English in the Canaries: past and present

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The presence and influence of English in the Canary Islands

1. Introduction

The Canary Islands are very well known as an all-year-round tourist resort, thanks to their mild climate. References to the Islands have been many and varied since ancient times. Caught between legends and reality, the Canaries were described as marvellous islands on the limits of the world. They were referred to as 'the Isles of the Blest', the Hesperides or the Elysian Fields by the Greek poets of the Golden Age.

Although lying less than 60 miles off the East coast of Africa, the Canaries are a Spanish archipelago. After their incorporation into the Crown of Castile in 1493, the islands were settled with Spanish-speaking colonists from the continent who readily imposed their language and culture on the native Guanche population. The archipelago soon became a point of linguistic and sociocultural contact due to its strategic position in the middle of the maritime commercial Atlantic routes. For centuries it was seen politically as a remote, rather isolated, colony of Spain. While socially and culturally their dependence on the continental government was always strong, the islanders soon established close commercial links with the Anglo-Saxon world. In fact, the impact of the English language and culture was strongly felt in the last decades of the nineteenth century and continued throughout the twentieth, while the islands' economy was completely dominated by British money and in practice they were almost considered as a British territory.

Nowadays, the islands are no exception to the globalisation process the rest of the planet is experiencing, and the presence and influence of English is still significant not only in the economy but also at educational and socio-cultural levels.

2. The past: the Canaries within the plot of the glorious British Empire

In contrast to continental Spain, where the influence of English did not filter through until the 1960s, the people in the Canary Islands have been in close contact with the English language and culture since the last decades of the nineteenth century. Earlier contacts can be traced back to 1519, with the wine trade established between the islanders and English wine merchants from Bristol (Bethencourt-Massieu, 1991). In fact, Shakespeare already acknowledged the quality of Canarian wine, or canary, in some of his works, namely Henry IV, Twelfth Night and The Merry Wives of Windsor. But it was after 1880 when a numerous British colony began to settle down on the main islands and, in particular, in the city of



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Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, a very convenient port on the maritime commercial routes to West Africa.

Several studies have shown that the British colony that settled here between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth played a significant role in the development of the Canarian economy (cf. Bethencourt-Massieu, 1991; Guimerá-Ravina, 1985; Morales-Lezcano, 1970; Millares-Cantero, 1995; Quintana, 1985, 1992; Riedel, 1972). The British were vital in giving assistance to the shipping lines which ran between Europe and the African countries. But they also had a great impact at other levels, such as the sociocultural (Almeida, 2005; Hernández-Gutiérrez, 1995; Herrera-Piqué, 1977, 1987) and even the linguistic one (cf. Castillo, 1991; Corbella, 1991–2; González Cruz, 1993, 1995).

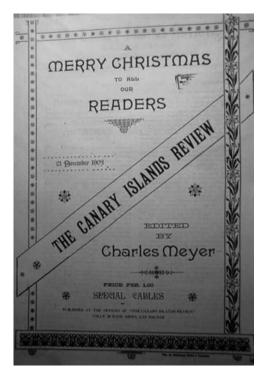
It was mainly during the period 1880–1914 that the British played a considerable part in the prevailing feeling of modernity which changed the life patterns of the islanders. The construction of La Luz Port by a British company, Swanston & Co., with British engineers and materials, though funded by the Spanish government, was the beginning of a dramatic change in the shape and the life of the city. The foreign investors provided Canarians with new jobs under British management. The progress in both communication systems (wire and telephone) and means of transport, along with the improvements of the underlying structure for lighting, water supply and sanitary drainage, were soon observable in the city. Besides, the large number of British visitors and residents demanded a variety of English-style services, such as hotels, restaurants, bars, bazaars, milliners, etc., which little by little invaded the place. The colony founded their own social and sports clubs (The British Club, Las Palmas Golf Club - the

oldest in Spain, Las Palmas Lawn Tennis Club, Las Palmas Football Club, Las Palmas Cricket Club), several institutions, such as the British Church of the Holy Trinity, the British Cemetery, Queen Victoria Hospital, the Seamen's Institute, most of them still functioning today, and their own newspaper, The Canary Islands Review, published weekly from 9 March 1903 till 25 January 1904 (González Cruz, 2003).

