

A Report on English Historical Linguistics in Spain (1968-2011)

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In the following pages we will report on the development of research in English historical linguistics in Spain, looking specifically at doctoral dissertations. These can be seen as an indicator of the relationship between research and teaching in the Spanish public university system. This system, highly valued by Spanish society in general, requires that most teachers occupying permanent positions have doctoral degrees. However, someone with a doctorate in a particular field of expertise is not guaranteed to teach in that same field, which represents a poor use of human resources and impacts negatively on teaching quality. The cause for this is two fold: on the one hand, the humanities in general are gradually losing prestige, due to society's demand for institutions of higher education to provide teaching and scholarship of an immediate, practical and applicable nature. On the other hand, the reform process agreed on in Bologna for the creation of a Europe-wide higher education system has required an extraordinary effort on the part of faculties to rethink and adapt previously courses to these new trends. This process has implied an increasing load of administrative work and thus a decrease in the time devoted to research and to the preparation of lectures. There is a danger, if this critical situation is not addressed, that lectures will become ever more unappealing and dull, a situation compounded by the fact that the necessary financial resources are not available for the implementation of the whole process.

We write this report at a time when the reforms are not yet completed, and the data we have used correspond mostly to the "old good days". We have included two different time-spans, the first of which (1968-1997) embraces dissertations that were written and presented prior to the influence of Bologna. The second time-span (1998-2011) covers dissertations written by researchers who in some way or other have been in contact with this new European regulation and the pragmatism of current social

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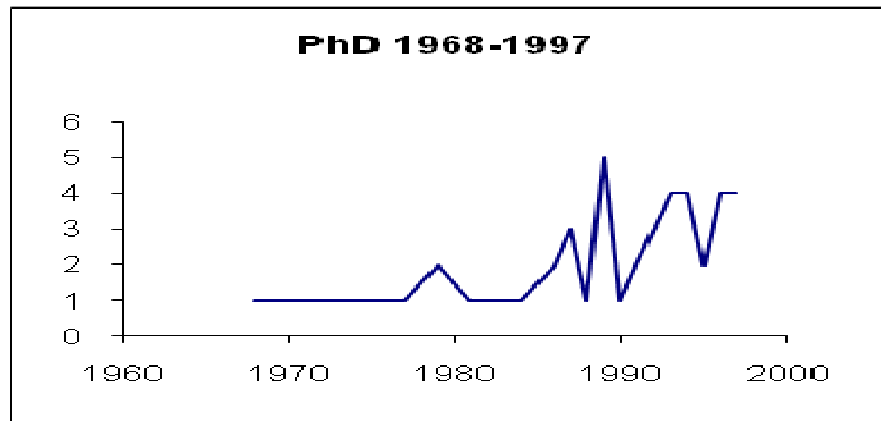
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tendencies. The first report was presented in the 23rd AEDEAN conference in León (1999) and the second report has been discussed recently in a SELIM Conference held at the University of Huelva (September 29th to October 1st 2011). Here we present a comparison of findings from both reports in order to establish a general outline of the evolution of researchers' concerns within historical linguistics in English.

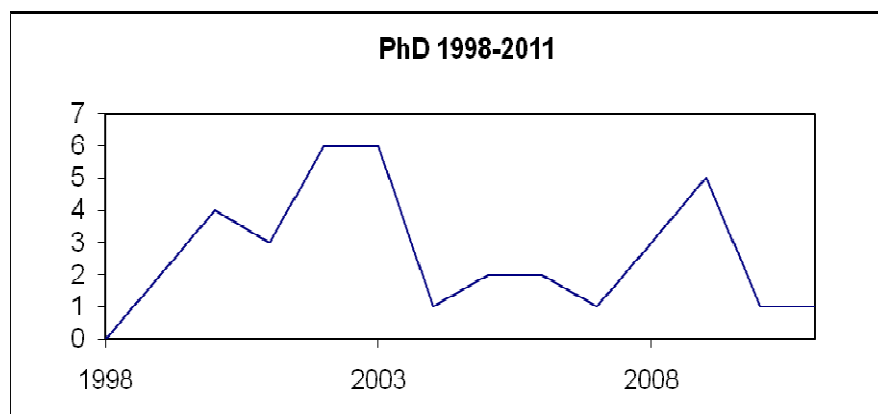
All the data we have used have been obtained from TESEO, the official database of doctoral dissertations presented in Spain, maintained by the Ministry of Education (www.educacion.teseo). Since the database contains a number of fields (title, author, date of public presentation, supervisor, keywords, university, summary, examining committee) for each record, searches were made by using keywords. Because our intention was to compare the evolution and number of dissertations written in English historical linguistics, the data we used as variables for the present study, and for both time-spans, were the following: date, university and linguistic period under study.

