

Coolabah, No.13, 2014, ISSN 1988-5946, Observatori: Centre d'Estudis Australians, Australian Studies Centre, Universitat de Barcelona

Vested Interests: the Place of Spanish in Australian Academia

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Abstract: The history of Spanish departments in Australian universities can be traced back to the 1960s, when a number of British *hispanistas* relocated to Australia and created a small number of successful teaching programs that reproduced the British model. A second generation of Spanish scholars arrived in the 1980s and 1990s, mainly from Latin American countries, in a migration wave that is still current. The transition from a British understanding of the Spanish discipline, with a strong focus on (canonical) literary studies, to current curricula that emphasise communicative skills and a loose notion of cultural studies, is symptomatic of deeper changes in the way the discipline has sought to reposition itself in the context of the Modern Languages debate.

Keywords: Spanish in Australia, Teaching of Spanish, Discipline of Spanish

Languages in Australia

Australia is a multicultural, migrant society where many languages are spoken in communities and at home. Figures from the most recent census (2011) reveal that English is commonly spoken by 76.8% of the population, with Mandarin (1.6%) and Italian (1.4%) as the most widely used migrant languages.¹ Migrant languages are taught in schools to both migrant and non-migrant children, together with other languages that have been part of the education system in English-speaking countries, such as French and Latin.

The role of foreign languages in Australian society has been subject to controversy over the last three decades, with the replacement of the White Australia policy with the multicultural policies that have defined contemporary Australia. The many waves of migrants from all parts of the world brought their languages to Australia. Some language communities were soon assimilated into English, but many others successfully passed their languages on to the second and third generations, thus creating bilingual communities that proudly maintain and use languages other than English.

Homogenising ideologies have always favoured assimilationist policies. During the White Australia era, English testing was used as a means to filter out undesirable migrants (McNamara 2009). In multicultural Australia, English instruction is used as a means to ensure a functional knowledge of the language. In this context, maintenance and use of foreign languages is often seen as an obstacle to achieve full English functionality. Their use was actively discouraged in the past, and quietly tolerated in multicultural Australia. State and Commonwealth officials rarely promote them to the general population.

The difficult articulation between the need to have one national language and the reality of a multilingual migrant society was encapsulated by Michael Clyne's expression "a multicultural society with a monolingual mindset" referring to multicultural Australia (Lasagabaster and Clyne 2012). Australian ideal monolingualism would place English at the centre of the language architecture of the country. English is the language of the first European settlers; the language of British colonial imperialism; the language of American global hegemony; and the global language of trade and diplomacy. For practical as well as symbolic reasons, English occupies a unique place in Australia's linguistic ecosystem.

Other languages spoken in Australia include migrant languages, often divided between the languages of post-war European migrant waves and more recent waves from Asia and Africa; and indigenous languages. Migrant and indigenous languages are treated differently by legislation (Leitner 2004): while migrant languages are passively tolerated, indigenous languages are used as vehicle languages in education in indigenous schools.

Debates about languages crystallise in education practices. The presence of languages in the national curriculum is indicative of the many tensions that exist in society around languages other than English. From a language perspective, the Australian education system displays a number of salient peculiarities: English is compulsory for all; indigenous languages are compulsory in indigenous communities; foreign languages are compulsory only for three years at primary level but schools not always comply; the percentage of school-leavers who have studied a foreign language to Year 12 is the lowest of any OECD country.² Excuses abound for the extremely low presence of foreign language education in Australian schools: it is difficult to find suitable teachers; the curriculum is overcrowded; students and parents dislike foreign languages; language efforts should focus on improving English. This monolingual mindset was challenged by the 2008-2012 National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP), a Commonwealth initiative to foster the teaching of Asian languages in schools by making compulsory for schools to offer at least one of four strategic Asian languages (Mandarin, Japanese, Indonesian, Korean), regardless of any other language offering. The 2012 *Australia in the Asian Century* White Paper maintains this policy with a slightly different choice of languages (Mandarin, Japanese, Indonesian, Hindi).³

The Spanish language in Australia

Spanish is an important community language in Australia. With 117,498 speakers according to the 2011 census (compared to 90,477 in 1991), Spanish is the 7th most commonly used language in Australia after English. Spanish was brought in during the post-war period by a wave of immigration from Southern Europe that included several thousands of Spaniards; by the Latin American wave of the 1970s; and by more recent waves of skilled migrants from Europe and the Americas. Spanish is also seen as an international language spoken in several continents, with a growing presence in the United States and Brazil and historical links to South East Asia through the Spanish colonial presence in the Philippines and the Pacific.

