



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**  
Hugvísindasvið

# **Media Exposure and English Language Proficiency Levels**

*A Comparative Study in Iceland and Spain*

*B.A. Essay*

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**September 2011**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this essay is to study the status of English in Iceland and Spain. In order to achieve this goal, a comparative study of the media of both countries in terms of exposure is performed. As a result, it is suggested that Icelanders are considerably more exposed to English by the media than their Spanish counterparts. In addition, their education systems, regulations and government policies on English teaching are described. It is found that the Spanish education system devotes more time to English teaching than the Icelandic one. Add to this, Spain has more aggressive policies for improving competence in English. However, Icelandic students are expected to achieve higher proficiency levels. Therefore, it seems likely that due to higher exposure to English media Icelanders have better proficiency levels. Unfortunately, more empirical evidence is needed to state this as a fact. Thus the relationship between proficiency gained at school and proficiency gained by exposure to the media is a question worthy of further study.

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## **Introduction**

Initially, the English linguistic status in Iceland and Spain is considered. These considerations are related to the traditional definitions of foreign language (FL) and second language (L2). Due to lack of exposure and the limitation of use of English to a certain context, English was considered to have FL status in Spain. On the other hand, English is close to having a L2 status in Iceland but it has not. There are two reasons for this: firstly, English proficiency levels are not high enough and secondly, English is not widespread enough in Iceland. In addition, English proficiency levels of Spaniards within the European context were compared.

Secondly, a study comparing English exposure through the media in both countries was performed. The study was focused on television broadcasting, cinema, internet, radio and books. As a result, it was found that Icelandic society is considerably more exposed to English than the Spanish one. This is especially true for television broadcasting and cinema. In the third place, the compulsory education systems of both countries were considered. Add to this, new policies on education and state regulations concerning English teaching were taken into account as well. It was concluded that Spanish students spent more time being taught English. Moreover, the Spanish new policies on English teaching are far more radical than the Icelandic ones. However, the Icelandic National curriculum is more demanding with Icelandic learners of English. Finally, it is pointed out that Icelanders exposure to the media in English is likely to be the reason for their better English proficiency when compared to their Spanish counterparts.

# **1. The status of English in Spain the EU and Iceland; foreign language and second language**

According to the report *Europeans and their languages* (2006), the majority of Europeans think that foreign languages are useful for their personal development. In the same way, most of them think that their children should learn foreign languages. Among all the foreign languages in the EU, English is the most widely used language and the one that is considered most useful.

In addition, 59% of Europeans learn foreign languages at school. In spite of this, their use of foreign languages is moderate. Foreign languages are mainly used when going abroad for holidays, or watching television or movies (Eurobarometer 2006). However, according to Arnbjörnsdóttir (2007), English is widely used in Iceland. Therefore, it would be interesting to compare the use of English between Spain, Iceland and the EU.

## ***1.1. The traditional distinction between second language and foreign language***

It is necessary to make a theoretical distinction between second language and foreign language before we can deal with the status of English in any country. Besides, we should introduce the concept of first language or L1. Thus, according to Saville (2006):

For purposes of SLA concerns, the important features that all shades of L1s share are that they are assumed to be languages which are acquired during early childhood – normally beginning before the age about three years – and that they are learned as part of growing up among people who speak them. (p. 4)

In addition, he states that it has been traditionally agreed that a second language or L2 is learnt by immigrants who are new to the community and speak other languages (L1s) but are learning the dominant one in the community (Saville, 2006).

Conversely, a foreign language or FL is confined to few linguistic environments, frequently learned at school in the L1 country or is used for communications means with other societies (Saville, 2006). Therefore, as pointed out by Arnbjörnsdóttir (2007) what tells an L2 from an FL is that an L2 is learned in the community where it is spoken but the FL is learned mainly by exposure in the classroom. That is, a L2 is characterized by a great amount of input or exposure while in a FL input or exposure is almost limited to the classroom.

Nevertheless, are these theoretical approaches still suitable for the countries of concern? This is a question that must be addressed.

### ***1.2. English as a foreign language in Spain***

As it was previously mentioned, one of the main features of a FL is its small amount of input in a given society. As a consequence of this, a FL is not widely used in daily-life matters, and its influence is confined to certain environments. As it will be properly explained in the following chapter, Spanish society has little or total lack of exposure to English. This is especially true within the Spanish media, that is to say, that a rather small amount of English exposure comes from television, internet, radio, cinema, books or newspapers. In addition to this, according to the Eurobarometer report, *Europeans and their languages* (2006), just 27 % of Spaniards can hold a conversation in English (Eurobarometer, 2006).

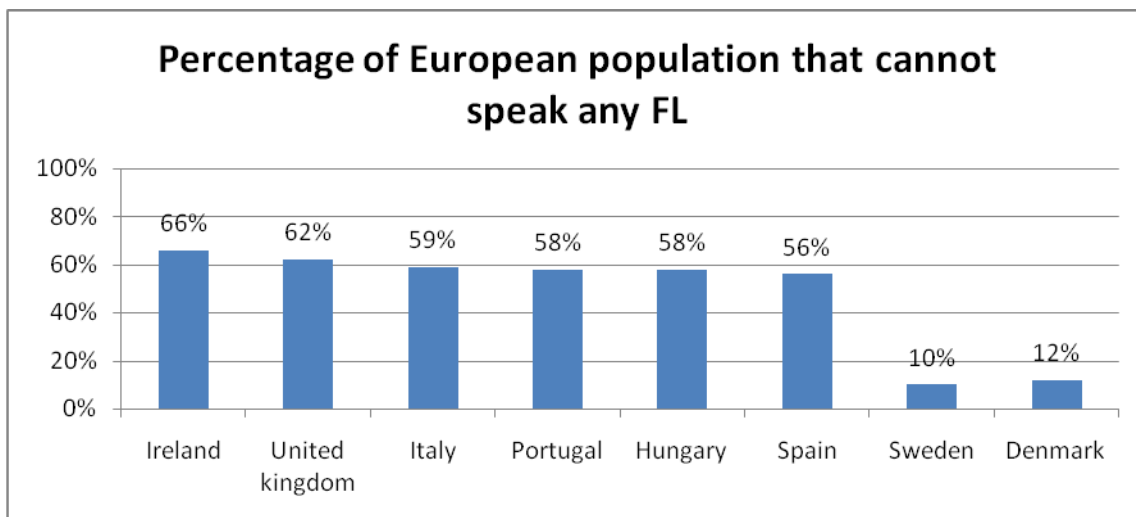
However, English is used within the academic context and it is studied at schools and universities. Besides, it is used within the business and tourism industry. Under these circumstances, it can be assumed that the traditional definition of FL fits well within the current linguistic situation in Spain.

### ***1.3. English as a foreign language in Spain and the European Union***

Firstly, in order to provide a better framework for the understanding of the status of English in Spain, it was thought convenient to compare it with the English status of other European countries. In this sense, the *Europeans and their languages* (2006) survey, suggest that 56 % of Europeans say they can hold a conversation in a language other than their mother tongue (Eurobarometer, 2006).

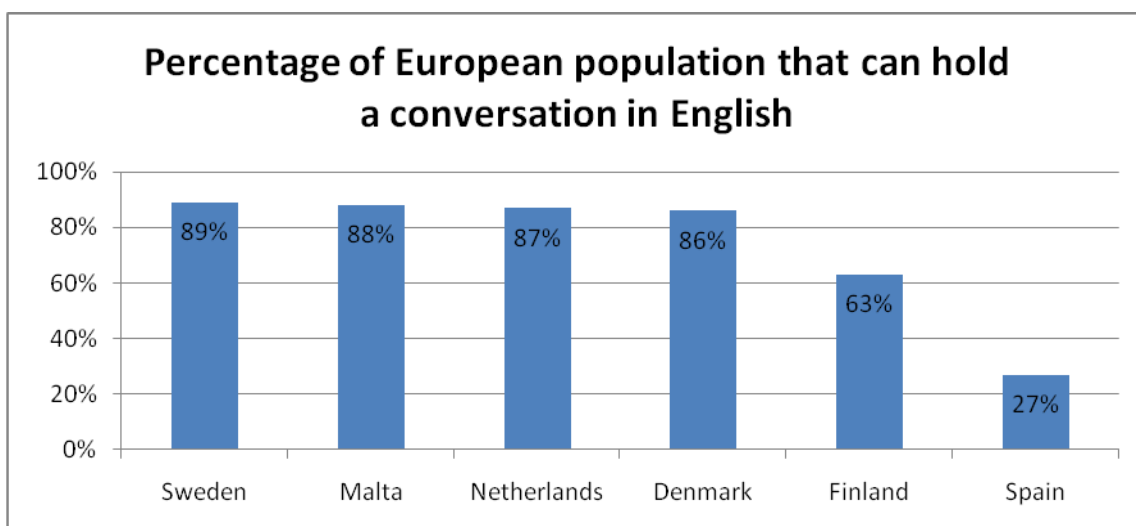
On the contrary 44 % of them say that they cannot speak any language besides their own (Eurobarometer, 2006). In addition to this, Spain is within the six member states in which the majority of the population cannot speak any foreign language (Eurobarometer, 2006). These countries are Ireland (66%), the United Kingdom (62 %), Italy (59 %), Portugal (58 %), Hungary (58 %) and Spain (56 %), see chart:





**Chart 1. Percentage of European population that cannot speak any FL, Eurobarometer (2006)**

On the other hand, English is the most widely spoken language within the EU, with 38 % of surveyed Europeans being able to hold a conversation in this language. In this respect, Spaniards are clearly under the European average with 27% able to do so (Eurobarometer, 2006). Conversely, a high percentage of respondents can hold a conversation in English in countries like Sweden (89%), Malta (88%), Netherlands (87%) and Demark (86%) which are placed on the top of the list (Eurobarometer, 2006, p. 13). Unfortunately, figures for Iceland could not be found but figures from some of the Scandinavian countries were available. See chart:



**Chart 2. Percentage of European population that can hold a conversation in English, Eurobarometer (2006)**

Secondly, those who speak more languages and are more motivated language learners seem to share a particular pattern all over Europe. That is to say, they are young, well

educated, in a managerial position or students who need skills in foreign languages (Eurobarometer, 2006).

