

Remarks on semantic exploitation of misspellings in Spanish

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- **Empirical Domain:** Conventionalized neographisms in Spanish used in order to establish, as a diacritic, some difference in meaning, such as *Riber* (River 'soccer team'), *Voca* (Boca 'soccer team'), *travajo* (trabajo 'work'), *abzurdo* (absurdo 'absurd'), *onvre* (hombre 'man'), among others.
- **Claims:**
 - ① The disident ortographies come in two flavours: i) alterations by fusion; ii) alterations by estrangement.
 - ② They convey differences of descriptive, expressive or stylistic meaning.
 - ③ At least in some cases, meaning emerges from the violation of specific kind of rules.

- Orthography is organized as a set of two types of rules (de Academias de la Lengua Española 2010: 11-12):
 - ① **General rules** determine the basic use of the constituents of the orthographic system.
 - ② **Particular rules** regulate the correct spelling of specific words.

General rules concern the general behaviour of seven types of constituents:

- ① **an alphabet made up of 27 letters;**
- ② the distinction between lowercase and uppercase letters;
- ③ diacritical marks;
- ④ punctuation marks (the period, the comma, the semicolon, the question mark and exclamation mark, parentheses and the dash, among others);
- ⑤ auxiliary signs (hyphen, brace, arrows, apostrophe, calligraph, paragraph sign, among others);
- ⑥ white space;
- ⑦ an indefinite set of symbols and abbreviations for technical expressions (numbers, mathematical operators, among others).

- The alphabet establishes basic correspondences between phonemes and graphemes.
- However, these correspondences gives rise to spaces in which more than one spelling could be possible for the same lexical item by virtue of its pronunciation.

- Particular rules are not included in the orthographic proposals, but are stipulated in the academic dictionaries.

- (1) a. **General Rule:** the rule that the grapheme <g> corresponds to the phoneme /g/ before the vowels <a>, <o> and <u> and to the phoneme /x/ before the vowels <e> and <i>.
- b. **Particular rule:** The rule that determines that *gente* ('people') is written with <g> instead of <j> (*jente*).

- In recent years, digital discourses gave raise to conventionalized cases in which a spelling different from that stipulated by the particular rules –but compatible with general rules– is intentionally chosen to establish, as a diacritic, some difference in meaning.
- In this presentation, I study these violations to particular rules concerning the use of the alphabet graphemes.

Neographisms studied here partially coincide with what Real Academia Española (2018) calls *dissident orthographies*, that is, “the use of spelling in order to visually show dissent or to draw attention to changing the uses of letters and words” (344).

Neographisms used before the popularization of digital platforms are, as far as I can tell, mainly occasional author's coinages:

- ① *différance* in Derrida's work
- ② *Revelde* instead of *rebelde* ('rebel') in the title of a song by the Argentine band La Renga
- ③ *Oktubre* instead of *Octubre* ('october') in the title of an album by the Argentine band Patricio Rey y sus Redonditos de Ricota
- ④ *Rockas vivas* instead of *Rocas vivas* ('living stones') in the title of an album by Miguel Mateos - Zas.

Dissident orthographies are classified into two main groups:

- 1 alterations by fusion, in which lexical items are orthographically manipulated to merge them with other items with which they are intended to be semantically associated;
- 2 alterations by estrangement, in which the spelling of lexical items is intentionally “subverted” in order to assign them a different meaning.

Alterations by fusion consist in cases such as the following:

- ① *travajo* for *trabajo* ('work').
- ② Riber for River (soccer team),
- ③ *La Nazi3n* for *La Naci3n* (The Nation, name of a newspaper),
- ④ the use of <v> instead of to refer to vegan products
- ⑤ the use of the grapheme <k> instead of any of the other graphemes or digraphs that represent the phoneme /k/, with the aim of establishing an allusion to Kirchnerism.

travajo I

The use of *travajo* instead of *trabajo* is intended to allude to tasks performed by transexual worker and comes from the fusion of the shortening *trava* for transvestite with *work*. In (2) we illustrate some cases of its use taken from social networks.

trabajo

- (2) *CAPACITACION: **TRABAJO** PARA TODES. Se lanzó la nueva edición de la capacitación gratuita de herramientas digitales y derechos laborales para la inclusión laboral (...) Los talleres están destinados a personas trans, travestis y no binaries...*

TRAINING: **TRABAJO** FOR ALL. The new edition of the free training on digital tools and labor rights for labor inclusion (...). The workshops are aimed at trans, transvestites and non-binary people...
[<https://www.pagina12.com.ar/485271-agenda-lgbtqi-seleccion-primavera>, 9/30/2022]

trabajo

- (3) *Surbió a comienzos de este año para visibilizar y poner en valor el arte y la cultura TTNB, disputando sentidos y generando **trabajo**.*

It was created at the beginning of this year to make visible and give value to TTNB art and culture, disputing meanings and generating **trabajo**.

