

Boletín 111 by olliemfl

www.boletin.co.uk

The importance of family in Spain. Young people's worries. Spanish values. Women in a "live and let live" liberalist society. Francoism. In this week's Boletín author Giles Tremlett shares his insight on a range of A Level Spanish related topics.

👋 **Welcome to Boletín**, an English-language newsletter covering historical, cultural and topical stories related to the A Level Spanish course. These newsletters accompany a student worksheet which can be downloaded [here](#). This week:

1. Edition 111 of Boletín (the three texts)
2. Tier 2 & 3 vocabulary, grammar search for students and A Level structures.
3. An interview with Giles Tremlett.

📌 Edition 111.

Giles Tremlett is an author, historian and journalist. He is known for his writings on Spain with books such as *Ghosts of Spain* (not a ghost story as a lady in the gym once asked) and *España: A Brief History of Spain*. His most recent [long read](#) for The Guardian, an investigative piece trying to solve the 40-year-old mystery of three children abandoned at a train station, has clocked up close to 2 million reads. In Spain he is a regular current affairs commentator on the radio and on television. All of this is to say I was **very lucky** to be able to speak with him during half-term break. I hope you enjoy the interview!

Boletín #111

An interview with author and journalist Giles Tremlett.

*Family in Spain.
Young people's worries.
Transatlantic slavery.
Women post-1975.
Francoism.
plus more!*



In the interview Giles shares his thoughts on:

1. Languages in everyday life.
2. Spanish traditions.

3. Transatlantic slavery in the 19th Century.
4. Spanish values.
5. What do young people in Spain care about?
6. The role of family in Spain.
7. Women in Spanish society.
8. Integrating into Madrid.
9. Franco/Primo de Rivera and the Falange.
10. Traces of Francoism in modern day Spain.

But first, for those who don't download the student worksheet, here are the three texts based on the interview.

Francoism and Falangism.

En 1936 hubo un golpe de estado militar liderado por el ejército y uno de los líderes fue Franco. Necesitaban contar con el apoyo de otros grupos de extrema derecha y les hacían falta una ideología porque eran simplemente reaccionarios en el sentido de que reaccionaban en contra de un gobierno democrático izquierdista que no les gustaba y que pensaban que llevaría el marxismo a España. Por lo tanto, en busca de sustentar ideológicamente su nuevo régimen recurrieron en gran medida a la Iglesia Católica, al nacionalismo y a la Falange, que era la versión española del fascismo.

La familia española.

Ahora estoy muy acostumbrado a una sociedad en la que todos cuidan y se preocupan por sus abuelos, primos, tíos, tías, etc. Hay muchas familias británicas así, pero en España es algo más general que ayuda a crear una estructura social más firme. La familia en España es una red de seguridad, ya que no tenemos un sistema de bienestar tan avanzado como el de Gran Bretaña u otras partes del norte de Europa, por lo que la familia en ese sentido también es vital en el sentido literal. Necesitas a tu familia para poder sobrevivir y superar tiempos difíciles y apuros. Todo el mundo lo sabe y les parece natural y normal.

La integración.

Puedo ver a mi alrededor que Madrid está cambiando. Se está volviendo mucho más internacional y hay cada vez más gente que habla inglés y que no se esfuerza en hablar español. Cualquiera que sea musulmán, negro o que provenga de una cultura muy diferente a la cultura española le costará a la hora de integrarse. En ese sentido, lo he tenido muy fácil. El racismo existe prácticamente en todas partes, y ciertamente existe en España. A menudo, los españoles suelen afirmar que no son racistas, pero eso se debe a que no se detienen a preguntarse cuáles son las diferentes manifestaciones del racismo.

🔑 Tier 2 & 3 vocabulary.

- Recurrir (vb) - *to turn to, to resort to.*
- El ejército (nms) - *the army, the armed forces.*

- Hacer falta (vb) - *to need, to lack, to be missing.*
- Sustentar (vb) - *to underpin, support.*
- Una red de seguridad (nfs) - *a safety net.*
- Sobrevivir (vb) - *to survive.*
- Superar (vb) - *to overcome, get through.*
- Apuros (nmp) - *hard times, hardships, predicaments.*
- Provenir (vb) - *to come from.*
- Costarse (vb) - *to find difficult (to do something).*

Grammar to look out for.