Perceptions of Spanish in Australia are strongly influenced by its international reach. Spanish overtaking of English as the world's second largest language by number of native speakers in 2005 was registered by the media. Spanish impact on US media and entertainment industries does not pass unnoticed in Australia. Spanish is also seen as the language of the growing economies of Latin America - despite the fact that much of that growth is due to Brazil.

Perceptions of Spanish are also grounded in the growing presence of Spanish speakers in Australia. The opening in 2009 of a Cervantes Institute in Sydney was symbolic of the robustness of these perceptions. Spanish makes itself present through cultural events of all kinds; through growing trade and commerce with Spanish-speaking countries; and through education.

For several decades Spain has maintained a strong program of language support in Australia that includes a Spanish language teaching scheme aimed at second generation migrants (ALCE); a network of language advisors who seek to collaborate with Australian education officers in resourcing and training; a network of university lectors funded by the Spanish Cooperation Agency (AECID). The Spanish Embassy in Canberra is one of only a few that has an Education Attaché in the country. Since 2009 Spain is one of a small number of countries that has its own language and culture institute (Instituto Cervantes) in Australia.

The group of Latin American embassies in Canberra (GRULA) actively lobby in Canberra for an enhanced visibility of the Spanish and Portuguese languages at all levels. As from 2013 a total of fifteen Latin American countries have permanent embassies in Canberra: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Spanish is offered in a small number of Australian schools. Data provided by the Spanish Embassy Education Office show that in late 2012 only 258 of the 9,529 primary and secondary schools in the country offered Spanish in some form. Accordingly, the number of students who complete Spanish to Year 12 is very small compared to other languages. As an example, official 2010 figures reveal that in Victoria 4,151 students studied Spanish at primary or secondary level in public schools, compared to 74,421 that studied Italian, 62,221 Japanese, 56,057 Indonesian, 39,474

French, 26,287 German, and 22,460 Mandarin (State of Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2011). While the new national curriculum includes Spanish as one of eight modern languages to be offered,⁴ comparison with the presence of other languages in Australian schools reveals that Spanish enrolments are lower than any of the NALSSP languages; Spanish enrolments are lower than French, German and Italian; noticeable differences exist in Spanish enrolments between different States, due to the fragmentation of the system into States and Territories, with relatively large numbers in South Australia and zero numbers in the Northern Territory.

At tertiary level, Spanish has a growing presence in Australian universities. First introduced to Australia in the 1960s, Spanish is nowadays taught at undergraduate level in 19 universities, including seven of the Group of Eight research intensive universities. According to data provided by the Spanish Embassy Education Office, in 2011 the largest cohorts were located at the universities of Melbourne (1,282 students), Sydney (1,114) and Queensland (716).

Spanish in academia

As an academic discipline at tertiary level, Spanish is growing both in popularity and in visible outcomes. Growing numbers of undergraduate language enrolments – in particular at beginners' level – guarantee the viability of the discipline. According to figures provided by the Spanish Embassy's Education Office, the number of higher degree enrolments continues to grow, from 6,341 in 2007 to 9,173 in 2010. Research projects on Spanish language and culture funded by the Australian Research Council remain scarce but growing. The discipline enjoys a professional association that brings together academics from language and social science departments, the Association for Iberian and Latin American Studies of Australasia (AILASA), and its associated scholarly journal, the *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* (JILAR). In Sydney and Melbourne, clusters of universities collaborate on research seminars and projects: the Sydney University Research Community for Latin America (SURCLA) and the Wally Thompson seminar series co-organised by the universities of Melbourne, Monash, La Trobe and RMIT.

