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Spanish in the United Nations System

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Topic: Weight and demand for Spanish language inside and outside the UN

Abstract: Spanish occupies a privileged place within the United Nations system. Nevertheless, its institutional representation remains inferior when compared with English and, to a lesser degree, with French. While Spanish's reduced weight is principally due to political decisions, the current demand for the language both inside and outside the UN leads to thinking of a future where there is greater recognition of Spanish within the organization.

Key words: Spanish, multilingualism, official language, working language, language parity

Concern for multilingualism has been a constant in the United Nations. Proof of this can be found in both the successive resolutions on this issue that, since 1995, have been approved by the General Assembly, as well as the creation, in

1999, of the position of Coordinator for Multilingualism, whose mission is to ensure a balanced representation of different languages within the organization.

Outside the institutional level, the United Nations also plays an important role in worldwide multilingual preservation and linguistic diversity. Especially in the last two decades, bylaws for organizations like UNESCO have reflected the need to preserve this common good by adopting measures to maintain and protect national and worldwide heritage (UNESCO 2005). According to UNESCO, more than 50% of the world's approximately 6,000 spoken languages are in danger of disappearing. In fact, 96% of the total is spoken by only 4% of the population and fewer than a quarter are used in education and cyberspace. Against this background, Spanish, an international language with official and vehicular character in 21 countries, is clearly situated at the opposite extreme of the world linguistic spectrum. Moreover, Spanish is a first-order cultural language that continues to expand and possesses a high degree of homogeneity. This makes it a powerful tool for transnational communication and therefore an economic and cultural asset for all who speak it either as a first or second language (Moreno-Fernández and Otero 2007: 33).

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Thanks to all of the above, it is possible to say that Spanish occupies a privileged position within the United Nations. In order to expedite its work, the organization has chosen to limit the number of languages used in its day-to-day activities. Spanish is one of the six official languages that the UN currently uses, along with Arabic, Chinese, French, English and Russian. This official status stems from the United Nations Charter, signed on June 26th, 1945, which states, “the Chinese, French, Russian, English, and Spanish texts are equally authentic”. Although the charter's wording was originally in the four main languages –Chinese, French, Russian, and English; languages with countries of reference that were all permanent members of the Security Council- the important contribution by Latin American states in the San Francisco Conference meant that Spanish was also included (Ybáñez Bueno 1998). Thus, the Provisional Regulations, which stated that these five would be the official languages for all of the organization's organs,

were adopted at the General Assembly's first session. However, it was not until 1948, during the third period of sessions, that Spanish was recognized, and as a working language, thanks to a proposal by the Philippines. Thus, from 1948 until the end of 1968, the year in which Russian was included, Spanish enjoyed working-language status alongside French and English. Later, in 1973, the General Assembly approved the addition of Arabic to the list of the UN's official languages. At the same time, they also expanded the number of working languages to six with the inclusion of Chinese and Arabic.

Spanish in Meetings

The fact that Spanish is an official language means that it can be used in all formal meetings convened by the United Nations. Furthermore, all speeches in Spanish as well as all official documents produced and written in this language are interpreted and translated into the other official languages.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of the 351 meetings scheduled in 2014 by the United Nations and its affiliated bodies that have interpretation services in the different official languages.

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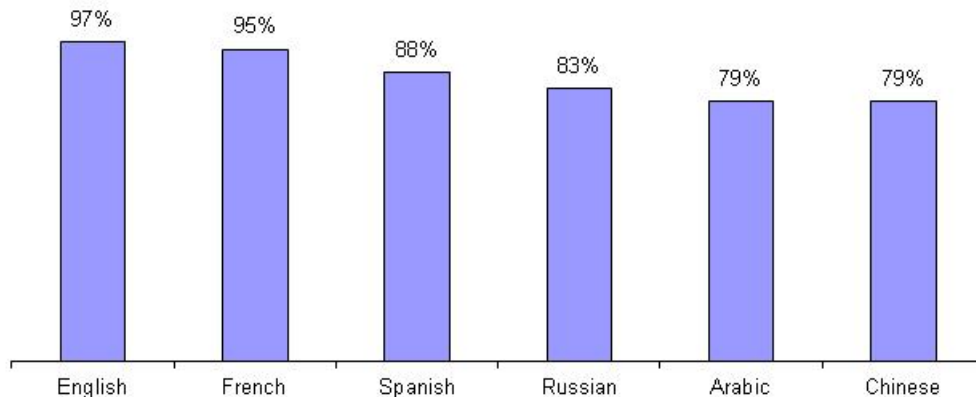


