

## AN ANALYSIS OF '(PRE)PARADOS', 'MILEURISTA', 'NI-NI' AS USED TO DESCRIBE THE YOUNG UNEMPLOYED IN SPAIN

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### ABSTRACT

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The desire for university education after years of dictatorship reached unprecedented heights in Spain as education appeared to ensure a secure future, especially for the generation born after the dictator years. As a member of the European Union, Spain experienced rapid infrastructural development and economic growth which necessitated the employment of qualified graduate labour. However, the economic collapse of 2014 made the labour force trained during the period of economic boom overqualified for the few, menial jobs available. As a result, there emerged economic and social conditions in Spain which made this affected group appear to have been 'prepared' for unemployment. In the course of time the expressions, *(Pre)parados*, *mileurista*, *ni-ni* used to describe this group found their way into everyday Spanish lexicon. This paper adopts two methods in the examination of these coinages. The first is a morpho-semantic analysis, while in the second, the theory of labelling and stigma is applied to highlight the psychological state of the young unemployed Spaniard. The findings reveal that labelling and stigmatisation of a group may come from the stigmatised group itself and may not necessarily be perceived as discriminatory when it also finds a general acceptance in society. The paper suggests that vocational education should be a substantial part of university education in a world of unpredictable economic dynamics.

**Keywords:** Unemployment in Spain, (Pre)parados, Mileurista, Ni-ni, Labelling and stigma

### INTRODUCTION

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Unemployment is a measure of political, social as well as economic problems in a country. Graduate unemployment is a further complication of this situation which casts doubt on the efficacy and purpose of the ivory tower. In a Working Paper on Youth Unemployment in Spain, Garcia (2011: 4) reveals that because education-related decisions and the growth of the labour market are interlinked, a successful transition

from the education system to the labour market is conditioned, not only by the training received but also by the employment situation and outlook, and by the quality of (worker-job) matching. These factors, in his words, have an impact on the decision to continue (or not) studying. Consequently, malfunctions in this process led to increases in youth unemployment. More so because Spain's high level of early school leavers, coupled with the extraordinary rise in the weighting of university graduates, has given rise "to an imbalance between job supply and demand, a high rate of underemployment, and a fall in the wage premium of education" (Garcia, 2011: 15). Thus, it has become common within the Spanish society to find two groups of the unemployed- the early school leavers with no qualifications, and the group of graduates with university degrees, amongst other qualifications. What unites both groups is the stigma of unemployment and the labels they have acquired in the Spanish society. The rest of the paper goes into these issues as follows: the first section introduces the theory of labeling and stigma and their relevance for the analysis in this paper. Thereafter, the second section goes into a brief overview of the emergence of Spain's vocational universities during the dictatorship, and the subsequent economic crisis which led to the unemployment of educated, young, and qualified Spaniards. This is followed by a morpho-semantic analysis of the expressions used to designate this group of the unemployed hand in hand the psychological impact of the coinages on the young unemployed in Spain. Section 4 forms the summary and conclusion.

### Labelling and Stigma

The concepts of labeling and stigma have their origins in mental health sociology (see Goffman, 1963; Deegan 1993).

On stigma, Goffman's definition of the term as an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" and that reduces the bearer "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (1963: 3) gave rise to other definitions of the term (see Stafford & Scott 1986: 80; Crocker et al 1998: 505) as the issue of mental health presented variable facets. Thus, there is a lack of consensus on the use of the term for two main reasons:

First, many social scientists who study stigma do so from the vantage point of theories that are uninformed by the lived experience of the people they study because they do not belong to stigmatized groups (Kleinman et al 1995; Schneider 1988 as cited in Link and Phelan 2001: 367-366).

Secondly, research on stigma was selective in nature and focused on the perceptions of individuals and the consequences of such perceptions for micro-level interactions with the exclusion of the effects on social and economic life (see Oliver 1992).

