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# 'English invasion' in Spain: an analysis of toys leaflets addressed to young children

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Do toy advertisements introduce Spanish children to English?

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## Introduction

The current spread of English across the globe is, as Schneider states (2009: 1), 'one of the most remarkable, and perhaps unexpected, sociocultural changes of the modern period'. This author states the wish for 'a single, universal language which would allow all of mankind to communicate with each other directly, but all attempts at constructing such a code artificially have failed in practice. Now, it seems, one has emerged quite naturally' (Schneider, 2009: 1). On the other hand, other authors (Anderman & Rogers, 2005: 2) report that the emergence of global English has created a homogenised form of communication, and it has made 'mother tongue speakers fear that, in the process of becoming common property, their native tongue is turning into a "hybrid" language sometimes referred to as Euro-speak within the European Union and more broadly as "McLanguage"' (Anderman & Rogers, 2005: 2). There are, therefore, controversial viewpoints in Europe as regards the spread of English as the *lingua franca* or global language.

This controversy may be extended to the strong academic debate which has arisen as regards the emergence of a new variety of European English or so-called *Euro-English*. Different authors such as Modiano (2009), Jenkins (2009) and Seidhofer (2009) assert that a new variety of English is emerging in Europe. Certain specific features, especially in terms of vocabulary, make this variety different from other varieties such as Chinese English or Hong Kong English, to mention some examples. Some of the terms that belong to this European variety of English are *Euro-zone*,

*Euro-area*, *Member States*, and so on. Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008: 214) state that,

In WE studies it is notable that a new kind of mid-Atlantic might be arising, spoken by neither US nor UK residents, but in continental Europe. This variety occurs under conditions of 'elite bilingualism', with well-educated and well-travelled speakers.

Opposed to this point of view, Mollin (2006; 2007) claims that rather than talking about the emergence of a European variety of English, we should instead talk about incorrect uses employed



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by European speakers of English. This author considers that the concept of *Euro-English* should be discarded, as there is not such a variety.

Leaving apart this controversy, it is a fact that hundreds of papers have been devoted to documenting the important role that English is playing all over the globe. In the context of Europe, different scholars have analysed this enormous influence in many different realms such as the legal one (Berns, 1994), the field of politics (Hilgendorf, 2007), advertising (Martin, 2007), economy and commerce, science and technology (Berns et al., 2007; Görlach, 2002). Other works have also highlighted this tremendous influence in European educational systems.

In any case, be these considerations about the role that English plays in Europe positive or negative, there is no doubt about the need to have a common language which allows international communication. It is especially necessary in the context of a present-day Europe. Since European governments desire the creation of a common economy, a common market, and elements that create a sense of 'Europeism'; why not use a common language that allows all Europeans to communicate among each other? I would go a step further, why should Europeans oppose the emergence of a European variety of English or 'Euro-English' as other well-known scholars (Modiano, 2009;

Jenkins, 2009; Seidhlofer, 2009) describe? In Pennycook's words (2007: 97) 'the world Englishes framework can take us some way towards an understanding of the processes of localization'. Whether this 'localised' variety of English is already emerging or not is under debate, but if it has not, why should it not emerge?

Globalisation has created a unification of values, fashions, and consequently, languages. One language has to fulfil this unifying function, as it must play the role of *lingua franca* or vehicle of communication among speakers of different languages. English is the language that plays this role.

This paper focuses on the context of Spain. In this country, the English language is present in almost every single domain of Spaniards' daily life. Different points of view may be observed in Spain: a purist tendency attempts to protect Spanish from this 'invasion' (Lorenzo, 1996). Other authors (Rodríguez, 2002) merely describe, without judging, such influences in realms such as sports, the media, economy and finances, medicine, and so on. Nevertheless, as Reichelt (2006: 3) states, 'little recent published work has explored the role of the language in Spain'. In an attempt to document the influence of English in Spanish society, this piece of research deals with the impact of this language on the youngest generation through its presence in advertising leaflets for toys addressed to children.

León (1996: 183) asserts that 'due to the naive condition of children there is the conviction that they are the most defenceless public in front of the advertising persuasion. . .this emotional vulnerability of children makes them an especially simple target for advertising products'. Moreover, this is a very broad and profitable market because of the great number of children that exist in different societies. According to data of 2009 by INE (Spanish National Institute of Statistics), in Spain there is a population of 5,217,584 (including boys and girls) children from 0 to 10 years old, which is a substantial population. This fact explains the growing market interest for them.