Figure 1. Percentage of Scheduled Meetings at the United Nations and Affiliated Bodies for 2014 with Interpretation in the Official Languages

Source: Prepared from United Nations Document A/68/32, pp. 27-69

As can be seen, Spanish ranks third in use as a working language within the United Nations system. That is, Spanish is present in 339 of the 351 meetings that were analyzed. However, the table above only reflects the legal reality regarding the use of different languages, or, in other words, interpretation coverage that occurs in formal meetings. And, in this regard, it should be noted that countries for whom linguistic parity is important are careful to qualify as formal any meeting, regardless of how short its duration or how small its attendance (Rupérez and Fernández Vitores 2012: 20).

To provide an idea of the real situation in regard to the use of language in the UN's inner workings, it is necessary to analyze the informal meetings as well. This includes the communication between staff. Although studies on this matter are lacking, a survey conducted in 2010 by the United Nations Office in Geneva produced similar results to those that appear in Figure 1, but with a notable reduction in the use of languages other than English and French.

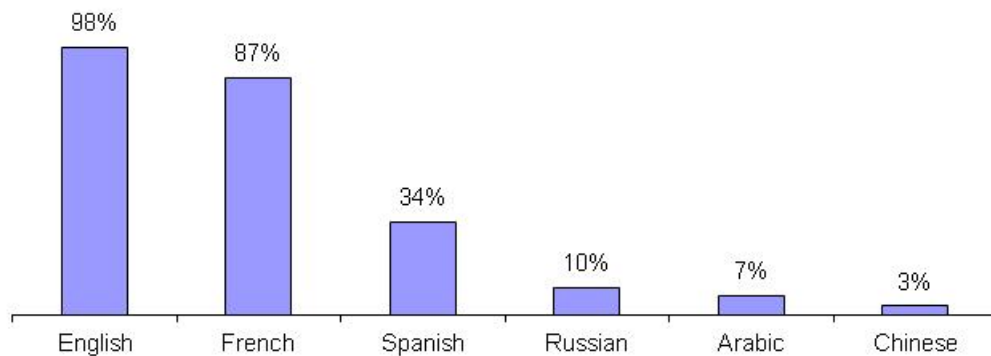


Figure 2. Percentage of Spanish use in the United Nations Office in Geneva

Source: ONUG 2010, p. 2.

However, it should be added that the survey sample which serves as the basis for the graph above was composed mostly of staff members of the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG) which is, of course, a French-speaking city. This could

mean that the results for French were increased with respect to those that could have been obtained in at the offices in New York, Vienna, or Nairobi. In any case, the survey clearly shows a markedly reduced use of Spanish as compared to that which occurs in formal meetings. However, it should be noted that, although limited, the use of Spanish in informal communication within the United Nations is far ahead of the use of Russian, Arabic, and Chinese. This same pattern of official language use can also be seen in other organizations within the United Nations system.

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Official Language</i>	<i>Working Language</i>
Secretary General of the UN	A C E F R S	E F
UNHCR	A C E F R S	E F
CEPA	A E F	A E F
ECLAC	E F S	E F S
UNECE	E F R	E F R
ESCWA	A E F	A E F
ESCAP	C E F R	E F
FAO	A C E F R S	A C E F R S
UNFPA	A C E F R S	E F S
ICAO	A C E F R S	A C E F R S
IAEA	A C E F R S	E
ILO	E F S	A C E F R S G
IMO	A C E F R S	E F S
WMO	A C E F R S	A C E F R S
WIPO*		A C E F R S
WHO	A C E F R S	A C E F R S
OMT	A C E F R S	E F S
UNODC	A C E F R S	E F
UNIDO	A C E F R S	E F
UN-Habitat	A C E F R S	E F
UNRWA	A E	E
WFP	A C E F R S	E
UNDP	E F S	E F S
UNEP	A C E F S	E F S
ITU	A C E F R S	A C E F R S
UNCTAD	A C E F R S	A E F S
UNESCO	A C E F R S H P I	E F
UNICEF	A C E F R S	E F S
UNOPS	A C E F R S	E F
UPU	F	F E

Key: A: Arabic; C: Chinese; E: English; F: French; G: German; H: Hindi; I: Italian; P: Portuguese; R: Russian; S: Spanish.

