LEXICAL SIMILARITIES BETWEEN SPANISH AND ENGLISH

Georgi Dzhumayov, Institute for Bulgarian Language "Prof. Lyubomir Andreychin", Bulgaria

Abstract: *This article points out lexical similarities between English and Spanish and analyses the results of research carried out among students at the University of Valladolid in Spain whose native language is Spanish and who study or have studied English as a foreign language. The principal objectives are to gather more data based on the topic, classify the obtained information and draw appropriate conclusions in order to reveal the secret of what exactly hinders Spanish speaking people from learning English easily.*

Key words: *foreign language, native language, research, false friends, education, inquiry, similarity.*

One of the main goals to commence studying a foreign language is the desire of learners to accomplish various types of communication with a great diversity of people. People who want to learn a definite foreign language always begin with sounds and words, i.e. the first linguistic fields which they meet on their way are the phonetics and lexis. In the very beginning, they have to acquire a set of words in the respective foreign language, so that subsequently these words can be used as a basis, and only then do they have to take into consideration grammar and syntax. Thus they could be integrated into a comprehensive text and provide adequate communication.

The current research was conducted in Valladolid, Spain, in May, 2015. The principal objective of the study is to gather more data on lexical similarity between English and Spanish. The information obtained is classified and analyzed, and eventually appropriate conclusions are drawn.

Students at the university of Valladolid, whose mother tongue is Spanish and learn English as a foreign language, give their responses to the questions listed in the questionnaire below. On the first question students indicate their name and, in case they want to preserve anonymity, they just indicate their gender. Secondly, they have to reveal their mother tongue. For the purposes of the current research, it is Spanish. In the third place in the table shown, respondents write down examples of nouns and verbs (some of them give examples of adjectives and adverbs) that are similar or identical in both languages. The question *"Have you ever unintentionally used a Spanish word/phrase instead of an English one in a conversation?"* comes fourth. Here, apart from giving an affirmative or negative answer to the question, respondents are requested to indicate the corresponding word/phrase and to describe the situation in which they used it. The fifth question set out in our questionnaire is linked to the place where the students have encountered words in English and Spanish similar in sound or morpheme construction – newspaper, magazine, textbook, coursebook, a fiction book or even during the

process of speech communication. The question *"Can you give examples of similar words with figurative meaning in English and Spanish?"* occupies the sixth position. Unfortunately, this question does not get any answers. The aim of the next question is to identify words in English and Spanish with equal or similar sound content. The last question of the survey reads *"Have the similarities between the two languages (English and Spanish) helped you acquire English as a foreign language?"*.

The results of the questionnaire survey indicate the proximity of various words from the same word class. Some of the examples are identical while others undergo slight changes in terms of pronunciation or morpheme construction.

According to the research conducted in Valladolid, Spain, in May 2015 and the corresponding results, the Spaniards find the nouns ending in *–ncia* in Spanish similar to the nouns ending in *–nce* in English, e.g. *circunstancia – circumstance*; *dependencia – dependence; elegancia – elegance.*

Adjectives that in Spanish end in *–oso*, very often end in *–ous* in English, e.g. *famoso – famous; laborioso – laborious; fabuloso – fabulous.*

Verbs that in Spanish end in *–ificar*, very often in English end in *–ify,* e.g. *clasificar –*

classify; gratificar – gratify; amplificar – amplify.

Adverbs which end in *–almente* in Spanish, often end in *–ally* in English, e.g. *realmente – really.*

Words ending in *–tion* in English, often end in *–ción* in Spanish, e.g. *edición – edition; emoción – emotion; ficción – fiction.*

Words in English ending in *–ty*, end in *–dad* in Spanish, e.g. *universidad – university;*

proximidad – proximity; seguridad – security.

Some words in English which begin with *–th*, have their equivalent in Spanish spelled with *–t*, e.g. *teoría – theory; tesis – thesis.*

A lot of words in English containing *–ph* in their spelling, have *–f* in their Spanish variants, e.g. *foto – photo; física – physics.*

English adverbs ending in *–ly*, end in *–mente* in their Spanish equivalent, e.g. *precisamente – precisely.*

Some English words beginning with *–s*, followed by a single consonant, have as an equivalent in Spanish a word beginning with *–es*, e.g. *eslovaco – Slovak; especialista – specialist.*

English words which contain double letters, do not have that doubling in their Spanish equivalents, although there are some words which contain *–rr* both in their Spanish and English variants, e.g. *acusación – accusation; correspondencia – correspondence.*

The names of fields of study which end in *–ology* in English, in Spanish end in *–ología*, e.g. *biología – biology; ecología – ecology.*

A word which ends in *–cy* in English, in Spanish ends in *–cia*, e.g. *democracia – democracy; clemencia – clemency.*

Some nouns which name various professions in English end in *–ist* and very often in Spanish the corresponding word ends in *–ista*, e.g. *pianista – pianist; socialista – socialist; especialista – specialist.*

English words ending in *–ism*, in Spanish end in *–ismo*, e.g. *egoísmo – egoism; modernismo – modernism; socialismo – socialism.*

One of the eight questions in the research carried out in Spain in 2015 reads: *"Have you ever unintentionally used a Spanish word/phrase instead of an English one in a conversation conducted in English?"*. The aim of this question is to point out lexical similarities between the two languages according to people whose native language is Spanish and study or have studied English as a foreign language. In view of the results obtained through the questionnaire survey, we can deduce that the students in Spain very often misplace the stress of English words that are similar or identical to their corresponding Spanish words. Hence, they tend to use a word in Spanish in a conversation conducted in English.

