

# Portrait of a Contender

## Ismael Arinas Pellón

- Foreign Language Lecturer at  
Universidad Politécnica de Madrid



“Language at Work – Bridging Theory and Practice” recently connected with Ismael Arinas Pellón, a foreign language lecturer at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Spain. Ismael had interesting insight to share with “Language at Work” readers about the role of foreign language usage from a personal and professional perspective.

Proficient in Spanish, English, French and German, Ismael remarked that English as a foreign language was a compulsory course in school in Southern England, not to mention a prerequisite before studying abroad in High School in the United States. French as a foreign language was also taken on as compulsory courses in England, Spain and the United States, whereas German was introduced later as an elective subject at the university level.

These days, Ismael mentions that he uses English most, as even native speakers of French and German prefer to speak English with other non-native speakers. When asked about how Ismael specifically utilizes his foreign language skills, he answered, *“English is my main teaching activity, but I also publish research papers in English, present in English at international conferences and socialize in English with fellow researchers at conferences or via e-mail. French and German are very useful for research (there are still tons of interesting ideas in languages other than English). Sometimes I have the opportunity of chatting in German or French with my Erasmus students or some fellow researchers. I also read in several other languages either for research or for fun.”*

### The Role of Language in Business, Politics and Education

Regarding the role and function of foreign language usage from a professional standpoint, Ismael shared some insightful thoughts with “Language at Work”,

*“As a very basic observation within the E.U., there are large companies and SMEs who still ignore the existence of initiatives such as the Language Portfolio and the European Common Framework of Reference for Languages. These two initiatives go beyond language education and allow both the employer and potential employee to identify the linguistic skills needed to fulfill the tasks of specific jobs. I would like to insist here on the importance of making these tools available to as many people as possible.*”

*“Knowledge society” is a concept that politicians are linking to economic recovery, but their policies seem to focus on biotechnology, computing, engineering, and business strategies. However, knowledge is transferred using language and I believe there is a huge potential for business development in the research of knowledge from the point of view of linguistics. I miss political and entrepreneurial initiatives promoting research in multi-disciplinary teams that include language experts. The following are a few areas where language experts can make a difference: knowledge modeling (ontologies), institutional communication (laws, tax-revenue forms, court rulings), knowledge discovery (text mining, terminology management), human-machine communication, intercultural communication, expert-lay communication, analysis of social trends (social psychology), clinical linguistics (cognitive neurology, neuropsychology), or persuasion (NGOs, attraction of funding, political campaigning).*

*Education policies are being focused on the instruction of English as a foreign language, which is probably a convenient approach, but knowledge of additional foreign languages certainly increases, at least in the current situation, the employability and mobility of skilled job seekers. In the case of universities and from a commercial standpoint, offering courses in English apparently increases the potential market share or customer base. Nevertheless, I am not sure that the relation of the students with the university is that of customers with suppliers. The faculty definitely does not have that relation with the students. University managers should be aware that the competitive advantage of an international academic experience derives from the cultural awareness and adaptation developed by the students in their host universities.*

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