

Viva Español as language students go pop

by Tracy McVeigh

THEY HAVE treasured it, passed laws to protect its purity and even out aside a day to celebrate it, but the French now have to face up to *la verde horrible*.

The elegant native tongue of Voltaire, Proust, Zola and Johnny Raddlyday is falling out of fashion with Britons and being replaced by Spanish.

Judging by sales of teach yourself kits, would-be linguists have turned from French, traditionally the UK's most popular second language, to Spanish. With

five per cent of the world speaking Spanish as its first language, experts believe it is already on track to overtake English (at seven per cent) in five years as the most-spoken tongue after Mandarin Chinese.

In British schools, French is still the most-taught language but has fallen by four per cent in five years, while the progress of Spanish has been virtually uninterrupted. It has increased by 101 per cent, although it remains in third place behind German.

A spokeswoman for the Centre for Information on

Language Teaching, which looks at trends in examination entries, said: 'Spanish is suddenly very trendy among schoolchildren perhaps it is the new pop stars such as Ricky Martin and Jennifer Lopez.'

In adult learning centres, too, demand for Spanish is rising faster than any other language. And Isabel Mateos of the Spanish Embassy's education office in London believes this is partly because Spanish is easier than French.

She added: 'Increasingly British people are seeing the advantages of Spanish, especially as travel to

I'M ONLY DOING IT
TO ANNOY THE
FRENCH



South and Central America is on the increase.' A recent study by the embassy estimated that 250,000 people in England and Wales

are studying Spanish – a 60 per cent increase on 1996. GCSE entries in the subject rose by 101 per cent over the past decade, compared with 21 per cent for French.

Globally, an estimated 300 million people speak Spanish – the official language of 20 countries.

The study firm Linguaphone saw its French tapes and books outsold by Spanish ones this year. Chief executive Peter Jamieson said: 'Spanish now comfortably exceeds French as our most popular course, for both serious students and holidaymakers interested in simple repartee.'

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