

English in Spain: Education, attitudes and native-speakerism

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Abstract

Spain has traditionally featured rather low in the rankings measuring the knowledge of English by European citizens, and yet English has been constantly entering different areas of Spanish life and in all levels of education. This article delves into the efforts made at different levels of education to enable school graduates to communicate in English without difficulty. It focuses on how young people conceptualise English: their attitudes towards the language and to what extent they associate it with Inner Circle countries, or whether instead they see it as a tool for international communication. This discussion is complemented with an analysis of the pervasiveness of 'native-speakerism' in Spanish society, which we claim acts as another handicap to the normalisation of the use of English as a lingua franca by Spanish citizens in multicultural settings within and outside the country.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Spain is a country in Southern Europe with a population of 47 million citizens, and its official language, Spanish, is one of the top world languages, spoken as a first language by more than 400 million speakers and widely learned as a foreign language. The demand for Spanish has constantly increased in the last decades due to the economic and cultural growth of Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America and its wide presence as a heritage language in the United States. However, a few other local languages are also spoken within Spain, and they are co-official in the

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respective regions where they have historically been spoken. Catalan is a co-official language in the regions of Catalonia, Valencian Community¹ and Balearic Islands, Basque is recognised in the Basque Country and Navarre, and Galician in Galicia. By adding up all the population living in these officially bilingual communities, we find that 41.1% of Spanish citizens inhabit in officially bilingual areas. By far, Catalan is the local language with the broadest presence in the country, with an official status for 13.8 million people (29.4% of the total Spanish population). The remaining 5.5 million citizens are rather evenly spread between Galicia and the two Basque-speaking regions altogether.

The main implication of these figures with regard to English is that for 41.1% of Spanish citizens, English is not their second language but their third language. The school systems in all those six regions provide compulsory education in at least three languages, the two local languages plus English, which is currently offered as a compulsory foreign language in practically all schools in the country. It is often accompanied by an offer of other optional languages, which typically are French and/or German, with a very recent trend of some schools introducing Chinese. Nevertheless, the number of students taking these optional foreign languages is rather low in comparison to those taking English. By way of illustration, we may refer to Lasagabaster's (2005) reporting of 6% of Basque students taking French as a second foreign language, followed by German, with a mere 0.1%, and his concluding remark that 'the supremacy of English over other foreign languages in the Basque educational system is definitive, and this situation can be extrapolated to the whole of Spain' (Lasagabaster, 2005, p. 312).

This article aims to explore the current situation of English in Spain, a territory within the expanding circle that shows certain peculiarities in this respect. Thus, in order to provide a holistic view of the status of English in the country, we start by delving into its historical evolution, followed by an analysis of the position of English across all levels of education. In third place, attitudes to English and prevailing 'native-speakerist' attitudes are examined. Finally, the article scrutinises the views of prospective English language teachers and the impact of societal understandings of the role of English on their identities.

2 | SPAIN'S LOVE AND HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH ENGLISH

Globalisation and its consequent expansion of world Englishes has affected practically all spheres of Spanish society in the last decades. From the increasing adoption of 'bilingual programs' (where 'bilingual' means first language/s + English) to the introduction of English-medium instruction (EMI) programs and the demand for certified English language proficiency in a vast amount of job applications, Spain seems to have followed the same Englishisation trend as other European countries, and the presence of English in society is increasing year after year. However, the relationship of Spaniards with English is rather complex. In the following lines, we will expand and comment on the reasons that may account for such complexity and the challenge experienced by citizens of a country who see and accept the desirable nature of English and at the same time resist to Englishisation in multiple subtle (and no so subtle) ways.

2.1 | A historical overview

Spain has traditionally featured rather low in the rankings measuring the knowledge of English by citizens of different European countries. It is not easy to determine the exact causes for this, but there are several characteristic elements of Spanish history and culture that have been drawn as possible explanations for the low percentage of proficient speakers of English in Spain compared to most European countries. Some of these are the habit of watching dubbed films and TV instead of being exposed to the original version with subtitles, the history of empire, a traditionally isolationist culture, the perceived lack of need to learn foreign languages. These contribute to an attitudinal general frame that is not particularly fostering the development of English proficiency among Spanish people, including youngsters, a great number of which struggle with their English education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The relationship of Spain with English could well be described as marked by love and hate. This could be traced back to historical conflicts between Spain and England, most iconically represented by the defeat of the Spanish Armada near the Irish

coasts in the 16th century, and the Battle of Trafalgar, more than 200 years later, which marked the naval supremacy of England over other European nations for the whole 19th century. The latent territorial conflict for the control of the small piece of land called Gibraltar, in British hands since the 18th century, has not helped in creating an atmosphere of trust and mutual recognition between Spain and the United Kingdom.

