



SIXTH EDITION

A NEW REFERENCE  
GRAMMAR OF MODERN

# SPANISH

John Butt, Carmen Benjamin and  
Amorita Morcillo Rodríguez

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# A New Reference Grammar of Modern SPANISH

*A New Reference Grammar of Modern Spanish* is a comprehensive, cohesive and clear guide to the forms and structures of Spanish as it is written and spoken today in Spain and Latin America. It includes clear descriptions of all the main grammatical phenomena of Spanish, and their use, illustrated by numerous examples of contemporary Spanish, both Peninsular and Latin-American, formal and informal. Fully revised and updated, the sixth edition is even more relevant to students and teachers of Spanish.

The sixth edition includes:

- new chapters, providing more detail and examples of key areas of Spanish grammar;
- an increased number of Mexican examples to reflect the growing interest in this country's variety of Spanish;
- new information for readers studying Spanish and French together;
- a glossary of grammatical terms including English translations of Spanish terms.

The combination of reference grammar and manual of current usage is invaluable for learners at level B2–C2 of the Common European Framework for Languages, and Intermediate High–Advanced High on the ACTFL proficiency scales.

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Antonia Moreira Rodríguez

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

Feralan.com

Sixth edition published 2019  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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First edition published by E. Arnold 1988  
Fifth edition published by Hodder Education 2011, Routledge 2013

*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*  
Names: Butt, John, 1943- author. | Benjamin, Carmen, author. | Rodríguez, Antonia Moreira, author.  
Title: A new reference grammar of modern Spanish / John Butt, Carmen Benjamin and Antonia Moreira Rodríguez.  
Description: 6th edition. | London ; New York : Routledge, 2019. |  
Series: Routledge Reference Grammars | Includes bibliographical references and indexes.  
Identifiers: LCCN 2018023122 | ISBN 9781138124004 (hbk) | ISBN 9781138124011 (pbk) | ISBN 9781315648446 (ebk)  
Subjects: LCSH: Spanish language--Grammar. | Spanish language--Textbooks for foreign speakers--English  
Classification: LCC PC4112 .B88 2019 | DDC 468.2/421--dc23  
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018023122>

ISBN: 978-1-138-12400-4 (hbk)  
ISBN: 978-1-138-12401-1 (pbk)  
ISBN: 978-1-315-64844-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Palatino Roman by  
Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire

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# Preface to the Sixth Edition

This new edition of Butt and Benjamin, now Butt, Benjamin and Moreira, differs in several ways from earlier versions.

- We have created some new chapters with the result that section numbers have changed and the Index has been re-written.
- We have added a large number of Mexican examples since Mexico is by far the most populous Spanish-speaking country and its language is of special interest to North-American readers.
- We have thoroughly revised the whole text, clarified it where we found it unclear, simplified it where it was complicated, re-written or expanded it where we had new ideas or new information, and corrected it where we thought the original was misleading or inaccurate.
- We have included new information for readers who are studying Spanish and French together, this combination being especially widespread in the UK.
- We have marked as **Important** points that in our experience cause problems for English-speaking students, but this does not mean that the other notes should be neglected.
- The Glossary includes Spanish translations of grammatical terms.

Any grammar or dictionary of Spanish that aspires to be comprehensive must face the problem of the international variety of the language, a problem that is much less serious in other widely-studied European languages like French, German and Italian.

English has basically only two internationally recognized standards: American and 'received' British. No one would or should suggest that the varieties of other places like Australia, New Zealand, South-Africa, the Caribbean or India are 'bad' English, but there seems to be a more or less tacit agreement that foreigners should learn either American or 'received' British usage (in practice the language of the middle and upper classes of south-east England and of those who speak like them). There are however no universally recognized international standards in Spanish, which differs in detail between the twenty-one countries where it is the official, or the main official, language. Despite the claims one hears to the contrary, none of these different varieties is accepted as a model to be followed by the others.

It is not easy to define how much these varieties differ from one another. People who know only one variety of Spanish can usually read texts and understand films and broadcasts from other Spanish-speaking countries without noticing more than a few obvious peculiarities, especially when the material is intended for international audiences. On the other hand, local Spanish language can cause problems for outsiders, and not just for people from Spain. *El País Semanal* of 10 May 2015 describes how the late Mexican poet José Emilio Pacheco met blank incomprehension when he asked the receptionist in a Madrid hotel for 'un plomero para componer la llave de la tina' ('a plumber to fix the bath tap/faucet'); a Spaniard would have said 'un fontanero para reparar el grifo de la bañera'. Fortunately, these misunderstandings mainly affect vocabulary. The syntax of Pacheco's question is perfectly 'standard', and as far as grammar is concerned the differences between regions and countries are not striking. Spanish is still very much one language.

In order to make this book as useful as possible to students of all the varieties of Spanish, we have selected the Latin-American content in line with the policy of previous editions of this book



of quoting examples which, unless otherwise stated, are also good European Spanish and therefore worthy of imitation by readers studying the language of Spain as well as of Latin America. We usually in fact include Latin-American examples that show that their language is the same as that of Spain and that their syntax is therefore presumably acceptable everywhere or almost everywhere.

However, we cannot guarantee that all our examples of European Spanish are good Latin-American Spanish, particularly as far as their vocabulary is concerned. Translating the Spanish of Spain into 'Latin-American Spanish' is often impossible because there is no single 'Latin-American Spanish'. To cite one well-known example, 'pavement'/'sidewalk' is *la acera* in Spain and some parts of Latin America, *la vereda* in the Southern Cone, *el andén* in Colombia, *la banqueta* in Mexico and, according to the dictionaries, *la orilla* in some other American republics, and there may be other regional words that we do not know.

As far as the language of the examples is concerned, we have tried to confine ourselves to plain everyday Spanish prose that can loosely be described as 'educated informal'. However, we include a good deal of information about popular Spanish syntax since learners are bound to encounter it in films, novels and everyday conversation and they will need to know about whether to imitate it or not.

The dividing line between syntax and lexicon is blurred in any language, and this book contains a number of points that are really more appropriate for a dictionary than for a grammar book. But lack of space prevents us from competing with dictionaries when it comes to defining meanings, so when in doubt readers should check our translations – particularly those of individual words – in a good Spanish-English dictionary.

The difference between British and American English has also sometimes caused us some anxiety, and we hope that our British dialect will not cause too much trouble across the Atlantic. We sometimes supply American equivalents of our British English where we think that the latter may cause confusion, for example 'torch'/US 'flashlight', 'potato crisps'/US 'chips', but we have not been systematic about this because we are not fluent in American English. We also hope that American readers will forgive our spellings such as 'colour', 'neighbour', 'centre', 'metre', 'defence', 'traveller', 'cancelled', 'to fulfil', 'to practise' (the noun in Britain is 'practice'), 'preterite' and other British forms.

Carmen Benjamin has retired from the fray after many years of hard labour on the previous editions and Antonia Moreira has brought a fresh pair of eyes and ears to the project and made countless valuable suggestions. We are especially grateful to Mikko Takala, whose computer wizardry more than once rescued us in moments of frustration. We again offer our heartfelt thanks to the many persons, English-speaking and Spanish-speaking, who have contributed to this book over the years – and particularly to Carmen Benjamin – but as always the authors alone are responsible for any errors or omissions.

John Butt  
Antonia Moreira Rodríguez  
London UK, 2018

# Abbreviations and conventions

NGLE: *Nueva gramática de la lengua española*, 2 vols, Real Academia Española (Madrid 2009). A third volume on phonetics and phonology appeared in 2011.

GDLE: *Gramática descriptiva de la lengua española*, Ignacio Bosque and Violeta Demonte eds, 3 vols, Real Academia Española (Madrid 1999)

DPD: *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas*, Real Academia Española (Madrid 2005)

Esbozo: *Esbozo de una nueva gramática de la lengua española*, 13th edition, Real Academia Española (Madrid 1991)

CORPES: Real Academia Española: *Banco de datos (CORPES) [en línea].Corpus del español del siglo XXI.* <http://www.rae.es>

CREA: Real Academia Española: *Banco de datos (CREA.Versión anotada) [en línea].Corpus de referencia del español actual* <http://www.rae.es>

Arg.	Dom. Rep.	Hon. Honduras	PR Puerto Rico
Argentina	Dominican	Mex. Mexico	Sp. Spain
Bol. Bolivia	Republic	Nic. Nicaragua	Ur. Uruguay
Col. Colombia	Ec. Ecuador	Pan. Panama	Ven. Venezuela
CR Costa Rica	ES El Salvador	Par. Paraguay	
Ch. Chile	Guat. Guatemala	Pe. Peru	
Cu. Cuba			

Lat. Am. Latin America(n)

S. Cone: Southern Cone (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Paraguay)

(f.), (fem.) feminine

lit. literally

(m.), (masc.) masculine

n: any number, as in 'n days', *dentro de n días*

plur. plural

sing. singular

/ indicates alternatives with the same or very similar meaning, e.g. *en vano/en balde* 'in vain', *yo no sabía que fuera/fuese verdad* 'I didn't know it was true', or alternatives that are possible translations, e.g. *su libro* = 'her/his/your/their book', 'I went' = *fui/iba/he ido*.

One or more asterisks before an example show that it is badly formed and should be avoided, e.g. \**produció* (for *produjo*), \*\**el mujer*.

A preceding question mark shows that the form is controversial or doubtful: ?*se los dije*, ?*habían muchos alumnos*.

Bracketed items in unattributed quotations can be deleted without a significant change of meaning, as in *debe (de) ser el cartero* 'it must be the postman'.

'Colloquial' refers to language that is acceptable in relaxed educated speech but avoided in formal situations. 'Familiar' describes language that may be heard even from educated speakers in informal situations but should be used cautiously by non-fluent foreigners. 'Popular' describes forms that some speakers may reject as 'uneducated' and which foreign learners should avoid.

## X Abbreviations and conventions

‘Dialogue’ shows that the words quoted are spoken by fictional characters whose opinions and language, which are sometimes comical, sexist or in some other way outrageous, should not be attributed to their author.

We use the term ‘Latin America(n)’ rather than ‘Spanish America(n)’ since it should be obvious that we are not referring to Brazil or to the French-speaking territories, and because the term ‘Spanish American’ potentially annoys Latin Americans as much as ‘British American’ would no doubt irritate Americans and Canadians.

The spelling of Spanish words reflects the Spanish Academy’s latest recommendations, especially noticeable in such words as *guion* for *guión*, *rio* for *rió*, *crie* for *crié*, etc. (see 44.2.4). In the case of unresolved disputes, e.g. whether one should write an accent on the pronouns *este/éste*, *ese/ése* and *aquel/aqué*l and on the adverb *solo/sólo*, we show both forms but recommend the Academy’s advice, which is to omit the accent.

On hearing, out of context, a verb form like *habla* ‘she/he/you/it speak(s)’, Spanish-speakers do not automatically form a mental image of a male grammatical subject. For this reason we translate such forms by ‘(s)he speaks’ even though the other possibilities – ‘you speak’ (*usted*) and ‘it speaks’ – are not usually shown. If only ‘she’ or ‘he’ appears in the translation of an attributed example this reflects the gender of the character in the original text. When a third-person plural verb appears without a pronoun, e.g. *reciben* ‘they receive’, it must be remembered that the translation could also be ‘you receive’ (*ustedes reciben*) if the meaning of the sentence or phrase allows it.

## Phonetic Symbols

Spanish pronunciation is roughly indicated as follows. Previous editions adopted the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), but some IPA signs were confusing for students:

Symbol	Phonetic description	Remarks
β	voiced bilabial fricative	Air released steadily through lips held as for English <i>b</i>
χ	voiceless velar fricative	Like <i>ch</i> of German <i>lachen</i> or of Scottish ‘loch’
ɣ	voiced velar fricative	Air released steadily through the throat held as for English <i>g</i> in ‘ago’
θ	voiceless interdental fricative	Like <i>th</i> of ‘think’
ð	voiced interdental fricative	Like <i>th</i> of ‘this’
λ	voiced palatal lateral	Palatalized <i>l</i> , as in Spanish <i>llamo</i> . Tongue flat against roof of mouth
ɲ	voiced palatal nasal	Like <i>gn</i> in French <i>cognac</i> . Tongue flat against roof of mouth (IPA <i>ɲ</i> )
ŋ	voiced velar nasal	Like <i>ng</i> in American and Southern British ‘sing’ (not as in ‘finger’)
r	voiced alveolar tap or flap	<i>r</i> pronounced with a single flap of the tongue as in Spanish <i>caro</i>
rr	voiced alveolar trill	Rolled <i>r</i> as in Spanish <i>carro</i> (IPA <i>r</i> )
y	voiced palatal approximant	Like <i>y</i> in ‘yes’ (IPA <i>j</i> )
ch	voiceless palatal stop	Like <i>ch</i> in ‘mischief’ (IPA <i>tʃ</i> )

A dash separates syllables and the stressed syllable is marked with an accent: [a-βlá-mos] = *hablamos*; see 44.5.