As an academic discipline, Spanish has a relatively short history in Australia. Its introduction in the 1960s did not follow the introduction pattern for other languages. French and Classics, for instance, were core disciplines of the British-inspired curriculum that was taught in Australian colonial universities since the mid nineteenth century. The introduction of German and Russian in the post-war period was motivated by geopolitical reasons. Italian and Modern Greek were introduced as a consequence of the Southern European immigration waves of the 1950s and 1960s. Economic agendas and the repositioning of Australia in the Asian region led to the introduction of Japanese and Chinese, and later Indonesian and Korean.

The introduction of Spanish at Monash and La Trobe Universities in Melbourne, UNSW in Sydney and Flinders University in Adelaide was not directly related to economic or geopolitical reasons. The Spanish migration wave of the 1960s was not sufficiently large to warrant it either. The reasons seem to be related to the financial

crisis of British universities that caused numbers of academics to migrate to Australia and other English-speaking countries (Boland and Kenwood 1993).

Immigration waves from Latin America (from Chile, Argentina and Uruguay in the 1970s, from El Salvador in the 1980s) took the Spanish-speaking population in Australia to record numbers by the early 1990s. In 1992 Spain was starting a two-decade cycle of economic expansion and direct foreign investment that allowed the country to invest in overseas cultural actions. With the support of the Spanish embassy and lured by the growing presence of Latinos in the country, a number of universities introduced Spanish in the 1990s and the 2000s (Queensland and Griffith in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, ANU). In 2013, all Go8 universities except UWA have an academic Spanish program.

In nearly all universities where it is offered, Spanish is taught within the Bachelor of Arts as a Major or as an independent study path. The flexibility of the Australian system allows students to study Spanish in a number of ways: as a three-year study pathway within a Bachelor's degree, which in some cases can be extended to a fourth year (a Bachelor with Honours degree that usually includes a one-semester research component), or as a shorter study path of one or two years leading to a Minor within the BA. In most cases, students can also take one or two single Spanish subjects as electives within their undergraduate degrees. Some universities offer Spanish and other languages as concurrent diploma options, allowing students who have all their major and elective subjects in other disciplines to study some extra-curricular Spanish. In addition, a small number of universities offer non-credit bearing Spanish classes through community-oriented language institutes and centres.

In 200, the University of Melbourne introduced an innovative degree structure that allows students from any undergraduate degree to enrol in any other subject. Known as the Melbourne Model, this system has resulted in a dramatic increase in language enrolments as “breadth” options. A similar result has been observed more recently at the University of Western Australia following the adoption of a similar structure.

Spanish majors are typically structured around a core set of language acquisition subjects that follow a progression from absolute beginners to roughly B2 or C1 European Framework levels. Non-core options include subjects that present cultural, literary or historical contents. The latter are often taught in Spanish and play a language-acquisition role although they are sometimes offered in English in an attempt to open up the Spanish major to non-language students. The research component of the Fourth Year (Honours) degree takes the form of a long essay (in the range of 8,000 to 15,000 words). Most universities give students the choice to write this essay either in English or in Spanish. The main focus of the exercise is on developing research and academic writing skills; when the essay is written in Spanish the language-acquisition component becomes assessable.

At postgraduate level, Spanish has a very small presence in Australian universities. Professional master degrees in areas such as Spanish and Latin American Literature or Hispanic Studies, which are fairly common in North American universities, do not exist in Australia. Education master degrees, addressed at future school teachers, include a language component, but due to the negligible presence of Spanish in primary and

secondary schools nationwide, Spanish subjects are rare. Education master programs focus on policy and pedagogy and are taught by schools and departments of Education, with minimal or no input from language academics. The same can be said of master programs in areas such as Applied Linguistics, Linguistics and the very few Cultural Studies master programs that exist in Australia.

In sharp contrast to other humanities disciplines, such as History and English, research higher degrees attract very small numbers in Spanish and in all other language disciplines. Reasons for the low uptake of research degrees in languages remain unclear and require further investigation. Anecdotal observation suggests that a perceived lack of professional career opportunities and low levels of second-language proficiency may be factors at stake. Doctoral programs in Spanish are currently offered at a small number of universities.