The reluctance with which Spanish people have embraced English as an international language and the low figures in published surveys of knowledge of English (EF, 2021) may be partly attributed to the imperialistic past of Spain, which at a particular time in history was in direct competition with the emergent British Empire, and yet, three further reasons may be argued to have contributed to such reluctance. The first comes as a direct consequence of history, the Spanish Empire, and the subsequent spread of the Spanish language in a good deal of countries in the Americas, which has positioned Spanish as the second language with the highest number of first-language (L1) speakers (after Chinese), and the third (after English and Chinese) if we take into account the total number of speakers. The second reason can be traced to the political isolation and economic deprivation after the Spanish Civil War in the mid-20th century. The country was ruled by a fascist regime and was for a long time cut out from the rest of Europe. It only started opening up to the world and reaching out politically and economically in the 1960s. The third reason that can be observed to have contributed to the lack of social enthusiasm for English learning in Spain is the geographical proximity to France, combined with a traditional Spanish admiration for the values, society, national pride and organisation of the neighbouring country. Such proximity and admiration made French a strong competitor to English until the very end of the 20th century, when it was evident that no other language could compete with English in its global spread. Ever since that time, when it was clear to Spanish society that French had lost the international language battle and that English was the only reasonable first choice in foreign language education, Spanish society and educational authorities have struggled to change the established parochial dynamics of lack of social interest in foreign languages and promote the learning of English among its citizens, particularly the younger ones.

The last quarter of the 20th century saw a boom in the development of the country in all relevant aspects: politically, the country joined major international institutions, such as NATO in 1982, and the European Economic Community (ECC, now EU) in 1983; economically, the GDP grew steadily as a direct consequence of joining the ECC; educationally, the baby boom generation² gained access to university degrees and an unprecedented proportion of the population became fully educated; and finally the successful organisation of the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992 also gave an international dimension to the city and by extension to the whole country. All in all, the country experienced a dramatic increase in international participation and the need for English as the major language for international communication multiplied exponentially.

2.2 | The present

The *Special Eurobarometer 366*, a survey of Europeans' knowledge of languages (European Commission, 2012) placed Spain as one of the countries with the lowest levels of knowledge of English. In particular, Spain is listed among the five countries where respondents are least likely 'to say they understand English well enough to follow radio or TV news' (p. 29), 'to read press articles' (p. 34) or 'to use it for communicating online' (p. 35). Not only that but also the 2022 annual test of basic competences of Catalan secondary education revealed that the average scores in English obtained by students of this region graduating from compulsory secondary education (age 16) did not reach the 70 points established by the authorities as the necessary threshold level. It must be said, however, that the average score in the 2023 test was above such level (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2023). Although the recent pandemics, with the lockdown period and online instruction, may have been an influential factor in the students' performance, the low results in the basic competences test show a recurrent problem in the Spanish educational system, and it is complemented by the results obtained by the *EF English Proficiency Index* (EF, 2021), which places Spain in the second to last position of all EU countries, with only Italy occupying a lower position.

One may be tempted to blame English teachers for the poor figures in English knowledge among Spaniards, and especially among young people who have been taught English in school for at least 10 years, but it would be

reductionist to assume that the full responsibility of students' success in learning English is in the hands of educators. As stated above, several other factors play a role, and the discourse highlighting the increasing presence of Spanish as an international language which abounds in Spanish media is not a minor one. Indeed, Spanish has lately become one of the most popular languages in the 'foreign language learning market'. The hegemonic position of this language in Southern and Central America, as well as in Mexico, and the recent popularity of Latin music and rhythms such as bachata, reggaeton and Zumba fitness programs, combined with the active involvement of government-sponsored *Instituto Cervantes*, have catapulted Spanish as a highly desirable language and have rapidly increased its popularity and global demand as a foreign language.

Our argument is that the global presence of Spanish, together with the public discourse and enhanced perception of the language as a major player in the international sphere acts as a deterrent to Spaniards' motivation and desire to incorporate English in their language repertoire. One obvious symptom of the general lack of interest in foreign languages is the fact that the current Prime Minister of Spain is the first one since 1977 (when democracy was restored after almost 40 years of dictatorship) who is capable of fluently speaking English. Pedro Sánchez took office in 2018. Six other people had been sworn in before him, none of whom was proficient in English when they became prime ministers. However, that was no impediment for them to be elected. In a way that can be somehow equated to the general lack of interest in foreign languages found in the United Kingdom and the United States, a similar lack of interest exists in Spain (albeit on a smaller scale), which may be closely linked to the perception of Spanish as a major player in the global market of languages. Newspaper headlines emphasising the 'great' international dimension and status of Spanish elsewhere do not help keep the influence and international role of this language in perspective when it is compared to English and its absolute dominance of the international communication sphere. Though only tentatively, we may point to the centuries of Spain's colonial power, which led to its considerable current number of speakers, as a possible reason for the low English proficiency of Spaniards. In the case of English, the colonial past has been complemented with many other historical circumstances that have gradually reinforced its international role and have left an imprint on English speakers, who might deem less necessary to learn a foreign language, since they perceive that they can communicate in their first language with a significant amount of people. The current economic and political status of Spanish-speaking countries in the world may not be such a powerful argument for Spanish speakers to refuse to learn foreign languages. However, societal perceptions of the global spread of the language may deter many Spanish speakers from making the effort to learn another language. The abundance of public discourses in the media praising the current outreach of Spanish and its very significant presence in the United States contributes to a sense of chauvinistic pride that can only discourage Spanish citizens from learning English or any other language.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the fact that in spite of the absolute prevalence of English as the preferred (and often the only) foreign language taught and learned in Spanish schools, official documents regulating the curriculum at all levels of education (from kindergarten to higher education) do not name the language and instead use the generic term 'foreign language' as a substitute. It is absolutely obvious and silently acknowledged by everybody that whenever 'foreign language' is mentioned, one should interpret 'English', and so if one looks at what teaching positions are offered by the public system of education, as well as by private schools and by universities, it is quite obvious that all the talking about foreign languages meant mostly English. Nevertheless, the word 'English' is mysteriously absent from official documents, like a forbidden taboo that cannot be brought to the fore by explicitly mentioning it in written form.