#### ***1.4. Use of foreign languages by Europeans***

According to the survey *Europeans and their languages* (2006), the use of foreign languages is moderate within the continent. 53% of the individuals, who master one or more foreign languages, declared not to use any of them. On the contrary, 47% of individuals use a foreign language almost every day. English was the most widely used language in a daily basis with 31% of users followed by Spanish as the most used when travelling for holidays (Eurobarometer, 2006).

In the second place, the survey suggests that foreign languages are mostly used when travelling abroad, followed by its use when watching television, movies or listening to the radio (Eurobarometer, 2006). This last point will be of great importance when dealing with the media exposure in Iceland and Spain. At the same time, it is interesting to remark, that just 7% of Europeans use foreign languages when studying (Eurobarometer, 2006). Yet again, Spaniards are under the European average as it will be explained in the chapter about exposure.

#### ***1.5. How do Europeans learn languages?***

The majority of Europeans state that they learn languages at school. That is 59% during secondary education and 24% during primary education (Eurobarometer, 2006). Besides, it should be pointed out that in countries like Spain among others, children started FL learning in kindergarten, being so for 9 % of Spanish children (Eurobarometer, 2006).

#### ***1.6. The attitudes of Europeans towards foreign languages learning***

As stated in the report *Europeans and their languages*, 18% of Europeans have started to learn a new language or improved the ones that they already knew (Eurobarometer, 2006). Yet again, Spaniards are under the European average in this respect with 14% claiming to do so. Add to this, 21% of Europeans declared that they intended to learn a new FL or improve

the ones that they already knew. At the same time, 17% of Spaniards declared to do so, being within one of the lowest percentages among the members of the EU (Eurobarometer, 2006). In addition, the majority of Europeans (83%) considered FL learning useful. In spite of 80% of Spaniards agreeing with this statement, Spain was situated in the 21<sup>st</sup> position among 29 countries surveyed on this respect (Eurobarometer, 2006).

Not surprisingly, Europeans think that English is the most useful language to learn for their personal development and career. In this sense, 73 % of Spaniards shared this opinion. Furthermore, when asked about the languages their children should learn, 85% of Spaniards answered English. This time over the European average (77%) who supported English as well (Eurobarometer, 2006). On the other hand, the first reason to learn English in Europe is for using it during holidays abroad (37%), followed by use at work (33%) or personal satisfaction (29%) (Eurobarometer, 2006).

### ***1.7. Reasons for not learning foreign languages***

According to the report *Europeans and their languages*, Europeans gave several reasons for not being able to learn foreign languages. Among these reasons were lacking of time, motivation or economic reasons. In this sense, 28% of Spaniards declared not to have enough time to do it. However, 29% of Europeans said that having free language lessons would encourage FL learning (Eurobarometer, 2006).

### ***1.8. English in Iceland; second language or foreign language?***

As Arnbjörnsdóttir (2007) states, English is widely used in Iceland. It is present in almost every aspect of Icelandic society and as it will be shown in the following chapter, the media plays an important role in terms of exposure. Moreover, English is present in the academic context and it is equally used by professors and students. Arnbjörnsdóttir (2007) adds, that some children even “come to school already fluent in English” (p. 58). Furthermore Icelandic teenagers are especially skilful when it comes to informal spoken American English (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007). In spite of these circumstances, she argues that English is close to L2 status but it is not a L2 yet. In addition, Arnbjörnsdóttir points out, that Icelandic youngsters overestimate their English skills (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007). Many have good speaking and listening skills while their productive skills may not be as good. In spite of their excellent

speaking and listening skills, their productive skills are not good enough to be considered L2 English users.

Arnbjörnsdóttir (2007) suggests that this imbalance between the four skills is a result of the type of exposure Icelanders receive, namely television and other kind of media (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007). This kind of phenomena among English learners in Iceland is what makes them similar to what Arnbjörnsdóttir (2007) calls the generation 1.5, that is: Generation 1.5 is a term used for second or third immigrant students whose reading and writing proficiency does not fit the traditional categories of native speakers nor non-native speakers enrolled in university level courses in the United States (p. 63)

There are two differences between the generation 1.5 and Icelandic children; firstly, Icelandic learners are not born in a new country and secondly, Icelanders have literacy skills when it comes to their L1. She adds that productive skills, that is literacy (reading and writing), have to be taught. It is not possible to rely on L2 acquisition through context to obtain those skills (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007). It should be borne in mind as well, that although English is widely present and very important to Iceland society, it does not have a dominant status in Icelandic society. Moreover, English students in Iceland are not immigrants in an English speaking country.

As a consequence of these circumstances, the traditional distinction between L2 and FL does not fit well within the Icelandic linguistic situation. Thus, Arnbjörnsdóttir concludes that English is neither a L2 nor a FL in Iceland. Although, in her opinion, English is closer to an L2 status in Iceland (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007).

### ***1.9. Conclusions***

The traditional definitions of FL and L2 are suitable for the Spanish linguistic environment. However, this is not the case for Iceland. According to Arnbjörnsdóttir (2007), it is not enough to distinguish between L2 and FL in terms of amount of exposure alone.

On the other hand, Spaniards are left behind in their English proficiency levels when compared to their European counterparts. Nevertheless, they are aware of the importance of learning English but they seem less motivated than some other Europeans (Eurobarometer, 2006).

## **2. A comparison of young people's exposure to English through the media in Iceland and Spain**

### ***2.1. Introduction: "old" and "new" media***

Firstly, it should be said that the term "media" is circumscribed to television, internet, books and cinema in this essay. Secondly, we should introduce the concept of new media. According to Broddason (2006), "A monumental shift is occurring in the media and communication habits of young people" (p. 105). He claims that television does not fit within the term new media anymore, arguing that this medium does not fulfill its traditional role nowadays (Broddason, 2006). That is, the way television is watched has changed due to an increase of television sets per home. Currently, watching television is shifting from being a familiar activity to an individual one. Broddason (2006) adds, "However, a corresponding dramatic increase in television viewing has not materialized; there is even at last some suggestion of television being displaced by other activities" (p. 116). When Broddason speaks about the new media, he is referring to internet and mobile phones.

The "Spanish media environment" is quite similar to the one in Iceland. According to the EGM report (2010), television share still reigns supreme within the media. Its media share had remained stable, from 90.7% in 1999, to 89.7% in 2010 (EGM 2010). Conversely, the reading of books, newspapers and magazines has dropped (EGM 2010). On the contrary, the internet media share has been increasing in a significant way. During 1999 was barely 0.9%, increasing up to 38.4% in the year 2010 (EGM 2010).

Although these issues are not clearly related to this essay, the importance of the new media environment and its consequences should be borne in mind. The role of exposure from the media in Iceland and Spain will be described in the following sections.

### ***2.2. Icelandic television broadcasting***

According to DataMarket (a), 98% of Icelandic households have a television set. Therefore, television remains the most influential within the media with an average of 2.5 hours daily spent per individual for watching television (Capacent, a). Likewise, there is a rich range of different kinds of channels; Iceland has one public owned channel, "RÚV" and the rest are privately owned. As we will explain in the following section, Spain has one public channel

and several private ones as well. Nevertheless, there is a difference between the two countries regarding their policy of subtitling. According to Capacent (a), the most popular channels in Iceland are, “Sjónvarpið”, “Skjár einn” and “Stöð 2”.