With relatively low levels of research activity and large enrolment figures in undergraduate language-acquisition subjects across the country, it comes as no surprise that Spanish is perceived by many as a teaching discipline with only a marginal interest in research. This perception is supported by the extremely low success rates of Spanish in National Competitive Grant schemes such as the Australian Research Council Discovery and Linkage schemes.

In a laudable attempt to foster research, research training, and visibility, a learned association was launched in 1992 with the name of Association for Iberian and Latin American Studies of Australasia. With some 100-150 paid members, AILASA has served as a discussion forum and gathering point for Spanish researchers for more than two decades, using biannual conferences, an academic journal and distribution email lists as its main means. The *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* (formerly *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, a title that created confusion with its British homonymous) was managed until 2010 by the Institute for Latin American Studies at La Trobe University. Since that date the journal is managed by the Taylor and Francis Group. In 2010 the Excellence for Research in Australia rated *JILAR* as a B journal on a 4-point scale (A*, A, B, C) for quality.

Spanish as an academic discipline

The building of the Spanish discipline in Australia has taken the form of a gradual aggregation of similar block units. With small variations, each university has decided to do exactly the same: hiring a small number of permanent academic staff at career-entry levels (academic Level A or B on a 5-point scale that places full professors at Level E) and a contingent of casual and sessional tutors, language departments have been introducing popular Spanish programs in an attempt to offset enrolment declines in established languages. This pattern, which is observable in most of the universities that introduced Spanish since the 1980s (Brotherton 1998: 40), is undoubtedly linked to the financial difficulties of many language departments as commonwealth funding for universities was dramatically reduced in the 1990s. The pattern is also revealing of the hardly academic (in some cases blatantly anti-academic) agendas that drove language departments in that period, that led to large numbers of very junior, relatively inexpensive appointments, often with no research training nor interest on a research

career. While in New Zealand the Prince of Asturias Chair of Spanish has existed since the early 1990s, no Australian university has ever created a named Chair of Spanish; currently personal professorships in the discipline exist at Melbourne University and the ANU only.

Exceptions to the described pattern include early adopters (universities that introduced Spanish in the 1960s) and high flyers (research intensive universities). The early adopters enjoyed a period of expansion for languages in Australia that led to senior appointments and low student ratios. La Trobe University, for instance, sustained at its peak an 11-strong Spanish department that offered Spanish, Portuguese, Galician and Catalan, as well as a world-class Institute for Latin American Studies that worked closely with History and Social Sciences departments. La Trobe, as all the other early adopters, entered a period of decline in the 1990s that resulted in diminished enrolments and staff redundancies. Research intensive universities in the Group of Eight, such as ANU, Sydney, Melbourne and Queensland introduced their undergraduate Spanish programs along the lines of the financially-driven pattern described above, but an emphasis on research productivity led them to make some senior appointments and to invest in research training for staff at more junior levels. Increased competition for national competitive research funds, an increased awareness of international university rankings strongly biased towards research performance and reputation, and the introduction of a national ranking league system in 2010 (Excellence in Research for Australia) combined to lead the elite group of research intensive universities to invest in research in all disciplines, including Spanish and other modern languages.

To a large degree, the definition of the Spanish discipline in Australia has been the responsibility of senior academics in two groups of universities: scholars educated in the post-war British university system, on the one hand, that favoured a strong division between language acquisition and properly academic endeavours – the latter defined mainly by high literary studies of the Spanish canon; and, on the other hand, academics with post-structural, post-modern and post-colonial backgrounds, together with linguists, second language experts, historians and social scientists. The replacement of the former by the latter occurred roughly in the mid to late 1990s. The most notable consequence of the change was the introduction of research areas and methods that had been traditionally neglected. In particular, research on the cultures of Latin America and methods associated to the *new humanities* contributed to an unprecedented expansion of the discipline. In addition, language acquisition was turned into a legitimate scholarly field that allowed many language teachers to undertake research projects.