Fine and Asch (1988) argue that the process of affixing labels was taken for granted without any questioning of the social circumstances that gave rise to the labelling. This contributed to Link and Phelan's (2001: 367; 2013: 529-530) position that stigma as a convergence or overlap of the interrelated components of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination which need a power situation (social, economic, and political), to manifest. According to the authors, the associated constituents of stigma include:

1. distinguishing and labelling differences
2. associating human differences with negative attributes,
3. separating "us" from "them"
4. status loss and discrimination

Regarding labelling, the authors state that labels can be "official" when they are formally applied in a sanctioned official process or "informal" when they are used in day-to-day interactions but not officially processed and recorded (Link and Phelan 2013: 525). This paper adopts Link and Phelan's (2001; 2013) position of stigma as an overlap in different components with emphasis on status loss, and "official" labelling as can be inferred from the expressions used to describe the young unemployed in Spain.

### **Spain's Vocational Universities: An Overview**

The Spanish civil war (1936-1939) left a shattered and ravaged country. It was in the wake of this depressing situation in which about 18% out of a population of five million were illiterates (Delgado, 2005: 247), that the regime of General Francisco Franco instituted the country's vocational universities.

Upheld as centres destined to qualify specialists and workers necessary for the country's economic development, the vocational universities became ideal centres of excellence for the working class of adults as well as young workers (Delgado, 2005: 248). However, the state used it as an instrument to achieve the subjugation of its workers by being personally involved in their social, economic, cultural, and professional lives (Delgado, 2005: 249) as evidenced in article 3 of the statute of the vocational universities of 1956. This national-socialistic socio-educative program was maintained in the Republic throughout the Franco years of dictatorship till the installation of democratic reforms in 1975. Nevertheless, with the promulgation of the General Law on Education Reform and Financing of Universities (*Ley General de Educación y de Financiamiento de la Reforma Educativa*) in 1970, a change in the restructuring of the vocational university system was enacted and this led to a slow and gradual decline in the number of these universities.

General university enrolments increased from 77,000 to 241,000 between 1960 and 1972 (U.S. Library of Congress. [countrystudies.us/spain/47.htm](http://countrystudies.us/spain/47.htm)) with the universities under the direct control of the central government's Ministry of Education and Science until the 1980s. In 1983 the socialist government passed the law on University Reform (*Ley de Reforma Universitaria-LRU*) which weakened central government control over universities and gave increased autonomy to each public university (U.S. Library of Congress. [countrystudies.us/spain/47.htm](http://countrystudies.us/spain/47.htm)).

Although Spain had the second highest rate of university student population in Western Europe in the late 1980s, tutoring laid more emphasis on rote learning rather than independent research or combined teaching and research. Consequently, the university system prepared far too few young people for the jobs needed in an advanced industrial society- a situation comparable to most countries in the developing world. This, however, changed with Spain's adoption of the EU educational system.

From 1999, Spain became immersed in a transformation of its higher education system along with more than 30 European countries, with the aim of creating a *European Higher Education Space* (EHES). Today there are over 70 universities throughout Spain out of which more than 50 are public and the rest, are private.

However, García (2011: 6) surmised that improved educational attainment of the young Spanish population in the last three decades had focused more on university education leading to an imbalance between job supply and demand at different educational levels. In other words, progress made in this area had been mainly motivated by the increased importance of university education among the youngest generation which unfortunately created the imbalance between demand and available supply of work.

The resultant effect on Spain's employment market was a very high level of graduate unemployment compared with elsewhere in Europe with the incidence of over-qualification above 40% among the younger populace between the ages of 25-29 years.

### **Economic Crisis and Unemployment**

Spain joined the European Union (EU) on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1986 with the expectation that accession would help consolidate the country's newly established democratic institutions, modernize the outdated economic structures, and finally normalize relations with other European neighbours (Royo, 2006: 7). After a long period of economic expansion, which began in the mid-nineties, in 2006 the Spanish economy began to show the first signs of exhaustion (Carballo-Cruz, 2011: 309) because it was

unstable and relied majorly on the construction industry, and private consumption (Royo: 8). Thus, contrary to expectations of a robust economy with more prospects for employment by joining the EU, Spain witnessed an economic downturn because of “the two big problems”: the huge debt growth and unemployment uncontrolled growth (Caballo-Cruz, 2011: 318-319). The latter in particular is the genesis of the formation of new words which are now part of the Spanish lexicon.

Tremlett’s (2011) report analysed the situation of the young unemployed Spaniards from the point of economic boom, migration, and unemployment. The report concludes that whereas booming Spain was a magnet for immigrants in the last 10 years, the country returned to the mass emigration of the 1960s when about 2 million left looking for jobs in Northern Europe. The notable difference between the two groups is that today’s Spanish emigrants are mostly young graduates. The summation of the report is that a university degree no longer guaranteed a job in Spain.