1. The present continuous.
 2. The present perfect.
 3. The imperfect tense.
 4. The preterite tense.
 5. Relative pronoun *que*.
 6. Intensifiers.
 7. The present tense.
 8. Adjectives.
 9. Use of *ser* (characteristic) and *estar* (feeling/emotion).
-

A Level structures.

The first A Level structure this week is to do with the verb *volver* which in most cases means *to return* or *to come back*. However, when followed by an adjective or if the verb includes the suffix *-se* (*volverse*) the meaning changes to *to become* or *to turn*. There are many nuanced ways to use it. The easiest thing is to check WordReference which lists [them all](#).

Example:

1. *Madrid se está volviendo más internacional (Madrid is becoming more international).*
2. *Me estaba volviendo impaciente (I was becoming impatient).*
3. *Recientemente me he estado volviendo más consciente del (Recently I've started to become more aware of)*

The second structure is *hay cada vez más/menos* which is a lot easier to explain. This can be used to say *there are more and more/less and less* or *there are increasingly more/less* of something.

Example:

1. *Hay cada vez menos gente que fuma (there are less and less people who smoke).*
2. *Hay cada vez más divorcios (there are more and more divorces).*
3. *Hay cada vez menos creyentes (there are less and less believers)*

 **An interview with Giles Tremlett.**

I thought a good place to start would be introducing exactly who will be reading this. They're most likely sat in a UK classroom, aged between 16-18 and studying A Level Spanish. They studied all the core grammar and topics at GCSE and are now faced with the, until now, largely unexplored cultural/societal side of the A Level. So, it's unlikely to reach the 1.6 million+ reads your most recent long read Guardian piece achieved but I know your in-depth insight will be valuable to the readers. I wonder if you could introduce yourself to the readership with a little background on yourself.

My name is Giles Tremlett. I'm a writer and journalist. I've lived in Madrid since 1992 and now have Spanish nationality. I've worked as correspondent for the Guardian and correspondent for the Economist and more recently of the last ten years I basically write books mostly about Spanish history and write what they call long-form journalism which is pretty much what it says on the tin, very long pieces of journalism.

Do you have a favourite Spanish word or idiomatic phrase?

Well, the trouble is a lot of them are filthy.

Okay, "Nadie me quita lo bailado" in other words nobody can take away all the dancing that I've already done. It means it doesn't matter what happens in the future, but my past life has been good, and nothing can change the fact however miserable my future life might be, nothing can change the fact I've had a good life up to now.

How do you use languages in your day-to-day life?

Well, languages are vital to me in my day-to-day life. I exist jointly in Spanish and English. I wish, like your students, I had learnt Spanish at school but alas in my day if you were good at languages, they made you take your exams quickly so you didn't have to do them anymore. So I did French and Latin to O Level which I took when I was 14/15, I think. Languages are completely vital to me. I also speak Portuguese which comes up when I want to report in or about Portugal and over the years, I have taught myself to read certainly French, Italian, and last year I was even studying Romani which is the language of the Roma people. Later in life I've become very interested in language and it's become vital to me.

Of the co-official Spanish languages which one would you most like to speak?

I'd love to speak Euskera. I'd love to be able to speak Basque. I love listening to Gallego because I can hear the Spanish and Portuguese coexisting and I'm very used to listening to and reading Catalan. Ideally, I'd speak them all. I think Spain's languages make the country much richer even though many Spaniards would disagree with me.

What have you found to be the biggest misconception about Spain?

There are probably two. One is a sort of warped view of Spanish history as bloody, violent, cruel, and nasty and that somehow that is a Spanish trait. Perhaps the other one is that you can come to Spain and speak English and expect everyone to understand you just by talking louder.

What is your favourite Spanish tradition?

Drinking in bars or having coffee in cafes which may sound banal but it's very important.

What is the strangest Spanish tradition?

