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Gaming, glamour and other American realities in Spanish obesogenic news

Debra Westall*

Universitat Politècnica de València, Camino de Vera s/n, Valencia 46022, Spain

Abstract

The major Spanish dailies regularly publish news about health and nutritional research, especially that conducted in the USA, and in doing so, many American English (AmE) lexical creations have been incorporated into Spanish. In this study over 50 AmE loanwords were first identified in 88 national press reports on childhood obesity. Then the 28 popular culture items were extracted from a 48-article sample and divided into four thematic categories: consumerism, entertainment, sports and video gaming. The analysis provides evidence of contemporary Spanish borrowing of pure (*king-size*) and naturalized (*hamburguesas*) AmE loans as well as calques like *supermercado* and *videojuegos*.

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1. Introduction

In Spain, newspapers have always played a fundamental role in the initial phases of lexical transfer from the source language as well as in the consolidation of loanword use in the borrowing language over time (Esteban-Asencio, 2008; Vázquez-Amador, 2012). Throughout the twentieth century the Spanish language responded to language contact and socio-cultural changes by adopting myriad terms whose origins may be traced to American

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34-96-387-7007 (ext.75311); fax:+34-96-387-7539.
E-mail address: dwestall@upv.es

English (AmE). *Fast food* and *prime time* are two Americanisms (*angloamericanismos*), i.e. loanwords or lexical borrowings, which the Spanish mass media use to designate cultural realities created or coined in the USA.

American lexical items are commonly found in Spanish press reports, as revealed in previous small corpus-based research into health and nutrition news (Westall, 2011). So while the Spanish press regularly publishes news about nutritional guidelines, scientific investigation, institutional initiatives and pediatric concerns, much of this information originating in the USA, the Spanish language has been able to accommodate a number of American lexical creations that characterize the global obesogenic environment and its discourse (Westall, 2013).

This research aims to better our understanding of the peculiarities of obesogenic discourse, and particularly, the use of AmE loanwords in Spanish health news related to childhood overweight and obesity. After briefly explaining the materials and methodology used for this small corpus study, this paper will focus on the findings from quantitative and qualitative analyses of the 28 AmE loanwords that represent American contributions to popular culture and contemporary peninsular Spanish lexicon.

2. Materials and methodology

Previous corpus-based research into Spanish print media coverage of childhood obesity brought to my attention a surprising array of AmE lexical creations sprinkled throughout the discourse. In order to properly examine this phenomenon, I began documenting AmE loanwords in a specially-created corpus of 231 news articles published between 1 January and 31 December 2008 in the top three national newspapers (*ABC*, *El Mundo*, *El País*). The AmE loanwords appearing in 19 headlines were registered first to create an initial list of prominent items. Each article was then scrutinized manually for AmE loanwords or expressions; this search served to identify and record 55 AmE loanwords in the discourse context of 88 articles. These loanwords were then classified as food (8), health and medical (19) and popular culture (28) loanwords, the latter then being divided for the present study into four socio-cultural categories: consumerism, entertainment, sports and video gaming.

The quantitative analysis of these 28 items aimed to estimate the frequency with which each AmE loanword appeared in the discourse (this being reflected in number of articles, not repeated use in a single article) and to highlight multiple loanword use in the articles. The qualitative analysis aimed to examine variations in form or format of individual loanwords, tendencies in Spanish use of the 28 AmE popular culture loanwords, and their role in relation to childhood obesity discourse in the 48-article sample.

3. Results and discussion

In regard to the quantitative analysis, results showed that 15 AmE loanwords were used in 15 *ABC* articles (*aeróbic*, *baloncesto*, *béisbol*, *bolos*, *estrella*, *hardcore gamers*, *king-size*, *NBA*, *Popeye*, *reality show*, *supermercado*, *videoconsola*, *videojuego*, *videojugadores*, *zapping*), 5 of these having more than one popular culture loanword, while three other AmE loanwords were identified in two articles (*palomitas*, *donuts*, *bulimia*). Second, there were 12 AmE loanwords (*baloncesto*, *bolera*, *bolos*, *estrella*, *houla-hop*, *juegos de ordenadores*, *prime time*, *rapero*, *reality show*, *supermercado*, *videoconsola*, *videojuegos*) identified in 17 *El Mundo* articles, 4 of these having more than one popular culture loanword while 7 additional articles featured other AmE loans (*bulimia*, *comida basura*, *comida rápida*, *índice glucémico*, *ortorexia*, *perritos calientes*). Third, there were 16 loanwords identified in 16 *El País* articles (*aeróbic*, *baloncesto*, *canasta*, *disc jockeys*, *estrella*, *funk*, *glamour*, *hiphop*, *Homer Simpson*, *parque de atracciones*, *Popeye*, *supermercado*, *vaquero*, *videoconsola*, *videojuego*, *videojugadores*), 7 of these contained more than one popular culture loan, while 10 articles had other AmE loans as well (*comida basura*, *comida rápida*, *dieta mediterránea*, *donut*, *efecto rebote*, *grasas trans*, *hamburguesa*, *síndrome metabólico*, *síndrome X*). Finally, the 28 popular culture loanwords were classified thematically as follows:

