

Table 13.1. Non-overlapping features of Spanish and English languages

Linguistic feature	Spanish	English	Comment
1. Word order variation	High	Low	Refers to the number of different orders of subject, verb, and object possible in the spoken language
2. Inflectional morphology	Rich	Sparse	Refers to bound morphemes added to free-standing words to indicate changes in tense, person, number, and gender
3. Morphologic regularity	Multiple regular and irregular forms	One regular; multiple irregulars (for plural and past)	Refers to the consistency of inflectional morphology in the language. The single regular past form in English is <i>-ed</i> , but there are many irregulars such as <i>eat/ate</i> , <i>do/did</i> , <i>drink/drank</i> , and <i>drive/drove</i>
4. Omission of constituents in sentences	Subject can be omitted	Not permitted	Subject omission is grammatical and frequent in Spanish. For example, to translate the sentence <i>I already read it</i> , Spanish speakers would drop the <i>I</i> and say "Ya lo leí."
5. Lexical ambiguity	Low (due to inflectional markings)	High (especially for nouns and verbs)	English has many words that need to be interpreted with respect to context. For example, <i>chair</i> can be either an object (the chair) or action (to chair the meeting); the word <i>scale</i> used with fish or pounds conjures up two different referents.
6. Use of compounding	Low	High	Refers to words that are composed of other free-standing words (e.g., <i>bluebird</i> ; <i>laptop</i>)
7. Grammatical cues to word identity	Gender and form class (masculine and feminine singular and plurals)	Form class only	Both languages use form class cues that reliably distinguish between nouns, verbs, and other grammatical classes

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Linguistic feature	Spanish	English	Comment
8. Word length in syllables	Long	Short	(e.g., <i>I went to the store</i> versus <i>I want to store the items</i>). However, only Spanish uses gender (<i>el, la, los, las</i>) as an additional cue within the nominal category. An analysis of 520 non-inflected nouns showed Spanish words contained an average of 2.76 syllables (with 54% of words having 3 syllables or greater); average syllable length in English was 1.74 (and 84% of words were 2 syllables or less).
9. Canonical syllable shape	CV	CVC	The default syllable shape and most common sound combinations vary across languages. For example, post-vocalic consonant singletons and clusters are frequent in English. Spanish has only five consonant singletons that can be used in word-final position / <i>d, l, n, r, s</i> / and no consonant clusters.
10. Orthographic regularity	Highly regular	Highly opaque	Both languages are alphabetic in that writing is based on sound-symbol correspondence. However, this sound-symbol relationship is much less transparent in English (e.g., <i>sh</i> sound written with <i>s</i> in <i>sugar</i> , <i>-tion</i> in <i>nation</i> , or <i>sh</i> in <i>cushion</i>).

Parts of this table are adapted from Bates et al. (in press) and Kohnert, Scarry-Larkin and Price (2000). (Key: C = consonant; V = vowel.)