A sample was taken from the programming website of Sjónvarpið during the second week of June. As a result, out of a broadcasting time of 73.7 hours, 57.2 were devoted to Icelandic and 16.5 to English. It should be said that the Icelandic variety show “Kastljós”, occasionally conduct interviews in English. On the other hand, the majority of cartoons aimed for children were dubbed into Icelandic. However, this was not always the case, as it happened during the week of study with “Jimmy Two Shoes” (Sjónvarpið, 2011). Another sample was taken from the Icelandic television channel “Skjár einn” website during the same week. This time domestic productions were virtually non-existent. Therefore of 126.4 broadcasted hours all of them were English spoken (Skjár einn, 2011). Although this channel does not seem specifically targeted for very young audiences, some of its shows were aimed for family viewing, for instance; Rachel Ray or Top Chef. Finally, a sample from the aforementioned week from “Stöð 2” programming website was studied. Throughout a total of 49.4 broadcasted hours, 38 hours were in English and 11.4 in Icelandic (Stöð 2, 2011). Accounting for the total amount of hours broadcast by these channels during the same week in June (2011), 68.6 hours were of domestic origin with 180.9 hours of English language broadcasting. That is to say, that just 27.4% of these channel broadcasting was in Icelandic. Interestingly these figures roughly coincide with a similar study performed by the website DataMarket (b), where a 23.1% of the broadcasting was in Icelandic. It should be borne in mind that this study refers to broadcasting of foreign origin which includes other languages besides English. In spite of this, the presence of these other languages can be mainly considered marginal. See figures:

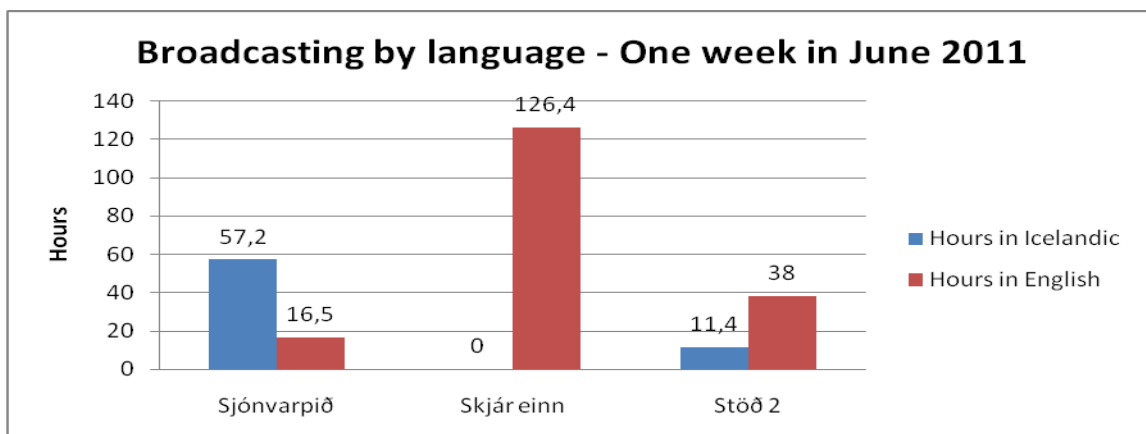
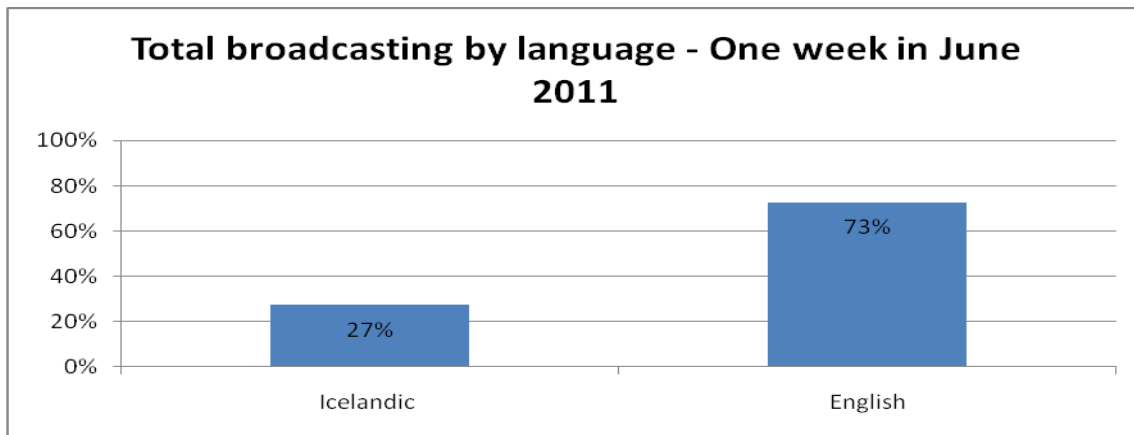


Chart 3. Broadcasting by language and TV Channel – One week in June 2011



**Chart 4. Total broadcasting by language – One week in June 2011**

In addition to this, according to Capacent (b), eight out of the 10 most popular movies broadcasted during June of the present year were in English and 7 out of the 10 most popular shows were English ones. Furthermore, it should be remarked that a significant increase on broadcasting of foreign origin took place from 1999 onwards, precisely after the appearance of the private channels “Skjár einn” and “Stöð 2” (DataMarket, b).

### ***2.3. Spanish television broadcasting***

According to the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* (2010), 84.5% of the Spanish population watch television daily, spending an average of 3.7 hours watching television per day. Thus, it can be stated that television remains the most influential within the media in Spain.

There is a wide range of channels offer, one public channel, private channels, subscription channels and satellite ones. However, we will focus on the three most viewed from February to December 2010, that is to say; “Televisión Española”, “Tele 5” and “Antena 3”. When a sample from the programming was taken during the last week of June from the aforementioned channels, not a single English spoken broadcast could be found (*La guía Tv*, 2011). In addition, the ten most viewed programs during the month of June were mainly of Spanish production, for instance; two soccer matches, weather forecast, *Survivor* (Spanish version) among others. In the eighth position, there was “the movie of the week”, which was an American dubbed movie (formula Tv, 2011). “Eurosport”, which stands in the eleventh position between the most watched satellite channels, is the only English broadcast channel in Spain (EGM, 2010). As it was mentioned above, there is a wide offer of television channels in Spain. However the majority of them broadcast in Spanish or in another of the

official languages of the country. Therefore, there is an evident lack of English exposure from television in Spain.

#### ***2.4. The cinema in Iceland***

According to Hagstofa Íslands (2009), Icelanders went to the cinema on average five times during 2009. In order to establish a comparison between the movies available in Iceland and Spain, a sample from the second week of July in cinemas of Reykjavík and Akureyri was taken. Within 20 movies, 16 were dubbed and 4 were Icelandic productions (midi, 2011). As it can be observed in the sample, dubbing only takes place when the films are aimed for the youngest audiences. Apparently, it is very difficult to find dubbed movies, when the films are rated for children from 12 years or older. On the other hand, within the Icelandic top five of the 12<sup>th</sup> of June of the present year, two dubbed American productions for children were found (midi, 2011).

#### ***2.5. The cinema in Spain***

In terms of exposure, cinema in Spain has the lowest share in the media market. The survey conducted by EGM (2010) shows that 3.9% of Spaniards went to the cinema weekly during 2010. When interviewed for the survey an 11.5% of subjects between 14 and 19 years old said they went to the cinema weekly EGM (2010).

A sample of 55 movies in the second week of July was taken from the capital of Spain. 54 of them were dubbed or were not English spoken productions (sensacine, 2011). It should be said, that many movies are the same ones within the sample. However, they were offered in different cinemas.

##### ***2.5.1. Dubbing against subtitling; two different approaches for Spanish and Icelandic cinemas***

The overwhelmingly preference for dubbing movies in Spain can help us to understand the Spanish rejection towards movie subtitling, not only with cinema movies but other kinds of media, as well. In this sense, two articles of the Spanish newspaper, “El pais” can throw some light on this issue. In the first one, titled “*Learning English at the academy of Brad and*



*Angelina*”, Angel Gabilondo, Spanish Ministry of education declared, “also evident that in countries where films are not dubbed, it has clearly had a bearing on the knowledge of languages”, conversely he said that subtitling was not a “cure-all” for the problem (Manetto, 2010).

On the other hand, many translators and dubbers are clearly against the abolition of dubbing. Julio Morales Merino, director of “Doblarte” acting school and translator commented, “If languages must be taught why don’t they ban the profession of translator, and let everyone fend for themselves when reading Shakespeare in his language, Schiller in German or Tolstoy in Russian?” (Manetto, 2010). Moreover, a European report is said to support the idea that it is risky to establish a link between subtitling movies and the improvement of language learning. On the contrary, Paul Kelly, an experienced English teacher in Spain argued, “Even though is a passive activity (Watching original version movies), provides a lot of information, perhaps at an unconscious level, about the language” (Manetto, 2010).

In the second article of the same newspaper, titled “La versión original languidece”, the lack of interest by Spanish audiences in non-dubbed movies is reported (Belichón, 2011). The article states that the situation is worsening, showing that a decade ago subtitled films accounted for 10% of the market, while last year accounted for 1.2%. In addition to this, Madrid and Barcelona, the biggest cities in Spain, are the only ones in the country with more than one cinema offering non-dubbed movies. Minor cities have either one, or none at all (Belichón, 2011).

Therefore, there seems to be a resistance towards movie subtitling in Spain. The dubbing industry clearly supports this tendency. At the same time, there is a lack of political will to change the current situation. Spain has a long tradition on dubbing which started with the dictatorship of General Franco in the 1940’s who used dubbing for censorship means (Manetto, 2010). Yet more reasons worth of further study should support this attitude.