[<https://latinta.com.ar/2021/12/03/festi-feroz-teatro-griego/3/12/2021>]

Riber

In 2011, Club Atlético River Plate, one of the most important clubs in Argentine soccer, was relegated from category A to B, that is, to the second division league of Argentine soccer. The event led their opponents to change the spelling from River, with <v>, to Riber, with , in clear allusion to the name of the second division. Although River's time in this league lasted only one year, as in 2012 the team returned to the first division, the nickname stuck and it is often used in digital discourse to disqualify the team.

Riber

- (4) a. *OJALÁ RIQUELME SE PONGA A LABURAR DESPUÉS DE PERDER CONTRA **RIBER**.*

I HOPE RIQUELME PUTS AN EFFORT AFTER LOSING AGAINST **RIBER**.

[tweet 27/04/2025]

- b. *Cómo le cuesta a la gente de **Riber** quedarse callada, es un caso de estudio. Hablan más de Boca que nosotros los hinchas.*

How hard it is for Riber's people to keep quiet, it's a case study. They talk more about Boca than us fans.

[tuit]

<k> for the /k/ phoneme in allusion to kirchnerism

- The grapheme <k> was for a long time considered foreign to Spanish (RAE/ASALE 2010: 112 and following, RAE/ASALE 2013).
- This has caused the usual permutation of <k> to <c> or to the digraph <qu> when adapting foreign words in Spanish (e.g., Malay *kakatúwa* > *cacatúa*; French *kangourou* > *kangaroo*, English *diskette* > *disquete* (RAE/ASALE 2013)).
- This low frequency of the grapheme <k> in Spanish heritage words has probably influenced its ease in the field of Argentine politics to become a vehicle to make references to Kirchnerism: *conicet* > *konicet*, *dictadura* > *diktadura*, *cuca* (shortening of *cucaracha*) > *kuka*.

<k> for the /k/ phoneme in allusion to kirchnerism

- (5) a. *Los kirchos realmente creen q los inversionistas se fijan en si tenés un **Konicet** y se espantan si resulta q no*

The kirchos really believe that investors check if you have a Konicet and freak out if it turns out you don't.
[tweet 7/30/2024]

- b. *che STURZE!!! Para cuándo la limpieza de **ñokis** del **Konicet**???*

che STURZE!!! When will the Konicet be cleaned of lazy people????

[tweet 6/04/2025]

- (6) a. *Libertarios: ay como le explicamos a los yanquis estos octagonos esto es una **diktadura**!!! (...)*

Libertarians: oh how do we explain to the Yankees these octagons this is a diktat!!! (...)

[tweet 20/12/2024]

- b. *pensar que cuando empezó todo esto había afiliados defendiendo a José OSDE de la **diktadura komunista** que les iba a robar las camas (...)*

to think that when all this started there were affiliates defending José OSDE from the kommunist dictatorship that was going to steal their beds (...)

[12/7/2020]

<k> for the /k/ phoneme in allusion to kirchnerism

- (7) a. *no es **kuka**, los **kukas** quieren que sea **kuka** entonces aparece un poco de miga **kuka** y lo mega exageran por eso parece **kuka**, pero no lo es*

it's not kuka, the kukas want it to be kuka so a little bit of kuka crumb appears and they mega exaggerate it so it looks kuka, but it's not

[tweet about the publication of the El Eternauta series, 2/5/2025].

abzurdo

The word absurdo (absurd) also appears, written as *abzurdo*, to allude to the left:

(8) **Abzurdo/a**.- (adj.) *relativo a una izquierda que no tiene sentido.*

Abzurdo/a.- (adj.) relating to a left that makes no sense.

[tweet 2/14/2025]

v for vegan

- (9)
- a. *boicot* > *voicot* (name of an animal liberation movement)
 - b. *lado b* > *lado v* (name of a vegan restaurant)
 - c. *buena comida casera* > *vuena comida casera* (name of a vegan restaurant)
 - d. *burrito* > *vurrito* (vegan version of the mexican food)
 - e. *bao* > *vao* (vegan version of the asiatic food)
 - f. *bacon* > *vacon* (taken from English)

La Nación

- (10) a. *Se lee en **La Nación**: “Fiesta clandestina en Nordelta: ‘Están intentando hacer un estado comunista’, dijo el abogado de los detenidos”.*

It reads in La Nación: “Clandestine party in Nordelta: ‘They are trying to make a communist state’, said the lawyer of the detainees”.