*I've seen lots of very strange things, I'm not sure they're completely Spanish in the wider sense but I think in *Ghosts of Spain* I describe a procession from a church in Galicia where people were basically carried around in coffins as part of some kind of ceremony of thanks for having their prayers for good health answered. It's very strange. If I was going to choose a favourite, it would be rounding up wild horses in Galicia and Asturias.*

You've written about Spain's past, the International Brigades and recently a brief history of Spain. If you had unlimited time and resources, what other aspects of Spanish history would you like to delve into?

I think it would be fascinating to go back to Muslim Spain. We haven't, and I'm planning to write about this, really had a conversation in Spain about transatlantic slavery which Spain started and finished. Where Spain accounted for 3x as many enslaved people shipped from Africa across the Atlantic as ever landed in the United States.

How is that not more widely known?

That's a very good question, I'm planning to write about it soon. In the 19th century more than 800,000 enslaved people were transported to Cuba, which of course was Spain. And if you look at the records for the number of enslaved people who reached what is now the United States the kind of accepted figure is around 430/440/450,000. Almost half as many as Spain, in terms of Cuba, in the 19th century alone.

WJEC Theme 1: Being a young person in Spanish speaking societies (values, issues, employment).

Are there any values/characteristics you consider distinctly Spanish?

No, I think all values are shared somewhere with somebody else, so I don't think there are values which are specifically Spanish. There are values that, if like me you are brought up being British, there are certain Spanish values which you think are great! They tend to revolve around family and sociability. Doing things in groups rather than as sad and lonely individuals.

What are the issues affecting young Spanish people? What's do they care about?

I think largely they care about the same things as young people in Britain. They care about their own futures, they care about the future of the planet and perhaps what makes them

different, on average, is that they probably care a lot more about family going up and down and across the generations, than your average British person.

What have you learnt about the role of the family in Spain?

I'm not sure whether learn is the right word here but put it this way I'm now very used to a society in which everyone naturally cares and minds about their grandparents or their cousins and their uncles and aunts. This actually fits the model of my own family anyway, because there are lots of British families like that too, but here it's just a more general thing which is very lovely and creates a firmer social structure. Family in Spain is the safety net, we don't have as advanced a welfare system as Britain or other parts of Northern Europe so family in that sense is also vital in the literal sense. You need your family to be able to survive and get through hard times. Everybody knows that and it seems natural and normal to them.

We study the film *Volver* by Almodóvar which features a very resilient strong female lead. In *Ghosts of Spain* you said you had questions yourself about how women had fared moving from post-fundamentalist Catholicism to a 'live and let live' liberalist society. What did you learn?

Well, that's something I said 15 years ago but it's very interesting actually I think Spain has had a massive social revolution over the last fifty years. Women in many ways have led that social revolution. You can see for example some very basic things like the employment rate of women comparing Spain to Italy. When Franco died, just before democracy came back, much fewer Spanish women were working than Italian women and now many more Spanish women are working than Italian women. What I'm not so sure of is that men have realised. Women have soared ahead but that doesn't mean that they're now able to share all the other responsibilities of life that already fell in their lap like child rearing and running a house.

WJEC theme 3: Diversity and difference.

You once described yourself as an *integrated outsider*. Is your integration into the community, in Madrid, typical of other "outsiders'" experiences?

Probably not in the sense that I have a public persona. I take part in television debates and on the radio, present books and give talks so in that sense it's not very similar but I think on another level it is very similar for my generation of immigrant and British people, because that's what we are we've migrated from one country to another, and we are immigrants in Spain. I can see that changing around me though, I can see Madrid becoming far more international. Many more people speaking English, many more people not bothering to speak Spanish and so it may be that generationally my experience is very different to anybody who arrives now.

Which group of people has the toughest time integrating into the community?

Anybody who is Muslim or black or comes from a culture that's different or very different from Spanish culture. In that sense I've had it easy if not very easy. I'm not sure I'd say that Spain is a more or less racist country than Britain because I haven't lived in Britain for a long time, but racism exists pretty much everywhere, and it certainly exists in Spain. Spaniards often like to claim that they're not racist but that's because they don't stop to ask themselves what the different manifestations of racism are.

