Why Making Mistakes In Another Language Should Be Encouraged



On Wednesday I opted to take a day (1) _____ from my beloved job editing the English Edition of EL PAÍS, so I could race through a freelance translation I had been (2) _____ to do. Like any good freelancer, however, rather than making good use of the luxury of this extra time, I spent most of my morning (3) _____to Twitter – partly due to the political earthquake that was being (4) _____throughout the country and partly due to the flurry of responses I was receiving to a tweet I had posted about making mistakes in another language.

When I moved to Madrid (5) _____in the year 2000, I only knew a few words of Spanish. The incredible social life I found in the capital, however, combined with my job as an English teacher, soon put paid to that and (6) _____a very short amount of time I was building up my linguistic skills. The Madrid of the early noughties was a non-stop fiesta for me, with a seemingly (7) _____supply of house parties, discobares, nightclubs and after-hours – and thanks to a steady diet of San Miguel beer, and (8) _____strong whiskey-and-cokes, I had plenty of opportunity to practice my Spanish with the friends I made along the way, with very few inhibitions.

When you make one of these mistakes and people laugh, you will never forget it, and (unless you are my wife) you are very (9) _____to make that same mistake again One of the keys to the speed with which I (10) _____up the language, in my opinion, was a complete willingness to make mistakes. (11) _____the first of these, and one that still makes me laugh, was when I went shopping in my local market to buy some pasta. Being something of a fan of Italian food, I wanted some of those little ridged tubes – known to me, and Italians I (12) _____, as penne. Imagine, then, the confusion and frankly shock on the face of the stall holder as I pointed at the packets on the shelf behind her and loudly shouted "¡Pene! ¡Pene!" Which of course means "penis" in Spanish.

And then there was the time while giving an English class that I (13) _____my own handwriting and explained that "to trip" in Spanish was "pezonar" – basically I had created a new verb, "to nipple," rather than what I wanted to say, which was "tropezar." My (14) _____of using my fingers to imitate legs stumbling along the table only heightened the confusion.

This of course also works the other way – my Spanish wife, who speaks English but appears to (15) _____ abandoned all hope decades ago of actually improving her level – is an endless source of joyous linguistic malapropisms. If you ever get in an elevator with her don't be alarmed if she invites you to "touch the bottom," rather than the button. She also (16) _____to introduce my father, who was a solicitor, by

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saying: "This is Michael. He is a liar." (Depending on your opinion of lawyers, that description may not have been too far (17) _____the mark.)

Even my three-year-old son is providing us with a few gems lately, our favorite being his insistence (18) _____saying "Monster fuck!" every time he sees one of those trucks with the massive wheels.

The point is that when you make one of these mistakes and people laugh, you will never forget it, and (unless you are my wife) you are very unlikely to make that same mistake again. I remember all my clangers from those early days in Spain and they helped me sort (19) _____my pollo from my cajones quick sharp.

And as the responses from my tweet proved yesterday, I'm not alone. Many people, (20) _____they are Spanish or English learners, had a story to share. Here are some of the best I received. Who knows – they might just save you from making the same mistakes.

#I was told last week that a Spanish student of mine went to London and got funny looks in M&S asking for tights. When she got home she realised her pronunciation meant she was asking for a pair of tits.

my friend was trying to find me in the park and I told her "estoy al lado de los pajeros"



My first year in Spain I remember coming back from the toilet in a restaurant and telling a waiter 'no hay sopa en el servicio'. He was pretty confused.

I also had a language exchange buddy from the Canarias who informed me that "all the bitches in Lanzarote are black."

Adapted from article by Simon Hunter
"El País in English"

AMONG	BACK	COMMISSIONED	DESPITE	ENDING
ENDLESS	FRIGHTENINGLY	GATHER	GLUED	HAVE
MIME	MISREAD	OFF	OFF	ON
OUT	PICKED	POSSIBLE	TOOK	UNLEASHED
UNLIKELY	USED	WHETHER	WITHIN	WOULD

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