[tweet 3/5/2021]

- b. *Si, nacio una Teocracia **Nazionalista** y criminal*

Yes, a Nazionalist and criminal Theocracy was born

[tweet 2/5/2025].

Alterations by estrangement, in which the spelling of lexical items is intentionally adulterated with the aim of not linking them to others, but simply “subverting” them to assign them a different meaning.

There are two sybtypes:

- ① Cases in which the grapheme replaces a syllable from cases in which the substitution of one grapheme for another is not correlated with a phonological contrast. These cases do not preserve general rules.
- ② Cases substituting one grapheme or digraph with another homophonous grapheme.

Estrangement type 1

- (11) a. *Hay un **Cñor** en la clínica mirando videos con el sonido a un 200 %.*

There is a Cñor in the clinic watching videos with the sound at 200 %.

[tweet 3/28/2025]

- b. *. ay **bbote** como te entiendo*

ay baby. I really understand you

[tweet 12/04/2023]

- c. *Mensaje de **Lgante** para la Sociedad. #LAM*

Message from Lgante to the people.

[tweet 30/04/2025]

Estrangement type 1

- (12) a. *Si quieres **knclar** tu operación no s **necsario** pulzr 20 **vcs** el botón cancelar y luego hacer figuritas sobre los **dmás** botones y **x** último **knclar**.*

If you want to clear your operation it is not necessary to press 20 times the cancel button and then make figures on the other buttons and finally clear.

[tuit 30/07/2011]

- b. *Y tú dignidad amigo? Pasaron 10 añitos nomás **rktat***

And your dignity friend? It's been 10 years. Get yourself together.

[tuit 12/10/2019].

- c. *La cara de **ogt** de Juancho lo dice todo.*

Juancho's fish face speaks volumes.

Estrangement type 2

- (13) a. *La triste historia del **onvre** que viene a cuestionar el rol de les lesbianas en el feminismo. Mansplaining nivel un millón.*

The sad story of the onvre who questions the role of lesbians in feminism. Mansplaining level one million.

[tweet 12/04/2020]

- b. *Yo cuando mi **envra** hace un mensaje largo*

Me when my envra makes a long message

[tweet 12/01/2025]

- c. *Voy a cenar **anvorguesa**?*

I will have vurger for dinner

Estrangement type 2

- (14) a. *Final del partido River 2 **Voca** 0 Con goles de Rondon y Diaz...*

End of match River 2 Voca 0 With goals by Rondon and Diaz
[tuit 01/10/2023]

- b. *La propuesta de la gente de Lousteau es ser una **Okupa** de la bibliotecas*

Lousteau's people's proposal is to be a Library Squat
[tweet 04/30/2025]

Estrangement type 2

- (15) a. *La filósofa mexicana Sayak Valencia menciona el hecho de que Brad Epps (2008) y Norma Mogrovejo (2012), aunque desde diferentes perspectivas, se han opuesto al uso del término queer para referirse a Latinoamérica. Ella misma defiende el uso del vocablo **cuir**, pues supone una mirada geopolítica hacia el sur y desde las periferias*

Mexican philosopher Sayak Valencia mentions the fact that Brad Epps (2008) and Norma Mogrovejo (2012), although from different perspectives, have opposed the use of the term *queer* to refer to Latin America. She herself defends the use of the word *cuir*, as it implies a geopolitical gaze towards the south and from the peripheries

(Mateo del Pino 2019).

Three rough types of meaning involved:

- ① Descriptive
- ② Descriptive + Expressive
- ③ Descriptive + Stylistic

	Descriptive meaning	Descriptive meaning + Expressive meaning	Descriptive meaning + Stylistic meaning
Alteration by fusion	trabajo; use of v for vegan products	riber, <k> referencing kirchnerism, Nación	
Alteration by estrangement	cuir	cñor, onvre, voca	okupa, anvorguesa

trabajo

- *trabajo* appears predominantly in texts that advocate for transexual rights.
- *trava*, a clipping for *travesti* is often (though not necessarily) associated with a negative valorative meaning, although it is more subject to appropriation than its paranomasial alternative *travesaño*.
- This suggests that the term *trabajo* is built on the appropriated or claimed meaning of the term *trava*.

cuir

The form *cuir* introduces descriptive meaning, since its Latin Americanist perspective is subject to the scope of operators such as negation and it is not speaker-oriented:

- (16) a. *Esa línea de investigación no es cuir, ya que no tiene una perspectiva latinoamericanista.*

This line of research is not cuir, since it does not have a Latin Americanist perspective.