Theme 4: The Two Spains.

Which Civil War story has impacted you the most or for you is the most memorable?

Well, funnily enough you talked of your own family and people walking across the Pyrenees and I've heard many stories of families who had to do that. You can dive into the photographic archives and find very moving images of that happening. A friend of mine's mother tells stories about walking across the Pyrenees in the snow, as a child, past the bodies of those who had died and frozen on the way. On another level, the whole story of the International Brigades I find fascinating which is why I've written a book about it but in many ways that's not Spanish history it's international history or British history or American history or Welsh history.

Are you able to demystify the Franco/Primo de Rivera/Falange relationship?

Okay, so there was basically a right-wing military uprising which was led by the military and one of those leaders was Franco and they needed to bring in everybody else on the far-right. They also needed some kind of ideology because they didn't have one. They were just reactionaries in the sense that they were reacting against a left-wing democratic government that they didn't like and which they thought would bring Marxism to Spain. So, looking for a sort of ideological underpinning of their new regime, they turned to the Catholic church largely, to nationalism and to the Falange which was the Spanish version of fascism.

You wrote “the events in Spain marked the definitive end of Francoism” in reference to the attempted coup in 1981 by Tejero. I recently came across a disagreement online between two people based on your statement. One said “The journalist is wrong: Francoism didn't die that day. It has not been unrooted from the Spanish institutions of power”. Which got me thinking: is there any trace of Francoism left in modern day Spain?

Yes, because not all the laws have been rewritten and as the critical voice in that conversation knows most structures of power and influence don't just disappear overnight, they have a lot of inertia attached to them so in that sense they're right. Francoism will never be 100% eradicated not least because it was a kind of socially accepted phenomenon for a large number of Spaniards so in that sense it doesn't disappear at all.

Many Spaniards will spend the coming centuries arguing over whether it was a good thing or a bad thing but in terms of being a threat to democracy and preventing Spain being a full and proper member of the Western Democratic Alliance I would stand by that statement and even amplify it to say it's sort of the end Spain's post-imperial chaos.

The draft Democratic Memory law last year saw an amendment with the inclusion of the line “desarrollando en los libros de texto y materiales curriculares la represión que se produjo durante la Guerra y la Dictadura”. What do you think it's necessary that Spanish school children learn about Franco?

The easiest answer is a lot because he is the key figure of Spanish history in the last few centuries. Because Francoism itself lasted so long that some parts of it became socially ingrained and because that's what everybody's grandparents lived through, so you'll understand your grandparents and what their lives were like. I'll go back to this theme that

preoccupies me at the moment. Learn to see Francoism in a far wider lens that looks at Spain's imperial history, Spain started falling apart at the beginning of the 19th century and it took a century and a half, almost two centuries to digest that completely. A quarter of that space, or a fifth of it, is occupied by Francoism. In a way it's a continuation of other moments of the whole process of post-imperial decline and reaction.

Can Franco be credited for doing anything which was good for Spain?

Yes, he can be credited with improving the social security network with the construction of social housing, with the building of dams and irrigation systems. It's difficult to be in charge for 40 years and not do something useful but it's important that people should be able to weigh these things and know that the purpose of Francoism, wasn't certainly in the francoist minds, to make Spaniards miserable and keep them in poverty. Quite the opposite, just that they weren't very good at it until about 1960. Spain's economy did take off hugely after that. Some people will argue that Francoism was miraculous in that sense but actually if you stick on a graph with GDP per capita, in other words how wealthy individual Spaniards were compared to Italians or the Portuguese, you'll see that actually from 1936 – 1975 Italians improved much more than Spaniards and also the Portuguese did so there was a Southern European boom in which Spain did worse than its neighbouring countries.

Student feedback

Students, I need your help. Please, if you have some time, can you provide me some feedback on Boletín so that I can make it better. Teachers, if you could pass this link on to your students I'd be eternally grateful! It should take about 4 minutes to complete.

👉 Student voice [Microsoft form](#).
