The Sociolinguistics of Contemporary Spanish.

"…Through the influence of science, politics, economics and other fields of learning, words of foreign and learned origin are constantly enriching the Spanish language…" [1]

This statement is still true to this day. The Spanish Language is constantly evolving and developing. There are two main reasons for this- to replace and modernise antiquated terminology and to accommodate new modern concepts, for example, new technological advances:

"…need to lexicalise something which has not been expressed before…" [2]

Nowhere has this need for neologisms been more apparent than in the field of Information Technology:

"…the rise of information technology is the single most important technological development of the twentieth century…computer jargon is one of the fastest and widest-reaching areas of lexical change in Spanish…" [3]

The purpose of this essay is to examine the different processes by which this change is being effected in the Spanish language in the field of information technology.

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[1] De Ridder, page 22
[2] John Daly- Essay on Spanish language and computing vocabulary.
[3] "Can Spanish Take the Strain?" Tom Bookless

There are two main processes:

1. The creation of neologisms from Spanish language stock; and

2. The creation of neologisms through "borrowing" from other languages.

The first process is perhaps less common in the area of I.T. This is due to the fact that many of the advances in this area occur in the United States. As a result, they are accepted into the English language first of all as it there that the "need" for a neologism becomes apparent in the first instance. Spanish then has to devise its own term and, consequently, often uses the new English term as a starting point.

Another existing process is known as "coinage" but this is rather less common. This is where a totally new word is created from no existing lexis.

It is necessary to describe the two main processes in greater depth.

1. <u>The creation of neologisms from Spanish language stock.</u>

There are a number of different mechanisms that can be employed to effect this process of lexical change. The main mechanisms are:

(a) Affixation- prefix, interfix or suffix;

(b) Compounding;

(c) Conversion;

(d) Use of Acronyms or Alphabetisms;

(e) Abbreviation or "clipping"; and

(f) Metaphor.

(a)Affixation

This is a very common method of word formation in Spanish. There are three types of affix.

The first is the Prefix. This is added to the beginning of an existing word to alter its meaning. In the field of I.T. there are some very common prefixes. The limitation here is that many of these prefixes stem originally from the English version- thus we have overlap with the process of "borrowing". It could be argued, however, that these are still part of the "Spanish language stock" as they have already been assimilated into the Spanish language.

There are a number of very common prefixes that are used to convey the meaning that the word formed relates to computer technology.

"Ciber-" is used to denote that a word has to do with the Internet, e.g. "Ciberspacio" and "ciberchat."

"Tele-" is another common prefix in this field e.g. telecargar (meaning to "download"). The prefix denotes that the 'loading' takes place remotely.

Other examples include:

"Interconector"- the prefix brings the idea of "between" thus this word means a device that connects between two different things. (An Interface.)

"Megabitio"- the "mega-" denotes a large number.

"Sobrescribir"- the "sobre-" means "to go over".

"Re-inicializar"- (to reboot.) In this example the prefix conveys the idea of "doing something again."

"Hipervínculo"- conveys the idea that something is done quickly.[4]

A further use of prefix can be seen with the letter "**e-**". Once again this has been borrowed from English originally. It is then used to prefix Spanish lexis e.g. "E-comercio." The same thing has occurred with the letter "**I-".** This is now a prefix in English that is becoming more and more common, meaning "Internet". For example: I-book:

> "*...con iMovie, iTunes, el Nuevo iBook está diseñada para adaptarse a tu vida...*"[5]

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[4] Source of these words: online dictionary of English and Spanish computer terms.
[5] El País Semanal Número 1.312 Domingo 18 de nov de 2001- Advertisement for Apple Computer Products.

The 'interfix' is added in the middle of a word that already exists in the lexis. There are uncommon in the field of I.T. and perhaps more uncommon than the other affixes in general.

Suffixation is responsible for the creation of many neologisms- this is when a suffix is added to the end of an existing word to create a new one. There are many examples of the use of this mechanism in I.T. related lexis.

There are two types of suffixation- emotive suffixation, where the suffix "*substantially alters the base in some sort of subjective, emotional way…*"[6] This means that they create diminutives, augmentatives or pejoratives. Non-emotive suffixation is where the base is not affected by the suffix.
Examples of suffixation in I.T:

Chat**ear**/Convers**ar;**

Pirat**ear**/Sabot**ear**/Hack**ear;**

Busca**dor;**

Cifr**ar;**

Microprogram**ación.**

These are merely a few examples of suffixation creating verbs and nouns.

(b) Compounding.

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[6] *Spanish Word Formation*, M.F. Lang at page 91

This is the mechanism whereby two words are joined to produce a new tem that is usually easily identifiable from the meaning of the two words separately.

According to M.F. Lang[7] there are two kinds of compound. 'Orthographic compounds' are those where the words are joined to form a single word. A wider interpretation of the word "compound", however, also encapsulates terms where the words are side by side but not actually joined. This means that neologisms are created in this instance by attaching a specific meaning to two or more words when they are side by side.

Examples of 'Orthographic compounds' in the world of information technology:

"Salvapantallas", "microplaca", "teletrabajo" and "videoconferencia."

Examples of 'compounds in the wider sense':

"En línea", "Inteligencia artificial", "piráto informático", "disco duro", "página web", "circuito activo".

Some of these can be further sub-categorised- "campo de direcciones", "mensaje de alerto" and "base de datos" are all "prepositional link compounds".[8]

A special type of compound is known as "blending". This occurs when parts of two words are "mixed" resulting in the creation of a new term.