[aw] is like the 'ow' in English 'cow'; [ay] is like the 'i' in English 'high'; [ey] is like the 'ay' in 'hay'; [oy] is like the 'oy' of 'boy'; [ew] is like the 'e' of 'egg' followed by 'w'; [w] is the English 'w' but with well-rounded lips. Other signs should be given their usual Spanish pronunciation.

[ñ] must be distinguished in pronunciation from [ny] as in words like *uranio* [u-rá-nyo] 'uranium' and *huraño* [u-rá-ño] 'grumpy'/'unsociable'.

[ʎ] must be distinguished from [ly] in words like *pollo* [pó-ʎo] 'chicken' (for cooking) and *polio* [pó-lyo] 'polio' (the disease).



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# 1 Gender of nouns

The main points discussed in this chapter are

- Gender of nouns referring to humans and some animals (Section 1.2)
- Gender of nouns referring to lifeless things, plants and other animals (Section 1.3)
- The gender of foreign words (Section 1.3.12)
- Doubtful genders (Section 1.3.15)
- Misleading genders of some French nouns (Section 1.4)

## 1.1 Gender of nouns: general

Spanish nouns are either masculine or feminine except for a few nouns of undecided gender listed at 1.3.15. The whole question of the gender of Spanish nouns becomes clearer if we divide them into two groups:

(A) Nouns that refer to human beings and to a few well-known animals: Section 1.2.

(B) Nouns that refer to lifeless things, to plants and to the animals not included in group A: Section 1.3.

## 1.2 Group A: gender of nouns referring to human beings and to a few animals

As one might expect, nouns that denote males are masculine, and nouns referring to females are feminine, so *el hombre* 'man', *la mujer* 'woman', *el toro* 'bull', *la vaca* 'cow'. This rule applies to almost all human beings but only to a few animals, many of them listed in 1.2.1. The gender of other animals is discussed at 1.3.1.

The gender of the nouns in group A is more logical in Spanish than in French, where the masculine noun *le professeur* can refer to a woman. Forms like *la recluta* 'recruit', *la centinela* 'sentry' were applied to men in the past, but we now say *el recluta*, *el centinela* for a man and *la recluta*, *la centinela* for a woman.

**Exceptions:** a few nouns of fixed gender like *la víctima* or *la celebridad* may refer to males or to females: see 1.2.11 for a list.

(1) Note that usually the plural masculine form of these nouns is used for mixed sex groups: *los gatos* = 'cats' as well as 'tom cats', *mis tíos* = 'my aunt(s) and uncle(s)' as well as 'my uncles', *los padres* = 'parents' as well as 'fathers'. See 1.2.8.

### 1.2.1 Special forms for male and female

As in English, some nouns have special forms for the male and for the female and they must be learned separately. The following list is not exhaustive:

*el abad/la abadesa* abbot/abbess  
*el actor/la actriz* actor/actress

*el barón/la baronesa* baron/baroness  
*el caballo/la yegua* stallion/mare

## 2 Gender of nouns

*el león/la leona* lion/lioness  
*el carnero/la oveja\** ram/ewe (or sheep)  
*el conde/la condesa* count/countess  
*el duque/la duquesa* duke/duchess  
*el elefante/la elefanta* elephant  
*el emperador/la emperatriz* emperor/empress  
*el gallo/la gallina\** cockerel/hen (or chicken)  
*el héroe/la heroína* hero/heroine (or heroin)  
*el hombre/la mujer* man (see note 2)  
*el jabalí/la jabalina* wild boar

*el marido/la mujer* husband/wife (or woman)  
*el padre/la madre* father/mother  
*el príncipe/la princesa* prince/princess  
*el rey/la reina* king/queen  
*el sacerdote/la sacerdotisa* priest/priestess  
*el toro/la vaca\** bull/cow  
*el varón* (human) or *el macho* (animals)/*la hembra* male/female  
*el yerno/la nuera* son/daughter-in-law (*la yerna* is heard in parts of Lat. America)

(1) Asterisks mark a feminine form which is also used for the species, e.g. *las ovejas* = 'sheep' as well as 'ewes'. Usually the masculine plural is used for the species. See 1.2.8.

(2) In Latin America 'wife' is *la esposa* and 'woman' is *la mujer*. In Spain *la mujer* means both things and *la esposa* is formal and polite, and *El País* of Spain encourages its use for 'wife'. An unmarried partner is *la pareja* (for either sex) or *el compañero/la compañera*. For more on *la pareja* see 1.2.11.

(3) *Papá* and *mamá* are constantly used in Latin America for 'father' and 'mother' even in quite formal speech. The words *padre* and, especially, *madre* have become somewhat discredited in Latin America, particularly in Mexico, where *padre* is a colloquial adjective meaning 'fantastic'/'great' and *madre* has many not very respectable uses which should be sought in a dictionary.

### 1.2.2 Feminine of nouns in group A ending in -o

Nearly all of these make their feminine in -a:

*el abuelo/la abuela* grandfather/grandmother  
*el burro/la burra* donkey  
*el amigo/la amiga* friend  
*el candidato/la candidata* candidate  
*el cerdo/la cerda* pig/sow (Spain)  
*el chanco/la chancha* pig/sow (Lat. Am.)  
*el ciervo/la cierva* deer/doe  
*el ganso/la gansa* gander/goose  
*el gato/la gata* cat/she-cat  
*el hermano/la hermana* brother/sister

*el lobo/la loba* wolf /she-wolf  
*el médico/la médica* doctor  
*el novio/la novia* boyfriend/girlfriend, also 'groom' and 'bride'  
*el oso/la osa* bear/she-bear  
*el pato/la pata* duck  
*el pavo/la pava* turkey  
*el perro/la perra* dog/bitch  
*el tío/la tía* uncle/aunt  
*el zorro/la zorra* fox/vixen

**Exceptions:** a few nouns ending in -o that refer to professions or activities do not have special feminine forms, so gender is shown by an article or adjective as in *un soldado* 'a soldier', *una soldado* 'a female soldier', *modelos francesas* 'female French models'. Other examples:

*el/la árbitro* (or *la árbitra*) referee  
*el/la cabo* corporal  
*el/la miembro* member (of a club, etc.)  
*el/la piloto* (rarely *la pilota*) pilot/racing driver

*el/la reo* accused (in court)  
*el/la sargento* sergeant (but see 1.2.7)  
*el/la soprano* soprano  
*el/la testigo* witness

### 1.2.3 Feminine of nouns in Group A whose masculine form ends in -or, -ón, -ín, -és, -án

These add -a, and any accent written on the last vowel disappears:

*el asesor/la asesora* adviser/consultant  
*el burgués/la burguesa* bourgeois

*el campeón/la campeona* champion  
*el capitán/la capitana* captain

*el doctor/la doctora* doctor*el anfitrión/la anfitriona* host/hostess*el león/la leona* lion/lioness*el bailarín/la bailarina* dancer*el peatón/la peatona* pedestrian*el profesor/la profesora* teacher (see note 1)*el programador/la programadora* programmer

For adjectives like *cortés*, *preguntón*, *pillín* see 5.2.1.

(1) *El profesor/la profesora* = ‘secondary school or university teacher’, *el maestro/la maestra* = ‘primary school-teacher’, although in Spain nowadays the fashion is to call all of them *profesores/as*. A British professor is *un/una catedrático/a*.

### 1.2.4 Feminine of nouns in Group A whose masculine form ends in *a*

These do not change:

*el/la artista* artist*el/la astronauta* astronaut*el/la atleta* athlete*el/la brigada* (roughly) warrant officer in the Navy, Air Force or Civil Guard*el/la cabecilla* ringleader*el/la colega* colleague*el/la guardia* policeman/woman. See note 2.*el/la guía* guide (*la guía* also = ‘guidebook’)*el/la pianista* pianist*el/la policía* policeman/woman(*la policía* also = ‘police’). See note 2.*el/la psiquiatra* psychiatrist

(1) *El modisto* for *el modista* ‘male fashion designer’ is heard in Spain: *todo las separa . . . incluso los modistos* (*El Mundo*, Sp.) ‘everything stands between them . . . even fashion designers’. The Academy (DPD, 441) accepts it but *Seco* and *El País* reject it. *La modista* also means ‘dressmaker’.

(2) In Spain *guardias* and *policías* are not the same. The *Guardia Civil* deals with rural policing, frontiers, etc. The *Policía Nacional* polices urban areas, and there are also municipal and regional police forces like the Basque *Ertzaintza* and the Catalan *Mossos d’Esquadra*. Latin-American republics may also have complex policing systems.

### 1.2.5 Feminine of nouns in Group A whose masculine ends in *-nte*

The majority do not change:

*el/la adolescente* adolescent*el/la agente* police officer/agent*el/la amante* lover*el/la cantante* singer*el/la representante* representative*el/la televidente* TV viewer*el/la teniente* lieutenant*el/la transeúnte* passer-by

But a few feminine forms in *-nta* are in use, at least in Spain; they may be unacceptable in parts of Latin America:

*el asistente/la asistenta* assistant, daily help*el dependiente/la dependienta* shop assistant/US ‘sales clerk’*el principiante/la principianta* beginner*el sirviente/la sirvienta* servant*el comediante/la comedianta* comic actor*el pariente/la parienta* relative (*la parienta* is also humorous for ‘wife’)

(1) *El/la asistente social* ‘social worker’, *la asistente social* (the usual form) or *la asistenta social* for a woman. *La asistenta* is usual in Spain for ‘domestic help’.



## 4 Gender of nouns

(2) *La presidente* 'president' is found, but *la presidenta* is recommended by Seco (1998) and is now very widespread.

(3) Forms like *\*la estudianta* for *la estudiante* are considered substandard, but a few popular nouns/adjectives may form their feminine in *-nta*: *el atorrante/la atorranta* (Lat. Am.) 'tramp'/'slacker'/'US 'bum', *dominanta* 'bossy'/'pushy' (applied to women). For *la clienta* see 1.2.7 note 1.

### 1.2.6 Feminine of other nouns in Group A whose masculine form ends in -e or in a consonant

Apart from those mentioned in the preceding sections, these do not change:

<i>el/la alférez</i> second lieutenant	<i>el/la enlace</i> representative	<i>el/la mártir</i> martyr
<i>el/la barman</i> (Sp.) barman/ barmaid	<i>el/la intérprete</i> interpreter	<i>el/la rehén</i> hostage
<i>el/la cónyuge</i> spouse	<i>el/la joven</i> young man/ young woman	<i>el/la tigre</i> (or <i>la tigresa</i> ) tiger
	<i>el/la líder</i> political leader*	

**Exceptions:** *el huésped/la huésped* 'guest' (more usually *la huésped*, which the Academy recommends), *el monje/la monja* 'monk'/'nun', *el sastre/la sastra* 'tailor'. For *la jefa* see 1.2.7.

(1) *\*La lideresa* is approved by the Academy for a female political leader, but most people say *la líder*.

### 1.2.7 Feminine forms of nouns referring to professions

As the social status of women improves, the stigma once attached to some feminine forms of professions is vanishing. The following should be noted:

- *El/la abogado* 'lawyer'. The form *la abogada* is now widely accepted, but it originally meant 'intercessionary saint'.
- *La clienta* 'female customer' is increasingly accepted, at least in Spain, but *la cliente* is also heard.
- *El/la jefe*: *la jefa* is accepted by *El País* as the feminine of *el/la jefe* 'boss', but it sounds too familiar for some people. García Márquez (Col.) writes *Maruja había sido . . . jefe de relaciones públicas* 'Maruja had been head of public relations'.
- *El/la juez* 'judge' – the preferred form in Spain, Mexico and Peru: *El País* insists on *la juez*. Elsewhere in Latin America *la jueza* is not uncommon for a female judge. The Academy accepts *la jueza* and it is widespread in speech everywhere.
- *El médico* 'doctor': *la médica* is normal in much of Latin America, cf. *una médica blanca sudafricana* (Granma, Cu.) 'a white South-African female doctor', but *Emilia Saura, la médico sin hospital* (AM, Mex.) 'ES, the doctor without a hospital'. *El País* and the Academy approve of *la médica* and it is gaining ground though some people still considerate it slightly disrespectful. *La doctora* is polite alternative for a woman doctor. The Academy rejects *la médico*.
- *El/la miembro* 'member' (of clubs), also *el socio/la socia*. The NGLÉ 2.9f approves of *la miembro*.
- *El/la ministro* 'minister', but *la ministra* is usual nowadays. *El País* and the Academy recommend *la primera ministra* over *la primer ministro* 'prime minister' although it logically means 'the first female minister'.
- *La poeta* is now preferred to *la poetisa* 'poetess'.
- *La política* is accepted by the NGLÉ 2.6g for a female politician; it also means 'politics'. *La informática* is a female IT expert; it also means 'computing'.

