

# Less Widely Spoken and Taught Languages: The Spanish Situation

## Méně rozšířené jazyky: situace ve Španělsku

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**Abstract:** This paper addresses the issue of less widely spoken and taught languages. The terminology regarding these languages is discussed. The Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale used by Ethnologue is explained to show the problem regarding endangered languages. Finally, the situation of languages in Spain is dealt with, both institutionally and academically.

**Key words:** less widely spoken and taught languages, minor languages

### Introduction

Some people foresee a future with only one language spoken all around the world, a language to be used as *lingua franca* in all international communications such as Latin was in other time. The term *lingua franca* is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as a language “that is adopted as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different.” A *lingua franca* has its own value, sometimes operating for diplomacy purposes as French once, but most frequently serving economic purposes.

Many people nowadays speak English all over the world, so many think English will be this predicted *lingua franca*. Of course, English plays a key role in our everyday life: it is the language of business, culture, diplomacy, international cooperation, sport, the Internet, Science, Technology, Engineering, Tourism, and Education.

However, despite the importance of English as a common means of communication in all these fields, language diversity seems to be characteristic of human nature, diversity being considered as synonym of richness, as the *Council of Europe* thought when the European Day of languages (26th of September) was established, and policies to their safeguard set up. David Crystal (2000: 44) puts it this way,

If diversity is a prerequisite for successful humanity, then the preservation of linguistic diversity is essential, for language lies at the heart of what it means to be human. If the development of multiple cultures is so important, then the role of languages become critical, for cultures are chiefly transmitted through spoken and written languages.

In spite of this, the idea of studying and teaching languages other than the major international Languages (English, French, German, etc.) at primary and secondary levels is often rejected. Several reasons are usually put forward: the concern that its teaching would take away hours from other more important subjects; the feeling that it would be a waste of time, energy and money; the doubt that children should learn other languages in addition to their mother tongue and English; and other people think that to learn their own minor language along with the national one is a right they are entitled to, so they do not need another one.

In Higher Education, Language Centres have a key role in the teaching of languages that are not widely taught at secondary level, e.g. Eastern European languages and Asian languages each day becoming more popular. Although English represents the major offer in most Language Centres, i.e. the language more demanded and more offered, other major European languages also play an important part in serving different needs and are taught and studied in those language centres; languages such as German, French or Spanish, for example.

There are many plurilingual people in the world and the fact of being plurilingual has not harmed them in the least but it has helped them learn other languages and obtain better jobs.

## 1 Terminology

When talking about languages, several terms need to be considered. As living organisms languages have what has been called variation. Variation is a very interesting field of study as languages can be studied from different perspectives: diachronic variation, i.e. variation in time as new lexical, phonological or grammatical features appear in the geographic and social space over time, e.g. Old English, Middle English and Modern English; and synchronic variation, choosing a given period and place or social or cultural group and studying its language characteristics, or even comparing two or more languages of the same period. The most effective source of language change or variation is cultural transmission. New speakers recreate the language of the previous generation selecting some exact elements but changing others slightly. Thus, the language of the community does not remain stable and change and variation are unavoidable.

...change is a normal and necessary part of all languages. Healthy languages are always borrowing from each other, and vocabulary is always changing between old and young generations. (Crystal, 2000: 30)

Some other terms are important in this field such as standard language, dialect and accent. A language is never used in a uniform way. Varieties of language share similar features but deviate from one another to different degrees. We usually have a standard language, which is the language taught in schools and used by

media, generally the most prestigious variety; and we also have what we call accent and dialect. Accent refers to aspects of pronunciation which identify where a speaker is from regionally or socially. Dialect is a divergent variety with different features of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Crystal (2000:8) gives this definition: "on purely linguistic grounds, two speech systems are considered to be dialects of the same language if they are (predominantly) mutually intelligible." Dialects are not better than the standard language but different, although very frequently socially rejected or despised.