Table 1. Official and Working Languages of the Secretariats of the United Nations Organization (2010)

Source: Fall and Zhang 2011, p. 47.

As is apparent from Table 1, prepared by the Joint Inspection Unit, Spanish is the official language in 23 of the 30 organizations studied and is present as a working language in 15. In other words, it has a recognition rate of 76.7% as the official language and 50% as the working language. Once again, this places Spanish in the third position, ahead of Arabic (with 80% and 30%, respectively), although the latter is slightly ahead of Spanish in terms of its recognition as an official language. Russian is in fifth place (with 73.3% and 26.7%, respectively) and Chinese in sixth (70% and 23%). For their part, English and French are practically ubiquitous as official languages, except in the case of WIPO, where constituent texts do not define “official languages”. However, French, with a usage rate of 90% as a working language, is slightly behind English, which is used in all of the organizations studied.

Despite the profile described above, it must be noted that, partly due to the urgency of some meetings, many are conducted without interpretation. This situation favors a convergence towards the use of English which certainly affects Spanish’s use and can also be seen in the translation of official documents (Fall and Zhang 2011: 41). Such is the case in regard to reports analyzing the UNDP Executive Board, where the difficulty in meeting internal deadlines almost always means that a single version is distributed in English with the Spanish reports appearing some time later. At other times, as in the case of the Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Spanish language benefits thanks to the linguistic management of the organizations themselves. This can often happen at the expense of an established working language, such as French (ibid.). In this regard, it should be noted that the venue of the meetings and the geographic distribution of the participants also influences the use of official languages. Thus, Spanish use is usually higher in meetings which take place in Latin America and the Caribbean compared to those that occur in other

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geographic areas (FAO 2002: 20).

Language use does not just vary from one organization to another, but also between the different organs of the same organization. By way of example, Table 2 illustrates the current language coverage in the official meetings of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), divided by category. This coverage, with the exception of some linguistic peculiarities that may be present in a few specific organs, can be extrapolated to the rest of the UN system.

	English	French	Spanish	Arabic	Chinese	Russian
PRINCIPAL ORGANS (BODIES)						
General Assembly	X	X	X	X	X	X
WIPO Conference	X	X				
Coordination Committee	X	X				
Assembly and Executive Committee of the Berne Union	X	X				
Union Assembly in Budapest	X	X				
Union Assembly in the Hague	X	X	X			
IPC Union Assembly	X	X				
Union Assembly in Lisbon	X	X	X			
Union Assembly in Locarno	X	X				
Union Assembly in Madrid	X	X	X			
Union Assembly in Nice	X	X				
Assembly and Executive Committee of the Paris Union	X	X				
Assembly and Operation Committee of the PCT Union	X	X				
PLT Assembly	X	X	X	X	X	X
STLT Assembly	X	X	X	X	X	X
Union Assembly in Vienna	X	X				
WCT Assembly	X	X				
WPPT Assembly	X	X				
COMMITTEES						
Program and Budget Committee	X	X	X	X	X	X
Audit Committee	X	X	X			
Development and Intellectual Property Committee	X	X	X	X	X	X
Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore	X	X	X	X	X	X
Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights	X	X	X			
Standing Committee on Patents Law	X	X	X			
Standing Committee on Trademark Law, Industrial Designs and Geographical Indications	X	X	X			
Standing Committee on Information Technology (since 2010, Technical Committee on WIPO Standards)	X	X	X			
Advisory Committee on Enforcement	X	X	X			

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WORKING GROUPS						
Patent Cooperation Treaty Working Group	X	X				
Committee of Experts of the IPC Union	X	X				
Working Group on the Review of the CIP	X	X				
<i>Ad hoc</i> Working Group of the Nice Union	X	X				
Working Group on the Development of the Lisbon System (Appellations of Origin)	X	X	X			
Working Group on the Legal Development of the Madrid System for the International Registration of Marks	X	X	X			
Working Group Charged with the Examination of Paragraphs 4-6 of Rule 3 of the Singapore Treaty on the Law of Trademark	X	X	X			
Working Group on Issues Relating to the Audit Commission	X	X	X			
Intercessional Working Group of the IGC	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 2. Categories of Official Meetings of the WIPO and Language Use

Source: OMPI 2010, p. 4.