Unlike other language disciplines that are closely associated to a national language (e.g. Japanese, Italian) or to a canonical set of well-established academic discourses (e.g. French, Classics), Spanish has often been hard to define in Australian higher education. The model supplied by other languages does not seem to fit Spanish well, for two main reasons: firstly, Spanish is by no means a national language only; secondly, Spanish departments tend to incubate non-language, social-science disciplines in addition to language and culture. Spanish is increasingly defined primarily as the regional language of the South American or Latin American geopolitical block, but also as a global language with actual and historical presence in five continents. The role of Spain in the multi-centre Spanish-speaking world is very different to the role that, for instance, France plays in the highly centralised Francophonie. Using the label *Spanish* to name

departments that do more than just teach the Spanish language feels increasingly inaccurate or incomplete. As a result, some universities are renaming their Spanish programs as “Spanish and Latin American” and some initiatives use denominations such as “Latino” and “Hispanic”. On the other hand, while many universities offer area studies courses related to European and Asian countries (e.g. French History, Chinese Economy, Japanese Politics), courses related to Spain and Latin America are very rare. This institutional deficit has led some Spanish departments to absorb the demand for such courses and to try to establish collaboration partnerships with other departments or, in some cases, to offer cultural studies options that somehow include historical and social sciences components. This tends to further open up the discipline, making the traditional labels *Spanish Language* and *Spanish Language and Literature* look very inappropriate.

Current demographics of Spanish departments reveal an overwhelming presence of early-career academics who are supported by large numbers of casual and sessional tutors. Areas of research specialisation include linguistics, applied linguistics, second language acquisition and Spanish as a Second Language, language policy, the history of Spanish in Australia, multilingualism and multiculturalism, migrant and diasporic communities, a wide range of Spanish-language literature, film studies, post-colonial studies, gender and sexuality, comparative literature, US Latino studies, and cultural studies focused on specific countries of the Spanish-speaking world. In some universities, Spanish departments attract researchers from closely related areas such as music, history, politics, art history, philosophy, etc.

The tendency to hire Spanish academics with a broadly-defined specialisation in Latin America became clearly visible in the 1990s. It could be argued that the desire of language departments to focus on Latin America was prompted by two concurring factors: the perception that Latin America was a demographically and economically growing region that in time could become a significant trade partner for Australia; and the perception that declining enrolments in European languages was related to Australia's repositioning as an Asian country and its consequent distancing from its European partners. Both assumptions proved to be only partially correct. The widespread belief that Spanish is a useful language because of its Latin American dimension did not stop universities from forging links with Spain in terms of student exchange programs, research projects funded by Spanish agencies (such as the Cultural Cooperation Program between the Spanish Ministry of Culture and the ANU, and the 2013 Education Ministry's Hispanex program for cultural promotion), and language lecturers fully or partially funded by the Spanish Cooperation Agency AECID.

While it would be exaggerated to affirm that Australia's departments of Spanish reproduce the trans-Atlantic divide that has marred US departments for decades, the fact remains that such divide exists to some extent. Some positive consequences of such divide is that Spanish departments can play equally well on European and American studies, thus forging inter-disciplinary teaching and research projects with academics in both hemispheres. A hypothetical rekindling of interest in the Spanish-heritage countries in the Asia Pacific region would have great potential as well. Specific foci on Latin America have resulted in the creation of active debating forums, prominent among which are the Australian National Centre for Latin American Studies at the ANU, the

Institute of Latin American Studies at La Trobe University, and SURCLA research community at the University of Sydney.

Spanish, as nearly all the other language disciplines, has become an increasingly polymorphous discipline whose goals, objects of study, epistemology and research methods are as diverse as its institutional presence, professional associations, journals and leadership. Gone are the days when languages disciplines were defined by the US-inspired notion of 'language and literature' or by the French '*langue et civilisation*'. Gone are the days also when academic hierarchy ensured that deans and chairs had the power to define methods and goals. The most external description of Spanish departments in Australia reveals a huge variety of methods and epistemologies, of research agendas and ultimately of academic goals. It also reveals a common trait in languages disciplines in the country: relative low levels of activity in research training, research funding, and research collaboration.

Challenges for the Spanish discipline

According to the preceding notes, the discipline of Spanish in Australian academia is characterised by the following traits: noticeable popularity as an undergraduate elective; a short institutional history; low visibility; strongly skewed towards teaching; unremarkable research achievements; negligible presence in schools; useful internationalisation tool; strong regional identification with Latin America; gathering point for area studies; loose disciplinary definition. The place of Spanish seems to be therefore a combination of low level academic pursuits and higher level soft power interests, a contested space that migrant and nomadic academics have carved within universities that is being used by international and exchange offices to suit their own agendas and by diplomatic agencies to create spaces of local interaction.

