

MADE IN USA. AMERICANISMS IN SPANISH ADVERTISING¹

DEBRA WESTALL
Universidad Politécnica de Valencia

ABSTRACT. *To continue our study into the linguistic and cultural influences in peninsular Spanish, we analyze five advertisements that feature references originating in the United States of America (USA). By observing the audiovisual content of these ads, we will first illustrate how advertisers rely on images (streaking) and sounds (gospel) made in the USA to promote telecommunications companies like ONO or Jazztel. By examining the message transmitted, we shall then describe how advertisers promote or reinforce American linguistic creations like the all-terrain vehicle (el todoterreno) and the 4x4 (el cuatro por cuatro) as well as popular food items like the donut. Through this brief study, we aim to shed light on how publicity not only influences the language, but also reflects the habits of contemporary Spanish society.*

KEY WORDS: *Sociolinguistics, cultural contact, advertising, lexical borrowing*

RESUMEN. *En este artículo estudiamos el contacto cultural y lingüístico entre el español peninsular y el inglés norteamericano a través de la publicidad. Para demostrar la importancia de este canal en la incorporación de 'lo americano' en el español actual, estudiaremos dos anuncios de compañías de telecomunicaciones (ONO, Jazztel) que importan imágenes (streaking) y música (gospel) típicas de Norteamérica. A continuación, analizamos el mensaje de unos anuncios para automóviles japoneses con denominación 'made in USA' (el todo terreno y el 4x4) junto a otros para el donut como elemento representativo de la gastronomía americana. De este modo tratamos de explicar cómo la publicidad puede influir no solamente en la lengua, sino también refleja los hábitos y costumbres de la sociedad española.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Sociolingüística, contacto cultural, publicidad, préstamos léxicos*

1. INTRODUCTION

Today's high-profile advertising industry is undoubtedly one of the most effective agents contributing to the global spread of the English language, mainly the American variety (Graddol and Meinhof 1999). In an effort to draw attention to their products, Spanish advertisers also make use of English words, incorporating both the spoken and written elements into their discourse. The Spanish scholar, Lázaro-Carreter (1997: 581), highlights the numerous channels facilitating contact between these speech communities:

Contra la nacionalización oficial de los extranjerismos, ha surgido un obstáculo importante: es la entrada simultánea del neologismo por vía oral y por vía escrita. Hoy se oyen, pero también se leen, en prensa, carteles y televisión, centenares de palabras extranjeras, angloamericanas sobre todo.

Unlike the more noticeable interference on a syntactical or grammatical level resulting from the more intimate contact of bilingual communities, the case of contact between peninsular Spanish and American English (AmE) has led to the mutual exchange of loanwords of a material or cultural nature. On the one hand, many Spanish loanwords nowadays have rustic flavor in AmE; some like *amigo*, *hombre*, *frijoles*, *pueblo*, *rancho*, or *burro*, have been kept current in English, mostly for their expressive function in the discourse (Rodríguez-González 1994). On the other hand, Spaniards have readily adopted AmE creations like *bestseller*, *surfing* or *hippie* (see Westall 2005), while Spanish advertisers, as illustrated in the ads chosen for study, frequently spice up their already persuasive discourse

with a variety of AmE loanwords. In his study of the seductive elements in advertising, Grijelmo (2004: 103-104) affirms:

Los mensajes que excluyen los vocablos conocidos por el público para sustituirlos por otros desconocidos pueden adquirir un gran valor de sugestión inconsciente. Una fórmula de seducción publicitaria consiste, por ejemplo, en enviar a millones de personas hispanohablantes monolingües un mensaje en inglés o en francés. [...] Es cierto que generalmente tales licencias publicitarias pretenden identificar el producto con el país de origen y sembrar la idea de que se trata de algo auténtico.

It is the foreign and apparently genuine element that may serve to reflect many of the changes taking place in contemporary Spanish society. In this regard, one must agree with Rodríguez-Segura (1999: 631) when asserting, “[...] el anglicismo ha llegado a convertirse más en un fenómeno sociológico que lingüístico, tal es el ritmo al que crece el influjo de lo anglosajón, o más concretamente, de lo norteamericano”. So to better understand these social changes as reflected in Spanish advertising, particularly that of television, this study focuses on five cultural and linguistic references originating in the United States of America (USA). On the one hand, the audiovisual contents of two ads illustrate how advertisers rely on cultural images (streaking) and sounds (gospel music) made in the USA to promote telecommunications companies ONO and Jazztel. On the other hand, the messages of other ads reveal how American linguistic elements are incorporated to market all-terrain vehicles or 4x4s as well as popular food items like the donut.

