

Uses and Linguistic Attitudes towards the English Language and the Anglo-American Culture: the case of the Canary Islands

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The Canary Islands have become one of the most important tourist resorts in Europe. Every year thousands of British people choose this place to spend their holidays. This study attempts to point out the influence of the English language, by means of the number of English words that have introduced in the Canarian Spanish. Likewise, it is an attempt to reveal the attitudes of the Canarians towards the English language and the Anglo-American culture.

I Introduction

First of all, we have to locate the Canary Islands geographically. They are in the Atlantic Ocean near the coast of Morocco in the North West of Africa. From the political point of view, these islands belong to Spain. The economy of the islands is becoming a bit stronger, after a long period of weakness. Most of the inhabitants work in the Services sector, especially in tourism.

The English language has been the only compulsory foreign language in all schools (State and Private) since around 1970, German being another language which is becoming very popular among the Canarian population. Spain would belong to the so-called 'Expanding Circle' in Kachru's typology¹ (Kachru, 1992:356). This circle is composed of those countries where English is a foreign language (and not a second or native language).

Canarians come into contact with the English language through two main frameworks: firstly, at school and University, and secondly in tourist areas, since every year these islands receive a great number of British tourists. The influence of the Anglo-American culture comes to the islands, as well as to the rest of the world, basically through the media. We could state that it is an increasing influence that affects all the areas of our everyday life, some examples are: fast-food, jeans, skyscrapers, music, etc., and this is more noticeable in the case of the young Canarians, and young Spaniards in general.

¹ Kachru (1992:356-357) distinguishes three concentric circles that represent the kinds of spread, the forms of acquisition and the functional situation of English in a number of countries in the world. The Inner circle refers to those countries where English has traditionally been spoken as a native language (USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand). The second or Outer Circle represents all the non-native, though institutionalised, varieties of English. This circle includes most of the ex-British colonies located basically in Africa and South Asia. The third or Expanding Circle includes all those countries where English plays the role of a foreign language. In this last circle, we must include many countries of the world and, of course, a great number of European countries.

All these facts provided plenty of reasons for us to carry out a research project that revealed the real extent of influence of the English language and the Anglo-American culture on the Canarian dialect and culture.

The main reason why we have focused our analysis on the Canary Islands is because of the increasing presence of English words in the daily life of most Canarians. In mainland Spain, this topic has been the subject of different researches (Pratt, 1980; Gimeno-Gimeno, 1990; Sevilla Muñoz-Sevilla Muñoz, 1996; Gómez Moreno, 1996; Smith, 1997), but this is not the case in the Canary Islands, where there seems to exist a kind of gap as regards the research projects in these topics. Moreover, we have considered it especially interesting to carry out this kind of research in such a tourist place as the Canary Islands, where the linguistic and cultural exchanges are very frequent.

In that sense, we must also remember Turell's statement (1986) as regards the need of more sociolinguistic studies in the English language in Spain. She says, 'in the field of English studies in Spain, no attention has been paid to Sociolinguistics, in none of the domains; in the area of teaching or in the one of research' (Turell, 1986:39). In fact, in Spain many studies have been devoted to describe the massive introduction of English words in Spanish (Pratt, 1971, 1980; Estrany, 1970; Lorenzo, 1971, 1996; England-Caramés, 1978; Pérez Ruiz-Vivancos Machimbarrena, 1994), but they have not focused on the analysis of the linguistic attitudes that have led Spaniards to use these anglicisms so often.

II Study

Therefore, this research has been centred on the two main capital cities of the Canary Islands: Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Santa Cruz de Tenerife. It has had a twofold aim, as the title suggests, on the one hand, it has tried to find out which English words are used by the Canarians of Las Palmas and Santa Cruz, as well as which ones are the most used as opposed to the least used. On the other hand, it has tried to reveal what attitudes Canarian speakers have towards the English language and the Anglo-American culture in general.

We have reviewed a great quantity of literature available about these topics. We have also collected empirical data from practical research that has taken place in Las Palmas and Santa Cruz.

III Methodology

As far as methodology is concerned, this study is composed of two sections: the first is theoretical, whereas the second is practical. The practical part has used some practical tools that have provided us reliable data.

When we talk about practical tools, we are referring to the primary sources we have used, and they are:

- 1) An analysis of the Canarian press.
- 2) The daily watching of two Canarian television programmes
- 3) A questionnaire that was answered by a representative sample of the population of the two capital cities that have been analysed in this study.

The analysis of the press was the main basis for the elaboration of the list of English words that we used (see Appendix). We have been following the headlines of four Canarian newspapers- two of each capital city- (*La Provincia* and *Canarias 7* from Las Palmas de Gran Canaria; and *El Dia* and *La Gaceta de Canarias* from Santa Cruz de Tenerife). We have been reading their headlines throughout the last four years (from 1995 to 1998), and we have collected all those headlines that contain any English word.