Running parallel with this, a sense of modernity pervaded the local social life, and the British were considered to be the prestigious makers of all that progress. Their entrepreneurial spirit certainly had important effects on the economy of the islands, such as the increase in commerce and the beginning of two essential industries, the export of agricultural produce (bananas, tomatoes and potatoes) and tourism, which are still our main economic resources. However, apart from improving the economy, the settlement of a numerous British colony in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria gave rise to the coexistence of Spanish and English speakers. This meant cultures and languages were in contact, which caused a great deal of cultural and linguistic interference1 to native Canarians, but also to the British residents and visitors. In particular, the study of this linguistic interference is useful to illustrate and summarise the historic events. They confirm how the massive influx of British tourists, steamers, shipping companies, and the increasing number of premises for the new firms that began to settle in the Port affected not only the life but also the language of the citizens. While some of this linguistic interference remained simply as occasional usages recorded in the written press, other English words were adopted definitely as borrowings and have remained in the variety of Spanish we speak at present, though they are used mostly in colloquial speech. This is the case



Photograph taken on 26 February 1883, the day the works for La Luz Port began.



Front page of the special Christmas issue of *The Canary Islands Review*.

of many of the words included in Guerra's (1977) lexical repertoire, like bol (from bowl), queque (from cake), piche (from pitch), guagua (from wagon), or even chone (from Johnny), which are only used in the Canaries, and whose equivalents in Standard Castilian Spanish are tazón, pastel, alquitrán, autobús and extranjero, respectively. For some of these terms, which clearly reveal an English origin, it is rather difficult to find written evidence; this happens to words such as breca (or brecha, from break), piche (from pitch), chone (from Johnny), naife (from knife), Interferences from English tend to be more numerous in those semantic fields which refer to areas where the British strongly exerted their influence, namely, politics and economics, sports, society and culture, food and drinks, ships and the harbour, and leisure.

Many terms were introduced orally, through the peculiar sort of pidgin spoken by the dockers and traders, or harbour pedlars (locally known as *cambulloneros*), to communicate with the passengers and the crew members on board the foreign steamers. Armistead (1996, 1997) believes that this trade pidgin, known as *Pichingli*, flourished in the islands during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was a mixture of English and Spanish

that was used in the two major ports of the islands but also by other professional groups, like the selfstyled 'guides and dockside interpreters known as *pimpes*' (Armistead, 1996: 86).

This pidgin seems to have fallen into disuse but part of its vocabulary has remained and been adopted as English loanwords in our Canarian Spanish, obviously adapted to our phonological system, as reflected in their Hispanicised forms. Some of these words and expressions are the following: refre, cona or gona, orsay, pena, esport, pailebot, esplín, yanqui, mildiú, vate or váter, bisté, rosbif, sangüis, spik, mitin, brete, chone, guachimán, monis, naife, paipa, queque, bol, piche, quinegua, suasto, jailas, yova, guanijai, tique, etc., which respectively reveal the process of adaptation into Spanish of the original English pronunciation of referee, corner, off-side, penal, sport, pilot's boat, spleen, yankee, mildew, water(-closet), beefsteak, roast beef, sandwich, speech, meeting, bread, Johnny, watchman, money, knife, pipe, cake, bowl, pitch, King Edward, Swanston, Highlands, Yeoward, one John Haig and ticket. Other terms like changue, guagua, and artodate are the result of the islanders' attempt to read the English words change, wagon, up-to-date, respectively, using the Spanish phonological system. They are so ingrained in our culture that today many Canarians are not really conscious of their English origin.

