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English Teaching in Spain: a Comparison with Sweden

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Abstract

The importance that the English language has acquired in the present society is indubitable as to the extent that it represents the channel for any international communication. The analysis of the English language methodology in Spain may reveal a series of weaknesses in terms of its efficiency since the result of the Spaniards' learning process is below the European average. Consequently, this paper aims at analyzing the evolution of the English teaching methodologies in Spain and at making a critical comparison with the ones applied in Sweden taking the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as the starting point. The results show the strengths and weaknesses of the current English teaching methodologies in Spain and in Sweden.

Key words: CEFR, English teaching methodology, description and comparison Spain - Sweden, solutions

Resumen

La importancia de la lengua inglesa en la sociedad actual es indudable hasta el punto de haberse convertido en el canal para cualquier tipo de comunicación internacional. El análisis de la metodología de la lengua inglesa en España parece poner en evidencia una serie de carencias en cuanto a su efectividad ya que los resultados del aprendizaje de los alumnos españoles están por debajo de la media europea. Por consiguiente, este trabajo pretende analizar la evolución en los métodos de enseñanza de la lengua inglesa en España y realizar una comparación crítica con los aplicados en Suecia tomando como punto de partida el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para los Idiomas (MCER). Los resultados muestran las fortalezas y debilidades de la metodología actual de enseñanza del inglés en España y en Suecia.

Palabras clave: MCER, metodología enseñanza del inglés, descripción y comparación España-Suecia, soluciones.

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1. TESOL

The Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) represents an utterly common teaching procedure since English has been recognised as the global lingua franca (“European Survey” 7). In this paper, lingua franca means “a language used for communication between groups of people who speak different languages” (“Lingua Franca” 2018). However, the students’ proficiency that follows the teaching of English differs depending on the country we look at given that there are many aspects surrounding language that trigger either a low or a high competence in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), as proved to be throughout the “European Survey on Language Competences”. In the words of Viña Ruoco part of those aspects affecting language are, “the socio-cultural component, which comprises the educational and historical context in which foreign languages were taught and learnt (political factors helping or hindering linguistic achievement, working conditions, subject and teacher status, demand of the languages concerned, school systems (among others)” (255).

In the case of Spain, recent researches show how our interaction in second languages is different from that of other European forces. Following the final report of the First European Survey on Language Competences (93), Spanish students prove not to achieve an A1 level in at least one of the three skills set by the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR): listening, reading and writing. In contrast, Swedish students, representing the European population that has the best interaction in English, have a high command of the first second language taught at school (English). The previous unbalanced situation, among these two specific European countries, might suggest at a first glance that the teaching of the first second language taught in Spain (English) may lack consistency in its tenets.

1.1 Purpose

Since there seems to be a high interest in the topic of English Teaching, especially around the Spanish population, and there are only, as far as we know, few recent works available; the aim of this paper is to make an analysis of ELT (English Language

Teaching) in Spain through a comparison with Sweden so that a constructive conclusion can be made regarding the Spaniards' proficiency in the most prominent Second Language taught in the country (English). Besides, it will attempt to prove right the initial hypothesis that Spanish students are not skilled in SLA as a direct consequence of a lack of appropriate language teaching methodologies.

Even if it is a fact that there are many works available regarding English being taught in Spain, none, as far as we are concerned, deal with its current status in comparison with upper level countries such as Sweden. With the intention of completing this goal, two main aspects have to be covered first for a good understanding of the topic:

- The history of English teaching worldwide and its most prominent methodologies;
- An introduction to the CEFR, its aim and organization.

This paper then is divided into six sections starting with this one, which is the introductory component. Following parts will refer to some of the many features that shape the process of second language teaching such as the idea of language and globalisation and the establishment of the English language as the international *lingua franca*. The selection of these two geographical spots (Spain and Sweden) resides in the fact that the former represents the teaching system I am more familiar with and that the latter contains the most thoroughly studied methodology through the Common European Framework in its political and Educational context (CERF). Hence, this research paper will be covering different aspects: first, and because like many other human activities language teaching has dwelt in different historical contexts, it will briefly comment on the history of English teaching in Spain, as said before; second, it will compare different aspects that affect and shape the divergences in the process in Spain and in Sweden, third, it will finally display different conclusions on how various aspects surrounding language teaching can jeopardise its proficiency and also, on how the current situation in Spain could be improved. Since the vast majority of English teaching data has been recently recorded and therefore published, especially from the moment this aforementioned European Framework started, I have chosen the year 2001 as my starting point. However, the historical background and other specific data will be

covering several moments in history (from the 16th century until the present). Also, the age differentiation around this field is narrow and more data about the last generation of Millennials (1999 onwards) can be found fundamentally in secondary researches.

1.2 Competencies to develop

The main competences that we will foster by the execution of the present research paper, according to *La Guía Docente del Grado en Estudios Ingleses (syllabus)*, are as follows:

- G1 Capacidad de análisis y síntesis, conceptualización y abstracción;
- G3 Organización y gestión del tiempo;
- G6 Fluidez y versatilidad para la comunicación, especialmente en un entorno profesional y multilingüe (internacional);
- G10 Autonomía en el aprendizaje;
- G14 Aptitud para la resolución de problemas;
- G20 Madurez, disciplina y rigor intelectuales, académicos y expresivos;
- E20 Capacidad para la comunicación oral y escrita en lengua inglesa;
- E21 Capacidad de comprender y producir en las lenguas estudiadas textos relacionados con las principales salidas profesionales del Grado;
- E27 Capacidad para localizar, manejar y sintetizar información bibliográfica;
- E30 Capacidad de relacionar el conocimiento filológico con otras áreas y disciplinas.

