



# *Did you say Asturian? Presentation of a lesser-known Romance language*

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# OUTLINE

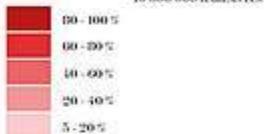
- ▶ 1. Geographical distribution
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# 1. Geographical distribution

IDIOMAS COOFICIALES  
Y NO OFICIALES  
EN LA  
PENÍNSULA IBÉRICA

% PERSONAS QUE HABLAN LA LENGUA

CATALÁN / VALENCIANO  
~10 000 000 HABLANTES

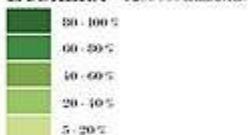


GALLEGO ~2 500 000 HABLANTES

GALLEGO, BONAVIGO, FERRO,  
SANOMA Y FALA DE JÁCAMA

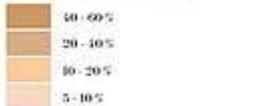


EUSKERA ~1 200 000 HABLANTES

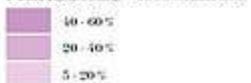


ASTURLEONÉS ~250 000 HABLANTES

(ASTURIANO, LEÓNÉS Y MIRANDÉS)

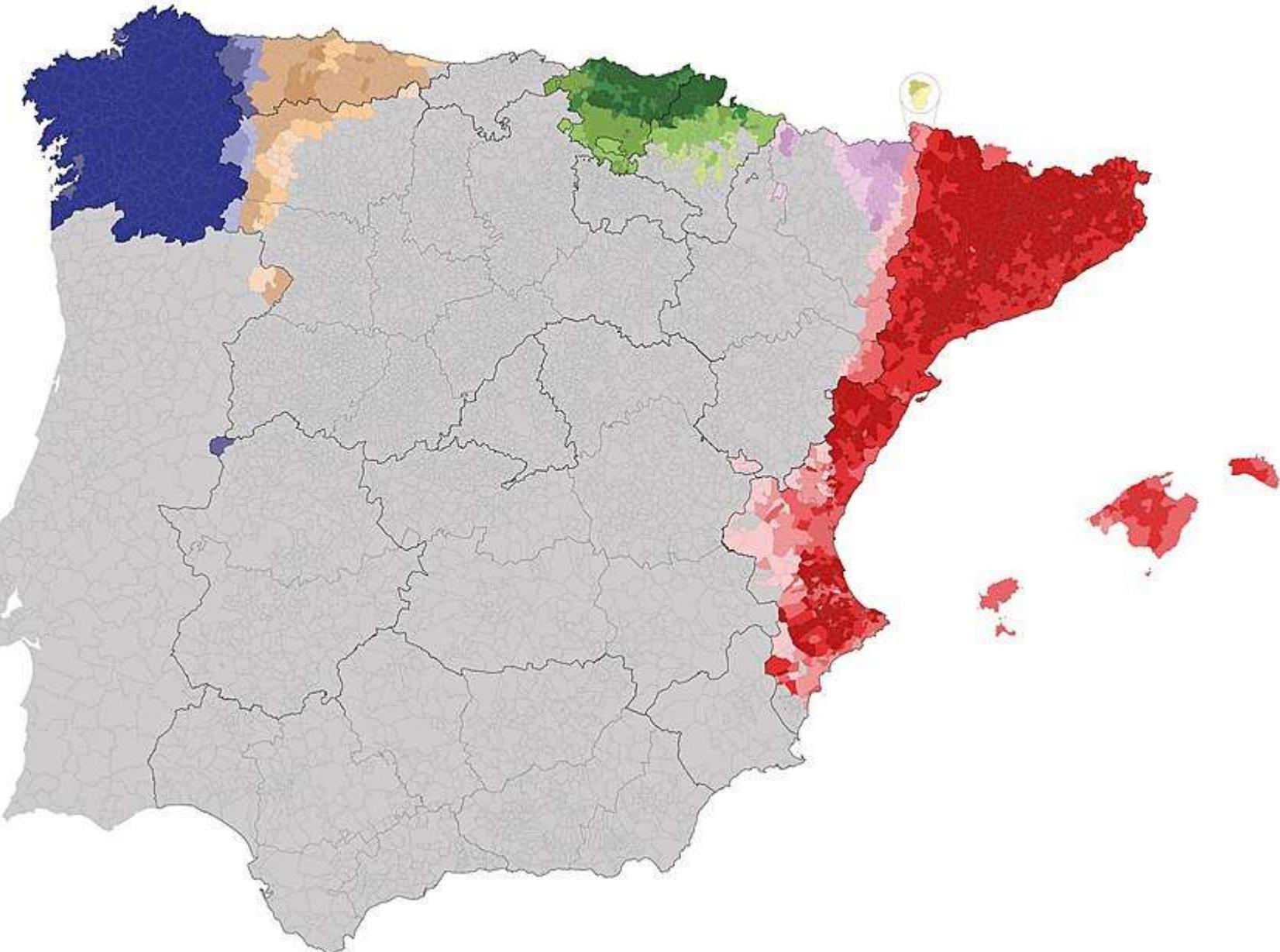


ARAGONÉS ~10 000 HABLANTES

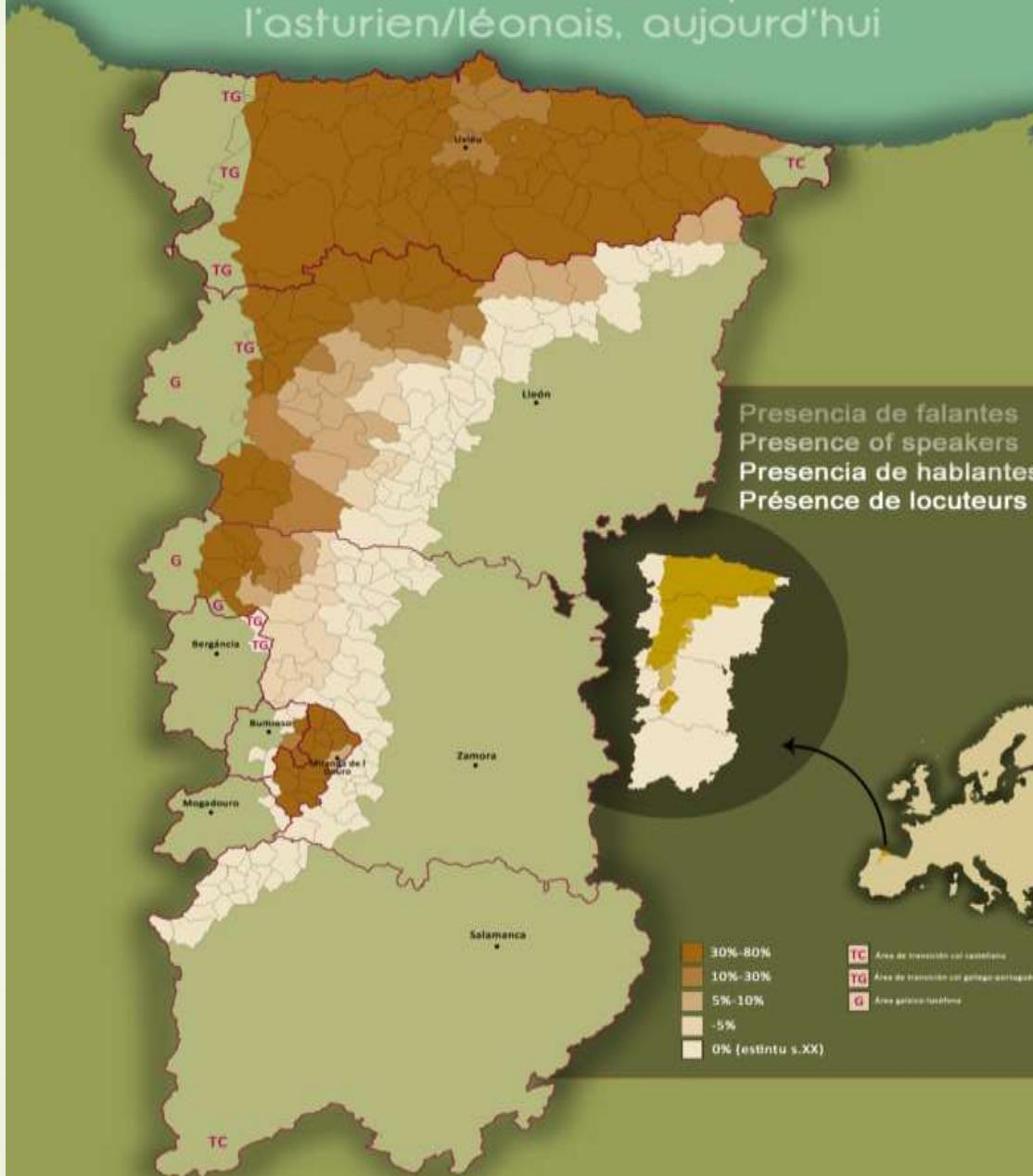


OCCITANO ~4 000 HABLANTES

(ARANÉS)



