Interview with [M2]

M = Ministerial/Agency participant

The following conventions are used in transcription of spoken interviews:

[replacement information in square brackets]

[redacted information in grey in square brackets]

[?] = unintelligible missing word(s); immediately following word = unclear[?]

[#] = redacted numerical information

CAPITALS to signify emphasis in speaking

((Extraneous information in double brackets))

Researcher  
OK, thanks so much. It's great to have you, to have your input. So I I told you a little bit about the project. So, you know, we're looking at how English is being increasingly used for academic programmes in Europe. So, we've been looking at countries in Europe and we started with the Netherlands because there were quite early implementers of English language programs. And then I was looking at Austria, and I’ve recently been moved to Spain. So what we're trying to figure out is WHERE this drive for English language programs come comes from, and whether it's coming from, from the places people tend to ASSUME that it's coming from. And we're also trying to put it in into the context of changes in higher education more GENERALLY, for example towards, you know, massification of education and new public management and the AUTONOMY that's been given to university.

And and because you're you know, you're in a prime position to comment because you have BOTH government background and ACADEMIC background and EXPERTISE in higher education, I really wanted to talk to you and try to understand the Spanish context a little bit better.

So um obviously my questions were a bit too much ((laughing)).

[M2]

OK, yeah, if you want, I have an idea of what can be useful for you. I I I just can start talking about this and just let me know if there is other information you need. OK. So first thing is that Spain is a BIG country uh in terms of universities and number of students. And there is, well, it's not 17, but the MOST of the decisions are in the level of REGIONAL governments, not in the NATIONAL government. So NATIONAL government only have the competencies in in a few areas, one of those is the definition of the framework for so to say OFFICIAL programs, programs that the uh that the the DEGREES are recognized by the the the WHOLE country OK, for the administrations and so on.  
So in THIS sense, in 19, in 2007 the was, it changed and we moved from a very restricted um definition of what the programs, it was, uh, someone called it the national curriculum. It was a national curriculum for a list of 150, something like that, programs. So EACH university had ONLY the possibility to offer this, ONE of those, degrees and they have a closed framework for how to design or how to implement these these programs. In 2007, uh 2006 sorry, there was a CHANGE, and then the the universities had only, so to say, a framework of number of credits and a few more things. Um they had the possibility of designing the programs in the way they want, with an exception, those degrees that are linked, directly linked with professional competencies, professional regulations uh health and uh some engineerings, engineering.

So, English in this FRAMEWORK was at the level, not even the in the regional government, but in the level of level of UNIVERSITIES. So each university decide in which program, even in which COURSE,  
they wanted to offer THAT in English. So at the beginning it was not much, it was, you know, everybody was concerned about the designing of the new programs and the the to adapt to the structure of the Bologna framework, the Higher Education Area framework.

But there was a feeling that we would like to internationalize the UNIVERSITIES, so uh, the FIRST idea is that internationalization in Spain has a very BIG component in Latin America. So it’s a HUGE market for us and English is NOT needed for US. So there has been a tradition in in this connection. So we can say we had a very high level of international students, but we don't need English for that.

Researcher  
Umm.

[M2]

But there was also some policies pushing universities to offer some activities in English. So there was at the level of COURSES, MANY universities have ASKED teachers say, would you offer this course in English? And there are two, it's twofold. Uh, you you can offer a GROUP of Spanish, and they look for English, or ONLY one in English? Or could you, uh, provide some activities for English speaking people uh students, so it's it was like a at the at THAT level it was the decision of each faculty, each teacher in each course. They DECIDE how to deal with that. The experience is that we don't have MUCH ACCESS of uh international students uh that are non-Spanish speaking. Umm, so uh at that level there is an OPTION. Some students COME, and we try to to help them in English, but most of them come to Spain, NOT to have uh teaching in English but in SPANISH. They're looking for the experience of learning SPANISH while they, while they are here. OK, this is the the the first uh, the the most BASIC level.

There are other level that some universities offer the programs for two groups of students, but SOME of them are in English NOT because we have international students, but because we have, we want to, to TEACH in English to OUR students, to SPANISH students. So they are, for instance, international relations, some in the area of economics, sociology, international affairs. Some of those are they it's it's like a BILINGUAL uh approach of of the teaching.