This generation of young unemployed Spaniards, *los tan preparados* ‘those (so very well) prepared’ find themselves in *la sociedad paralizada* ‘a paralysed society’ despite their qualifications. *El País* dedicated a series to these young unemployed graduates in Spain with the aim of sketching their profile, as well as accompanying them in their travails. This group made up 44% of those who found work but were underemployed; which was twice the European average according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Therefore, many graduates resorted to underplaying their qualifications when applying for jobs since *sobretitulación /sobrecualificación* or ‘over qualification’ resulted in rejection in the job market. Meanwhile, this state of being over qualified is as a result of a dysfunctional economy in which the available jobs in the labour market did not require highly qualified professionals.

These qualified and unemployed youths have been labeled with expressions which have underlying negative interpretations. They include words and phrases such as *la generación castigada por el desempleo* ‘a generation penalised by unemployment’, *la generación ya que no sueña* ‘the generation that no longer (has) dreams’, *la ‘generación perdida’* ‘the lost generation’, and ‘*la generación de los mil euros*’ or ‘the generation of a thousand euro (earners)’ by Jiménez-Barca (2005). Shorter expressions such as *Pre)parados*, *mileurista* and ‘*ni-ni*’ convey the same message, but have become part of everyday Spanish lexicon. A morpho-semantic analysis of each of the selected expression in line with the word formation processes in the Spanish language, and their examination from the perspective of labeling and stigma is undertaken in the next section.

## ANALYSIS

Etymologically, Spanish words could be said to originate from three main sources: words inherited from Latin, words borrowed from other languages, and words created through the language's internal resources. It the last group which allows borrowings to be assimilated and subsequently to generate related forms (Stewart, 1999: 62). Therefore, word formation in Spanish is an extremely innovative aspect of the language's own mechanism of affixation, derivation and composition which, with the ever-increasing coinages of new expressions, is inexhaustible.

### (Pre)parados

(Pre)parados was the title of a series written by Silvia Blanco and Carmen Pérez-Lanzac in *El País* in its online edition. It highlighted the struggles of the young generation of Spaniards in the face of a worsening economic crisis and subsequent unemployment in which they found themselves.

Morphologically, *(Pre)parados* is formed through derivation. The Spanish productive prefix, *(pre-)* in its Latin origins signifies 'before'. The second component, *parados* can be analysed from two different angles: first, as a verb, *parar* 'to stop/halt'; and secondly, *parado*, the participle form of the verb which is formed when *parar* combines with the participle morpheme, *(-do)*. Thus, *parar + do* → *parado* 'stopped/halted'. However, in this instance *parados* is a nominalised form whose morphological realisation is as follows:

- (i) Para(r) do s  
 To stop + PART. + PLU.  
 'Parados'  
 'Those who have (been) stopped'.

Thus, *parados* is a nominalisation through affixation of the past participle + plural suffixes with the meaning, *those who have stopped to (work)*" or *those who are out of work*. Hence, to be unemployed, *estar parado* is a fixed expression, with a complex verbal construction of the verb *estar + parado* (adjective) which translates "to be in the state of having stopped working/ (to) work".

The expression *(Pre)parados* seems to carry a positive connotation because the prefix *(pre-)* placed before the participle *parado* implies effort made ahead or in advance in preparation towards something. However, the word actually masks an underlying pejorative label, because the prefix *(pre)* contradicts the meaning of the morpheme it modifies in the sense of those so labeled to have been *prepared* (beforehand), but, *not for employment*. More so the use of the participle, *-do* + plural suffix, *(-s)* gives rise to

*parados* or those who have been stopped (from working). Consequently, to be one of the *(Pre)parados* implies being one of those who have been prepared in advance for unemployment.

Looked at from the angle of labeling and stigma, the term *(Pre)parados* labels a group that is stigmatised in Spanish society, and set apart from those not referred to as such because of being unemployed. In addition, the group of *(Pre)parados* experience status loss when they have to underplay their professional qualifications and years of experience in order to take up menial jobs which require little or no qualifications. Finally, those who find themselves in this group are consequently disadvantaged with regard to income and psychological well-being.