Just a few more examples taken from the local press published between 1880 and 1914 may illustrate the extent to which some of these interferences from English entered the domains of our Canarian Spanish lexicon. This is the case of some English words to which Spanish suffixes have been added, such as interviuvar, interviewado, reporterismo, sportivo, butterina, sheriffiano - as well as words which, once adopted, follow the Spanish rules to form the plural: pudines (from puddings), wagones (from wagons), lores (from lords), bistegues or bisteses (from beefsteaks), etc. There is also written evidence of specific cases of mixed compounding, like Cemento-house, Insular Police, brick-barca, as well as some instances of code-mixing, such as the ones below:

- ... el God save the Queen circuló de mesa en mesa...
- ... y el whisky cantó un Save the Queen sin oído...
- ... Llegar pronto o no llegar, that is the question...
- ... ese triunfo es muy precario...y quimérico, to be or not to be, that is the question... Sin toasts y sin hurrahs...
- ... como ellos dicen, let hell loose...

Many English terms began to be used in the local newspapers much earlier than in continental Spain. For instance, we can mention some items from the numerous examples of terminology referring to sports, which can be found in the local newspapers published between 1906 and 1914. Loanwords like *goal* and *football* turned later into the Hispanicised forms *gol* and *fútbol*. Other terms were borrowed only temporarily – sometimes for as long as ten or even more years – to be, in time, superseded by new Spanish words. This is the case of *goalkeeper*, *referee*, *team*, *player*, *score*, etc., which were later on replaced by the Spanish words *portero*, *árbitro*, *equipo*, *jugador* and *resultado*, respectively.

In addition, the British exerted a great influence on the islanders' habits, and many of the foreigners' behaviours and customs were adopted, since the members of both the British colony and the upper-class Canarians participated in the organisation of numerous social, cultural, sporting and charitable activities. Furthermore, in spite of keeping their idiosyncrasy as a group, many British residents integrated themselves into the Canarian society, and family links were established between the communities, many of which remain today.

In those days, thousands of British travellers and tourists (many of them invalids) began to visit the islands, especially Gran Canaria and Tenerife, while the number of British residents also increased considerably. The Canary Islands also started to inspire an array of publications, so that there is actually a copious and varied literature written mostly by British, but also some American, authors. They include travel books, tourist guides, sociocultural, historic works and even works with a literary or linguistic orientation, as well as all kinds of scientific studies, covering disciplines such as anthropology, astronomy, biology, botany, entomology, geology, ornithology and other fields within zoology, together with a wealth of research related to climatic and health issues. This long bibliography, comprising more than 300 titles, from 1583 till the present, has been classified, studied and commented on (González Cruz, 2002). It constitutes an invaluable legacy which reveals the enormous interest this place has aroused throughout history. Travel accounts and tourist guides are particularly useful to provide us with a detailed description of day to day life in those days and how this contact between the British and the Canarian people developed. They are also helpful to study the linguistic influences upon the writers during their stay on the islands. The many interferences from Spanish found in the English records (González Cruz, 2011 and forthcoming) obviously reveal the extent of the writers' socio-cultural and linguistic interaction with the Canarian people, particularly when they codeswitch and choose Spanish words to refer to things they could have mentioned in English. This can be seen just as the other side of the coin, showing how to some extent the influential English-speaking visitor sometimes became 'Canarianised' in many ways.

3. The present

Recognised worldwide as the international language, English is now leading the process of globalisation. A look at the Canaries today reveals that the archipelago is not outside this reality. Nowadays English is even more present in the islands than it was in the past, not only through the many tourists and foreign residents, but also due to its influence in the media — particularly through advertising, computers and modern technology, and also education.

The British community now settled in the Canary Islands is still quite numerous (estimates are about 75,000 residents), but they don't play a particularly important role in the economy, which is not moved exclusively by British money either. The presence of English is noticeable in all types of advertising: TV ads, the press, commercial signs and names, shop-windows, etc., as some scholars (Luján, 2010a, 2010b; Medina, 1991, 1994) have noted. This phenomenon is also mentioned in several studies (González Cruz, 2003; Luján, 2003; González Cruz and Luján, 2003; González Cruz et al., 2009), which have described and analysed the present use of anglicisms in the Canarian variety of Spanish, especially by youngsters, whose vocabulary includes a lot of terms and expressions, many of them marked with humour, such as crack, stand-by, happy, fifty-fifty, show, K.O., overbooking, light, number one, groggy, business, fashion, heavy, off, superstar, superwoman, flower power, body, off-the-record, sorry, hello, darling, please, bye, no comment, etc. The list of anglicisms that are known and used is, of course, much longer and includes most of the terms collected by Rodríguez and Lillo's (1997) dictionary. They cover almost every domain of any individual's life, since anglicisms can be encountered and used when talking about sports, computers and technology, music, clothes, TV and cinema, drinks and food, or even children's toys, as Luján (2011) has recently shown.

