

# Translating False and Fickle Anglicisms

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## Abstract:

This paper explores the phenomenon of false Anglicisms in modern Spanish and some of the problems they pose for language acquisition and translation. We propose an analysis of four types of transformation and adaptation in the use of false Anglicisms that we have identified between English and modern Spanish:

Modern Spanish is increasingly peppered with Anglicisms in all lexical fields, both professional and informal, and this tendency shows no signs of waning. On the contrary, all forms and registers of Spanish seem to be infused with numerous Anglicisms and not only such predictable spheres of influence such as business and technology. Many of these terms are loanwords which have occupied a genuine lexical gap in Spanish, are used appropriately and provide a genuinely useful service to speakers of the language. Nevertheless, there is also a great deal of misuse of these Anglicisms, both in terms of their meaning and their grammatical function and this inevitably leads to an undeniable source of potential confusion that needs to be addressed both by language teachers and translators in terms of the transmission and the transfer of these items of vocabulary between English and Spanish.

- 1) **Grammatical transformation** – a change in the grammatical function of the Anglicisms in question which in turn tends to permeate and contaminate subsequent English use by Spanish speakers. A clear example of this is the adoption of the English noun ‘fashion’ which is used as an adjective and therefore leads to solecisms such as ‘this shirt is fashion’.
- 2) **Lexical reduction** - this phenomenon consist of the reduction of an English term to the use of the first word only, thus leading to mistakes and confusion when the word is ‘backtranslated into English. A very common example is the use of the word ‘catering’ as a noun to refer to any kind of ‘catering company’ or ‘catering service’. This tendency to lexical reduction leads to rather clumsy and incorrect expressions in English such as ‘my sister has a catering’.<sup>1</sup>
- 3) **Pseudo Anglicisms** – this phenomenon refers to the unconscious use of a false Anglicism in the mistaken belief that this is the correct English term. As English is often considered to provide a certain

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<sup>1</sup> The confusion is compounded by the tendency to mispronounce the word so that it sounds similar to the name ‘Katherine’ so that the assertion ‘I am waiting for the catering’ can be thoroughly misunderstood.

prestige by association in fields such as medicine, this leads to the use of pseudo Anglicism such as a 'lifting' to refer to the practice of a 'face lift' in the field of cosmetic surgery.

- 4) **Faux or 'cod' Anglicisms** – this increasingly popular tendency refers to the practice of knowingly using a false Anglicism, usually based either on the humorous conflation of a Spanish lexeme with an English word ending or on the deliberately direct translation of a quintessentially Spanish term or expression. An example of the former tendency is to be found in the humorous use of terms such as 'tumbing' (from the Spanish verb 'tumbarse' which means 'to lie down') or 'puenting' (the transposition of 'bungee jumping' which adds the Spanish word for bridge ('puente') to the universally popular English gerundial form. The 'positive' humorous use of false friends can also be echoed in knowing misuse of cod Anglicisms in the form of playful use of deliberate direct mistranslation in the publishing phenomenon known as 'From lost to the river'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The expression 'from lost to the river' is the literal translation of the Spanish saying 'de perdidos al río' and its nearest equivalent in English would be 'in for a penny, in for a pound.' This was the title given to a successful book of English 'versions' of traditional Spanish sayings and was followed up by another volume called 'speaking in silver'. The popularity of this phenomenon shows no sign of waning and is largely due to the widely held, self-deprecating perception among Spaniards that their command of English still leaves a lot to be desired.