

**ENGLISH IN INTERNATIONAL NEWS IN THE
SPANISH PRESS
(A Methodological Approach)**

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The newspaper article to which this talk makes reference is from “Diario 16” of Monday, February 25th 1991, the day after the Allied land offensive to take back Kuwait from the Iraqis, during the Gulf War, and my examples are nearly all taken from two international conflicts in the Middle East, that of the Suez Canal of 1956, and that of the Gulf War.

This brief talk is divided into three parts: I shall begin with some general reflections about the influence of English on Spanish; secondly I shall talk about problems of etymology, and thirdly I shall go on to classify the types of linguistic influences noticed.

GENERAL REFLECTIONS

Some people, seeing the extent to which Spanish is influenced by foreign languages, relate this phenomenon to the Spanish character. While the so-called “Anglo-Saxon” countries are comparatively impervious to the influence of foreign languages, the Spanish like whatever is from abroad more than what is home-grown, whether it is cars, videos or music, and welcomes it with open arms. This is an interpretation I personally like, although there are other views, such as that expressed by Chris Pratt (4), when he links the extent of borrowing and foreign influence with the technological backwardness that Spain has suffered during the last three centuries, and furthermore claims that there have been practically no Spanish neologisms in recent history.

One must be slightly cautious, especially before a Spanish audience, in talking about foreign influence, which may be either denied or rejected for a number of non-

linguistic reasons. We are talking, in the last analysis, not about one language as such exerting pressure on another, but about institutions, news agencies, media, and the people and governments behind them. Circumstances have dictated the use of English as the source language for most foreign news, the language used wherever the news is made, then translated into others, and of course these other languages are inevitably influenced.

Language follows the flag, whether it is the “Tricolore”, the Stars and Stripes or the Union Jack. Robert Phillipson¹, speaks of “Linguistic Imperialism”, as if there were a deliberate and politically motivated undermining of other languages by English, R. R. Day² speaks of “Linguicide”, a kind of genocide of minority languages especially in the Third World, and some Spanish writers such as Salvador de Madariaga write along the same lines, referring to the “Pasión y Muerte del Castellano”³. People are rightly sensitive to changes which take place within their language, and who can deny that it is in the interests of any state to encourage the use of its language.

Spanish newspapers are very sensitive, in theory, to the problems of Anglicisms in the press. The “Manual of Style” of the Agencia “Efe” (1980) draws attention to the “colonialismo al que tradicionalmente estaba sometida nuestra lengua..el arrollador acoso del colonialismo cultural anglosajón..el anglicismo se ha impuesto ya en el lenguaje popular..” etc., but in practice they are still used. The very same manual uses “lead” when it could speak of “entrada”/“entradilla”, for example.

ETYMOLOGY

A Spanish dictionary can only tell us just so much about the present-day meaning of a word or its origin. The meaning in use of a word, especially in combination with others in fixed expressions, can be very different from the “dictionary definition”. It is true that neither part of the word “intercomunicación” is originally English, but the modern meaning and use have little to do with ancient Latin or Greek; “internacional” is a translation of “international”, an English neologism of the 18th century, invented by the then Prime Minister Jeremy Bentham; and the same is true for hundreds of other neoclassical compound words to do with modern science, like “tecnología” and “tecnológico”(line 151) as Chris Pratt points out in his book “El Anglicismo en el Español Peninsular Contemporáneo”⁴. Other compound words which owe a lot to English are “ecosistema”, “bienestar” and “telégrafo”. As with words, so with expressions: it is true that neither “espacio” nor “aire” are English in origin, but the concept of a nation’s “air space” (espacio aéreo) has been imported from the English language, and the same is true of “cortina de hierro” (used before the expression “telón de acero”), “orden internacional”,

¹ “Linguistic Imperialism”, by Robert Phillipson, Oxford University Press. 1992.

² “ESL: A Factor in Linguistic Genocide?” by R.R.Day, in “TESOL 1980” Washington D.C.

³ “Pasión y Muerte del Castellano” by Salvador de Madariaga, in “Cosas y Gentes” Vol. II “Procosas” p99-115.