2. A brief history of English (Teaching)

2.1 The concepts of approach, design and procedure: similarities and differences in language teaching

As pointed out by Richards and Rodgers, all the methodologies employed in language teaching can be described according to a tripartite distinction: approach, design and procedure. Each of them, separately, deals with the different parts of the teaching process that melded together, form a specific methodology (19). Moreover, it represents a wholly relevant distinction because they are vital for a correct understanding of language teaching in general, and consequently they will be employed throughout the paper. In the field of linguistics and according to these two aforementioned linguists (1999), an approach deals with, “theories about the nature of language and language learning that serve as the source of practices and principles in language teaching” (16). Therefore, an approach is related to the practical side of a methodology, the basis for the practices that can be employed in schooling or in any other teaching environment, and the overall techniques employed. The second term described in Richards and Rodgers’ study is the design of a methodology. What they state is that, “in order for an approach to lead to a method, it is necessary to develop a design for an instructional system”, a system that covers: the objectives of the methodology used, the organization and selection of the language content used in class (the syllabus), the nature of the activities followed by the learner and their role, and, the importance of the figure of the teacher (20). Thus, it can be understood as the general and internal layout of any language teaching method.

Finally, the idea of the procedure of a method that Richard and Rodgers give is, in their words, “the actual moment-to-moment techniques, practices, and behaviours that operate in teaching a language according to a particular method” (26), all the actual practice that can be spotted within a class such as dialogues, feedback exchange after the reading of a text; the set of practical content specific to a teaching method, etc. Consequently, the three aspects that have been defined will be unique to a sole teaching method. This distinction that Richard and Rodgers carried out following Anthony’s theory (1963) will be now employed to explain, in broad terms, the forerunner language

methodology in the history of language teaching, the one that followed, the methods that have flourished and also, the ones that are, nowadays, best recognised.

2.1 The global dichotomy in English teaching methodology

As explained by Rodgers, the history of language teaching, in broad outline, can be divided into two main methods: classical methods and oral-related ones, named as the grammar-translation and the direct approach, respectively (Richards 3). They are the ones that this part of the writing will concern.

As in the case of many other taught modules worldwide, English has been affected by the methodology that teachers have employed in class and the enthusiasm with which learners have been willing to acquire a second language. The English language can be widely recognised as a constantly changeable subject due to a wide variety of aspects. It represents a language that is exposed to several and volatile factors such as the needs that a given society has around Second Language Acquisition, the methods and procedures that language instructors apply; but especially, the historical aspects in which it has been and it is currently immersed (Viña Ruoco 257). History is a force that has an impact on every single aspect in life, languages included. It can be said that it is one of the most direct triggers for the choice of the methodology employed in a class because the period of the teaching of a language will go together with the needs of its students at a certain point in history.

As in the words of Thanasoulas, “in the Western world back in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, foreign language learning was associated with the learning of Latin and Greek, both supposed to promote their speakers' intellectuality” (2). Both the Classical Greek and Medieval Latin periods were characterized by an emphasis on teaching people to use foreign languages. These classical languages, first Greek and then Latin, were used as *lingua francas* (languages for international intelligibility) and it was only around Europe where higher classes were receiving this education. These languages also happened to be widely used in philosophy or religion, politics, and business (Celce, “Vintage”). It was already in the 18th century when a Classical approach to language teaching started to be employed (Grammar-Translation method) because of the specific use teachers and learners wanted to give to the language in

question. Therefore, the population was mainly interested in the acquisition of a target language through the theoretical side of the language; classical languages were taught for syntactical purposes rather than communicative at their beginnings.

What Celce and Larsen-Freeman state is that, from its outset, English Teaching has experienced an alternation between a focus on the forms or analysis of language acquisition and, on the other hand, on an emphasis on the practical and communicative use of the language (9). Therefore, the trigger for the choice of the teaching methodology teachers want to use will, in most of the cases, depend on the pragmatism speakers want to give to the language and on the effort that instructors put on fulfilling that desire.

As explained by Rodgers, this is precisely what prompted a shift in the language teaching direction in the 20th century (3); the needs of the population as well as that time's historical situation triggered the birth of the Direct Method, method that opposed the forerunner, the Grammar-Translation one. This shift mostly dealt with a change from an approach based on grammatical content and translation exercises to a focus on communication. To do so, they encouraged students to engage in an oral interaction without using textbooks at such but potentially little manuscripts or handbooks with a list of equivalents in the two languages involved (Celce, "Vintage"). The latter's new methodology's approach mainly deals with the learning of a second language in the same way that the mother tongue is learnt by any learner. It covers every part that forms a language but fails in the assumption that we can learn a L2 (Second language) correctly as a first language and its syllabus states that the student's mother tongue cannot be employed ("Direct Method"). By the end of the 19th century the Direct Method had been established as a "viable alternative" (Celce-Murcia et al. 2) to what the former methodology offered.

Therefore, changes in language learning have been taking place all over the history and it can be noticed how the intentions of a language learner can strongly influence the approach, design and procedure used for the purpose and can shape a common usage for both: teachers when teaching and learners while learning. Moreover, the alternation in the process of language teaching between grammar and oral focuses represents the most significant distinction concerning the history of Second Language

Teaching and nowadays, when analyzing the approaches available, this distinction can be easily seen. There is a higher tendency to learn a language for the sake of being able to communicate in a foreign language with the purpose of travelling, maintaining an international communication, adding that skill on to the user's CV, etc. Many other methods have been developed after the grammar-based methodology and the communication-based one with slight variations as it will be explained in following parts using the approach, design and procedure's theory (Richards and Rodgers).