Compared with the size of the discipline in Europe or North America, Spanish in Australia displays a tendency to suffer from three reductionist strategies. Firstly, Spanish is often described as a language discipline strongly associated to one of the regions where the language is spoken, Latin America, with growing disregard for others. Secondly, the discipline is often described as a training ground where undergraduate students can acquire useful communicative skills, sometimes with the added value of some cultural awareness. Thirdly, Spanish popularity is currently seen at universities but not in schools, with no signs that this situation will change in the short term. The three combined challenges (regionalisation, reduction to communicative skills and minimal presence in schools) do have consequences for the discipline of Spanish and Latin American Studies and university departments of Spanish.

In the first place, the discipline itself is no longer seen as a unified set of epistemological practices around the key notion of knowledge about the Spanish language and its social and literary manifestations. Increasingly, Spanish programs are repositioning themselves as internal service providers to universities that require them to focus on language acquisition, exchange programs with Latin America and engagement activities with local Latin American stakeholders.

The key notion of literary canon, which articulated the discipline in the 1960s and 1970s, is no longer active. It was first questioned in the 1980s, when the cultural studies turn in the humanities prompted a redefinition of English and language programs nationwide and favoured the fragmentation of the canon in a multiplicity of traditions based on national, ethnic and sexual paradigms. Current trends are prompting the abandonment of the very idea of the canon in favour of a loose approach to individualised texts.

The emphasis that many universities place on Latin America as the defining element of Spanish programs is prompting a gradual marginalisation of expertise in non-Latin American studies - including peninsular, Latino US, Philippine and African literatures. Spanish programs are now working more actively with Latin American centres (at the ANU and La Trobe), which in turn are prompting the introduction of area studies in language programs. The displacement of a linguistic notion (Spanish as a defining driver of the discipline) in favour of a geopolitical concept (Latin America) does not seem to bother academics in language departments.

Low demand for Spanish teachers at schools has an impact on interdisciplinary relations between Spanish and Education departments. Secondary schools' virtual inability to feed advanced Spanish students to universities places Spanish at odds with other languages - mainly French, German, Italian, Chinese and Japanese. Forced to focus on absolute beginners, Spanish departments perform less well at honours and postgraduate levels. In fact, only a handful of Spanish departments offer PhD degrees. Low activity at postgraduate level is also related to the poor record of Spanish departments in securing national competitive research grants.

Ideology of Spanish

The place of Spanish in universities around the English-speaking world is quite unique amongst the field of modern languages. Spanish is commonly classified as a European language despite its overwhelming geographical and geopolitical presence in non-European regions. Amongst the so-called European languages Spanish is the discipline that has undergone a less traumatic downsize in terms of enrolments and staff in the last two decades. In the Australian case, the relatively late arrival of Spanish to schools and universities has resulted in a lower level of presence and penetration in the education industry at large, with better established disciplines acting as 'gatekeepers'. Research productivity in the discipline is commensurate with the relatively junior profile of staff in Spanish programs.

All these peculiarities make Spanish a very unique language discipline in Australian universities: a truly international language with a global presence and strong academic credentials around the world whose potential in research, internationalisation and teaching above the undergraduate curriculum is far from realised. Educational managers such as humanities deans and state education coordinators acknowledge the importance of Spanish but consistently fail to strategize accordingly. At both pre-tertiary and tertiary levels the pressures that budget holders receive from a deficit-shy system are huge – and this is one of the reasons most often mentioned to keep Spanish, together with all the other languages, as a low maintenance, low investment, low return academic

operation. The triple potential of Spanish as a global language, an Australian community language and an intellectually rich language has never been fully developed in Australia.

This situation reveals a poor understanding of the role of languages in modern education – an understanding that is consistent with the monolingual mindset mentioned earlier in this paper. It also reveals the inability of educational leaders to think of languages beyond and above the narrow margins of the ‘nice but non-essential’ model that has been favoured by an infantilising set of multicultural policies and by a de-facto English-only approach to education in general and higher education in particular.