⁴ “El Anglicismo en el Español Peninsular Contemporáneo” by Chris Pratt. Gredos. Madrid 1980.

or “opinión mundial”. Both “super” and “potencia” have a Latin root, but “superpotencia” (superpower), is an Anglicism. Both “doctrina” and “militar” (1.42) have a Latin root, but in combination they sound like the American English “military doctrine” to me, and the same with “unidad de apoyo”, (support unit) (1.58). “Campo” is the Spanish equivalent of “field” or “camp” or “ground”, but owes nothing to them and is not derived from them, but “campo de concentración”, “campo petrolífero”, “campo de pruebas” and “campo de acción” owe plenty to the English language. As Pratt says, and I partly agree with him, we should be primarily concerned with what is called the “étimo inmediato” of a word or expression, in this case English, and not with the “étimo último”, in these cases Latin, that is, where it came from indirectly.

The etymological question of which language came first can be a thorny and often a sterile one, as we often lack chronological data accurate enough to be sure of the date of the first appearance of a word or expression in different languages. Dictionaries themselves are often vague and inadequate. We often need to rely on extra-linguistic data, historical elements which with the use of common sense lead us to make an inference, and this will very often point to an immediate source which is neither of the two languages we are considering, often French. There is, too, a large body of words and expressions belonging to what Rosén⁵ called “Standard Average European”, which have existed in many languages for too long for their history to be unravelled now. eg. Who can tell with certainty whether *el “ganapan”* came before or after “the breadwinner” or the French or German equivalent? Both formal written English, which we find in international news, and Spanish, are rooted in Latin, so they have many things in common, which facilitates what is called the “contamination” of one language by another, when they are juxtaposed by translation or other forms of language contact. On the other hand, where a word is similar, usually with a Latin base, in two European languages, they may have developed in a parallel or divergent way during these last centuries, without there being necessarily language contact or “contamination” of one by the other. This is proved by the existence of the many “false friends” that exist between Spanish and English, like “actually”, “realize”, “assist” etc. (although we are beginning to see this divergence eroded, eg. “dirección asistida”, “asistencia médica” etc.)

Turning to the press, some parts of it are very much influenced by English, others are not. Pages on art and literature have practically no Anglicisms, as the new trends, new ideas, novelties, are more likely to occur on the European continent than in English-speaking countries. If I read the term “post modern”⁶, I infer it has travelled to English from other languages, while in international news it is likelier that vocabulary, expressions and morphosyntactic influence have originated in English, at least during the last 40 or so years, when apart from anything else, it has been an English speaking country which has called the tune in international affairs.

The correspondent, in this case José Manuel Moreno, writing for “Diario 16” from New York, is exposed daily to a flood of news from English speaking sources. He may

⁵ Rosén (1957), quoting Blanc (1957) “Hebrew in Israel, Trends and Problems. Middle East Review.

⁶ “The European” September 7th 1993

come to wonder which is his L1 and which his L2. The case of a correspondent is an atypical one, that of L2 having some effect on L1 ! Usually the term “language transfer” is employed for the influence of your native language on your Target language ! But a native speaker, living abroad, may come to wonder which is his L1 and which his L2. Some would say that the correspondent is committing “errors”, others that he is simply making a “language transfer”; which we prefer is a matter of taste, and depends on what we mean by an “error”.

Some loan words have been so long in the language or are so well known that the correspondent does not even bother to mark them out in his/her text. We see here “el Army” and “la Navy” (ll. 115 + 118), untranslated because every educated reader is supposed to understand them. Some anglicisms have been in the language for centuries, so that they are not even noticed: “este”, “norte” and “sur” (ll. 112, 120, 110) in this case. There is also the case where, almost unnoticed now, but criticised by Madariaga, Emilio Lorenzo and others, foreign names, not from English but from languages with a different alphabet, for instance Russian or Arabic, are written using the accepted English spelling, names like Beijing (unpronounceable in Spanish. At least “Pekin” was slightly different from the English version), Husein, Primakov, Kuwait, Khasravi etc. even when a more phonetically correct Spanish version is possible eg. “Chejov” is a more faithful phonetic/phonological reproduction of the Russian writer’s name than “Chekhov”, and “Jasravi” than “Khasravi”. Even the name “Sadam Husein” (l.118), though it avoids the double letters, uses the English “H”. There are also initials imported unchanged into Spanish, in this article “USA” (l. 44), “MLRS” (Multiple Launch Rocket System) (l. 27), and “SEAL” (l. 114).