- **La sacerdotisa** is a possible feminine of *el sacerdote* 'priest', mainly used for ancient religions. The *NGLE* notes the increasing use of *la sacerdote* for female (i.e. non-Roman Catholic) priests.
- **La sargenta** is used to mean a bad-tempered, fierce woman, so *la sargento* is a female sergeant.

Other nouns ending in *-o* may be regular: *el arquitecto/la arquitecta* 'architect', *el biólogo/la bióloga* 'biologist', *el catedrático/la catedrática* 'professor' (European meaning), *el filósofo/la filósofa* 'philosopher', *el letrado/la letrada* 'counsel'/'legal representative', *el sociólogo/la socióloga* 'sociologist', etc. Nevertheless, forms like *la arquitecto*, *la filósofo*, *la letrado* may be preferred in Spain. *La magistrada* 'judge' (higher in rank than a British magistrate) is now usual.

(1) Feminine forms are often used, even in educated speech, when the woman is not listening: *¿qué tal te llevas con la nueva jefa?* 'how are you getting on with your new woman boss?', but *me han dicho que usted es la jefa del departamento* 'they tell me that you are the head of the department'.

### 1.2.8 Nouns referring to mixed groups of males and females

With the rare exceptions noted at 1.2.1, the masculine plural refers either to males or to both sexes, which confuses English-speakers. *Mis hijos* means 'my sons' or 'my children'; *mis hermanos* means 'my brothers' or 'my brother(s) and sister(s)'. The answer to *¿tienes hermanos?* might be *tengo dos hermanos y una hermana* 'I've got two brothers and one sister'. Likewise *hoy vienen los padres de los niños* 'the children's **parents** are coming today'. 'The children's fathers are coming' would have to be clarified by *vienen los padres de los niños—los padres solos* = 'the fathers on their own'. Further examples:

*los alumnos* students/male students  
*los ingleses* the English/English men  
*los niños* children/little boys  
*los perros* dogs/male dogs

*los primos* cousins/male cousins  
*los profesores* teachers/male teachers  
*los reyes* the King and the Queen/kings/  
 the kings and queens

(1) Feminine nouns refer to females only, so one uses the masculine in sentences like *no tengo más amigos que mujeres* 'the only friends I have are women' or *todos los profesores son mujeres* 'all the teachers are women'. ?*No tengo más amigas que mujeres* means 'the only women friends I have are women'! *Tú eres la más inteligente de todos* 'you're the most intelligent of all' is a better compliment to a woman than . . . *de todas* since the feminine excludes males. But a sentence like *María es la mejor profesora del instituto* 'María's the best teacher in the school' is ambiguous: it may or may not include males. *Emilia Pardo Bazán es la mejor intérprete de la vida rural de toda la literatura española del siglo XIX* 'Emilia Pardo Bazán is the best interpreter of rural life in the whole of nineteenth-century Spanish literature' is assumed to mean that she is better than everybody. If 'the best female interpreter' were meant one would say *intérprete femenina*.

(2) Care must be taken with words like *uno, otro*. If a woman from Madrid says *todos los madrileños me caen gordos* 'all Madrid people get on my nerves' one could reply *¡pero tú eres uno de ellos!* 'but you're one of them!', but not \* . . . *una de ellos*, since *madrileños* includes both males and females (*¡pero tú también eres madrileña!* avoids the problem). Compare also *Ana es una de las profesoras* 'Ana is one of the women teachers' and *Ana es uno de los profesores* 'Ana is one of the teachers'. In a few cases, usage seems uncertain. A woman might say either *unos están a favor y otros en contra*. *Yo soy de las que están a favor* or . . . *de los que están a favor* 'some are for, others are against. I'm one of those who are for it'.

(3) The fact that the masculine includes the feminine irritates some feminists since a phrase like *oportunidades para alumnos de química* 'opportunities for students of chemistry' does not clearly

## 6 Gender of nouns

include females, so in notices and pamphlets one sometimes sees *alumn@s*, *candidat@s*, etc. *L@s alumn@s* is a gender-neutral (and unpronounceable) way of writing *los alumnos y las alumnas* 'male and female students'. The Academy disapproves of this use of @.

### 1.2.9 Gender of nouns denoting non-living things when they are applied to humans

Feminine nouns that usually apply to lifeless things can sometimes be applied to human males. In this case the noun acquires masculine gender:

	Applied to a male	
<i>una bala perdida</i> stray bullet	<i>un bala perdida</i>	ne'er-do-well/waster
<i>una bestia</i> wild beast	<i>un bestia</i>	beast/brute/lunatic
<i>la cabeza rapada</i> shaved head	<i>un cabeza rapada</i>	skinhead
<i>la cámara</i> camera	<i>el cámara</i>	cameraman
<i>la primera clase</i> first class	<i>un primera clase</i>	someone first-class
<i>la superventa</i> top sale	<i>el superventa</i>	top seller
<i>la trompeta</i> trumpet	<i>el trompeta</i>	trumpet player

These feminine words can be applied to females: *la trompeta* = 'trumpet' or 'female trumpet player'.

### 1.2.10 Gender of names applied across sex boundaries

A female's name applied to a male acquires masculine gender: *tú eres un Margaret Thatcher* 'you're a Margaret Thatcher' (said to a man of his right-wing political ideas). But men's names usually remain masculine: *María, tú eres un Hitler con faldas* 'Maria, you're a female Hitler', lit. 'Hitler with skirts'.

### 1.2.11 Nouns of invariable gender applied to either sex

Some common words applied to human beings do not change their gender. One says *el bebé está enfermo* 'the baby is ill' whatever its sex, although *la bebé* or *la bebe* is nowadays commonly heard for baby girl: *una bebé muere al recibir un fármaco prescrito a su madre* (*El País*, Sp.) 'baby girl dies after receiving drug prescribed for mother' (*la beba* is heard in the Southern Cone). Some words of common gender are:

<i>el ángel</i> angel	<i>un ligue</i> date/casual boy or girlfriend
<i>una calamidad</i> calamity	<i>una lumbrera</i> genius
<i>una celebridad</i> celebrity	<i>la pareja</i> unmarried partner. See note 2
<i>un cerebro</i> genius/'brainy' person	<i>la persona</i> person
<i>un desastre</i> disaster	<i>el personaje</i> character (in novels, etc.)
<i>un esperpento</i> fright/weird-looking person	<i>una pesadilla</i> nightmare
<i>la estrella</i> star (TV, etc.)	(eres) <i>un sol</i> you're wonderful/an angel
<i>un genio</i> genius	<i>la víctima</i> victim

and a few other masculine nouns can be used to refer to women, most of them, involving sexual innuendo or comparisons with objects, cf. *el pendón* 'trollup'/'slut' (lit. 'pennant', also *la pendona*), *el marimacho* 'tomboy', etc.

(1) Titles like *Alteza* 'Highness', *Excelencia*, *Ilustrísima* 'Grace' (title of bishops) and *Majestad* 'Majesty' are feminine, but the person addressed keeps his/her gender: *Su Majestad estará cansado*

(to a king), 'Your Majesty must be tired'. This particularly applies to the phrase *su señoría* used in the Spanish parliaments to address other members of the two houses and for judges.

(2) *La pareja* is used even for a male partner, but note *su pareja es español* (*El Periódico*, Sp., 8-3-15) 'her (male) partner is Spanish'. *Compañero/compañera* are also used for unmarried partners, sometimes clarified by adding *sentimental*, but *pareja* is becoming more common.

## 1.3 Group B: Gender of nouns referring to animals not included under 1.2 and to lifeless things and to plants

### 1.3.1 Nouns referring to animals not included under 1.2.1–11

Nouns referring to most of the animals not included in the preceding sections are of fixed, arbitrary gender which must be learned separately. The gender of the noun has nothing to do with the sex of the animal:

<i>la araña</i> spider	<i>el gorila</i> gorilla	<i>el panda</i> panda
<i>la babosa</i> slug	<i>la hormiga</i> ant	<i>el puma</i> puma
<i>la ballena</i> whale	<i>la mariposa</i> butterfly	<i>la rana</i> frog
<i>el canguro</i> kangaroo	<i>el mirlo</i> blackbird	<i>el sapo</i> toad
<i>el chimpancé</i> chimpanzee	<i>la mofeta/el zorrillo</i> skunk	<i>la víbora</i> viper
<i>la cucaracha</i> cockroach	<i>la nutria</i> otter	<i>la vicuña</i> vicuña

and many others which will be found in good dictionaries.

(1) One can make an animal's sex clear by adding *macho* 'male' or *hembra* 'female': *la ardilla macho* 'male squirrel', *el cangrejo hembra* 'female crab'. In good Spanish, an adjective agrees with the gender of the noun not of the animal itself: *la rana macho está muerta* 'the male frog is dead', *un cisne hembra blanco* 'a white female swan'. *Macho* and *hembra* are invariable: *las cebras macho* 'male zebras', *los gavilanes hembra* 'female sparrowhawks'.

Familiar language may say things like *el/la gorila* 'he-gorilla' and 'she-gorilla' (properly invariably *el gorila*).

(2) *La canguro* ('she-kangaroo') is used in Spain for a female child-minder or baby-sitter.

### 1.3.2 Gender of nouns referring to non-living things, to plants and to other animals

The gender of nouns referring to non-living things, to plants and to the animals mentioned in 1.3.1 must be learned for each noun. It has no sexual implications and it sometimes varies from place to place: cf. *sauna* 'sauna', feminine in Spain, either gender in Latin America; *sartén* 'frying pan'/US 'skillet', feminine in Spain, often masculine in Latin America. The gender of some nouns also occasionally changes with time: cf. seventeenth-century *la puente*, now *el puente* 'bridge' (occasionally still *la puente* in some regions). *El maratón* and *la maratón* 'marathon' are both current nowadays: *El País* insists on *el maratón*.

There are few infallible rules and we quote only those which in our view do not encourage false generalizations.

### 1.3.3 Masculine by meaning

Some of these have acquired the gender of an underlying omitted noun:

(a) Rivers (*el río*): *el Amazonas* 'the Amazon', *el Jarama*, *el Manzanares*, *el Sena* 'the Seine', *el Támesis* 'the Thames', *el Volga*. Locally some rivers may be feminine, but outsiders rarely know this and the masculine is always correct.

(b) Mountains, oceans, seas and lakes (*el monte*, *el océano*, *el mar*, *el lago*): *los Alpes*, *el Etna*, *el Everest*, *el Himalaya* (singular), *el Pacífico*, *el Caribe* 'Caribbean', *el Windermere*.

(c) The names of cars, boats and aircraft (*el coche*, *el barco*, *el avión*): *un Toyota*, *un Mercedes*, *el caza* 'fighter plane', *el Queen Elizabeth*, *el Marie Celeste*, *un DC10*, *un Mig-31*. But small boats (*la barca*) are usually feminine, as are light aircraft because of the noun *la avioneta*: *una Cessna*.

(d) Months and days of the week (*los meses y los días de la semana*): *enero/abril pasado*, *el lunes* 'Monday', *un viernes frío* 'a cold Friday', etc.

(e) Wines (*el vino*): *el Borgoña* 'Burgundy', *el Chianti*, *un Rioja*, *el champaña* 'champagne', usually *el champán* in spoken Spanish, but *la champaña* in Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela. *El cava* is used to refer to champagne made in Spain.

(f) Pictures (*el cuadro*) by named artists: *un Constable*, *un Leonardo*, *un Rembrandt*, *un Riley*.

(g) Sports teams (*el equipo*): *el Barça* 'Barcelona FC' (pronounced [bár-sa]), *el Betis* (one of Seville's soccer teams), *el Real Madrid*, etc.

(h) All infinitives, and all quoted words: *el fumar* 'smoking', *el escupir* 'spitting', *"mujer" es femenino* '(the word) "mujer" is feminine', *no viene la señal*, *el "siga" que él esperaba* (EP, Mex.) 'the signal doesn't come, the "go on" that he was expecting'.