2.3. English and Globalisation

This section of our research paper will be dealing with the relation of the globalised world in which we dwell and the idea of English as the international lingua franca as one of its main direct consequences.

At present, more than ever, it is essential to have an adequate training in second languages like English and French especially for students who shortly will face a world with a labour market characterised by globalisation. There will be the need for an international communication in diverse fields like commerce, industry, tourism and all types of multicultural relations in general. Quirk and Widdowson firmly believe that,

“now English is in daily use among three or four hundred million people who were not brought up speaking it as their native language. Most of them live in countries requiring English for what we may broadly call 'external' purposes: contact with people in other countries, either through the spoken or the written word, for such purposes as trade and scientific advance” (18).

Language exchanges are rooted in cultural and international relations, therefore, to know the languages close to our surroundings becomes an essential requirement if there are the will and need for a global intelligibility. One of the scopes covered in the European Survey on Language Competences is “the importance of making young people, their families and society at large aware of the huge importance of acquiring language skills in languages other than their mother tongue” (7).

Nowadays, taking a look at globalisation as a bridge between cultures, one can perceive how it affects many different scopes, which of course, has also an impact on languages. In any of the cases, the dimension at this moment important is that of a

globalized world where a lingua franca is needed for a communication across cultures. The inclusion of English in common class around the world is vital because of globalisation, language and their relation.

The fact that it exists a globalized language has been well explained by Crystal in his *English as a Global Language*, among many other aspects. He gives his own account of how languages are surrounded and therefore altered, of how human beings accommodate the use of language in terms of the audience they are talking to...etc, but especially of how a language becomes global: “a language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country” (3).

And he admits, in that same work, that this is precisely the case of English because it currently has a unique dominance over seventy countries (4). Following this statement one could presume that *the* example of a global language, the one that Crystal has in mind as well as anybody who might think about it, is English, the current language of power. The ever increasing interconnectedness of languages, especially when talking about the English language, is one of the leading triggers for language learning (Crystal, “Language” 15). It can be appreciated that no matter what the official language in any given country might be that the objective of learning the language of power will deal, in most of the cases, with an international intelligibility regardless of the scope of that communication. Related to it, is what Crystal explained: English native speakers may feel pride of the global importance it has achieved, while others might feel a bit embittered when realizing that they do not own their language anymore (*English* pp. 2-3). Moreover, the idea of language and globalisation will have a direct effect regarding the methodology employed for the learning of English since in a large number of situations it will deal with acquiring an excellent command of communication skills.

3. History of ELT in Spain

The next part of this paper will briefly comment on the general history of the teaching of English (ELT) in Spain. As it will be explained throughout the following part, everything that forms English teaching is interrelated: the methodology of the teaching of a language followed by teachers at a certain point, the linguistic needs of language learners and their willingness to take part in the process, language and globalization..., etc. As Stern pointed out, “through studying the history of language teaching we can gain perspective on present-day thought and trends and find directions for future growth. Knowing the historical context is helpful to an understanding of language teaching theories” (76). More relevant this previous statement by Stern becomes when looking at how current teaching language methodologies are planned. It is undoubtedly necessary to analyse previous trends to do better in the future; “the historical perspective awakens a critical attitude in the teacher, which at the same time helps him to develop a real motivation to innovate his methodology” (Viña Ruoco 257). As a consequence, for a better understanding of the educational situation Spain is currently experiencing around second language teaching, the best is to take a look at how it started. If compared with other European countries, the teaching of English in Spain never had success in its beginning because it did not flourish as a second language.

However, in terms of the approach, design and procedure theory (Richards and Rodgers), if taking a look at second language learning in Spain, it can be seen that the alternation between grammatical and communicative approaches has always been present. It is widely believed in the field of linguistics that the best way of approaching this special historiography is through the analysis of the creation of language institutions and the selection of particular textbooks (Viña Ruoco 260). Such approach is so because there is a broader study of teaching methodology through the methodologies acquired by instructors in certain institution than through teaching methods as such. Countries like Germany and Holland present a more in-depth historiography of English teaching than Spain does because educational institutions included ELT to school's curricula long before and therefore have been learning English for a more extended period (Lombardero 16). Potentially, what is the most relevant

amongst this field is not the time it has been done for but instead, the success of the method established by the teacher concerning the final competence of the student.

3.1. ELT in Spain in the 18th and 19th centuries

When looking at ELT in Spain, it is noticeable how many different factors such as the localization of Spain, economies and diplomacies, among many others, prompted a setting where other languages but English were predominant within this country's borders during the 18th and 19th centuries (Viña Ruoco 258). Following what many scholars agree on, it was not until the creation of the first grammar of the English language in Spain (1769) that a history as such of ELT in this country started. Before this date, the learning of English was done employing dictionaries or even through other languages such as French. Since English, from its beginnings, never acquired a minimum level of prosperity in Spain, it was through other romantic languages with which the Spaniards were more familiar that they would attempt to learn the English language; logically, teachers also had their role around the matter. In addition to this, the vast majority of the manuals available for ELT were not translated into Spanish; therefore both teachers and students had to resort to sources in romantic languages. According to Lombardero, the 16th century was the time for teachers, the 17th for the consolidation of national grammars, the 18th the time for the Illustration, a secular education (56). Furthermore, another element that represented an obstacle for the Spanish society within the learning of a L2 (Second Language) is the fact that this particular education was only at the hands high classes. Thus, it represented another setback for the population. "By the 17th century, the main body of such users was the nobility (with the aid of a private tutor) and traders, much like the 18th century, although it also saw the first timid attempts at introducing FLT (Foreign Language Teaching) in formal education or at private institutions (Spain)" (Lombardero 64). Today we can consider English as the global lingua franca but back to those days it was French, and thus English was considered as a mere leisure activity for the elite. There was neither a willingness among the society to learn English nor favourable social circumstances for doing so. Most of the teachers of English in Spain were, in the 19th century, exiles from England who were seeking for new opportunities abroad and a wide variety of Laws were passed at the end of the century that favoured them for