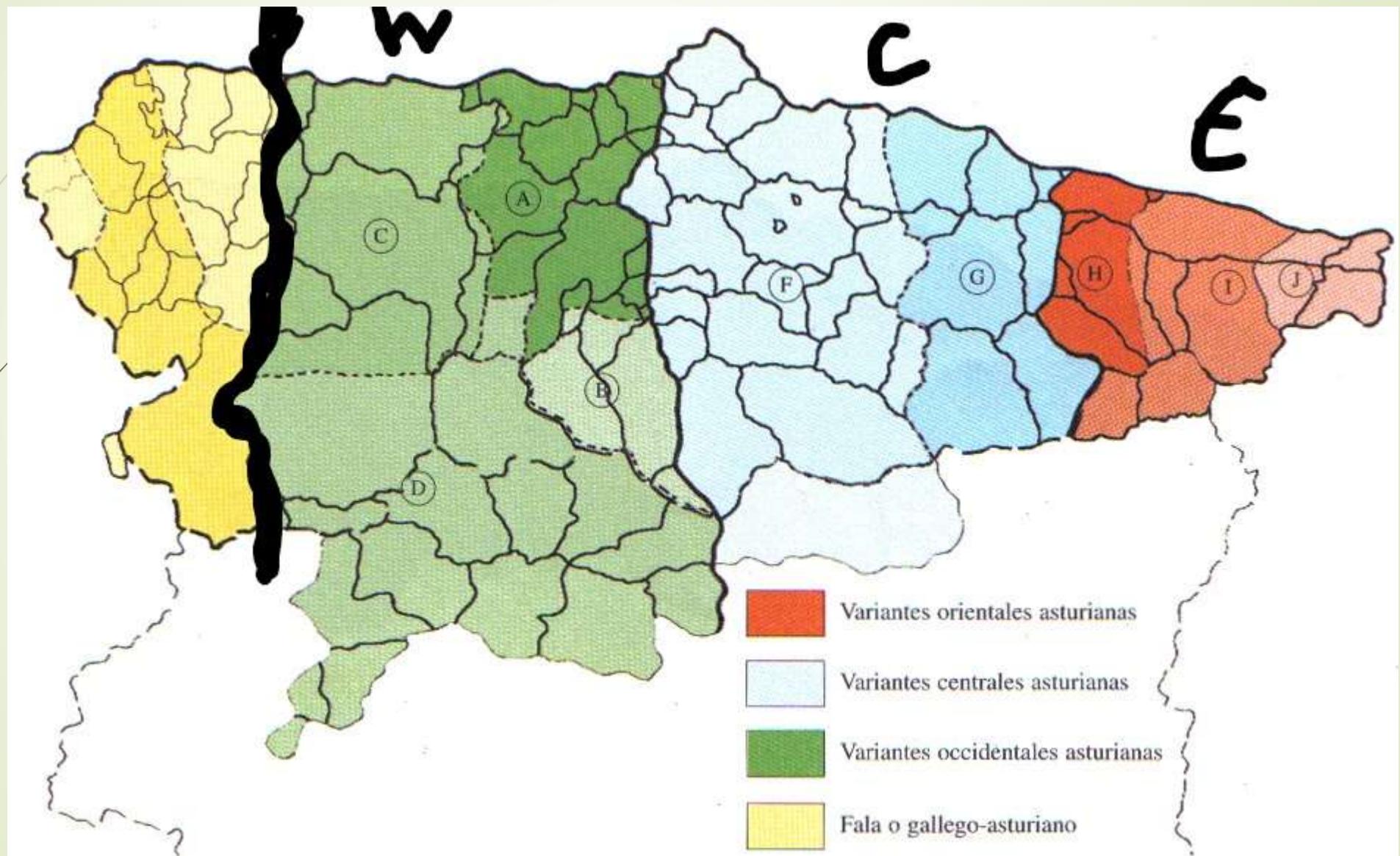
l'asturianu/lleonés, güei  
asturian/leonese, today  
el asturiano/leonés, hoy  
l'asturien/léonais, aujourd'hui



## 2. Linguistic description

## 2.1. Dialects

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Western dialect	Central dialect	Eastern dialect
Falling diphthongs: <i>ei, ou</i> FRAXINU > <i>freisnu</i> ('frêne') ALTERU > <i>outru</i> ('autre')	No falling diphthongs: <i>ei</i> > <i>e</i> / <i>ou</i> > <i>o</i> FRAXINU > <i>freisnu</i> > <i>fresnu</i> ALTERU > <i>outru</i> > <i>otru</i>	No falling diphthongs: <i>ei</i> > <i>e</i> / <i>ou</i> > <i>o</i> FRAXINU > <i>freisnu</i> > <i>fresnu</i> ALTERU > <i>outru</i> > <i>otru</i>
F- > f- : FUMU > <i>fumu</i>	F- > f- : FUMU > <i>fumu</i>	Aspiration: F- > [h] FUMU > <i>humu</i>
Feminin plurals in –as: <i>las casas</i> ('les maisons')	Feminin plurals in –es: <i>les cases</i>	Feminin plurals in –as: <i>las casas</i>

► Asturian **standard** is based on the central dialect because:

- Most part of Asturian native speakers (approx. 75%) are central dialect speakers.
- Central dialect has literary tradition.

