexities of this issue, revealing two key points. Firstly, despite the fact that the film industry receives large subsidies from the regional government, detailed statistical data does not exist to evaluate the success of this expenditure. Suárez concluded that this not only fails to confirm whether public money is being used effectively to achieve these ends but also does not enable us to see to what extent the Galician government is meeting its cultural and language normalisation obligations. Secondly, Suárez pointed out that there are many grey areas concerning what constitutes a ‘Galician’ film demonstrating that, on many occasions, productions and projections fulfil their linguistic obligations by simply including the absolute minimum of Galician language to satisfy the rules of the financial incentives provided by the government. However, as Suárez concludes, the lack of concrete, centrally collected data means that it is difficult to ascertain whether the role of the Galician film industry to promote Galician language and culture is being successfully achieved.

The promotion and continuing existence of Galician in the public domain or, at least, within audiovisual production will undoubtedly have a wider social effect on the perceptions of the language, particularly in terms of its perceived vitality and usefulness when compared with Spanish, which is also spoken in the region. The last paper in this panel sought to address this issue. Delivered by Estefanía Mosquera Castro and Maria Montserrat Muriano Rodríguez (Universidade da Coruña) entitled “Normalizar a desigualdade” [normalising inequality], this paper explored the increasing prejudices existent in education towards the Galician language. More specifically, it considered the increasingly deep-seated conflict that exists between Castilian and Galician in schools in terms of which language students and parents felt should be studied. Also, the study revealed that there are serious training issues surrounding the linguistic competency of teachers in Galician, meaning that on many occasions students are not able to learn in Galician. Consequently, Galician is relegated solely to domestic domains. Although the methods employed in this study were not particularly innovative, the interdisciplinary nature of the symposium enabled attendees to see the interconnectedness between these different subfields of research and their wider implications for the Galician language. The panel revealed that the very future of the

language, the communication channel through which much of Galician research is disseminated, is itself under threat. The placing of these three seemingly disparate papers within the same panel enabled attendees to see that despite the early successes of language planning, the same positive outcomes, particularly on the everyday use of the language, are not long-lasting. Furthermore, it also revealed that there is a lack of region-wide statistical evidence available for the interrogation of such successes and failings and that there is a clear need for further research by national and international bodies to collect this data.

Other interdisciplinary papers that adopted innovative approaches included a geocritical exploration of ‘space’ in the canonical *Cantigas de Santa María* delivered by Manuel Magán Abollo (Universidad de Complutense de Madrid). Geocriticism is a form of literary theory that seeks to explore the relationships between narrative and geographic space as well as the ways in which texts refer to and transgress the external world. Abollo employed the innovative use of digital cartography; this approach seeks to triangulate geographical referents mentioned in the texts with their function and to display them visually on a digital map viewable in html. In this case, Abollo was researching the role of topographical references in texts, especially those in reference to the ‘author’ (or, more likely, the commissioner) of the *Cantigas*, King Alfonso X ‘the Wise’. Little is known, but many have conjectured why Alfonso wrote in Galician given that he was born in Toledo in central Spain. Abollo’s research sought to map out visually topographical references mentioned in the *Cantigas* in order to better understand Alfonso’s relationship to these places, shedding light on why he wrote his poetry in Galician. Akin to some of the more innovative approaches seen within the field of Digital Humanities, this approach demonstrated how new avenues of research within Galician Studies can be explored through the application of new techniques. Indeed, such techniques should be of prime consideration to scholars in Galician Studies, as it ensures that the results of academic research emanating from this small, yet fruitful research community become visible and remain accessible to a wider audience.

Another presentation worthy of particular note in this panel was that offered by Xoan C. Castro (Anta da Moura) who provided a didactic overview of the Roman *Salinas* or salt pans in O Areal, an area of Vigo on the western coast of Galicia. Salt pans or salt works, are manmade, shallow ponds that are designed to extract salt from sea water through a process of evaporation. One of the fascinating aspects of this paper was how a scientific understanding of the production of salt allows archaeologists to make further historical suppositions for which there are no historical records. For example, archaeologists and historians can make predictions about the climate at this period of time based on the ideal scientific conditions for making salt. Indeed, Castro led us to question why such salt works were constructed here in

the 3rd century at the extreme periphery of the Roman Empire and attributed this choice principally to climate. This interdisciplinary approach often referred to as STEAM (the exploration of science through the arts) that is in vogue in teaching and learning pedagogy could open up new research fields, particular in Galician Studies where the importance of the environment is integral to Galician life and culture.

Indeed, representative of this interdisciplinary approach in which the role of the environment is explored through literature was the presentation made by Manuela Palacios from the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela. This focused on the work undertaken by the Galician-Irish research group entitled “Eco-fictions: emergent discourses on Women and Nature in Galicia and Ireland” that is funded by the Spanish government, the Galician regional government and the European Union. This project involved a number of colleagues in attendance as well as others working in a diverse range of higher education institutions, but all underpinned by their work in Galician and Irish Studies. The inclusion of this review of this research group at the end of the symposium demonstrated to other attendees, many of whom were early career researchers, the potential of interdisciplinary research within Galician Studies with colleagues from a diverse range of institutions as well as the vast array of special edition journals, creative output and public engagement that can be achieved through such work.

Overall, the major strengths of this conference were its interdisciplinary approach, the diverse array of topics dealt with in each panel and the range of innovative approaches offered by rising research in the field. The symposium showed that Galician Studies provides a space for interested researchers to explore a diverse range of themes and issues. However, it also made it saliently clear that there is a need for researchers to explore ways in which the language, culture and society of Galicia can be described quantitatively. The case for the collection of rigorous data that can be interrogated to explore not only the impact of political policy but also the changes occurring in Galician society is particularly pressing. From a personal perspective and as alluded to at the outset of this report, there is a fundamental need to engage more researchers from outside of Galicia in such events. The vast majority of delegates at the symposium were Galician and, whilst their contributions are integral to the development of Galician Studies, it is also important to use these international events to not only celebrate the true spirit of interdisciplinarity within the field but also to broaden its horizons by engaging other researchers from the wider international community.

Craig Neville is a PhD candidate in the Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies at University College Cork, Ireland. His research is centred in the field of

audiovisual Translation Studies in in the minority language communities of Galicia and Catalonia. His main research interests concern the use of dubbing and subtitling for cultural representation and sociolinguistic standardisation. He is also a founding member of Project DaRT, a research group at UCC exploring the concept of Translatorship in all its guises.