As regards other studies related to this topic, most of them have focused on the analysis of the impact of TV commercials on the youngest generation, rather than on the field of printed advertising. In the context of Spain, Durán (2002) examined the presence of English in various areas of Spanish printed advertising: perfumes, cosmetics, watches, fashion, mobile phones and computers, cars, drinks and tobacco. However, no papers have been devoted to cover the research gap that



Figure 1. Sample of toy addressed to 0 to 5 year-old boys and girls.



Figure 2. Sample of toy addressed to boys between 5 and 10 years old.

documents the presence of English in advertising leaflets for toys addressed to children in Spain, (see figures 1 and 2). All these reasons make this particular piece of research different from others.

### Objectives

This paper provides evidence of the remarkable influence of the English language in written advertisements addressed to Spanish children.



Figure 3. Sample of toy addressed to girls between 0 and 5 years old.

Some more specific goals are as follows:

- To carry out a quantitative analysis of the English words found in the children's leaflets.
- To check whether the variables age and gender of the children have any effect on the results.
- To analyse some specific uses of the English words found from a linguistic point of view.
- To discuss the function of these English words in printed advertising addressed to children.

### Method

These leaflets, which are freely given by shops to all customers, are produced mainly at Christmas (see figures 1, 2 and 3). As regards the impact of advertisements, Goddard (1998: 3) claims that:

Although advertisements are ephemeral [...] they leave traces of themselves behind, which combine to form a body of messages about the culture that produced them. These messages can then function both to reflect and to construct cultural values: they can reflect the values of the powerful groups in society who produced the texts.

It is unquestionable that this kind of publicity may produce long term effects on children's minds. The young boys and girls who carefully read and see these leaflets are exposed to many English terms from a very early age. That implies that these kids not only have been familiar with English words since they were very young, but also, they may associate (consciously or unconsciously) this foreign language to something they like (presents, in this case), probably with nice feelings.

When the advertising leaflets under study are analysed from a formal point of view, a variety of colourful photographs and attractive designs may be observed. These leaflets do not have much text written in them, instead you can basically see the name of the product that is being sold, the name of the manufacturer, the age of the child, whether the toy needs batteries, a brief description of it (not in all cases), and its price.

In this paper, two different age groups have been distinguished as shown in table 1: the first one covers children from 0 to 5 years old, and the second one includes children from 6 to 10 years old. In terms of gender, a distinction among toys and games addressed to boys, girls and both genders has been made. Finally, a linguistic analysis of the English words found has been carried out.

**Table 1: Number of toys containing English words addressed to children of different age groups**

	<i>Toys r Us</i>	<i>Carrefour</i>	<i>Hiperdino</i>	Total	Means
0–5 children	126	104	50	280	93.3
6–10 children	44	28	4	76	25.3

## Sample

The sample has been provided by three different toys leaflets of three different shops: *Toys r Us*, *Carrefour* and *Hiperdino*. *Toys r Us* is an international franchise of North American origin, *Carrefour* is a European franchise which has shops all over Spain, and *Hiperdino* is a local chain of supermarkets which has shops all over the Canary Islands (Spain).

The following offers a breakdown of those toys and games with English names. In this analysis, the variables gender and age (a distinction between two groups will be made; 1<sup>st</sup> group includes 0 to 5 year-old children, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> group covers 6 to 10 year-old children) will be considered.

The gender of the game is not explicitly specified in the leaflets under analysis; however, it seems to be implicit. The criteria that have been employed to distinguish between those games addressed to boys, girls or both genders is based on the different sections that are in these leaflets, in addition to the photographs of the particular game or toy. Most of the ‘male games’ appear with a boy playing with the game. However, in the case of the ‘female games’, we can see girls in the photographs. In the case of the toys addressed to both genders, the photographs are neutral in the sense that there is neither a boy nor a girl in the photograph, or both of them are present. Some of the brief descriptions of these toys include the note ‘for boys and for girls’.

## Results

In this section, a summary of the numbers of all the advertisements that contained some English word (s) in the analysed leaflets will be offered.

### Variable age

It is worth mentioning the obvious difference in terms of age in this sample. The number of toys advertised in English is visibly higher in the case of the children whose ages are between 0 and 5 years old (280 products contain an English word) compared to the products addressed to children between 6 and 10 years old (76 toys contain an anglicism). This fact might have various explanations. Firstly, it is probable that this kind of written advertisement in the form of leaflets is more demanded by the youngest generations (those children between 0 and 5 years old). Secondly, it might be possible that advertising companies prefer to use Spanish more frequently for products addressed to older children, as they can already read and they might want to understand what they are reading. These children may want to know the details of the toy, as they may be more demanding than the youngest generation, and in this case, it is necessary to use Spanish.