Many countries have a main or dominant language and other languages that are subordinate to it, usually spoken by minority groups, being bilingualism a very common phenomenon. In some areas the standard chosen may be a variety which originally had no native speakers, a creole language which comes from a pidgin language. A pidgin is a variety of a language which developed for practical purposes such as trading among groups of people who did not know each other's languages (the word pidgin comes from the Chinese version of the word business). When a pidgin develops beyond its role as a trade language and becomes the first language of a social group it is called a creole language. Pidgin languages do not have native speakers as they are created for a particular purpose, but creoles have native speakers: the children of people who used pidgin learn this language from their parents as a mother tongue.

The coexistence of two varieties of the same language (dialects) in a speech community is called diglossia (Ferguson, 1959). Typically, one variety is more formal and prestigious while the other is more informal and its speakers are usually considered less educated people or belonging to lower social status despite the fact of being the genuine mother tongue.

For convenience of reference, the superposed variety in diglossia will be called the H ('High variety') simply H and the regional dialects will be called L ('low') varieties, or, collectively, simply L. (Ferguson, 1959: 234)

The difference between diglossia and a standard language-with-dialects is that in diglossia no-one speaks the high variety as a mother tongue, only the low-variety. In the standard language-with-dialects situation, some speakers speak the high variety as a mother tongue, while others speak low-varieties as a mother tongue. Typical diglossic situations are Modern standard Arabic & Arabic dialects.

Another phenomenon related to variation is code-switching which is the use of more than one language, or language variety, in conversation. People that know more than one language frequently use elements of different languages when talking, mixing them consciously or unconsciously while speaking, for expressive, social, cultural or psychological purposes.

## 2 Languages of the World

Europeans often feel that they live in a continent with a great number of languages but that is a candid presupposition. The truth is that only 287 languages are European, while Asia has 2,296 language, Africa, 2,139, The Americas, 1,062 and the Pacific, 1,313.

Not every single language in the world has been studied but, according to the last update by *Ethnologue*, our planet has more than 7 billion people who speak 7,097 different languages. Only a few of these languages are spoken by millions of speakers, such as English, Chinese or Spanish, some by thousands of speakers, and some by only hundreds. In fact, 96% of the world's languages are spoken by just 4% of the people (Crystal, 2000).

All the languages around the world are precious for their speakers, and when a language dies out, its culture also fades away and might be lost forever. Unfortunately, many minority languages are in danger of dying in this globalized world of today and this issue should be a matter of concern for all of us. As Crystal (1999:3) says "The world is a mosaic of visions. To lose even one piece of this mosaic is a loss for all of us."

Crystal (2000) thinks that there are many reasons for the decay of languages, from natural disaster to genocide, being the main threat at the present time, cultural assimilation, a process in which a community of speakers gradually shifts to another language until they cease to use their original language. This process leads to the decline of a language and it may be intentional or imposed upon. Speakers might decide to abandon their mother tongue because of economic, usefulness or prestige reasons. When a rejected language has only a few old speakers and it is not used anymore for communication purposes by the younger generations, then the language is said to be on the edge of death.

## 3 Endangered languages

An endangered language is a language that is at risk of extinction because the speakers have ceased using it, acquiring another language instead. The intergeneration transmission, thus, is interrupted and the language can only be found in recordings or written records. Languages which have not been documented disappear altogether.

A language is said to be dead when no one speaks it any more. It may continue to have existence in a recorded form, of course – traditionally in writing, more recently as part of a sound or video archive (and it does in a sense 'live on' in this way) – but unless it has fluent speakers one would not talk of it as a 'living language. (Crystal, 2000: 11)

