

## THE WORLD OF BUSINESS: A BILINGUAL APPROACH

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*This paper focuses on a presentation of two business languages, English and Spanish, with the purpose of rendering similarities and differences between them, as perceived by Romanian students. Various principles have been analysed in order to emphasize the special attributes of each business vocabulary unit, such as: the independence of Business Spanish learning research, characteristics of the Business English-Spanish course, focusing on similar English and Spanish business terms, and differences of meaning regarding the specific business realities of the two cultures.*

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### Introduction

The problem of an association between Business English and Spanish by Romanian students has appeared thanks to the Master's Programme, "International Business Administration", now offered at the University of Craiova, The Faculty of Economics and Business Administration. All the courses which make the syllabus of the programme are taught in English, and, consequently, Business Spanish was another subject to be structured for delivery using English as the language of instruction.

The students who attend this course have already completed a Business English course and wish to learn Business Spanish for particular reasons connected with their studies or jobs. The teacher of such a group is thus faced with learners, often adults, who, now, are well aware of their purpose in learning the language as they are business people who need to be able to handle deals and negotiations in English and Spanish. Such a language educator has to develop programmes, classes, and teaching methods to address these students' needs, which are different from those of native-English-speaking students studying Spanish as a foreign language. Most of the materials and courses available for teaching Spanish to Romanian students are not appropriate for teaching Business Spanish at a Master's programme where the language of instruction is English and the mother tongue is Romanian. As a result, a gap in materials had to be filled for these specific-purpose learners, taking into consideration learners' needs as central to the problem of deciding course content.

Teaching a Business Spanish course using Business English as a filter language has always been both challenging and motivating. It has been challenging because it represented a new approach of business language which had to be seen through a three-dimensional linguistic perspective: English, Spanish and Romanian. Motivation came from the idea that, starting from the Romanian linguistic background on business knowledge, both teacher and students had to focus on a Romance language, Spanish, and a Germanic language, English, almost at the same time during classes.

### The Independence of Business Spanish Learning Research

High educated people of the world have fostered prestigious languages. Hundreds of years ago, Romans welcomed the study of Greek until Latin was widely considered "the sole safeguard of man's store of culture, science and faith" (Lewis 1997:27). European high culture was dominated by French and most authors and poets used French as their preferred language. During the 19<sup>th</sup>

and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, German dominated the world of science in Europe and North America. (Lewis 1997). English is the “international language” of the moment and a key in global communication in many fields of activity. There are countries where bilingual education programmes that include the national language and a language of prestige are very common. This trend towards globalization opens the perspective for the acquisition of bilingual abilities.

In order for a bilingual programme to be successful, it must develop both languages and use them alternatively to promote academic achievement. If the language used denotes consistency and cross-grade articulation, it is of great help for students’ development (Christian, Montone, Lindholm, and Carranza 1997). Students’ progress is constantly monitored in both languages. For bilingual courses, assessment needs to include language and content. Evaluation of language proficiency and content knowledge need to be separated when carried out in the second language so that students might acknowledge their ability to use grammar patterns correctly when they actively participate in a Business English and Spanish environment.

Vivian Cook (1994: 2) gives three examples of the contribution that second language learning has on language teaching: “understanding the students’ contribution to learning, understanding how teaching techniques and methods work, and understanding the overall goals of language teaching”. In the case of the Business Spanish course, Spanish is not the second language for Romanian students, but actually the second foreign language they study, after English. Given a learner or a group of learners with a specific purpose in learning Business Spanish, it seemed logical in a learner-centred approach to base a course on that purpose and on the learners’ needs in this situation. Once a learner’s needs have been defined, in terms of why he wished to learn Spanish through English, and the kind of English and Spanish he will have to use, this information can be used as guideline for the content of the course suited to his particular interests and needs.

### **Characteristics of the Business English-Spanish Course**

Cultural aspects are very often present in business people’s lives and, quite frequently, they find it difficult to cope with all the requirements of such a problem. Students need to be aware of all the implications of the concept of “crossing borders”. They also need to know how to do their jobs by using as an advantage the partner’s culture so that they should have a profitable deal. This course **has been designed to help students maximise their potential on the global stage through mind-opening cross cultural communication courses and it offers** a range of flexible, scrupulously researched and vibrant cross cultural communication workshops. Implications of English and Spanish upon the Romanian business life have been taken into consideration when establishing the linguistic and informational corpus of the course.