### Mileurista

The Spanish language uses the productive suffix, *-ista* in the word formation process for professions that are not gender specific. For example, *periodista* 'journalist', *repcionista* 'receptionist', *dentista* 'dentist', etc., whereby the gender of whoever is carrying out the profession is reflected when the masculine or feminine definite articles, *el* and *la* or their indefinite counterparts, *un* and *una* are prepositioned before the noun. For example, *el/un dentista* 'the/a (male) dentist'; *la/una dentista* 'the/a (female) dentist'. Consequently, *mileurista* can be analysed thus:

(ii) Mil + eur (o) + ista

Thousand Euro + ista

'The profession of the one thousand Euro [Earner]'

Therefore, *mileurista* refers to someone who practices a profession of the 'one thousand (*mil*) (euro) earners'. Thus *mileurista* is raised to the same status as other non-gender specific professions such as *dentista* 'dentist', *pianista* 'pianist', *taxista*, 'taxi driver', etc. But while this is a linguistic coinage that lexicalises how a group of unemployed is portrayed in the Spanish society, this lexicalisation nevertheless, stigmatises the group and those addressed as such because *mileurista* is not given the recognized core values of a professional body.

However, a search for the word, *mileurista* in the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy (DRAE) before 2005 yielded no results, because it was not yet in the everyday Spanish vocabulary, and thus, was not a part of items in the Spanish dictionary entries. The expression *mileurista* originated from the young Spanish woman, Carolina Alguacil (2005) in the now famous phrase '*Yo soy 'mileurista'* or 'I am a mileurista (a thousand euro earner)'. In her own words, Carolina Alguacil describes the *mileurista* as:

El *mileurista* es aquel joven, de 25 a 34 años, licenciado, bien preparado, que habla idiomas, tiene posgrados, másteres y cursillos...lo malo es que no gana más de mil euros...

*Mileurista* is that well-educated young graduate between the ages of 25 and 34 years who speaks several languages, has postgraduate Masters degree, professional course certificates[...] but unfortunately, that person does not earn more than a thousand euros [My translation].

*Mileurista* finally made its entry into the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* (DRAE) in 2012 (Moran Breña, 2012), thereby gaining an “official” labeling status. And to justify its entry the DRAE explains thus:

El término no ha dejado de usarse desde entonces. No hay español que no lo conozca. Ha cumplido todos los requisitos que exige la RAE para abrirle las puertas del diccionario: un uso generalizado y sostenido en el tiempo.

The term has not stopped being used since then. There is no Spaniard who does not know it. It has fulfilled all the requirements of the Spanish Royal Academy for its entry into the dictionary because of its general and sustained usage in the course of time (My translation)

What this implies is that *mileurista* has consistently been in use since its first appearance in 2005, all Spaniards have become familiar with the expression, and it has therewith fulfilled all the requirements for its entrance into the DRAE. This is relevant because as a rule, “la Academia [...] solo recogen aquello que se consolida en la calle [...]”. That is, the Spanish Royal Academy only includes in its dictionary words that have become consolidated and sustained through everyday usage. The DRAE in its entry defines *mileurista* as:

Persona que gana alrededor de mil euros de retribución laboral mensual y que [por el contexto económico o dinámica en el mercado laboral] no logra superarla a pesar de sus capacidades, experiencia y preparación.

A person who earns about a thousand euros monthly and who (because of the economic context or the dynamics of the labour market, cannot earn more in spite of his qualifications, experience and education.  
(My translation)



*Mileurista* is therefore, a simple lexicalisation of a group in Spanish society that in spite of its professional qualifications, experience and education does not earn above a thousand euros in a month, the inclusion of economic context or labour market dynamics does not change the social status of this group.

This form of self-labeling by Carolina Aguacil and its general acceptance in the Spanish society exemplifies a general downward placement of a person in a status hierarchy (Link and Phelan 2001: 371). In addition, she describes the life of a *mileurista* as follows:

El *mileurista* hace tiempo que decidió irse de casa...gasta más de un tercio de su sueldo en alquiler...comparte piso con más gente ...El *mileurista* no ahorra, no tiene casa, no tiene coche, no tiene hijos, vive al día...

