

Los Rules

OF ENGAGEMENT

I may be dead, pero todavía estoy horny.
—epitaph on the tomb of the unknown mujeriego

Until now the rules of Spanglish have been unwritten. And, para ser sin- cero, many would have preferred they stay that way. Yet somehow I managed to succeed where tantos habían fracasado before me.

Not that I am any fan of grammar. The more I try to learn it, cuanto más paranoid me pongo that I'm not qualified to be communicating in any lan- guage. Seriously, todos mis textbooks viejos are full of ridiculously hard to fol- low explanations, como la siguiente:

Any spastical pronoun pursuant to the full frontal interrogatory negation of the infinitive garfunkel should always face Mecca relative to the extra nuclear flying monkeys in the third down of the main clause when followed by a dou- ble helix in the falsetto voice deriving tangentially but not passively every other Wednesday from the indirect object of the antecedent marsupial.

¡Ovlídate! That's muy confusing. And, te lo juro, that's exactly what all that nonsense sounds like to me. ¡No hombre no! I said to myself, mejor to start desde scratch.

Bueno, this totally liberated me to discover cuales son los dos and don'ts de un language you aren't even supposed to be speaking in the first place. The research is ongoing. Pero, I can't wait to share with you mis conclusiones so far.

There are hundreds and hundreds of Spanglish rules, and new ones pop up every day as research continues at the Santiago Spanglish Institute for World Peace. Sin embargo, as space is medio-limited, and this book is contrac- tually obligated to entertain, I've selected algunos de los rules más entretenidos to help whet your Spanglish whistle.

Aparecen aquí in the same random order que se escojieron para ser included.

Spanglish Rule #18

Never say hips when you mean caderas.

Words don't always mean the same thing even when they supposedly do. So make sure to switch languages whenever doing so facilitates accuracy.

I mean, if you look up the word "hips" in an English/Spanish dictionary, it will tell you the correct word in Spanish is caderas. But that is, como se dice, way off. Caderas means "hips," but so much more than "hips." Just look at the two. Even the word caderas seems to have more caderas than the word "hips." First of all, caderas has a gender, and that gender is female, which gives the word extra superpowers when referring to a female.

Also, notice that you can describe hips as curvaceous. But the word caderas already implies that. Curvaceous caderas would be redundant, although they do exist (especially in Brazil). Plus, caderas has three syllables, instead of just one, giving it built-in motion. When pronounced correctly, the word even has a syncopation to it, so that when you hear it, you picture those caderas dancing or making love.

Of course, everybody knows Shakira had that hit song "Hips Don't Lie." Yeah, well, let me put it to you this way. You will tell any lie necessary for caderas. That's la diferencia.

Spanglish Rule #509

Love bastard words as if they were your own.

Bastardization of vocabulary es muy esencial to Spanglish. In fact, most of what people recognize as Spanglish refers to such bastardized beauties as *furnitura*, a Spanishized form of the English word “furniture.” Easy, right? A little spelling change at the end to make it sound Spanish-sounding, *y estás* good to go. Claro que the correct Spanish word for “furniture” is “muebles.” But everybody knows if you want a good deal, look for a *furnitura* sale at a *reputable* *furnituría*, with a sign in the window that says, “Hacemos delivery.”

Note that bastard words are usually the ones that make you laugh the most, because they strike you as so odd and out of place and clearly wrong. Which is also what makes them feel tan right to nosotros die-hard connoisseurs of the habla.

I just heard this one in Chicago, and it’s still cracking me up. Instead of saying, “I like” something, advanced Spanglish speakers there say, “Me likea.”

For instance:

“Do you like your tequila?”

“Si, me likea mi tequila.”

C’mon now, les digo que I just laughed again a *carcajadas* as I typed it. How can you not like a word like *likea*?

What about reverse bastardization? Happens all the time. *Cuántas veces* haven’t you heard a cowboy en una película western saying algo como, “He *vamoosed* with all the dinero” or “*Vamoose fellas!*” or “*Better vamoose!*”?

Well, did you think any of these involved an actual moose? Of course not. It’s simply an Americanized form of the Spanish word *vamos*, which *vaqueros* in a hurry say to mean “let’s go,” “scram,” “beat it,” or “skedaddle.”

Now, I have a doctor friend just learning Spanish who likes to put her own twist on it. When it’s time to *vamoose*, she says, “*Shall we vamos?*” It’s more polite and endearingly more wrong to my Spanglish ears.

Spanglish Rule #110

Thou shalt conjugate English words into Spanish.

This is taking bastardization to the next level, and *sin lugar a dudas* it is one of the fluent Spanglish speaker’s most basic instincts. Almost as if it were involuntary, nosotros Spanglish speakers *kidnapeamos* English words from their realms and slap Spanish verb tenses on the end of them, como si no tuviera nada de extraño.

Lo hacemos as if we didn’t know they weren’t *palabras españolas* to begin with!

Pero esta costumbre makes us more fun to *janguear* with. In case you didn’t recognize it, *janguear* is Spanglish for “to hang out.” We really make this one our own. First we change the spelling to reflect Spanish *pronunciación*. And then we conjugate the hell out of the bastard, without asking anybody permission: *Yo janguéo, tu janguéas, él/ella janguéa, nosotros janguéamos, ellos janguéan...* And if addressing upper-crust Spanglishistas, you might even say, *vosotros janguéis*.

