

The Incursion of English as a Marketing Strategy in the Spanish Fashion Brands on Instagram

Joana Longo

ESIC Business & Marketing School

Paula Suarez Alvarez-Hevia

Esic Business and Marketing School

Ana Ortega

ESIC Business & Marketing School

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Abstract

Faced with the evidence that English is increasingly gaining dominance in online sales in the Spanish fashion industry, the incursion of this foreign language in 50 Spanish brands was studied, both on their Instagram account and on their correspondent website (Spanish version). After categorizing these 50 brands according to five levels of English language dominance, the type of loanwords or borrowed expressions were analyzed from two different sources: their online store, (the website of the brand in its Spanish version) and their Instagram account. The total number of registered entries in English was 6,062 in web content, and 36,489 in Instagram content. but also the type of anglicisms used in Spanish were predetermined to achieve the brand image purpose.

Keywords: marketing, Instagram, language.

Track: Marketing Strategy & Theory

1. Introduction

The frequency of using English to sell on Instagram and the correspondent websites, provides evidence that there is a clear desire by the businesses to adapt their jargon to a modern and up-to-date type of consumer. Ample research on the theory of Foreign Language Display (FLD) has confirmed this business intuition (Domzal, Hunt and Kernal, 1995; Haarmann, 1989; Kelly-Holmes, 2005; Piller 2003; Ray, Ryder, and Scott 1991; Usunier 2007; Hornikx 2013). This article aims to expand FLD literature by focusing on the display of products on Instagram and launched websites. The present study differentiates various degrees of English incursion as predetermined marketing decisions to position a brand image in a way that will help companies reach their targeted consumers. Thus, this article is framed within the emerging field of study called “consumer linguistics”, which is based entirely on finding out how to use language to build a brand image.

Needless to say that Instagram works as an e-commerce tool which improves visibility, traffic, and online sales. On an Instagram page, directly under the biographic line of the brand description, a short URL is found. It links customers to their website. Furthermore, when a customer is shopping on Instagram and clicks on an item, the target page will open. Users looking for products on Instagram land on websites time and again. Since websites will be launched from Instagram when visitors try to shop, Instagram may be regarded as the hook for websites. At any rate, the hyper connection between Instagram and websites is the justification for the comparison of English language on the two media. Provided that English incursions are a way to build a brand image, a secondary purpose of this article is to compare the role of the social media platform in relation to the launched sites.

2. The Reasoning Behind FLD

Most of the reviewed linguistic literature agrees that FLD is symbolic since foreign language incursions are used for the ethnocultural associations they evoke. That is, it is the associations transferred to the product which seem to hold relevance, rather than the content. The connotations of a particular country were believed to be the real motivation to display products in English. Usunier’s (2007) review of literature and his own research proved that consumers are more willing to buy items that are associated with the country-of-origin. However, as this analysis shows, Spanish consumers who buy Spanish fashion on Instagram pages with anglicisms, do not have associations with a particular English-speaking country evoked, but connotations of immediacy and universality in a current and modernized brand.

People buying products advertised and displayed in English feel they have updated their knowledge and skills; by buying online, and understanding certain incursions of English language, they prove to be competent in integrating into an English-speaking globalized world. In fact, De la Cruz's (2012) quantitative research demonstrates that the influence of English word-stock is pervasive inasmuch as it extends into every field of Spanish vocabulary: "Spanish is not immune to the growing phenomenon of English as a global language. It is, indeed, a tendency that will certainly continue in the future".

It seems that the context of previous sociolinguistic research on FLD has swiftly become obsolete since the world order has changed completely in recent decades. For instance, Domzal, Hunt and Kernel (1995) stated that the success of a foreign language display is due the fact that foreign language is not anticipated by customers and makes them process information more deeply. Obviously, this is not the case on Instagram and their correspondent websites. Firstly, English display is no longer a surprise to Spanish shoppers. On the contrary, English is the language of globalization, like Latin in the Roman Empire; therefore, the decision to use English responds to globalized meanings associated with the latest trend in the world of fashion. Secondly, this study reveals that the type of English incursion is consistent with the target market of each brand, so consumers do not need to struggle to find a product or understand its description.

