

Ricardo's Spanish Coaching Dispatch

"The 3 Biggest Spanish Learning Mistakes"

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I normally like to stay pretty positive on these coaching dispatches but today I want to talk with you briefly about what I believe are the three biggest Spanish learning mistakes. I know your time is valuable so let's get right to the point here.

Biggest Mistake #1 - Impatience. Yes, impatience. We live in a fast-moving, self-serve, drive-thru culture age. Most people are used to getting what they want quickly. The problem with learning Spanish well is that it does take time to develop the skill. There are no magic wands or powerful pills you can take.

You have to be patient with yourself and with the process. If you aren't, you'll get discouraged and quit. It's that simple and it's far and away the biggest Spanish learning mistake I see people make.

Biggest Mistake #2 - Assuming that words that look the same, or similar, mean the same thing. These false cognates as they are called can really trip up a lot of people. Let's take, for example, the word "embarrassed" in English. If you see the word, "embarazada" in Spanish it would be natural to think that it means "embarrassed." It really means "to be pregnant." You don't want to say to a woman, "Tu estás embarazada?" when you really mean, "Are you embarrassed?" "Ella está embarazada" means, "She is pregnant," not "She is embarrassed."

This is a common mistake and one that you can avoid by a. not assuming that all words that look similar actually mean the same thing, and b. taking the time to look up words like this before you start using them in your actual speech. By the way, Google Translator is a fantastic tool and although a mechanical translator can never be 100 percent accurate, it does a very nice job and could be very helpful for you in this type of situation.

Biggest Mistake #3 - Insisting on following English sentence order. Spanish is a very flexible language from a structural standpoint. English, well, let's just say it's not quite so flexible. For example, let say in English I say, "Bob is going to the store." I cannot correctly say, "Bob, to the store, is going." or "To the store, Bob is going." Those don't sound correct. But with Spanish you could easily do that. Por ejemplo, "Bob está yendo a la tienda." or "A la tienda está yendo Bob", or "Bob, a la tienda, está yendo."

All of those sound fine. The point here is that you don't have to worry about where the put the verb pattern in Spanish near as much as you do in English. Focus on the patterns, not the actual placing of those patterns in a sentence. Doing so will make your life much, at least your Spanish life, much easier.

Oh, by the way, I just thought of what I think is the biggest, the biggest, and baddest mistake of all. I saved the best for last. Ready? Here is it. Being afraid to make mistakes. That's the biggest mistake. Just plain not wanting to make mistakes and beating yourself up when you do. Goodness, you're learning a new language. Making mistakes are part of the game. Let's face it here, Learning a new language will humble even the most powerful and arrogant among us. Laugh at yourself if you must, but by all means be willing to make mistakes. If you're not, you simply won't get very far.

So now, I must close this coaching dispatch or I will commit my gravest mistake at a teacher and that's going too long.

¡Adelante!