3 | ENGLISH IN THE SPANISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Spanish Constitution, in effect since 1978 establishes a decentralised education model, where educational competences are shared by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, the regional governments of the autonomous communities, local administrations and educational centres. The Spanish government dictates the conditions for obtaining, expediting and homologating academic titles, as well as the subjects and assessment criteria.

TABLE 1 Stages in the Spanish education system.

Non-compulsory	Compulsory		Non-compulsory		
<i>Educación Infantil</i> (kindergarten)	<i>Educación Primaria</i> (primary education)	<i>Educación Secundaria</i> (secondary education)	<i>Bachillerato</i> (Baccalaureate)	<i>Formación Profesional</i> (vocational training)	Higher education
Years 0–6	Years 6–12	Years 12–16	Years 16–18	1st cycle: 2 years 2nd cycle: 2 years	BA: 3–4 years MA: 1–2 years

The Spanish Education System is divided into different stages with only two (primary and secondary) stages of a compulsory nature (Table 1).

3.1 | English in the curriculum

In order to offer an example of the role of English across the educational stages in the Spanish system, we will focus on the autonomous community of Castilla y León, a traditionally monolingual territory which has got Castilian Spanish as the only official language. We need to mention here a classification of education institutions that has recently been gaining terrain, in spite of the fact it is not acknowledged as such in any of the legal documents related to the curricula. This divides schools into (a) bilingual teaching (involving content and language-integrated learning, henceforth CLIL) and (b) regular teaching. In fact, the curricula for all education stages stipulate that the competent regional council in matters of education may establish the use of CLIL methodologies in the foreign language and the use of CLIL methodologies in co-official languages of other autonomous communities.

3.1.1 | Bilingual teaching institutions

So-called bilingual teaching institutions are those which offer CLIL at any or all the educational stages, in a foreign language that, according to the law, could be English, French, German, Italian or Portuguese. Bilingual Programs have been gaining terrain within the Spanish education system because they were initially understood as a solution to the low English proficiency of the population. However, they have not come without criticism (Alonso-Belmonte & Fernández-Agüero, 2021). In this category, we can find three types of institutions:

- (i) Bilingual sections (established in 2006–2007): institutions in which a bilingual project ‘Spanish – foreign language’ has been authorised, either in primary or in secondary education (Boletín Oficial de Castilla y León – henceforth BOCYL, 2006). Several 2–3 non-linguistic (not more than 50% of the curriculum) subjects are taught through CLIL. CLIL teachers are required to have a minimum B2 CEFR level in the chosen foreign language. Other agents in these institutions are ‘native speaker’ teacher assistants (a total of 225 at the moment) and local prospective teachers who have just graduated or who are about to obtain their university degrees. These assist CLIL and foreign language teachers mostly with teaching oral skills and ‘cultural knowledge’. This cultural knowledge is related to the cultures of Inner Circle countries, which are still understood to be the providers of legitimate linguistic and cultural input. Table 2 shows the distribution of institutions in the autonomous community that offer foreign language CLIL at primary (including kindergarten) and secondary levels. Although we find some examples of French or German CLIL classes, the overwhelming majority of them are in English.
- (ii) Schools under the agreement between the Ministry of Education and the British Council (established in 1996) for the development of a bilingual English–Spanish program, from kindergarten until the end of secondary school. Offered by a total of 37 education institutions,³ this program relies on a curriculum that integrates both Spanish

TABLE 2 Bilingual (CLIL) sections in the education system of Castilla y León.

	English	French	German
Kindergarten and primary school	353	9	3
Secondary school	243	8	2
Total	596	17	5

and British education curricula. The foreign language is English and, additionally, several two subjects are taught through CLIL (in English). Students devote two extra hours a week to English lessons than those students in regular schools. The English teachers, content teachers, experienced British language counsellors and 'native' teacher assistants are involved in this program.

- (iii) *Bachibac*: Bilingual French–Spanish programs offered at the Baccalaureate stage, offered by four schools within the autonomous community. At least a third part of the curriculum must be taught in French. Only students with a background in French education or a minimum B1 level in French are admitted to this program.

3.1.2 | Regular schools

For non-bilingual schools, the curricula dictate that a foreign language should be introduced in the first stage and it should/must be taught in all the following stages (Table 3). Language curriculum for each stage (with the exception of vocational training) establishes eight key competences to be achieved. Two of them are directly related to language and language competence: (a) linguistic communication competence and (b) plurilingual competence.

Plurilingual competence is directly related to foreign language learning. It is defined as 'the ability to use different languages in an adequate and effective manner for learning and communicating'⁴ (BOCYL, 2022, p. 48211). In general lines, it shares the principal capabilities of first language competence, such as

- Identifying, understanding, expressing, creating and interpreting concepts, feelings, facts and opinions in oral, written and signed form in different social and cultural contexts in accordance with their wishes and needs.⁵

However, it also presents some specific characteristics:

- Recognising and respecting individual linguistic profiles.
- Relying on self-experiences in order to develop strategies that allow for mediation and transfer between languages, including the classical ones.
- Maintaining and acquiring skills in the mother tongue, as well as in the official languages; integrates historical and intercultural dimensions oriented towards recognising, valuing and respecting the linguistic and cultural diversity of the society with the aim to encourage democratic coexistence.⁶

In the curriculum for primary education, foreign language becomes a compulsory subject and a few descriptors of plurilingual competence are added (BOCYL, 2022, p. 48348):

- Using at least one language, in addition to the family language or languages, to respond to simple and predictable communicative needs.
- Using effectively one or more languages, in addition to the family language or languages, to appropriately respond to their communication needs, in a way that is appropriate both to their development and interests and to different situations and contexts.