Should the case be that a particular word or expression is unknown to Spanish customers, they may infer the meaning, ignore it or look it up. In any case, the complexity of an English type of incursion does not seem to be considered in the marketing strategy as the frequency of this language incursion confirms that foreign content is not met with reluctance but rather inspires a willingness to buy state-of-the-art clothes. Estornell (2012) comes to the same conclusion after collecting and reflecting upon English loanwords in Spanish fashion magazines: even though the complexity of some English loanwords contrasts with their divulgation purpose, the creation of a modern, current and attractive image is prioritized. Spanish language is rich enough to avoid anglicisms; nonetheless, English language is preferred for pragma-linguistic reasons.

Certainly, the reasoning behind the preference for a particular type of English incursion on Spanish brands relates to a social and personal expression of understanding the world and one's individuality. Marketing intuition of using anglicisms when displaying their items on Instagram corresponds to Zenner's proposal that a change of language is motivated by an expression of social or personal identity (2019). Zenner's review of a variety of previous quantitative research makes a strong case for considering the use of loanwords as a

tool to express social identity or individual personality. Thus, applying Zenner's assumption to the present analysis, behind the will to use an English word instead of the Spanish one, there is a clear social tendency to convey a different social image. Consequently, it might be stated that when fashion brands create new fashion collections, they are also creating the jargon and even the ideology of a new identity. The question of whether the brands are using English to imitate the latest social expressions or using English to build new social and ideological tendencies requires more research. Indeed, the fact that each language structures our understanding of reality and self-identity, in a different way has become a recurrent issue in other disciplines of knowledge, such as psychiatry or even cinematography (Ortega, 2020). What becomes unquestionable in this globalized world is a clear determination to use a particular type of incursion of the English language as a marketing strategy to create brand positioning.

Together with this decision to use some English in their online sales, marketing experts know the susceptibility to being engaged of their target markets (or should this be: the experts know how to engage their target markets). As identified by A. W. Eigenraam (2018), customers who want to learn about a brand on platforms or websites become engaged by a brand by viewing videos, watching pictures and signing up for updates, such as newsletters. These activities noticed by Eigenraam are precisely what visitors do on Instagram, which explains the fact that brands release short videos in English (with or without translated subtitles), comment on their pictures with youthful idioms and other fashionable jargon in English and invite customers to register and sign up. On the whole, English incursion constitutes a clear strategy when brands display items with an associated identity and create engaging activities for potential customers.

3. Methodological Issues

In order to accurately select a list of 50 Spanish fashion brands on Instagram, a survey of 100 people aged 20-50 was carried out. The participants, who all had an account on Instagram, were asked to list their favorite Spanish brands to shop for clothes or shoes. Since the original list counted on 164 brands, firstly, we pursued Wondwesen's findings (2021) to exclude brands with fewer than 100,000 followers. Secondly, brands mainly focusing on jewellery or other accessories, without fashion wears (clothes or shoes) were discarded. Then, haute couture and bridal fashion were not considered since these outfits are only purchased for very special occasions. Moreover, 14 brands which belong to Spanish multi-brand groups (Inditex and Tendam) were also eliminated: Firstly, their incursion of English in different

brands was extremely similar because of closely-related marketing strategies; and secondly, their large-scale economies at international level (working in at least 97 different markets and owning more than 5000 stores) justified their high English incursion on their websites.

As a result of these criteria of selection, 114 brands were excluded.

The definitive criteria which gather the present sample of 50 brands are the following: a) the design, if not the major production, has to originate in Spain; b) the number of followers on Instagram has to be higher than 100,000; c) either clothes or shoes have to be the main distributed products of every brand; d) the marketing of the products in the fashion industry has to be ready-to-wear (workwear, sportswear, homewear, either smart, business or casual clothes), whereas high fashion or haute couture is excluded; e) brands which collaborate to create items or collections are accepted, but brands belonging to the same group with multi-brand strategies are excluded.

As regards the differentiation of the types of anglicisms, it responded to the intrinsic conditions of the marketing strategy of the fashion industry. The present categorization of anglicisms does not follow etymological or other linguistic criteria, but what seems to be marketing decisions on the type of jargon used. Anglicisms or “English loanwords” are understood following De la Cruz (2012), “any interference coming from the English language regardless of its etymological provenance”. Actually, at a first stage of this research, attention was paid only to the dominance of English language over Spanish language on Instagram and home webs. Thus, in the beginning, only three types of anglicisms were set: 1) entries exclusively in English (e.g.: “jeans high rise minimal”); 2) entries that are translated (original word and its translated version); (e.g.: “zapatillas sneakers”); and 3) , random combinations of Spanish and English (“cinturón garden print”). Nevertheless, due to the high number of proper names which extend their signification to name some products, this specific morphologic category had also to be included in the measurement of English loanwords (“vestido largo Uma”, “bufanda de punto Alaska”).

