

# ¿Qué? Podcast, Season 3, Episode 3

**Simon:** This is “¿Qué?”...Oh no \*laughter\* not again!

## Intro Music

**Simon:** Hello everyone! My name is Simon Hunter, I'm the editor of the English Edition of EL PAÍS, and this is ¿Qué? A podcast from El País that likes to ingest the best of the Spanish news before violently regurgitating it back out all over the place in the finest possible English.

Whether you're fascinated by Franco, mesmerised by Messi or astounded by Assange, we are here for you, don't touch that dial.

So sit back, relax, and let us break down all the Spanish stories that make you say,

## Sound bite

**Simon:** Today is October 9, 2019 and I am, as ever, here with my dedicated colleague Melissa Kitson, hello Melissa! How are you this week?

**Melissa:** I'm good, hello!

**Simon:** What news? \*laughter\* Last week we heard about your mouthguard...any news this week?

**Melissa:** Nothing quite as exciting

**Simon:** No sickness in your house

**Melissa:** Oh there's fake sickness

**Simon:** Fake sickness, well we've had real sickness in our house \*laughter\* hence my *vomitivo* introduction, but we're all on the mend now, I'm glad to say it. It looked like a scene from The Exorcist the other night at 1am but it's all going well. So, this is episode three of season three of the ¿Qué? podcast

As usual we will start with the correspondence we've received this week from our beloved listeners. We encourage you to get in touch you can find me on twitter

@simoninmadrid you can also use the hashtag #quepodcast or you can email EnglishEdition@elpais.es

Tell us where you're listening from, why you're listening and suggest topics for us. And leave us a review and share our podcast on social media! Get the word out, please!

So first of all, we heard from Joseph Sexton @josephsbcn:

“@simoninmadrid @mnkitson almost 32 minutes this week!” Thank you for that José “I’m liking it! Good episode, as ever.” So the longer episode..\*laughter\* I’ve seen Veronica today, I’ve spoken to her about the longer episode, she seems cool with it so the longer episode seems to have gone down well!

I’ve also heard from my wife! “Oh! @simoninmadrid Aún no me has mencionado en la nueva temporada de #quepodcast tendré que volver a hacer un Shepherd's pie!”

That refers to a legendary clip of my wife saying “hello, can I have a Shepherds pie, please” In a Welsh accent **[Sound Bite]**, which I managed to get played on the BBC Radio 1 Chris Moyles breakfast show back in the day.

### **[Sound bite of clip on Chris Moyles Radio 1 show]**

**Simon:** She says, “Enhorabuena con la nueva temporada. Os entrevistaremos en @agencia\_comma.” So Melissa Rosa wants to interview us at her communications company which would be exciting, talk about the podcast, hopefully we will get to do that soon.

We heard from our dear old friend of the show Chris Thompson, he says,

“Greetings anew,

Nice episode - you really do manage the summary and analysis in a personable and yet professional way - nice trick. Maybe you could try harder to promote the podcast to Spanish students learning English - Melissa for how to prepare a piece and Simon for the use of fillers like err, uum and well-er.” Honestly, do I do so many fillers?! I’m not sure if that’s strictly fair Chris

Chris also says,

“The EuroCitizens mention made me wonder if you'll be covering the Cita Previa demonstrations? I heard a two liner about it on the radio this morning and a bit of research turned up that there are "mafias" selling the citas previas.”

Now I hadn't heard about this and I don't know if this is true or not but this is about people getting appointments to go and register ahead of Brexit basically, Brits registering ahead of Brexit

**Melissa:** oohh

**Simon:** And apparently, in areas obviously where there are lots of British people living, there is a lot of demand for these appointments and apparently “mafias” are selling them on. So I don't know whether that's true or not, if anyone else has heard please do let us know!

He says, “if you think you can hotfoot it down to Extranjería you may bump into a little problem that we several pint of lager-quaffing-coastal-Brits have been experiencing for a while as we suddenly realised the need for a last minute "residencia" before the Brexit apocalypse”

And he signs off as usual, “Un abrazo cálido pero aún varonil” \*laughter\* So thank you very much for that Chris.

On the issue of Brexit, Brexit fans...Brexit podcast fans...\*laughter\* ‘Brexit fans’ \*laughter\* not many of those round here...podcast fans will no doubt already be aware that bloody Brexit podcast ad is back!