When a translator or correspondent wishes to mark out the foreign “loan word” in his/her text, however, there are three devices: inverted commas, as in “día G” (l.2), italics, as in *marines* (ll. 63, 74 + 114), and brackets as in line 27, where some foreign initials are explained in Spanish. But even here between these three examples we can see some problems. “Día G” is not English but Spanish, “*marines*” is English but comes originally from Spanish central America, and the initials are not a foreign word. How do we classify these foreign borrowings ?

TYPES OF INFLUENCE

Of the six categories of language transfer mentioned by Larry Selinker in his book “Rediscovering Interlanguage”⁷, following Weinreich⁸ and Haugen’s⁹ classification of the early 1950’s, we can see the following illustrated in this article:

One type is what he calls “Loan Translations”, that is “a new item or concept which is imported from a donor to a recipient culture and is translated literally.” Sometimes

(7) “Rediscovering Interlanguage” by Larry Selinker, Longman 1992.

(8) H.H. Weinreich (1953)

(9) “The Analysis of Linguistic Borrowing” by Einar Haugen, in “Language” Vol 26, 1950a. pp 210-231.

we can call this a transfer, a “calco”, sometimes it is just a translation: how would we categorize “Jardin de Infancia” for example, as a transfer from the German idea of “Kindergarten”, or as a simple translation? Is the idea of “Jardin” here the same as the one traditionally accepted in Spanish, ie. is it a pre-existing “equivalent”, or does it acquire a new dimension with the importation of the term “Kindergarten”? In the text in front of you, you will see “Cortina de humo” (1.144), “Manual de Campo” (1.39), “Batalla Tierra-Aire” (1.42), “fuerza de disparo” (1.6) etc, and there is no doubt that some of the words in Spanish actually antedate their English equivalents, but the concepts involved in the combination of words, the new expressions that have been formed, have been borrowed by Spanish, ie. the phenomena is either only reported on or has been imported into this country’s culture. Single words that are just transferred into a similar Spanish form, for better or for worse, are for example the following “calcos”: “aviación” (1.12), “tanques” (1.12), “trincheras” (1.69), “choque” (1.51), this last presumably suggested by its phonetic likeness to “shock”. All these words and phrases are translations, but new meanings are given to Spanish words by the importation of the idea or the phenomenon, so they are not purely and simply translations.

A second category mentioned by Selinker is that of the “loanblend”, which is defined as occurring when “the borrower imports part of the model, and replaces part of it by something already in his own language.” This is especially common with affixes, which are often translated and added to a native word. Two examples found recently have been in “La Voz de Galicia” of Sept. 21st 1993: “La declaración es inusual” instead of “poco usual” and used to translate “unusual” by the London-based correspondent; and “Michael Portillo denunció la indisciplina que se registra en las filas del partido” = la falta de disciplina, or “indiscipline” as the correspondent read or heard in the original English. As Pratt says: “Tradicionalmente, para negar el adjetivo, el español ha tenido que recurrir a “poco...”, construcción que resulta torpe desde el punto de vista sintáctico.” Translators very often use relatively infrequent Spanish affixes to translate common English ones, and thus certain Spanish affixes become “artificially” more frequent, eg. “-ante / -ente” to translate “-ing”, as in “fuerzas atacantes” (line 9), or “alarmante”, “desconcertante”, “aplastante” etc.; “contra” to translate “counter-”(line78) “contraataque”, “des-” to translate “dis-” or “de-” as in “desmembrar” (line 68), “desembarco” (line 115), and outside the text “descolonizar”, “desescalación”, “desnuclearización” and “desmoralizar”. “un-” or “non-” become “in-” “unimaginable” > “inimaginable”, “unusual” > “inusual” instead of “poco usual”, “non-observance” > “inobservancia”; “non-” is translated as “no-” before nouns, as in “los no violentos”. This particular article does not back up my case, but there is ample evidence outside this text that English affixes stimulate the use of their Spanish counterparts. It can be seen, too, how verbs are often formed in modern Spanish using the suffix “-izar” eg. “colonizar”, “especializar”, “climatizar”, “traumatizar”, “flexibilizar”, “estabilizar”, “profesionalizar” etc. (even “improductivizar” has been recorded !), formations which have been influenced by the common verb ending “-ize” in American English neologisms. It is quite possible that the verb “movilizar” in its military sense, has not come directly from English, but it is doubtful whether the formation of the words “movilización” and consequently