And then there is the there is another level which is at the MASTER’S level. And there there are MANY initiatives um depending on the uh the topic, so there is not a list there, as far as I know, there are no statistics, records, indicators of what is happening at that level. You can have a look to some web pages and specific programs and see if they offer the teaching in in English. And THIS is based on an initiative that they that the initiative from the global[?] mainly it was in the 2015, something like that trying to OPEN the campus to the internationalization, and this uh was MOST focused on RESEARCH rather than on teaching, but research AND doctoral studies.

((Break in communication due to technical fault))

Researcher

Can can I just ask? So what, what is the REWARD? So you say that you know the universities want to show we’re international, and you said it doesn't matter how many students they even HAVE, but they want to show it. So what is the reward? What is the incentive for this?

[M2]  
So to say, it’s a kind of marketing. It’s GOOD for a university to say that, uh, you are at in the INTERNATIONAL context. But there is no [?] reward ((shaking head)).

Researcher  
OK, so that there is no kind of financial reward, you know?

[M2]  
Each student counts with the financial aids uh brands, but uh it is a an individual one. I mean the our our reward is the the FEES, but as you know as I mean from the I'm I'm talking mainly about PUBLIC institutions, because private institutions are other, for instance, I know that there are private institutions offering various specific programs at master’s level that they offer FOR international students, ONLY for international students. So this is a kind of business, and the REWARD is the the money they get. And for for the PUBLIC university, there it's the NUMBER of students. It's OK, they get money from the fees, the fees is NOT that much, but sometimes it's GOOD in terms that you you so to say FILL the the the groups with other students and they and they are always wanting to to do to have MORE students in one group, so you know resources for for teaching in a group is are the same, but if you have instead of 20 students you have 50, so it's more incomes. There is a specific let me mention the specific uh policy by the CHINESE Government that came into some universities. They they wanted master’s, I I think that MOST of European countries are uh TOUCHED by this, they as far as I know, they they had the the problem that they they couldn't provide master’s to ALL the the students, they don't have a room enough for all the the, the bachelors that wanted to to have a master. So they offer a fee, I remember it was like they offered to pay about 5000 or 6000 Euros per YEAR for EACH Chinese student that that will be ACCEPTED in one university.

((Break in communication due to technical fault))

Researcher

So I guess we're picking up from where we left off left LAST time.

[M2]

OK, good.

Researcher

So I wanted to, I SENT you a couple of questions. So you had mentioned that SOME English programs were implemented to accommodate SPANISH students who themselves wanted to study in English. So I was wondering where this shift comes from? So what you were saying BEFORE there weren't so many courses in English, and NOW there are, in PARTLY it's to accommodate Spanish students THEMSELVES. So do you know WHERE is this drive coming from that the Spanish students-?

[M2]

OK, well. I think, and I think that there's a culture, so to say, in the educational area of this bilingual well teaching. It comes from the, even from primary schools, secondary school, there are many public SCHOOLS where they develop bilingual teaching. And it was, it is very frequent that of most of the the schools have at least one GROUP of students with this option to be in a bilingual. Bilingual means that that levels are at least a couple of courses in in ENGLISH at the whole year in English. So,  
then the universities started with this same IDEA, which is provide learn[?]- teaching in English for Spanish. This is mainly in, NOT in in very clear courses or programs like uh, you know, translation or interpretation or uh theology or [?] or whatever, but ALSO in these kinds of international BUSINESS or international ADMINISTRATION or you know something about international relationships or international, well, whatever international is in the program, even in the in law or in law, economics are the MOST important one.  
   
So this this is the I think the it comes from this IDEA, the the idea of providing English and that the students at the end of the program had the the chance to PRACTISE and to LEARN in English, which is going to be needed in THESE specific programs as a a master.

Researcher  
So do you think the foundations for this kind of implementation of these programs were LAID then by the LOMLOU, or how would you fit that into-?

[M2]

No, I don't, no, I DON'T think so. It's a, I mean always the the laws have this PARAGRAPH talking about internationalization. But if you read it CAREFULLY, and and we are I I I'm not sure because I I just want to I'm not following the debates because I'm late TIRED about that because of my experience, and so I just want to to read the final VERSION. I don't want to to to to to know about the the the procedure ((laughing)). So you can see in the laws these paragraphs about internationalization, and if you read that carefully the these paragraphs they they say the universities CAN do, or SHOULD do. But they there is no DEMAND, there is not the the universities HAVE to, you know, provide at least 20% of the programs of the courses. There is no demands at, especially because the the Government, the national government don't have the competence to to PUSH the universities in this kind of [?] AUTONOMY, so it's a it's a, it's NOT a possibility.