Table 2 demonstrates that Spanish is the third working language in the WIPO, well ahead of Arabic, Chinese, and Russian. However, it remains a considerable distance from English and French, which remain this organization's principal working languages.

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Spanish in Official Documents

One aspect that is particularly interesting in assessing the institutional presence of Spanish in the United Nations is the extent to which it is used in drafting original documents produced by the organization. Although the aim of the United Nations is to facilitate simultaneously all official documents in different languages, the language used in the original composition is by no means trivial. This is because it can stylistically influence the versions translated into other official or working languages. The following table shows the languages used in drafting the original texts generated by the secretariats.

Organization	Percentage
United Nations	E (76.5%) F (12.8%) E/F (4.2%) Others (6.5%)
World Bank	-
FAO	E (97.34%) S (1.47%) F (1.16%) A (0.02%)
IFAD	A S F E
IMF	-
ICAO	E (85%) F (6%) S (4%) A C R (5%)
IAEA	E (68%) R (14%) S (8%) F (4%) A (3%) G (2%) C (0,4%) Others (0,3%)
ILO	E (85.2%) F (13.3%) S (1.5%)
IMO	-
WMO	E (97.4 %) A (1.7%) R (0.2%) Others (0,7%)
WIPO	E (57.5%) F/E (17.8%) S (12.3%) F (8.2%) Others (4.2%)
WHO	-
UNIDO	-
ITU	E (93%)
UNESCO	E (74.69%) F (25.31%)
UPU	F (45%) E (45%) Others (10%)

Key: G: German; A: Arabic; C: Chinese; S: Spanish; F: French; E: English; R: Russian.

Table 3. Original Texts of Documents Generated by the Secretariats

Source: Kudryavtsev & Ouédraogo 2003, p. 38.

While English is the language in which most of the original documents are written, followed timidly by French, Spanish is the third composition language for these primary texts. However, Spanish's use is so small as to be almost imperceptible when compared with English and, to a lesser extent, with French. Because of this, Spanish is often classified as a "translation language" since most of the texts in Spanish at the UN are translations from other languages, usually English. In fact, the influence of the original English on the Spanish version has led some authors to speak of Spanish as a "hostage language," thus implying that the translators have a tendency to use a type of Spanish that is informed by the lexical and syntactic forms of the original texts in French –during the years in which this was the predominant language- and now in English, today's *lingua franca* (Hernández Francés 2010: 191). In this sense, the Spanish translations reflect a certain rigidity in the sentences due to abuse of the preposition "de" in translating English phrases; excessive use of the singular caused by adjectives without

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English's final "s," parallel translation of English's definite and indefinite articles, and English's capacity to form plurals without determinants; loss of words that have no formal correspondence in English or which have a distinct use in Spanish; and the loss of Spanish prefixes and suffixes (ibid. 194).

Moreover, the multinational character of the United Nations largely determines the type of language used in the translations. This is due to the fact that coexisting within the organization are the varieties of Spanish from Spain and those of Latin American countries represented by the Translation Services. To avoid conflicts between the different varieties, the Conference Services Department strongly encourages translators to avoid the use of localisms and abide by the majority use (Barros Ochoa 2001). Thus, the documentary language that is adopted is a fairly neutral one with few syntactic variations throughout the Spanish-American linguistic map (Nóbrega 2008: 138). At the lexical level, semantic differences between different varieties of Spanish are usually resolved by avoiding terms that are completely unintelligible to speakers of other varieties (ibid. 139).

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Spanish Learning by People Working at the United Nations

Although translation and interpretation services are the base upon which sits the multilingual communication in the United Nations, this organization also tries to encourage multilingualism within its workforce.