As adaptation to students’ needs, the Business Spanish course looks at the following main areas: cross cultural communication; the impact of cultural values on norms and practices; investigating the way in which cultural aspects impact companies, personnel and team building; discussing ways in which differences can be solved, and establishing strategies for dealing with future issues. Whereas business courses present the specific reality of economics in terms of theory and practice, business language courses attempt to adapt students’ business knowledge to either English or Spanish discourse. The course has the following learning objectives: to introduce students to the theoretical and practical grammatical structures, to practice through exercises in order to identify when culture impacts business, to develop students’ ability to recognize and handle cross cultural issues at the workplace, to make students understand business texts, economics materials, to make them communicate in Spanish and English and the most important of all, to make them be able to do their job both in English and in Spanish.

International English has long been acknowledged as the main means of communication in the world of business. It has also been a source of inspiration for other languages especially in the field of business. Thus, the teaching method used in the first courses of Spanish was not that of

introducing new vocabulary, but rather focus on those English words which could easily find their translation into Spanish by means of association. Thanks to the activity of brainstorming in English, Romanian students of Spanish came up with their own list of “new words”. Here is the list of similar terms, which was conceived by Romanian students during their very first Business Spanish course taught through English:

<i>English</i>	<i>Spanish</i>
<b>bank</b>	<b>banco</b>
<b>debate</b>	<b>debate</b>
<b>group</b>	<b>grupo</b>
<b>idea</b>	<b>idea</b>
<b>hotel</b>	<b>hotel</b>
<b>list</b>	<b>lista</b>
<b>telephone</b>	<b>teléfono</b>
<b>cheque</b>	<b>cheque</b>
<b>secretary</b>	<b>secretario</b>
<b>costs</b>	<b>costes</b>
<b>economy</b>	<b>economía</b>
<b>product</b>	<b>producto</b>
<b>funds</b>	<b>fondos</b>

Such similarities of the two languages, associated mentally with their translation into Romanian, which is again almost the same, encouraged further research into the language and made students realise that finding similarities between the learned Spanish terms and the already known English words is a very effective way of expanding knowledge upon the new language.

The Business Spanish course mainly concentrates upon real life situations exposed either in texts or dialogues. It is a genuine vocabulary builder that presents both formal and informal Business Spanish in context. Here is an example of a dialogue used in class and the translation into English provided by Romanian students. The equivalence in translation has been guided so that it might render the same informal style. It is focused on business language connected with work:

<i>Spanish</i>	<i>English</i>
Gloria: <b>No puedo más</b> , Sofía. Necesito unas vacaciones.	Gloria: <b>I’ve had it</b> , Sofía. I need a holiday..
Sofía: Y yo... Esto de <b>currar</b> tanto no es sano.	Sofía: <b>Working this hard</b> isn’t good for your health.
Gloria: ¡Ni que lo digas! Llevo <b>una racha</b> que <b>no paro</b> . Hoy he pasado toda la mañana <b>pegada al ordenador</b> sin descansar.	Gloria: You said it! <b>I haven’t let up for a while now</b> . And today I’ve spent the whole morning <b>glued to my computer</b> without taking a break.
Sofía: ¿Y tus <b>compañeros de trabajo</b> ? ¿También están <b>agobiados</b> ?	Sofía: What about your <b>colleagues</b> ? Are they <b>swamped</b> too?
Gloria: ¡ <b>Qué va!</b> Yo <b>estoy a tope</b> y ellos están allí charlando. No <b>dan ni golpe</b> . En fin. <b>Estoy hasta el gorro</b> del <b>trabajo</b> . Y no aguanto más a mi <b>jefe</b> .	Gloria: <b>Are you kidding? I’m up to my ears</b> and they are chatting away. <b>They don’t lift a finger</b> . Anyway, <b>I’ve had it with my job</b> . And I can’t take my <b>boss</b> anymore.
Sofía: ¿Qué dices? Siempre te has llevado bien con Arturo...	Sofía: What are you saying? You’ve always got along well with Arturo...
Gloria: Sí, pero desde que le han <b>ascendido</b> y es <b>un pez gordo</b> en <b>la empresa</b> , se ha puesto insoportable.	Gloria: Yeah, but ever since he got <b>promoted</b> and became <b>a head honcho</b> in the <b>company</b> ,

