

Morphological Study of Verb Anglicisms in Spanish Computer Language

Ricardo M. Reyes and Rodney C. Jubilado

Abstract

One of the obvious reasons which contributes to the linguistic hegemony of English is the rise of the USA as the sole world power in terms of economy and global politics. English is foremost the language of international communication be it in personal engagement, institutional exchange of ideas and even in the virtual world, which is made possible by the internet. In the virtual world, English exerts more of its influence among its speakers as seen in social media such as Facebook, blogs, and other chat avenues and websites. Moreover, computer technology and informatics are by default in English with other languages as necessary options. Next to English, Spanish is one of the widely spoken languages even in cyberspace. With English being more lexically dominant in the lexicalization of computer concepts, Anglicisms in Spanish often result when the two languages are in contact in the cyberspace. It is along this line that this study is done to analyze how Anglicisms have been integrated into the Spanish lexicon in the field of computer language including the social media in cyberspace. Due to its rapid evolution in modern times, computer language requires a very large supply of new terminology, which exerts an enormous pressure over languages in a lexical level. This lexical gap is, in most cases, filled in by borrowed terms that already exist, generally from the English language. This process of language integration can take place by using English words in their original form, or by transforming them in a morphophonemic level. This paper discusses the linguistic processes that take place in the latter type of Anglicisms, focusing on verbs, as no comprehensive study has been conducted in this area.

Key terms: Anglicism, loanword, Spanish, morphological productivity, lexicology

1. Introduction

Technological developments constantly pressure languages to produce new lexical units. The need to label and name the new objects and features that appear daily in this modern and globalized world is a big challenge both for linguists and for the rest of the language users. In the field of information technology, or Informatics, it is exceptionally challenging for lexicologists to meet the demand for new terms. This is due, first, to the high speed at which technology develops in this area, with new devices, features and applications that need to be named somehow, continuously flooding the markets. The second reason is that because normally these technological advances are often introduced to the world market with names in English, given the technological superiority of some of the countries using this language, and the vast global presence of this language as a medium for the dissemination of knowledge, and its prominence in communication networks (De la Cruz, Tejedor, Diez & Cerda, 2007). In recent decades, global communication depends largely on the Internet, as services such as e-mail and applications like Skype and instant-messaging services offered by multiple companies have revolutionized the way in which we communicate. For this reason, Spanish has recently been extensively influenced by the English terminologies used in the Internet (Posterguillo, 2002). According to McGregor (2009):

“With the increasing globalization of English during recent decades, and its status as the international language of business, science and technology, many languages have borrowed, and continue to borrow, considerable numbers of English specialized terms from these domains”.

Consequently, it must be noted that languages offer alternatives for dealing with this disproportionate demand of lexical units. According to Tosi (2001), Anglicisms can be transferred to a language in three ways: first, copying the word while maintaining its original morphology and with very few phonetic changes, which generally occurs in some nouns and acronyms. The second, adapting the existing English word to the phonological and morphological rules of the borrowing language. Lastly, calquing English words which are already available, by translating them literally (Tosi, 2001). Each of these methods has its advantages and disadvantages. Nevertheless, in order to satisfy the overwhelming demands of lexical units in the computer language, one must also take into account the concepts of morphological productivity, the overarching theoretical framework of this study. By employing morphological productivity in the production of new lexical units required by computer language, this theory favors the second option for the generation of neologisms: the phonological and morphological adaptations of existing English words. Through this procedure of borrowing and processing existing lexical items, the Spanish language manages to keep up with the lexical demand that computer language requires. Researchers state that “In times of rapid social, cultural and technological change, speakers of a language need to add new words to their vocabulary in order to talk about new things that come into their daily lives” (Crowley & Bowern, 2010). If this was not the case, languages would stagnate and their users would be constantly forced to make a change of code (code-switching) between languages to communicate their ideas. Given the fact that English is considered the lingua franca in the field of informatics (Posterguillo, 2002), the use of these code changes between Spanish and English is justified. However, this study focuses on the second option proposed by Tosi (2001) on lexical transfer. Neologisms of this kind are sometimes referred to as loan-blends, as they combine elements of both the donor languages. Studies similar to this one have been performed previously by analyzing these changes in Anglicisms applied to nouns, and to a lesser degree verbs, but limited to a descriptive level. For this reason, the purpose of this study is to analyze in depth these lexical transformations, concentrating on verbal Anglicisms in the Spanish computer language and linking the findings to the morphological productivity framework.