Organizations such as *UNESCO* and the *European Union* are actively working to save and stabilize endangered languages. Other associations, institutes and groups are also concerned about this issue, e.g. *NCOLCTL* (National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages) represents the less commonly taught languages in the United States, more specifically it gives information to organizations, institutions, and individuals interested in the teaching and learning of these languages. The *Endangered Languages Alliance (ELA)* is an independent non-profit organization in New York City and the only organization in the world focused on the immense linguistic diversity of urban areas; the *Endangered Language Fund (ELF)* was founded in 1996 with the goal of supporting endangered language preservation and documentation mechanism for supporting work on endangered languages by funding grants to individuals, tribes, and museums; *Endangered Languages Project* serves as an online resource for samples and research on endangered languages as well as a forum for advice and best practices for those working to strengthen linguistic diversity; founded by linguist Dr. Anderson, the *Living Tongues Institute's* objective is to promote the documentation, maintenance, preservation, and revitalization of endangered languages worldwide; *Enduring voices Project* is a joint initiative of *Living Tongues Institute* and *National Geographic* for documenting the world's endangered languages by identifying the most crucial areas where languages are endangered and embarking on expeditions to record these languages; the *University Council of Modern Languages (UCML)* was established in 1993 as the overarching national organization which represents the interests of Modern Languages, Linguistics and Cultural Studies in Higher Education throughout the United Kingdom; the *International Organization for Standardization (ISO)*, an independent, non-governmental international organization, uses a standard named *ISO 639-3 2007* that provides unique three-letter codes for over 7,500 languages, including living, extinct, ancient and constructed languages, written or unwritten; *Ethnologue* was founded by Richard S. Pittman in 1996 with the goal of supporting endangered language preservation and documentation by funding grants to individuals, tribes, and museums and has become the most reliable source of information as regards language issues.

## 4 Ethnologue

The first edition of *Ethnologue*, in 1951, was 10 mimeographed pages that contained information on 46 languages or groups of languages. Hand-made maps were included in the fourth edition of 1953. The publication became a book in the fifth edition of 1958. The seventh edition (1969) listed 4,493 languages. Nowadays, *Ethnologue* gives information about 7,097 living languages for researchers, institutions and individuals interested in bilingualism, language planning and policy, endangered languages, cross-cultural communication, and other issues related to languages. In addition, *Ethnologue 2016* also lists 360 recently extinct languages.

The descriptions in the *Ethnologue* are organized by area, region, and country, indicating the region of use, their genetic classification and the speaker population and listing dialect names. It also describes the language use, its viability, the writing script and the availability of literature. Extensive references are cited along with more than 200 language maps.

*Ethnologue* uses the *Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale* or EGIDS (Lewis and Simons, 2010), a scale consisting of 13 levels of vitality or disruption to the intergenerational transmission of the language. Vigorous languages have lower numbers on the scale and weaker, endangered languages have higher numbers:

- EGIDS 9 (Dormant) and EGIDS 10 (Extinct) focus on the function of the language as a marker of identity. If no one links the language with their cultural identity, the language is considered Extinct. If there is an ethnic group that uses the language only for symbolic purposes so as not to forget that identity, the language can be categorized as Dormant (EGIDS 9).
- In levels EGIDS 6a (Vigorous), 6b (Threatened), 7 (Shifting), 8a (Moribund), and 8b (Nearly extinct) the factor considered is the state of daily face-to-face use and intergenerational transmission. The gradual loss of use, generation by generation is represented in lower numbers.
- EGIDS 4 (Educational) and EGIDS 5 (Developing) concentrate on whether the use of the language is backed and strengthened in education, considering issues such as standardization and literacy acquisition.
- EGIDS 3 (Wider Communication) focuses on the notion of vehicularity, i.e. if a language is widely used as a second language and as a means of cross cultural communication.
- In EGIDS 2 (Provincial) and EGIDS 1 (National) the central point is the level of recognition and use given by government, media and the workplace at sub-national or national levels.
- EGIDS 0 (International) is a category for those few languages used as the instrument for communication in diplomacy and international commerce.

The following paragraphs show how many languages are institutional, developing, vigorous, in trouble and dying by continents.