- Consumerism: *king-size*, *supermercado(s)*, *vaquero(s)*
- Entertainment: *disc jockeys*, *estrella*, *funk*, *glamour*, *hip hop*, *Homer Simpson*, *rapero*, *Popeye*, *prime time*, *reality show*, *zapping*
- Sports: *aeróbic*, *baloncesto*, *béisbol*, *bolero*, *bolos*, *canasta*, *houla-hop*, *NBA*, *parque de atracciones*
- Video gaming: *hardcore gamers*, *juegos de ordenadores*, *videoconsola(s)*, *videojuego(s)*, *videojugador(es)*

Even though the majority (22) of the 28 AmE loanwords appeared only once or twice in the dailies, six loanwords were repeatedly used in the discourse: *reality show* (in 4 articles), *baloncesto* (5), *estrella* (7), *supermercado* (10), *videoconsolas* (8) and *videojuegos* (11); thus, these were selected for a more detailed examination.

First, both *reality show* and the abbreviated *reality* were found with and without special markings, and in one particular *El Mundo* article both forms had inverted commas and were used alongside another AmE loanword, *rapero* (< rapper):

- La reinscripción social de un rapero, nuevo 'reality' en la cadena MTV (headline, mundo2805b)
- La reinscripción protagonizará el nuevo 'reality show' de MTV, ocho episodios que mostrarán la vida del rapero estadounidense T.I. (mundo2805b)

These uses agree with the information provided by Rodríguez-González and Lillo-Buades: “Programa televisivo que muestra aspectos desagradables de la vida real, a menudo con escenas truculentas que producen gran morbo entre los espectadores” (1997: 423). Moreover, the same article provided evidence of what these authors considered the “infrequent use” of the adjective ‘reality’ and of how obese children are seen as worthy of mention in the line-up of ‘reality’ characters: “El fenómeno 'reality' lo abarca todo. Herederas millonarias, madres separadas, niños obesos...” (mundo2805b).

Furthermore, the reality phenomenon was also associated in the discourse with two other manifestations of popular culture, *baloncesto* (< basketball) and *estrella* (< star), found in 5 and 7 news articles, respectively. The first uses of basketball date in AmE from the late 1890s, while the calque *baloncesto* has been used in Spanish since the early 1930s (Del Hoyo, 1995: 40). As for *estrella*, according to Lorenzo (1996: 423), “[...] en el caso de la voz inglesa *star* ha triunfado el calco y se prefiere *estrella* o *astro*, según el caso, cuando se habla de artistas de cine más o menos famosos [...]”. In Spanish obesity news, *estrella* is used as well in reference to the NBA player Shaquille O’Neal. As reported in the article entitled “Adelgazar en vivo y en directo” (abc2101), this basketball star is doing his part to fight against childhood obesity, in this case with his own reality show:

- La cruzada catódica contra los michelines alcanzó su culmen durante el verano del año pasado, cuando una de las estrellas más refulgentes de la NBA, Shaquille O’Neal, capitaneó para la cadena ABC el programa «Shaq’s big challenge» (El gran reto de Shaq). [...] Las expectativas eran enormes porque, para variar, aquello parecía un reality show incluso humano.

Despite the popularity of basketball and its star players today, the need to promote physical activity among Spanish children is not being properly addressed, as reflected in the report entitled “No es la hamburguesa, niños, es el deporte” (país1202). In this article, José María Odriozola, President of the *Federación Española de Atletismo*, affirms that physical education teachers in Spain, for example, are not doing enough to stimulate youngsters to actively participate in sports: “Les sienta y les explica el reglamento del baloncesto en vez de coger un balón y tirar a canasta. Y se ha perdido el gusto por sudar” (país1202).