- b. *Pedro declara en su proyecto de investigación que adopta una perspectiva cuir, pero yo no creo que tenga una perspectiva latinoamericanista.*

Pedro states in his research project that he adopts a cuir perspective, but I do not believe he has a Latin Americanist perspective.

In *Riber*, the use of <k> referencing kirchnerism, *Nación*, *cñor*, *onvre* and *voca*, it is possible to identify a content that cannot be cancelled, which is not under the domain of operators such as negation and is necessarily speaker-oriented.

Cancellability

(17) a. *Ayer jugó **Riber**, #el cuadro del que soy hincha.*

Yesterday Riber played, #the team I'm a fan of.

b. *Juan trabaja en el **konicet**, #institución impulsada por el kirchnerismo, el mejor gobierno de nuestra historia.*

Juan works at konicet, #institution promoted by kirchnerismo, the best government in our history.

Cancellability

- (18) a. *Ayer leí **La Nación**, #diario del que soy ideológicamente afin.*

Yesterday I read La Nazion, #daily of which I am ideologically affine.

- b. *Está casada con un **cñor/onvre**, #pero no es machista.*

She's married to a cñor/onvre, #but he's not a Chauvinist.

- c. *Ayer jugó **voca**, #y yo tengo el corazón azul y oro.*

Yesterday voca played, #and I have a blue and gold heart.

Negation

- (19) a. *Ese no es **Riber**.*

That's not Riber.

[does not deny the speaker's contempt for River]

- b. *Eso no es **Konicet**.*

That's not Konicet.

[does not deny speaker's aversion to the K's]

- c. *Ese diario no es **La Nazione**.*

This newspaper is not La Nazione.

[does not deny that it deplores the extreme right]

Negation

- (20) a. *Juan no es un **cñor/onvre**.*

Juan is not a cñor/onvre.

[does not deny that the speaker judges chauvinists]

- b. *Ese equipo no es **voca**.*

That team is not voca.

[does not deny the speaker's contempt for Boca]

Speaker orientedness

(21) a. *Pedro dijo que ayer hinchó por **Riber**.*

Pedro said that yesterday he was a fan of Riber.

b. *Juan dijo que **La Nazion** está escribiendo noticias imparciales.*

John said that La Nazion is writing unbiased news.

c. *Mariana insiste en que el **cñor** de arriba es un caballero.*

Mariana insists that the cñor upstairs is a gentleman.

d. *Ana dice que le cayó muy bien el **onvre** con el que tuvo una cita.*

Ana says she liked the onvre she went on a date with very much.

Stylistic

- In *okupa* and *anvorguesa* there is only playful nuance, typical of what we have called stylistic meaning.

(22) words with one spelling

a. $\llbracket /koN'fjaR/ \leftrightarrow \langle \text{confiar} \rangle \rrbracket = \lambda x. \lambda y. y \text{ trusts in } x$

b. $\llbracket /fu'maR/ \leftrightarrow \langle \text{fumar} \rangle \rrbracket = \lambda x. x \text{ smokes}$

(23) Heterographic homophones

a. $\llbracket /ca'saR/ \leftrightarrow \langle \text{casar} \rangle \rrbracket = \lambda x. \lambda y. y \text{ marries } x$

b. $\llbracket /ca'saR/ \leftrightarrow \langle \text{cazar} \rangle \rrbracket = \lambda x. \lambda y. y \text{ hunts } x$

Dissident spellings are phonologically reconstructed from general rules and can only be used orally in a code-switching manner :

- (24) a. $\llbracket /'trabaxo/ \leftrightarrow \langle trabajo \rangle \rrbracket = \text{work}$
 b. $\llbracket /'trabaxo/ \leftarrow \langle travajo \rangle \rrbracket = \text{work for transgender people}$

- (25) a. $\llbracket /'ribeR/ \leftrightarrow \langle river \rangle \rrbracket = \text{River}$
 b. $\llbracket /'ribeR/ \leftarrow \langle riber \rangle \rrbracket = \text{River} \bullet \text{bad(River)}$

- Dissident spellings of the fusion type take meaning presumably from the same mechanisms as acronyms (e.g., *macrisis*, *albertibio*, see Carranza 2024).
- Meaning of Dissident spellings of the estragement type is triggered by the violation of particular rules.

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