The Spanish Program is one of the six that make up the Language and Communication Program of the United Nations. Its purpose is to promote and facilitate the learning and use of Spanish –as well as cultural knowledge of Spanish-speaking countries- between officials and members of diplomatic missions who perform their work in the UN headquarters in New York and the offices in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Geneva, Santiago, and Vienna. Each year between 1,500 and 2,000 students enroll in Spanish classes. In addition to

improving their communicative competence in Spanish, they also develop specific skills and knowledge through a variety of specialized courses (Spanish for cooperation projects, conversation, writing, cinema, culture, etc.). Interestingly, Spanish is again in the third position in regard to the percentage distribution of enrollment in the courses that teach the six official languages: Arabic (10%), Chinese (7%), Spanish (17%), French (35%), English (25%), and Russian (6%). In addition, this demand for Spanish is not something new, but has remained constant over the years, even though the total number of participants in these programs has increased significantly (United Nations 2010: 4).

These percentages refer only to the actual enrollment of UN staff in training courses. It should be noted that the latest report on the status of implementation of multilingualism in the United Nations showed that 30% of respondents had not enrolled in language courses because they were too busy during working hours. If the number of staff who have enrolled in courses is added to those who show interest, Spanish would comfortably be in second place, after French. In any case, the low percentage corresponding to English may be because most of the United Nations staff has a satisfactory level in this language.

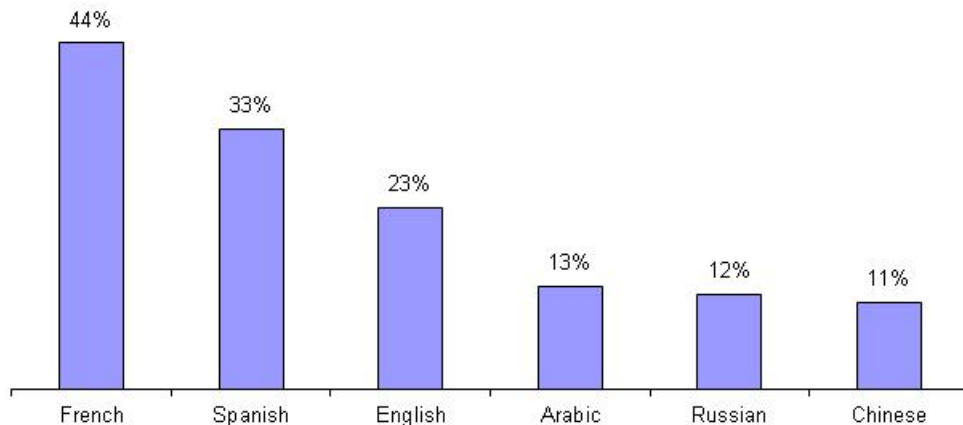


Figure 3. Percentage of UN Officials Who Are Learning or Are Interested in Learning Any of the Official Languages.

Source: ONUG 2010, p. 2.

As is the case with the rest of the official languages, the main motivation to learn Spanish is professional (in 80% of the cases). The other reasons for UN staff to learn Spanish are, in order of importance, to use outside of work in daily life; to learn about the language and culture; to socialize with colleagues; to pass the Language Proficiency Exam (LPE); to address tourism needs; and to meet other people in class (ONUG 2010: 2).

Spanish in the Hiring Process

It is true that strengthening language skills at the United Nations through a wide range of courses is a prerequisite to solidifying the organization's multilingual identity. However, the main tool to maintain that identity is the hiring process itself. Although the language requirements may be adapted in regard to the hiring of local staff, they are much stricter in hiring international personnel. The latter must have a good command of at least two working languages, if not from the beginning of his or her career, then in the course of it and within a reasonable time.

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However, the departments in charge of hiring often include rather vague clauses in regard to language skills. Normally, only English proficiency is required while, in the majority of the cases, control of any other language is either desirable or only valued but not required (with limited exceptions). This ranks Spanish equally with the rest of the non-English official languages and, to a lesser extent, with French. In fact, even in the case of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the staff is not required to know Spanish. At most, knowledge of Spanish is appreciated, but not a mandatory requirement. This is surprising considering that most of the Member States of ECLAC and its partner countries are Spanish speaking. In regard to vacancy notices, most of the organizations of the United Nations publish in English and French. In fact, an important part of the organizations post their offers in English and only six advertise their vacancies in Spanish in addition to French and English (see Table 4). Moreover, in some

cases, even the vacancy announcements for hiring local staff at ECLAC in Santiago, Chile, are written in English only. Perhaps it is this institutional trend towards the use of English which makes most of the candidates submit their applications in this language, even in cases where the organization permits them in Spanish.