2. AMERICAN CULTURAL REALITIES: STREAKING AND GOSPEL

There is abundant evidence of specific American cultural realities commonly used to enhance the visual and auditory perceptions of the target audience. Consider the 2002 ads for telecommunications companies ONO and Jazztel, each featuring distinct American realities: streaking and gospel singing. In the ONO ad, a group of streakers, in an apparent protest, first runs up the steps of a downtown building, turning bare bottoms toward the cameras from the top of the stairs, only to be taken off by the local police. The following spoken text accompanies the images: “Hola, buenos días. ONO te ofrece tarifa plana de Internet sin límite de descargas a un precio de escándalo, y por supuesto llamadas locales gratis entre teléfonos ONO. Para que hables y navegues al mismo tiempo”.

The term *streaker*, as well as its derivations *streaking* and *streak*, are mentioned in the literature on Anglicisms, and Spanish streakers occasionally race across the field during televised soccer matches. In this sense, the latest *Diccionario de español actual* included the following entry for *streaking*: “Hecho de correr desnudo por un lugar concurrido, normalmente como protesta” and cited examples dating from 1974 and 1992 (Seco et al. 1999: 4183). In his pioneering research into Spanish Anglicisms, Pratt (1986: 349) discussed the introduction of this concept in European languages via mass media:

In the contemporary period, however, with its instantaneous communications, any coining made on any given day could theoretically become part and parcel of any other language in a question of days [...]. For those with good memories for or interest in ephemera, streaking appeared in Spanish (and in most other Western languages) within a week of the first student ‘streak’ in the United States in March 1974.

Likewise, in the Jazztel commercial, advertisers rely on not just on images, but also on sounds from the heart and soul of America: a female Afro-American soloist, shaded by an

oversized parasol, softly accompanies a prison work crew with her bluesy and jazzy tones as the chain gang repairs the highway. The narrator then says: “Jazztel acaba de llegar al kilómetro 10.000 de su red de fibra óptica de última generación y para celebrarlo presentamos los bonos más económicos de la historia”. As evidenced by these and indeed many Spanish television commercials, advertisers not only make full use of images and sounds reflecting American cultural realities to promote their products, but they also incorporate AmE lexical creations, highlighting the adaptation of foreign items and the acceptance of the American-made products by Spanish society.

3. AMERICAN LEXICAL CREATIONS IN SPANISH ADVERTISING

In Spanish *un todo terreno* (from AmE *all-terrain vehicle*) describes not only the automobile known in the USA as the SUV, but it also refers to the individual who, as specified in the dictionary of the *Real Academia Española*, is “capaz de realizar múltiples funciones” or one “que se adapta a todo tipo de lugar” (2001: 2188). Thus, the calque *todo terreno*, as seen in the television ad for the *Nissan Terrano*, narrated by the actor Carlos Sobera, the text being reproduced in the *Gaceta Universitaria* (nº 384, 26-11-2001, 17), is now completely integrated in the receiving language:

Me habían dicho que el Nissan Terrano era toda una leyenda. Que si un líder en todoterrenos, que si una bestia de coche y yo tenía que contárselo a todos ustedes. Pero pensé, antes de contar nada yo tengo que probarlo, y lo he probado y francamente no sé lo que decía el guión pero sí sé que si usted también lo prueba me entenderá perfectamente...

Further, we also find, on the next page (18) of the same newspaper, reference to the now popular 4x4 or *cuatro por cuatro*, in this case, the *Nissan X-Trail*, which, naturally, can be driven on any terrain:



As depicted in advertising, the *todo terreno* and *4x4* are now common in Spanish urban landscapes and reflect the changing preferences of modern consumer societies. Yet it seems that Spaniards have traditionally been keen to adopt not only the foreign realities themselves, but they have also imported certain unaltered foreign denominations as discussed by Pérez-Rioja (1990: 198), who draws attention to North American influence on Spanish society in the 1920s:

El afán de los españoles por imitar las modas y los modos de comer y beber de los franceses e ingleses y luego también de los norteamericanos, ha hecho que estos extranjerismos se propagaran pronto, aun sin españolizarse varios de ellos en nuestra propia lengua coloquial.