**Simon:** Do you remember me talking about this ahead of the...

**Melissa:** Ohh, yes

**Simon:** when we were supposed to leave back in March

**[Sound bite of Brexit ad]**

**Simon:** Well they're back! Every podcast has been ruined for me by the nefarious Brexit ads saying, “Are you ready? You need to find out if you're living, you can live here legally,” Yeah and it's targeted, I mean they must be going out all across Europe but

who knows, it doesn't look like we'll be leaving at the end of the month but, who knows, I shouldn't speak too soon.

Now, an interesting email here that I got this morning actually. It's about an article that we published yesterday, I feel like... this is from Carl Painter, I feel like Carl may have written to us before. He says,

"Hi El Pais team,

I am an avid listener to the podcast and reader of El Pais so firstly would like to say please keep up the good work.

I was reading the article in Spanish from 7th October regarding "Los últimos Domingos con Franco" as I am very interested in the Spanish Civil War and the ongoing Franco exhumation of the dictator. I thoroughly enjoyed the article and a couple of days later saw the same article reproduced in English, unsurprisingly titled "The Last Sundays with Franco."

Reading through it I noticed that it must have been about half the length of the original with virtually all of the mildly controversial or disparaging comments about the people attending his tomb removed and a real loss of the context of the original article. This is something that I have noticed in the majority of the translated articles reproduced into English from the original version.

I accept that there will not be like-for-like translations due to the differences in the two languages but a wholesale reduction seems a pointless exercise. Are the English articles paid for via the translators on a word-by-word basis as this economic argument seems to be the only rationale for such an approach?

Regards,

Carl Painter"

Well, lots of things to say here Carl. First of all, I wouldn't completely agree that its stripped out that piece, and lost all of the context. Very rarely is there an article that's over 2,000 words as this one is that doesn't benefit from a little but of tightening up, I would argue. I think generally if you can't tell a story in 800-1,000 words there's probably something wrong with your story. Also, of course we are a small team as you will all know, regular listeners will know, there's just three of us so it's a question of time.

That particular piece was written by Manuel Jabois who's got a very distinctive style, it was a very colorful piece, it was somewhere between, it was kind of almost verging on

an opinion piece really so, when it came to cutting it down, what my colleague Susana Urra did is she did go for a lot of the quotes. A lot of the stuff was quite sort of esoteric to Spain, to Spaniards, that maybe would have needed a bit more explanation than the space we had allowed for.

I listened to a very interesting podcast from The Guardian, The Guardian long read podcast about, it was called something like 'Why can't we agree on what the truth is anymore?' or something like that and it was a bit of an examination of journalism and of course editing decisions, before the days of the internet, editing decisions used to be more opaque but now, of course, they're more transparent and open to scrutiny. And in our case, of course they are completely open given that everyone can clearly see our source material and if you hold up the two articles next to each other you can see what we've done.

I mean, all I would say is, when we get trolled or when we get criticism, often people sort of think that we make decisions out of ignorance or, you know, just because we felt like it or there's some sort of dark manipulation going on. But, I can assure you that all of the decisions that we make we agonize... well \*laughter\* I'm probably quite annoying in that I agonize over them with the rest of the team probably a bit more than...

**Melissa:** No! We all have our...

**Simon:** \*laughter\* Melissa would enjoy, and Susana. But yeah, so in that case we cut that down by about 500 words I think in the end, and yeah sometimes just something has to go and in this case we took out quite a lot of the quotes but thanks very much for your email Carl, good for our readers to keep us on our toes!

## **Music**

**Simon:** Alright and, now to finish, probably my favourite...\*Melissa laughs\*..Melissa knows what's coming! Probably the favourite email that we've ever had, from a gentleman called Neil Halley who is, I must say, is obviously a very well settled foreigner living here in Spain!

He writes...now normally I don't read out the emails to Melissa when I receive them, I wait until we're in the podcast so that I get her first reaction, but this one I just had to read out to her,

"Hello Simon and Melissa

I am enjoying your podcasts talking about deep and important subjects, however I have a more trivial query.

Why are there always the same contestants on Pasapalabra?"