## 2.2. Phonetics

### VOCALISM

- ▶ Stressed vocalic system with 5 vowels and three openness degrees.
- ▶ Protoromance opposition between \*/ɛ/ - \*/e/ and \*/ɔ/ - \*/o/ is resolved through the diphthongization of the open vowels \*/ɛ/ and \*/ɔ/ into /ie/ and /ue/

(I >) **i**

**u** (< ū)

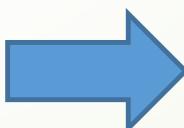
(ī, ē >) **e**

**o** (< ū, ō)

(ē, AE >) **ɛ**

**ɔ** (< ō)

**a** (< ā, ā)



**i**

**u**

**e**

**a**

+ /ie/, /ue/

P̄ILU > *pelu* ('poil')

F̄ILIU > *fiyu* ('fils')

A(U)ḠUSTU > *agostu* ('août')

L̄UNA > *lluna* ('lune')

CASTĒLLU > *castiellu* ('château')

CATĒNA > *cadena* ('chaîne')

P̄ORTA > *puerta* ('porte')

UŌCE > *voz* ('voix')

CARRU > *carru* ('char')

- In Asturian, the diphthongization process of stressed Protoromance \*/ɛ/ and \*/ɔ/ tends to happen spontaneously, without the need of any conditioning factor such us the syllabic structure (as in French), the influence of ‘yod’ or ‘wau’ (as in Occitan)...

E.g.: FĚRRU > *fierru* ('fer'); ŌCULU > *güeyu* ('oeil'); FŌLIA > *fueya* ('feuille'), etc.

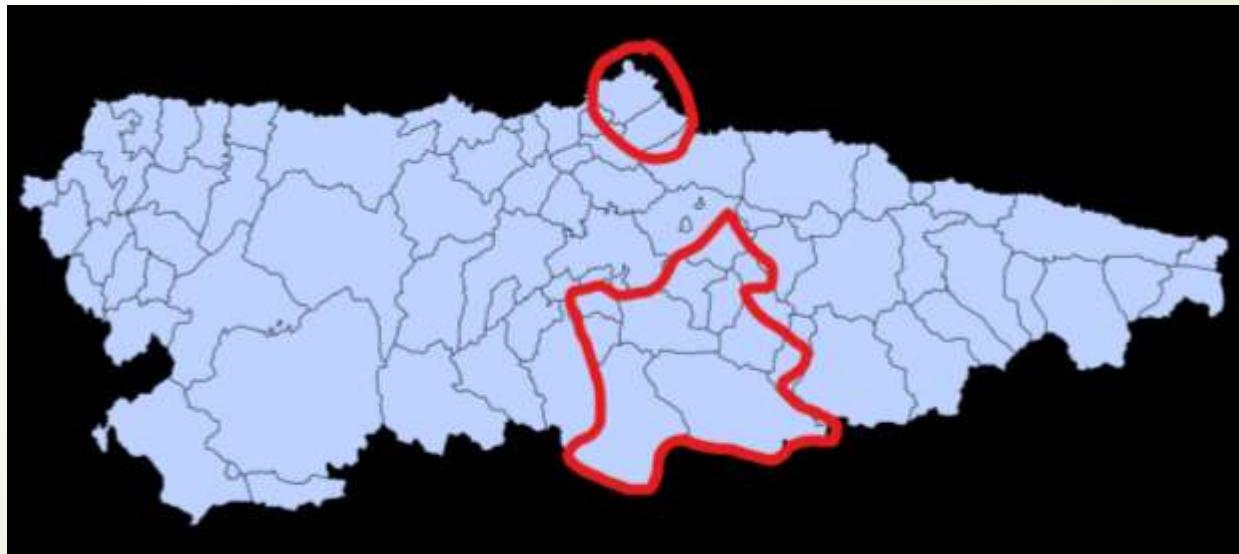
- However, it has been observed that there are some contexts which can sometimes stop the diphthongization:

- 1) + nasal consonant: FŎNTE > *fonte* ('fontaine'); PŎNTE > *ponte* ('pont'); BŎNU > *bonu* ('bon'). BUT: ABSCŎNDO > *escuendo* ('je cache'), RESPŎNDIT > *respuende* ('il répond')...
- 2) + certain types of ‘yod’ (-PJ-, BJ-, -UJ- or ‘yod’ from -CT-): TĚPIDU > *tebiu* ('tiède'); PĚCTU > *pechu* ('poitrine'), CŎCTU > *cochu* ('cuit'), NĔRUIU > *nerviu* ('nerf')... BUT: NŎCTE > *nueche* ('nuit'), \*FŎUEU > *fuexu* ('fosse')...

## ► Umlaut or Metaphony

In Asturian, this term refers to the process in which the stressed vowel of a word closes its openness degree because of the presence of a final vowel [-i] or [-u].

- a) Historical metaphony: it was produced in a Protoromance period and it affected some terms existing in the three Asturian dialects: FĒCĪ > *fici* ('je fis'), UĒNĪ > *vini* ('je suis venu'), PŌSUĪ > *punxi* ('j'ai posé')...
- b) Modern metaphony: it is still an active phenomenon, especially in some central regions.



It can affect any kind of word ended in [-i] or [-u], closing its stressed vowel:

HÖRTU > *güertu* > *güirtu* ('verger')

CAECU > *ciegu* > *ciúgu* ('aveugle')

NİGRU > *negru* > *nigru* ('noir')

SACCU > *sacu* > *socu* / *secu* ('sac')

Sometimes, the metaphoric variant implies a different pragmatic sens (it helps to intensify the meaning):

*Xuan ta llocu* ('Jean est fou')

*Xuan ta llucu* ('Jean est très très très fou !')