In this line of research, Morant and Peñarroya (2000: 13) also describe certain recent changes in the Spanish diet and language while stressing the key role of television in the process:

Un convidat d'honor és la televisió, que presideix sovint el saló-menjador. Tota la família seu a taula disposada de tal forma que puga veure-la. [...] De la mà de la televisió, entre d'altres mitjans, s'ha anat produint a poc a poc una cocacolonització o americanització del llenguatge i del menjar (burguers, refrescs de cola, pantalons vaquers, anglicismes verbals i gestuals...) [...].

The case of the *donut* is particularly illustrative of this globalization of cultural realities and lexical borrowing from AmE, and advertisements from three decades exemplify the changing values associated to American junk foods. Initially introduced in the early 1980s, the AmE term, originally a trademark, is written in Spanish as *donut* but is most often pronounced *donus*. Donut is now commonly known as the generic denomination for this American gastronomic creation.

Undoubtedly unaware of its origin or evolution, children are perhaps the main consumers of donuts in Spain. Two television commercials, one from the 1980s and the other from 2002, illustrate that the donut is indeed an essential part of the Spanish diet. In a popular commercial of the 1980s, advertisers place the donut alongside the schoolbag as an essential element for academic success. On his way to school, a young boy realizes he has forgotten something, exclaiming *janda el donus!* After fetching his donut, he then realizes he has forgotten something else, this time exclaiming *janda la cartera!*. In light of testimony from more than a few Spanish baby boomers, it seems that an entire generation recalls with fondness the advertisement and mimics the boy's expression when forgetting something so fundamental as the donut.

By the year 2002, these baby boomers now have children of their own, and advertisers now transmit the message that donuts are acceptable to be served to children at school: a group of pre-school children are sitting at their table; their teacher enters the classroom with a box of Donuts:

Teacher: Bueno, dejo aquí esta caja de Donuts, pero no la toquéis.

Boy (after teacher leaves room): Yo me comería todos a la vez... Nos dice la profesora lo que tenemos que hacer...

Other children: Se lo vamos a decir, eh...

Teacher (returning to room and addressing all): ¿Quién se ha comido el Donuts?

Teacher (to all except Boy): ... ¿y por qué le habéis dejado?

Narrator: No se puede aguantar. Donuts.

Perhaps because they are so irresistible for children of all ages, though still considered a 'forbidden food' by many, adult consumers are now targeted with distinct marketing strategies. The Spanish top model Judith Mascó now lends her image to advertise *Donuts Light Bombón*, whose label and ads include the expressions *Por fin, light* and *-30% calories* (see Díaz-Rojo et al. 2005). One 2005 commercial features Mascó imitating the spectacular stunts of Hollywood stars Catherine Zeta-Jones, who dodged the laser alarms in the movie *La Trampa*, together with those of Tom Cruise, who descended into the control chamber in the first *Misión Imposible*. Mascó is on a mission to obtain chocolate; she cascades down into the high-security kitchen and just as she is about to grab her cake and eat it too, an alarm sounds

and she is awakened from her dream and states: “Se acabó la pesadilla del chocolate. Por fin puedo cuidarme disfrutando del mejor cacao. Nuevo Donuts Light Bombón. Para un día redondo”.

Clearly, the donut has become an intrinsic element in popular culture as depicted in another commercial from the 1990s in which advertisers incorporate American cultural references like Steven Spielberg’s *E.T.*, which in turn led to jokes arising from the ad itself:

Un gesto similar al del pequeño extraterrestre [E.T.] se usó en un anuncio televisivo de donuts en el que para pedir uno de estos dulces bastaba con elevar el índice. De esta manera este gesto se convirtió en sinónimo de ‘quiero un donut’ y por eso, los chistosos comentaban: ¿Sabéis de qué ha muerto Ete? Pues de un empacho de donuts. (Morant and Westall 2005: 289)

Moreover, in their dictionary of Spanish Anglicisms, Rodríguez-González and Lillo-Buades (1997: 177) indicate the full incorporation of donut in Spanish, citing the following reference from 1995: “[A Polanco] se le identificará mejor con el doctor glotón de la teleserie Médico de familia que se pasa el día comiendo donuts”. These scholars also indicate two Spanish phrases based on the American creation and thus highlight its role in the lexicon. On the one hand is the expression *no comerse ni el agujero de un donut*, which is commonly used by young people to describe someone who is unlucky or unfortunate in some way. On the other hand, they point out that “se da entre estudiantes para indicar el cero logrado en un examen” (ibid.). Clearly, the donut is both a lexical and a cultural element that Spaniards have not hesitated to incorporate into their discourse and diets, and Spanish advertisers have not hesitated to use American cultural realities and lexical items to market this and many other all-American creations.