**[Sound bite of theme tune]**

Pasapalabra! Amazingly he should write about this. It's this game show that's just been taken off the air because it turns out they lost this lawsuit to the UK broadcaster ITV about the format. But he asks,

"The current contestants seem to have been on forever and there never appears to be a winner or loser!

On the same theme do any of the contestants on Ruleta de Suerte ever watch the programme before going on?"

This is great Neil I don't think we've ever had an email from a foreign resident of Spain who actually watches Spanish TV \*laughter\* and he says,

"Keep up the podcats," I think he meant podcasts, "it's good to listen about current affairs with only one person talking at a time compared to the normal half a dozen talking over each other." - Yes that would be when my wife interviews me Neil. He says,

"Regards from Blanes, Girona. Neil Halley.

P.S. another mystery has been solved as I was hearing at the end of the podcast, "I'm Simon Hunter and I'm a little kitten" \*laughter\* - now I know it's Melissa Kitson!"

No! It is not a little kitten presenting the podcast Neil! It is Melissa Kitson! And I love that and I think now, from now on Melissa you are going to have to sign off 'I'm a little kitten'

**Melissa:** I'm a little kitten, it made me laugh so much! I told everyone that I could think of

**Simon:** Thank you so much for that! Right, without further ado, now this extra time that we've got on the podcast just seems to be for us to waffle on about our correspondence.

So let's, without further ado, pop to our two stories, starting with the extraordinary spying case involving Julian Assange. Tell us about that Melissa.

**[Sound bite]**

**Melissa:** Yes, well a Spanish security company is under investigation for spying on Wikileaks founder Julian Assange while he was living at the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

Spain's high court, the Audiencia Nacional, opened the investigation into Undercover Global and its boss David Morales, after Assange himself filed a criminal complaint against the firm.

David Morales, who used to be part of Spain's Marine Ops, has been arrested and released on bail.

So this company, Undercover Global or UC Global, was tasked with protecting the Ecuadorian embassy between 2012 and 2018, but documents, video and audio material that EL PAÍS has had access to show that it was collecting information on the cyberactivists and the people who visited him.

This information was then passed on to the CIA, according to documents seen by EL PAÍS. Morales allegedly told staff at UC Global that he also worked "for the Americans."

Several video cameras, which could also capture audio, recorded dozens of Assange's meetings. There were also hidden microphones in decorative items inside the embassy, in fire extinguishers and even in the women's bathroom, where Assange would meet with his lawyers for fear of being spied on.

The security team had to monitor Assange's every move, record his conversations, and take note of his moods. They even carried out a handwriting examination behind his back, and in another peculiar case, took a feces sample from a baby's diaper to see whether Assange had fathered a child with one of his collaborators.

Needless to say, this intelligence work had nothing to do with the security company's protection duties.

And it wasn't just Assange who was being targeted. Morales also ordered his employees to monitor visits from people considered priority targets – Americans, Russians, attorneys and journalists.

These visits were monitored, the video and audio were recorded, and reports about the conversations were drawn up and were sent to a server to the company's base in Jerez de la Frontera, which the CIA allegedly had access to.

Some of the people affected by this surveillance were Baywatch actress Pamela Anderson, investigative journalist Lowell Bergman, and Washington Post reporter Ellen Nakashima.

Morales, for his part has refused to say whether his security company spied on Assange: "All the information is confidential and it belongs to the government of Ecuador. We simply did a job."

No doubt we will learn more about what this job actually entailed as the investigation continues.

**Simon:** Baywatch! \*laughter\* There's a name that I haven't heard for a long long time, I'd almost forgotten that 'Pammy' was in Baywatch!

### **Sound bite**

**Simon:** So yeah, so kudos, again to use that word, kudos to our colleague José María Irujo, who's the head of the El Pais investigative journalism department, who has been - basically the High Court investigation came about because of Irujo's reporting. It's not the other way round, it's not that he was getting this information, as it so often seems to be in Spain, not from a leaky high court investigation but actually the other way round.

And it sheds a lot of light on the extraordinary circumstances that Assange was living in during that time, in the Ecuadorian Embassy.

What we published yesterday was a video which included images from the company. In the video you can see Assange meeting with people like Pamela Anderson, but then you can also see the photos that the security team were taking of the items belonging to those visitors, because visitors, when they checked into the Ecuadorian Embassy, were made to hand over their personal belongings which included their cell phones and other devices.