Some proper nouns can undergo the process of the so called “appellativization” when they lose their original meaning and turn into common nouns. Names of historical, mythological or literary characters become characteristic of the qualities and defects of a human type and are transformed into common names through “antonomasia”. Some other proper names simply extend their signification from an object of a class to an entire class (Druta, 2017). Based on the evidence of 782 proper names in the sample of study, it can be stated that many English proper names in fashion constitute a highly productive way of increasing the “appellativization” process. For instance, “zapatos Oxford” (“Oxford shoes” or

simply, “Oxfords”) are made of leather, usually formal shoes, characterized by their open lacing, while “zapatos Derby” (“Derby shoes” or “Derbies”) also have open lacing but are slightly less formal. Yet, some other proper names which work as adjectives describing womens-, mens- or kids- wear, have not yet developed into a commonly known type of clothing, although the fashion jargon seems to accelerate this process.

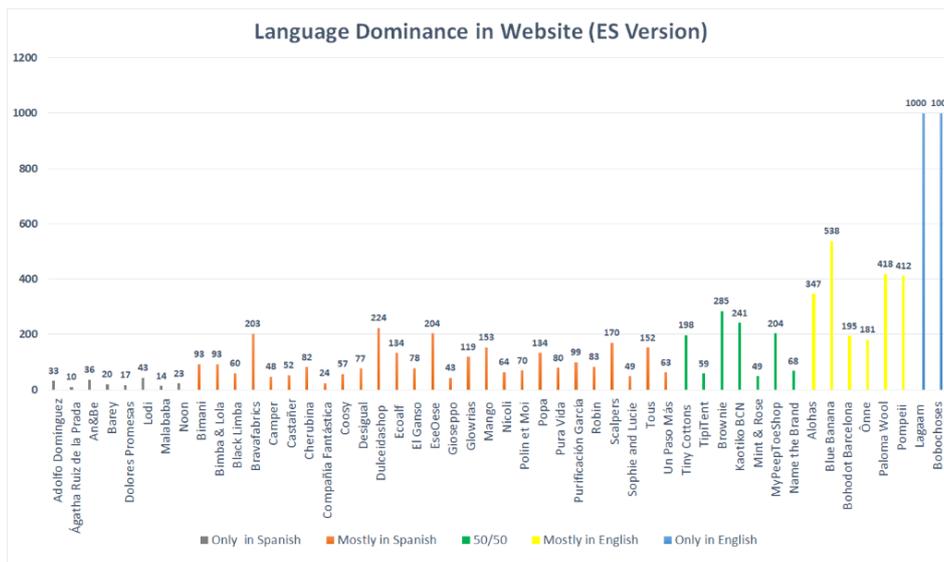
In the analysis of each brand, the number of English words on both the homepage and other pages was registered. Then, the types of English incursions when naming the products were also listed. In parallel, the number of English words of each brand on Instagram was noted in three different sections: description of the brand, stories, and posts. Thus, comparisons between the incursion of English on Instagram and on the correspondent web pages could be easily made. Additionally, the type of linguistic incursion chosen in the jargon of each brand was clearly evidenced.