## ***2.6. Icelandic radio broadcasting***

As it is the case of Spain, radio broadcasting has an important role within the media share. For instance, the radio station “Bylgjan” was listened to 255 minutes by 43.5% of the population ranging from 12 to 49 years old during the last week of June of 2011 (Capacent, d). Once again, the most listened radio stations in Iceland within the aforementioned age

group, are devoted to popular rock and pop music. These radio stations are “Bylgjan” with 43.5 % of the share, “Rás 2” with a 29.2% and “FM 95,7” which reached 12.8% of listeners in the last week of June of the present year (Capacent, c)

A sample from the top ten of the radio stations previously mentioned was taken during the second week of June. As a result, one Icelandic song among nine English or American ones were found in the “Bylgjan” top ten (Bylgjan, 2011). Secondly, three Icelandic songs out of 10 in “Rás 2”, (Rás 2, 2011) and finally two Icelandic songs out of 10 in “FM 95,7” (FM 95,7, 2011). Yet another important aspect of the Icelandic broadcasting is the presence of two English broadcasted radio stations. One of them is a religious one and the other broadcasts BBC World. Here again, Icelanders are clearly more exposed to English when listening to the radio.

## ***2.7. Spanish radio broadcasting***

According to the EGM (2010) survey, 56.9% of Spaniards claim to have listened or listen to the radio regularly. The radio is on fourth position in the media share, when compared to the rest of the media; television with an 86.5% of the media share the first, followed by internet 62.9% cent and magazines 60.4%. Besides, of 14.000 individuals that took part in the study, 12.718 said to listen to radio stations devoted to music while the rest listened to other kinds of radio programming (EGM, 2010).

The survey previously mentioned states that the most listened to radio station is “Los 40 principales”, which broadcasts music aimed for the young audiences (EGM, 2010). It should be remarked that within its top ten, nine songs were sung in English (los40, 2011). The second most popular radio station is “Cadena Dial”, which is devoted to youngsters as well. However, it only deals with Spanish music (Cadena Dial, 2011). Every year this radio station releases a double compact disc with the most popular music broadcasted during the previous season. Within the 39 songs released for 2010 there was not a single one in English (Cadena Dial, 2011). Finally, on the third position “Cadena 100” is placed, as the former is devoted to music (Cadena 100, 2011). Here again, it releases a greatest hits compact disc every year. When taken as a sample, with 25 Spanish songs and 15 American or English were found (Cadena 100, 2011).

## 2.8. Presence of Internet in Iceland and web browsing

In the year 2010, 92% of Icelandic households had access to the Internet (DataMarket, c). Moreover, 73.5% of the population claimed to use internet seven or more times a week (Capacent, d). Hence, it is safe to assume that Icelandic society is highly exposed to the web. Besides, it should not be forgotten that not just adults but children are exposed to this kind of media as well.

In this sense the following figures provided by DataMarket are worth of consideration. In 2010, 100% of households with a single parent and dependent children had access to internet (DataMarket, d). In homes with three or more adults and dependent children, the percentage was 99% (DataMarket, d). In addition, DataMarket provides us with some clues about the frequency of use and usage of Internet by Icelanders. For example; during 2010, 90% of individuals accessed the internet daily while 98% did it weekly. In addition, 10% used internet for doing an online course in the last 3 months, and 80% used internet for training or education during the same period of time (Datamarket, e). Besides, 94% used internet for reading or downloading online newspapers. See figures:

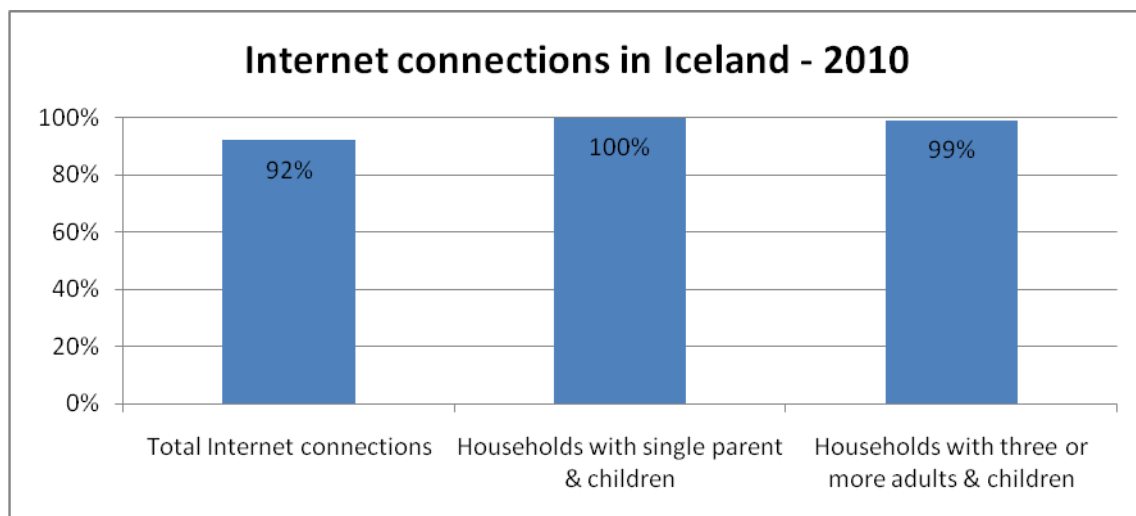
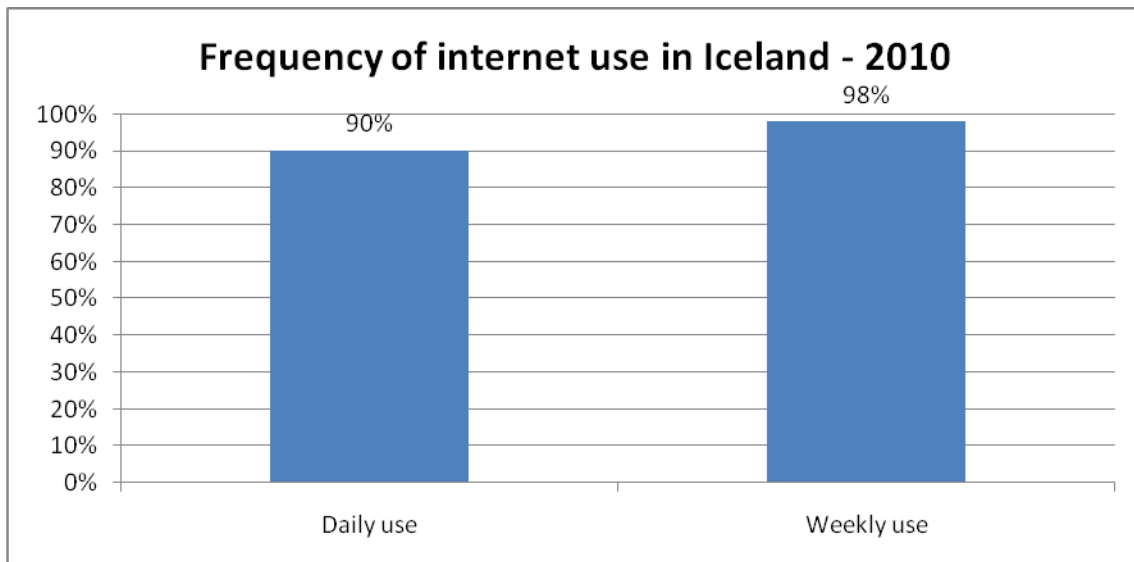
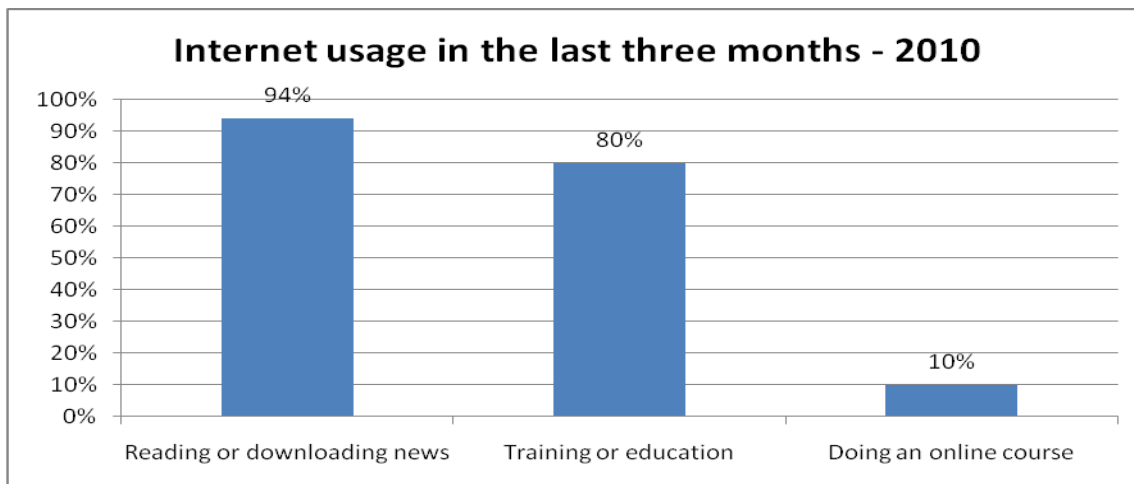


