

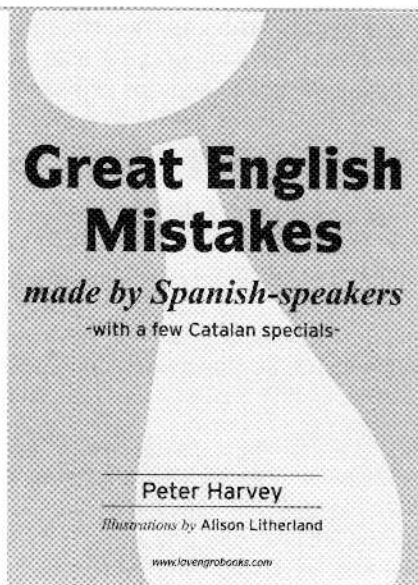
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GREAT ENGLISH MISTAKES MADE BY SPANISH SPEAKERS – WITH A FEW CATALAN SPECIALS

Peter Harvey (2008)

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As the author himself points out in the Introduction, everyone makes mistakes when they are speaking a second language. Mistakes are part of the language learning process. However, this does not mean that non-native speakers should not pay attention to them. Quite the contrary: non-native speakers of whatever L2 language must learn from their mistakes if they do not want to learn them. *Great English Mistakes made by Spanish speakers* focuses on the significance of identifying every speaker's mistakes on the one hand and the importance of distinguishing between trivial and serious mistakes on the other.

This book provides the reader with a comprehensive list of almost 300 mistakes made by Spanish speakers of English. These mistakes range from very common ones such as the confusion between *boring* and *bored* or the misuse of the word *fathers* instead of *parents*, to some more striking items such as the translation of the title into Spanish of Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*. In addition to this, the book also offers a special mention of mistakes made by Catalan speakers of English as well as two appendices dealing with vowel and consonant phonetic symbols and a list of common English irregular verbs and their Spanish equivalents.

The entries in the book are delivered in the traditional dictionary alphabetical style which makes it a very user-friendly volume for quick reference. In order to reinforce this alphabetical structure, the author gives his target audience an easy-to-search A-Z content table at the beginning of the book and a useful cross-referenced word index at the end of it. It is both enjoyable and easy-to-read and maintains a sensible balance between the language issues involved and a light-hearted narrative style (for instance, when writing about the lexical entry *Buckingham* the author says, "The King of Spain lives in la Zarzuela, but does not mean that he lives in a light operetta or in a fish stew"). It makes the reading really amusing and pleasurable.

The entries displayed in the book fall into one of the following linguistic categories:

1. Phonetic mistakes: some common pronunciation errors by Spanish speakers of English are provided, e.g. the distinction between plosive / b / and fricative / v /. Spanish learners of English are usually taught that this distinction cannot be found in standard Spanish. However, it is highly distinctive in English because there is a lot of difference between the following statement in English 'RP English has twelve vowels' and the nonsense sentence 'RP English has twelve bowels.'

2. Spelling mistakes: if a Spanish L2 user is thinking of making a reservation for a hotel room in an Arab country which is bordered by Tunisia, Lybia, Niger, Mali and Mauritania, he or she must be careful with the spelling of that country as the l and the r are the opposite way round in English from Spanish, namely: 'Algeria'.

3. Lexical mistakes: most of the entries in the book can be classified under this broad heading. It can, in turn, be divided into the following subcategories:

a. False friends: some false friends have some space in the book, ranging from the classic false friends *constipated*, *library* or *sympathetic* to the more unusual *abandon* or *luxury* (instead of leave and lust, respectively).

b. Phraseological units: there is no doubt that phraseology plays an important role in language teaching nowadays. Idiomaticity is a significant feature of natural language, whatever language it is. Therefore, L2 learners should pay special

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attention to natural collocations in English: e.g. if they arrive late at the station or the airport, they *miss* (not *lose*) the train or the plane.

c. False lexical borrowings: some students get really surprised when they learn that the word *footing* does not refer to jogging in spite of its spelling; *footing* does exist in English but it has a different meaning from that of Spanish. Similar examples can be found like *camping*, *lifting* or *parking*.

d. Similarity word pairs: these word pairs can be grouped on the basis of formal similarity, e.g. *mayor* and *major* or meaning relationships, e.g. *clock* and *watch*.

4. Grammatical mistakes: grammar receives careful attention. Accordingly, problematic grammar areas for Spanish speakers of English are dealt with in the book, such as the use of certain verb tenses or the distinction between *few* and *little*, or *many* and *much*.

5. Culture-bound mistakes: Spanish people celebrate the 6th of January (Día de Reyes). Do English people have a sort of Wise Men Day in the UK? No, they don't. This celebration is specific to Spain and other Spanish-speaking countries.

As far as strengths and weaknesses are concerned, some positive aspects have already been mentioned: it is an easy-to-read and user-friendly book for quick reference. On the negative side, however, explicit explanations would have contributed to a clearer understanding of which mistakes are trivial and which are serious.

All in all, *Great English Mistakes Made by Spanish Speakers* may benefit both intermediate and advanced Spanish students of English who are able to read and understand the comments and tips provided. Teachers of English may also find it useful to correct common mistakes made at the elementary level.

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