4. Analysis of Data

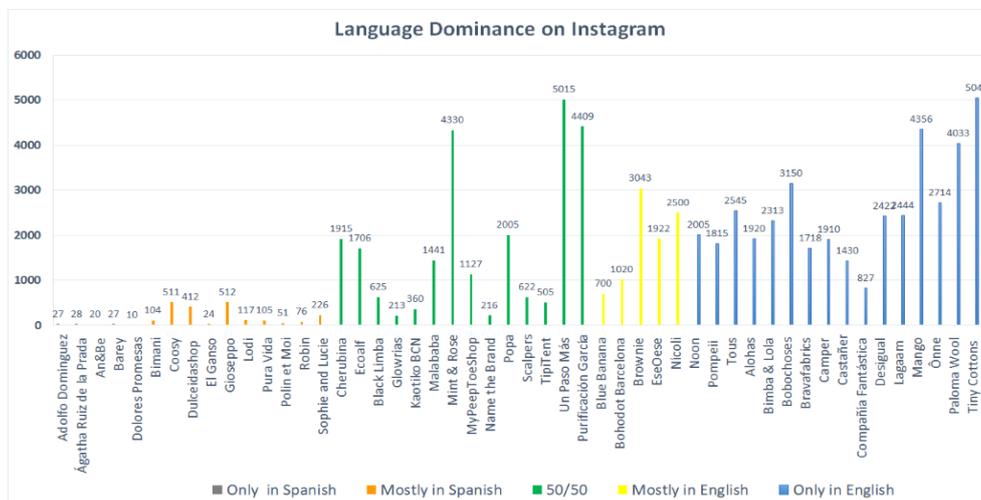
Once the quantification of English loanwords on Instagram and on the correspondent websites in the sample of 50 brands was registered, the results enabled the establishment of five types of brands according to the language dominance. Our taxonomy is based not only on the amount of anglicisms, but also on the number of Spanish and English words on each page. The convergence of both paradigms resulted in the following taxonomy:

- a) “Only in Spanish”: Brands which scarcely include words in English to sell online or are present on Instagram. The number of English words per page is no higher than 5% of the total amount of words;
- b) b)“Mostly in Spanish”: Brands which use some anglicisms, but the content and display of items and messages are mainly in Spanish. The number of English words per page is between 5% and 40%.
- c) “50-50”: Brands which translate everything or both languages are evenly combined, as if they were selling in a particular type of e-commerce jargon. The number of English and Spanish words varies from 40% to 60% on a page.
- d) “Mostly in English”: Brands which use English mostly both on Instagram and on their website. The number of English words is higher than 50%
- e) “Only in English”: Brands which only use English, that is, the Spanish version of their website is not provided or their profile on Instagram seems to belong to an international brand. The number of Spanish words per page is not higher than 5%.

Hence, the percentage of a language per page was enough evidence to determine that two brands with the same amount of anglicisms belonged to a different language dominance category. It must also be noted that not every brand conveyed the same amount of information. There were some brands with around 14,000 posts on Instagram and 500 items on their webpage, and some other brands counted with less than 300 posts and 200 items. Notwithstanding the difficulties in the categorization process, as the figures on the bars show in the following graph, it can be stated that the majority of Spanish consumers of fashion are used to brands with Spanish dominance over English language:

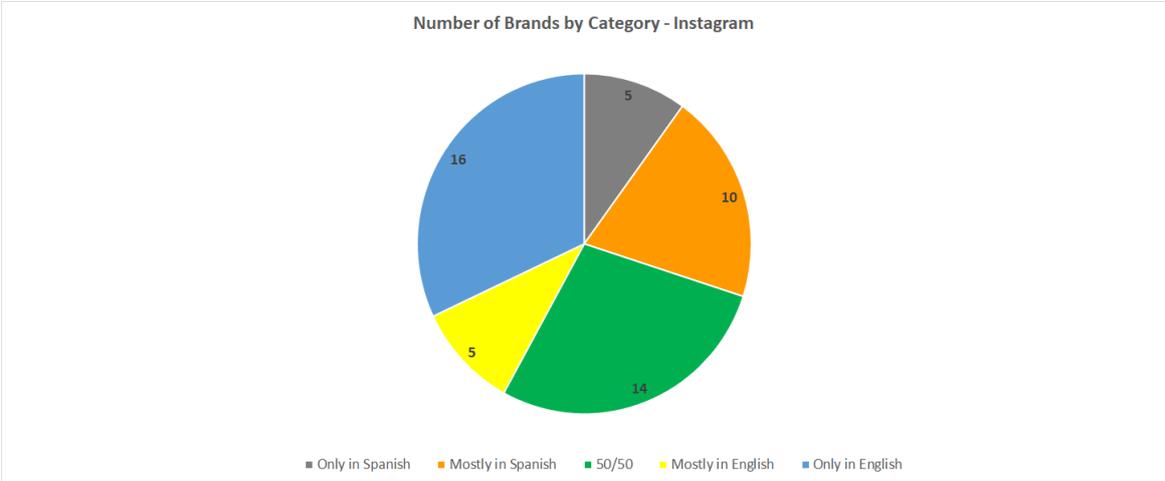
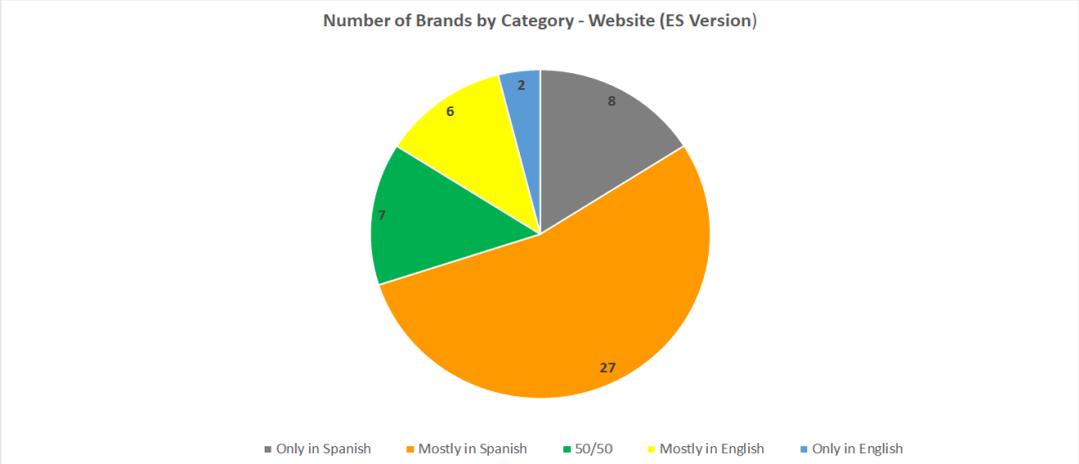


As the bars illustrate, a vast majority of the brands have their website mostly in Spanish. On the right-hand side, “Only in English” brands were given a symbolic figure of 1000 which allows us to visualize these brands in relation to the other groups. Furthermore, the number of anglicisms registered on Instagram resulted in a significant increase from webpages. As it is shown on the bars of the graph below, Instagram consumers are ready to shop using both languages and there is a higher tendency to buy mostly or only in English:



This second bar graph shows the 50 Spanish brands to assess the language dominance in Instagram. Here again, figures on the bars of “Only in English” brands show the total number of posts with less than 5% of Spanish words.

Not only did results prove that foreign-language display is indeed more productive on Instagram than on the launched websites, but they also evidenced a deliberate change of linguistic strategy from the websites to Instagram. The following circle graphs illustrates that most brands chose to change from one category of our taxonomy to one where the dominance of English over Spanish is higher:



While 8 Spanish brands display their offered products only in Spanish on their web pages, 3 of them increase the English incursion on Instagram. Even though 27 Spanish brands chose to present their products “mostly in Spanish” on the webpages, only 10 keep that level of Spanish on Instagram. However, the number of Spanish brands which mix equally Spanish and English languages doubles the website figure. The reason why there is one fewer brand in the amount of “mostly in English” brand on Instagram is due to the impressive increase in the number of brands which are “Only in English” on Instagram.

5. Conclusions

The initial hypothesis predicted that English language dominance in Spanish fashion and the type of English incursion was determined by the marketing strategy and the brand positioning. Data of this study shows that the use of English language by Spanish brands on Instagram is higher than their use on their correspondent web pages. This difference in the figures proves that each brand has predetermined some degree of English incursion for each one of its platforms as different marketing strategies.

While traditional Spanish brands of fashion remain faithful to their Spanish identity and their clients, including less than 5% of English words on their sites, more modern and international brands aim to use more English, predominantly on Instagram. Hence, there is a direct correspondence between an image of modernity and the use of English. Simply by using English, brand messages portray more attractive products and tendencies of a progressive and globalized world, to such an extent that English is associated with what is desirable and upmarket.

If according to the reviewed literature, English incursions respond to pragmatic reasons for building new identities, further research is needed to identify consumer groups' concern for sustainability, travelling, fun practices, ethics, learning or even working. There is a parallel between consumer group identity and type of English incursion which still needs to be explored more thoroughly.

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