However, it is important to break down the results, as Table 2 offers. In the *Toys r Us* leaflet, there is a higher percentage of toys addressed to six to ten years old children (59.4 of boys and

**Table 2: Toys with English names addressed to girls and boys taking into account variable age**

	<i>Toys r Us</i>	<i>Carrefour</i>	<i>Hiperdino</i>	Total
Boys (0–5 years old)	80 (51.6)	57 (36.7)	18 (11.6)	155
Boys (6–10 years old)	41 (59.4)	26 (37.6)	2 (2.8)	69
Girls (0–5 years old)	46 (36.8)	47 (37.6)	32 (25.6)	125
Girls (6–10 years old)	3 (42.8)	2 (28.5)	2 (28.5)	7
Both genders (0–5 years old)	27 (32.9)	47 (57.3)	8 (9.7)	82
Both genders (6–10 years old)	35 (62.5)	11 (19.6)	10 (17.8)	56

42.8 of girls) than those addressed to zero to five years old children (51.6 of boys and 36.8 of girls). These figures contrast with the ones found in leaflets from the other two shops. In the case of *Carrefour*, the findings show that again older boys (6–10 years old) obtain higher scores (37.6) than younger ones (36.7). However, in the case of females, the youngest girls (0 to 5 years old) get 37.6% of toys addressed to them, while the oldest girls (6–10 years old) get a lower percentage, 28.5. Finally, in the *Hiperdino* leaflet, a percentage of 11.6 of the advertised toys are addressed to young boys (0–5 years old), whereas 25.6 are addressed to young girls. In the case of the older boys (6 to 10 years old), 2.8% of the adverts are addressed to them, whereas 28.5 per cent of toys are addressed to the older girls.

The results show that English is used to advertise a great many games, toys, dolls and so on. At this point, we could question whether the children understand the meaning of these toys that are advertised totally or partially in English, rather than in Spanish. The answer is probably no but the advertisement of these goods is strongly supported by a photograph or image of the product on sale. Most probably, it is the photograph that appeals to children, and makes them ask for this present from their parents and relatives.

Therefore, in spite of the obvious difference when it comes to toys addressed to the youngest children (0–5 years old), which represent a higher number in comparison with the oldest children (6–10 years old), it would be necessary to highlight that these age differences vary depending upon the kind of shop we refer to.

### Variable gender

In terms of gender, there are differences as regards the number of toys addressed to each. Boys' toys obtained the highest score, as 224 games were addressed to them, whereas 132 were addressed to girls, and 138 were devoted to both genders.

In addition, table 3 provides a breakdown among the three different shops under analysis considering

gender differences. In the case of the *Toys r Us* leaflet, the highest amount of toys containing English terms is addressed to boys (54%), whereas the lowest (37.1%) is devoted to girls, and an intermediate amount (44.9%) is addressed to both genders. In the case of the *Carrefour* leaflet, the highest percentage is that of toys addressed to both genders (42), followed by the girls' score of 37.1, which is very similar to the boys' (37). In the leaflet by *Hiperdino*, the girls obtained the highest score (25.7), being followed by both genders (13), and the lowest score was obtained by the boys (8.9).

It might be stated that in general terms, the highest score is for those toys containing English words addressed to boys. Nevertheless, as in the case of the variable age, depending upon the type of shop, the results may be different.

After analysing the previous table, it is worth mentioning the considerably larger number of toys with English names that is addressed to boys as compared with the smaller amount addressed to girls. Male children seem to be more exposed to the influence of English words when they choose their Christmas toys than female children are. The means obtained reveal that almost half of the total (45.3%) toys containing English names are addressed to boys, whereas only 26.7% are addressed to girls, and 27.9% to both genders.

### Linguistic analysis

From the linguistic point of view, most of these adverts appear with the first letter being capitalised and embedded within a longer name with one or two Spanish components and one or two English components. These names of toys might be considered a sort of hybrid, half in English and half in Spanish. Sometimes, there may be a mixture of an English root such as *fashion* and the Spanish ending *-istas*, creating the word *fashionistas*, used to refer to a kind of Barbie.

Sophisticated uses of the language may be observed such as the superlative ending *-est* next to the adjective *little* in the case of *Ordenador Littlest Pet Shop*. Another example is the word play

**Table 3: Toy advertisements with English names addressed to boys, girls and both genders**

	<i>Toys r Us</i>	<i>Carrefour</i>	<i>Hiperdino</i>	Total	Mean per cent
Boys	121 (54)	83 (37)	20 (8.9)	224	45.3
Girls	49 (37.1)	49 (37.1)	34 (25.7)	132	26.7
Both (boys and girls)	62 (44.9)	58 (42)	18 (13)	138	27.9

*Art-titude*, which combines the English terms *art* and *attitude* in one word (*Moxie Girlz Art-titude*). Another example is the word play used to name the game *Atmosfear*, instead of *atmosphere*.