#### 4.1 Africa

There are 2,139 languages in Africa with a population of 1,144,196,000. Of them, 190 are institutional, 545 developing, 1,024 vigorous, in trouble 245 and dying 135. The continent is divided into different regions: Eastern Africa, with 80 institutional languages, 137 developing, 140 vigorous, 53 in trouble and 22 dying; Northern Africa where there are 8 institutional languages, 22 developing, vigor-

ous 18, in trouble 36, dying 14; Southern Africa has 13 institutional languages, 7 developing, vigorous 17, in trouble 3, and dying 8; Middle Africa with 32 institutional languages, developing 157, Vigorous 350, in Trouble 96, and dying 41; and Western Africa where there are 57 institutional, 222 developing, Vigorous 499, in trouble 57, and 50 dying languages.

#### *4.2 Americas*

With a population of 975,451,983, there are 1,062 languages in The Americas, of which 37 are institutional, developing 237, vigorous 143, in trouble: 306, and 339 dying. According to the regions, the Caribbean has 3 institutional languages, 4 developing, 9 vigorous, in trouble 4, and dying 3; in Central America there are 14 institutional, developing 106, vigorous 77, in trouble 87, and dying 42; Northern America holds 4 institutional languages, developing 12, vigorous: 2, in trouble 83, and dying 155; and South America. institutional 16, developing 115, vigorous 55, in trouble 132, and dying 139.

#### *4.3 Asia*

In Asia there are 2,296 languages: With a population of 4,394,809,000, 201 are institutional languages, 379 developing, 842 vigorous, in trouble 683, and dying 191. Asia is divided in the following regions: Central Asia where there are 5 institutional languages, 1 developing, 2 vigorous, 4 in trouble and 1 dying; South Eastern Asia with 78 institutional, 212 developing, vigorous 434, in trouble 410, and dying 113; Southern Asia has 80 institutional languages, 136 developing, vigorous 286, in trouble 126, and 31 dying; in Eastern Asia there are 20 institutional, developing 24, vigorous 100, in trouble 111, and dying 34; and Western Asia holds 18 institutional languages, 6 developing, 20 vigorous, 32 in trouble, and 12 dying.

#### *4.4 Europe*

Europe has 287 languages with a population of 740,383,131, of which 74 are institutional, 80 developing, 31 vigorous, 50 in trouble, and 52 dying. It is divided into Eastern Europe with 27 institutional languages, 33 develop, vigorous 7, in trouble 22, and dying 32; Northern Europe has 18 institutional, 13 developing and 6 vigorous languages, 3 in trouble, and 10 dying; Southern Europe, with 19 institutional languages, 16 developing, 8 vigorous, 13 in trouble, and 9 dying; and Western Europe has 10 institutional, 18 developing, 10 vigorous languages, 12 in trouble and 1 dying.

#### *4.5 Pacific*

The Pacific area has 1,313 languages, with a population of 39,314,049. Of this 1,313 languages 70 are institutional, 378 developing, 422 vigorous, 240 in trou-

ble and dying 203. The areas are Australia and New Zealand with 5 institutional languages, developing 18, vigorous 15, in trouble 36, and dying 136; Melanesia has 49 institutional languages, 353 developing, 403 vigorous, in trouble 188, and dying 6; Micronesia with 11 institutional languages, 4 developing, vigorous 4, in trouble 5, and 3 dying; Polynesia with 5 institutional languages, developing 3, and in trouble 11.

## 5 Minor languages

*Minor* languages as opposed to *major* languages seem to be an unavoidable dichotomy, being major languages such as English, French, German or Spanish and minor languages those as Catalan, Serbian or Romanian. However, the line between a minor or small language and a major or big language is, at least, controversial, as the statistics are frequently based on different criteria. One of the usually considered indicators is the number of native speakers, and thus, languages such as Chinese (1,302 million), Spanish (427 million), English (339 million), Arabic (267 million) and Hindi (260 million) are the major ones. However, Chinese is a macro-language which encompasses some 13 languages and many dialects, some not mutually intelligible, and Arabic comprehends 19 varieties. Similarly, a language can be considered minor or major according to the context, for example Russian in Finland and the Baltic states is used by a minority of speakers and thus considered a minor language there.