Two more details are also revealing of the significant role that English plays in the Canaries.

Firstly, the importance of English was already recognised in 1998, when Telefónica, then established as the National Telephone Company, decided to publish a bilingual (Spanish/English) edition of the popular Yellow Pages ('Páginas amarillas'), only for these islands and the Balearics, probably because of the relevance of tourism in these Spanish regions. Secondly, newspapers in English have been published from time to time. Apart from the already mentioned The Canary Islands Review (which was only briefly superseded by The Canary Islands Gazette), another weekly came out later in the sixties. The Canary Sun, which lasted for several years. Today, we have The Canary News, which publicises itself as 'The Canary Islands' most successful English language newspaper' and a 'primary source of English language news and views from the Canary Islands'. It seems to be the only paper that reports both online and in print, 'on the province of Las Palmas from Gran Canaria to Fuerteventura and Lanzarote and the wider Islas Canarias as a whole', and its purpose is 'to inform, to entertain and to communicate'. According to the editor, Edward Timon, the print version has a fast growing circulation and the demand for it is high.

We have also found several websites devoted to news from almost every island, such as *Tenerife News Online: News and Information in English for the Canary Islands*, available at http://www.tenerifenews.com, or *Island Connections*, which offers 'Daily news from the Canaries' and considers itself to be 'Tenerife's biggest English language newspaper on-line', available at http://www.islandconnections.eu/.

Likewise, Fuerteventura and Lanzarote have *El Sol News Online* at http://fuertecomputermaintenance.co.uk/ or the *Lanzarote Magazine*, at http://www.lanzarotemagazine.co.uk; while we have

La Palma News. Local news for La Palma, CA continually updated from thousands of sources on the web, at http://www.topix.com/city/la-palma-ca, or the so called *The City of La Palma*, at http://www.cityoflapalma.org/civicalerts.aspx, and many more.

Even as I write these lines, two important sociocultural events, with English names, are taking place in the city of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: the 'Fashion Week', held between April 4th and 8th, and 'Good Night Triana', a special Friday evening with shops opening till midnight, varied activities for children and live music in Triana High Street, one of the two most important shopping areas of the capital. The local press gives a detailed report on them (*La Provincia*, 8 April 2011, p. 72) as well as on other socio-cultural celebrations like that of Halloween, which in the last decade has been adopted in an increasingly successful way, even by the local institutions, proving the strong influence the Anglo-Saxon world is exerting in the place.

Meanwhile, in recent decades the local government has developed policies which have intensified the presence of English in the educational system, not only by making the study of English compulsory in Canarian state primary schools at an earlier age than is legally required, but also by reinforcing and improving the teaching and learning of English at the secondary level. The educational authorities have also implemented the creation, since 1988, of 22 Official Language Schools all over the islands – plus three minor local branches in some areas of Lanzarote and Fuerteventura – where English is now taught widely, together with other foreign languages, such as German and French, and to a lesser extent Italian, Russian, Arabic and even Spanish for foreigners (the latter being increasingly in demand by the many immigrants settling in the place).





Some of the many English signs in the streets of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria



The town council of the village of Agaete, on the northwest coast of Gran Canaria, organised a Halloween party in 2008, which was announced with this poster.

Another major recent initiative within the educational realm is the adoption of the modern Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), an approach that has been taken by a total of 407 state primary and secondary schools all over the islands (thus representing 54.63% of the total number of local educational centres) in the last two academic years (2009-10, 2010-11). In this method, previously known as 'Content-based instruction' or 'Bilingual education', content subjects are taught and learnt in a language which is not the mother tongue of the learners, in this case in English, so that, apart from being integrated into the broad curriculum, this foreign language becomes the means of learning content (geography, history, physics, mathematics, etc.). Teachers working in any of the educational centres that are developing the CLIL Project use web sites and blogs to share material and experience.