TABLE 3 Foreign languages across Spanish education stages.

Kindergarten	Primary education	Secondary education	Baccalaureate	Vocational training
Foreign language introduced at age 3–4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foreign language (compulsory) Second foreign language (optional fifth or sixth year) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foreign language (compulsory) Second foreign language(optional) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foreign language (compulsory) Second foreign language University entrance exam – at least 1 foreign language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical foreign language module (optional)
CLIL optional				
Primary education – ‘throughout the stage the students acquire the terminology of areas in both languages’ (BOCYL, 2022, p. 48331) ^a				
Secondary education – ‘it should be aimed that during the whole stage, students acquire the terminology that is specific to the subjects in both languages’ (BOCYL, 2022, p. 48868) ^b				
No mention of any compulsory/optional foreign language				
Possibilities: English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese				

^aThe authors’ translation from Spanish.^bThe authors’ translation from Spanish.

- Based on their experiences, recognising the diversity of linguistic profiles and experimenting with strategies that, in a guided way, allows them to make simple transfers between different languages .
- Based on their experiences, making transfers between different languages as a strategy to communicate and expand their individual linguistic repertoire.
- Knowing and respecting linguistic and cultural diversity present in their environment, recognising and understanding its value as a dialogue factor, to improve coexistence.
- Knowing, valuing and respecting linguistic and cultural diversity present in society, integrating it into their personal development as a factor of dialogue, to promote social cohesion.⁷

Additionally, the possibility is mentioned that educational centres can decide to teach a second foreign language in the fifth and sixth years (corresponding to the last academic years of this stage). No reference to any particular foreign languages is made. For secondary education, among the compulsory subjects, we find foreign language. At this stage, students may also choose a second foreign language. Again, there is no reference to any foreign language in particular.

Baccalaureate and vocational studies are included in the post-compulsory stage. Students can choose between the former, which prepares them for the university entrance exams, or the latter, which is directed towards the achievement of a profession. For Baccalaureate studies, there are four different itineraries, organised in a flexible way in different areas, depending on the type of subjects. However, the three subjects that are common and compulsory in all of them hint to the importance of languages in the curriculum: Spanish language and literature, foreign language and the optional subject should also be a second foreign language. Once more, no allusion to any foreign languages in particular is mentioned. However, it is compulsory for students to sit at least a foreign language exam for their university entrance assessment. In relation to vocational studies, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training stipulates that 'competent administrations may incorporate a technical foreign language module in accordance with the necessity of the business in the region and of the production sector in general'⁸ (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2022, p. 43615). We can see that also at this stage, there is no reference to any particular foreign language.

4 | ENGLISH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Internationalisation of higher education has involved in the last two decades a gradual trend to offer an increasing number of EMI content courses. Even though EMI has become a popular practice and a highly researched topic in Spain (Block & Khan, 2021; Dafouz & Smit, 2020; Lasagabaster, 2022; Mancho-Barés & Aguilar-Perez, 2020), the figures are far behind those in other European countries, such as the Netherlands or Denmark, in which EMI is much more present. By way of example, the courses offered in English at the University of Lleida in the academic year 2020–2021 accounted for 7.4% of the total in BA degrees and 17.1% in MA degrees. As for the number of PhD theses written in English, they were 39.1% of the total. A problematic side effect of the trend to introduce EMI at university is that this has often been done at the cost of sacrificing existing ESP courses, that is, language courses adapted to the different areas of specialisation, such as Business or Medicine. Thus, the curriculum has seen a slight increase in courses taught in English but has lost many courses that placed language at the centre and exclusively focused on developing students' language skills.

The importance of English in higher education is recognised by academic and political authorities, which in Catalonia attempted to make the accreditation of a B2 level in a foreign language (a rather euphemistic way to refer to English) a compulsory requisite for all students graduating at Catalan universities. However, such a requisite has never been implemented, after the initial regulation making it compulsory was first subject to a moratorium and finally overturned due to the problems that would derive from it and the rather obvious impossibility to obtain such accreditation by a rather significant number of students who would not be able to graduate under such regulation. Thus, the challenge for higher education institutions is to promote the use of English as a way to add an international dimension to the competences developed in the course of studies without lowering academic standards and rigor and, at the same time, to respect the students' right to be educated in their own language. In the six officially bilingual regions of Spain,

it is often the case that the combination of the poor level of English proficiency of local students, combined with the attempts to internationalise the curriculum and the presence of international students, results in the compromising solution of using Spanish as a way of combining the local and international dimensions.

Obviously, Spanish does not have the same international status as English, and it is not a local language in the same sense as Catalan, Basque and Galician are in their respective territories, but it can work as a compromising solution that may suit the needs of both local students who are not comfortable enough with English and international students who may be willing to learn Spanish but will not invest in learning a regional language. The real challenge by academic institutions is to contribute to functional trilingualism by bringing up the local language to the highest domains, including PhD thesis writing, and simultaneously making English a language that all students can use with a certain degree of comfort, while at the same leaving enough space for Spanish.