What’s more, the word has been adopted into the official municipal lexicon in some Los Angeles neighborhoods, where I have actually seen street signs to discourage loitering that say, “No *Janguear*.”

And notice that *janguear* is used only for that one connotation of “to hang.” You would never greet anybody with, “Hey, how’s it *janguéando?*”

Now, you can also conjugate Spanish words to give them English endings, but no examples come to mind. Estoy totally blanking. I’ll have to get *pensar-ing* on this one.

Spanglish Rule #32

Never, pero nunca nunca, stay in English or Spanish for too long, que da mal ejemplo.

You must switch between languages compulsively, casi pathologically, si quieres hacerte master del idioma Spanglish. Ahí está la cosa. What makes Spanglish come alive, más que cualquier otro detalle, is that constant switcheo. Tienes que go for it every time, siempre y cuando the switch is in compliance with Spanglish dos and don'ts—which, frankly, todavía están up for grabs.

The seasoned Spanglish hablante is on the lookout for any chance to switch, como un gato medio wild buscando any chance to slip out of the house. If the door is left open just a crack . . . it's hasta la vista baby.

Spanglish Rule #60

Wherever there's junction, Spanglish will function.

Listen to Spanglish closely, y te fijarás que a lot of the switching tends to happen justo cuando one phrase or fragment or clause, or other unit of speech or thought, links or transitions to the next. (Think commas, periods, prepositions, and conjunction words!)

Aim to switch at these lingual encrucijadas, intuitively reconciling the grams del inglés y el español for perfect fit and maximum flow en lo que brincas back and forth. Trust me, una vez que you get the hang of it, you'll wonder por qué tardaste tanto to start doing it.

Each one of these junctures can function as a revolving door into either language. Por ejemplo, you can be going along in English, English—blah blah blah—then throw in a pero, which takes you instantly into español. Or you might be speaking en español, español—blah blah blah—y de repente te tiras un “but,” que te conduce muy fácilmente into English.

Por cierto, that's exactly how Spanglish actually sounds to people who don't understand both languages. Half the time it's just mucho blah blah blah.

Spanglish Rule #7

Put approved English words a trabajar en tu español.

Approved English words are words that have not yet been adopted officially into Spanish, sin embargo they thrive there, a consecuencia de popular usage and abuse.

Think of these approved English words as having guest-worker visas to operate in your Spanish here in the United States, a.k.a., the Spanglish homeland. Nótese que outside the homeland, tal uso is more illegal but no less frequent.

Estas palabras inglesas are generally underpaid pero muy trabajadoras, so please employ them as much as possible. Aunque sea solo part-time.

Just how many of these approved English words are there currently? Roughly, un montón. Other estimates put the number closer to a montón and a half. But, por ahora, we'll look at just a few.

Spanglish Shortlist of Palabras Aprobadas del Inglés

OFF

I'm not hung over. Pero me siento un poco off.

Apaga la televisión. Don't make me say it again. ¡Ponla off!

Esa mujer en el front row anoche, laughed her nalgas off.

El goofing off es un mecanismo de coping.

They recycle everything, y viven muy off la grid.

Don't set the alarm que mañana tengo el día off.

Try to make it, que la fiesta va estar off the hook.

APPOINTMENT

Hice un appointment en la beauty para darme un nuevo look.

I can't now, porque tengo un appointment to have a fight with my wife.

Oh, he's too busy to talk to his friends. Hay que hacer un appointment.

Pero si hoy no hacemos el teeth whitening. Su appointment era pa' yesterday.

Tuve un appointment with myself para ir shopping en Victoria's Secret.

COMPLAIN

Yo no me paso complaining de nada. Mi único complain es que she snores like a horse.

OK, tengo un complain para ti. ¿Por qué no estoy en tu Top 8 de MySpace?

The concert sucked. Mucha gente estaba complaining about el lipsynching.

Sorry about your haircut. Métele un complain al Better Business Bureau.

DOWN

After I gained the weight back, me sentí bien down.

Mija, those diamonds were fake. Son \$15 dólares que se fueron down the drain.

The guy se ve muy amable, muy down on earth, ¿no? So are we all going to Puerto Rico for Christmas? Porque I'm down!

We turned off the lights. Entonces le di un beso en el downtown.

FULL

Perdóname, my bad. Acepto full responsibility.

Es que I can't eat another bite. Ya estoy full.

Después de ser una ama de casa full-time por tantos años, I'm really enjoying estar divorciada.

¿Cómo de full está la clase de spinning?

Ese Lou “El Gordo” Dobbs on CNN es tan arrogante, tan pre- sumido, tan full of himself.

HOMELESS

Throw them out already, que ni un homeless se pone esos zapatos.

Estoy harto de estar schlepping* around, como si fuera un homeless.

If you don't, por lo menos, get un part-time, nos quedamos homeless.

I'm telling you, ese hombre homeless drives un Cadillac Escalade nuevecito.

¿Vivir contigo? Prefiero estar homeless.

SERIOUS

Tengo algo super serious que discutir contigo about esas mini faldas you like to wear.

Seriously, no es pa' tanto.

He'll never win the tamale-eating contest, hasta que no se ponga serious.

But like seriously, te lo digo, I totally blanked.

Gracias a Dios, it was just a rash, nada muy serious.

SHOW

Basta ya de estar fooling around. ¡Se acabó el show!

Ah no, esta familia es un show!

No voy a poder ir a tu show, pero te deseo mucho luck.

Siempre le gusta estar showing off.

Como quien dice, “El show tiene que go on.”

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