# CONSONANTISM

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## 2.2.1.

	-P-	-B-, -V-	-T-	-D-	-C-	-G-
Asturian	β	β, Ø	ð, Ø	ð, Ø	ɣ, Ø	ɣ, Ø
French	v	v	Ø	Ø	Ø	Ø

SAPĒRE > ast. *saber* [β] ('savoir')

LAUARE > ast. *llavar* [β] ('laver') / LIXÍUA > ast. *llixía* [Ø] ('lessive')

UĪTA > ast. *vida* [ð] ('vie') / TOTU > ast. *tou* [Ø] ('tout')

SUDARE > ast. *sudar* [ð] ('suer') / CRUDĒLE > ast. *cruel* [Ø] ('cruel')

SECŪRU > ast. *seguru* [ɣ] ('sûr') / FŌCU > ast. *fueu* [Ø] ('feu')

A(U)GŪSTU > ast. *agostu* [ɣ] ('août') / FATIGARE > ast. *fadiar* [Ø] ('fatiguer')

## 2.2.2.

	L-	-LL-	-L-	N-	-NN-	-N-
Asturian	ʎ	ʎ	l	n, ñ	ŋ	n
French	l	l	l	n	n, Ø	n, Ø

- ▶ LANA > ast. *llana* [ʎ] ('laine') – UILLA > ast. *villa* [ʎ] ('ville') – CAELU > ast. *cielu* ('ciel')
- ▶ \*NATICA > ast. *nalga* [n] or *ñalga* [ɲ] (old fr. *nache*, 'fesse') – ANNU > ast. *añu* [ɲ] ('an') – BÖNU > ast. *bonu* ('bon').

!!! In some Western regions, the L- and -LL- reflex is not articulated [ʎ], but [tʂ] → voiceless retroflex sibilant affricate. It is a kind of cacuminal sound that is very similar to Sardinian ɖɖ

## 2.2.3.

	TJ, CJ, CE, CI	PL-, CL-, FL-	-LJ-	J, DJ, GJ, GE, GI	-CT-
Asturian	θ	λ	j	initial → ſ intervocalic → ſ, j, θ, Ø	tſ
French	s, jz	pl, cl, fl,	λ > j	initial → ʒ intervocalic → j, Ø	jt

ERICIU > *erizu* [θ] ('hérisson') – VICINU > *vecín* [θ] ('voisin') – PUTEU > *pozu* [θ] ('puits')

CLAVE > *llave* [λ] ('clé') – PLANU > *llanu* [λ] ('plain')

MULIERE > *moyer* [j] ('femme') – FOLIA > *fueya* [j] ('feuille')

IOCU > *xuegu* [ʃ] ('jeu') – GELARE > *xelar* [ʃ] ('geler') – RADIU > *rayu* [j] ('rai') – CORRIGIA > *correa* [Ø] ('courroie')...

FILICTU > *felechu* [tʃ] ('fougère') – TECTU > *techu* [tʃ] ('toit')

## 2.3 Morphosyntax

The expression of gender and number

	Singular	Plural
Masculine	<b>-u</b>	<b>-os</b>
Feminine	<b>-a</b>	<b>-es</b>

Ex.:

- ▶ *el llobu* ('le loup') – *la lloba* – *los llobos* – *les llobes*
- ▶ *el cuentu* ('le conte') – *los cuentos*
- ▶ *la camisa* ('le chemise') – *les camises*

► Other noun paradigms

	Singular	Plural
Masculine	-e	-es
Feminine	-a	-es

*el xastre* ('le tailleur') – *los xastres* – *la xastrá* – *les xastres*

	Singular	Plural
Masculine	-consonant	-os / -es
Feminine	-a	-es

*el rapaz* ('le garçon') – *la rapaza* – *los rapazos* – *les rapaces*

*el llabrador* ('le laboureur') – *la llabadora* – *los llabradors* – *les llabradores*

 Adjectives

- Invariable in gender: *l'home triste* ('l'homme triste') / *la mujer triste* ('la femme triste')
- With three endings: *malu*, *mala*, *malo*

The variant ending with the morpheme **-o** is used to express:

- a) Some neutral concordances: *Fumar ye malo* ('Fumer est mauvais')
- b) Semantic difference between the **countable** and the **uncountable** nouns:
  - *El neñu ye altu* ('l'enfant est grand') / *la neña ye alta* ('la fille est grande')
  - *El vinu ta frío* ('le vin est froid')
  - *La lleña ye barato* ('le bois est bon marché')
  - *Xuan compró la carne llandio* ('Jean a acheté la viande tendre')

→ This semantic difference is expressed grammatically through the adjective ONLY in case the adjective is placed AFTER the uncountable noun, but not before: *el vinu frío* / but → *el fríu vinu*

► Unstressed personal pronouns and their position in the sentence

	Direct object	Indirect object
1st singular		<b>me</b>
2nd singular		<b>te</b>
3rd singular	<b>lu, la, lo</b>	<b>-y</b>
1st plural		<b>nos ~ mos</b>
2nd plural		<b>vos</b>
3rd plural	<b>los, les</b>	<b>-yos</b>
Reflexive		<b>se</b>