<p>Sofía: Vaya..  Gloria: <b>Total</b>, chica, estoy super <b>quemada</b>. A ver si consigo que me <b>despidan</b>.  Sofía: Y si te <b>echar</b>, ¿que harías? ¿Vivirías del <b>paro</b>?  Gloria: Pues claro, mientras que me <b>organizo</b>. Y luego a lo mejor me <b>monto un negocio</b>. Algo <b>rentable</b>, claro.  Sofía: ¡Estás loca! ¿Y como lo harías? No tienes <b>capital</b>..  Gloria: Eso es <b>lo de menos</b> ... Ya verás, Sofía, ¡Voy a <b>triunfar</b>!  (adapted from <i>Spanish among Amigos. Conversational Spanish Beyond the Classroom</i>, pp. 61)</p>	<p>he's been unbearable.  Sofía: Oh dear..  Gloria: <b>Anyway</b>, I'm really <b>burned out</b>. With a little luck I'll get myself <b>fired</b>.  Sofía: And what would you do if they <b>laid you off</b>? <b>Live off unemployment benefits</b>?  Gloria: Yeah, while <b>I get myself together</b>. And then I'd probably <b>start up my own business</b>. Something <b>profitable</b>, of course.  Sofía: You're nuts. How would you do it? You don't have any <b>capital</b>..  Gloria: Listen, that's <b>the least of it</b> ... You just wait, Sofía, I'm going to <b>make it</b>!</p>
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As it can be seen, the Spanish-English equivalence has been done taking into consideration the business reality of working in an office both in the Spanish culture and in the English one. For such expressions as “estar hasta el gorro” or “montar un negocio” have been found English equivalents which are also quite similar to the Romanian ones. “Estar hasta el gorro” is “to have had it” or “to be fed up”, but literally it means “to be up to one’s cap”, which is “a fi sătul până peste cap” in Romanian. “Montar un negocio” is “to set up a business” in English and “a începe o nouă afacere” in Romanian.

The Romanian students’ translation has been done directly from English into Spanish, without using any English-Romanian or Romanian-Spanish dictionaries. Nevertheless, an English-Spanish/ Spanish-English dictionary has been used for a better accuracy of the text. Before the translation, students were asked to consider business terms such as: *ascender, despedir, echar, organizar, rentable, capital*, and expressions such as: *estar a tope, estar agobiado/a, no dar ni golpe, montar un negocio*. The explanations for them have been provided both in Spanish and in English with the purpose of expanding knowledge in the two languages. Thanks to such translations, students have been exposed to real life business situations in doors and out doors and they have learnt that Business Spanish and Business English have the same patterns in terms of terminology.

If students consider language as a set of symbols for their thoughts and opinions connected to the business world, they might realize that as they converse normally, translation is constantly a flow of words. Their specific opinions are translated into symbols which are reprocessed into thought-images again. When Romanian students begin to deal with Business Spanish and English, the confusion may be doubled. However, the advantage that translation from one language into another has over the translation of thoughts to symbols is that when they deal with the two languages, they actually deal with a more or less objective group of symbols. Consequently, in order for Romanian students to be able to translate correctly both concerning terminology and meaning, they must think and feel both languages, while always being cognizant of the differences and similarities inherent in both languages.

## Conclusions

Association of words, expressions and their meaning in the two languages has helped students abandon the sweet temptation to use Romanian and has given them an impetus to greater trust in speaking Spanish alongside with English at work. The results of a Business Spanish Course using English as a filter language have been impressive for the business environment in Craiova. After

having graduated from the Master's Programme, "International Business Administration", students were able to better communicate in the two languages, improving considerably the business relationships between the companies they represented and the Spanish ones. In this case, International English has given space to Business Spanish and, students' ability to speak both Business English and Business Spanish has contributed to the development of regional trade.

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