

# The sociolinguistic situation of the British and the US American communities in Spain

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## Abstract

This report is concerned with the sociolinguistic situation of the British and US American communities living in Spain. The data used to compile it were drawn from speech data collected during the course of a project financed by the Spanish Comisión Interministerial de Ciencia y Tecnología on the sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic aspects of migrated speech communities and language minority groups in Spain (SEC93-0725), of which the British and the US American communities were two of the twenty-four investigated.\*

**Key words:** Linguistic Minority Groups, Language Interaction, English, Code-Switching, Borrowing, Calque.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the late seventies and eighties, from a situation of net emigration, Spain has become a destination for immigration, the host country for quite a large number of new minorities which have added to the long-standing ones. In the case of the British settlers, their moving to and settling in Spain are not recent trends. In fact, Spain has historically been one of the preferred destinations for British people to come and live after retirement; in the case of US

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American people their motivation for moving and settling may be professional or personal, and in some cases both.

This report aims at highlighting the sociolinguistic situation (particularly regarding language use and language interaction patterns) of the stable British and US American communities looking at members who settled in Spain at least five years before conducting the pilot study on the sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic factors of speech communities and linguistic minority groups in Spain. Constraints of space impose oversimplification and overgeneralization regarding the diverse nature of both the migrated communities and the host communities, both in sociocultural and linguistic terms. The term British community is a cover term for Irish, Welsh, Scottish and English migrants from the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The speech community is described as if all members spoke something called British English. The same kind of simplification applies in the case of our approach to US American migrants, in that we ignore geographical and ethnic differences. The same again is true of the receiving country (Spain) where we disregard such differences.

The study as a whole involved twenty-four other communities investigated from six different viewpoints: a) the sociolinguistic situation in the respective countries of origin, b) the nature of the migration process and the distribution of each speech community and linguistic minority group, c) the changing patterns of language use, language choice and language interaction (formerly language contact), d) the links and support that the minority group receives from their community or country of origin, e) the role of education and the whole question of «language reproduction» (Alladina & Edwards 1991), and f) the analysis of the learning and acquisition process of the language of the receiving country, with particular attention to learning strategies.

That the British and US American communities in Spain are worth considering can be confirmed by figures from different sources: census data (Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE); Anuario de Migraciones 1994, 1995), employment data (Ministerio de Trabajo, Migration Office, 1993), and consular estimates. In a list of migrants from fifteen countries (see table 2, in Turell & Corcoll (forthcoming)), British migrants to Spain come second, only surpassed by Moroccans, while US Americans are seventh.

Information extracted from the above sources, and from interviews conducted during our pilot study undertaken in a number of Spanish cities, was used to draw a general profile type of British and US American migrants to Spain. In the case of the British community, the sample is constituted by 30 informants and in the case of the US American community the sample includes 20 informants. All the interviews followed the same pattern and were carried out in English, although Spanish and Catalan were also used at certain points by the interviewees. The topics used during these thirty-to-forty minute interviews ranged from demographic factors to linguistic competence, family, neighbourhood, hobbies and interests.

## 2. The British community in Spain

British consular estimates puts the British population in Spain at 291,000 although this figure is not completely reliable since there is no obligation to register with the consulates. From the population data analysed (including settlement patterns, employment, demographic factors of age, sex, and educational level) and from the pilot study interviews, the following conclusions can be drawn about the British population in Spain:

1. Four motivations seem to constitute the reasons for British people's migration to Spain and these motivations are constrained by the age-factor: first of all, the younger migrants migrate for linguistic reasons (to learn other languages and have the experience of living abroad); the middle-aged migrate for professional reasons; a third group migrates for family reasons, and finally, the oldest age group migrate to Spain to retire there.
2. Settlement does not seem to pose problems, although many do not seem to integrate completely, in particular those who migrate to retire, since they live in sites along the Mediterranean coast inhabited by retiring people from the same countries and constitute closed communities. But for those who do integrate, their integration seems to proceed rather smoothly, particularly if they become members of mixed families.
3. Compared with other communities, the British community seems to be a relatively closed-type of community; British people pride themselves on keeping their roots and not adapting to new places; there are relatively fewer mixed marriages and UK community members tend to establish themselves and work in areas and professions that recreate the sort of employment (eg. as teachers of English, which automatically leads to fewer contact situations) and social networks that recreate what they would find in their country of origin. The community have their own meeting points, such as pubs and clubs, and although anybody can walk into an English pub, it may be difficult for the non-British to socialise. The community has its own societies and entering them has proved to be a hard task, although British schools and the British Council in several cities in Spain (Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, Bilbao, Salamanca, Málaga, Las Palmas, Palma de Mallorca) have contributed to bringing together British and non-British people so that they can meet in a joint cultural and educational environment.
4. Their linguistic attitudes and behaviour varies from generation to generation. First generation migrants keep English as their most usual language, except if they are members of mixed families. English is also the usual language at school for those families who decide to take their children to any of the many British and American schools that exist in many of the big capitals in Spain. But some second and third generation members of the community attended Spanish schools, and in most cases English is reduced to the family domain. By domains, in non-mixed families, English is spoken at home between the couple and between parents and