The first time-span begins in 1968, the first dissertation on the history of English having been recorded in TESEO that year. Since then a total of 77 dissertations have been presented in Spain. Of these, 40 correspond to the first period (1968-1997) and the remaining 37 were presented between 1998 and June 2011. The distribution over time for both periods is displayed in Graphs 1 and 2 below. Both graphs show irregular progressions. However, there are deeper valleys and steeper peaks in Graph 1, corresponding to the first period, than in Graph 2, which is slightly more balanced.

For the sake of thoroughness, and to make a more meaningful comparison possible, we have normalized these raw figures: the first period runs over 29 years and the second only 13 years. Normalisation indicates that the 37 dissertations presented between 1998 and 2011 would in fact be equivalent to 82.53 had both periods covered the same number of years. This seems to indicate a growing interest in the field in recent years.



Graph 1. PhD 1968-1997



Graph 2. PhD 1998-2011

The second variable we have investigated refers to the specific universities involved in supervision and public presentations. Our data reveal that there has been an increase in the number of universities involved as well as a change in geographical distribution.

1968-1997

Barcelona
 Complutense
 Granada
 Jaén
 La Laguna
 León
 Málaga
 Murcia
 Oviedo
 Salamanca
 Santiago
 Sevilla
 Valencia
 Zaragoza

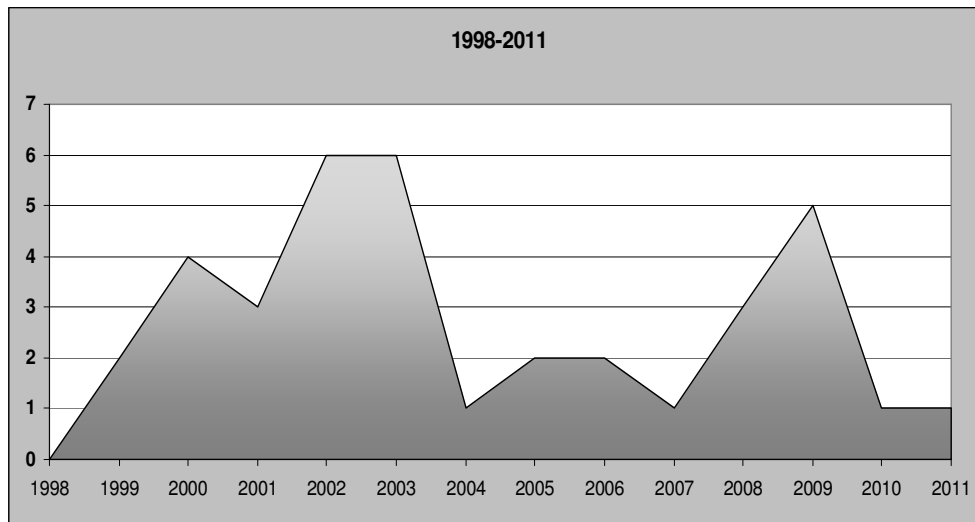
1998-2011

A Coruña
 Castilla-La Mancha
 Complutense
 Córdoba
 Jaén
 Jaume I Castelló
 La Rioja
 La Laguna
 Las Palmas
 León
 Málaga
 Murcia
 Salamanca
 Santiago
 Sevilla
 Vigo

Table 1. Geographical distribution.

