

Leaps of Language

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As many of you know, I grew up in Spain, thanks to my Dad's job which transferred our family to Madrid when I was 13 years old. I graduated from high school at the American School of Madrid and thanks to my time there I developed a lifelong passion for culture and language. I speak seven of them with reasonable levels of fluency, so nothing intrigues me more than someone in an elevator who is speaking a language that I can't even regionally place, much less understand.

Spanish, of course, doesn't fall into that category. I speak it well enough (thanks to so many years in Spain followed by a college degree in it) that I am often mistaken for a native speaker - which I guess I almost am. But even with that level of familiarity, there is one aspect of the Spanish language that fascinates me all the time, and that is the number of words that it has given to the English language. I'm not talking about Spanish words that are used in their native form as if they were English words, like *enchilada*, *amigo*, and *Los Angeles*. I'm talking about Spanish words that entered the English language because they were overheard and adopted - but typically transmogrified (good word, look it up) along the way. Here are a few of my favorites.

Alligator: This word came from the Spanish phrase *el lagarto*, which means 'lizard.' Say it - sounds just like 'alligator,' doesn't it?

Hoosegow: This is a corruption of the phrase, *el juzgado* which means 'the court.' Hossegow is a slang English word for jail or prison (as in, "He's in the hoosegow - we gotta go spring him.")

Key West: Who would have thought that the name of this popular resort comes directly from Spanish, and not from the fact that it's a western Cay. Nope: It comes from the Spanish phrase, "Cayo Hueso," which means "Bone Cay." Many ships were wrecked on the Key West coral reefs and because of the bones scattered about it was given this name by the Spaniards and was then misinterpreted by the Americans as 'Key West' because that's what it sounded like to the Anglo ear.

Lariat: Another great word that came from the Spanish. It derives from the phrase "la reata" which means a rope or strap. Similarly, "lasso" comes from "el lazo," which is a noose or braided rope for tying things together.

Mustang: This Word comes from the Spanish word *mesteño* which means, in Spanish, "Pertaining to or derived from the Mesta." The Mesta was an influential association of

shepherders in medieval Castile in Spain. Interesting fact: These people had so much power in Spain that to this day they are free to drive herds of sheep down the main streets of Madrid with impunity - the law protects them.



Palaver: In old western movies it was common to hear one character say to another, "We need to have a palaver." This word derives from the Spanish word "palabra," which means word - although it is also used in slang form to mean an extended conversation.

Rodeo: This word comes from "rodeado," which means "to surround or encircle; a roundup."

This is interesting, isn't it? We use many of these words without even thinking about where they come from; it fascinates me to see how languages leak into one another. Here are a few more.



Ten-gallon (hat): Most of us (myself included) would conclude that the name "ten-gallon" refers to the size of the hat. But in fact it comes from the Spanish phrase, "¡Tan galán!" which translates to "How gallant!"

Vamoose: From the Spanish word ¡Vamos! Which means "Let's go!"

Thanks for reading.