children who may also speak Spanish (or any of the other languages in Spain: Catalan, Basque and Galician-Portuguese, depending on the school and settlement area) with friends and teachers. At work, it will depend on the activity or profession, but apart from English, first generation migrants might have to use Spanish, Catalan, Basque or Galician-Portuguese. In mixed families, Spanish or any other language in Spain may also become the home language together with English, while the other domains have the same language choice pattern.

### 3. The US American community in Spain

The migration rate of US citizens to Spain was quite high between 1985 and 1989, decreased slightly between 1990 and 1991, and then increased again after that year. At present, as the 1994 INE statistics indicate there are a total of 14,528 US citizens living in Spain, mainly concentrated in Madrid (4,880), Andalusia (2,420) and Catalonia (1,648), usually residing in big cities (Barcelona (1,470); Seville (667).

As with the British, the information facilitated by the INE allows us to derive a quite accurate reflection of the general profile of the established US migrant to Spain. The following conclusions can be drawn from this information and from that extracted through the pilot study sample of informants:

1. Four motivations underly the migration process in the case of US citizens: first of all, most people seem to migrate for professional reasons (teaching and business); others migrate for sentimental and family reasons; a third group migrate for study or linguistic reasons, or simply because they are looking for another kind of life; finally, another group is formed by the American Army personnel who came to Spain to live on the US American bases and decided to stay in Spain even after the bases were dismantled.
2. The settlement process does not seem to prove very difficult: US community members tend to adapt and integrate fairly quickly; they claim that at the beginning it is difficult to meet people, although after a period of time they make a lot of friends.
3. The US American community seems to be a quite open type of community: there are many mixed marriages among its members and these have a propensity to mix with the host community members in the same social networks; and, although they have their own societies, they tend to establish and work in areas and professions related to the host community, so that the contact between US and non-US community members is frequent and continued.
4. Since US immigration to Spain is basically first generation (the highest age-group is between 25 and 34), there is very little information about the few second and third generation migrants from this community. In

general, children of US Americans living in Spain know two or three languages: they use English with their parents and Spanish and/or any other language in Spain (Catalan, Basque and Galician-Portuguese). English is, therefore, used at home (although if there is more than one child in the family, the tendency seems to be for them to use Spanish among themselves), and Spanish and/or any of the other languages at school and with friends. Another trend involves their attending one of the many American or British schools that are to be found in the large provincial capitals of Spain. The US American migrated families tend to promote multilingual settings and reinforce their children's use of the many languages available in the host community.

#### 4. Patterns of language use and language interaction

This section is concerned with the modalities of discourse in which the members of the British and the US American communities are engaged, in terms of language interaction patterns, when they speak English but switch into Spanish (or Catalan, Basque and Galician-Portuguese), or borrow from these languages either a word (lexical borrowing), a structure (syntactic calque) or a meaning (semantic calque).

##### 4.1. Code-switching

Examples of code-switching produced by British-English speakers can be found in (1) (sentential), (2) (intrasentential) and (3) (extrasentential):

- (1) [...] to start with, Barcelona, **posa't guapa** (Cat.), eh?, it's become a lot more attractive (NI/92/UK)  
[Barcelona make yourself pretty]
- (2) [...] he said we had six months *permission de trabajo*, temporary ones (FA/93/UK)  
[work permit]
- (3) A: Do you speak it properly?  
B: **Bastante**, yes (DI/92/UK)  
[quite]

Examples (4) (sentential), (5) (intrasentential) and (6) (extrasentential) include code-switches produced by American-English speakers:

- (4) what do you call it? **un cepillo** (JB/92/US)  
[a plane]
- (5) it was like in a **tiovivo**, you know? (MI/92/US)  
[merry-go-round]
- (6) Uy, if I can remember, that's not very easy (AM/95/US)  
[gosh!]