Chart 5. Internet connections in Iceland – 2010, DataMarket



**Chart 6. Frequency of internet use in Iceland – 2010, DataMarket**



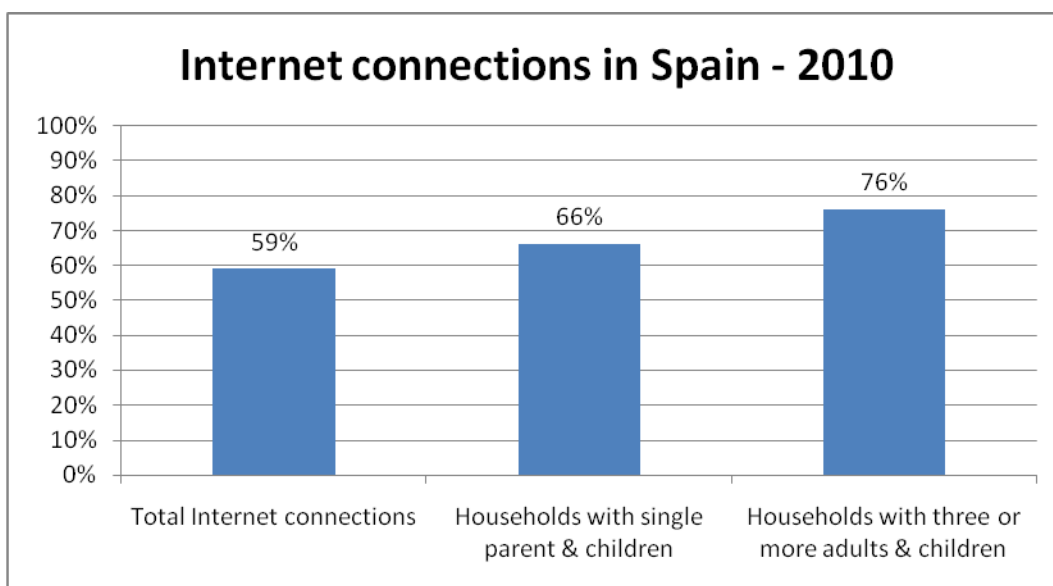
**Chart 7. Internet usage in Iceland in the last three months – 2010, DataMarket**

It is generally assumed that the “mbl.is” website is the most visited by Icelanders. However this assumption is not accurate. The fact is that sites like “mbl.is” pay to private companies to monitor their websites visits. As a consequence, the sites that do not pay to those companies are not included on the list. In order to solve this problem, a non Icelandic “monitoring company” was consulted to obtain the most visited websites in the country. On doing so on 8th July 2011, the most visited were “Facebook”, “Google.com” and “Google.is” followed by “mbl.is” in the fourth position and youtube.com, “”Visir.is”, “Dv.is”, “Pressan.is”, “Wikipedia.org” and “Já.is” . Besides, “BBC on line” and “Telegraph.co.uk” were situated on the 33th and 41<sup>st</sup> position respectively (alexa, a). In spite of this, the figures provided by the website are not as reliable as they should. Therefore, it cannot be assumed

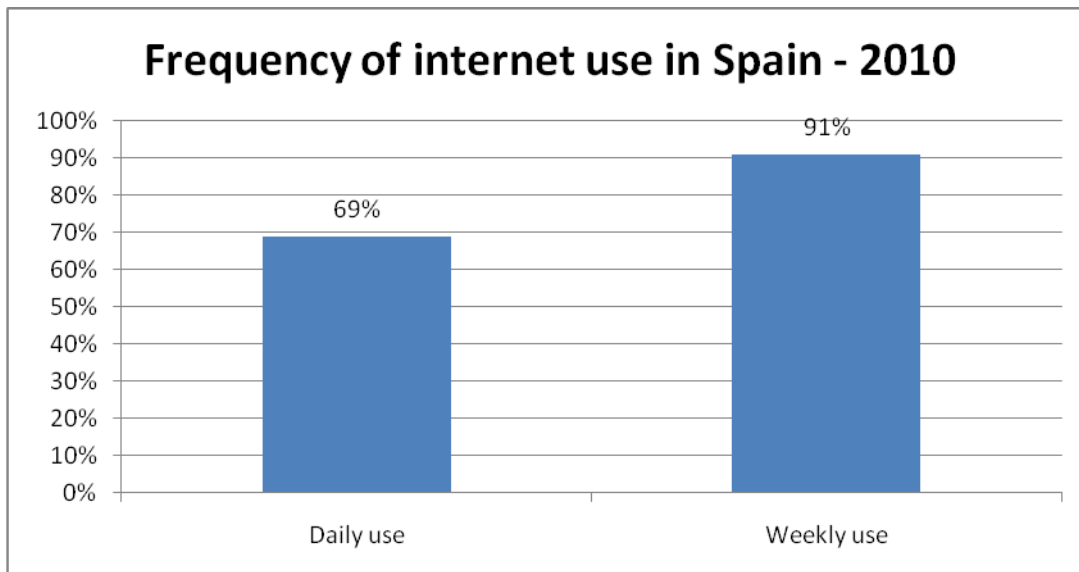
that Icelanders are exposed to English when browsing. However, it can be assumed that almost every Icelander has access to the internet.

### ***2.9. The presence of Internet in Spain and web browsing***

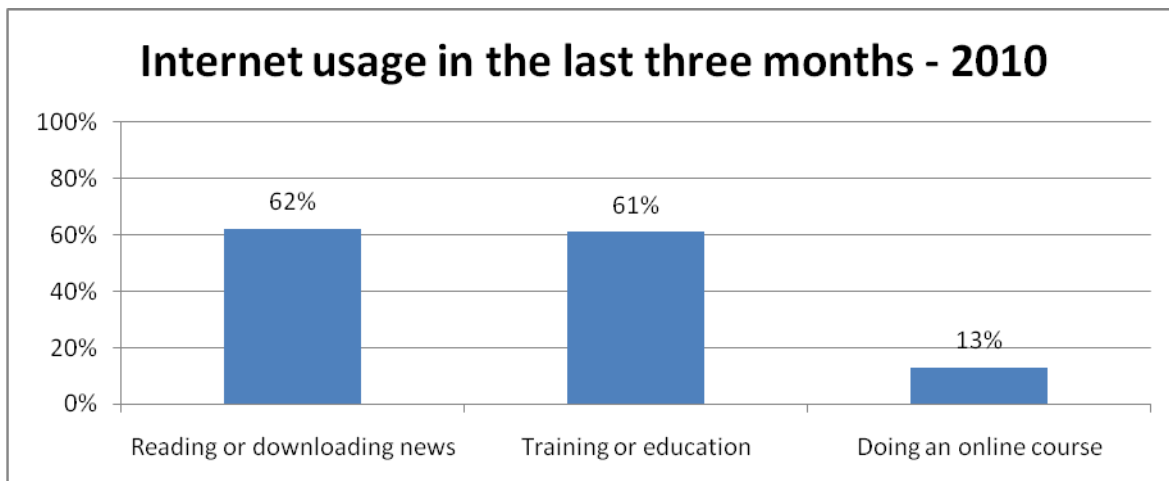
In the year 2010, 59% of Spanish households had internet access (DataMarket, c). The amount of internet connections and internet use has considerably increased since 1999 (EGM). In spite of this, Spain is significantly behind when compared to Iceland in this matter, as we can see in the following figures provided by DataMarket. In the year 2010, 66% of households with a single parent and dependent children had access to internet. In addition, 76% of household with three or more adults and dependent children had internet access (DataMarket, d). As for the frequency of internet use and usage, 69% of individuals used internet daily and a 91% did it once a week. Furthermore, 13% of Spaniards had used internet for doing an online course whereas a 61% did it for training or education. Finally, 62% of the surveyed had read or downloaded online newspapers or news (DataMarket e). See charts:



**Chart 8. Internet connections in Spain – 2010, DataMarket**



**Chart 9. Frequency of internet use in Spain -2010, DataMarket**



**Chart 10. Internet usage in Spain in the last three months – 2010, DataMarket**

The same problem arose when trying to establish the most visited websites in Spain. Consequently, the same external company was consulted to obtain the list. On doing so the eighth of July the most visited websites turned out to be; “Google.es”, “Facebook.com”, “Google.com”, “youtube.com”, “Windows live.com”, “Blogger.com”, “Yahoo.com”, “Wikipedia.org” and the Spanish sports newspaper “Marca.com (alexa, b). Yet again, the reliability of these figures is under question. Thus, it can only be assumed that Spaniards have less access to the internet when compared to Icelanders.