Other names are also applied to minor or small languages, terms such as *lesser spoken*, *minorised*, *regional*, *endangered*, *threatened* or *ormenaced*. In USA the expression *less commonly taught languages* is applied to foreign languages other than the most commonly learned in public schools such as Chinese, Arabic, Russian or Persian. And very often in Europe reference is made to *less widely spoken and taught languages*.

The choice of the label is for each language community to decide, but it is important to understand that in this essay when we refer to a *less widely spoken and taught language* it can be a national language, a minority language or the language of an immigrant group which are not used in global or wider European communications, but are taught and learned in Higher Education. What is interesting here is the mere concept of *minor languages* because the importance of a language depends on its economic or strategic interest for other cultures. For example, Portuguese and French are languages spoken by our neighbours, and, of course, it is but natural that we have a prior interest in these languages, especially in the borders.

Minor languages, those that are used by smaller communities, are very frequently in danger of disappearance, as they can be threatened by external (political, social or educational) or internal pressure (refusal of the speaking community). If



a language is displaced by a dominant one used in education and in the working place, speakers of that language can decide not to use it, believing that it is a disadvantage or even rejecting it as worthless. It has been said that language loss is part of its evolution as any living organism, however, if biodiversity is a concern for humanity, endangered languages should be a priority. National policies should be taken to protect minor languages, creating a favourable social and political environment with educational systems that promote its instruction. In doing so, the communities will be proud of speaking their own language and will consider plurilingualism as a desirable and valuable talent. According to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* Council of Europe (2001:168),

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw.

However, the benefits of plurilingualism is not solely the linguistic knowledge. Cummins (1981: 31) stated that,

Many recent research studies suggest that under these circumstances bilingualism can enhance intellectual and educational abilities. These studies have reported positive effects of bilingualism in five areas. (1) ability to analyse and become aware of language; (2) overall academic language skills (for example, reading and writing), (3) general conceptual development, (4) creative thinking, and (5) sensitivity to communicative needs of the listener.

Likewise, Cenoz & Valencia (1994: 206) conducted a research in order to assess the effect of instruction in a minor language on third language acquisition (English), concluding that “the use of a minority language as the language of instruction can improve linguistic proficiency not only in a second language (Basque) but also in a third (English). Thus, if language diversity has to be preserved,” Policies affecting Linguistic Diversity need to challenge prevailing definitions that are based only on restrictive and exclusive groupings of standardized state-languages, which exclude other types of languages from enjoying the same opportunities (Mercator, 2013: 20).

## 6 Spain

Being Spain a multilingual country, the issue of minor languages is very important and somehow difficult or controversial.

## 6.1 *Spanish communities*

Spain is political and administratively divided into communities created in line with the Spanish Constitution of 1978, with the aim of guaranteeing limited autonomy of the nationalities and regions that comprise the Spanish nation. There are 17 communities: Andalucía, Aragón, Asturias, Baleares, País Vasco, Islas Canarias, Cantabria, Castilla la Mancha, Castilla y León, Catalunya, Extremadura, Galicia, La Rioja, Madrid, Murcia, Navarra, Valencia and Ceuta and Melilla, two enclaves located in the North of Africa with a special status as Spanish autonomous cities.

## 6.2 *Official Languages and Dialects*

There are four official languages in Spain, Castellano or Español is the standard language with some dialects as asturleonés or bable, aragonés, extremeño, murciano, andaluz and canario; Catalan, with dialects as valenciano and mallorquín; Gallego similar to Portuguese; and Euskera or Vasco. However, Aranés-occitano has also been given the status of a language. It is spoken in Valle de Arán in a geographical region between Catalunya, Aragón and Huesca, near France.