The *mileurista* decided to leave the home a long time ago...he or she gives out more than a third of his or her salary on rent...shares apartment with many persons...The *mileurista* has no savings, has no house, has no car, has no children, he or she lives from day to day.... (My translation)

Hence, the *mileurista* is disadvantaged, and experiences status loss because he or she is in a state of financial, societal and psychological exclusion in the society.

### 'Ni-ni'

The economic crisis and ensuing unemployment in Spain did not affect only the *sobrecualificados* or the 'overqualified' with years of study such as the (*Pre*) *parados* and *mileuristas*. As revealed in *El País*, it also included a younger group, labelled '*la generación ni-ni...que ni estudia ni trabaja...*' in other words, the generation of 'Nini', i.e., those who neither work nor study and who consequently, were sucked into the vortex of unemployment in the economic crisis. Tinoco (2014) describes the group as *jóvenes menores de 25 años que no estudian ni trabajan*. In other words, young people below 25 years of age who neither work nor study.

Linguistically, *ni* is a correlative conjunction and is one of several Spanish negative words (Butt and Benjamin, 2000: 334-335). For example, in the sentence below, 'Ni' translates 'neither nor':

(iii) Ni tú ni yo lo sabemos Neg. Sec.Pers.Sing.Ind. Neg.  
First.Pers.Sing.Ind. it we know 'Neither you nor I know (it)'.

In the Spanish setting, this expression is used to describe the generation of the age group as: *la generación ni-ni: ni lo uno, ni lo otro* 'the generation ni-ni: neither the one nor the other'. Whereby *ni lo uno, ni lo otro* refers to the simultaneous rejection of work and study by this group. This label is similar to describing a group (in English) as the group of the 'neither-nor'. That is, a group that is neither for one thing nor the other. More aptly, Spanish sociologists have identified this group as a whole generation, "*la de los ni-ni, caracterizada por el simultáneo rechazo a estudiar y a trabajar...*" or 'the generation of the ni-ni characterised by their simultaneous rejection of study and work' (Barbería, 2009).

In its appearance as *ni-ni* or *nini*, it takes the form of an abbreviation of the correlative conjunction that has become nominalised. Hence the reference to a group as *la generación ni-ni* or 'a generation that is neither here nor there'.

To label a whole generation of under 25 year olds as *ni-ni* because they neither work nor study is discriminatory and a stereotyping of a whole generation which reduce their status in the societal hierarchy.

## CONCLUSIONS

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All over the world, the employability of university graduates constitutes one of the principal indicators of the educational system's efficacy and of the achieved association between higher education and the labour market (Cheng et al. 2022). Again, studies by Kostoglou and Paulokis have shown that while cases of over qualification play a significant role, university graduates are also ill-prepared for the real world's conditions and show inadequate signs of creativity, adaptability, and flexibility. This again is further compounded by the fact that the rate of enterprise creation in Spain is merely 10% (compared with 11.2% which is the Europe average) and 70% of newly created companies do not have paid employees. This can be partly attributed to the precariousness of the job market, which leads youngsters to look for security above everything else, with many seeking jobs as civil servants (Royo15). Grubb's (2006) suggestions on vocational training and education (VET) to enhance equity and equilibrium in the labour market could serve as a functional model for tackling this crisis.

The expressions, *(Pre)parados*, *mileurista* and *ni-ni* are coinages derived from the mechanism of Spanish word formation. With the exception of *mileurista*, the other two can be described as "official" labels which have taken root in Spanish society to identify those who are unemployed; even though the circumstances of each group is different, for example, the *(Pre)parados*, *mileurista* can be said to be disadvantaged when it comes to income; labeling them has set them apart from others in Spanish society because

they undergo status loss as well as experience discrimination. Thus, the *(Pre)parados* need to underplay their professional qualifications to take up menial jobs, the *mileurista* cannot earn more than a thousand euros in a month despite their qualifications and the young adult below 25 is unemployed because he or she dropped out of school.

Finally, that these coinages have become part of Spanish daily lexicon, or that '*mileurista*' even arose from a young unemployed Spanish woman herself, does not remove the fact that the expressions have pejorative emotive and aversive properties which can be said to be associated with psychological reactance and memorability (see Jay, Caldwell-Harris, & King, 2008; Jay, King, & Duncan, 2006 as cited in Jay, 2009, p. 81). They describe the psychological state of frustration and disillusionment of a whole generation.

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