So it's it's something that well, it's in the in the air, so to say it's the we would LIKE that our universities PROVIDE this, but there is no direct consequence about that. I think it's most, I mean the the LAW and what is happening at the universities comes from the same course, which is we need to improve the the competence the the language skills, the language skills of of our students. And this is VERY clear for most of the universities, for SOME, some of the programs it's very OBVIOUS.

Researcher  
Can I ask though, because my understanding, I think from what you said LAST time or from the laws that the LAST law, I think the LOMLOU, it allowed for the universities to be more autonomous in their OWN creation of programs, right?

[M2]

Yeah, that's right.

Researcher

So so given that they're able to do it THEMSELVES, does that not perhaps encourage English language programs because it's their own CHOICE, so to speak.

[M2]

Yeah, but but the but it previous to that it was worst, I mean, in 19- uh 2007 we we um, I'm gonna say we decides to END with the tradition of the Spanish way of doing things, DESIGNING programs. This comes from the Napoleonic model of the universities, where the state decide a LIST of programs and they decide the characteristics of the of the EACH of these programs. So we had at that moment 150 something number of programs, so that there is a specific CURRICULUM, BASIC curriculum for all these, for EACH of these programs. So the universities only had to to apply for I want to OFFER this program. So I present the the curriculum in and and they look at the the curriculum of the university and they decided this is adjusted to the to the laws.

So we cancelled that, we we decide not to do that ANYMORE and to OPEN the universities the the OPTION to offer whatever they WANT. So we only maintain that for these specific programs that provide so to say the LICENSE to for specific professions, for instance medicine, nursery, teaching and some engineers, but NOT for the rest. So the universities can DO what they want. So the first idea, what what happened? Well, the tradition was SO strong that most of the universities just reply what they already had. So they there was not a LOT of innovation, so to say. But SOME universities did at that moment, and and that was I don’t know, 15, 15, more than 15 years ago, 20. Yeah, 15 years ago some universities have take the the this this NEW path to to improve or to move things. So in THIS autonomy is where the universities could DO these new designs, these designs of bilingual because there was NOT this national or state curriculum, so they they could provide that without any limitation.

Researcher

Umm. So I mean does that not SUGGEST that they might be driven by say market forces or something else that might LEAD to the English implementation of English language programs through HAVING that autonomy? Or do you not think so, is there not-?

[M2]

I think there is a reason some of these programs are very clear in areas like a Madrid. And if you look at the map in the Spanish universities, you can see that there is MANY universities, for instance, [redacted identifying information] [name of region], they are universities in different cities, different provinces, and there is NOT much competence, competence among them. So MOST of the students come to the university, go to the university, which is the local university. It's, there's some mobility, of COURSE, even [?], but in MADRID there are a LOT of the public universities offering the same programs, in some in many cases. And there's a HUGE increase of private universities. So in this SENSE it's very clear that in in these areas, these kind of programs arise more and more. So, my feeling is that the MARKET is one of the forces that push them.

But on the OTHER hand, it's also a rational DECISION because, as I mentioned, MOST of these programs, most of the programs that I know are are in areas which is VERY clear that you HAVE to offer that. I mean if you are International Business Administration. Uh I mean it's VERY clear that you you need to to to offer your students this, I mean, not just teaching of ENGLISH but LEARNING BUSINESS in English. So but I mean YOU already have a need to have, uh, a certain level of English to to ENTER this program, and that's what is happening. So, we are here with uh with native English speaking teachers and even well or Spanish teachers with a high level of ENGLISH and and and that was my it's my my main idea I don't know there OTHER specific programs in science or engineering but also are in in this field but but my my feeling is that the MARKET and also the the, the, the scientific area, the the DISCIPLINE, it's the one that that force the the universities to to offer that in any case.

Researcher  
Can I just ask for clarification. So when you say the market, do you mean the labour market like for students going into the labor market or do you mean the UNIVERSITY market.

[M2]

The UNIVERSITY market because some of the PRIVATE universities are are offering THAT, and and for instance, I know some private universities that they offer groups in English, but the idea is not for NOT for Spanish speaking people, people, for locals, but for people that they want to to to attract all from different countries.