- In Asturian, unstressed personal pronouns are placed generally in an **enclitic** position, that is, AFTER the verb:
  - *La manta cosiómela Xurde* ('c'est Georges qui m'a cousu la couverture')
  - *Xuan cuénta-y histories a Lluis* ('Jean lui raconte des histoires, à Louis')
  - *Él garró-y lu [el coche]* ('Il la lui a prise, la voiture')
- However, some syntactic contexts require placing the pronouns before the verb (proclitic position):
  - a) Negative sentences: *La manta nun me la cosió Xurde* / *Xuan nun-y cuenta histories a Lluis* / *Él nun-y lu garró [el coche]*.
  - b) Subordinate clauses: *Diz que me la cosió Xurde* ('Il dit que Georges me l'a cousue').
  - c) In case the verb is preceded by certain adverbs: *Siempre me fala de la so vida* ('Il me parle toujours de sa vie') [Note the difference → *Fálame siempre de la so vida*].

 The verb

- One of the main characteristics of the Asturian verbal system is probably its **lack of compound tenses**.
- This system is made of simple forms only, that can express different contents, including not only the imperfect aspect but also the perfect aspect.

*Güei fui a la escuela* ('Aujourd'hui je suis allé à l'école')

*Allégrame que ganáremos la llotería* ('Je suis content que nous ayons gagné à la loterie')

- In Asturian, the etymological meaning of some Latin perfect verbal forms is kept. It is the case of the “plus-que-parfait” form.

- *Cuando llegué, ella yá cantara la canción* [< CANTA(VE)RA(T)] ('Quand je suis arrivé, elle avait déjà chanté la chanson).
- *Él dixeráme munches tonteríes* [< DIXERA(T)] ('Il m'avait dit beaucoup de bêtises')

## 2.4. Vocabulary

- As expected, the great part of Asturian words correspond to the Latin lexical repertory.
- However, the influence of other languages can be detected:
  - a) Pre-roman substrate: *bedul* ('bouleau'), *bierzu* ('berceau'), *carbayu* ('chêne'), etc.
  - b) Superstrata:
    - Germanic: few words can be attached to Germanic influence → *ropa* 'vêtements' (< got. \*RAUPA), *espetu* (= iron stick) (< got. \*SPITUS), etc. The Germanic superstrate is more remarkable in Onomastics:

E.g.: an important number of Asturian toponyms is explained through the syntactic construction (*UILLA*) + *Germanic owner's name* –usually latinized– *in genitive case*: *Villatresmil* (< UILLA + \*TRASEMIRUS in genitive), *Ardaliz* (< (UILLA) + \*ARDARICUS in genitive), *Villarmosén* (< UILLA + \*ERMESINDUS in genitive), etc.

- Arabic: It is usually hard to know if arabisms in Asturian have come directly from Arabic or through Spanish. Sometimes, the Arabic word is taken with the Arabic article integrated, but it has no function as an article in Asturian, which needs to add its own article:

ar. SUKKAR ('sucre') // ar. A-SUKKAR ('le sucre') → ast. azucré // **L'**azucré

ar. BAITAR ('vétérinaire') // ar. AL-BAITAR ('le vétérinaire') → ast. albeitre // **L'**albeitre

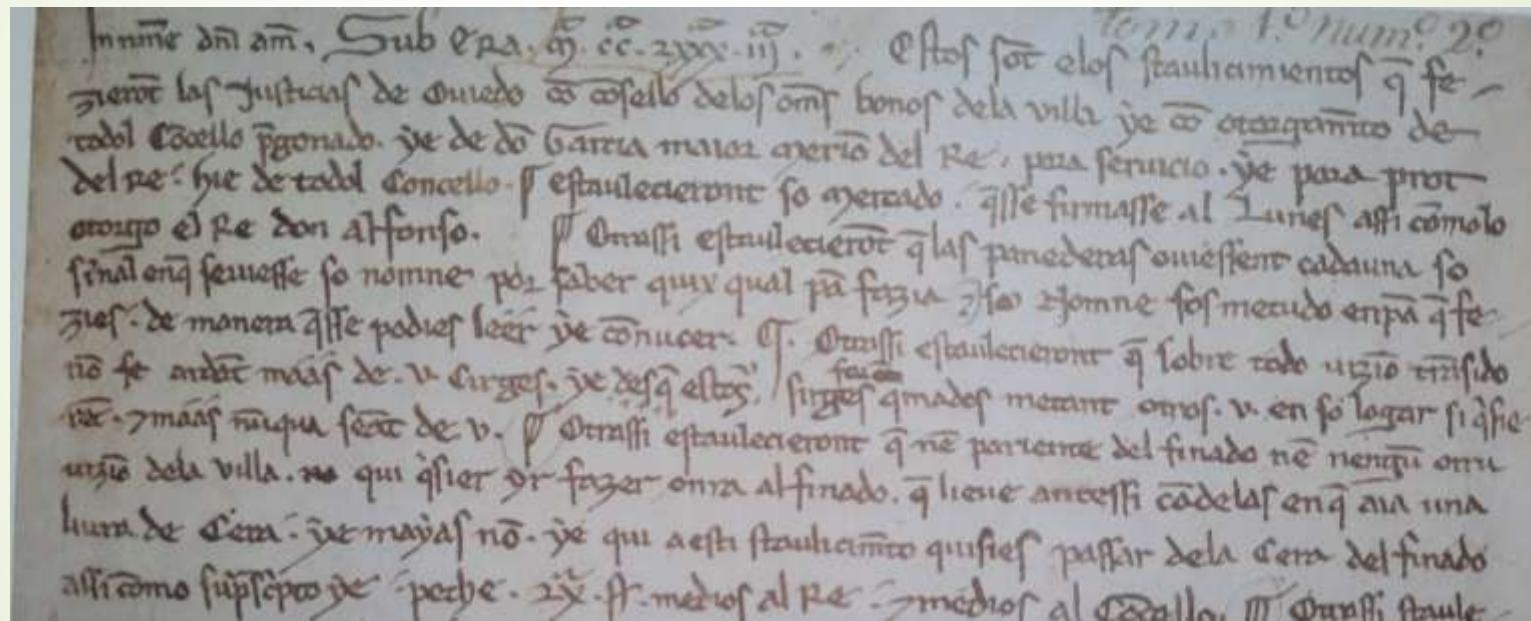
c) The modern influence of different European languages is less important.

