

In speech to MDC students, Spanish royalty raises the language issue

HIGHLIGHTS

King Felipe calls Spanish part of American heritage

Avoids politics but suggests Spanish here to stay

Royal couple at Miami's Freedom Tower



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Republican candidates have both derided and defended the use of Spanish on the campaign trail.

On Thursday, the king of Spain himself paid homage to the tongue of Cervantes in a timely speech to Miami Dade College students who packed the Freedom Tower in downtown Miami.

“With respect and admiration for the English language, today I feel Spanish is experienced in the United States as a part of its history, but especially as a substantial part of its current situation and a key component of its future identity,” said King Felipe VI of Spain.

Republican frontrunner Donald Trump has criticized his rival, former Florida governor Jeb Bush, for slipping into *español* on the campaign trail. During the Republican debate on Wednesday, Trump refused to back down from his comments that Bush should “really set the example by speaking English while in the United States.”

The Georgetown University-educated Spanish royal avoided any mention of American politics or the ongoing banter between GOP rivals over the use of Spanish. But he spoke mostly in *castellano* in his 30-minute speech, which examined the use of Spanish in the United States and celebrated its many accents, and students gave him a standing ovation. Someone in the crowd waved a Spanish flag when the monarch was finished speaking.

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“I agree that the Spanish-language is just as much ours,” said Cuban-American student Michelle M. Rodriguez, a 19-year old political science major.

“And we should be proud and make it our own,” said 19-year old Bryan Gonzalez, whose family is Cuban and Nicaraguan.

The king’s talk was academic in tone and he pointed to the country’s changing demographics as the best indicator of whether Spanish will thrive as a language. Hispanics are among the fastest growing populations in the U.S.

“It seems obvious that the future of language used in the United States will depend on what the American people – including their largest minority groups – want for themselves,” he said.

Felipe and his queen, Letizia, stopped by the iconic Freedom Tower as part of the royal couple’s first official trip to the United States. The monarchs were in Florida to visit St. Augustine, and previously met with President Barack Obama in Washington.

Juan Pablo Alfonso de Todos los Santos de Borbón y Grecia, which is his full name, assumed the crown in June 2014 during a scandalous time for the royal family. His sister has been tied up in a corruption scandal involving her husband. His father, Juan Carlos, stepped down after the public derided him as out of touch for going hunting in Africa while the country is struggling through deep economic turmoil.

By contrast, Felipe is popular at home. On Thursday, Miami Dade College President Eduardo Padrón presented the king with the college’s presidential medal. The 6-foot, six-inch tall Felipe had to bend deeply at the waist for Padrón to drape the medal around his neck.

Padrón called the king’s visit “history in the making.”

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