

Guide to Spanish bad language. (work in progress)

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1. Preface.

This small text is intended for students of Spanish to be able to explore and understand the rich and sometimes obscure variety of bad language that is there in the Spanish language. The author of this text believes it is important for anyone who is learning a language to be capable of gauging how strong a curse or an insult is and whether it is inappropriate (or better said, too inappropriate) for a given context, so this text is written in the hope that it guides new learners and provides some confidence when dealing with native speakers.

Warning. This text contains a large number of language that can be deemed hurtful, sexist, racist or immoral. The reader is encouraged to avoid it and also to be careful when asking for clarification.

2. Introduction and instructions.

In this text we'll explore as much bad language as the author (native speaker and moderately interested in lexicography) can master.

As you, the reader, may know, some dictionaries provide information about bad language and use signs (often asterisks) to give an idea of the register of the word or phrase. Since this text focuses on bad language, we will assume that, unless stated otherwise, *all* the language that appears in this text is somewhat offensive or inappropriate, but we will also establish a range of severity and other forms of offense.

Following the phrases or words the reader will find a set of signs that can orient about the register and connotation of said phrase or word. Unless stated otherwise, all expressions derived from the main word in the entry have the same connotations.

| | |
|-----|---|
| * | Low register, offensive but sometimes used in a jovial context. |
| ** | Inappropriate register. Possibly used non-offensively in very familiar contexts. |
| *** | Extremely inappropriate. Almost never used with neutral intention, sometimes used deliberately to lower the register. |
| H | Insult intended to hurt |
| R | Racist insult |
| S | Sexist insult |
| D | Allegedly blasphemous (insult to deities or related ideas) |

As is known by anyone who has mastered a language other than his or her mother language, many phrases cannot be translated directly and very often not even an equivalent phrase can be found. Due to this the author has attempted to accompany each phrase with an example for clarification, although it is not clear to what extent this will be helpful or perhaps contribute to the general confusion.

This text is intended to help only within the Iberian Peninsula, excluding the Spanish dialects spoken in America, although additions to this text and suggestions are encouraged.

3. Exclamations.

We will define an exclamation as a spontaneous verbal expression that has no other purpose but to show a surge of feelings. These feelings can be either positive or negative but mustn't be directed to anything specific. If they are, then it will be classified as a curse.

According to this definition, “wow”, “awesome”, “rats” or “shit” would be included, but also stronger exclamation such as “fuck yeah”.

anda!

Used to express mild surprise due to an unexpected outcome. Neutral expression, acceptable in front of children.

coño! (**)

somewhat equivalent to “fuck!”

Used to express surprise, frustration or anger.

As an expression of surprise it is equivalent to “hostia!”, maybe somewhat stronger. When expressing frustration or anger it is equivalent to “fuck!” in English. Despite the sexual meaning, it is not considered sexually discriminatory or offensive (since it is not used as an insult).

The word “coñazo” (**) is often used to mean something very boring or annoying: “esta película es un coñazo” means “this movie is extremely boring”

hala! wow!

Exclamation used when something is excessive or disproportionate. E.g. if I ask a friend to send me a picture of himself so that I can show it to someone and he sends me fifty pictures I would say “hala!” or “hala fotos!”

hostia! (*) equivalent to “crap!”

Very often used to express surprise, but has use as general exclamation. If I'm getting stitches without anaesthesia in a small wound and I'm enduring the pain, I might say “hostia, cómo duele!”

If I'm using a new knife and want to see how well it cuts meat, so I test it on a piece of meat and find that it has also cut the board underneath I'd say “hostia!” or “la hostia!”

Hostia is also often used to refer to one strike or blow in a fight or even an involuntary hit. For example “if you say that again I'll punch you” “si vuelves a decir eso te doy una hostia” or “I've hit myself with the kitchen cupboard door” “me he dado una hostia con la puerta del armario de la cocina”.

Many related slurs also use this word, such as “no me vengas con hostias”, which is somewhat “cut the crap” “está más duro que la hostia” “it's hard as hell” or “ni helado ni hostias!” which would be something like “ice cream my ass!” (that is, an angry way to say “no ice cream”).

See also vocabulary.

joder! (**): “fuck!”

This word is, as “fuck” in English, a verb that can be used for other purposes. It also means to damage something so that it stops working or the purpose is killed (it is also used when said thing stops working on its own devices) such as:

“Mi marido me ha jodido el coche” : “my husband has fucked up my car”

“La lluvia nos jodió el día”: “rain fucked up our day”

“El microondas está jodido”: “the microwave is fucked up”

One of the widely accepted uses is as “tired”: “estoy jodido”: “I’m tired” (still inappropriate).

