

Is English replacing Spanish at universities in Spain?

Keywords: lingua franca, English, Spanish, domain loss, multilingualism

Abstract:

The proposed talk focuses on the increasing hegemony of English as a lingua franca in academic contexts in Spain. Due to a combination of intense pressures on researchers to publish almost exclusively in English in high impact journals, growing demand from students who have been educated in bilingual primary and secondary education, and the ongoing process of internationalization of Higher Education, a Mediterranean country such as Spain is increasingly surrendering Spanish as its academic language in favour of the use of English as a Medium of Instruction and the language of research. Flexible European and international citizenship requires a strong command of English which is increasingly no longer seen as a foreign language belonging exclusively to the English-speaking world, but rather as a basic skill which is essential to stand a chance in a highly competitive job market. New linguistic demands have arisen with the growing implantation in the Spanish university system of EMI degrees, and the concomitant requirements made of the prospective students and teaching staff on these degree programmes in terms of language certification and entrance tests that must be passed in order to be accepted to study or teach on these degree programmes.

In Spain, unlike other European countries, there is currently no sense of domain loss or significant concerns about the academic/scientific status of Spanish, and only the Spanish Royal Academy and similar organizations such as Fundéu (Foundation for Urgent Spanish) struggle in vain to resist the spread of Anglicisms in every sphere of Spanish-speaking life. There is very little popular resistance to this in comparison to other European countries such as France or Italy, and what resistance there is stems mainly from the minority language communities such as Catalan and Basque. English as a lingua franca continues to be legitimized in a country where the most highly educated young people often expect to migrate to find work or at the very least know that they will have to be ready to work in an English-speaking professional environment. This renegotiation of languages clearly reflects the demands of Spanish society stakeholders in universities, students and their parents, employers, as well educational policy makers on a regional and national level, and this phenomenon raises a number of questions regarding language change and cultural ideologies which I will attempt to address in the proposed talk.