



The Influence of Al-Andalus in the Spanish Language and Literature

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Andalusi Poetry: Kharja, Muwashshah and Zajal

There were three important types of poems in the Al-Andalus times:

Kharja (*jarcha* — *أخرجة*)

These were short poems written in colloquial Arab or Mozarabic. They were usually at the end of the *moaxajas*.

*“Báayse méw quorazón de mib. My heart has left me,
;Yā Rabb, šī še me tōrnarād? Oh Lord, will you transform me?
;Tan māl me dólēd li-l-habīb! So great is my pain for my beloved!
Enfermo yéd: ;kuánd šanarád?” It is sick, when will it be cured?*

—Kharja by Yehuda Halevi

Muwashshah (*moaxaja* — *موشح*)

These were significantly longer and more complex poems than the kharjas. They were usually written in Classical Arabic. *Moaxajas* were closed by a kharja as the one below.

Zajal (*zéjel* — *زجل*)

Zéjel poems were colloquial short songs. They usually came in the shape of a short chorus and some other verses. It was afterwards adopted by different reputable poets throughout the history of Spanish literature.

Andalusi Poetry and Spanish Poetry

These types of poems had a great influence in the upcoming generations of writers and poets, especially during the Renaissance. This influence can be seen in the structure of the texts, as well as in the topics that they cover.

Villancicos are a great example of this influence. Structurally they are very similar to *zéjel* poems. They have a chorus (*estribillo*), and other stanzas called *coplas*.

Apart from that, the topics covered in all of these kinds of poems are fairly similar, due to their folk origin.

Also similar are the **cantigas de amigo**, which are short folk songs of Galician-Portuguese origin, though very popular in Castille. In the same way as *zéjel* poems, the *cantigas* have short choruses.

*Riu, riu, chiu,
La guarda ribera,
Dios guardó del lobo
a nuestra cordera.*

*El lobo rabioso
La quiso morder,
Mas Dios poderoso
La supo defender,*

*Quizole hazer que
No pudiesse pecar,
Ni aun original
Esta virgen no tuviera.*

*Riu, riu, chiu,
La guarda ribera,
Dios guarde del lobo
a nuestra cordera.*

—Villancico attributed to Mateo Flecha el Viejo (c. 1500)

*¡Ay fortuna,
cógeme esta aceituna!*

*Aceituna lisonjera
verde y tierna por defuera,
y por dentro de madera,
¡fruta dura e importuna!*

*¡Ay fortuna,
cógeme esta aceituna!*

*Fruta en madurar tan larga
que sin aderezo amarga;
y aunque se coja una carga,
se ha de comer sola una.*

*¡Ay fortuna,
cógeme esta aceituna!*

—Modern *zéjel* by Lope de Vega (c. 1615)

chorus

Arabic Influence in the Spanish Language

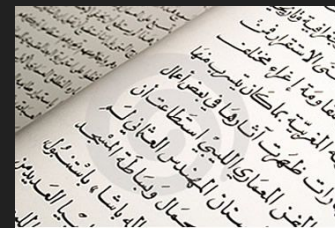
The Arabs arrived in Spain in the year 711, bringing their language along with them. The sudden contact of Arabic and Spanish soon formed a mix of the two, the **Mozarabic language**.

This language was mostly spoken at a colloquial level, because Arabic was still the official language. This caused a big part of the vocabulary, expressions and phrases of Arabic origin to remain even to this day in the lexicon of the modern Spanish language.

Between the years 711 and 1492 the Arabs had a stable presence in the Iberian Peninsula. Even after the fall of the Kingdom of Granada, the close coexistence lasted until the eviction of the Moorish in 1609.



Arabic Influence in the Spanish Language



Arabic had a great influence on the Spanish language. Nowadays, every Spanish speaker will be using hundreds of words of Arabic origin. These kinds of words amount to a total of about 4000, that is, around 4% of the entire lexicon.

Some curious cases in Spanish are the numerous *doublets* in which we find pairs of words, one of Arabic origin and the other Latin, to designate the same thing:

alcázar rough equivalents *castillo*
(from Hispanic Arabic *alqáṣr*, 'fortress') (from Latin *castellum*, 'castle')

From a linguistic point of view, Arabic words in Spanish are in very specific categories. Most are nouns and place names, and there are very few adjectives and verbs. As for prepositions, we will only find one: *hasta*, 'up to, until' (from Hispanic Arabic *ḥattá*).

<i>Words of Arabic origin</i>	
Nouns	<i>aceite, alcalde, alcohol, albañil, barrio, jabalí, sandía, tambor...</i>
Toponyms	<i>Alhambra, Almería, Alcalá, Murcia, Benidorm, Calatayud...</i>
Other words	<i>ojalá, mezuqino, gandul, acicalar...</i>

Arabic Influence in the Spanish Language

A very big part of these words of Arabic origin are introduced by the form *al-*, the definite article in Arabic, much like *the* in English.

alacena, albahaca, albañil, alberca, albóndiga, albornoz, alcachofa, alcalde, alcantarilla, alcoba, alcohol, alhelí, alférez, alféizar, alfombra, algodón, aljibe, almíbar, almohada, añil, alquiler...

Classical Arabic **qāḍī** ('magistrate, judge')



Hispanic Arabic **alqāḍī** ('the mayor')



Modern Spanish **alcalde** ('mayor')

It is also important to know that most of the vocabulary of Arabic origin is restricted to just a few different topics. These are the most common ones:

- Water and hydraulic resources.
- Plants, trees, crops, etc.
- Craftsmanship.
- Trading, business and commerce.
- Science.
- Cult and religion.

More on this: <https://go.albertonl.com/spanish-arabisms>
(automatic English translation, may be inaccurate)

Thank you!

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