<i>Languages used in job advertisements</i>	<i>Organizations</i>
English	UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNRWA, WFP, IAEA, UNIDO
English and French	Secretariat of the United Nations, UNCTAD, ESCWA, ESCAP, ECLAC, ECA, UNODC, UNESCO, UPU, WHO, WIPO, WMO
English, French, and Spanish	UNDP, FAO, ILO IMO, ITU, WTO

Table 4. Languages Used in Job Advertisements in the United Nations System

Source: Fall and Zhang 2011, p. 37.

Spanish in institutional Communication

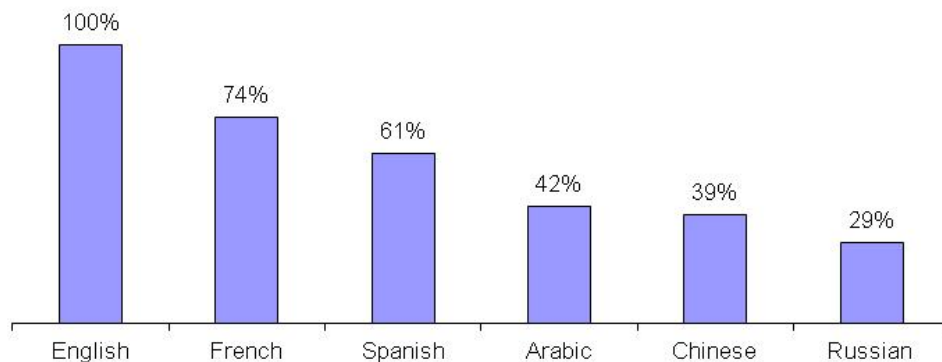
In areas such as internal communication, the representation of Spanish is virtually nonexistent. The UN intranet, iSeek, keeps pages in English and French and also publishes articles in these languages. Along the same lines, the deleGATE portal (launched in 2008, this is the intranet for delegates in New York), just publishes papers in English and French. The only initiative related to Spanish began in 2011 with a page in iSeek called “The Corner”. This is a space where officials and staff can send more personal items in any of the six official languages (United Nations 2012: 14).

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Outwardly, the mechanisms for public information and outreach employed by the United Nations present a rather different picture as far as the use of official languages is concerned. While radio, television, and publications have traditionally been the most important means to disseminate information about the organization, web sites and social networks are now essential tools to

promote their image and also provide unique opportunities to reach a wider audience.

Since the UN's webpage began, the Department of Public Information has tried to achieve parity among the official languages. However, it can be stated that in the United Nations, fully multilingual webpages are more the exception than the rule (Fall and Zhang 2011). Currently, users of the United Nations website can access multimedia content from the home page. This provides electronic transmissions, live and on-demand, of meetings, conferences, and events. These videos come with subtitles in various languages, including Spanish. While there might be good examples of multilingual webpages, such as the United Nations Commission on International Trade (UNCITRAL), UNESCO, WHO, and the United Nations, most electronic spaces pertaining to the other organizations use only English. To a greater or lesser extent, Spanish is present in 61% of the websites in the United Nations system, which puts it again in the third position after English and French.



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Figure 4. Presence of the Official Languages in the Webpages of the United Nations

Source: Prepared from information in Louis Fall and Zhang 2011, p. 49.

Although Spanish has less presence than French in institutional webpages at the United Nations, it is important to clarify that, in terms of the number of visits, the pages in Spanish far exceed those in French. This emphasizes the contrast

between the real demand for information in different languages by users and what the organization offers. In fact, Spanish has occupied a comfortable second place since 2005 in regard to the number of visits (United Nations 2007: 5, 2008: 9; 2010; 2012; 2014). Furthermore, this second place is not subject to specific situations, but has remained constant over time, as can be seen in Figure 6.