### 6.2.1 *Spanish*

Spanish is a Romance language from the branch originated from Western vulgar Latin. Originally from the Northern region of Castilla, from which it takes its name “castellano” (Castilian), it spread to southern Spain at the times of the fall of the Islamic Emirate of Granada. It is the official language of the state as a whole and is taught all over the country.

As the Spanish empire extended its influence from the XV century onwards, Spanish became the language of many territories, the estimated numbers of speakers being around 500 million today. It is the second most widely spoken language as regards native speakers, the second most spoken language in the world after Mandarin, and the third most commonly used on the Internet.

Apart from the so called Hispanic countries (Chile, Colombia, Argentina, Ecuador, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, Perú, Panamá, Nicaragua, Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, México, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia), Spanish is also an official Language in Ecuatorial Guinea and a special status language in Andorra and Gibraltar where it is used at school, in administration and in the media. In other countries, such as Trinidad and Tobago, Belize, and Guyana, Spanish is regularly spoken by some communities, and USA, with more than 50 million native and second language speakers, is the largest Spanish speaking population in the world.

## 6.2.2 Catalan

With some 8 million speakers, Catalán (*Català*) is a Romance language from the same branch as Spanish, spoken in Catalunya, Valencia and Balears, some villages in the border of Aragon, some municipalities of Murcia, Andorra, the Roussillon (a region of France), in the northwest of Alghero (a city of Sardinia, Italy), and among catalan immigrants in different parts of the world. Catalan has two main dialectal groups, one being the Western Catalan (North West Catalan and Valencian), and the other the Eastern Catalan (Roussillonnais, Central Catalan, Balearic and Alguerese). There are also subdialects, of which up to 18 have been identified, e.g. Pallarés, Ribagorzano, Leridano in the group of North Western Catalan.

Catalan was banned from the Education system during Franco dictatorship, although in 1975 Franco and his Education Minister, Cruz Martinez Esteruelas, signed the Decree 1433/1975 which allowed the introduction of Catalan as an elective subject in pre-primary and primary school plans. However, in 1978 the Spanish Constitution authorized other communities to have their own official languages along with the official language of the state, being backed by the first Statute of Autonomy of Catalunya in 1979. The second Statute of Autonomy of Catalunya, in 2006, decreed that Catalan should be used in public administration, media, and Education.

The Royal Decree 2092/1978 introduced the possibility of developing programs either in Catalan or in Spanish depending on the mother tongue of the population, the parents' options and the means available. The Royal Decrees 2003/1979 and 2193/1979 regulated the incorporation of Valencian and Balearic varieties of Catalan into their Educational system. The Organic Law on the General Organization of the Education System (LOGSE) of 1990 provided a legal framework for the Generalitat of Catalunya which established in the Decree 75/1992, article 3.1 that Catalan should be used as the language of learning in infant, primary and secondary education. The Statute of Catalunya (2016) also declared in 35.1 that Catalan had to be used as the vehicular and learning language at university and non-university education. Nevertheless, in 2010 the Spanish Constitutional Court concluded that the above mentioned Article 35.1 should be interpreted as Spanish and Catalan having the same status as vehicular language of teaching.

Thus, the ruling challenges the role of Catalan as the vehicular language of Catalan schools. This interpretation could lead to a change of linguistic model in Catalan schools. It still remains to be seen to which extent this is brought into practice. (Mercator, 2013:17)

In Valencia and the Balearic Islands, the situation is different. In Comunidad Valenciana there are three programmes: Valencian Teaching Programme (Programa de enseanza en Valenciano or PEV), Linguistic Immersion Programme (Programa de

Inmersión Lingüística or PIL) and Progressive Incorporation Programme (de Incorporación progresiva or PIP). The Educational centres can apply the programme that better suits their needs. In the Balearic Islands, the linguistic situation is far more complicated complex as most of the population speak Catalan and Spanish but in many areas English and German are spoken. As regards Education, the Balearic Islands have followed the steps of Catalunya, i.e. Catalan immersion, after a failed plan of applying a trilingual model (Catalan, Spanish and English) by the former Government.