Another meaning is, like in English, to intentionally cause damage or trouble to someone: “se están besando delante de mí para joderme”: “they are kissing in front of me in order to fuck me”.

It also means to act in a very bothersome way, either intentionally or unintentionally: “los chavales están jodiendo con los coches y con la música” : “the teenagers are fucking about with their cars and their music”.

In certain cases also means “to steal”.

mierda! (*) shit!

Very close to the English word in some of the uses, but there are additional ways to use it in Spanish. We’ll put all the uses here for clarity.

When something sucks, we say in Spanish “es una mierda”, such as “este teléfono es una mierda”.

Note that the register is lower than the equivalent in English. If you want a milder expression you can say “este teléfono es una chufa” or “este teléfono apesta”, which is the one used when translating movies or books.

Also used as “vaya mierda de teléfono” (such a crappy telephone) or “vaya teléfono de mierda”, although this last one might be a curse more than a complaint about the bad quality of the telephone.

Another use is as a curse (if it refers to an object) and an insult if it refers to an individual:

If my car doesn't start and I get angry, I might curse “coche de mierda!”*

If I get angry with the supermarket cash I might insult him/her saying “cajero de mierda!” (**H)

Note that adding “de mierda” adds the insult to an otherwise completely normal word.

toma! score!

Exclamation about a small achievement. Often heard as “toma ya!” (appropriate in informal register).

4. Curses.

We will define a curse as an exclamation that expresses a negative feeling towards any specific entity, be it a person, an object or even an idea.

For example, according to this definition “stupid key!” would be a curse, as well as “fucking computer!”, but not “fucking asshole” (which would be an insult) or “fuck!” (which would be an exclamation).

Cagar(se) (*) somewhat equivalent to “be damned”.

This is by far the most common curse in Spanish. The verb “cagar” means “to shit”, and it is used as a pronominal verb (non-reflexive, of course). Anything or anyone can be cursed using this verb, most commonly, but not always, in present form.

“Me cago en dios” (*D) is almost exactly “god dammit” and literally “I shit on god”. It is such a common curse that sometimes the expression is smoothed, by sheer force of use, into “cagüendiós” or “cauendiós”.

Other very common *general purpose* curses would be “me cago en la hostia”(*), “me cago en la virgen” (**D) or “me cago en la puta”(**). Many other milder versions also exist such as “me cago

en la leche”(*), “me cago en diez”(*) or “me cago en la mar”(*). The expression “me cachis en la mar” is a mild euphemism that is acceptable even in front of children.

There are almost no restrictions about what can be put in this curse and, due to the natural creativity of Spaniards when it comes to curses, many of the versions are subject to meme dynamics, such as “me cago en los cojones de Mahoma”(*D) or “me cago en todo lo que se menea”(*).

This curse can be used towards one single object to express anger or frustration. For example, if we're trying to unscrew a screw and the head is worn off and it's extremely difficult, we might curse “me cago en el tornillo” or “me cago en el puto tornillo”(*) or “me cago en el tornillo de los cojones”(**).

Another example: while walking through a snow-covered forest looking where you tread, a lump of snow falls from a branch right in the back of your neck, filling your spine with freezing cold snow that you can't brush off before it melts. That would be a situation in which the curse “me cago en el puto árbol y en la puta nieve”(**) could be understandable for a Spanish native speaker.

This expression is also used as an insult intended to hurt. This is done by aiming it to some person close to the intended recipient of the insult rather than the recipient himself.

So, if I want to insult you, I wouldn't say “me cago en tí” but rather “me cago en tu padre” (**H).

These insults can be used jovially in very familiar environments but most of the time they are

intended to hurt. As with the curse, there is no limit to what can be put as object of the sentence:

“me cago en tu madre”(**H) “me cago en tus muertos”(**H), “me cago en tus muelas”(*H), “me cago en tu sangre”(*H), “me cago en la madre que te parió”(**H), “me cago en la leche que te han dado”(*H) and so on.

5. Insults.

Bobo: mildly stupid, seemingly distracted or slow-understanding person.

Cabrón: bad person. Sometimes used for someone who knowingly causes problems.

Capullo: dork, jackass. Obtuse person who causes a small problem.

Estúpido: stupid.

Hijo de puta: son of a whore. Bastard. (see below “puto/a”)

Imbécil: dumbass.

Indeseable: undesirable. Person that can only be despised.

Mamón: person who knowingly uses as many resources as possible disregarding other people's need or right to the same resources. Sometimes person who abuses power.