The following table illustrates such examples of similar cases from Valladolid and shows the correct pronunciation of the words in English and Spanish.

Word	Pronunciation in Spanish	Pronunciation in English	Part of Speech
adorable	[aðo'raβle]	[ə'dɔ:rəbl]	adjective
agenda	[a'xenda]	[ə'dʒendə]	noun
audible	[aw'ðiβle]	['ɔ:dəbl]	adjective
bar	['bar]	[ba:]	noun
brutal	[bru'tal]	['bru:tl]	adjective
capital	[kapi'tal]	['kæpitl]	noun
chocolate	[tʃoko'late]	['tʃɔkalit]	noun
dental	[den'tal]	['dentl]	adjective
doctor	[dok'tor]	['dɔktə]	noun
durable	[du'raβle]	['djuərəbl]	adjective
editor	[eði'tor]	['editə]	noun
familiar	[fami'ljar]	[fə'miliə]	adjective
favor	[fa'βor]	['feivə]	noun
flexible	[flek'siβle]	['fleksibl]	adjective
honor	[o'nor]	['ɔnə]	noun
hospital	[ospi'tal]	['hɔspitl]	noun
ideal	[iðe'al]	[ai'diəl]	adjective
improbable	[impro'βaβle]	[im'prɔbəbl]	adjective
labor	[la'βor]	[leibə]	noun
material	[mate'rjal]	[mə'tiəriəl]	noun

mediocre	[me'ðjokre]	[ˌmi:di'oukə]	adjective
metal	[me'tal]	[metl]	noun
miserable	[mise'raβle]	['mizərəbl]	adjective
notable	[no'taβle]	['noutəbl]	adjective
oral	[o'ral]	['ɔ:rəl]	adjective
perfume	[per'fume]	['pə:fju:m]	noun
personal	[perso'nal]	['pə:sənl]	adjective
plural	[plu'ral]	['pluərəl]	adjective
popular	[popu'lar]	['pɔpjulə]	adjective
rumor	[řu'mor]	['ru:mə]	noun
rural	[řu'ral]	['ruərəl]	adjective
separable	[sepa'raβle]	['sepərəbl]	adjective
singular	[siŋgu'lar]	['siŋgjulə]	adjective
usual	[u'swal]	['ju:ʒuəl]	adjective
variable	[ba'rjaβle]	['vɛəriəbl]	adjective
vertical	[berti'kal]	['və:tikl]	adjective
vulnerable	[bulne'raβle]	['vʌlnərəbl]	adjective

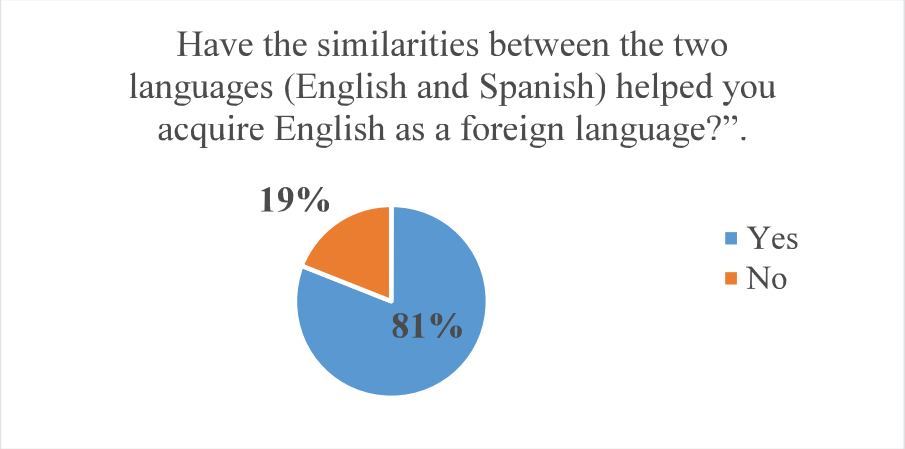
The fact that Spanish is the mother tongue of the respondents does not mean that they can pronounce English words without the necessary diligence and the appropriate articulation. Just the opposite, they have to be particularly careful in order to be able to realise a successful communicative act with an English speaking interlocutor.