teaching their mother tongue abroad (Viña Ruoco 259). An Example of those is the so-called Ley Moyano of 1857, the first public Spanish complete education plan that has been maintained likewise until 1970, year that saw the Ley General de Educación being passed (Shubert). Consequently, the learning and teaching of English in Spain started as an unsuccessful and unaffordable activity for the average population but the situation changed when laws that were passed during these years favoured both: the teachers and the learners' situation; better wages for instructors and improved techniques for students. This period, a period of Reformation in Spain, coincides with an increase in literacy among the population but still low in comparison with other European forces such as Great Britain, Germany and France. The main reasons for it to be inferior were the lack of interest students had to learn English, miserable salaries for teachers, really shallow level in secondary education... (Lombardero 70). All this period deals with a pre-industrialized society where the vast majority of the population were illiterate and precisely after the Industrialization, real efforts were made to include second language learning (French, German and English, mostly) into schooling. English teaching in Spain took place at private schools in provinces such as Santander (Northern Spain) among the wealthy population (Viña Ruoco 258). Another instances for places where this private schooling happened was also the Real Seminario de Nobles, Madrid where real examinations of English took place (Lombardero 86). The methodology that was followed in Spain coincides with the situation in Europe: a shift from the study of grammatical related content to an oral education of a foreign language. This state of affairs took place because both, Spanish learners and teachers, at the beginning, were more interested in the grammatical side of a language. However, when time passed and society started to develop within international matters, a stronger concern around communication skills flourished. The methodology that teachers followed then was in harmony with the tendency established at a certain point becoming predominantly oral when second living languages were included in the curriculum, as happened from the 19th century onwards. At current schools in Spain, a grammar-based methodology will be rare to find because of the idea of a globalised world and students will rather be encouraged to engage in a communicative class.

3.2 Most Recent methodology

The priorities for language learning around the globe have changed and the latest trends included language teaching methodology such as the ones pointed out by Richards and Rodgers: The Audio-Lingual Method, Total Physical Response, and the Cooperative Language Learning. As revealed in the Assessment of Pupil's Competence in English, first of all and especially during the 21st century, it is important to highlight that the main curricular objective of SLA is not acquiring a foreign language but communicating in it. For that purpose, it is necessary to adopt a based-on communication approach intended for communicative competence (Alabau et al. 55).

All the teaching methodology previously mentioned and many more fell within the denomination of humanistic teaching methodologies and the above mentioned four represent an excellent instance of the path that SLA is undertaking. As in the words of Moskowitz, "humanistic education seeks to teach both the intellectual and the emotional dimension of the students" (149). What all of them intended was to create in the learner a feeling that language learning with a positive attitude can be enjoyed. The characteristics of these four methods are pointed out by the previous linguists following the distinction between approach, design and procedure (Richards and Rodgers):

1-*The Audio-Lingual Method*, specially employed in the 60s, is the method that follows an approach in language learning that states that language has to be spoken rather than written. For that sake, the use of the mother tongue in class ought to be avoided. Furthermore, the design of this specific method gives great emphasis to the pronunciation of the target language and within its procedure; the use of dialogues is frequent. Although the method was correctly shaped it did not worked out as expected; students, for instance, remembered the dialogues heard in class but were not able to speak the target language.

2- Total Physical Response: in Richards and Rodgers words, "the Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method built around the coordination of speech and action; it attempts to teach language through physical (motor) activity" (87). It is organized around the approach that verbs are the most important part of speech, especially in the imperative form (88). Concerning this approach's design, the objective

it tends to reach is a basic competence in the target language through “*action-based drills in the imperative form*” (91). In short, it attempts a basic fluency in the L2 through imperative grammatical constructions. Finally, the syllabus that this method follows, apart from *the action-based drills*, is based on the use sentences with a special emphasis on their meaning.

3-The Silent Way: “It is based on the premise that the teacher should be silent as much as possible in the classroom and the learner should be encouraged to produce as much language as possible” (Richards and Rodgers 99). As a consequence, the learner has to be completely active in the process if they want to acquire a native fluency in the target language (103). There is not a specific syllabus for this methodology but classes are organized around a correct pronunciation of the studied material (design).

4-Cooperative Language Learning: This teaching methodology deals with the language approach that states that the learner should become fluent in the target language but, as the title shows, in a cooperative way. It works around the figure of a counsellor who “is one person giving advice, assistance, and support to another who has a problem or is in some way in need. Community Language Learning draws on the counselling metaphor to redefine the roles of the teacher (the counsellor) and learners (the clients) in the language classroom” (Richards and Rodgers 113). The approach has in its tenets a *peer cooperation* procedure and a syllabus based on small group activities (Dornyei 483). Furthermore, within the current context of SLA, this methodology is well received by teachers who want their students to acquire good communication skills but always, by means of cooperation.

As stated by Alabau et al., it was in the decade of the seventies when an important shift took place within the context of SLT in Spain. “*La Ley General de Educación* of 1970 introduced a foreign language as a compulsory subject for the first time within the *Educación General Básica* (6 – 14 years of age) from the age of eleven”(55).