The creation of compound words is remarkable, such as *Bakulauncher*, *Bakubattle* or *Bakuboot*, which combine the name of the brand *Bakugan*, and the kind of game along with its aim. Another example is *Construblok*, a word which combines *Construction* and *Block*.

The use of the inflected genitive may also be regarded as a sophisticated use of the language in the case of *Rubik's Revolution*, *Anakin's Jedi Starfighter*, *Muñeca Angel's Friends*. Another case, which is not correct, is *Pack 2 CD's de Villancicos* instead of omitting that apostrophe as it is not necessary.

In some cases, the English word occurs with a spelling mistake. Either it may be a marketing strategy used to attract the customer's attention or it may be a careless use of English. Some examples are: *Fantasy*, instead of *fantasy* (*Nancy y su Pony Fantasy*), *blok* instead of *block* (*Bolsa Maxi Mega Bloks*). *Magic Drago*, when the correct form would be *Magic Dragon*, as it is the name of a night lamp with a dragon inside. Another example is *Turbo Pro Wheelle Radio Control*, where the use of *Wheelle* should be *Wheel*, as it is used to name a motorbike with big wheels. *Ducati Moster* instead of *Monster*. *Transformers Power Bots* instead of *Power Boots*, since it is used to refer to a transformer with big boots.

The ending *-z* is used for the plural forms of some names, especially *girlz*, instead of *girls*, which is the regular and conventional form of the plural in English. *Cool Cardz* instead of *Cool Cards*, *Streetz Playset* instead of *Streets Playset*.

Some inconsistencies may also be present. Such is the case in the use of inverted commas in certain toys' names in English. For example, "*Gold*" (*3 figuras "Gold"*). This may be regarded as an inconsistent use of the inverted commas, as the majority of the advertised toys do not use inverted commas or any other kind of highlighter (bold type, italics, underlining). No hyphens have been observed, which means that these words are not in the process of acceptance in another language; as Berns (1994: 184) reports, 'the insertion of a hyphen in a compound often is used at a half-way point in the process of integration'. It might be asserted that none of these English words are in the process of integration in the Spanish language.

The frequent use of acronyms in English is also present in this kind of advertisement. For example, Night Raven *G.I. Joe*, *TMNT Mini*

*Megapack*, *Figuras articuladas G-Force*, *FJ Cruiser*, *Tag Jr+ libro Pocoyo*, *BFC Ink Muñeca*, where BFC stands for Best Friends Club.

## Function

After this analysis, it might be asked, what is the function of these English terms in Spanish printed advertising? As presented in the introduction of this paper, English has a part to play in a number of realms of daily life in present-day societies, such as law, medicine, science and technology, sports, economy and finance to list some of the fields where English makes inroads every day. The area of advertising is not exceptional. In fact, this realm teems with English words. Two main reasons may be considered for employing so many English words in Spanish: first, the well-known prestige which is associated with English as the language of the most powerful country in the world, the United States. The second reason is more related to the kind of language used in the advertising industry, whose main purpose is to attract customers by using an innovative, original and cool discourse. This kind of language, as it may be expected, is found in Spanish advertising which is full of English words.

## Conclusions

All in all, in this sociolinguistic study, I have provided evidence of the unlimited influence that the Anglo-American culture is having on present-day Spanish society. Even though this analysis has focused on the specific context of printed advertising leaflets addressed to young children, this tremendous influence tends to affect almost every single area of Spaniards' daily life.

Children are also the target of such influences, as has been shown by means of this linguistic analysis. Children are not only uncritical and defenceless consumers, but also they are the future generations who will be more than familiar with Anglo-American culture and values.

After having taken into consideration the variables age and gender, it might be asserted that the youngest children (between 0 to 5 years old) are more exposed to the presence of English words in these advertisements, whereas the oldest ones (6 to 10 years old) are also exposed to this influence, but to a lesser extent. As regards gender differences, although the analysis of the three different leaflets has shed light on this issue, it might be stated that male children seem to be

more exposed to the presence of English names in their toys, rather than female children.

From the linguistic point of view, many different kinds of use may be observed. These uses range from incorrect employment of certain words (*bots* instead of *boots*, *moster* instead of *monster*, and so on), to uses of inflected genitives, compound words, word play, inconsistencies such as the use of inverted commas, just to mention some examples.

Finally, the discussion about the function of these English words in Spanish printed leaflets addressed to children makes you regard most of these names as *cool* and *fashionable* uses that intend to attract a prospective customer or, in other words, one more marketing strategy that attempts to persuade parents and children to purchase a product. ■

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