(i) Any adverb, interjection or other genderless word used as a noun: *el más allá* 'the Beyond', *un algo* 'a "something"', *tiene un no sabe uno qué que gusta* (LRS, Puerto Rico, dialogue) 'she's got something or other pleasing about her'.

(j) Numbers (*el número*): *un seis*, *un 5*, *la Generación del 98* the 'Generation of '98', *el dos por ciento* 'two per cent'.

(k) Musical notes: *el fa*, *el la* (underlying noun unclear).

(l) Colours (*el color*): *el azul* 'blue', *el ocre* 'ochre'; *se amplía el naranja del horizonte* 'the orange of the horizon is spreading' (AG, Sp.), *mandaron instalar una alfombra verde aunque no hiciera juego con el rosa pálido de las paredes* (ES, Mex.) 'they had a green carpet laid even though it didn't match the pale pink of the walls'.

(m) Certain trees (*el árbol*) whose fruit (*la fruta*) is feminine, e.g.

*el almendro/la almendra* almond

*el avellano/la avellana* hazel

*el castaño/la castaña* chestnut

*el cerezo/la cereza* cherry

*el ciruelo/la ciruela* plum

*el granado/la granada* pomegranate

*el guayabo/la guayaba* guava

*el guindo/la guinda* morello cherry

*el mandarino/la mandarina* tangerine

*el manzano/la manzana* apple

*el naranjo/la naranja* orange

*el nogal/la nuez* walnut. See note 2

*el papayo/la papaya* papaya

*el peral/la pera* pear

(1) Some fruits are masculine: *el aguacate* 'avocado' (*la palta* south of Ecuador), *el albaricoque* 'apricot', *el higo* 'fig', *el limón* 'lemon', *el melón* 'melon', etc. 'A banana' is *una banana* for most Latin Americans, but *un plátano* in some regions and in Spain. *Plátano* also means 'plane-tree' in Spain, so 'banana tree' is *el plátano bananero*.

(2) 'Nuts' in general are *los frutos secos*. However, in Latin America *las nueces* can be used for 'nuts', cf. *cuando está comprando nueces, debe elegir los tipos más populares como almendras, manís, pacanas y nueces de nogal* (Colombian cookery book) 'when buying nuts you should choose the most popular kinds like almonds, peanuts, pecans and walnuts'. *El maní* = *el cacahuete* in Spain.

### 1.3.4 Masculine by form

(a) Nouns ending in *-o* are usually masculine: *el colegio* 'school', *el libro* 'book', *el macro* 'macro' (in computing), *el resguardo* 'receipt' / 'payslip' (e.g. from an ATM), *el trampantojo* 'illusion' / 'trick'. There are a few exceptions, some of them important:

<i>la nao</i> ship (archaic)	<i>la Gestapo</i> the Gestapo	<i>la mano</i> hand (dim. <i>la manita</i> or <i>la manito</i> )
<i>la dinamo</i> dynamo ( <i>el dínamo</i> in Lat. Am.)	<i>la libido</i> libido	<i>la moto</i> motorbike
<i>la disco</i> disco	<i>la magneto</i> magneto (frequently masc.)	<i>la polio</i> polio
<i>la foto</i> photo		

(b) Words ending in *-aje*, *-or*, *-án*, *-ambre* or a stressed vowel:

<i>el equipaje</i> luggage	<i>el sofá</i> sofa / couch	<i>el enjambre</i> swarm
<i>el paisaje</i> landscape	<i>el paisaje</i> landscape	<i>Canadá</i> (masc.) Canada
<i>el calor</i> heat	<i>el azafrán</i> crocus / saffron	<i>el rubí</i> ruby
<i>el color</i> colour	<i>el desván</i> attic	<i>el champú</i> shampoo
<i>el amor</i> love	<i>el calambre</i> spasm / cramp	<i>el tisú</i> tissue (e.g. Kleenex)

**Exceptions:** *la flor* 'flower', *la labor* 'labour'. *El hambre* 'hunger' is also feminine: see 3.1.2 for an explanation of the *el*. Forms like *la calor*, *la color* for *el calor* 'heat' and *el color* 'colour' are heard in regional dialects. *Pelambre* 'mop or tuft of hair' is usually feminine, but sometimes masculine.

(1) *La radio* 'radio' is feminine in Spain and in the Southern Cone, but in Mexico, Cuba, Central America and northern parts of South America it is usually, but not always, *el radio*. In some places *el radio* is 'radio set' and *la radio* is 'radio station'. *El radio* also everywhere means 'radius' and 'radium'. In García Márquez's *Noticia de un secuestro* (Col., 1996) *el radio* and *la radio* are used for 'radio' with about equal frequency.

(2) *El porno* is masculine even though it comes from *la pornografía*: *detenido T.*, *el rey del porno español* (*El Periódico*, Sp.) 'T., king of Spanish porn, arrested'.

### 1.3.5 Common masculine nouns ending in *-a*

There is no rule in Spanish that says that nouns ending in *-a* must be feminine. Many nouns ending in *-ma* and several others ending in *-a* are masculine:

(a) Masculine nouns ending in *-a* (for masculine nouns ending in *-ma* see list **b**):

<i>el alerta</i> alert ( <i>el alerta rojo</i> 'red alert' or <i>la alerta</i> )	<i>el bocata</i> familiar in Spain for 'sandwich' / 'baguette' ( <i>el bocadillo</i> )
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*el burka* burka  
*el busca* bleeper/pager  
*el caza* fighter plane  
*el cólera* cholera  
*el cometa* comet (*la cometa* = 'kite', the toy)  
*el día* day  
*el ébola* ebola (the disease)  
*el escucha* listening device/'bug'  
*el extra* extra payment  
*el giga* gig(abyte)  
*el gorila* gorilla  
*el guardarropa* cloakroom  
*el Himalaya* the Himalayas  
*el insecticida* insecticide (and all chemicals ending in *-icida*)  
*el karma* karma  
*el manga* Manga comic

*el mañana* the morrow/tomorrow  
(*la mañana* = 'morning')  
*el lempira* Honduran unit of currency  
*el mapa* map  
*el mediodía* noon  
*el mega* meg(abyte)  
*el nirvana* Nirvana  
*el panda* panda  
*el planeta* planet  
*el Sáhara*. See note 1.  
*el telesilla* ski-lift (but *la silla* 'chair')  
*el tequila* tequila (the Academy rejects *la tequila*)  
*el vodka* vodka (rarely fem.)  
*el tranvía* tram/tramway  
*el yoga* yoga  
*el zika* zika (the mosquito-borne disease)

### (b) Masculine nouns ending in *-ma*

The following words are masculine, in most cases because the Greek words they are derived from are of neuter gender. This list is not exhaustive:

<i>el</i> (or <i>la</i> ) <i>anatema</i> anathema	<i>el dogma</i> dogma	<i>el pijama</i> pyjamas (see note 2)
<i>el anagrama</i> anagram	<i>el drama</i> drama	<i>el plasma</i> plasma
<i>el aroma</i> aroma	<i>el eccema/el eczema</i> eczema	<i>el poema</i> poem
<i>el cisma</i> schism	<i>el emblema</i> emblem	<i>el prisma</i> prism
<i>el clima</i> climate	<i>el enigma</i> enigma	<i>el problema</i> problem
<i>el coma</i> coma ( <i>la coma</i> = 'comma')	<i>el esquema</i> scheme	<i>el programa</i> program(me)
<i>el crisma</i> holy oil (but <i>te rompo la crisma</i> 'I'll knock your block off')	<i>el estigma</i> stigma	<i>el puma</i> puma
<i>el crucigrama</i> crossword	<i>el fantasma</i> ghost	<i>el reúma</i> rheumatism (fem. in Mexico. Also <i>reuma</i> )
<i>el diagrama</i> diagram	<i>el genoma</i> genome	<i>el síntoma</i> symptom
<i>el dilema</i> dilemma	<i>el holograma</i> hologram	<i>el sistema</i> system
<i>el diploma</i> diploma	<i>el lema</i> slogan/watchword	<i>el telegrama</i> telegram puzzle
	<i>el magma</i> magma	<i>el tema</i> theme/topic/subject
	<i>el miasma</i> miasma	<i>el trauma</i> trauma
	<i>el panorama</i> panorama	

and most other scientific or technical words ending in *-ma*. But *la amalgama* 'amalgam', *el asma* 'asthma' (feminine, see 3.1.2 for the *el*), *la estratagema* 'stratagem' and *la flema* 'phlegm' are feminine. For other feminine words ending in *-ma* see 1.3.8.

(1) *El Sáhara* 'the Sahara', pronounced as though written *sájara*, has more or less replaced the older form *el Sahara* (pronounced [sa-á-ra]). *El País* rejects the latter form.

(2) 'Pyjamas'/US 'pajamas' is *la pajama* or *la piyama* in Mexico, the Caribbean and much of Central America: *en piyama te ves soñada* (EM, Mex., dialogue; Spain *pareces un sueño en pijama*) 'you look a dream in pyjamas'.

(3) A few masculine words ending in *-ma* are made feminine in popular speech, dialects and pre-nineteenth-century texts, especially *clima*, *miasma* and *fantasma*, cf. *pobre fantasma soñadora* in Lorca's *El maleficio de la mariposa*.

### 1.3.6 Feminine by meaning

The following are feminine, usually because of an underlying feminine noun:

- (a) Companies (*la compañía, la firma*): *la Ford, la Hertz, la Microsoft, la Seat, la Volkswagen*.
- (b) Letters of the alphabet (*la letra*): *una b, una c, una h, la delta, la omega*. But note *el delta* 'river delta'.
- (c) Islands (*la isla*): *las Antillas* 'West Indies', *las Azores, las Baleares, las Canarias*, etc.
- (d) Roads (*la carretera* 'road' or *la autopista* 'motorway'/'freeway'): *la N11, la M4, la Panamericana*.
- (e) Many fruits. See 1.3.3m for a list.

For more on how an underlying noun may determine the gender of a noun see 1.3.14.

### 1.3.7 Feminine by form

Nouns ending in *-ez, -eza, -ción, -ía, -sión, -dad, -tad, -tud, -umbre, -ie, -nza, -cia, -sis, -itis*

<i>la niñez</i> childhood	<i>la versión</i> version	<i>la presencia</i> presence
<i>la pez</i> pitch (i.e. tar)	<i>la verdad</i> truth	<i>la crisis</i> crisis
<i>la vez</i> time (as in two times)/appointment	<i>la libertad</i> freedom	<i>la diagnosis</i> diagnosis
<i>la doblez</i> duplicity	<i>la virtud</i> virtue	<i>la tesis</i> thesis
<i>la pereza</i> laziness	<i>la cumbre</i> summit	<i>la parálisis</i> paralysis
<i>la acción</i> action	<i>la serie</i> series	<i>la bronquitis</i> bronchitis
<i>la tontería</i> foolishness	<i>la superficie</i> surface	
	<i>la esperanza</i> hope	

But the following are masculine:

<i>el ajedrez</i> chess	<i>el doblez</i> fold/crease, also <i>la</i>	<i>el paréntesis</i> bracket
<i>el pez</i> fish	<i>el éxtasis</i> ecstasy	<i>el énfasis</i> emphasis/
<i>el análisis</i> analysis	<i>el apocalipsis</i> apocalypse	pomposity of style

*La doblez* also means 'duplicity'.

### 1.3.8 Common feminine nouns ending in *-ma*

Many nouns ending in *-ma* are masculine (see 1.3.5b), but many are feminine. The following are common examples of feminine nouns ending in *-ma*:

<i>el alma</i> * soul	<i>la Cuaresma</i> Lent	<i>la forma</i> shape
<i>el arma</i> * weapon	<i>la diadema</i> diadem/tiara	<i>la gama</i> selection/range
<i>el asma</i> * asthma	<i>la doma</i> breaking-in/taming	<i>la goma</i> rubber
<i>la alarma</i> alarm	<i>la enzima</i> enzyme	<i>la lágrima</i> teardrop
<i>la amalgama</i> amalgam	<i>la escama</i> scale (fish)	<i>la lima</i> file (for nails),
<i>la broma</i> joke	<i>la esgrima</i> fencing (the sport)	lime (fruit)
<i>la calma</i> calm	<i>la estima</i> esteem	<i>la llama</i> flame/llama
<i>la cama</i> bed	<i>la estratagema</i> stratagem	<i>la loma</i> hillock
<i>la chusma</i> rabble	<i>la fama</i> fame	<i>la máxima</i> maxim
<i>la cima</i> summit	<i>la firma</i> firm/signature	<i>la merma</i> decrease
<i>la crema</i> cream	<i>la flema</i> phlegm	<i>la norma</i> norm



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<i>la palma</i> palm	<i>la prima</i> female cousin;	<i>la marisma</i> marsh
<i>la paloma</i> dove	bonus/prize	<i>la suma</i> sum
<i>la pamera</i> unnecessary fuss	<i>la quema</i> burning	<i>la toma</i> taking
<i>la pantomima</i>	<i>la rama</i> branch	<i>la trama</i> plot (of novel)
pantomime	<i>la rima</i> rhyme	<i>la yema</i> egg yolk/fingertip
	<i>la sima</i> chasm/abyss	

\*These forms require the articles *el/un* for reasons explained at 3.1.2, but their gender remains feminine.