And then this team, what they were actually doing was taking apart the cell phones to be able to take pictures of their ID numbers which theoretically makes it possible or at least easier to hack them.

Pamela Anderson apparently wrote down her passwords to her email and the passcode to her iPad on a piece of paper which I'm not quite sure... \*laughter\*... why she did that. I wasn't clear about whether she was doing that to give it to Assange or whether it was just in her possession. But, low and behold, the security company took pictures of it. So

if you're listening Pammy \*laughter\* I hope you've changed your password from 'Baywatch1989' \*laughter\* to whatever it is now!

It also emerged this morning that Morales, the head of this security company, was actually arrested in August, he's been released on bail. He had two pistols with the serial numbers filed off in his house, as well as 20,000 euros in cash.

And also, it's worth mentioning that, earlier in the year it emerged that a reporter and two computer experts actually tried to extort Assange by offering to sell him some of this personal data back.

And this again, there's another Spanish link here, this was a meeting that took place at a Madrid hotel, and the former president of Ecuador who obviously was a key in actually offering Assange asylum in the embassy in the first place. He wrote earlier this year on his Twitter account that this Spanish company was spying on him as well, and on members of his family. And he claims, Correa claimed, that they were bought by the CIA.

So yeah quite an extraordinary web of espionage here and no doubt more detail to emerge. Let's see whether it comes from Irujo or whether it comes from the courts. So definitely keep an eye on that story on our website because it is pretty extraordinary.

Alright, let's move on to our second topic for the week which is an extraordinary story from up in the north of Spain. Why don't you tell us about this Melissa?

**Melissa:** Yes this is a very grisly and strange story [**Sound bite**]

So, one day, a woman in Castro Urdiales in Cantabria hears a knock on the door. It's her neighbor, 61-year-old Carmen Merino, and she's carrying a box. She says it is filled with sex toys and asks the woman if she wouldn't mind keeping it at her place, in case the Civil Guard come by to search her house in relation to the disappearance of her partner, Jesús María Baranda, who has been missing since February.

The woman agrees but soon the box starts to smell. The stench is so bad she decides to open it. What she finds is not sex toys, but the severed head of Jesús María in an advanced state of decomposition. The shock gives her a panic attack and she calls the police.

Merino is now under arrest on suspicion of murder. DNA tests have confirmed that the head belongs to her partner.

There's now questions about his body. Investigators suspect that it may have been unwittingly disposed of by a cleaning lady. Back in February, Merino called the woman who regularly cleans her home and told her to take out several "big, black and heavy" trash bags and dispose of them wherever she could.

The police are now looking for the remains in the trash dump but are not hopeful of finding the body.

It is one of many question marks still hanging over the case. The other question is why? There are suspicions that the murder may have been motivated by money, but there's still very little known about this very peculiar case.

**Simon:** Yeah really is, I mean it's the most extraordinary story and actually connected to one of our other podcast heroes who's Mr Alan Jones who we were, we've been in contact with in the past. He actually lives 100 meters from where this all took place, he tweeted me the other day about this.

He said "You missed that the head was boiled (who has a pan big enough!) and wrapped in aluminium foil." And he says "I don't normally get quite so interested in such gory details but this is an exception as the head was discovered only about 100 m from where I live."

Now this, I mean there's not much analysis to do here but it throws up lots of, sort of, issues about journalism. Alan was telling us about that the head had been boiled, and also about the cleaner. Now at that point our reporters hadn't confirmed those parts of the story and I think it's worth saying, that you have to be very careful with a story like this which obviously, you know, it attracted so much media interest and quite a lot of wild speculation. And obviously, for us, we're never going to include any reporting that hasn't been confirmed by our own reporters or from a trusted source such as a news agency.

So now I tweeted, when I was writing this story I put out a tweet while I'd literally just written the first paragraph and I sent out a tweet that said, "Your opening sentence should pull the reader in."

And then I wrote - "Will this do? "The Civil Guard in Cantabria are searching for the remains of a 67-year-old man named Jesús María B. R., after his partner gave her neighbor a box to take care of containing his head."