“desmovilización” have not been in some way originated or at least influenced. If “internacional” is an Anglicism, it is no less true that its derivatives “internacionalizar” and “internacionalización” are also. There are also cases, as mentioned by Emilio Lorenzo¹⁰, where foreign words adopt foreign plurals, with “-s”, not “-es”. An example here is “Harriers” (l. 124), not “Harrieres”, but outside the text there are many more common examples: “campings”, “comics”, “gangsters”, “play-offs”, “pins” etc.

A third group is when an existing native word disappears under pressure from a foreign one. In international news we find “posición” taking over where before “actitud” or “disposición” might have been used, and the same can be said of “misión” as opposed to “tarea especial”, “explotar” as against “hacer explosión” or “estallar”, “interferencia” against “injerencia”, “crucial” against “decisivo”, “drástico” against “radical”, and “sustancial” pushing out “importante”. In this text we might have seen “cohete” 40 or even 10 years before, but practically all they talk about in 1991 are “misiles” (l. 28), even when the original here was “rocket” and not “missile”. This is linked with another category where the foreign word or expression pushes the native word into a corner, that is, it loses some of its meanings. “Cohete” may in the future mean little more than a kind of firework.

A fourth very important type of borrowing is called “Expansive” borrowing, in Selinker’s words “Semantic shifts occur after the word has been borrowed, with the new word taking on meanings it did not have before.” In this text we see native words assuming the extension in meaning given to them by their foreign equivalents, although of course we can never be absolutely sure that they are not autochthonous extensions of meaning, independent of foreign influence. In this text I would suggest that the special meanings given to “satélite” (l. 105), “paralizar” (l. 77), “sistema” (ll. 5,27 + 149), “baterías” (l. 126 + 155) and “ablandar” (l. 34), are due not to independent Spanish development of their meaning, but to foreign influence, (other examples could be “inteligencia” in the sense of “información”, “política” in the sense of “policy”).

A fifth category is called “Additive” borrowing, where two words exist side by side, like “fútbol” and “balompié” where one word, often but not always the foreign one comes to dominate (see the predominance in football terms of “saque de esquina” over “corner”, and the practical disappearance of “offside” in favour of “fuera de juego”). In 1956¹¹ the word “pipeline” was used in Spanish to refer to “oleoducto”, but the native term seems to have won out during these intervening years.

Syntactic elements imported are few here. We might point to some compound words eg. “aerotransportadas” (l.122), or the compounds “norteamericano” (l. 14), like “sudafricano” etc. which, as they are Anglicisms in French¹² presumably are in Spanish too. These words have the “adjective” element first, unnatural in Spanish but normal in English, just as in “superpotencia” and other examples already given.

¹⁰ *La Voz de Galicia*, Día 1 de agosto, 1956

¹¹ “Dictionnaire des Anglicismes” by J. Rey-Dubove and G. Gagnon. (Les Usuels du Robert).

¹² Line references are to *Diario 16*, Monday February 25th 1991, page 6.

CONCLUSIÓN

We have seen how the English language has exerted a continuing and insistent influence, making inroads not only into Spanish but into most other languages, at all levels. The end result of the process may be a convergence of all European languages, partly as a result of extensive translation. Perhaps we are seeing the beginning of a historic forging of a fresh language under the influence of English. Maybe they will be enriched in some ways, but at the same time their "porvenir", (so as to avoid "futuro!") will surely be made poorer, if they are made to forfeit their own unique characteristics, their unique expressions and words. The problem is that although all the "Manuals of Style and Usage" of Spanish newspapers and news agencies, and the readership with them, set out with the intention of opposing the spread of anglicisms, the day-to-day pressures and practicalities of the news correspondents' situation increase the flow of influences from English to Spanish, which at present seems unstoppable.