The following table classifies the responses of the students at the University of Valladolid to the fifth question. It is connected with the place where the respondents have encountered words in English and Spanish similar in sound or morpheme construction. The results show that lexical similarities between English and Spanish can be found in newspapers, magazines, textbooks, and according to the answers of the students even during speech communication.

Language	Newspaper/ magazine	Course-book	Book	Speech communication
English	breakdance	click	bestseller	camp site
Spanish	breikdans	clic	un béstseller	un cámping
English	football	bacon	leader	baseball
Spanish	fútbol	el béicon	un líder	el béisbol

A large part of the interviewed students at the University of Valladolid in Spain who speak English reply that the similarities between English and Spanish have really helped them learn English as a foreign language. 81 % of them give an

affirmative answer to the question *"Have the similarities between the two languages (English and Spanish) helped you acquire English as a foreign language?"*.



We have to take note of the so called *false friends* – words from another language which are similar in spelling or pronunciation pattern to words from the native language of the speaker but have completely different meanings. According to Arnold (cfr. Rubén Chacón Beltrán, 2006:4) not knowing the meaning of some false friends in reading activities is potentially more dangerous than not knowing the meaning of unfamiliar words, because in the former case students usually try to infer the meanings of those words without checking them.

If the Spanish speaking people participating in the current research do not pay the necessary attention, very often they can be misunderstood in a conversation conducted in English or even they can get into ridiculous situations, which even we managed to witness during our stay in Spain.

Word in Spanish	Meaning in Spanish	Word in English	Meaning in English
éxito	success	exit	a way out of a building
suceso	event, incident	success	the fact that you have achieved something that you want
decepción	disappointment, frustration	deception	deceit
librería	bookshop	library	a place in which collections of books, are kept for people to read or borrow

Other examples of words which have managed to deceive our students in Spain are *notorious*, which in English means „*well known for being bad* " and *notorio*, which has no negative connotations in Spanish and means just „ *popular*".

In English the cause of *intoxication (the state of being drunk)* is the alcoholic beverage, while in Spanish *intoxicación* means *poisoning* as a whole.

Reunion (meeting, gathering) in English means *a meeting of people who have not seen each other for a long period of time*, and in Spanish *reunión* bears the idea of any kind of gathering.

In English one person has to be a mother or a father in order to be a *parent*, while in Spanish each family member can be *pariente (relative)*. We can only imagine what confusion would a *false friend word* cause among English speaking people when a Spaniard they are having a conversation with says that he/she has six or seven *parents/parientes*.

Idiom in English means a fixed, typical expression we use in a particular situation (idiomatic expression), while *idioma* in Spanish is actually another word for *language*.

Embarrassed in English means *ashamed*. *Embarazada (pregnant)* in Spanish is used to qualify a woman who is expecting a baby.

Lectura in Spanish is the action or process of reading comprehension and perception of the meaning of a text, while in English *lecture* means *a lesson, usually given by university teacher*.

An important conclusion we can draw from our research at the University of Valladolid in Spain, conducted through questionnaires, is that native speakers of English and Spanish and people who have already acquired one of these languages, and are in the process of learning the other, have to pay special attention to the aforementioned examples.

Conclusions:

What exactly hinders Spanish speaking people from learning English easily?

- **Pronunciation –** the more difficult it is to pronounce a word, the harder it is to learn it. Words which have sounds in their construction not typical of the native speakers of a language are those that are learned at the expense of many efforts. The situation is more or less the same with words that have a group of consonants in their structure which are difficult to pronounce.
- **Spelling –** since English is not a phonetic language, i.e. we do not write what we hear, Spanish speaking people have problems with the spelling of English words. This happens very often when letters that are not pronounced appear in words and in English such words abound.
- **Meaning –** when the meanings of two or more words coincide, this creates difficulties for students. For example, the study among students at the University of Valladolid shows that Spanish speaking people tend to err on the

use of the English verbs *do* and *make*. In Spanish they say *hacer deberes*, that is why they often make a mistake using the phrase *make homework*, instead of the correct expression: *do homework*.

This report highlights some of the lexical similarities between English and Spanish discovered with the help of students at the University of Valladolid, Spain, in 2015, whose native language is Spanish and study or have studied English. Examples are mentioned that have helped or hampered them to acquire English as a foreign language. The results obtained are classified into groups and eventually appropriate conclusions are made.

References

1. Beltrán, R. Ch., 2006: *Resla* 19 (2006), *Towards a typological classification of false friends (Spanish-English)*, 2006:4.
2. Transcriptor Fonético Automático del Español, http://www.aucel.com/pln/transbase.html (visited: 22.05.2016).
3. Oxford Learner's Dictionary, http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/ (visited: 24.05.2016).
4. Real Academia Española, http://www.rae.es/ (visited: August, 2016).

Contact Details

Georgi Dzhumayov

dzhumayov.georgi@gmail.com