Malasombra: literally “bad shadow”. Person who intentionally causes major damage with little or no benefit for him or herself.

Maricón (*H): faggot. In Spanish the word “marica” means approximately “queer”, but adding the suffix -ón increases the size of the word, turning it into an insult. Words related to this are “afeminado”, which means “effeminate” and is standard Spanish, “mariquita”, which means approximately the same (and also means “ladybug”) but is colloquial, and “gay”, which is directly borrowed from English (it seems there wasn't a non-offensive word for homosexual men).

As an example of the flexibility of the language, one additional suffix can be added to the word “maricón” to make it even bigger: “mariconazo” (*H).

Perro/perra: extremely lazy.

Puto/puta **

Whore.

One of the words with most variants in Spanish (according to Arturo Pérez-Reverte, about 80 or 90 variants have been documented throughout history).

In Spain the masculine noun “puto” is rarely used meaning “male prostitute”, the word “prostituto” being used instead, but the feminine is very common as an insult. It is occasionally used jovially in very familiar circumstances, but even in those cases it intended as a small reprimand.

The insults “son of a whore” and “son of a bitch” are directly translated as “hijo de puta”, an insult so frequent in Spanish that it is often simplified as “hijoputa” and, of course, H.P.

As a curse it is used as an adjective, as in “la puta silla” or “el puto cuchillo”. This curse is simple as it is energetic, and can be used as an insult if it is used to address a person.

“El puto ordenador” is equivalent to “the fucking computer” and “el puto taxista” is equivalent to “the fucking taxi driver”. This curse has the gramatical advantage that it can be used in the middle of a sentence that has a purpose other than cursing, such as “estoy intentando enviar el email pero el puto ordenador no me deja”.

Occasionally this curse is used merely for emphasis, such as “no tengo ni un puto duro” (I'm fucking broke) or “en la puta calle” (on the fucking street).

Tonto: silly.

Zorro/zorra (*): fox/bitch.

It literally means fox, so the feminine means female fox. Interestingly, calling someone “zorro” means that the person (man) is astute and cunning, but calling a woman “zorra” means she is a bitch, that is, a sneaky and treacherous person who takes advantage of people in a weak situation. If we want the latter meaning to be applied to a man, we can use the word “cerdo”, which means pig, but they are not entirely equivalent.

6. Sexual language.

There is one general aspect of sexual language in Spanish, and it is that the neutral words for sexual activities are often not used, not known or misleading. The effect of this is that the words most people use are actually inappropriate, and the appropriate words usually sound too high register or even technical.

cojones! (**)

Balls! (see vocabulary). This word is used in all three types of expressions.

When standing alone it can be understood as a stronger (and more inappropriate) version of “anda!”. “Los cojones!” or “los huevos!” can be equivalent to “hell no!”

Adding “de los cojones” to any noun is equivalent to adding “fucking” in English; “la mesa” is just “the table”, but “la mesa de los cojones” would be like “the fucking table”. Notice that adding “puto/a” is very similar and usually equivalent.

The expression “tocar los cojones” (**) means to bother or to annoy. The annoyance might not be major, but the expression is highly inappropriate.

Unexpectedly, the expression “tócame los cojones” (***) (literally “touch my balls”) is a taunt used to express defiance in a belligerent way.

The word “cojonudo/a”(**), which literally means “endowed with big balls” is common too and it means very good, therefore “este coche es cojonudo” would mean something like “this car is awesome”.

follar (***)

To fornicate. Very often is translated in movies as “to fuck”. Due to its inappropriateness it is often substituted with euphemisms, of which we have a wide variety.

“hacer el amor” means “to make love”, but since there is no direct translation of “to have sex” it's common to see “to have sex” translated into Spanish as “hacer el amor” or “acostarse con”, which means “go to bed with” or “sleep with”.

“chuscar” (*) is somewhat an extended localism in Spain and “chingar” (*) is the most common version of the word in the Americas.

Vocabulary.

Hostia: (1) Oyster. (2) Small cracker that is given during certain religious rites.

Chufa: the small tubers of a grass-like plant that are used to prepare a refreshing beverage called horchata.

Cojón (**): testicle.

Coño (**): visible parts of the female genitalia. Equivalent to “pussy”.

Follar (***) : to fornicate.

Huevo: egg. Huevos (**) balls, testicles. See “cojones” in section 3.

Leche: milk.

Polla (***) : dick (penis). Also, female chicken (pun with care).

Virgen: virgin (usually refers to the “virgin” Mary in the christian religions).