Nowadays, the preferred methodology at present in Spain is the so-called eclectic approach or eclecticism. “Eclecticism refers to a teaching situation in which the teacher does not use any particular method but includes a mixture of different methods

to suit his class” (Aslam 67). Therefore, the idea of approach, design and procedure stated by Richards and Rodgers will not be relevant within this last teaching methodology because rather than establishing one particular method; the instructor incorporates, in standard class, aspects from different approaches, designs and procedures. Nowadays, there are many different teaching methodologies implemented in the students’ curricula and it is not possible to cover them all. However, it is noteworthy to point out that the broadest dichotomy in the field of language teaching (grammar and oral approaches) is the one that started with Second Language Teaching because, as stated, the different directions that ELT has and is currently following, have either one or the other methodology in its tenets. In Spain, Eclecticism became relevant when the Ley Orgánica de Educación 2/2006 was passed. The Law implied that the learning of English in Spain as a second language was no longer an option but an obligation (García). At present, learners wish to acquire basic proficiency in the target language in an entertaining, enjoyable and fast way. This intention is well related to the idea of language and globalisation as to the extent that learners are aware of the importance of proving an admirable command on second languages and this is not specific to Spain but to the rest of the world.

4. CEFR, its establishment and divergences between Spain and Sweden: methodology

4.1 Introduction to the European Framework in its political and educational context

The next part of this research paper will introduce the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) in the context of language teaching. Likewise, as stated before, it will briefly comment on its establishment in Spain and Sweden so that further analysis within this scope can be made through a comparison of both countries. The selection of this framework resides in the fact that it is, as far as we know, the broadest language framework reference established around Europe thus its importance and homogeneity within the European Community utterly fit for the purpose. Moreover, it is directly connected to the methodology nowadays developed in SLA around Europe since all the countries adopting the CEFR in their curricula, will follow language teaching approaches based on this framework.

Why is the CEFR influential within ELT? The first idea that the Common European Framework states concerning this matter is that, “the CEFR provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe (1). The keywords in the previous statement are a *common basis across Europe* due to the fact that CEFR tends to unify the wide diversity amongst the different educational systems that exist in Europe through the establishment of a joint linguistic framework. Its aim, as it can be read since its first publication in 2001, is to defeat the different obstructions that arise within the field of communication deriving from the diversity that exists within the European educational systems (“Common European” 1). Generally, it represents a difficult task for any educational order to establish a series of joint guidelines that homogenize the goals that ought to be accomplished; and the CEFR could be taken as a straight solution.

The Common European Framework of Reference was first published by the Council of Europe in the year 2001 and since then, it has been suggested and made available for the 28 Member States that, at present, form the European Union. However, not only these countries can acquire the CEFR as their guidelines, but also 18 more

have implemented this framework in their curricula as member states of the Council of Europe (North 3). Therefore, all the years in between have been dominated by its implementation in different geographic spots as well as by constant efforts to improve it. The year 2008 represents the moment when the Council Ministers invited the Member States to include the CEFR in their educational systems. During this period, as pointed out by Broek and Van den Ende: “the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the use of the CEFR and the promotion of plurilingualism was released” (9). What all of the Members were encouraged to do was to add this framework into their educational systems as a means, following the basis of the CEFR, of boosting multilingualism and uniformity amongst the European society. They all have been inclined to include the CEFR in their curricula although it was not until the release of this Recommendation above by the Council of Europe that a date can be set for its real adoption.

When it comes to language teaching in Europe, the CEFR is the best representation that this geographical spot has ever carried out, as far as we know, that aims at creating common language examinations, syllabuses, curriculum, guidelines, etc across Europe (1). As pointed out by Caraker, besides this ‘new’ initiative for language teaching, the EU has been conducting, for the last 30 years or so, different measures that try to enhance the importance of an educational compatibility within the European community; examples of those are the Bologna Declaration in 1999 (uniformity of Universities) and the European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students in 1995 (exchange programme) (26).

When it comes to the principles of the framework, especial importance has to be given to the term plurilingualism since it resides in the tenets of the CEFR and most of the efforts made are directed to its accomplishment. To reach this aim, it is crucial that “these conditions should encourage cooperation between both education institutions and Member States” (Broek and Van den Ende 8).

Regarding the internal structure of this European framework, it needs to be mentioned that it is comprised by a scale of six different levels of language proficiency and those are as follows (“Common European” 26):

- *Breakthrough (A1)*
- *Waystage (A2)*
- *Threshold (B1)*
- *Vantage (B2)*
- *Effective Operational Proficiency (C1)*
- *Mastery (C2)*

“The scheme proposed adopts a ‘hypertext’ branching principle, starting from an initial division into three broad levels – A, B and C” (“Common European” 24). Consequently, this implies that all the language institutions that fall within or that have adopted this reference scheme have had to establish both, teaching methodologies and consequent examinations according to those aforementioned levels. In this way, the certificates issued by those institutions are equally valid around Europe and the teaching methodology employed is cognate. Finally, those examinations have to consist of three different competences: *understanding (listening and reading)*, *speaking (spoken interaction and production)* and *writing* (“Common European” 26). The user, therefore, acquires a specific level regarding their interaction acquired in those three competences.

The European Council claims to have carried through a wide variety of initiatives in the field of languages that guarantee uniformity in the basis of the CEFR. Instances of those are as follows and according to Broek and Van den Ende (10):

- *Projects within the Lifelong Learning Programme;*
- *Incorporation of the CEFR in the Europass format;*
- *Development of the European Survey on Language Competence;*
- *Guidance material on how to use the CEFR in practice.[...]*
- *The European Language Portfolio (ELP).*

Potentially, the one that represents the best example as for the measures carried out by the Council of Europe is the European Language Portfolio (ELP); its primary objective is to “mediate to learners, teachers and schools and other stakeholder the ethos that underpins the CEFR”: an intercultural education, cultural diversity, plurilingualism and learning autonomy of the language learner ("History"). The CEFR, as a *recent* initiative, posed a challenge for instructors because a period of adaptation was needed. Counting on user-guides such as the Portfolio, or the guidance material published by the European Council, the adjustment was made more accessible, but there is still a long way towards an ideal reception.