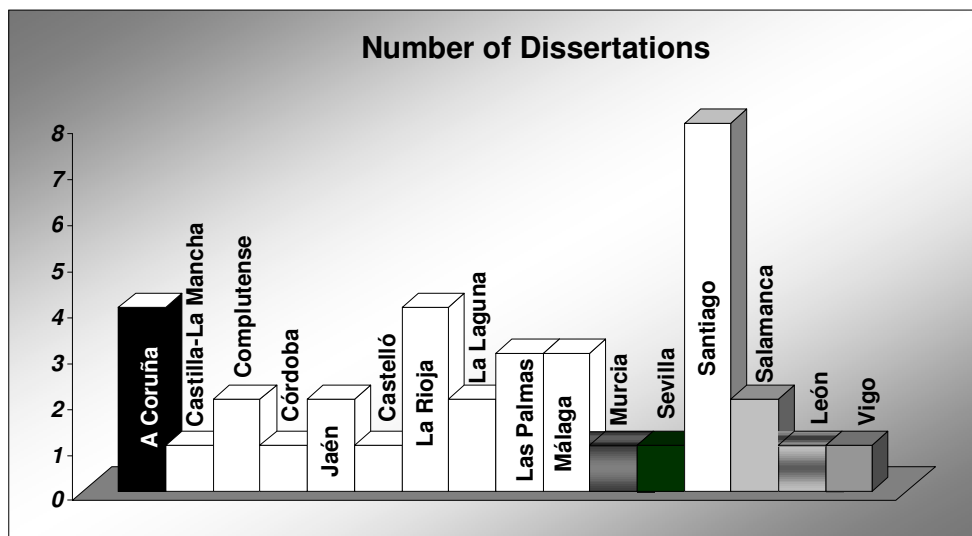
The initial 14 institutions have increased to 16 in the more recent period. Though this seems only slight, we must take into account that a number of traditional universities have withdrawn from the field (Barcelona, Granada, Oviedo, Valencia and Zaragoza) whereas others, some more recently founded institutions, either continue or have emerged. This is the case with A Coruña, Castilla-La Mancha, Córdoba, Jaime I Castelló, La Rioja, Las Palmas and Vigo.

As regards the intensity of academic activity, there is notable variation. In the first period, the Universidad Complutense de Madrid stood out with 8 dissertations presented, followed by Santiago de Compostela (5), Málaga and Oviedo (4) and La Laguna and Sevilla (3), as illustrated in Graph 3:



Graph 3. Universities involved in PhD presentations (1968-1997)

The data for the second period sheds new light not only on the geographical distribution of the institutions but also on the research efforts made by the newest universities. Although Santiago de Compostela, which had also appeared in the previous period, stands out with 8 theses, it is worth noting that much younger and much smaller Universities such as A Coruña and La Rioja occupy joint second position in this ranking. Las Palmas and Málaga follow with 3 thesis each (see Graph 4 below). A possible explanation may lay in the fact that some of the researchers obtaining doctoral degrees in more traditional institutions during the first period were employed as faculty in the new ones during the second period, and made efforts to nurture further research around them.



Graph 4. Universities involved in PhD presentations (1998-2011)

In terms of the historical periods studied, there seems to be a tendency to change from OE in 1968-1997 to ME in 1998-2011. Similarly, a preference for diachronic studies in the early years has been superseded by a concentration on particular synchronic slices in more recent times. Modifications in the syllabi and the contents of new degrees, as noted above, may have had an impact on the choice of period for research. Students do not feel confident with older stages of the language, and the less they study old English in their degrees the less they choose OE as their research topic, and thus are more likely to favour more modern periods.

By way of conclusion, we might say that there is a dramatic increase in the number of dissertations that have been presented in Spanish universities. There is no way we can measure those now in progress, since although these might reflect interesting tendencies, they do not yet constitute comparable data. We have also seen that the new geographical distribution reflects, in the first place, the political decision of the 80s to decentralise old institutions and, as a consequence, the opportunities that this policy of decentralisation opened up for young lecturers to promote research in the field. Although a strict linear progression cannot be seen, in some cases this is not for academic reasons but due to circumstances beyond a researcher's control.