Researcher

Right, right. And how about the public, so you mentioned the private universities, but how about the PUBLIC universities, do they BENEFIT in any way from this? When you say it's the market, do you mean financial reward or what kind of incentive?

[M2]

Yeah, actually it’s the existence. So if they have these kind of programs, they can, well, universities have some flexibility in the organization for instance if you have so to say in international administration, you have a group for Spanish speaking people people. This group could be even first year a hundred students per group. But if YOU are offering a an English speaking GROUP, you have a group of 20?

So there are some benefits for the for the FACULTY for the academics that they have more, more HIGH level of students at that groups. So they benefit for for the by the EXISTENCE or so, YOU can offer that this is offering by [name of university]. This is something good for YOU because the the fee is the SAME for all of the students. So there is a especially for Europeans as you know they are considered as uh citizens EU CITIZENS. So there is NO difference there, there CANNOT be differences in the in the fees from one student to to another.

Researcher   
So I mean, what what I'm hearing from you is that, I think what you've been saying is there isn't much STEERING that would relate to English language programs from above, NEITHER from the the regional, so the AUTONOMOUS communities of of Spain OR from the national Government of Spain. Is that right?

[M2]

Sorry, what do you mean?

Researcher  
So, you know, STEERING at a distance is one of the things we're looking at in in our project, um for DIFFERENT countries not, you know, specific-, well, INCLUDING Spain. And so one of the things we've been looking at is laws that GIVE autonomy TO universities and that the, but THEN require REVIEWING and MONITORING um within this system. So there's an INTERACTION BETWEEN universities and the state and NATIONAL level government or in Spain also with the autonomous communities. So from what from what you've been saying, I get the impression you're saying that there ISN'T much interaction between these different levels that would IMPACT on English language programmes within an institution.

[M2]  
OK, so I I I'm not sure if I I'm going to answer your question but this is not ONLY for, for for these kind of programs. This is a as a whole. The constitutions, the Constitution gives only the the government, the national government, the competency, the competence of organizing the   
CERTIFICATION of the programs, ONLY that. I mean the programs that SHOULD be recognized in the WHOLE country, the government can- MUST ORGANIZE the legislation, the rules FOR that.

SO the idea was give autonomy to the university, so the the intervention of the government in that area is very low. So there is another way that the national government can participate in that which is funding SOME activities, but they cannot give MONEY to the universities because ALL the money that the national government have for support the universities, I mean the STATE, all the money that the state have is not in the NATIONAL government, it’s in the REGIONAL government. So budget can be here or there, it’s there, it’s in the regional government. So the national government can can only give some EXTRA finance. For instance, the Erasmus program, the Erasmus program for students, the mobility, so the STUDENTS can apply for a for a grant to go abroad to to a semester or whatever. So the the national government, I mean the regional, the universities provide some money, the European Union provides some money, the regional government sometimes provide an extra money. And the national government can provide extra money FOR the students. It's NOT for the university. That impacts, of course, in the in the university activity. But this is something directly TO the students, and THEY can do that, they can support students with not many economic or not enough economic resources for international mobility. Uh apart from that, it's it's VERY difficult. So the the national government only can only PUSH universities from the so to say intellectual uh that's from the from the IDEAS, but NOT from the the budget. The budget is really LOW for a, I mean it's it's not a, it's a DUTY to provide money for for that it's everything is in the level of the regional government.

Researcher

When I when I compare Spain to other countries that we've looked at, for example the Netherlands or Austria, let's just take Austria for example, they have institutional development plans which are like STRATEGIC plans by the universities also NATIONAL development plans, and the universities have to engage with negotiations with the government about these strategies and what they're going to implement. And then together, they come out with a kind of BUDGET, what you know what they will intend to ACHIEVE within a certain period of time. So these are kind of STEERING instruments. So far what I've seen in Spain is there don't seem to be these type of STEERING instruments is, is that RIGHT?