As it can be seen, a series of measures are performed and many others are developed with the intention of accomplishing uniformity and plurilingualism amongst the different Member States of the European Union. Furthermore, means are made available for them to enhance homogeneity amongst each country's language institutions and this implies that the extent to which they wish to have it implemented in their curriculum is utterly their choice.

4.2 The CEFR in Spain and Sweden

In broad terms, the previous section has provided an overview of the main aims, structure and implementation date of the CEFR. Now, the following part will refer to the establishment of this same framework in Spain and Sweden as a means of contrasting both processes taking into account the students' proficiency in English, and also commenting on other influential factors.

As regard to Spain, one may think that it was not until a couple of years ago that the CEFR was incorporated in the country's curricula since the recommendation issued by the European Council was not released up to the year 2008. However, it was one of the European countries that first translated it into Spanish and therefore, showed a high interest in its adoption. Responsible for this translation was the *Instituto Cervantes (IC)*, one of the largest and non-profit Spanish educational organizations established worldwide (García Santa-Cecilia). In 2002, one year after the first and official publication of the CEFR, the IC adopted a standpoint in language learning based on communication and for that sake, carried out a change in the language curricula

following the recommendations of the Council of Europe (Coto Ordás 3). Initially, the IC dealt with the implementation of the CEFR within the context of the teaching of the Spanish language worldwide. Nevertheless; nowadays, following the premises of the framework, it presents the same design as any other Member of the European Union when it comes to second language teaching. Since then, Spain has introduced the CEFR in its educational curricula and has started to develop methodologies and examinations in accordance with the common levels mentioned above (see section 4.1) that guarantee coherence with the descriptions that are developed for other European languages (García Santa-Cecilia). The effort of including Spain into a European educational initiative (CEFR) had to do with the addition of a second language in the Spanish curricula. At present, the *Ley Orgánica* of 2006 and the *Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa* of 2013 (LOMCE); are the ones in force in Spain. They establish that one of the key competences that each learner has to acquire is linguistic communication referred to the official languages and to second ones, and also promote an educational initiative based on plurilingualism and on the acquisition of at least one foreign language (Arroyo Pérez et al.7). As a result, approximately 15 years have passed since the first translation of the CEFR took place in this peninsula; not long enough, apparently, for the Spanish population to show great command of second languages.

To move on to the implementation of the CEFR in Sweden, it is vital to underline that the way its educational system is organised differs from that of Spain: only 9 years of education are compulsory (7-16): pre-school and secondary school are not mandatory for those wanting to undertake a different pedagogy; in Spain; in contrast, every individual has to undertake at least, 10 years of compulsory education (6-16) (Tortensson 8). As pointed out by Alabau et al., in the case of Spain, the teaching of a second language has to be established from the first year of the first compulsory education (8 years old). It is not explicitly stated the language that should be taught; each centre is free to choose although in the vast majority, English is the predominant one. However, in Sweden, students start to learn a second language at the age of 10 and the one selected is English but schools are free to start that teaching before; tendency that is, at present, most common practice (55). As regards to the CEFR, in Sweden there is not an exact date for its adoption as it could be found in Spain. “Although the CEFR is not included in Swedish law or in any other legal document, the curriculum and

subject syllabuses for English and other modern foreign languages are influenced by the CEFR” (Broek, and Van den Ende 18). Nevertheless, its beginnings could be already placed hand in hand with the Bologna Process; a more European-like education started to be implemented in the sense that Swedish Universities inserted in the curricula “learning outcomes, competence based learning, standards-based curriculum, student work-load and ECTS-credits” (Lindberg-Sand 3), as recommended by the European Council. However, this process, in Sweden, took longer than in many European countries, that is not only its inclusion to the Bologna Process, which was finally accepted in 2007, but the fact of being part of an initiative towards a European and homogenised education (Lindberg-Sand 7). In Sweden, the late implementation of what was meant to become steady around Europe resorted in a problematic situation in terms of complying with the intended European uniformity. Approximately seven years ago, Swedish reports claimed that the grading system in the country was not partial; according to Mader and Urkun, “one of the reasons behind a new curriculum to be introduced in 2011 is in fact the need to make standards of grading more equivalent between schools; the previous curriculum goals and grading criteria were considered too open to interpretation” (83). Therefore, if a date for the implementation of the CEFR in Sweden were to be placed, this year mentioned above marked the start of what means language teaching uniformity around the country and a system directed towards European standards.

5. Current Status of English in Spain: a comparison with Sweden

Since both countries, Spain and Sweden have acquired the CEFR as their guidelines for second language teaching, and the learner's skills in the field vastly differ from one country to another, the analysis at this moment relevant deals with comparing a system established in two countries whose learners prove not to have the same proficiency in English as a second language to analyse its potential causes and consequences.

After having determined the starting point for the adoption of the CEFR in these two European countries, this section of the paper will be comparing Spain and Sweden following the First European Survey on Language Competences (2011), taking into account several aspects that potentially trigger a better competence in the English language.