### 1.3.9 Gender of countries, provinces, regions

Countries, provinces, states or regions ending with an unstressed *-a* are almost all feminine, e.g.

<i>la España/Francia/Argentina de hoy</i>	Spain/France/Argentina today
<i>la conservadora Gran Bretaña</i>	conservative Britain
<i>la Alemania que yo conocía</i>	the Germany I knew

The rest are masculine: *Canadá, México* (often *Méjico* in Spain); *Aragón, Devon* (all masc.), (*el*) *Paraguay, (el) Perú, Tennessee* (masc.), *Nuevo Hampshire*, but *Nueva Jersey*. Some place names include the definite article and may exceptionally be feminine, cf. *las Hurdes* (near Salamanca, Spain). For use of the article with countries and place names, see 3.2.17. *El Sáhara* is masculine.

(1) Sentences like *todo Colombia lo sabe* ‘all Colombia knows it’ are however correct, especially with the adjectives *todo, medio, mismo*, etc., probably because the underlying noun is *pueblo* ‘people’. Cf. *todo Piura está muerta* ‘the whole of Piura is dead’ (MVLI, Pe., dialogue). Compare the following, which refer to a place, not to people: *toda Argentina está inundada de obras mías* (MVLI, Pe.) ‘the whole of Argentina is flooded with books of mine’, *un mono provoca un apagón en toda Kenia* (*El Periódico*, Sp.) ‘monkey causes power outage throughout Kenya’.

### 1.3.10 Gender of cities, towns and villages

Cities ending with an unstressed *-a* are usually feminine, the rest are usually masculine:

<i>la Barcelona de ayer</i>	the Barcelona of yesterday
<i>el Moscú turístico</i>	the tourist’s Moscow
<i>... un imaginario Buenos Aires</i> (JLB, Arg.)	<i>... an imaginary Buenos Aires</i>

**Exceptions:** some cities appear to be feminine but are often treated as grammatically masculine: *Nueva York* but *el Nueva York contemporáneo* ‘modern New York’, *Nueva York está lleno de ventanas* (IA, Sp.) ‘New York is full of windows’, *Nueva Orleans, Nueva Delhi, la antigua Cartago, Bogotá, antes de ser remodelada* ... (Colombian press, *remodelado* is possible) ‘Bogota, before it was refashioned’; and spontaneous language often makes cities feminine because of *la ciudad* ‘city’. Some cities include the definite article (written with a capital letter) in their name: *El Cairo, La Habana* ‘Havana’, *La Haya* ‘The Hague’.

(1) Villages are usually masculine even when they end in *-a*, because of underlying *el pueblo* ‘village’.

(2) For *todo Barcelona habla de ello* ‘all Barcelona’s talking about it’ see 1.3.9 note 1.

### 1.3.11 Gender of compound nouns

These are numerous and nearly all are masculine:

<i>el abrelatas</i> can opener	<i>el paraguas</i> umbrella	<i>el saltamontes</i> grasshopper
<i>el cazamariposas</i> butterfly net	<i>el sacacorchos</i> corkscrew	<i>el salvapantallas</i> screensaver
<i>el lanzallamas</i> flame-thrower	<i>el sacapuntas</i> pencil sharpener	

**Exceptions:** *la quitanieves* and *la tragaperras*. See 2.1.8.

(1) Compound nouns consisting of two nouns have the gender of the first noun: *el año luz* 'light year', *un perro policía* 'police dog': see 2.1.9. The gender of other compound nouns should be learned separately.

### 1.3.12 Gender of foreign words

Spanish is nowadays full of foreign words, many still not recognized by the Academy.

Some of them have no real Spanish equivalent, e.g.

<i>el anorak</i>	<i>el bul(l)dog</i>	<i>el router</i> (in computing)
<i>el bitmap</i>	<i>el chat</i> chatroom	<i>el selfie</i>
<i>el/la blogger</i> (or <i>bloguero/a</i> )	<i>el cookie</i> (in computing)	<i>el tuit, el tuitero</i> , tweet, tweeter; <i>tuítear</i> to tweet
<i>el Bluetooth</i>	<i>el hackeo</i> hacking	

Some have official (Academy) Spanish equivalents but the English form is often preferred in speech because it is shorter or sounds 'cool':

<i>el backup</i> ( <i>la copia de seguridad</i> )	<i>el joystick</i> ( <i>la palanca de mando</i> )
<i>el blog</i> ( <i>la bitácora</i> )	<i>el feedback</i> ( <i>la retro-alimentación</i> )
<i>el bug</i> ( <i>el duende/el error</i> ; in computing)	<i>el firewall</i> ( <i>el cortafuegos</i> )
<i>el bullying</i> (pron. [bú-lin]) ( <i>el acoso</i> )	<i>el soft(ware)</i> ( <i>el soporte lógico</i> )
<i>el casting</i> ( <i>el seleccionamiento/la audición</i> )	<i>el littering</i> ( <i>el basureo</i> )
<i>el clipboard</i> ( <i>el portapapeles</i> )	<i>el look</i> (in fashion: <i>la imagen</i> )
<i>el hard(ware)</i> ( <i>el soporte físico</i> )	<i>el smartphone</i> ( <i>el teléfono inteligente</i> )
<i>la tablet</i> (computing: <i>la tableta</i> )	

English borrowings in Spanish can confuse learners. Sometimes their pronunciation is unfamiliar: *el iceberg* is pronounced in Spain as [e-li-θe-βér] (three syllables: for the phonetic symbols see the Preface); the *ai* of *el airbag* is pronounced like 'eye', *la* or *el wifi* is pronounced like 'wee fee', *el puzzle* is [el-púθ-le] or [pús-le].

Quite often their meaning differs from the original: *un áfter* is a bar or club that stays open after hours, *un biscuit* is made of cream and ice-cream in Spain and in Mexico is a sort of bun or muffin, *un bri(c)k* is a carton for milk or other liquids, *un escalextric* is a 'spaghetti junction', *el footing*, in Spain, is 'jogging'; *un lifting* is a 'face-lift', *un magacín* is a variety TV programme in Spain, *un piercing* is either the action or the stud or ring in the body, *la nurse* (properly *la niñera*) is paid to look after one's children, *el paddle* or *pádel* is 'paddle tennis'. According to *El País*, *esnob* in Spanish means 'an exaggerated admiration for what is fashionable' but in English it is someone who despises things or people that are 'lower class'.

Like all Spanish nouns, borrowed nouns must be masculine or feminine. Words that refer to human beings take the gender of the person: *un(a) yuppie*, *un(a) trader* and *un(a) hacker*, *la nanny*,

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*la miss* ‘beauty queen’. Words referring to non-living things may be feminine if they resemble a feminine Spanish noun in form or meaning or, sometimes, because they are feminine in the original language:

<i>la app</i> app (in computing)	<i>la élite</i> elite (usually pronounced [é-li-te])	<i>la pizza</i>
<i>la boutique</i> ( <i>la tienda</i> ) shop/store	<i>la Guinness</i> ( <i>la cerveza</i> ) ‘beer’	<i>la sauna</i> sauna (often masc. in Lat. Am.)
<i>la chance</i> chance (Lat. Am. only, also masc.)	<i>la NASA</i> ( <i>la Agencia</i> . . .)	<i>la suite</i> (all meanings)
	<i>la opus</i> in music (cf. <i>la obra</i> ), but <i>el Opus</i> = Opus Dei	<i>la yihad</i> Jihad ( <i>la guerra</i> ‘war’)

But if the word is un-Spanish in spelling or ending or is not clearly related to a feminine Spanish noun, it will be masculine. The majority of foreign-looking words are therefore masculine regardless of their gender in the original language:

<i>el affaire</i> affair (fem. in French)	<i>el eslogan</i> advertising slogan	<i>la performance</i> (of motor, etc.)
<i>el after-shave</i>	<i>el fax</i>	<i>el póster</i>
<i>el audiobook</i>	<i>el film</i> cling film/movie (latter usually <i>la película</i> )	<i>el pub</i> (a smart bar with music in Spain)
<i>el best-seller</i>	<i>el/la friki</i> ‘freak’ (person)	<i>el puenting</i> bungee-jumping
<i>el big-bang</i>	<i>el gadget</i>	<i>el quark</i>
<i>los boxes</i> pits (in motor-racing, better <i>el taller</i> )	<i>el gag</i> joke (by a comedian)	<i>el ranking</i>
<i>el burka</i> burka	<i>el hardware</i>	<i>el reality</i> ‘reality’ TV show
<i>el chalet</i> detached house	<i>el jazz</i>	<i>el slip</i> underpants
<i>el chándal</i> track-suit (French)	<i>el karaoke</i>	<i>el software</i>
<i>el christmas/crismas</i>	<i>el máster</i> Master of Arts, Science, etc.	<i>el standing</i> rank/prestige
Christmas card	<i>el módem</i>	<i>el top</i> (women’s clothing),
<i>el copyright</i>	<i>el office</i> pantry/utility room	<i>el vodka</i> vodka (also fem.)
<i>el echarpe</i> (light) scarf (fem. in French; pronounced as a Spanish word)	<i>los panti(e)s</i> tights (from ‘panty-hose’)	<i>el yoga</i> yoga
	<i>el pin</i> badge	<i>el zombi</i>

(1) For the phonetic transcription used in this section see the Preface.

(2) There is wide variation between the various Spanish-speaking countries as to the source and number of recent loanwords, so no universally valid list can be drawn up.

(3) The gender of *Internet* is uncertain: *El País* advocates masculine, the Academy is undecided. But *internet* is in fact mostly used as a proper noun, i.e. without an article: *lo puedes buscar en internet* ‘you can look for it on the Internet’, *en México 70 millones de personas no tienen acceso a internet* (*La Jornada*, Mex.) ‘in Mexico 70 million people have no access to the Internet’. It should be stressed on the final *e*.

(4) *Web* is now usually feminine whether it means ‘the web’ or ‘web site’. ‘Browser’ is *un navegador*. ‘Link’ is *un enlace*. *Wifi* can be either gender. *Las redes sociales* are ‘social networks’.

### 1.3.13 Gender of abbreviations

This is determined by the gender of the main noun:

<i>el ADN</i> ( <i>el ácido desoxirribonucleico</i> ) DNA	<i>el ovni</i> ( <i>el objeto volante no identificado</i> )
<i>el IVA</i> ( <i>el Impuesto de Valor Añadido</i> ) VAT	UFO
(Value Added Tax)	

*la CIA* (Central Intelligence Agency) *la Agencia*. . .  
*la ONU* (*la Organización de las Naciones Unidas*) *UN*  
*la OTAN* (*La Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte*) *NATO*

*la TDT* (*la televisión digital terrestre*) digital TV  
*la UCI* (*la Unidad de Cuidados Intensivos*)  
 Intensive Care Unit  
*las FF.AA.* (*las Fuerzas Armadas*) Armed Forces

(1) If the gender of the underlying noun is unknown or uncertain the abbreviation is masculine – e.g. *el DVD*, pronounced [dew-βe-ðé], but [di-βi-ðí] in some parts of Latin America (see the Preface for the phonetic symbols); *el GPS sistema de posicionamiento global*, but the English abbreviation is used; *el ISIS* ‘Islamic State of Iraq and Syria’. But feminine gender is used if there is a good reason for it, as in *la RAF*, *la USAF* (*las fuerzas aéreas* ‘air force’), etc. *ETA*, the now defunct Basque separatist organization, is feminine in Castilian.

(2) For plural abbreviations like *EE.UU.*, *FF.AA.* See 2.1.12.