- From French: *xofer* (< *chauffeur*), *xarré* (< *charrette*), *chambra* (< (*robe de chambre*)

### 3. Historical sources

- The first Asturian Romance texts preserved are dated from medieval times and are of legal nature (laws, regulations, etc.).
- Most part of these texts were written between the second half of 12<sup>th</sup> century and late 14<sup>th</sup> century.
- Since the last decades of 14<sup>th</sup> century, the administrative texts produced in the former Kingdom of León (previously the Kingdom of Asturias) were hispanicized, due to political and historical reasons, as the new Kingdom of Castilla was assuming almost all power in the non-Arab part of the Peninsula.

- *Fueru d'Avilés*: it is a kind of law promoted by the King Alfonso VII in the year 1155 to the city of Avilés. This text has Occitan influences.
- *Fueru Xulgu*: it is the Asturian translation of the *Forum Iudicum* (a Visigothic law collection), made in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.
- *Municipal regulations of Uviéu (13<sup>th</sup> century)*



*"In nomine domini amen Sub era M CC LXXX III (...) Otrassi estauleceriont que nen pariente del finado nen nengun otru vizino dela uilla qui quisier yr fazer onra al finado que lieue antesi candelas en que aia una liura de cera ye mayas non. ye qui a esti staulicimiento quisies pasar dela cera del finado assi como suprascripto ye peche. 2x. p. medios al re. 3 medios al concello. III Otrassi staule-*

- No fully Asturian literary texts are known in medieval ages, but there are some epic and lyric poems which contain lots of Asturian linguistic features: *Poema de Elena y María*, *El Libro de Alexandre*...
- The first literary text kept, fully written in modern Asturian, is the poem “Cuando esamen les abeyes” (year 1639), by Antón de Marirreguera. From then until today, there has been literary tradition in Asturian language without interruption, although with different textual productivity depending on the time.



*Cuando esamen les abeyes  
y posen de flor en flor  
si les escurren s'espanten  
vanse y non facen llabor,  
dexando 'l caxello vieyo  
pa buscar otro meyor.  
Santa Olalla fo l'abeya  
que de Mérida ensamó  
enfadada qu'adorasen  
les fegures de llatón.*

## 4. Social situation and legal status

- The Asturian language lives in a **diglossic situation** since late 14<sup>th</sup> century, when Spanish started to be the language chosen by the central administration as the main language in communication among the social higher classes, politics, texts...
- Consequently, → Spanish is seen as the “high” language // Asturian is seen as a useless language, that remains mostly in intimate or familiar environments.
- During 18<sup>th</sup> century, Gaspar Melchor de Xovellanos wrote about the historic and cultural value of Asturian, urging the compilation of a dictionary and a standard grammar and the creation of a language academy, but he was unsuccessful. The first Asturian standard grammar was written by Xuan Xunquera Güergo in **1869**.
- The 20<sup>th</sup> century is unfortunately marked by the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the Francoist dictatorship (1939-1975). The fascist government leaded by Franco considered Spanish as the only language of the “Nation” and pursued and punished the communication in the different languages of Spain (Galician, Asturian, Catalan, Basque).