## 2.10. Book reading in Iceland and exposure to English

Firstly, it would be interesting to point out some of the Broddason findings regarding to Icelandic youth reading habits. He shows in a survey conducted within 10 to 15 years-old in Reykjavík, Akureyri and Vestmannaeyjar that in 1968 and 11% of the youngsters said they had not read any books in the past 30 days. In the year 2003, this figure increased up to 22%. In a similar manner, the average of read books per month went from 3.9 in 1968 to 1.8 in 2003 (Broddason, 2006). In a survey with the same individuals but dealing with the amount of youngsters which read newspapers on a daily basis. He found out that in 1968 89% claimed to do so, whether in 2003 this figure dropped to 40% (Broddason, 2006). Broddason (2006) states, “the 2003 survey shows the average number of books read during the past 30 days falling below two for the first time “(p. 116). He believes that television, computers and internet are to blame for this significant decrease on reading (Broddason, 2006).

As Broddason points out, Iceland has always been considered a country of readers. Although the situation is currently changing and the tendency is to read less, reading remains an important activity among Icelanders. In this sense, in a survey elaborated by, the School of Social Sciences of the University of Iceland among Icelanders for 18 to 60 years old, when asked if they had read a book for pleasure in the last 12 months, 82% of subjects replied affirmatively (Dofradóttir, Arnalds, Sturludóttir & Jónsson, 2010).

On the other hand 91.8% of the interviewed claimed to read in English, when they did it for pleasure (Dofradóttir et al., 2010). Bearing in mind that 48.1% of Icelanders were reported to read in foreign languages, it could be said that within that percentage the majority of them read in English. See chart:

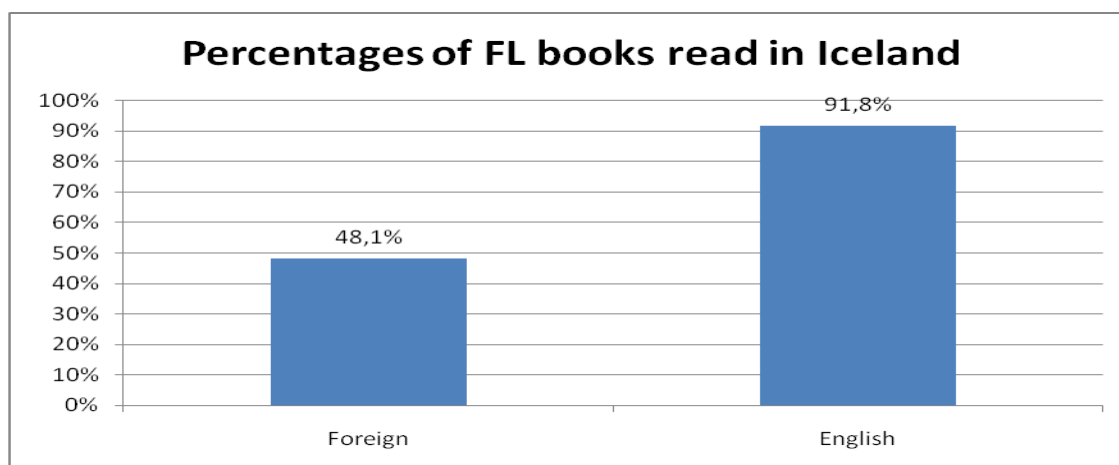


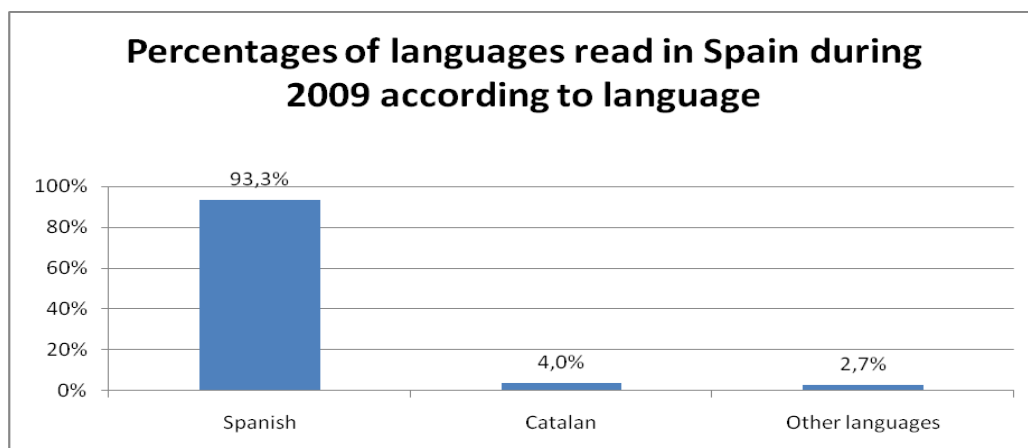
Chart 11. Percentage of FL books read in Iceland, Dofradóttir et al., 2010

### 2.11. Reading in English for educational purposes in Iceland

When Icelanders intend to study at university they find themselves with a majority of books written in English. A sample taken from Bóksala studenta seems to support this statement, for instance; out of 28 books available in medicine, all of them were in English or the eight books available in dentistry all of them were in English as well (Bóksala studenta, a). This happens with all the technical careers. If we are to find books in Icelandic, it has to be in the humanities section. An employee from the book shop staff estimated the sales of English books from 70% to 80%. It would be interesting to point out too, that in the top seller list there was not a single book in Icelandic (Bóksala studenta, b).

### 2.12. Book reading in Spain

In the report taken by the Spanish Ministry of Culture and Education (*Habitos de lectura y compra de libros*, 2009), it is stated that a 45% of Spaniards had hardly read any book or none at all during 2009. On the other hand, it is reported that 50.4% of Spaniards from 14 years old and older read a book at least once a month. On the other hand, it is shown that 93.3% of individuals read in Spanish whether a 4% do it in Catalan. Moreover, in 2009, 2.8% of the surveyed bought a written English book ((*Habitos de lectura y compra de libros*, 2009). Under these circumstances, it is safe to assume not just that Icelanders read more but that they are much more exposed to English when reading. See chart:



**Chart 12. Percentages of languages read in Spain during 2009 according to language, Spanish Ministry of Education, 2009**



### ***2.13. Reading English for educational purposes in Spain***

Spanish university students hardly ever use English for their studies. There are not precise numbers but if Spanish students are within the European average, just a 7% of them use a foreign language for academic purposes (Eurobarometer, 2006, p. 19). In this sense, a sample was taken from the medicine book shop of the University of Granada. Interestingly out of a sample of 28 books, 22 were in Spanish and 6 in English (Libreria Fleming, 2011). Another sample from dentistry was taken, out of 20 books, 10 were in English and 10 in Spanish (Libreria Fleming, 2011). There seem to be more English books in the technical careers. Nevertheless, the majority of them are in Spanish. Moreover, when we took a sample from the humanities section, not a single book in English was found (Libreria Fleming, 2011). Then again, the exposure of Spanish university students is very little when compared to their Icelandic counterparts.

### ***2.14. Exposure to the media and proficiency levels***

Having described English exposure to the media in Iceland and Spain, it was found very interesting what Rubio and Lirola (2010) argued:

“Finally, television broadcasting of films in the original version is considered a major facilitator for FL learning by many language experts, whether as a classroom tool or at home. We argue here, in addition, that watching television programmes in the original version, captioned or subtitled, should considerably benefit success in FL learning. In fact, those countries where American films or other English-speaking programmes are shown captioned or subtitle have a high number of FL speakers of English”. (p. 32)

In order to support this statement, Rubio and Lirola (2010) provide us with the example of Greece. This country shares with Spain similarities regarding the education system and culture. However, 48% of its population claims to be able to hold a conversation in English. On the contrary, just 27% of Spaniards are able to do so. According to Rubio and Lirola (2010), the reason for this higher percentage in Greece is due to the fact that they have subtitled TV broadcasting. At the same time, according to the report *Europeans and their languages* (2008), the Scandinavian countries prefer subtitling to dubbing (Eurobarometer, 2006). Interestingly, these countries have the highest percentages of English as a FL speakers, as it was shown in the first chapter (see fig 1).

### ***2.15. Conclusions***

We have established that the Icelandic society is considerably more exposed to English in its media than the Spanish one. This is especially true, regarding television broadcasting, cinema and books. In addition, it has been shown that Icelanders are much more exposed to Internet than their Spanish counterparts. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that as a result, they are more exposed to English in their browsing. Finally, there seems to be some support for the idea of linking subtitled broadcasting and better English proficiency levels.

### **3. Teaching of English as a foreign language in compulsory education in Spain and Iceland**

As the report *Europeans and their languages* (2006) suggests, the majority of Europeans learn foreign languages during compulsory education. In the same report, it is shown how parents, political and educational institutions stress the importance of foreign language learning nowadays. Thus, since compulsory education is the main resource for FL learning. This chapter will focus on the description and comparison of Icelandic and Spanish primary and secondary education among other aspects related to this matter.