### 1.3.14 Gender acquired from underlying noun (metonymic gender)

Several of the examples in this chapter have acquired the gender of another noun that has been deleted (‘metonymic gender’). One says *un Rioja*, *una Budweiser*, *una Guinness* because *el vino* is masculine and *la cerveza* is feminine. This creates apparent gender errors in informal speech:

*la Rey Juan Carlos* = *la universidad Rey Juan Carlos* in Madrid  
*la Modelo* = *la Cárcel Modelo* Model Jail  
*una HP Pavilion* = *una computadora HP Pavilion* (but masc. in Spain, where ‘computer’ is *el ordenador*)  
*un pura sangre* a thoroughbred animal. *La sangre* ‘blood’ is fem.  
*Virgi fue la número uno en el curso de cabo* (LS, Sp. dialogue) ‘Virgi(nia) was number one in the (Civil Guards) corporals’ course

### 1.3.15 Doubtful genders

The gender of some words is undecided, one of the oddest being *el azúcar* ‘sugar’ which is masculine even though a following adjective may be of either gender: *el azúcar moreno/morena* ‘brown sugar’. In the following list the more common gender is shown:

*acné* (preferred to *acne*) m. acne  
*apóstrofe* m. apostrophe  
*bikini/biquini* m. (see note 4)  
*chinche* f. bed-bug/drawing pin  
*cochambre* f. dirt/filth  
*cubalibre* m. (f. in Mex., Ven., Ch.)  
*dote* f. dowry, personal gifts (i.e. ‘qualities’)  
*duermeyela* m. or f. snooze/nap/light sleep  
*el herpes* m. herpes  
*hojaldre* m. puff pastry (Lat. Am. *la hojaldra*)  
*interrogante* m. question  
*lente* f. lens, but see note 2. *Las lentillas* = ‘contact lenses’

*linde* f. boundary  
*maratón* m. marathon  
*pelambre* f. thick hair  
*pitón* f. python (Academy recommends *el*)  
*pringue* m. fat/grease/sticky dirt (*esto está pringoso* ‘this is sticky’)  
*reuma* (preferred to *reúma*) m. rheumatism (fem. in Mexico)  
*sartén* (see 1.3.17)  
*tilde* f. written accent (i.e. ‘ or ~)  
*tizne* m. soot/black smear or stain  
*tortícolis* f. stiff neck

(1) Pre-twentieth-century texts may contain now obsolete genders, e.g. *la puente* ‘bridge’, *la fin* ‘end’, *la análisis* ‘analysis’, etc. For *Internet* and *Web* see 1.3.12 notes 3 and 4. For *la/el radio* see 1.3.4 note 1.

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(2) Masculine gender of *lente* is common, cf. *tuve que mandar hacer otros lentes* (GZ, Mex.) 'I had to get a new pair of glasses made'. The word for eye-glasses in Spain is *las gafas* and *los anteojos* in the Southern Cone.

(3) *Duermevela* 'nap'/'short sleep' is usually feminine in Latin America and also sometimes in Spain.

(4) *Bikini* or *biquini* is normally feminine in the River Plate area: *una biquini amarilla a lunares* (La Nación, Arg.) 'a yellow polka-dot bikini'. It is masculine elsewhere.

### 1.3.16 Gender of *mar* 'sea'

Masculine, except in poetry, the speech of sailors and fishermen, in weather forecasts and in nautical terms (*la pleamar/la bajamar* 'high/low tide', *la mar llana/picada* 'calm/choppy sea', *hacerse a la mar* 'to put to sea', *en alta mar* 'on the high seas', etc.), and whenever the word is used colloquially, as in *la mar de tonto* 'absolutely stupid', *la mar de gente* "'loads" of people'.

### 1.3.17 Some Latin-American genders

Some words are given different genders in provincial Spain and/or some parts of Latin America. Examples current in educated usage and writing in some, but not all, Latin-American countries are: *el bombillo* (Sp. *la bombilla*) 'light bulb', *el cerillo* (Sp. *la cerilla*) 'match' (for making fire), *el llamado* (Sp. *la llamada*) 'call', *el protesto* (Sp. *la protesta*) 'protest', *el vuelto* (Sp. *la vuelta*) 'change' (money). *Sartén* 'frying pan'/US 'skillet' is feminine in most of Spain and in Argentina, masculine in Mexico, and variable elsewhere. Students should enquire locally about its gender.

## 1.4 French nouns that mislead students of Spanish

The gender of nouns in other Latin-based languages generally provides guidance to Spanish genders, but there are important differences. The following French nouns are notorious traps for students of both languages:

*affaire* (f.) *el affaire* affair\*  
*aigle* (m.) *el águila* (f.) eagle  
*amalgame* (m.) *la amalgama*  
amalgam  
*anagramme* (f.) *el anagrama*  
anagram  
*analyse* (f.) *el análisis* analysis  
*apocalypse* (f.) *el apocalipsis*  
apocalypse  
*apostrophe* (f.) *el apóstrofe*  
apostrophe  
*armoire* (f.) *el armario* closet  
*asperge* (f.) *el espárrago*  
asparagus  
*asthme* (m.) *el asma*  
(fem.) asthma  
*attaque* (f.) *el ataque* attack  
*automobile* (f.) *el automóvil*  
automobile

*banque* (f.) *el banco* bank (*la banca* = banking system/  
bank in card-games)  
*barbecue* (m.) *la barbacoa*  
barbecue  
*calme* (m.) *la calma* calm  
*cidre* (m.) *la sidra* cider  
*Coca/Pepsi Cola* (m.) *la Coca/Pepsi Cola*,  
*comète* (f.) *el cometa* comet  
(but *la cometa* = 'kite')  
*courant* (m.) *la corriente*  
current  
*dent* (f.) *el diente* tooth  
*diabète* (m.) *la diabetes*  
diabetes  
*diocèse* (m.) *la diócesis*  
diocese  
*doute* (m.) *la duda* doubt

*éclipse* (f.) *el eclipse* eclipse  
*emphase* (f.) *el énfasis*  
pomposity of style, also  
'emphasis' in Spanish  
*énigme* (f.) *el enigma* enigma  
*équipe* (f.) *el equipo* team  
*extase* (f.) *el éxtasis* ecstasy  
*fin* (f.) *el fin* end  
*front* (m.) *la frente* forehead  
(but *el frente* = military/  
weather front)  
*fruit* (m.) *la fruta*, but 'the  
fruit of their efforts' = *el  
fruto de sus esfuerzos*  
*fumée* (f.) *el humo* smoke  
*guide* (m.) *la guía* guide book  
*hamburger* (m.) *la  
hamburguesa*  
*horloge* (f.) *el reloj* clock

*idole* (f.) *el ídolo* idol  
*insulte* (f.) *el insulto* insult  
*lait* (m.) *la leche* milk  
*lèvre* (f.) *el labio* lip  
*lièvre* (m.) *la liebre* hare  
*limite* (f.) *el límite* limit  
*marge* (f.) *la margen* only  
 when it means 'river bank',  
 masc. in all other meanings  
*massacre* (m.) *la masacre*  
 massacre  
*Méditerranée* (f.) *el*  
*Mediterráneo*  
*mensonge* (m.) *la mentira* lie  
*mer* (f.) *el mar* sea (but see  
 1.3.16)  
*meringue* (f.) *el merengue*  
*méthode* (f.) *el método*  
 method  
*miel* (m.) *la miel* honey

*minute* (f.) *el minuto* minute  
*moral* (m.) *la moral* morale  
*nez* (m.) *la nariz* nose  
*oasis* (f.) *el oasis* oasis  
*ongle* (m.) *la uña* (f.) finger-  
 nail/toe-nail  
*ordre* (m.) *la orden*. when it  
 means command or  
 religious order, otherwise  
 masc.  
*origine* (f.) *el origen* origin  
*panique* (f.) *el pánico* panic  
*paradoxe* (m.) *la paradoja*  
 paradox  
*parenthèse* (f.) *el paréntesis*  
 bracket/parenthesis  
*période* (f.) *el período/periodo*  
 period  
*phoque* (m.) *la foca* seal (the  
 animal)

*planète* (f.) *el planeta* planet  
*préface* (f.) *el prefacio* preface  
*Pyrénées* (f.) *el Pirineo* or *los*  
*Pirineos* Pyrenees  
*rat* (m.) *la rata* rat  
*sang* (m.) *la sangre* blood  
*sauna* (m.) *la sauna* sauna (m.  
 in parts of Lat. Am.)  
*seconde* (f.) *el segundo* second  
*sel* (m.) *la sal* salt  
*serpent* (m.) *la serpiente* snake  
*signe*, *signal* (m.) *la señal*, *la*  
*señal* sign, signal  
*stratagème* (m.) *la*  
*estratagema* stratagem  
*vallée* (f.) *el valle* valley  
*vodka* (m.) *la vodka* (or *el*  
*vodka*)  
*zèbre* (m.) *la cebra* zebra

\*An extra- or non-marital relationship is also *una aventura* (amorosa).

(1) Most French words ending in *-eur* are feminine, but their Spanish equivalents ending in *-or* are mostly masculine: *la chaleur/el calor*, *la couleur/el color*, *la douleur/el dolor*, *une erreur/un error*, *la terreur/el terror*, *la vigueur/el vigor*, etc.

## 1.5 Words differentiated by gender

A large number of common words have meanings differentiated solely by their gender. Well-known examples are:

*busca* (m.) bleeper/pager (f.) search  
*capital* (m.) capital (money) (f.) capital city  
*côlera* (m.) cholera (f.) wrath/anger  
*coma* (m.) coma (f.) comma  
*cometa* (m.) comet (f.) kite (toy)  
*consonante* (m.) rhyming word (f.)  
 consonant  
*corte* (m.) cut (f.) the Court/'Madrid'  
*cura* (m.) priest (f.) cure  
*delta* (m.) river delta (f.) delta (Greek letter)  
*doublez* (usually m.) fold/crease (usually f.)  
 duplicity  
*editorial* (m.) editorial (f.) publishing house  
*escucha* (m.) electronic bug (f.) listening/  
 monitoring  
*final* (m.) end (f.) final (race, in sports)  
*frente* (m.) front (military) (f.) forehead

*génésis* (f.) origin/genesis (m.) Genesis,  
 the book of the Bible  
*guardia* (m.) policeman (f.) guard (see  
 1.2.4 note 2)  
*mañana* (m.) tomorrow/morrow (f.)  
 morning  
*margen* (m.) margin (f.) riverbank  
*moral* (m.) mulberry tree (f.) morals/morale  
*orden* (m.) order (opposite of disorder) (f.)  
 command or religious order  
*ordenanza* (m.) messenger/orderly (f.)  
 decree/ordinance  
*parte* (m.) official bulletin (f.) part  
*pendiente* (m.) earring (f.) slope  
*pez* (m.) fish (f.) pitch (i.e. tar)  
*radio* (m.) radius/radium/spoke (f.) radio  
*terminal* (see note 2)

(1) *Arte* is usually masculine in the singular, but feminine in the plural: *el arte español* 'Spanish art', *las bellas artes* 'fine arts'. But note the set phrase *el arte poética* 'treatise on poetry', and consult

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a good dictionary for other similar phrases. Seco (1998), 60, notes that a phrase like *esta nueva arte* 'this new art-form' is not incorrect, and *los artes de pesca* 'fishing gear' (of a trawler) is standard usage, although *las artes* is also used: . . . *temiendo que un lobo marino o un delfín se hubiera introducido en las artes* (*El País*, Ur.) ' . . . fearing that a seal (Sp. *una foca*) or dolphin had got into the tackle'.

(2) *Terminal* is usually masculine when it means 'electrical terminal', usually feminine when it means 'computer terminal', and normally feminine when it means 'transport terminal'. However, in Chile, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela it is masculine in the latter meaning.

(3) For the gender of *radio* 'radio' see 1.3.4 note 1.