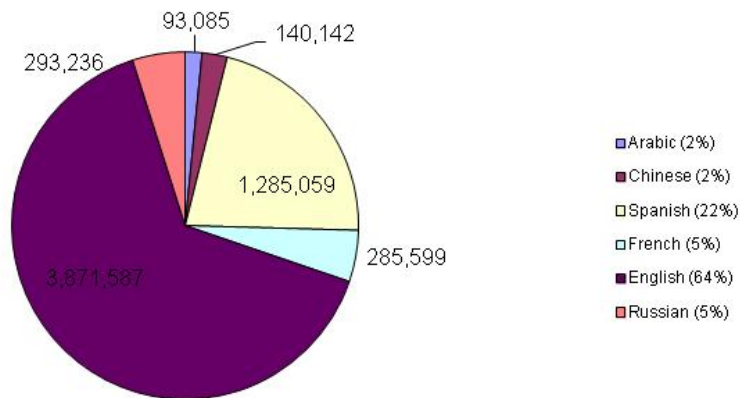


Figure 5. Percentage of Visits to the Website of the United Nations (www.un.org) Divided by Language (October 2013)

Source: United Nations 2014, p. 5.

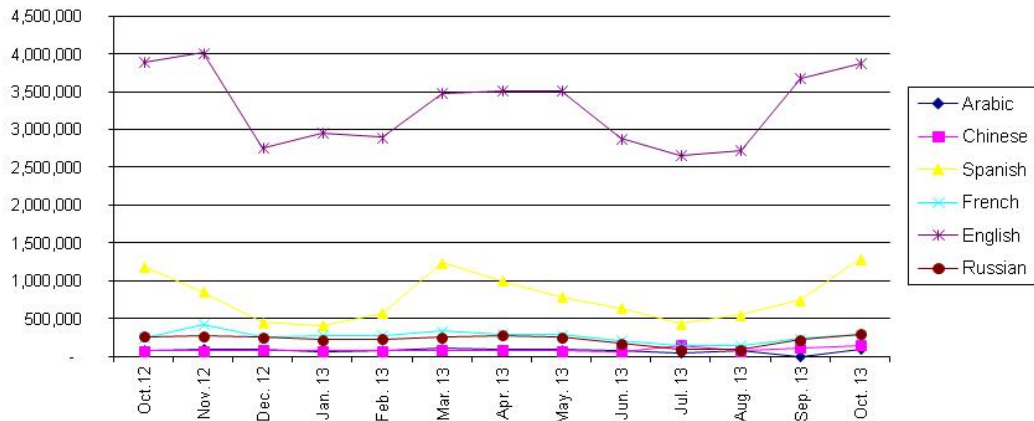


Figure 6. Number of Visits to the UN Web Site in the Official Languages from October 2012 to October 2013

Source: United Nations 2014, pp. 6-8.

In recent years, the United Nations has increased efforts to make their social media presence reflect their multilingualism. Currently the content that the Department of Public Information makes available on these media sites is followed worldwide in all six official languages by an every-increasing number of people. Publications in new multilingual channels like Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube include several links to related pages on UN web sites which contain more detailed information about specific issues. In this area, Spanish is the second most used language after English.

	Arabic	Chinese	English	French	Kiswahili	Portuguese	Russian	Spanish
Facebook (n° of "likes")	43,286	271	1,165,974	80,635	1,804	9,213	3,725	108,639
Twitter (n° of followers)	31,009	5,564	2,467,807	23,082	289	17,562	3,292	176,746
YouTube (n° of views)	1,750		8,264,008	294,875		418		296,474
Flickr (n° of views)			5,092,313			4,104		
Google+ (n° of followers)	483		1,503,247	23			492	
Pinterest (n° of followers)			9,547	116				
Tumblr (n° of followers)			25,783					

Table 5. Access to the Department of Public Information's Social Platforms Divided by Language (November 2013)

Source: United Nations 2014, p. 25.

In regard to traditional media such as radio and television, although the dissemination of programs is mostly done through broadcasters, after signing a cooperation agreement, the transmission through the Internet has increasingly been more public. As is the case with social networks, Spanish-language radio is second in regard to number of visits.

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English	40,201
Spanish	18,910
Russian	14,654
Portuguese	12,641
Arabic	9,030
Chinese	8,557
Kiswahili	5,283
French	5,255

Table 6. Number of Visits to United Nations Radio Divided by Language (November 2013)

Source: United Nations 2014, p. 10.