4. FINAL REMARKS

In brief, it has been the aim of this paper to describe instances of cultural and linguistic contact through television advertising and media discourse. To this end, ONO and Jazztel commercials illustrate how American realities such as streaking and gospel music are incorporated into marketing campaigns while advertisers reinforce the acceptance of loanwords like *todo terreno*, *4x4* and *donuts*, which have become an integral part of the Spanish lexicon and familiar elements of material culture the Spanish society. In conclusion, through studies such as these, it is my hope that the ideas and findings presented here will serve to further our interest in and better our understanding of this intercultural phenomenon both from a linguistic as well as a sociological perspective.

NOTE

1. This study was supported by the *Universidad Politécnica de Valencia (Programa de ayuda a la investigación y desarrollo - PAID 0006-2760)*. The author is grateful to the Department of English at Southeastern Louisiana University for providing the setting and assistance needed to continue this research.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Díaz-Rojo, J.A., Morant-Marco, R. and D. Westall-Pixton. 2005. "El sanismo lingüístico: recursos retóricos en la publicidad y etiquetado de los alimentos". *Revista de investigación lingüística* 1 (3): 5-22.
- Graddol, D. and U.H. Meinhof, eds. 1999. *English in a changing world – L'anglais dans un monde changeant*. Oxford: The AILA Review, 13.
- Grijelmo, Á. 2004 (2000). *La seducción de las palabras* (8ª edición). Madrid: Taurus.
- Lázaro-Carreter, F. 1997. *El dardo en la palabra*. Barcelona: Círculo de Lectores / Galaxia Gutenberg.
- Morant, R. and M. Peñarroya. 2000 (1996). *Llenguatge a la Carta* (2ª edició). Moncada (Valencia): Fundació Universitaria San Pablo C.E.U.
- Morant, R. and D. Westall. 2005. "Lo que el cine nos dejó: La herencia lingüística". *La creatividad en el lenguaje: colocaciones idiomáticas y fraseología*. Eds. J. de Dios Luque-Durán and A. Pamies-Bertrán. Granada: Granada Lingüística (Métodos Ediciones). 283-301.
- Pérez-Rioja, J.A. 1990. *La España de los años 20 en el lenguaje*. Madrid: Asociación de escritores y artistas españoles.
- Pratt, C. 1986. "Anglicisms in Contemporary European Spanish". *English in Contact with Other Languages. Studies in Honour of Broder Carstensen on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*. Eds. W. Viereck and W.D. Bald. Budapest: Akadémiai-Kiadó. 345-367.
- Real Academia Española. 2001. *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*. Madrid: Espasa.
- Rodríguez-González, F. 1994. "Función expresiva y textual de los préstamos del español en inglés americano". CENUA, 313-325.
- Rodríguez-González, F. and A. Lillo-Buades. 1997. *Nuevo Diccionario de Anglicismos*. Madrid: Gredos.
- Rodríguez-Segura, D. 1999. "El empleo del anglicismo como núcleo de ciertas licencias expresivas en los medios de comunicación.". *Contribuciones al estudio de la lingüística aplicada*. Eds. J. Cuevas and D. Fasla. Logroño: AESLA. 631-638.
- Seco, M., O. Andrés and G. Ramos. 1999. *Diccionario del español actual*. Madrid: Aguilar.
- Westall, D. 2002. *North American Influence on 20th Century Peninsular Spanish Lexicon*. Unpublished Dissertation. Valencia: Universidad de Valencia.
- Westall, D. 2005. "When Uncle Sam meets Don Quixote: Intercultural Perspectives and Emerging Lexical Contributions". *Perspectivas Interdisciplinarias de la Lingüística Aplicada*. Ed. M.L. Carrió. Valencia: AESLA/UPV. Tomo III, 275-281.