First of all, it needs to be mentioned that the present research paper does not tend to convey the idea that the fact of including the CEFR in any country's curricula is decisive for correct language proficiency. What it aims to take into consideration when analysing and comparing a system nowadays included in Spain and in Sweden (CEFR), is to see what type of variables lead to a better level in the teaching and acquisition of the English language. Many factors make it difficult to conduct a direct comparison between these two countries, such as the fact that the educational system does not work alike, the idea that the CEFR was not adopted at the same time, the differentiation in terms of the teaching methodologies implemented by each country... among many others. Nevertheless, it is easy to realise that there are; at least, two aspects that these two countries share: they both have an official mother tongue and the second language most studied in both countries is English. It is true that, the worldwide spread of the Swedish and Spanish languages cannot be contrasted because the latter is one of the most spoken languages worldwide and the former is spoken by a small percentage in the world. Thus, this makes it more necessary for Swedish to learn a second language than for Spaniards to do so ("European Survey" 11). Nevertheless, this idea cannot be taken as *the* factor that makes Swedish peers better in English according to the CEFR, they are by far more skilled than the Spaniards, therefore the causes for this disparity have to be analysed. Another difficulty hereby encountered was the fact that there is still not much information about each country's proficiency within the scope of the CEFR.

However, in all the surveys carried out to test the learner’s proficiency in Europe, both countries have participated in a great majority of them. The following table has been extracted from the European Survey on Language Competences, where on average 1600 Spanish and Swedish students were tested regarding their competence in oral comprehension, reading comprehension and writing. The results also took into account the same proficiency in 12 European countries where the English language is assessed as the predominant L2 and where the tool used for the teaching of second languages is, likewise, the CEFR:

Table 1
 “European Survey on Language Competences ESLC: Secondary Research.”

	LISTENING		WRITING		READING	
	AVERAGE	DEVIATION	AVERAGE	DEVIATION	AVERAGE	DEVIATION
SPAIN	0.234	1.096	-1.432	2.927	0.356	1.241
SWEDEN	2.376	1.114	1.668	1.893	2.019	1.298
AVERAGE	0.467	1.282	-1.427	3.095	0.320	1.319
SPAIN-SWEDEN	-2.142	-0.018	-3.1	1.034	-1.663	-0.057
SPAIN-AVERAGE	-0.233	-0.186	-0.005	-0.168	0.036	-0.078

Source: “European Survey on Language Competences ESLC: Secondary Research.” *Catálogo de Publicaciones del Ministerio*, Translated by Phil Troutt, Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2013, pp. 7-93, mecd.gob.es/inee/dam/jcr:fa1d67a4-6e6b-4a92-b955-ecce956ac904/escl.pdf.

When analysing these results, especially remarkable is the differentiation found in the writing part of the test where the Spaniards showed to be both below Swedish students and below-average the other European countries that participated in the research. In the writing data, the statistic mean of the European countries is not as distant to the Spanish one as when it comes to the contrast Spain-Sweden; the deviation is quite elevated (-3.1). There must be a wide variety of causes for this instability and those, potentially, may include the teaching methodologies that each of the countries employs. It has been seen that from its beginnings Spain has acquired a language teaching tendency mainly directed to grammar and translation whereas in Sweden there is a stronger preference for a communication-wise class environment. However, the results seem to

show how ineffective in Spain the methodology employed is as well as how ineffectual these data render the quality of the teaching process.

When looking at the listening and reading skills, the differentiation level is lower but likewise worrying: -2.1 and -1.7 points below Sweden, respectively. Potential causes might be the teaching methodology linked to this situation. Swedish students are more used to listening and practising English in an oral environment than Spaniards are. Therefore, the likelihood for the Swedish students to do better in language production is higher. As it will be mentioned in the following part of the paper (see section 5.1 below), parental input is essential in the process of language acquisition and the one that Spaniards have at home is, by far, poor compared to that of the Swedish. Furthermore, one may think that Spaniards should be skilled in reading since their workload is quite elevated and because the teaching methodologies they are immersed in, give great emphasis to grammar, translation, etc. Contradictory, the results of the given situation is not as expected as showed in the above table and; once again, an answer to the problem has to be developed.

Whether explicitly compared with Sweden or more generally with other European countries, the results of the Spanish learners clearly indicate that further action has to be conducted to solve this low interaction in the English language. It is all about a *Common Framework* where the same language is being taught as the primary L2, where the aims of the process are the same and where the disparity among the learners' proficiency is profound.

5.1 Potential determining factors

As it has been previously pointed out in the paper, many factors make it more ideal than others for the teaching and learning of a language. When comparing Spain and Sweden, it has also been mentioned the fact that each country's official mother tongue trigger either a higher or lower necessity for second language learning. So, therefore, could be compared with British students, for example, because their mother tongue has been recognised as the global lingua franca, they do not feel the urge or, at least, it is not vital for them to learn a second language if they wish to communicate with people across the world. Many aspects influence the learners' ability towards a language but since it is not

possible to cover them all, this paper will be mostly focused on six, following Rica and González de San Román's analysis (2012) so that a conclusion can be carried out. The following information has been withdrawn from the pages 19-25 and it deals with representative data for the comparison rather than conclusive:

Homework: Spanish students employ more time than the Swedish doing their homework and they are also given 50 more minutes a week of English lessons, fact that seems not to have any positive effect on the Spaniards' language skills as shown in Table 1. Even if longer time is spent in Spain for the writing part of the learning of a L2, the Swedish students, as seen in the above table, prove to do better in writing. Consequently, a high workload seems not to take effect on the Spanish nor has the extra lesson time they are given over the Swedish pupils; thus alternatives have to be found.

Parental input: Swedish peers have, in general terms, a better input at home from their parents than the Spaniards do because their English level (parents') is better in the Scandinavian country. The willingness to learn a language is directly connected to the extent to which parents push their children to do so and simply the importance that they give it at home. The necessity of learning a second language, in this case English, seems not to be reflected at the Spaniard's home. Moreover, this may be one of the reasons why Spanish students do worse in listening than Swedish do; the formers do not have the habit of dwelling in an English speaking environment, nor seem the Spaniards to live in a setting where the English-wise world is included in the household. When sitting an exam of the sort, the situation is therefore; utterly uncommon since there is little contact with the English language before that examination takes place.