In addition, the number of agreements signed by the United Nations with radio stations which broadcast in Spanish is not only the greatest of the six official languages, but also far exceeds the number of agreements signed with television stations (United Nations 2008: 8).

In regard to television, the series *UN in Action* is produced in the six official languages. The Department of Public Information also provides radio and television producers with Spanish-language scripts of the news program *21st Century* (United Nations 2012: 15).

Initiatives in Spanish-Speaking Countries

Against this background, the question arises to what extent the Spanish-speaking countries are pushing for greater representation of Spanish within the institutional framework of the United Nations. It should be noted that although the activity to this end has traditionally been very discreet, there has been a marked change since the beginning of this century.

The first institutional claim on record is a letter dated April 11th, 2001. It was sent to the person who was then Secretary General, Kofi Annan. In it, the ambassadors of Spanish-speaking countries denounced “the tendency to favor the use of a single language within the secretariats of the agencies of the United Nations” and lamented “the existence of this trend both in the writing and dissemination of important publications and in the negotiation of resolutions and decisions in the governing bodies, and even, sometimes, in relations between some secretariats and member states”. To avoid the latter, the letter called for “the necessary measures to address the alarmingly widening gap between the official languages of the United Nations in all areas” and, more specifically, rigorous efforts to apply “the existing language regime in the UN in regard to public information, establishing Spanish sections, with adequate staff and resources, both in the Department of Public Information and, in general, in all departments authorized to publish official information on the Internet”.

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More recently, on September 16th 2013 the Grupo de Amigos del Español en las Naciones Unidas (Friends of Spanish in the United Nations) was established with the signing of a charter by the Spanish-speaking countries in the United Nations. With this letter, which was delivered to the Secretary General for publication as an official General Assembly document, the GAE highlighted the importance of the Spanish language in the United Nations system and, at the same time, was empowered to coordinate and carry out activities to promote the use and dissemination of Spanish in the United Nations.

A month later, at the XXIII Latin American Summit, held on the October 18th and 19th, 2013 in Panama City, the heads of state of twenty Latin American countries issued a special statement on the use of Spanish in multilateral organizations (Segib 2013). In it, they celebrated the creation of the GAE and encouraged its members to further the consolidation of Spanish in the United Nations.

Conclusion

Spanish is the language with the third largest presence within the United Nations system. This is evident in observing aspects such as recognition as an official and working language, its use in the creation of original documents, and the publication of job vacancies in institutional webpages.

However, if issues such as interest in learning Spanish by UN staff, the number of visits to the United Nations webpage, and the number of followers on social networks associated with the UN are taken into consideration, then Spanish is the second most important language after English.

In other words, Spanish ranks third in the areas where its presence is determined by decisions of a political or administrative nature. However, it is second in spaces where its presence depends on the use of instruments that the UN makes available to its staff and the public in general.

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This is mainly due to the importance attached to French from the institutional point of view. However, it has a lower demand than Spanish by users within the organization. In any case, Spanish is still far from reaching the representational level enjoyed by English and, to a lesser extent, by French. However, it should be noted that, at least in the short term, it is unlikely that Spanish will lose this third place to languages like Arabic or Russian that have a more limited international presence. Nor is Chinese likely to substitute Spanish in importance because, despite having a large number of native speakers, it is rarely used as an international language.

The main threat to the presence of Spanish is not the greater political weight given to French, but the prevailing monolingual-English that is almost endemic in the meetings which take place within the United Nations system. In many cases, this focus on English is favored by the delegates and staff themselves who do not exercise the right to speak their mother tongue, either for budgetary reasons or the desire to make the meetings more dynamic by dispensing with interpretation. And the same happens in informal communication between officials and representatives of the member states, where English is the *lingua franca par excellence*.

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In this regard, recent initiatives such as the creation of the *Grupo de Amigos del Español en las Naciones Unidas* or the issuance of a special statement on the use of Spanish in multilateral organizations seem to indicate a changing trend from the Spanish-speaking countries who are members of the organization. Unfortunately, there are no tools to assess to what extent these initiatives are having the desired effect or if the achievements related to the increased presence of Spanish in the United Nations are linked more to the inertia of expansion of the language in the larger world or thanks to the UN's more general efforts to foment multilingualism; measures that, among other things, permit Spanish to enjoy a special place in the organization on every October 12th.

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