The task ahead for those who would like to give more space to the use of English in Spanish higher education is daunting given the low levels of English proficiency of many undergraduate students, but also given the low level of many lecturers, which makes the prospect of incorporating EMI in some degrees a rather difficult task due to the lack of instructors who can be at ease while teaching in English. In the officially monolingual regions of Spain, the difficulties in using English by low-proficient faculty and students are similar to bilingual ones, but institutional language policy and planning does not play such a key role. In officially monolingual regions, there is no such perception of the urgent need to protect the local language, namely Spanish, as with Catalan, Basque and Galician, because Spanish enjoys a much greater status and it is not so much threatened by the spread of English in Spain. Nonetheless, there is pressure from local agents to ensure that Spanish keeps its status within the country and that EMI does not have a negative impact on the knowledge and correct use of Spanish in specialised disciplinary language.

5 | ATTITUDES TO ENGLISH

Attitudes are a combination of cognitive, affective and behavioural elements that reveal the allegiance of an individual to an object (or a language in the case of language attitudes), which can be defined as 'an evaluative orientation to a social object of some sort [...] having a degree of stability that allows it to be identified' (Garrett, 2010, p. 20). Language attitudes have been found to be a fundamental factor in language maintenance in the contexts where a minority language co-exists with a national language, and have also been helpful to understand and explain the penetration of a new language in a given society or country. As expressed by Lasagabaster (2005): 'The paramount role of language attitudes in all models aimed at analyzing the final attainment in the L2 learning process is beyond any doubt' (p. 299).

Several studies have been conducted in bilingual regions of Spain with the aim of identifying and measuring the attitudes to the two co-official languages, and a few more have specifically focused on attitudes towards English. Lasagabaster (2003, 2005) conducted a study with 1097 undergraduate students in the Spanish Basque Autonomous Community in which students showed a rather positive attitude to English, but significant differences were found between students who had Basque or Spanish as their first language. As suggested by Baker (1992) in his description of the 'bunker attitude', speakers of the minority language (Basque) who feel their language is threatened by the powerful one(s) may hold less positive attitudes to English than to Basque. However, the lowest scores are kept for Spanish, which is perceived as a more acute and immediate threat to Basque than English, which after all is a language with very little presence in everyday activities in Basque and Spanish society. First-language Spanish speakers do not have the same emotional attachment to Basque and therefore respond to English in a more positive way than first-language Basque speakers.

A set of comparable studies were published in an edited volume by Lasagabaster & Hugué (2007). They used the same type of Likert-scale questionnaire to measure attitudes to English in four bilingual Spanish regions: Catalonia, Valencian Community, Basque Country and Galicia. In all cases, attitudes towards English were inferior to attitudes to Spanish or to the local language, and less than one third of participants held favourable attitudes to English, with percentages that were around 30% in the cases of Catalonia (Hugué, 2007), the Valencian Community (Pilar Safont, 2007), Galicia (Loredo Gutiérrez et al., 2007) and even lower (24%) in the Basque Country (Lasagabaster, 2007).

At around the same time, another study was conducted among Catalan secondary education students. Attitudes towards English were even lower than those in the above studies involving university students. Only 16.5% of secondary students held favourable attitudes towards English, in spite of over half of them were of the opinion that English was 'very important' (Llurda, 2007).

Another element that has been studied in relation to attitudes to English is the place of birth of participants. All studies that have compared results by autochthonous and immigrant subjects conclude that the attitudes of respondents who had been born outside Spain are more favourable than those of Spanish-born respondents (Bernaus et al., 2004; Fernández-Costales et al., 2021; Ibarraran et al., 2008).

None of the previously discussed studies, however, had looked at socio-professional status as an independent variable that might account for attitudinal differences. This variable was taken into consideration in a study focusing on the region of Aragon. Aragon is not included in the list of six bilingual communities because the region is officially monolingual. However, around 5% of its population live in a narrow area bordering Catalonia in which Catalan has traditionally been the home language of its inhabitants and it is still widely spoken by the majority of them, albeit with very little appreciation of it in the public sphere. The results of that study showed that socio-professional status did not affect attitudes towards Catalan, Spanish or even French but it did have a significant effect on attitudes towards English (Huguet & Lapresta, 2006), in the sense that higher status carried along more favourable attitudes to this language, thus highlighting the role of English as a social marker, supported and embraced by dominant socio-economic elites, with the potential side effect of further increasing the divide between privileged and unprivileged elements in society.

6 | NATIVE-SPEAKERIST IDEOLOGIES

'Native-speakerism' has been defined by Llurda and Calvet-Terré (2022, p. 3) as 'an ideology that presents NSs as the ultimate models of language use and the ideal teachers of a language, thus invalidating, discriminating and/or underestimating NNSs'. It is a phenomenon that can be found among speakers of all languages and it has recently received wide attention in applied linguistics (Holliday, 2005; Lowe, 2020) although it has so far only been empirically studied in relation to the learning of English as a second or other language. As Llurda and Calvet-Terré (2022) affirm, there is a need for more research showing how native-speakerism works and how it can be exposed and neutralised in languages other than English.