In the study of the television, we followed two Canarian TV programmes: the News programme called *Telecanarias*, during the period from the first of December 1997 until the thirty first of December 1998. The other programme is a leisure and entertainment programme called *Buenas Tardes Canarias*, that was followed from the first of December 1997 until the thirtieth of June 1998, when it stopped being produced.

For both, the press as well as the television, we made a compilation of all the English words used by writing down the whole sentence in which they occurred, the date and the frequency of occurrence. From that compilation, we were able to create a list of the English words (see Appendix) that we then used in our questionnaire.

The questionnaire is composed of two basic parts: the first tries to find out about the degree of knowledge and use of English words among the Canarian speakers. The second analyses the speakers' attitudes towards different aspects of the English language and the Anglo-American culture, as well as their assessment of the American and British varieties of English.

In order to determine the number of questionnaire responses needed, we used the Labovian theory of 0.025% (which means 25 informants for every 100.000 inhabitants) (Labov, 1966:170-171). However, in the case of the two capital cities that we were going to analyse this quantity was insufficient, since different sectors of the population were not represented at all. Therefore, we decided to widen the percentage of our sample to 0.08% of the population of each capital city. This can be translated into 169 respondents from Las Palmas, and 110 respondents from Santa Cruz². For the elaboration of the results, we used the computer package SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) in its version 7.5 for Windows.

For the analysis of the linguistic uses or, in other words, which English words are known and used by the Canarians, we produced a list of 104 different English words. Next to each English word, we asked the respondents if they knew the word, if they used it, and if so, how often on a scale that ranged from very often, sometimes or never.

For the study of the linguistic attitudes we provided a series of statements, and the respondents had to decide the degree of agreement with the statement. The range of answers varied from one which meant complete agreement to five which expressed complete disagreement with intermediate values, number three being the neutral option. The statements dealt with various aspects of the English language and the Anglo-American culture: For example, some of these statements are:

- a) English has all the qualities to be the most international language.
- b) All Canarian children should learn English as a second language.
- c) I do not mind seeing English words in any public place.
- d) Mastery of English is necessary nowadays in the Canary Islands, in order to be important and to have power.
- e) I use some English words when I speak Spanish.

Other statements more related to the Anglo-American culture were:

- f) English has become the most international language because of the influence of the American culture.

² This data has been taken from the Census (ISTAC 1996). The city of Las Palmas is composed of 355.563 inhabitants, whereas Santa Cruz has 203.787 inhabitants. In our research, we have focused on the population who is more than 20 years old and less than 60, therefore that gives us the final figure of 205.198 (102.793 men and 102.405 women) inhabitants in Las Palmas, and 116.104 (56.687 men and 59.417 women) inhabitants in Santa Cruz.

- g) If I had to leave my country, I would rather live in England than in the United States.
- h) I prefer English people to North American people.
- i) English people are very open and accessible.
- j) The Canary Islands have more in common with England than with the United States.
- k) The Anglo-American influence is invading our culture.
- l) If Canarians started speaking English they would assume Anglo-American values as their own.
- m) I like everything that is English.

IV Results

In our results, we will emphasise the tremendous influence of English upon the Spanish dialect spoken in the Canary Islands.

4.1 Linguistic Uses

Most Canarians use a great number of English words in their daily lives. The most common words are related to sports, and some examples are *open*, *rally*, *play off*, *sprint* and *mountain-bike*.

As far as the variable *age* is concerned, in this research we stratified our sample into four different groups:

- 1- composed of people between 21 and 30 years old
- 2- people between 31 and 40
- 3- people between 41 and 50
- 4- people between 51 and 60

The results reveal that the youngest social group knows and uses more English words than any other group. The level of knowledge and use of anglicisms diminishes as the social group ages. In that sense, the oldest group (between 51 and 60) is the one which knows and uses the least number of English words.

Sex seems to be a meaningful variable as regards the use of English words. This research has revealed that men know and use more anglicisms than women do. There are certain specific terms that occur frequently in men's speech, for instance, words related to

the field of sports, such as *open, rally, play off, cross, sprint, basket, mountain-bike* and *skin head*. By contrast, other words are more commonly used by women, for example, terms related to the physical appearance and fashion such as *lifting, wonderbra, light, look, top-model, casting, drag queen* and *piercing*.

The variable of *education* does not offer revealing results. We distinguished five different educational groups:

- 1- illiterate people
- 2- people with very basic education
- 3- people with medium level education
- 4- people with higher level education
- 5- postgraduates

In fact, there are many words that are used by any informant no matter his or her educational level. Some examples are, *camping, casting, hobby, jeep, light, miss, mister, mountain bike, pub, punk, rally, rock, sexy, strip-tease, walkman* and *(wind) surfing*. However, there are other words which are used basically by those informants whose level of education is quite high. Some of these words are: *best-seller, boom, comic, catering, cross, chip, doping, duty free, gay, handicap, hooligan, lifting, marketing, open, rap, round, set, sex-shop, skin head, soul, stand, stock, thriller, time-sharing, top less, western* and *zapping*.