# 2 Plural of Nouns

The main points discussed in this chapter are

- How to form the plural of nouns (Section 2.1)
- Special features of the plural of nouns (Section 2.2)
- Count and mass nouns in Spanish (Section 2.2.1)
- Number agreement rules (Section 2.3)

## 2.1 How to form the plural of nouns

### 2.1.1 Summary of rules

The vast majority of Spanish nouns form their plurals in one of the following three ways:

Method	Main type of noun	Example	See section
<b>1. Add -s</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nouns ending with an unstressed vowel</li><li>• Many foreign words ending with a consonant</li><li>• Nouns ending in <i>é, ó</i> and some nouns ending in <i>á, ú</i></li></ul>	<i>la casa-las casas</i> <i>el chalet-los chalets</i> <i>el jersey-los jerséis</i> <i>el café-los cafés, el capó-los capós, el sofá-los sofás, el menú-los menús</i>	<b>2.1.2</b>
<b>2. Add -es</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Spanish nouns ending with a consonant other than -s</li><li>• Nouns ending with a <b>stressed</b> vowel + s</li><li>• Nouns ending in <i>ú</i></li><li>• Nouns ending in <i>-í</i></li></ul>	<i>la flor-las flores</i> <i>el inglés-los ingleses</i> <i>la tos-las toses</i> <i>el tabú-los tabúes</i> <i>el israelí-los israelíes</i> <i>or los israelís</i>	<b>2.1.3</b>
<b>3. No change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nouns ending with an <b>unstressed</b> vowel + -s</li><li>• Families of people or things</li><li>• Some foreign nouns whose plural would be difficult to pronounce</li></ul>	<i>la crisis-las crisis</i> <i>el virus-los virus</i> <i>los Blanco, los Ford</i> <i>el test-los test (or tests)</i> <i>el kibbutz-los kibbutz</i>	<b>2.1.5</b>

### 2.1.2 Nouns that make their plural by adding -s

(a) Nouns ending in an unstressed vowel (very numerous):

*el huevo – los huevos* egg  
*la cama – las camas* bed

*la serie – las series* series  
*la tribu – las tribus* tribe

(b) Nouns ending in *-é*, and words of one syllable ending in *-e*:

*el bebé – los bebés* baby  
*el café – los cafés* coffee/café

*el pie – los pies* foot/feet  
*el té – los té*s tea



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(c) Nouns of more than one syllable ending with -ó (rare):

*el dominó – los dominós* domino

*el buró – los burós* roll-top desk

Compare *el no – los noes*, 'no'/'noes', a one-syllable word.

(d) Many foreign words ending in a consonant, e.g. *el anorak – los anoraks*. See 2.1.6.

### 2.1.3 Nouns that make their plural by adding -es

When -es is added any accent written on the last vowel of the singular disappears: *la revolución – las revoluciones* 'revolution(s)', *el/la rehén – los/las rehenes* 'hostage(s)'. But the accent is retained in the combinations *aí* or *aú* to show that the second vowel is pronounced separately and not like 'y' or 'w': *el país – los países* 'country', *la raíz – las raíces* 'root', *el baúl – los baúles* 'suitcase(s)'.

If -es is added to a final z, the z is written c: *la cruz – las cruces* 'cross', *la voz – las voces* 'voice'. The following words make their plural by adding -es:

(a) Spanish (or Hispanicized) nouns ending in a consonant other than -s (numerous!):

*el avión – los aviones* aeroplane

*el bar – los bares* bar (i.e. café)

*el baúl – los baúles* trunk/large suitcase

*el color – los colores* colour

*el dron – los drones* drone

*la ley – las leyes* law

*la verdad – las verdades* truth

*la vez – las veces* time (as in 'three times')

(b) One-syllable nouns ending in -s, and nouns ending in a **stressed** vowel plus s:

*la tos – las toses* cough

*el dios – los dioses* god

*el mes – los meses* month

*la res – las reses* farm animal

*el autobús – los autobuses* bus

*el inglés – los ingleses* Englishman

*el revés – los reveses* setback

*el país – los países* country

**Exception:** *el mentís – los mentís* 'denial' (literary styles).

(c) Nouns ending in -í, -ú or -á:

The following plural forms are found in written styles, but nowadays -s alone is added in speech and increasingly in print (but *El País* recommends -es). The Academy now accepts forms like *marroquíes* 'Moroccans', *pakistanís*, *iranís*, etc. The following are in the formal style:

*el bisturí – los bisturíes* scalpel

*hindú – hindúes* (Asian) Indian

*pakistaní – pakistaníes* Pakistani

*el zulú – los zulúes* Zulu

*el tabú – los tabúes* taboo

*el jacarandá – los jacarandaes* jacaranda  
tree, now usually *jacarandás*

**Exceptions:** several frequently heard words always simply add -s:

*el champú – los champús* shampoo

*el menú – los menús* menu

*mamá – mamás* mother, mum

*papá – papás* father/dad

*el sofá – los sofás* sofa/couch

*el tisú – los tisús* (paper) tissues

But forms like *champúes*, *menúes* occur in the River Plate area. In Spain a restaurant 'menu' is *la carta* and *menú* means 'set menu'.

(1) The Latin-American words *el ají* 'chilli' / 'chilli sauce', and *el maní* 'peanut' (Spain *el cacahuete*) often form the plurals *los ajises*, *los manises* in speech, although the NGLE 5.2g disapproves and *ajíes*, *maníes* are used in writing and careful speech.

### 2.1.4 Nouns ending in *-en*

Words ending in *-en* (but *not -én*) require an accent in the plural to preserve the position of the stress. Since they are constantly spelled wrongly the following forms should be noted:

*el carmen* – *los cármenes* villa with a garden  
(esp. in Granada, Spain)

*el crimen* – *los crímenes* crime

*el germen* – *los gérmenes* germ

*el origen* – *los orígenes* origin

*el/la margen* – *los/las márgenes* 'margin'  
(masc.), 'river bank' (fem.)

*la imagen* – *las imágenes* image

*la virgen* – *las vírgenes* virgin

(1) This also affects the word *el mitin* – *los mítines* 'political meeting' / 'rally'. An ordinary meeting, e.g. family, business, is *una reunión*. 'A reunion' is *un reencuentro*. See 2.1.11 for *el espécimen* and *el régimen*.

### 2.1.5 Nouns that do not change in the plural (quite common)

(a) Words ending in an unstressed vowel plus *s*:

*el* – *los análisis* analysis

*el* – *los atlas* atlas

*el* – *los campus* campus

*el* – *los cactus* cactus

*la* – *las crisis* crisis

*el* – *los croquis* sketch

*la* – *las dosis* dose

*el* – *los lunes* Monday

(similarly all weekdays)

*el* – *los mecenas* patron of  
the arts

*el* – *los paréntesis* bracket

*la* – *las tesis* thesis

*el* – *los virus* virus

If the word contains only one vowel the plural ends in *-es*, e.g. *el mes* – *los meses*; see 2.1.3b.

(b) Words ending in *-x*, e.g. *el/los dúplex* US 'duplex apartment', British 'split-level flat' or 'maisonette', *el/los clínex* or *kleenex* '(paper) tissue', *el/los fax* 'fax' (or *faxes*)

(c) Latin words ending in *-t* and *-um* (but see note 1) and a few other foreign words:

*los altos déficit presupuestarios* (El País, Sp.)  
'high budgetary deficits'

*el* – *los CD-ROM* the CD-ROM(s)

*el* – *los accésit* second prize

*el* – *los láser* or *láseres* laser

*el* – *los cuórum* quorum

(d) Some foreign words whose plurals would be difficult to pronounce, e.g. *los bíceps*, *los fórceps*, *los kibbutz*, *los sketch*. See next section.

(1) In everyday language Latin words ending in *-um* tend to form their plural in *-ums*: *el memorándum* – *los memorandums* (the accent becomes unnecessary because the plural ends in *-s*), *el referéndum* – *los referendums*, *el ultimátum* – *los ultimatus*, *el currículum vitae* – *los currículums vitae*. **Exception:** *el álbum*, usually *los álbumes* 'album'.

*El currículo* 'curriculum' has recently spread in Spain, and possibly also elsewhere. Where possible, the NGLE 3.3j prefers Hispanicized forms like *currículo(s)*, *referendo(s)*, *memorando(s)*, *foro(s)*, *solario(s)* to forms like *forums*, *solariums*.

The NGLE 3.3e recommends that Latin words ending in *-t* should add *-s*: *déficits*, *hábitats*, *superávits*, and this is common practice nowadays.

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(2) In general Spanish speakers do not use Latin plurals like our ‘cacti’ for ‘cactuses’, ‘fora’ for ‘forums’ or (incorrect) ‘referenda’ for ‘referendums’. The NGLE 3.3j rejects forms like *data*, *media*, *memoranda* and prefers *datos*, *medios*, *memorandos*, etc.

### 2.1.6 Plural of foreign words ending in a consonant

The tendency is to treat them all like English words and simply add -s – but see 2.1.5c for Latin words. This often produces words ending in two consonants, which is unnatural in Spanish.

If a word ends in *b*, *c*, *f*, *g*, *k*, *m*, *p*, *t*, *v*, or *w*, or in two or more consonants, it is almost certainly a foreign word and will make its plural in -s – the NGLE 3.4k now accepts these forms – unless they end with a *s*, *sh* or *ch* sound, cf. *el kibutz* ‘kibbutz’, *el flash*, *el lunch*, *el sketch*, in which case it will probably be invariable in spontaneous speech. Well-informed speakers may use foreign plurals like *los flashes*, *los kibutzim*, *los sketches*. Some common examples:

*el anorak* – *los anoraks* anorak  
*el boicot* – *los boicots* boycott  
*el bug* – *los bugs* ‘bug’ in computing  
*el complot* – *los complots* (political) plot  
*el chalet* – *los chalets* detached house  
*el gay* – *los gais* gay (homosexual)

*el hit* – *los hits* hit song, film, etc.  
*el hobby* – *los hobbies* hobby  
*el iceberg* – *los icebergs* iceberg  
*el jersey* – *los jerséis* jersey  
*el módem* – *los modems* modem  
*el penalty* – *los penaltis* in sports

Some modern loanwords are treated as Spanish words and add -es. This happens most readily when the word ends in -*l*, -*n* or -*r*:

*el bar* – *los bares* bar  
*el/la barman* – *los/las bármanes* barman/  
barmaid  
*el dólar* – *los dólares* dollar  
*el dossier* – *los dossieres* dossier  
*el dron* – *los drones* drone

*el electrón* – *los electrones* electron  
*el escáner* – *los escáneres* scanner/scanning  
*el estándar* – *los estándares* standard  
*el gol* – *los goles* goal (in sport)  
*el hotel* – *los hoteles* hotel  
*el suéter* – *los suéteres* sweater

(1) *El sándwich* (sliced bread, unlike *un bocadillo* which is made with a baguette), makes the plural *los sándwiches* in educated usage, but *los sándwich* is common, usually pronounced [sáj-wich]. The Academy’s recommendation for sandwich, *el emparedado*, never caught on. *El sánduche*, which is more pronounceable, is heard in some Latin-American republics.

(2) Old ‘Academy’ plurals like *los cócteles* ‘cocktail’, *los córneres* ‘corner’ (in soccer), *los fraques* (for *los fracs*) ‘dress-coat’/‘tails’, etc. have become obsolete: -s alone is added. However *los filmes* ‘films’ is not uncommon and is the form recommended by *El País* (the usual word is *la película*), and *los clubes* is more common in writing than *los clubs*; *El País* prefers *clubes*. *Los álbumes* is generally preferred to *los álbums* ‘albums’. *Los eslóganes* is preferred by the Academy to *los eslogans* ‘(publicity) slogan’. The usual plurals of *el pin* ‘badge’ and *el/la fan* ‘fan’ (e.g. of a singer, but a sports fan is *un/una hincha*) are *pins* and *fans*; the NGLE 3.4h advocates *pinés* and *fanes* but this advice is generally ignored (‘pin number’ is *el número secreto*).

(3) Some writers and editors treat foreign words ending in a consonant like Latin words (see 2.1.5c), so forms like *los módem*, *los láser* are seen. Such zero plural forms are often given to foreign words in spontaneous speech. The NGLE 3.4p recommends *los test*, *los trust* as plurals since many Spanish-speakers find *sts* difficult to pronounce.

(4) The NGLE 3.7m, says that abbreviations should not be pluralized: *las ONG* = *organizaciones no gubernamentales*, i.e. NGOs or ‘non-governmental organizations’, not *las ONGs*; *los DNI Documento*

*Nacional de Identidad*, not *DNI*s. But *las pymes* (*pequeñas y medianas empresas*) ‘small and medium-sized businesses’ is treated as an ordinary word.

### 2.1.7 Proper names

If a proper name refers to members of a family, it usually has no plural form: *los Franco*, *los Mallol*, *los Kennedy*, *los Pérez*; *en casa de los Riba hay una niña que amaré toda la vida* (EP, Mex., dialogue) ‘in the Ribas’ house there’s a girl whom I’ll love for the whole of my life’; but exceptions to this rule are seen. A group of individuals who merely happen to have the same name will be pluralized according to the usual rules, although names in *-és* and *-z* are almost always invariable:

Este pueblo está lleno de Morenos, Blancos y Pérecos/Pérez no todos los Juan Pérez del mundo (JD, Ch.)	This village is full of Morenos, Blancos and Pérezes not all the Juan Pérezes in the world
--	--

(1) The same rule applies to objects that form families: *los Ford* ‘Ford cars’, *los Chevrolet*, *los Renault*. The NGLE 3.6h recommends this rule.