### 6.2.3 *Euskera*

Euskera is a non-indoeuropean language spoken in Spain (Vizcaya, Alava and Guipúzcoa and North of Navarra) and in France in the so called the Franco-Basque country. It has some 545,800 speakers. Its origins are unknown but it is considered one of the oldest languages in Western Europe.

During Franco's dictatorship, all signs of Basque identity was suppressed and so was the language. The Basque Statute of 1979, in its article 6, brought back Euskera as their official language along with Spanish. In the Basque Educational system there are different models for pre-primary and compulsory education:

- Model A: Castellano or Spanish is used as the learning language except in the subject of Basque language.
- Model B: Some subjects are taught in Spanish (Reading, Writing and Mathematics) and some in Euskera (Experimental Sciences, Arts and Gymnastics)
- Model D: Euskera is used as the learning language and only Spanish Language is taught in Spanish.

As for Baccalaureate and F. P, only A and D models are used while at university Level, the students can choose either Euskera or Spanish.

### 6.2.4 *Galician*

Galician is spoken by some 2.4 million people, mainly in Galicia, one of the autonomous communities located in northwestern Spain, where it is official along with Spanish. The language is also spoken in some zones of the boundaries of Asturias and Castilla y León, as well as by Galician migrant communities in the rest of Spain, and other parts of the world (Latin America, USA, and Europe).

Galician is today official together with the Spanish Language (Castellano) in the Autonomous Community of Galicia, being the language of the local administration and government, schooling and media. It is taught along with Castilian in primary and secondary education, and used at the three universities established in Galicia. Galician has also legal recognition in other municipalities of León, and Zamora.

The Autonomous Community developed all the competencies regarding the teaching of Galician and its promotion in the decree 173/1982 and the *Law of Linguistic Normalization* 3/1983 which determines that Galician is a compulsory subject in all non-university levels of the Education system. Galicia has a balanced educational model with 50% of subjects in Gallego and 50% Spanish, except in infant education where classes are taught either in Spanish or Galician according to the students mother tongue. However, more than 4,000 teachers declared that they did not want to use Spanish as the medium of instruction, so the 50% balance is not real.

### 6.3 *Less widely spoken and taught languages in Spanish Higher Education*

Although in the USA there is no nation-wide requirement for students to learn a foreign language in school, studying a foreign language is compulsory in most European countries. In November 2008 the EU adopted a *Resolution on a European strategy for multilingualism* that stated, in page 2, that “linguistic and cultural diversity is part and parcel of the European identity; it is at once a shared heritage, a wealth, a challenge and an asset for Europe” and invited the member states to “broaden the selection of languages taught at different levels of education – including recognised languages which are less widely used, so as to enable pupils to choose on the basis of considerations such as personal interests or geographical situation.” (op. cit. page 3)

The 2012 Project *Language Rich Europe*, led by the British Council and co-funded by the European Commission, aimed to developing good policies and practices for multilingualism that “will ensure that languages and cultural exchange continue to be promoted and encouraged at school, university and in broader society.” (op. cit., page 9). The study examined the language policies and practices of 25 European countries and regions, finding that most European universities in the sample provide instruction in the national language or in English, as a consequence of international student mobility. As for Spain, it is highlighted that “the document entitled *Action Plan for 2010–2020* signed in 2010 by the government, lists 12 objectives to improve language learning and multilingualism, teacher education being one of the most important ones.” (op. cit., page 200), but the initiatives lost speed due to the subsequent financial crisis. However, most of the objectives have already been reached, for example improvements in pre-primary and primary education. At university level, it was found that English and French led the foreign language offer followed by German and Italian, situation that has not changed, as our study below shows.

