

40 Days & 40 Nights without English

Before arriving in Spain, I established a set of goals I wanted to achieve during my semester abroad in Sevilla. At the top of my list was the desire to learn and improve my ability to speak Spanish. I was about to be given an opportunity to practice Spanish every day during class, while walking in the streets and spending time with my host family.

After several failed attempts to eliminate my use of English, I decided to sacrifice my native language once and for all and speak only Spanish for the duration of 40 days and 40 nights. At the time, the idea seemed simple and basic. However, I did not realize just how challenging and rewarding the next 40 days would be.

The first week without English was absolutely miserable. I quickly became frustrated with the fact that I my speaking abilities were not as complex as my thoughts. I could not fully express any of my feelings or opinions and felt as if my collegiate mind was severely hindered by my elementary vocabulary. Often times, I would chose to sit in silence and listen to all of my friends talk rather than contribute my 3 word sentences to the conversation. This was especially hard for me because I must admit I LOVE to talk.

Towards the end of the second week, everyday conversation started to be less of a struggle. I was able to formulate sentences quicker and process information a little faster. I even started listening to Spanish music as I walked to and from class to get more practice listening to native speakers. My host family was also very supportive and my host brother, who highly dislikes vegetables, promised to eat raw tomatoes every day during my no-English period.

As the days continued to pass, I quickly became more comfortable with speaking Spanish or at least with making mistakes. I was able to understand jokes between my host family members and even tease them back sometimes. I also started processing Spanish directly and did not need to put everything in English first. At this point, I decided I was ready for a Spanish movie and had an amazing time with my host family at the local Nervion Plaza Theater. We also spent another night at home watching The Mask of Zorro – personal favorite starring Antonio Banderas.

Before I knew it, the time had come when I was allowed to speak English again and I could not believe I actually made it! As I reflected back on my experience, I realized I not only developed my language skills but I also established a close relationship with my host family. My host brother decided to keep eating tomatoes because I would be still be speaking Spanish. However, I think he really just likes them and I really like Spanish! My Spanish still is not perfect but I sincerely believe that my no English promise certainly helped me improve a lot.