2. Morphological Productivity

In morphology, there are two types of word class in terms of membership, namely, closed word class and open word class. Closed word class refers to lexical categories where membership is limited, such as pronouns, prepositions, articles, demonstratives, conjunctions, and auxiliaries. Open word class refers to lexical categories where membership is unlimited such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, among others. It is with the open word class that the concept of morphological productivity works best. By morphological productivity, we mean the facility and creativity of any particular language to create words according to a particular language system. Morphological productivity is responsible for the unlimited expansion of open word classes in any language (Bauer, 2001). In most cases, the use of derivational and inflectional affixes facilitates the formation of new lexical categories observing the linguistic principle of creativity (Jubilado, 2010). For example, the English nominal suffix –ess can be affixed to almost all nouns. Thus, it is lexically correct to say the English words *duchess*, *priestess*, *princess* but not the word *bishopess*. The latter is not lexically realized in English due to the absence thereof in Christian Church hierarchy. Creativity is at the core of the study of the generative school of thought of linguistics as implied in these words: “An essential property of language is that it provides the means for expressing indefinitely many thoughts and for reacting appropriately in an indefinite range of new situations” (Chomsky, 1965).

3. Assimilation of English words into the Spanish lexicon

The data used in the study was obtained from different sources such as the Internet and personal correspondences via email. The social network website Facebook was a major source of data, as the loan blends are used widely in this communication medium. Through the analysis of a corpus, this study was able to identify certain patterns in the transformation processes that Anglicisms go through when they adjust to meet the requirements of Spanish grammar. Such transformations are in accord with the second lexical integration proposed by Tosi (2001), which proves to be the one with the highest

morphological productivity. These transformations have been categorized into two groups, according to their phonological and morphological features.

3.1 Phonological features

Anglicisms integrated into the Spanish lexicon undergo a series of changes in order to adjust to the phonetic requirements of the Spanish language, thus affecting their orthography. In other words: “The phonological transformations took place whenever the Spanish language could not support the phonetic structure of certain sounds found in the English language due to phonotactic constraints” (Reyes, 2011). These orthographic adjustments are:

1. The final consonant cluster ‘ck’ found in English verbal endings, such as in the case of the English words *block*, *track*, *hack* and *check*, is respelled ‘que’ following the Spanish orthography. Therefore, the verbs provided previously were spelled in Spanish as: *bloquear*, *traquear*, *jaquear* and *chequear*, respectively, when written in their infinitive forms.
2. In Spanish graphology, the consonant sound /h/ is silent in the Spanish language, and consequently, it is spelled ‘j’. Following Spanish phonology, in English words such as *hack*, two phonological changes can be observed in its transformation to the Spanish infinitive equivalent *jaquear*: the replacement of /h/ for /j/ and the modification of the final consonant cluster /ck/ for /que/ followed by the corresponding Spanish verbal ending *-ar*.
3. The [oo] sound found in English verbs such as *boot*, or *Google*, were replaced by the phoneme /u/ in order to produce the same sound. However, *Google* being a metonymic word, the data also showed samples of this word retaining its original spelling. This word was found written both as *Guglear* and *Googlear*.
4. The [ee] sound found in English verbs such as *beep* and *freeze* was replaced by the vowel /i/ in order to represent the same sound.
5. To English verbs which start with the consonant ‘s’, such as *scan*, were added an initial /e/ to support the phonetic requirements of the Spanish language. Words in Spanish cannot start with the consonant sound /s/ followed by another consonant. In this case, the English *scan* is borrowed and respelled as *escanear* in Spanish.
6. English verbs ending in the letter ‘g’, as in *blog*, *tag* and *drag*, are spelled using an epenthetic silent ‘u’, following standards of Spanish graphology. Otherwise, the letter ‘g’ in the Spanish language would be spelled ‘j’ when followed by either vowel sound /e/ or /i/. Therefore the spelling of the verbs just mentioned becomes *bloguear*, *taguear* and *draguear*.
7. The consonant ‘w’ is absent in the Spanish lexicon, and it is only used for borrowed words. For this reason, it is replaced by the vowel sound /u/ to produce an equivalent sound. For instance, the verb to *switch* is spelled as *suitchear*, although the less common form *switchear* is also present in the corpus.
8. The consonant ‘y’ and the vowel ‘i’ have the same phonetic values in Spanish. However, opposite to the case of English, the consonant ‘y’ cannot be used as a vowel, and therefore it is replaced by the phonetic value of the sound /i/. An example of this phonetic change would be the English verb *type*, which in Spanish is spelled *tipear*.

3.2 Morphological features

Anglicisms are introduced into the Spanish language in two ways, based on their phonological features: in their original English form, and also with certain spelling changes that allow them to meet the phonological and graphological requirements of the Spanish language. The lexical terms introduced in their original English forms are used commonly when practicing “codeswitching” between English and Spanish, predominantly in the case of nouns. However, the focus of this paper is the second mode of lexical integration, where Anglicisms have gone through morphophonemic changes to meet the requirements of the Spanish language. For this reason, these terms are found mainly in the form of verbs, due to their complex grammatical composition. Furthermore, Anglicized verbs can also be integrated into the Spanish language to such a high degree, that it is possible to even conjugate these new verbs in all the tenses dictated by the Spanish grammar. For instance, the following table shows this linguistic adaptation, in comparison with the original lexical Spanish verb, to wit:

Person, number and tense	<i>trabajar (to work)</i>	<i>chatear (to chat)</i>
1st Person singular, present	<i>trabajo</i>	<i>chateo</i>
2nd Person singular, present	<i>trabajas</i>	<i>chateas</i>
3rd Person singular, present	<i>trabaja</i>	<i>chatea</i>
1st Person plural, indefinite past	<i>trabajamos</i>	<i>chateamos</i>
2nd Person plural, future	<i>trabajarán</i>	<i>chatearán</i>
3rd Person plural, conditional	<i>trabajarían</i>	<i>chatearían</i>
Participle	<i>trabajado</i>	<i>chateado</i>
Gerund	<i>trabajando</i>	<i>chateando</i>

English lexical units undergo morphological transformations when they are integrated into the Spanish language. It is found that there are two major morphological transformations in verbal Anglicisms, namely, transformations which deals with the verbal ending /-ar/ and transformation dealing with the epenthetic /e/.

3.2.1 Verbal ending /-ar/

Verbal Anglicisms studied in this article proved to comply with the grammatical requirements of the Spanish language, as it is possible to conjugate them in all tenses and form their participial, gerundive and also other grammatical forms following person and number. In this study, the collected data are in the form of verbs in their infinitive mode. In the Spanish language, verbs in their infinitive mode are made up of a stem and a suffixed verbal ending, which can either be: /-ar/, /-er/ or /-ir/. In this study, it is found that all verbal Anglicisms carry the verbal ending /-ar/, which happens to be the first verbal conjugation, and the most common in the Spanish language. According to Solis (2005), this occurs due to the fact that the verbal conjugation /-ar/ has the highest functional use in the Spanish language. Furthermore, the group of verbs ending with the affix /-ar/ is the one with the largest membership among Spanish verbs and is therefore more productive.

3.2.2 Epenthetic vowel /e/

A peculiar finding of this study is the use of an epenthetic vowel /e/ bridging the original English borrowed verb and the Spanish verbal suffix /-ar/. In the Spanish language, nouns are verbalized by adding the suffix /-ar/. Users of the Spanish language apply the suffix /-ar/ to Anglicisms with the epenthetic /e/ thereby producing the bridge in the form of the glide /j/. Thus, the English verb *scan* is produced in the form of the Anglicism *escanear* and pronounced roughly as [eskanjar], where the epenthetic vowel /e/ is represented by the glide /j/. This is a clear example of how users of the language opt to use existing morphological structures in order to adapt Anglicisms to the Spanish language and, unconsciously, apply the most productive process to this lexical adaptation.

3.3 The case of morphological productivity

When users of the Spanish language encounter the need to create an Anglicism due to a lexical gap in the field of computer language, they follow the principle of language economy, and automatically use the most productive form available. Nonetheless, one must be careful when dealing with the availability of terms: "Availability can change diachronically and valid statements about availability in one period do not necessarily apply to any adjacent period" (Bauer, 2001). This is particularly true in the dynamic field of Informatics, where language is constantly changing and Anglicisms are created ad hoc with the lexicon available at that moment in time. In the case of verbal Anglicisms, users of the Spanish language transform the original English word by instinctively adding the suffix /-ar/ to it to create the infinitive form of the Anglicized verb. A very similar case occurs with the Italian language, which grammatically, is closely related to the Spanish language. The most common verb ending in Italian is /-are/ and, in fact, the Anglicisms found in the study, also use this verbal affixation over the other two available: /-ere/ and /-ire/ due to its higher productivity level. To determine productivity, three

factors must be met: "...frequency, semantic coherence and the ability to make new forms" (Bauer, 2001). The processes being analyzed in this study meet all these three requirements, especially the third one, as their ability to make new forms is virtually unlimited. According to Bauer (2001), this ability to make new forms also qualifies these loan-blends as profitable.

4. Conclusion

This paper supports the idea that the main reason these morphological changes, which deal with the verbal ending /-ar/ and with the use of epenthetic /e/, take place in the Spanish language is due to the productivity level of these words. The Spanish language copes with the vast lexical demand required by computer language by borrowing existing English lexical items, as this process is more productive than the coinage of new words. Due to the dominance of English-speaking countries in this field, new products are introduced to the market bearing English names. Other languages, including Spanish, have methods to integrate these new terms into their lexicon. Although English nouns can be used in other languages without affecting their orthography or even their pronunciation (normally for code-switching purposes), as shown in this paper, verbs normally go through morphophonemic transformations observing the requirements of the linguistic properties of the Spanish language. These changes, however, are ruled by productivity and the principle of creativity, the principle which occupies the core of the generative school of thought in linguistics (Jubilado 2010). For this reason, the lexicon of a language has endless expansion potential, as it fills its lexical gaps by utilizing foreign terms and integrating them by adjusting these terms in order to meet the grammatical requirements of the borrowing language.

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