In a systematic review of studies on native-speakerism and on 'native' and 'non-native' teachers conducted by Llurda and Calvet-Terré (2025), the authors found that in the period from 2010 to 2020, only 6.1% of all papers published on this topic dealt with languages United Kingdom, United States, Canada and New Zealand. Consequently, we do not know yet whether native-speakerism is a phenomenon that affects a majority of languages and cultures, but it is absolutely clear that the English language teaching tradition and practice heavily rests on a bias that privileges some speakers of English over others, on the vague ideal assumption that they are 'better' speakers and teachers.

In Spain, we can find instances of native-speakerism deeply rooted in the discourses around language learning and teaching. Although these are gradually changing, they do so at a rather slow pace, and even pre-service teachers of English are subject to native-speakerist ideologies and discourses that – combined with their own resistance to incorporate new models of teaching – position them rather far away from becoming agents of change in their future teaching practice (Calvet-Terré & Llurda, 2023). A comparative study of ELF versus 'native-speaker' orientations of Spanish and Swedish pre-service teachers pointed to a more pro-'NS' orientation of Spaniards, and consequently a more pro-ELF orientation of the Swedish participants (Jeong et al., 2022). We will dwell here with two examples that illustrate how the Spanish context still privileges so-called 'native speakers', who are endowed with an aura of magnificence, and by the same token it projects a bias against those who are perceived as 'non-native' speakers. The two examples of native-speakerism in English language teaching in Spain are (1) anecdotal evidence found on the window of a language school in a Spanish city and (2) a language teaching business empire constructed around the figure of its founder, whose major selling point is having a name that can be immediately associated with a 'native speaker' of English.

The first of said examples is the casual discovery by one of the authors of a private language school offering English classes to the general public in a big Spanish city. On one of its windows, the school had a poster with the following message in big capital letters: *TAN INGLÉS COMO UN GUARDIA DE BUCKINGHAM PALACE* (As English as a Buckingham Palace guard). One cannot help but picturing one of those iconic guards with their enormous fancy black hats and their weapons performing the change of guards, one of the major tourist events in London. And the inevitable obvious question is 'Does anybody think that learning English will transform them into one of those guards?' The irony is that nobody from outside the palace or their circle of friends and relatives knows how a Buckingham palace guard speaks or writes, as their job appears to involve remaining quiet when tourists approach and try to interact while taking pictures of them. So, one must conclude that the main reason why such a poster was on that window is the powerful association of English (the language) with an idealisation of 'Englishness', which to many people in Spain is nothing else but a set of stereotyped symbolic images of England. The language school had an obvious reason to have that poster there, rooted in the power of the 'native speaker' concept and the notion of 'target' culture as though the language exists only in its ideal enculturated setting, by means of which the goal of diligent learners is to approximate the speech of 'native speakers', no matter how fake and unattainable such a target is.

The second case in point is worth looking in some detail. This is a company specialised in the teaching of English named after its American founder and owner, who settled down in Madrid as a college graduate in the 1970s and has lived there for more than 40 years. He started the company in 1977, which has developed into a network of different language-teaching resources and media, including a TV and a radio station, monthly publications, an 'English-village', in addition to standard face-to-face and online classes, all using their self-labelled (with the company's name) well-advertised method. The marketing strategy of the company spins around the charisma and the 'Englishness' of the owner who has an unmistakably 'English' last name. However, since the pronunciation of that name is rather odd for Spanish pronunciation patterns, all oral publicity says the name of the company and the method as it would be pronounced using Spanish phonological rules instead of English.

An analysis of the materials and sample lessons available on the Internet shows very clearly that this said 'innovative' method is a rather basic combination of grammar–translation and a structuralist–behaviourist approach based on pattern drilling and repetition. Sequences like 'a pen / *un lápiz* / a book / *un libro* / a chair / *una silla* / is this is a pen / yes, it is. / Is this a book? / Yes, it is. / Is this a chair? / Yes, it is.' (and so on and so forth) can be found in their video lessons.

A closer look at the materials reveals that they are very far away from current thinking and research in English Language Teaching (ELT), and yet their self-labelling of their product as an innovative method seems to work very well judging by the success of the company and penetration of the brand name in the Spanish–English language learning market. It is very clear that the key to its success is not in the method but in the marketing. The founder–owner of the company will never make it to the history of English language teaching as an innovator who came up with powerful original ideas on how to most effectively teach a foreign language, but he may well become a point of reference in how well he managed and marketed his company. It is marketing that is key in this story. One of the pillars of the company's marketing strategy rests on the name as well as the charisma of its owner. A name that is hard to pronounce by a Spanish audience and is conveniently adapted, but still it is unmistakably native. Eventually, this all goes down to the status of the 'native speaker', and its perceived superiority when it comes to deal with anything related to the English language, much in the same way as 'native speakers' are called upon in the Spanish media when there is a topic involving the learning of English or the poor results of Spain in international English proficiency surveys such as English Proficiency Index (EPI) (EF, 2021).

7 | ENGLISH TEACHERS IN THE SPANISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

The usual trajectory into the English teaching career implies the following steps:

- A university degree in English Studies or in Translation and Interpreting, with English as one of the working languages.

- An officially recognised MA in TESOL, offered by a Spanish university.

Most of the prospective English teachers are Spanish, 'non-native' English speakers. This is because in order to access a job in the public education system, candidates need to be in possession of an MA in TESOL offered by a Spanish university and officially validated by the government as a degree that qualifies to become a secondary education teacher in Spain.