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[7] *Spanish Word Formation*, M.F. Lang
[8] Source of these words: online dictionary of English and Spanish computer terms.

e.g. informática- this is a blend of "información" and "automática".

(c) Conversion.

This is the mechanism that allows existing words to take on a new meaning. For example:

"Bloquear(se)"- now means "to crash";
"Disco"- now means a "disc" rather than a "record".

These words, therefore, now used in "computer speak" were originally used in other ways.

(d) Use of Acronyms and Alphabetisms.

Acronyms become neologisms when the initials are said together, as one word. Alphabetisms, on the other hand, look like Acronyms except they generally have full stops after each letter. This means that each letter is pronounced individually. Like many of the mechanisms above, there is evidence of a lot of prior borrowing from English e.g. Acronyms: RAM, ROM. Alphabetisms: P.C, M.B., I.S.D.N, I.S.P.

It is evident that there is not a lot of computer lexis that derives from the real, original Spanish lexis as all of these terms above are short for English terminology.

(e) Abbreviation or 'Clipping'.

This method involves shortening a word without changing its meaning. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, to "modernise" or make certain concepts seem less antiquated e.g. la mili, el bici, el taxi[9]. Again it is difficult to give an example of this method in the field of I.T. that does not originally stem from English since there is so much borrowing in the first instance. The second reason for this is for the ease of the speaker where long words have been shortened merely for the sake of brevity. In I.T. however, they come mainly from English e.g. un foto.

(f) Metaphor.

This is where a word is formed from a metaphor. It is difficult to find bona fide examples of this in relation to the field of I.T. An example in Spanish lexis is un "canguro". An example of this in English is a "mouse". This metaphor, although devised in English, has been calqued and thus crossed over to Spanish- "un ratón".

From the examples above, it is easy to see that the creation of neologisms from Spanish language stock is quite scarce in the field of Information Technology. Most neologisms, as I will now examine, are created as a result of "borrowing" from the English language.

2. **The creation of neologisms through "borrowing" from other languages.**

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[9] The Spanish Language Today, Miranda Stewart.

There are three methods of "borrowing" to be considered:

      (a) Straightforward borrowing and assimilation;

      (b) Borrowing a word, then adapting it to make it sound Spanish;

      (c) Calquing; and

      (d) Semantic extension.

(a) Straightforward borrowing and assimilation.

The straightforward "borrowing" of words from the English language is one of the most common mechanisms. It has been suggested that this is because English terminology is seen as more modern, even in those cases where a Spanish alternative is available. Another reason is that English terminology is usually more succinct and thus easier and quicker for the speaker to say.

These are just some examples of straightforward borrowing where no wholly alternative Spanish alternative is available for use:

"Hardware", "software", "modem", "emoticon", "fax", "pixel".

These words have been taken from English and there has been virtually no attempt to make them sound Spanish.

Below are some examples of straightforward borrowing where a Spanish alternative is available:

"E-mail", "Website", "Internet", "Byte", "Webcam", and "Monitor".

 In this case words taken from English have superseded the Spanish alternative to a great extent. If we compare the English and Spanish terms we see that the English terms are shorter e.g. "e-mail" for "correo electrónico" or "internet" for "la red internet". Perhaps these words find favour with speakers largely for this reason? In addition, I believe that the fact that computer technology and the Internet are of interest and in usage on a global scale, there is a tendency to keep the jargon involved as similar as possible by its users.

As we have seen, alphabetisms and acronyms are also borrowed straightforwardly from English e.g.

"A.D.S.L"- "Advanced digital subscription line", "M.Bs"- "megabytes", and "SDRAM"- "synchronized DRAM".

(b) Adapting a word to insert it into the syntax rules of the Spanish Language.

There are also many examples of neologism creation through the borrowing of words from English whose form is subsequently adapted to fit in with the rules of Spanish syntax. Examples of these are:

"Escanér", "ciberspacio", "megabitio", and "computadora".

(c) Semantic Loan or "calquing"

Another very common method of creating neologisms through borrowing is by borrowing the "sense" of the English word. These are known as loan translations or "calques"

> *"…a loan translation or calque occurs when a host language takes a lexical item, commonly a metaphor, which has been coined in the donor language and translates it directly…"* [10]

Some examples of these are:

'ratón', 'procesamiento de datos', ' matriz de punto', 'disco flexible', ' autopista de información', 'correo basura', 'en línea', 'palabra de paso', 'tarjeta de sonido', 'verificador ortográfico'.

These are more acceptable than the mere lifting of words from English to some linguists as Spanish language stock is being used and developed rather than the imposition of totally new terms foreign to the language. The result this process is that very often Spanish speakers do not even realise that a word has been imported from English.

(d) Semantic Extension and Shift.

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[10] The Spanish Language Today, Miranda Stewart at page 85

Another process worthy of consideration is semantic extension and shift. This is when a term in the receptor language takes on a new meaning due to a similar sounding term in English having a different meaning. When there is contact between the two, the foreign meaning can replace the previous meaning or change it to an extent. The example given in "Bookless" is the word "versatíl", a term which can be used in the context of I.T:

For example, "el microordenador "versatil" de escritorio and "soportar" which can now be used in the sense of "compatible"

Conclusion

In conclusion, the I.T. field has created a huge new range of neologisms in the Spanish Language. As most of the technological advancement in this field occurs in America, English terms are mainly developed first. As a result there is no doubt that the most common method of word creation is borrowing from English. I do not believe, however, that this poses any great threat to the Spanish language as Computer jargon is just a very small area and there are many more fields where borrowing from Spanish language stock is much more common. In my opinion the reason that so many neologisms are imported from English is purely pragmatic: Information technology is a universal language.