#### 4.2. Borrowing

Examples (7) and (8) include borrowings used by members of both the UK and the US American communities:

- (7) I got involved in translation by the typical Spanish habit of **enchufe**, yeah (JB/92/UK)  
[thanks to a friend or an acquaintance]
- (8) it's a very **touristic** city (K/93/US)  
[Sp. *turístico* vs. Eng. *tourist*]

#### 4.3. Calque

a) Examples of syntactic calque can be found in (9) and (10) :

- (9) now, obviously, they **have a lot more years**, and I don't think even think that I've had a cross word with them in many years (RI/93/UK)  
[Sp. *tienen más años que antes* vs. Eng. *they are a lot older now*]
- (10) and we saw the flame, **two explosions more, one huge and one smaller** (MI/92/US)  
[WO calque: Sp. *dos explosiones más, una enorme y una más pequeña* vs. Eng. *two more explosions, a huge one and a smaller one*]

b) Examples of calques can be found in (11) and (12); (11) is a lexical phrase calque and (12) involves a partly semantic, partly lexical calque:

- (11) they **entered in** our house (JO/93/UK)  
[Sp. *Entraron en nuestra casa* vs. Eng. *they came into/entered*]
- (12) but I have no time now to do it **with tranquility**, to draw, to paint (MI/92/US)  
[Sp. *con tranquilidad* vs. Eng. *at my leisure*]

### 5. Code-switching in the UK and the US American communities: a comparative view

The data collected by means of field work done within the UK and the US American communities in Spain was used to test several hypotheses concerning the combined influence of internal and external factors that constrain the emergence, distribution and type of code-switching in linguistic minority groups. In particular, it was hypothesized that, given that internal factors such as language typology could not apply here, because there would be virtually the same structural differences between Spanish and American English as between Spanish and British English, there would have to be other factors, having to do with community-type, index of contact and social integration, causing such a difference. Indeed, as mentioned before, the qualitative analy-

sis of the two communities' settlement pattern, degree of contact and overall social integration showed that:

- a) there are many more mixed marriages in the US community than in the UK community, at least according to our sample, with a greater propensity to mix with the host country community members in their same social networks.
- b) the US community members establish and work in areas and professions related to the host community, whereas UK community members tend to establish and work in areas and professions that recreate the sort of employment and social networks that they would find in their country of origin, such as, pub owners, or develop their professional activity as teachers of English, which automatically leads to less contact situations.

Without obviating the existence of exceptions which appear when there is a correlation and interaction of such social factors and individual factors, including formal instruction in this case in Spanish, plus the creative marked dimension of code-switching, it could be concluded from all this that in its settlement in Spain, the American English-speaking US community appears to constitute an open community, while the British English-speaking UK community tends towards a less open community type.

(13) illustrates the modality of discourse of one member of the American English US community in Spain:

- (13) **JB:** Like today, I had, at work, I had a piece of, a tool, what do you call it? **un cepillo** [plane], you know, a carpenter's [...] thing, well, somebody put on there **averiado**, **no tocar**, **averiado** [do not touch, broken] and, of course, they spelled **averiado con b en vez de v** [«averiado» with a b instead of a v]. I knew that right off, you know, that it was wrong, but [...] I mean, there are some things that are difficult in Spanish [spelling], but, very few[...]

(14) reflects the modality of discourse of one member of the British English UK community and illustrates what seems to be the most usual code-switching parameter among members of this community, that is, insertions.

- (14) **James:** [...]we go to Tarragona and I find, the services are OK, in the middle of the afternoon they seem to sort of stop, possibly the drivers have a **siesta** [nap, an established loan in English], I don't know, but, but then, I can understand that because in the old days Tarragona had a **siesta** but now it does//, it's open all day [...]

At a qualitative level, it was observed that US American-English speakers made extended use of lexical code-switches (insertion) and intrasentential grammatical code-switches (alternations), as in (13), whereas, UK British-English speakers showed the insertion type more extensively, filling in the slots with words in Spanish that could not have been English because either

**Table 1.** Distribution of language interaction phenomena (UK & US communities)

	UK (12 speakers)	US (11 speakers)
Code-switching	38	90
Borrowing	4	8
Syntactic calque	16	71
Semantic calque	20	26
Total	78	195

the term or the concept, object, entity, or participant did not exist in their culture or everyday life back in their country. This will have decisive bearing on the establishment of the unmarked and marked code-switching types and the specific grammatical and pragmatic form they take, neither of which points can be developed here.

Quantitative observation also confirms that an open type of community favors language interaction phenomena and in particular code-switching, as is observed in table 1, which shows that there is, in particular, a much more extended use of code-switching and syntactic calque in the US American than in the UK community, according to our samples (Table 1).

## 6. Conclusion

The data reported here is a sample of the author's field work and that of her associates in the Language Variation Research Unit of the Institute of Applied Linguistics at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra. The whole research group is in the process of using them in a new project (SEC96-0627) to investigate language use (dialect divergence) and language interaction patterns (code-switching, borrowing, calque) in linguistic minority groups in Spain.

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