In order to explore how their condition of 'non-native' English speaker teachers affects the perception of their career, a number of 18 MA TESOL students at a Spanish University (2021–2022) were asked to reflect upon the question 'To what extent do 'native speaker' discourses prevail in your own professional context? Is there any element of discrimination based on the native/non-native distinction?' This task was conducted right after a 90-minute seminar on native-speakerism by one of the authors.

The totality of the participants agreed upon the fact that traditional understandings of 'native' English teachers as the coveted model for learning English are still rooted in Spanish society and negatively affect the job of 'non-native' English teachers. In particular, four different areas were identified as problematic: (a) impact on teacher identity; (b) inequalities in the hiring process; (c) professional development and economic aspects; and (d) the weight of the American and British traditions in ELT materials and certifications.

7.1 | Impact on teacher identity

One of the most recurrent themes was the impact of the dichotomy 'native/non-native' on their professional identities as teachers. Many of the prospective teachers alluded to the fact that due to a general social preference for 'native' teachers, they are expected to lose or hide their accent in Spanish in order to be acknowledged as legitimate teachers. One of the respondents (1) connects the requirements of parents to the need for 'non-native' teachers to shift their identity towards the ideal model. Not doing so might lead to losing self-confidence and even to develop fear of students who have studied abroad and may have a higher proficiency:

- (1) Around us, these ideas regarding 'nativeness' are still very much present today. As learners of English, we still often have it in our heads that we should speak like native speakers and lose all traces of a Spanish accent when this is practically a pipe dream. [...] There also remains a certain prestige bias, as many parents advocate sending their children to those places where they are promised that they will achieve the coveted 'native level of English'. In these cases, if a teacher does not live up to this idea, he or she may come in for criticism and many end up being afraid of the students they may have in their classes – of having a higher level than them – as well as of other colleagues and native speakers, causing them to lose self-confidence and the level of teaching to drop.

Similarly, another prospective teacher (2) affirms that because private language schools tend to hire more 'native' teachers, some speakers self-impose a 'native speaker' identity which leads to mockery and discrimination:

- (2) The 'native speaker' discourses still exist in the educational context. Specifically, I consider that this could be a symptom of non-native speakers' sense of inferiority when they are teaching in the public or private spheres of the educational field [...] employers tend to hire more native speakers [...] some non-native speakers impose upon themselves a fabricated 'native speaker' identity, which confronts with their ideal identity. Consequently, local natives mock them and discriminate against them.

Example (3) shows the account of a TESOL student who hints to employment practices that value the status of 'native speakers' over the teachers' training as conducive to the impostor syndrome:

- (3) Because of being native speakers they are also opened many doors in the job market, especially in the private sector [...] who seek prestige based on the status of being native and not on the teacher competences and abilities. [...] This can even lead to non-native teachers to have the impostor syndrome.

Some prospective teachers bring about not only discourses, but also their personal experiences as 'non-native' English teachers. In example (4), one of the students refers to the conviction that he/she had to aim to 'native speaker' skills and the overwhelming feeling of the struggle towards this objective:

- (4) I always thought that native-speaker skills and competences were always implied. [...] personally speaking, I felt completely overwhelmed about the fact that it was very difficult to achieve that.

7.2 | Inequalities in the hiring process

Many prospective teachers allude to the hiring process in private language schools as one of the occasions where 'non-native' English teachers are highly discriminated against 'native' ones. For instance, one of the students hints to accent, nationality and race, as reasons that could be determinant in the hiring process of English teachers (1):

- (1) These discourses appear in many English professionals who believe that being a native speaker is better for the learners. [...] Discrimination may easily appear because people tend to rely on the accent, the nationality, or even the race to determine whether a person will be more adequate for a job.

The need to compensate non-nativeness with titles and experience abroad is mentioned by another prospective teacher (2) who believes that the preference for 'native' teachers is related to prejudices and elitism. The student admits that in their studies, future 'non-native' teachers have been able to develop awareness in relation to this issue but declares that when it comes to the employment market, native-speakerist ideas prevail:

- (2) If they are non 'native', they are asked to justify their proficiency through titles and experience abroad. This preference for natives is an extended social perception [...] it roots on prejudices and elitism (even touching sociocultural domination). At the University, we are glad to see there is great awareness against this generalization [...]. But in employment terms, abroad experience and nativeness is always valued.

Once more, one of the students (3) relies on personal experience to explain the inequality experienced in a job application as an English teacher in a private school. The prospective teacher reveals how, despite having a multilingual repertoire, academic titles and work experience he/she was discriminated against monolingual speakers who did not have any background in teaching:

- (3) I was the only Spanish employee at a language school and my colleagues came either from the USA or the UK. In my opinion, a significant mistake was being committed in this case because most of the English native speakers were monolingual and neither were they educated on teaching. [...] I was multilingual, [...] my working languages were English, German, Italian and Spanish, I had already completed a master's degree on TESOL and I had worked as a teacher for two years. [...] Nevertheless, the boss was rather reluctant about hiring me at the beginning because she believed that if parents saw that all teachers were American or British, they would be more interested. I understood this is a clear way of discrimination towards me at the moment.