Extra English lessons: Spanish students undertaking classes outside the school setting prove to be better than those that do not attend. This may suggest that the methodologies followed at language academies are better and might be less traditional than the ones employed at school; or at least, more up-to-date and efficient. These two authors point out that a significant majority of Swedish students rarely look for language support outside the school; following the results published in the European Survey, they do not seem to need it as much as Spaniards do.

Dubbing or subtitling: when it comes to self-education, Swedish learners show greater willingness to improve their skills in English through the watching of subtitled material. The situation is exactly the contrary in Spain where they prefer dubbed one, suggesting that little effort language students; in general, seem to be making to get better in the aforementioned L2. It can be directly linked to the great differentiation that it exists among both countries in terms of the listening competence, the more effort students put into the process, the better their level will turn out to be.

Syllabi: both countries' syllabi present similarities concerning the aims to reach for any second language student; especially after the reception of the CEFR. However, the differences are also noteworthy: the Spanish syllabi states that students should express themselves in an oral, respectful and comprehensive way whereas the Swedish should be able to do so with variation and complexity. As a consequence, the aims that each country prefers to boost are not the same; more complexity and speech elaboration as well as dexterities are prone to be showed by Swedish students. This might suggest that because the level-average of the Swedish students is high, the goals and sophistication of the use of English can be elevated.

Students' emotions. When looking at the Spanish syllabi, the words interest and appreciation are quite frequent. In other words, this is so because Spanish students acquire a special interest towards the language they are learning. Nevertheless, none of this is explained in the Swedish curricula, to the best of our knowledge; but rather, focuses on the pragmatic skills that students are expected to acquire. The cause for this might be that the interest and concern of the Swedish students towards language learning are so implicit that there is no need to encourage them to do so but rather to set aims such as complexity and competence

6. Conclusions

The importance of the English language is nowadays indubitable no matter the country in question. The previous factors along with the teaching methodology employed in each country, socio-economic forces and political interests will affect first the language teaching process and second, the students' proficiency.

Following the surveys, data and publications by the European Council, one can notice how superior the Swedish are over the Spaniards in Second Language proficiency. Different tendencies are evident for Spain to apply within its syllabus since the current system is working below the level of the vast majority of the countries that have adopted the same framework in language teaching. Thus, less time should be spent in testing the Spaniard's proficiency in English since it is evident how negative the outcome is going to be. Consequently, more efforts ought to be made in changing this situation by first looking at the causes. Moreover, the focus on high workload and long class sessions need to turn into a tendency where greater emphasis is given to the demonstration of the efficiency of Second Language Acquisition. When this step is completed, students will have already realised how important and useful is to be fluent in the language of power and will; therefore, set their language learning objectives further.

So far, this paper has covered different aspects within the field of the teaching of English in Spain which is evident given that from the early beginnings of the teaching of English as a second language, the process has been quite traditional following a grammar-focus methodology. This idea represents another change that has to be carried out; the methodology must go hand-in hand with the preferences of the learners and blatantly obvious is the fact that a communicative approach has to be adopted throughout the Spanish teaching institutions. Reasonable results in English speaking proficiency would encourage students to reach higher levels than a mere *Threshold (B1)*.

Another aspect that it has been analysed is English as the global lingua franca. This implies that English is needed worldwide and a significant part of the learners will be trying to acquire competence that allows them to prove they are skilled enough to

communicate in a multicultural setting where English is the channel. None of the surveys that Spaniards have undertaken prove their level to be acceptable regarding speaking proficiency. Students must be encouraged to reach higher levels language elaboration in all the different parts that the CEFR establishes.

In Spain, there is the urge for a methodology that responds to the pragmatism that learners want to give to the language as well as to the level that each individual wants to reach. For that purpose, after seeing how better countries like Sweden are in terms of language proficiency, an in-depth comparison of methodologies, procedures and design amongst these two countries has to be made so that the feeblenesses are spotted and set as improvement targets. Nobody will doubt on the necessity of acquiring, at least, a basic competence in English and as pointed out by the European Council, the idea of plurilingualism and the ability to maintain an international communication should be the targets, among others, of any State Member. At the moment, the Spanish population is far from its accomplishment.

The educational system differs from one country to another, each has its own ways of dealing with the teaching of languages and there will always be more prosperous countries than others. Despite this, this paper has introduced the Common European Reference Framework for languages, as a means of seeing that it is an initiative at the hands of any of the European countries and so, the differences should not be as ludicrous as they are. Guidelines, training for teachers and support for educational institutions have been drawn up for a homogenised and well running system but; it seems that, countries like Spain have omitted those even before the establishment of the CEFR.

This paper has compared different aspects in Spain and Sweden, thus it does not propose that Spanish institutions should follow Sweden's footsteps but that at least, when looking at the language proficiency of the learners in both countries, the former must plan better ahead in the field of second language teaching. Changes that I firmly believe that should be carried out, apart from previous mentioned ones, to improve the Spanish learners' competence in English as a Second Language, include the following:

- Well prepared teachers willing to share their knowledge with students;
- Language learners encouraged to acquire new competences in a second language showing them both, its direct benefits as well as value;
- Educational environments prone to doing so;
- A teaching methodology designed in the directions of plurilingualism and international intelligibility;
- Teaching approaches specific to each of the CEFR levels set by the European Council;
- Efficient lessons, consequent practice and examinations in accordance with those established levels.

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