Of course, nothing in the Australian case is exclusive of Australia. A disdainful, almost disrespectful attitude towards foreign languages and cultures is prevalent in many education systems around the Anglosphere. Funding for research in language disciplines and the humanities in general is chronically low in many OCDE countries. And the late arrival of Spanish into many universities in Asia and the Asia-Pacific region disadvantages the discipline at institutional level.

The discipline has been forced to reposition itself in this new world. The history of the modern “Spanish and Latin American” programme in Australia is quite different from the history of the “Spanish Language and Literature” department in the US and the UK. The academic branding of the discipline in Australia relies heavily on its undergraduate teaching performance, which in turn is measured in terms of student popularity (Martínez-Expósito 2010). Concurrently, the undergraduate teaching of Spanish relies heavily on the branding of the Spanish-speaking world through the Spanish curriculum and the thematic choices each individual program makes in relation to countries/regions, historical periods, genres, and language registers/dialects.

The modern repositioning of the discipline could be described through a number of departures from the normative tradition of pre-1970 Spanish departments:

- The teaching of historical continuities that defined the Spanish-speaking world since the formation of the language until the present day has been reduced to introductory survey subjects or abandoned altogether.
- The privileged position of literature as the finest expression of language and as epiphenomenon of the entire cultural field has been deeply contested and, as a first consequence, the literary canon has been abandoned.
- The cultural field has been the subject of several redefinitions (from post-colonial, post-modern, political, economic and other discourses), none of which has received unanimous approval.
- While the discipline continues to be defined overwhelmingly, almost exclusively, in relation to Spain and Latin America, the balance between those two key players has been redressed in favour of the latter.
- Cultural definitions of geo-political entities such as Spain and Latin America have become extremely vague in the discipline and have favoured the inclusion of other cultural domains, such as lusophone cultures and local and indigenous languages from all around the Spanish-speaking world.
- Language acquisition has replaced literary and cultural studies as the disciplinary core.

- Language competence has been redefined as language acquisition in terms of communicative skills.
- Ancillary disciplines such as history and politics are no longer available to Spanish students in the majority of Australian universities; others, such as linguistics, education, literary theory and art history, remain generally available and play an important role in providing Spanish students with academic tools beyond the means of Spanish programs.

The ideology of Spanish in Australia has been deeply affected by the repositioning and the rebranding of the discipline. Internally, the discipline has become a richer, more diverse and more curious locus of enquiry, which nowadays is home to researchers in a wide range of geographical and cultural domains and themes that include women studies and masculinities and LGTBI studies, subaltern and postcolonial studies, studies in race and ethnicity, linguistic and cultural minorities, aesthetics and politics, and so on. From an external point of view, the discipline remains the focus of attention from Spanish-language countries with interests in Australia, but the interest of diplomatic representatives has gradually changed from a general promotion of foreign cultures to the fostering of educational ties such as student and staff exchange programs and study abroad options. Spain and, increasingly, Mexico, Chile and Argentina, see the discipline as an opportunity for cultural diplomacy and soft-power exercises, the most polished example of which is the Sydney Cervantes Institute.

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¹ The 2011 census data can be accessed at <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au>.

² According to the discussion paper released in 2011 by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages*, access to foreign language teaching varies considerably amongst different states, and it is mandatory in Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and the ACT only. ACARA's paper can be accessed at [http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/resources/Languages - Shape of the Australian Curriculum.pdf](http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/resources/Languages_-_Shape_of_the_Australian_Curriculum.pdf)

³ The 2012 *Australia in the Asian Century* White Paper can be accessed at <http://asiancentury.dpmc.gov.au/white-paper>

⁴ According to the ACARA published discussion paper (<http://www.acara.edu.au/languages.html>), languages for which an Australian Curriculum will be developed by the end of 2013 are: Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages (a framework); Arabic and Vietnamese (pitched to learners who have some background in the language); French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Modern Greek and Spanish (pitched to second language learners); Chinese (three learner pathways to be developed to cater specifically for second language learners across F-10, background language learners across F-10 and first language learners in Years 7-10).

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