7.3 | Professional development and economic aspects

Even though the inequalities in the opportunities for professional development and the related economic aspects are less clear than those in the hiring process, prospective teachers bear witness to the greater amount of work that 'non-native' teachers do, once more, as a compensating strategy for their 'non-nativeness' in (4):

- (4) They work twice as hard only to demonstrate they have a good command of the language to 'native language speakers'.

Another future teacher (5) alludes to the constant dichotomy between 'native' and 'non-native' speakers as even more acute in the teaching field. Accordingly, the prestige of 'native' teachers, which gives them authority and legitimacy, also brings about opportunities for professional development that 'non-native' teachers do not have:

- (5) The search for a constant differentiation between native and non-native speakers undoubtedly has professional consequences, even more when it comes to teaching [...] a native speaker will not only have more prestige and his or her opinions and decisions will surely be taken more into account, but also opportunities to grow for the native speaker, while the non-native speaker suffers the consequences of not being native.

In relation to economic aspects, one of the students (6) declares that 'non-native' teachers are offered lower salaries despite their professional capacity, leading to a vicious circle in which already diffident teachers are questioned their authority:

- (6) The term 'native' has way more positive connotations than negative ones, and this might affect to non-native speakers, who may suffer from lack of self-confidence. It's also discriminatory because it often offers lower salaries for non-native speakers, even if they are able to do the same task and as efficiently as a native one, questioning the authority of non-natives as well.

7.4 | The weight of the British and American traditions in English language teaching materials and certification

A few prospective 'non-native' English teachers point to the fact that besides an employment market that seeks 'native' teachers, the education system is also still oriented towards British or American traditions, which is not only discriminatory for 'non-native' teachers but also shapes the type of contents that are imparted in English lessons (7):

- (7) Not only do we see job offers that explicitly look for native speakers of the language but also it is easy to see that high schools and academies⁹ are highly oriented towards British or American traditions [...] for most people, the native speaker is still the best model pupils could have to improve their command of the language, which discriminates non-native teachers. [...] the importance of the UK and USA in English-teaching contexts could overshadow other relevant topics that may be part of the curriculum and more appealing for young learners.

On the same note, another future teacher mentions that 'non-native' teachers are regarded as being less efficient and capable because English language teaching materials are developed by 'native speakers' (8):

- (8) It would be naïve to try to defend that this discourse is not present in the educational reality of language teachers, in particular English teachers, considering, for example, that, most of the time, ELT writing materials have been in

the hands of native speakers, regardless of the country of destination. In many cases, non-native teachers are still perceived as less efficient and less capable.

8 | CONCLUSION

In this article, we have argued that the current global need to learn English has been met in Spain by a rather reluctant environment that explains the country's low number of fluent English speakers, in comparison to most other European countries. Such reluctant environment is rooted in the historical past of Spain as an empire and the lack of enthusiasm for other languages, and English in particular. Yet, modern-day Spanish society is gradually comprehending the inevitability of English and the need to embrace it as a way of engaging in prosperous economic, cultural and social development.

The curriculum of all levels of education places great emphasis on the need to develop foreign language skills, and in a rather mysteriously tacit way, it is understood by everybody that the goal is to develop English skills among all citizens so that they can communicate in international contexts without the need to resort to translation. Education institutions, among which universities in particular, are committed to the promotion of English and at the same time worry about the impact of the increasing presence of English on local languages, especially in bilingual regions where Spanish shares the space with a local language struggling for maintenance, status and visibility. In this context, attitudes of university students towards English reflect the tension derived from the need to orient academic activities towards internationalisation and the need to preserve their identity through the use of their local language. The attitudes of university students who speak a local regional language (Catalan, Basque or Galician) are affected by the phenomenon first described by Baker (1992) as 'bunker attitude', characterised by a negative reaction to languages that are perceived as a potential threat to the existence of their local language.

Finally, we have also delved into how English is still represented with a native-speakerist bias and is linked in the minds of many to the 'native speaker' myth. Even though it is clear by now that the power of English derives from its international status, the liaison between the language and so-called 'native speakers' is still strongly upheld. Two examples have illustrated such connection, followed by empirical evidence from TESOL students reflecting on the persistence of native-speakerist discourses in Spain. Their voices clearly depict how the prevailing native-speakerist orientation towards English and English language teaching has an impact on Spanish teachers' identities, as well as on their professional development and opportunities. Additionally, they show how English is still far from being appropriated by Spanish citizens who do not generally feel entitled to claim 'ownership' over the language (Widdowson, 1994). Such lack of appropriation of the language constitutes a major handicap to the normalisation of the use of English as an international language/lingua franca by Spanish users of the language in multicultural settings within and outside the country.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ In the Valencian Community Statute of Autonomy (the law regulating self-government of the community) the language is named Valencian, an alternative traditional term used to designate the local variety of Catalan.
- ² In Spain, the term 'baby boom generation' is used to refer to people born between 1957 and 1977, when the country opened to the world after the post-war period, and the economy grew rapidly.
- ³ Retrieved from <https://www.educa.jcyl.es/es/temas/idiomas-bilinguismo/programas-bilingues-secciones-linguisticas/convenio-mefp-the-british-council-cyl>
- ⁴ The authors' translation from Spanish.
- ⁵ The authors' translation from Spanish.
- ⁶ The authors' translation from Spanish.
- ⁷ The authors' translation from Spanish.
- ⁸ The authors' translation from Spanish.
- ⁹ The student refers to private language schools, which are popularly called *academias* in Spanish.

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