All these efforts aimed at improving Canarian students' communicative competence in English are grouped under the Project *Hablar otra lengua* ('Speak another language'). This global project includes the above mentioned CLIL, but is also

being carried out through other five specific steps which are part of the government's plan to implement the learning of English. Although today they all seem to be concentrated in CLIL, the specific strategies are the following:

- a) Classroom Assistants Project. The Department of Education ('Consejería de Educación') of the Canarian Government has been promoting this project since the academic course 2001–2 in an attempt to improve both Canarian students and teachers' communicative competence. The presence of English native assistant teachers in the classroom contributes to the linguistic immersion and reinforces students' and teachers' oral skills. Recently, it seems the CA Project has been assimilated into the CLIL Project, the reasoning being that every primary or secondary school that signs up for CLIL will get a classroom assistant assigned to them to help with CLIL.
- b) Creative English Workshops. Run by the class-room assistants, these multidisciplinary workshops were held until recently for both students and teachers working in centres which are not developing the CA Project, all over the islands. They deal with varied topics such as health, the environment, sports, consumerism, etc., which are discussed in a creative and playful way in an attempt to improve the participants' communicative competence in English.
- c) Conversation classes. The Department of Education of the Canarian Government also offers primary school teachers with an A1– A2 level of English the possibility of attending a 20-hour Conversation Course with a native assistant teacher. Sessions of 1–2 hours per week are held in the premises of several primary schools and in the CEPs (Teachers' Centres or 'Centro de Profesores') for groups of at least 10 teachers.
- d) Schools of the Future. This initiative involves an exchange between two British universities (Goldsmiths College and the University of Chichester) and Canarian educational centres. The purpose is that the British students training to become teachers can do their teaching practice in Canarian centres. This allows the creation of pedagogical links between teachers and students of the two institutions, which will favour cultural enrichment, as well as Canarian students' improvement of their communicative competence.

- e) European Language Portfolio. This measure is related to the European project to develop levels of proficiency that would lead on to the creation of a certification in language ability which can be used across Europe. The Portfolio is an online document that allows language learners to talk about their language and cultural learning experience and to reflect on it. Its aims are to encourage everyone to learn languages, to facilitate mobility across Europe, and to promote understanding and tolerance among the Europeans through the knowledge of other languages and cultures. The Portfolio consists of these three sections:
 - (i) Language passport. This is updated by every user and shows what he/she can do in different languages. It includes a self-evaluation chart describing the four skills as well as information about courses he/she has attended, diplomas gained, etc.
 - (ii) Linguistic biography. Designed to be a guide for the language learner who wants to plan and evaluate his/her progress. Here each user can describe his/her experiences with each language.
 - (iii) Dossier. This contains examples of personal works that illustrate the user's language competence, such as certifications, diplomas, written work, projects, presentations, video or audio recordings, etc.

In addition to all these measures, every year any state primary or secondary school teacher can apply for a grant to attend English, French or German courses in the European Union. These grants are funds offered by the Canarian Government through its Department of Education to cover only the course fees and the expenses derived from the stay, but the applicants must pay for the travelling expenses. They may also participate in any of the many European programmes which are promoted by an *ad hoc* office.

It is difficult to ascertain the results of all these measures, let alone to evaluate them. It is to be hoped that the efforts made by the local authorities will have (or are already starting to have) their fruits. Although Spaniards (and Canarians are included) traditionally tend not to have a good reputation as foreign language learners, I think the situation is changing today. For the moment we can only have access to information regarding the policies followed by the Department of Education of the Canarian Government, as they are explained in their website, available at http://www.gobie

rnodecanarias.org/educacion/WebDGOIE/scripts/default.asp?IdSitio=13&Cont=497. Maybe the only clue as to some positive result is given by the following piece of news, also published in the website above:

Rosa-Camino Viejo de la isla de La Palma, coordi-

El proyecto 'Getting Closer' del CEIP La

nado por la maestra de inglés, Annette Westerop, ha obtenido el primer premio europeo eTwinning en la categoría de alumnos de 4-11 años. El premio para la profesora ganadora y su colega en el proyecto consistirá en asistir a la Conferencia Anual que se celebrará en Budapest (Hungría) a principios de abril. Por su parte el alumnado participante han sido invitado al eTwinning Camp. The 'Getting Closer' Project carried out by the Primary School La Rosa-Camino Viejo in the island of La Palma, under the supervision of the English teacher Annette Westerop, has been awarded the first European eTwinning Prize for 4-to-11-year-old pupils. The Prize for the teacher and her colleague in the Project will be the attendance at the Annual Conference to be held in Budapest (Hungary) next April. In their turn, the pupils who participated in the Projects have been invited to an eTwinning Camp.

On the other hand, Canarian students (or rather, their parents) can also opt for enrolling in a number of private bilingual (English-Spanish) schools (Colegio Arenas, Colegio Hispano-Inglés, Brains School, etc.) and several schools whose teaching is entirely performed in English (Canterbury School, Kent College English School, Oakley College, etc.) apart from the more traditional British Schools, established on the islands of Gran Canaria and Lanzarote since 1966 and 1986, respectively; as well as the American School of Las Palmas, founded in Gran Canaria in 1967. The British School of Tenerife is a new school that has been much more recently founded (in 2010) by the merging of two schools in the north of Tenerife, Trinity School (established since 1987) and the International British Yeoward School (founded in 1968).

Many learners also turn to the numerous private academies and private native teachers who have been plentiful since the last decades of the nineteenth century, their number having also increased considerably lately. For example, Lucy Corne, in her article 'Teaching English in Paradise. Living in the Canary Islands of Spain' (www.transitions abroad.com/listings/work/esl/articles/teaching-eng lish-in-the-canary-islands-spain.shtml), tells us

about her experiences as a private teacher of English on the island of Gran Canaria.

Finally. the two Canarian universities. Universidad de La Laguna and the younger Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, offer a degree which is equivalent to English Studies (called 'Filología Inglesa' or 'Lenguas Modernas' in Spanish). At the ULPGC Faculty of Translation and Interpretation, English is also much in demand as one of the main languages of speciality in students' curricula. In June 2012, for the first time in its history, the PAU exam (the Spanish university entrance examination) will include an oral interview in English.

In general, today students are well aware of the importance of English in the labour market, especially so in a place where tourism is such a crucial sector for the economy. They also know that English will open doors to many universities abroad so that they can further their studies and broaden their professional prospects. With these ideas in mind, the local government and the two universities are organising the Feria de Idiomas Canarias 2011, to be held next April 29 and 30 (http://www.feriadeidiomas.com and http:// www.ccmeridiano.com/contenidos/verArt/noticiaseventos/feria-de-idiomas-canarias-2011). The aim of this event is to offer information about the different possibilities regarding language learning, both in the Canaries and abroad, to all the professionals working in this sector, such as language teachers, university teachers, editors, diplomats, travel agents, etc.

4. Conclusion

The Canaries have always been, and still are, in close contact with the English language and culture. In the past they almost functioned as if they were part of the British territory, as the Canarian economy was completely dominated by British money. Some authors have even talked about the emergence of a pidgin English variety in the islands. Nowadays, the status of English is simply that of a foreign language which plays a crucial role for the development of tourism, the basis of the Canarian economy. Both Canarian people and the local authorities are well aware of the importance of English, and therefore its teaching and learning is encouraged through a number of measures taken by the local educational authorities. English is and will remain present in the sociocultural sphere and the daily lives of Canarian people through advertising, commerce, tourism, technology, sports and all the many areas where English terminology noticeably abounds.

Note

1 MacKey (1977) made a distinction between borrowings and interferences. The former are elements of the *langue*, and are systematic and collective, implying an integration in the language, whereas the latter belong to the *parole*, being individual and occasional.

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