The *Eurostat* October 2015 reported foreign language skills in EU Member States, providing information on the number of foreign languages known along with the level of proficiency. The data is very relevant as it showed that around 2/3 of adults (working age, i.e. 25–64 years old) knew at least one foreign language,

that younger adults, employed adults and those with a tertiary level of education reported greater language skills, but the situation varies greatly depending on the country. For example, 72% of the adult population in Luxembourg, 49.2% in Finland and 44.9% in Slovenia reported they knew three or more foreign languages, while 63% of the working-age population of Bulgaria and Hungary, and 72.7% of Ireland stated that they did not know any foreign language.

In order to find out which languages of the so called less widely spoken and taught languages were accessible to students in Spanish Higher Education, 32 of the most representative Spanish Universities were selected. However, some considerations have to be put forward first as the size of the universities is very diverse and this characteristic has a big impact on the existing offer. Big state universities have a colossal offer of languages, for example, Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM), which has 28 *minor* languages, among them Catalan, Galician, Euskera, Slovak, Danish and Swahili, or Universitat de Barcelona (UB) with 17 languages offered, among them Danish, Greek, Hebrew, Polish, Norwegian, Japanese, Russian, Swedish and Arabic. However, smaller state universities offer a more limited number of languages, as Oviedo, with 12 languages, includes Sign Language, Russian, Greek, Japanese, and Catalan, Sevilla University with 11 languages, among them Russian, Portuguese, Japanese and Greek. Even smaller state universities such as Universitat de Valencia teaches less languages, 5 in this case, being one of them Valenciano, the Language Service of Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM) which offers Spanish, French, English, Portuguese and Italian, or Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) with 9 languages, for example Italian, Japanese, Neerlandic and Portuguese. And small private universities as Nebrija only teaches 4 languages: English, French, German and Chinese.

It is relevant to mention that only some years ago, such language diversity in Higher Education was unthinkable. Now, according to the data gathered in this brief analysis, not only the major languages can be studied but also minor languages such as the co-official ones or other less widely spoken and taught languages. The following table 1 gives a much more illustrative view of the offer in the selected Spanish universities.

English, French, German and Italian are the most offered and demanded languages, followed by Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, Japanese and Arabic. The co-official languages have become increasingly more popular, especially Catalan, probably because of its economic potential. As for other languages, the offer is varied and includes 9 *minor* languages, four of them from Eastern Europe.

It is clear that, along with the traditional interest on languages such as English, French or German, there is a growing curiosity toward other languages, some of them considered *minor*, such as the regional ones, and some others that might be attractive for different reasons, Portuguese for reasons of neighbourhood, Italian,

Tab. 1: Languages & number of universities

Languages	Number of Universities
English, French	32
German	30
Italian	27
Portuguese	21
Chinese	20
Spanish, Russian, Japanese	15
Arabic	14
Catalan	8
Euskera	6
Gallego, Greek	5
Danish	3
Bulgarian, Czech, Slovak	2
Finnish, Hindi, Slovene, Korean	1

Chinese, Russian, Japanese and Danish for their touristic impact in Spain, and Eastern European languages probably because of their rising economic power.

## Conclusions

Several general conclusions can be drawn from this overview on *less widely spoken and taught* languages. First, that the concept of *minor, less widely spoken or small languages* is not a fixed one, as it varies according to different variables. Second, that languages have different status and different political, economic or strategic value depending on the contextual situation in which they are used, each culture deciding which languages are more important for them according to their priorities and needs. Third, that, being cultural diversity the cornerstone of Europe, it is the responsibility of Universities to teach minor languages to preserve cultural diversity. And fourth, that knowing more than one language is an advantage that provides the individual with better cognitive, social, personal, academic, and professional skills.

As for Spain, the most interesting aspect is that regional languages are beginning to be attractive for students along with other minor languages, probably for different reasons such as a reaction to the standardizing effect of globalization, a desire for preserving one's cultural identity, for the intellectual challenge their learning imply, because you like travelling, or simply because you can be more attractive as a job candidate. helping to facilitate language learning and boost employability by offering courses. The fact is that Universities should facilitate language learning and boost employability by offering as many and varied courses as possible.

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