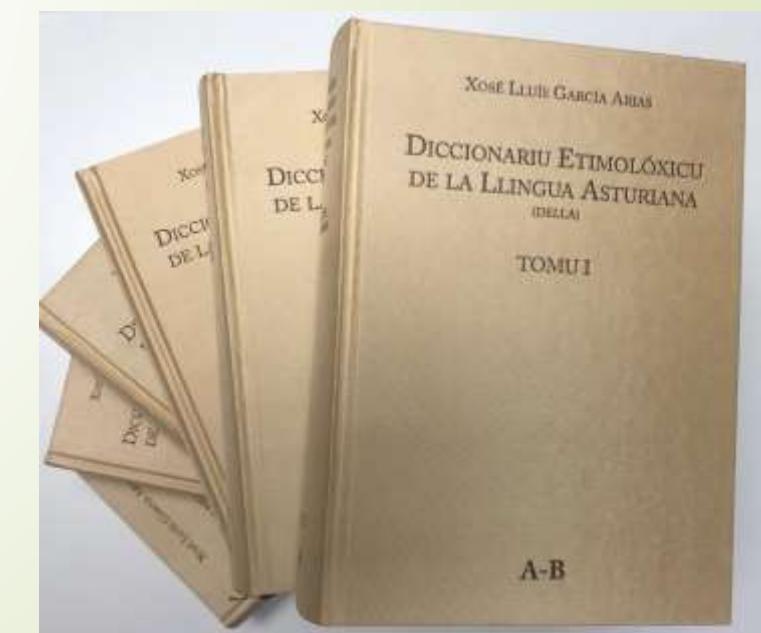
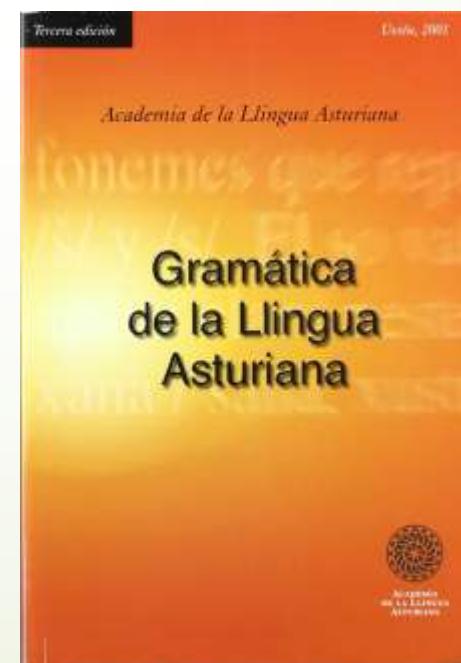
*“Si eres español, habla español”* (‘Si tu es espagnol, parle espagnol’)



- “*Hable bien. Sea patriota – No sea bárbaro. (...) Viva España y la disciplina y nuestro idioma cervantino*” (‘Parle bien. Sois un patriote – Ne sois pas un barbare (...) Vive l’Espagne, et la discipline et notre langue de Cervantes’)

# Modern standardization process

- ▶ Many efforts have been made since the end of the Francoist period in 1975 to protect and promote Asturian.
- ▶ The Academy of the Asturian Language (*Academia de la Llingua Asturiana* <http://www.academiadelallingua.com/>) was created in 1980 and it was in charge of setting the standard language. The Academy published the *Grammar*, the normative *Dictionary* and many serial publications (journals, newsletters...). The most important philological masterpiece about Asturian has been recently published: the *Diccionariu Etimolóxicu de la Llingua Asturiana* (© Xosé Lluis García Arias).



## Normative sources:

- ▶ (2000), *Diccionariu de la Llingua Asturiana*, Uviéu, ALLA (<http://www.academiadelalingua.com/diccionariu/index.php>)
- ▶ (2001<sup>3</sup>) *Gramática de la Llingua Asturiana*, Uviéu, ALLA (<http://www.academiadelalingua.com/gramatica-de-la-llingua-asturiana/>)
- ▶ (2012<sup>7</sup>) *Normes ortográfiques*, Uviéu, ALLA ([Normes Ortográfiques – Academia de la Llingua Asturiana](#))

## Other sources:

- ▶ DGLA = Xosé Lluis García Arias (2002–2004), *Diccionario general de la lengua asturiana*, Oviedo, Editorial Prensa Asturiana/La Nueva España (<http://mas.lne.es/diccionario>).
- ▶ García Arias, Xosé Lluis (2003), *Gramática histórica de la lengua asturiana. Fonética, fonología e introducción a la morfosintaxis histórica*, Uviéu, ALLA.
- ▶ García Arias, Xosé Lluis (2005), *Toponimia asturiana: el porqué de los nombres de nuestros pueblos*, Oviedo, Editorial Prensa Asturiana (<https://mas.lne.es/toponimia/>).

- During the last 40 years, the Asturian language has been gaining more and more spaces in public life: it can be studied at Primary and Secondary school and at the University; it appears in the regional TV, in advertising campaigns...



- BUT, according to the Spanish Constitution (= the supreme Law), Asturian it is not “officially” recognized, at the same level as Spanish, Catalan, Galician or Basque. The “official degree” is the highest legal status that the Spanish Constitution and the Asturian Statute of Autonomy can give to a language. A large part of Asturian society has been asking for this official recognition since the last four decades.



¡Muchas gracias!

Merci beaucoup !

Thank you very much!