[M2]  
OK, ALL these instruments those those instruments that you can find in SPAIN are always, always and only in the REGIONAL level, OK. So all the NEGOTIATION is between universities, public universities in this case AND the regional government. Uh financing MODELS is the the the word direct translation of translation of WHAT we use. These models were developed in the 1990s in many regions, especially developed in Valencia, Catalunya and then also well Galicia, and Andalucia, and some others. Most of the the the CORE of the budget are directly related to the NUMBER of the students. Uh, so the number of the students, while some division in in students of science, students of humanities, and well a bit complicated by a few variables, but there's ALSO a a a part which is not that much devoted to strategic goals. So strategic goals, uh, strategic plans. And so they they are not very with not very huge IMPACT, and and with great differences between or among community um REGIONAL governments. So there ARE. It's not easy to understand THAT because it's a part this financial the the financing of higher education of universities are most MOSTLY connected to the NUMBER of students that you have.

And the and there are SOME strategic goals uh that are financing also financing and is part of the NEGOTIATION. But as I told you, it's a I mean you you need to go DEEP into this in EACH specific region and to read carefully the model of financing. And it's not uh very easy to to understand what is going on and to the the, the, the, the DEPTH of the impact of this way of financing.

Researcher

Right right. Are they PUBLICLY available documents, do you know? Do they have to by LAW be public? Would I be able to find?

[M2]

I I I'm not SURE. But but there is uh probably if you go to the to the, I mean, this is something that you can ask to managers of the universities if you're trying to to, what we call ‘gerentes’, which is the the manager. They they have because they OR the Vice Rector of economy. As far as I know there are some models if you go to the to the websites of the regional government and university, PROBABLY there is a something inside.

Researcher  
Right right. That's really helpful. OK, so I've taken up another half hour almost of your time. So um was there anything that you would recommend I look at, I I know you're an expert in [subject area] and I I I don't know if you actively involved in teaching any classes of it, on this subject, but I mean would you have any kind of if you happen to have a recommended reading list that you could share with me if you happen to be teaching something, that would be very helpful for me to get, you know, background on Spain. But if not, don't worry about it ((laughing)).

[M2]

Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, it's, we we have a LOT. I mean it was, MOST of the the the the DOCUMENTS and good articles were developed in the 90s in the beginning of the 2000 and and so on, because it was the moment where we we we were DESIGNING the model, from from NOW on, the ANECA the national agency and the regional agencies some of the, MOSTLY have developed the the the initial the initial designs. So the reports that you can find now, it's are more the RESULTS or the SPECIFICS of the developing the procedure, some adaptations or improvements, but it's not that um something, I mean, it's too specific in the in the in the area[?], some changes in the criteria of the evaluations and changes in the creation of the commissions or the expert panel, expert panel and and so on. But it's not the that that in that bit[?]. I I have the feeling that even in EUROPE, there is we are now in that moment. So the, the, the IDEAS of doing something NEW, it's really not in the in the MINDS in the PRIORITIES of the people that is engaged, they are MORE concerned about how to to deal with the the obligations of the procedures previously designed.

For instance, I read about the problems that you have in your in in ENGLAND that the quality assurance agency had decided not to EVALUATE the the programs in England because of the, I mean, they are going to to do that in Wales and Scotland and Northern Ireland but not in England because they they are they are not um I mean the the the Government pushed them not to uh to FOLLOW the European standards for for the QUALITY. So in THIS sense there is a this this is MY idea, they are concerned about procedures rather than, you know, the THEORY or NEW ideas of how to evaluate. But there is this this specific ideas of how to evaluate RESEARCH, the problem of the JOURNALS, the citation REPORTS, the Open Access and all of these and and they're concerned about that, but NOT about the the whole system of how to create an accreditation system and evaluation for the improvement, how to engage the different stakeholders. And that's my feeling, but probably it’s because I'm I'm out of the the daily NEEDS ((smiling)).

Researcher  
Okay ((laughing)). I mean, ANECA is part of ENQA, isn't it, the the European-

[M2]

Yeah.

Researcher

Yeah. So there must be some kind of FLOW, exchange of ((laughing))

[M2]  
Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. YES. It's an IMPORTANT part. I mean, it's a a powerful AGENCY.

Researcher

Yeah. Yeah. OK. So thanks again. So thanks so much for giving it another GO. I'm so, so happy you you decided to come back after the first horrible attempt ((laughing))

[M2]  
It's it's great to to to talk to you STRAIGHT ((laughing)).

Researcher

Yeah. It's nice thing able to talk freely. Thanks again so much for your time. It's been really helpful.

[M2]

Thank you. If you need a another moment, then please don't, I mean after the holiday, don't worry to contact me. OK.

Researcher

Thank you. Thank you so much. Bye then.

[M2]

Bye. Bye. Thank you.