Now this prompted a kind of crowdsourced editing of my sentence because it wasn't the best constructed sentence and our good friend Matthew Bennett weighed in, my friend Sally Davies from Barcelona, who's also a journalist and an editor, she weighed in about just exactly how we should write that sentence. Sally gave the key word actually which was to say 'severed head', that was really what the sentence was missing.

But after a while, of course, someone pointed out, look, this is a murder case, this is a crime, and I did kind of realise that we'd all got a bit carried away. And I saw some, not related to our conversation, but I saw someone else point out that all of the jokes and the kind of comments online about this case may not have been so forthcoming from people were the victim female.

Now I don't want to sort of play in to, this is a kind of, I sound a bit like a Vox politician \*laughter\* you know cos one of Vox's things is about how domestic violence affects men and women. But it actually did make me stop and think, and say - actually yeah, that is a very good point that, you know, would we have been, would people be so lighthearted about it if the victim had been female and that it was a woman's head that had turned up in a box? And also just, you know, should we be being light hearted about this story when of course, this is a man who had a family, he had children, has been apparently, allegedly murdered?

So yeah, twitter is not a very nice place a lot of the time but I think actually, in this case, it served just as a sort of gentle reminder of the sensitivity that is needed with this kind of story.

It brings me to another journalistic debate that has come up this week which is about a story that we just published in English this morning which is about the Spanish businessman who literally hunted a museums worth of animals.

And this is a man called, Marcial Gómez Sequeira, he's the former president of the private healthcare insurer Sanitas, made a lot of money when he sold his stake in that insurer, he sold it to the British company BUPA actually. And basically this guy has dedicated a lot of his life to hunting and killing animals, big game animals, smaller animals, I mean just all kinds of animals and there are plans to put over 1,000 of his trophies in some kind of display, in some kind of museum, in Extremadura.

Now this article in its Spanish version actually prompted quite a lot of complaints to our readers editor, our readers 'ombudsman', the 'defensor del lector', who's a veteran journalist from EL PAIS called Carlos Yarnoz. And basically a lot of people are criticising

the journalists for having run the story in the first place and that's been reflected this morning in our English version, we've had a few comments like that saying "Why are you giving this person attention? Why are you giving him publicity?"

The original author of the article Manuel, he sort of responded and said "Well look, you know, I'm a journalist I've conveyed the information from my interview with this man in a completely unbiased and" ...What's the word?

**Melissa:** Impartial

**Simon:** Impartial, thank you. An impartial way. And then it's the reader that has to respond to that story based on what kind of response that they, it awakes within them, which I think is a really, really good point.

And some people have criticised him for not going to animal associations and finding out what they said about it, to which he responded, "Well what are they going to say? They are going to say well we're against hunting, obviously."

Manuel actually used to be a vet, I don't know if you knew that?

**Melissa:** Oh!

**Simon:** Yeah, before he became a journalist. So obviously he comes at it with a particular, you know you might expect him to come at it with a particular angle but he certainly, if he has got personal view of it, he certainly kept it out of the article.

And again, to refer to our columnist Manuel Jabois, he's written a great piece about it which isn't up in English unfortunately but it is, you can find it in Spanish. And he was talking about this particular case, he was comparing it to the way that cinemas have been putting out warnings about the Joker film, about how that, you know, these threats of violence related to the Joker film, and you know almost telling the viewer what they should think about the Joker film before they see it.

And he's suggested that, in his case, he's referred to the case of this article about the hunter and he suggested that maybe journalists should put an emoji after each line \*laughter\* in their articles to reflect how they feel about each thing that they're writing about.

So if you read good spanish, go and check out the article that the readers editor Carlos Yarnoz wrote about that particular article because it's very interesting.

### **Sound bite**

**Simon:** All right, so let's wrap up the third episode of season three

My name is Simon Hunter -

**Melissa:** I'm a little kitten

**Simon:** And this was ¿Qué? A podcast that tries to explain what happens in Spain to those of us who sometimes get a little bit lost in translation.

This is an EL PAÍS production, it was recorded right here in the EL PAÍS newsroom under the expert guidance of our stand-in producer José Juan Morales, and you can listen to it on your favorite podcast app.

You can also request it via Alexa, Siri or your Google Assistant. We'll be back next week with a brand new host of issues. Thank you for listening, adios!

**Melissa:** Ciao!