#### ***3.1. English as a foreign language in compulsory education in Spain***

As reported by the Eurydice report the *Organisation of the education system in Spain* (n.d), in Spain the education system from pre-primary education to tertiary education is organized as follows: firstly, pre-primary education (educación infantil) from the age of one to the age of six; secondly, from the age of 12 to 16, secondary compulsory education (educación secundaria obligatoria); thirdly, from the age of 16 to 18, upper secondary education (Bachillerato) (Eurydice, n.d, p. 65).

As stated in the Eurydice report, *Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe* (2008), since 2009 the teaching of English as a FL is compulsory from the age of three to the age of 16 (Eurydice, 2008). This early start is especially significant if we take into account that in 1984 English teaching did not begin until the age of 10. However, the Spanish educational authorities do not specify as mandatory any particular foreign language (Eurydice, 2008). In spite of this freedom of choice, 91.9 % of Spanish students learn English in primary education. This percentage increases up to 98.5 in lower secondary education to slightly decrease down to 94.6 % in upper secondary education.

On the other hand, 87.8 % of primary education students learn one FL while 4.6 % of them learn two foreign languages (Eurydice, 2008).

At the end of compulsory education, it averages 10.7% of the total teaching time during eight years (Eurydice, 2008, p. 96). Furthermore, the Spanish Ministry of Education establishes a maximum of students per FL classroom. This limit is set to 25 students in primary education and 30 students in secondary compulsory education. It should be

mentioned as well, that the Spanish curriculum gives equal importance to listening, speaking, reading and writing skills at the beginning of compulsory FL teaching (Eurydice, 2008).

Finally, it should not be forgotten, that more languages are spoken in Spain. The main ones are Catalan, Galician and Basque. These languages are used within certain regions and are taught at some schools as well.

### ***3.2. Teacher Education in Spain***

As reported by the Eurydice (2008) report, the majority of foreign languages are taught by non-specialist teachers in the European Union. This is not the case for Spain, where foreign language teachers during primary education have to be specialized teachers. These have to go through 4.5 years of tertiary education in order to become teachers. Moreover, educational authorities recommend that future teachers spend a period of time abroad as a formation requirement. This period can involve working as an assistant teacher or taking courses at a foreign University.

On the other hand, in order to teach in centers with the Content and Language Integrated Learning provision, they have to provide a certificate of knowledge of the target language. It should be said that the CLIL provision is part of the main stream education system in Spain, although it has not been fully implemented yet (Eurydice, 2008, p. 41). The CLIL provision uses the Target Language (FL) for teaching some of the subjects present in the curriculum. That is, in accordance to *the Bilingual Education Programme evaluation report* (2010), 40% of teaching time to English and 60% to Spanish (BEP, 2010).

### ***3.3. English as a foreign language in compulsory education in Iceland***

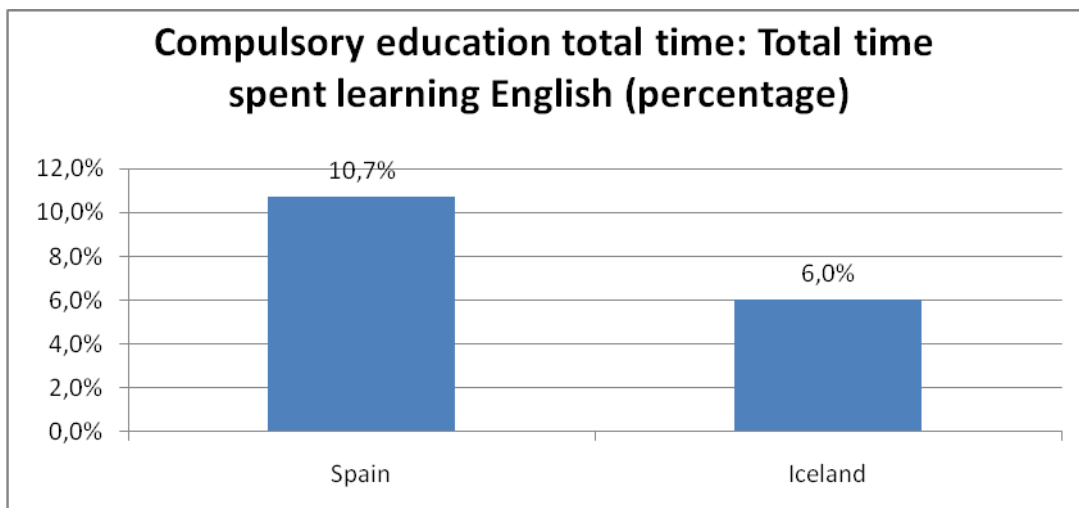
With regard to the Eurydice report the *Organisation of the education system in Iceland*, in Iceland the education system from pre-primary education to tertiary education is organized as follows: firstly, from one year of age to six, the pre-primary education (leikskóli); secondly, from the age of six to the age of 16, the secondary compulsory education (grunnskóli); thirdly, from the age of 16 to 20, the upper secondary education (framhaldsskóli) (Eurydice, n.d.). Since 2009 the teaching of FL does not start until the age of nine (Eurydice, 2008).

As in the Spanish case, the FL teaching age was lowered from 11 years of age in the 1980's to nine in 2008. On the other hand, Danish and English are the compulsory foreign

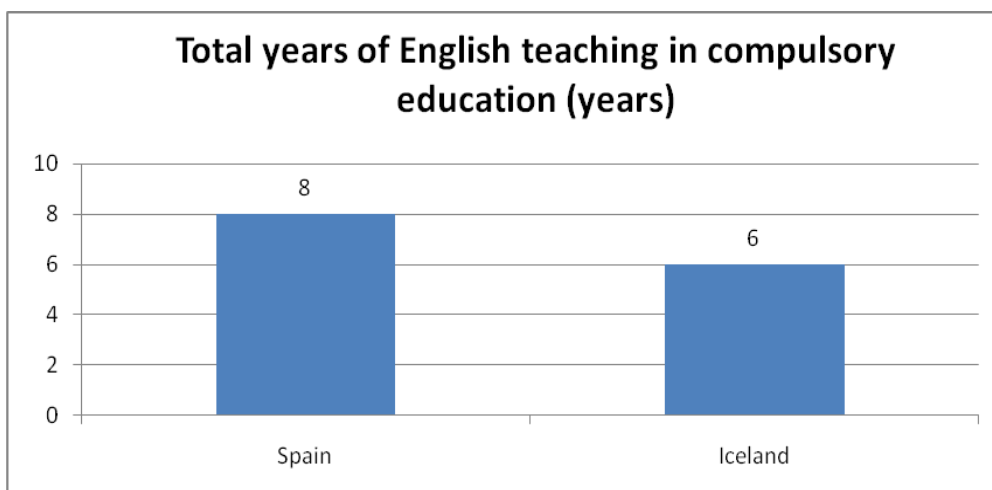
languages for Icelandic students, although they can choose between Swedish or Norwegian as well under certain conditions. Under these circumstances, 33.2 % of Icelanders learn one FL and 16.3 % learn two foreign languages before the age of nine (Eurydice, 2008). On the contrary, 50.5 % of students do not learn any FL before the age of nine. As the Eurydice (2008) study reports, “in most countries in which the proportion of pupils learning a foreign language is less than a 50%, foreign language learning is not compulsory at primary level (Ireland) or becomes so in the final years (The Flemish Community of Belgium, Slovenia and Iceland) “ (p. 56). This reference requires further clarification:

The somewhat unusual situation in Iceland may be attributable to the fact that the first foreign language as a compulsory subject is introduced relatively late (when pupils are aged 10) 2005/2006, and from the age of 9 since 2007/2008, whereas it becomes compulsory to learn a second foreign language at primary level relatively early (at the age of 12). (Eurydice, 2008, p. 56)

However, according to *the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory School* (2008) from 5<sup>th</sup> grade of compulsory education all Icelandic pupils have to study English as a FL (National curriculum, 2008). As is the case in Spain, English teaching time increases during compulsory education. At the end of this educational period it averages 6% of total teaching time during six years (national curriculum, 2008). Under these circumstances, the Icelandic education authorities do not make any provisions concerning the size of FL classrooms. On the other hand, the certificate of secondary compulsory education has a FL component (Eurydice, 2008). See charts:



**Chart 13. Secondary compulsory education total time: total time spent learning English**



**Chart 14. Total years of English teaching in compulsory education (years)**

### ***3.4. Teacher Education in Iceland***

In the first place, primary education FL teachers in Iceland do not have to be specialist teachers, although by the end of primary education many FL teachers are specialists (Eurydice, 2008).

Secondly, according to the Icelandic School of Education, in order to become a primary education teacher, Icelanders are required to complete five years of tertiary education. Contrary to the Spanish requirement, future teachers are not bound to spend a period abroad to complete their education (Eurydice, 2008). Besides this, there are not public Icelandic schools following the CLIL provision. However, the Icelandic school MH gives the choice to study upper-secondary education in English or Icelandic.