Generally speaking, the ten English words most frequently used by the Canarian speakers are:

ANGLICISM	FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE
Ferry	88.9
Hobbie	88.6
Pub	88.5
Sexy	86.1
Walkman	85.3
Rally	84.9
Strip tease	84.9
(Wind)surfing	83.5
Footing	83.2
Rock	79.2

All these words are used by around 80 per cent of the informants.

The ten English words from the list least used by the Canarians are

ANGLICISM	FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE
Scratch	2.2
Challenge	2.9
Off shore	3.9
Lobby	4.0
Raid	5.4
Antidumping	5.4
Stage	5.7
Handling	6.1
Trekking	7.9
Race	11.8

These words are used by less than 5 per cent of the informants.

4.2 *Linguistic Attitudes*

The Canarians' attitudes towards the English language seem to be quite positive. Most Canarians are very aware of the need to speak English for all kinds of instrumental reasons. That is why most Canarians answered that in order to have influence and power in the Canary Islands nowadays, you have to master the English language. A number of respondents do not really mind seeing English words in shops, restaurants and public places, since they occur in their daily use of the language.

The attitudes towards the Anglo-American culture are quite positive too. In general, there is an acceptance of the English language, but some respondents are concerned about its influence, but without regarding this influence as an 'invasion'.

Most of the respondents regard the influence of the United States as decisive for English having become the international language *par excellence*.

The respondents showed their preference for England rather than for the United States, since throughout history there have been more links with England than with the United States. These links can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century and

beginning of the twentieth, when an important British colony settled in the islands (González Cruz, 1995).

However, most Canarians stated that they preferred Americans rather than British people because the former are seen as more open and accessible than the British. Anyway, many respondents rejected generalisations, since you can find all sorts of people everywhere.

Most respondents stated that if they started speaking English, they would not adopt Anglo-American values, since for them language is quite different from values. In other words, speaking a foreign language does not imply that the speakers assume that foreign country's values as theirs.

The variables of *sex* and *age* did not provide outstanding results for the assessment of the English language and the Anglo-American culture.

In relation to *education*, many respondents with a high level of education do not really like to see English words in shops and public places, and they argue that English people do not make any effort to learn Spanish, and that they do not find Spanish words in public places when they go to Britain. This minority is also worried about the increasing influence of the Anglo-American culture over our own culture. In fact, they regard this influence as a kind of 'invasion'.

In the last part of our research, we attempted to reveal whether British English or American English was preferred by Canarians. For this purpose, we added a semantic scale at the end of the questionnaire. This scale was composed of a series of pairs of adjectives (positive and negative), and in between, we offered 5 different gaps to express the degree of agreement with the positive or the negative adjective, with number three being the neutral or no opinion gap.

Many of the informants were not able to give their opinion, since they are not so familiar with both varieties of English as to distinguish and make judgements about them. Among those who gave their opinion, the majority expressed their preference for British English rather than for American English. In fact, most Canarians have traditionally had a closer contact with the British variety than with the American one, and therefore that is the variety that they have learned in most cases. We must also point out that the scores for the positive adjectives attributed to the British variety are even higher in the case of Las Palmas than in Santa Cruz.

V Conclusions

As a conclusion, we can state that most Canarians use many English words in their daily use of Canarian Spanish. They also seem to have a generally positive attitude towards the English language and towards the Anglo-American culture. Most of the respondents are very aware of the need to master English for all kind of instrumental reasons. Similarly, most of the informants express their attitude of acceptance of the Anglo-American culture. Certainly, its influence over our culture has created a certain concern among the Canarians, but without regarding such influence as an ‘invasion’.

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Appendix

LIST OF ENGLISH WORDS USED IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT:

Affaire, airbag, amateur, antidumping, basket, best-seller, blues, boom, camping, cash & carry, casting, catering, challenge, chip, comic, crack, cross, dance, disc-jockey, doping, drag queen, duty free, fan, ferry, fifty fifty, fitness, footing, gay, glamour, handicap, handling, happy hour, heavy (metal), hippie, hobby, holding, hooligan, jazz, jeep, junior, karting, leasing, lifting, light, lobby, look, marketing, master, meeting, miss, mister, mountain bike, off shore, open, overbooking, parking, piercing, planning, play off, pole position, pop, pub, puenting, punk, race, raid, rally, ranking, rap, reggae, rent a car, ring, rock, round, scratch, set, sex shop, sexy, sketch, skin head, soling, soul, sparring, speed (ball), sponsor, sprint, stage, stand stock, strip tease, swing, thriller, tie break, time-sharing, top less, top model, transfer, trekking, underground, walkman, western, (wind) surfing, wonderbra, zapping.

Note:

Some words have their origin in other languages such as French (affaire) or Latin (junior), however they have come into Spanish via English and that is the reason why we have included them in this list.

Other words such as puenting or soling are hybrids of Spanish and English.