In the discourse on childhood obesity, the lack of physical activity is clearly highlighted, but it is not the sole contributing factor. Responsibility for overweight youngsters also resides in consumer choices and dietary habits, which are, in turn, associated in the discourse with modern supermarkets. The AmE *supermarket* was first created in the early 1930s, and Lorenzo (1996: 77) claims that this compound is well consolidated in Spanish. This calque was found in all three dailies, and as illustrated in the following examples, the discourse reveals how supermarkets contribute to childhood obesity. On the one hand are reports of French regulation aimed to remove sweets from supermarket check-out counters, and on the other is the direct reference to decisions taken by parents when grocery shopping:

- El 5 de febrero, Rosalynne Bachelot, ministra [francesa] de Sanidad, Juventud y Deportes, anunció que se tomaría esta medida para luchar contra la obesidad, al igual que la supresión de los expositores de confitería en las cajas de los supermercados. (país2004)

- Ocurre algo similar con la obesidad infantil. Si los padres van al supermercado y compran todo lo que tiene grasa... Con represión no se arreglan las cosas, y para un Gobierno es más fácil culpar a las empresas que a los ciudadanos. (país1509)

In addition to sedentary lifestyles and contemporary consumer behavior, video games are generally considered as a key factor in the current obesity epidemic, with two calques, *videoconsolas* and *videojuegos*, being found repeatedly in the discourse. As observed in the extracts below, the prevalence of obesity among Spanish youngsters is expressly related with changing dietary habits, no longer the *dieta mediterránea* (another AmE loan, Mediterranean diet), and ever more sedentary lifestyles, which are clearly influenced by the prominent role of video-gaming:

- Y si añadimos a estos que los niños españoles son cada vez más sedentarios, más aficionados a las videoconsolas y los ordenadores y se alejan de las bondades de la dieta mediterránea, parece casi obvio que nuestros jóvenes tengan achaques más propios de la tercera edad y casi el cincuenta por ciento de nuestros escolares sean incapaces ni siquiera de tocarse con sus dedos las puntas de los pies. (abc0706b)
- La obesidad (cuya prevalencia entre los críos españoles de seis a 13 años se ha duplicado en los últimos 20 años) está estrechamente vinculada al consumo de productos azucarados, bollería, embutidos y refrescos; además del tiempo dedicado a actividades sedentarias, como ver la televisión o los videojuegos. (mundo2702)

Even though childhood obesity is frequently associated with video gaming in the discourse, the gaming industry is now reportedly adapting its technology so as to encourage less sedentary lifestyles and to distance itself from obesity-related diseases such as syndrome X (> *síndrome x*), also known as metabolic syndrome (> *síndrome metabólico*). Evidence of this is found in the article entitled “CRÍTICA. JUEGOS: Adiós al sedentarismo” (país2404):

- Se cree que en pocos años tanto la población adulta como infantil experimentará un aumento del síndrome metabólico o también denominado síndrome X, [...] Ante esta problemática no se pueden hacer oídos sordos y Nintendo ha sido uno de los primeros en ponerse las pilas para que su consola Wii pueda combatir la nueva epidemia del siglo XXI. No se podrá decir que los videojuegos fomentan el sedentarismo, la revolución se llama Wii Fit y hará sudar la gota gorda a todo aquel que quiera ponerse en forma de manera divertida pero eficaz. (país2404)

Regardless of the gaming industry’s efforts to be seen less as a culprit and more as a cure for obesity, in Spain video gaming is still considered as the major contributing factor both by journalists and experts in nutrition, as revealed in the interview with nutritionist Etelvina Suárez, entitled “Los adultos se empeñan en querer niños gorditos” (mundo0103):

- P.- ¿Qué provoca más michelines: la videoconsola o la fabada?
- R.- Hay que desterrar mitos: los platos de cuchara no son los que provocan obesidad. Todos los niños, incluidos los que tienen sobrepeso, deben comerlos. [...] Pero el sedentarismo es más grave que una alimentación desequilibrada.

Finally, the most surprising revelations from this study were perhaps the references to obesity among youngsters, namely to their physiques, as illustrated first by a music critic who describes the performers as follows: “[...] los brasileños Bonde Do Rolê, cuarteto de chicos y chicas sin *glamour*, callejeros y en su mayoría obesos” (país2306) and second, by an interviewer who remarks on how the young subject is the exception to the rule of donut consumption and juvenile overweight:

- No tiene apetito, pero [...] le endosan un donut que terminará en el bolso de la abuela para el desayuno de la mañana. "No me gusta comer mucho", dice. La estadística sobre la obesidad infantil no va con ella. (país0603)

4. Conclusions

With childhood overweight and obesity on the rise in Spain, the national press frequently features reports on its causes and consequences, the discourse often focusing on research and realities originating in the USA. As a result, a surprising array of AmE loanwords were identified in a small corpus of news articles extracted from the three major Spanish dailies. The findings from the analyses of 28 AmE loanwords are described as these exemplify American contributions to modern popular culture, namely in areas of consumerism, entertainment, sports and video gaming. The results also shed light on contemporary Spanish borrowing practices as represented by pure (*glamour*) and naturalized (*rapero*) loanwords as well as calques like *supermercado* and *videojuegos*.

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