### ***3.5. New Spanish policies on foreign language teaching***

As it was suggested in the report *European and their languages* (2006), Spaniards have a poor proficiency in foreign languages when compared to their European counterparts. As a consequence of this, Spanish institutions have implemented different measures in order to improve FL skill among Spaniards. As it was already mentioned, the age at which children begin studying English as a FL was lowered to three years of age. Nevertheless, the most important policy taken by the Spanish Ministry of Education was the adoption of the CLIL provision, which was embodied with the signing of agreements with the British Council.

Agreements which were adopted between the Spanish ministry of education and the British Council back in 1996 to introduce a bilingual education system in Spain. What was a pilot program in 43 schools has been implanted in more than 1600 schools a decade after the first agreement. The main goals of the Bilingual Education Program or BEP should be introduced. As stated in *British Council evaluation report* (2010), these are:

To promote the acquisition and learning of both languages through an integrated content-based curriculum

To encourage awareness of the diversity of both cultures

To facilitate the exchange of teachers and children

To encourage the use of modern technologies in learning other languages

When appropriate, to promote the certification of studies under both educational systems. (BEP, 2010, p. 3).

In addition to this, the BEP program is implemented in state funded schools, beginning its curriculum before primary education and finishing in secondary education.

### ***3.6. Iceland new policies on foreign language teaching***

As we said previously, the Icelandic education system begins with the teaching of English as a FL rather late when compared to other European countries. On the other hand, although the starting age is set at the age of nine, Icelandic primary schools have the authority to lower this age. As Arnbjörnsdóttir (2007) points out, the tendency is to start teaching English earlier and earlier. Some of the pupils will start English as a FL instruction at the age of five and others at the age of nine.

As in Spain, the importance of English learning has been stressed by Icelandic institutions. For instance, in its report of 2004-2005, *the Icelandic Chamber of Commerce and Industry* suggests that Icelanders should become bilingual in Icelandic and English as English is the international language in the business world (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007). Add to this, the *Icelandic National Curriculum* (2004) highlights English importance for international politics, commerce, education, abroad and within Iceland itself as well. As Arnbjörnsdóttir (2007) translated from the 2006 online version of the National Curriculum (p. 19):

Good literacy skills in English are an important prerequisite for study at the University level in Iceland as the small size of the market makes it impractical to

translate and publish instructional materials in Icelandic. Scholars who wish to publish their work internationally often use English for this purpose”.

(Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, p. 62)

Nevertheless, Arnbjörnsdóttir (2007) complains about the fact that English is taught in Iceland as if it were a FL when it is not. She sets as an example the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, when students should have achieved a B2 level according to the Common European framework of reference for languages or CEFR. She argues that this level may be sufficient for some European countries where English is a FL but is not enough for small languages like Icelandic as in Iceland, 90% of the curriculum at tertiary level is in English.

In conclusion, the Spanish education system seems to have implemented more radical policies for improving English proficiency levels. Namely, the starting age for English instruction was lowered to the age of three and the expansion of bilingual education. In spite of this, English seems to be a FL in Spain whereas in Iceland this is not the case. Conversely, the new Icelandic policies on education have not been so radical. However, the starting age of English instruction has been lowered as well and there seems to be plenty of awareness and concern about the importance of English. Thus, the differences between the policies in the countries are probably due to the different status of English in one country and the other. That is to say, a FL in Spain and close to a second language in Iceland.

### ***3.7. Spanish state regulations concerning teaching of English as a FL***

In Spain matters regarding education are established by constitutional law and developed by the legislation of the different communities. In the article 17 of the *Ley general de educación* (2006) states that pupils have “to obtain in at least one foreign language, the basic communicative competence to express and understand simple messages and to manage in every-day life situations” (p. 17168). In terms of the CEFR, this corresponds to students having reached the A1 or A2 level of competence at the end of primary education (age 11). In addition, the article 23 of the same law sets the goals for secondary compulsory education (age 16) when it says, “Appropriate use and understanding of one or more FL” (p. 17169). Unfortunately, this article is rather ambiguous. Nevertheless, it will be assumed that this level corresponds to the B1 level in the CEFR.



### **3.8. Icelandic National Curriculum Guidelines**

The English as a FL requirements for each grade are regulated by the *Aðalnámsskrá grunnskóla: Erlend tungumál* (2007). At the end of primary education, Icelandic pupils are supposed to have a balanced basic knowledge of English in the four skills. To mention some of them set by the Curriculum: “ have a general understanding of material regarding daily life, when spoken clearly”; “be able to read simple short stories, novels, narratives and educational material aimed at children and teenagers”; “be able to take part in conversations regarding daily life and interest”; “being able to write a more or less correct text, after being given the instructions or a model to follow” (*Aðalnámsskrá grunnskóla Erlend tungumál* 2007, p. 16-28).

These requirements seem to be more demanding for Icelandic students when compared with the ones asked to their Spanish counterparts. If adapted to the CEFR, the National Curriculum requirements seem to be at B2 level.

### **3.9. Conclusions**

The Spanish education system devotes more time for English as a FL teaching when compared to the Icelandic system. In addition, Spanish new policies on English teaching seem far more radical as well. However, the Icelandic National Curriculum is more demanding to primary and secondary compulsory education students. Therefore, there seems to be an external factor which makes Icelandic students more prepared regarding their English skills when compared to those of their Spanish counterparts.

## **4. English, a FL in Spain and more than a FL in Iceland**

The traditional distinction between FL and L2 fits well within the Spanish linguistic environment. Namely, small input and limited use of the FL, mainly at schools and in the tourism industry. Nevertheless, this is not the case for Iceland. On the one hand, there is plenty of input, but on the other neither is English the dominant language, nor do Icelandic children and teenagers have the English language skills to be considered English L2 users (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007).

### ***4.1. Spanish low proficiency levels within the EU***

As already mentioned, Spaniards have low English proficiency levels when compared with their European counterparts (Eurobarometer, 2006). This is a reason for concern, because English is the most widely FL used in the continent. Moreover, it is the most used on a daily basis. On the other hand, Europeans use FL mainly when travelling (42%) or watching television or movies (26%), etc (Eurobarometer, 2006, p. 20). Besides, the majority of Europeans prefer dubbing (56%) to subtitling. Interestingly, the surveyed individuals from the Nordic countries favored subtitling. Unfortunately, this is not the case for Spaniards. Besides, Spaniards are under the European average when it comes to learning or improving foreign languages. However, they seem to be very aware of the importance of learning English. On the other hand, Spaniards FL learning takes place at school, as it happens with the majority of European countries (Eurobarometer, 2006).

Finally, some interesting conclusions are pointed out in the *Europeans and their languages* (2006) report, for instance: the smaller the country, the better FL skills, southern European countries or countries where English is the official language, have low proficiency levels and 44% of Europeans do not speak any FL.

### ***4.2. Two different education systems and the more demanding Icelandic curriculum***

As was mentioned in the chapter about education, the Spanish education system devotes more time to English during compulsory education. Add to this, the new Spanish policies on education are far more radical if compared to the Icelandic ones. That is to say, the early start

of English teaching at the age of three and the expansion of bilingual education through the CLIL program.

However, the Icelandic National curriculum is much more demanding than the Spanish constitutional law when it comes to English proficiency. That is, according to the CEFR, at the end of compulsory education an Icelandic student should reach a C1 level while a Spanish student should reach a B1 level. How can this be? Evidently, there is or there are several factors outside the academic environment which allow this to happen. However, it should be borne in mind that the new Spanish education policies have been recently adopted. Thus, an improvement in proficiency levels should occur within the coming years.

### ***4.3. Exposure to the media and language acquisition***

As suggested in the chapter about exposure, the average Icelander is much more exposed to the media in English when compared to his Spanish counterpart. This is especially true when it comes to television broadcasting or cinema movies. Furthermore, English language skills are a must for Icelanders pursuing tertiary education. Conversely, Spaniards are neither exposed to media in English nor is English required to pursue tertiary education in Spain. In addition, there seems to be a rejection of subtitling in the Spanish cinema industry which spreads to the rest of the media. The question then should be: does exposure to the foreign media have anything to do with better proficiency in English? In this sense Rubio and Lirola (2010) argue that there are plenty of language experts who are of this opinion. They add that countries which have a subtitling policy in Europe show better proficiency levels. In addition, they give Greece, which uses subtitling in television broadcasting, as an example, adding that in spite of sharing similarities with the Spanish culture and education system, it has more subjects able to hold a conversation (48%).

### ***4.4. Conclusions***

In the first place, English has a FL status in Spain but it is close to having a L2 status in Iceland. Secondly, Iceland is much more exposed to non-dubbed English media if compared to Spain. Thirdly, the Spanish education system devotes more time to English teaching than the Icelandic one. In addition, its new policies on English teaching are far more radical than the Icelandic ones. However, Icelandic students are expected to achieve superior levels of proficiency.

## **Conclusion**

This essay has attempted to explore the position of English in Spain and in Iceland, with particular reference to media exposure, levels of proficiency, years of study, teacher education, and government policy. From the data collected, it seems very likely that the higher English proficiency levels of Icelanders are due to English media exposure.

Unfortunately, we lack empirical evidence to state this as a fact. Thus, the relationship between proficiency gained at school and proficiency gained through media exposure is clearly an area worthy of further study.

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