(2) Royal houses are considered to be successive individuals: *los Borbones* ‘the Bourbons’, *los Habsburgos* ‘the Habsburgs’.

### 2.1.8 Compound nouns consisting of a verb + a plural noun

These do not change in the plural:

el – los abrelatas tin-opener	la – las quitanieves snowplough/US
el – los cumpleaños birthday	snowplow. Seco (1998) says it is feminine
el – los guardaespaldas bodyguard	el – los elevallas automatic car
el – los lanzamisiles missile-launcher	window-opener
el – los limpiabotas shoeshine	
el – los portaaviones aircraft carrier	
la/las tragaperras gambling machine/slot machine	

### 2.1.9 Compound nouns consisting of two nouns

This is a large and growing class of compound nouns. Normally only the first noun is pluralized:

<i>el año luz</i> – <i>los años luz</i> light-year	<i>el perro policía</i> – <i>los perros policía</i> police dog
<i>el arco iris</i> – <i>los arcos iris</i> rainbow	<i>el satélite espía</i> – <i>los satélites espía</i> spy
<i>el bebé probeta</i> – <i>los bebés probeta</i> test-tube baby	satellite
<i>el carril bus</i> – <i>los carriles bus</i> bus lane	<i>la tienda online</i> – <i>las tiendas online</i> online
<i>la hora punta</i> – <i>las horas punta</i> rush hour/peak	shop/store. Also <i>tiendas en línea</i> / <i>la</i>
hour ( <i>la hora pico</i> in many Lat. Am. countries)	<i>cibertienda</i> .

But always *el país miembro* – *los países miembros* ‘member country’, *la tierra virgen* – *las tierras vírgenes* ‘virgin land’.

(1) Pluralizing the second word makes it into a noun rather than an adjective: *los perros policías* sounds like ‘dogs who are policemen’, but *perros policía* are dogs who work for the police.

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Compare *las ediciones pirata* 'pirate editions' and *los editores piratas* 'pirate publishers', *los niños modelo* 'model children' and *los niños modelos* 'child models'.

*La ciencia ficción* 'science fiction' is unusual in that the second word is the head noun. It is borrowed from English.

(2) These compounds are very common in phrases like *un módem WAP*, *la red wifi* 'wi-fi network', *una tarjeta SIM* 'SIM card', *una página web* 'web page'; in abbreviated notices, e.g. *camisetas niño* 'children's T-shirts', *zapatos mujer* 'women's shoes'; and in trade descriptions: *champú anticaspa* 'anti-dandruff shampoo', *un cupón descuento* 'discount coupon', etc.

For the plural of adjectives like *extra*, *violeta* see 5.2.3 and 5.2.4.

### 2.1.10 Other types of compound noun

(a) The following compound nouns are invariable in the plural:

<i>el sin casa</i>	<i>los sin casa/sin techo</i>	homeless person
<i>el hazmerreír</i>	<i>los hazmerreír</i>	laughing-stock
<i>el vivalavirgen</i>	<i>los vivalavirgen</i>	fun-lover/laid-back/someone who couldn't give a damn

(b) Other compound nouns are treated as single words with regular plurals:

<i>el altavoz</i> – <i>los altavoces</i> loudspeaker (Lat. Am. <i>el altoparlante</i> )	<i>el quehacer</i> – <i>los quehaceres</i> task
<i>la bocacalle</i> – <i>las bocacalles</i> side street	<i>el rapapolvo</i> – <i>los rapapolvos</i> telling-off/ scolding
<i>el correveidile</i> – <i>los correveidiles</i> tell-tale	<i>el sordomudo</i> – <i>los sordomudos</i> deaf-mute
<i>los dimes y diretes</i> gossip	<i>el tentempié</i> – <i>los tentempiés</i> snack
<i>el hidalgo</i> – <i>los hidalgos</i> nobleman (the old plural was <i>hijosdalgo</i> )	<i>el todoterreno</i> – <i>los todoterrenos</i> four- wheel-drive vehicle
<i>el pésame</i> – <i>los pésames</i> condolences	<i>el vaivén</i> – <i>los vaivenes</i> ups-and-downs/ swaying motion

### 2.1.11 Irregular plurals

Only four irregular plurals are in common use.

(a) Three common nouns shift their stress in the plural: *el carácter* – *los caracteres* 'character' (**not** \**los caracteres*!), *el espécimen* – *los especímenes* 'specimen' and *el régimen* – *los regímenes* 'regime'.

(b) *El lord* (British) 'lord' has the plural *los lores*: *la Cámara de los Lores* 'the House of Lords'.

### 2.1.12 Plural of abbreviations

The plural of two-word abbreviations is shown by doubling the letters: *las CC. AA. Comunidades Autónomas* 'Autonomous Regions' in Spain, *las FF. AA. las Fuerzas Armadas* 'Armed Forces', *los EE.UU.* *Los Estados Unidos* 'USA', *las CC. OO. Las Comisiones Obreras*, one of Spain's trade unions, *los JJ.OO los Juegos Olímpicos* 'The Olympic Games'.

## 2.2 Some features of Spanish plural nouns

### 2.2.1 Count nouns and mass nouns in Spanish and English

A count noun refers to things that can be counted: 'an egg' – 'two eggs'. Mass or uncountable nouns are non-countable things: 'justice', 'bread', but not \*'two justices', \*'two breads'. In both English and Spanish, mass or uncountable nouns can often be pluralized to mean different varieties of the same thing: 'her fear' – 'her fears', 'my love' – 'my loves'. This device is more frequent in Spanish than in English, and translation of the plural may require thought, e.g.:

*Hubo varias urgencias*  
*Ejercía diversas soberbias* (JLB, Arg.)  
*... conductas que afectan el bolsillo de*  
*todos los mexicanos* (La Jornada, Mex.)

There were several emergencies  
 He practised various kinds of arrogance  
 ... types of behaviour that affect the pockets  
 of all Mexicans

A number of Spanish nouns can be pluralized in this way whereas their English translation cannot, e.g.

*la amistad* friendship  
*la atención* attention  
*la bondad* goodness  
*la carne* meat/flesh  
*el consejo* advice  
*la crueldad* cruelty  
*la información* information  
*el mueble* item of furniture  
*el negocio* business

*el pan* bread  
*el progreso* progress  
*la tostada* toast  
*la tristeza* sadness  
*el trueno* thunder

*las amistades* friends  
*las atenciones* acts of kindness  
*las bondades* good acts  
*las carnes* fleshy parts/types of meat  
*los consejos* pieces of advice  
*las crueldades* cruel acts  
*las informaciones* news items  
*los muebles* items of furniture  
*los negocios* business affairs, Lat. Am.,  
 stores/shops  
*los panes* loaves of bread  
*los progresos* advances  
*las tostadas* slices of toast  
*las tristezas* sorrows  
*los truenos* thunderclaps

(1) Both languages may use counters or quantifiers (words like 'loaf', 'piece') to make uncountable nouns plural: *tres pastillas/barras de jabón* 'three bars of soap', *las briznas de hierba* 'blades of grass', *unos dientes de ajo* 'some cloves of garlic', *las parcelas de terreno* 'plots of land', *trozos/hojas/pedazos de papel* 'pieces/sheets of paper', *las barras de tiza* 'sticks of chalk', *los terrones de azúcar* 'lumps of sugar', *las motas de polvo* 'specks of dust', etc.

(2) There are some subtleties: *a finales de agosto* 'at the end of August', but *al final del pasillo* 'at the end of the corridor'; *a comienzos* or *a comienzo de la década* 'at the beginning of the decade', but only *en el comienzo del libro* 'at the beginning of the book'. The NGLE 3.8p mentions the difference between *tener relación con alguien* 'to be connected/associated with someone' and *tener relaciones con alguien* 'to have a sexual, emotional or diplomatic relationship'. *El deber* usually means 'duty'; *los deberes* means 'homework', though the singular can be used for the latter in parts of Latin America.

## 2.2.2 Nouns denoting symmetrical objects

As in English, these nouns are usually invariably plural:

*los auriculares* earphones

*las bragas* panties

*las gafas* glasses (Lat. Am. *los anteojos* /

*los lentes*) *las pinzas* tweezers

*los prismáticos* binoculars

*las tijeras* scissors

'A pair of' is *unos/unas* before such nouns.

(1) Colloquially the singular may be used in some regions, as in *¿podría prestarme una tijera?* (EP, Mex., dialogue) 'could you lend me some scissors?'. The more usual form in Spain comes first:

*los alicates/el alicate* pliers/pincer

*el bigote/los bigotes* moustache

*los calzoncillos/un calzoncillo* men's  
underpants/US shorts

*la muralla/las murallas* city walls

*la nariz/las narices* nose (both used)

*las pinzas/la pinza* peg/pincers/ tweezers/  
dart (in sewing)

*el pantalón/los pantalones* trousers/

US 'pants': sing. and plur. equally common

(2) *Las escaleras* = 'stairs', *la escalera* = 'ladder'.

## 2.2.3 Nouns always plural in Spanish

As happens in English, some nouns or phrases are normally found only in the plural. The following list is by no means exhaustive:

*las afueras* outskirts

*las agujetas* pins and needles (in the skin)

*los alrededores* surroundings

*los altos* (Lat. Am.) upstairs flat/apartment

*los bajos* (Lat. Am.) downstairs apartment

*los bártulos* (colloquial) belongings/'gear'

*los bienes* goods, provisions

*buenas noches* good night

*buenas tardes* good afternoon

*buenos días* good morning

*los celos* jealousy

*los cimientos* foundations

*las cosquillas* tickling

*las dietas* expenses/allowances/diets

*los espaguetis* spaghetti

*las exequias* funeral arrangements

*las ganas* urge/desire

(*tener muchas*) *ínfulas* to be conceited

*las Navidades* or *la Navidad* Christmas

*las ojeras* bags under the eyes

*los prismáticos* binoculars

*los restos* remains

*los sesos* brains (in cooking)

*las tinieblas* darkness

*las vacaciones* holiday/vacation

*los víveres* provisions/supplies

*las zarandajas* fiddly things/gossip

(1) *Buen día* is a less common alternative to *buenos días*. Christmas is *la Navidad* or *las Navidades*: *Feliz Navidad* = *Felices Navidades* 'Happy Christmas'. *Buenos días*, *buenas tardes* and *buenas noches* can all be shortened to *buenas* . . . in very informal speech. *Buen día* is common in the Southern Cone and is occasionally heard elsewhere. It is uncommon but sometimes heard in Spain.

## 2.2.4 Singular for objects of which a person has only one

The English sentence 'they hurt their knees' is ambiguous: one knee or both? Spanish normally clarifies the issue by using the singular if only one each is implied or if only one thing is possessed:

*Les cortaron la cabeza*  
*Se quitaron el sombrero*  
*Todos tenían novia*  
*tres israelíes con pasaporte alemán*  
*La cara de Antonio no refleja el mismo*  
*entusiasmo. Ni la de sus cuñados tampoco*  
 (CRG, Sp.)

They cut off their heads  
 They took off their hats  
 All had girlfriends (one each)  
 three Israelis with German passports  
 Antonio's face doesn't reflect the same  
 enthusiasm. Nor do those (lit. 'nor does  
 that') of his brothers and sisters-in-law

(1) This rule is optional when the object possessed is not part of the body: *quítense el sombrero/los sombreros* 'take off your hats', *podéis dejar la chaqueta/las chaquetas aquí* 'you can leave your jackets here'.

(2) The rule with parts of the body is often ignored in Latin-American speech: *nos hemos mojado las cabezas* (Bol., quoted Kany, 26) 'we've wet our heads', *lo hacían para que no les viéramos las caras* (LS, Mex., dialogue) 'they were doing it so we wouldn't see their faces'. The plural can sometimes remove ambiguity, as in *los extranjeros felicitaban al maquinista por su gran pericia para lograr el descarrilamiento en el lugar preciso donde sus vidas correrían peligro* (La Época, Ch.) 'the foreigners congratulated the train-driver for his great skill in managing to cause a derailment exactly at the spot where their lives would be at risk', where the singular *su vida* might mean the train-driver's life.

### 2.2.5 Singular for plural

Singular nouns may sometimes be used to represent large numbers after words like *mucho*, *tanto*, etc., often, but not exclusively, with an ironic or faintly weary tone:

*También había mucha estudiante con vaqueros*  
*y camisetas* (JM, Sp.)  
*A mí me parecía maravilloso ver tanto soldado*  
 (NC, Mex.)  
*¿Cuál era el móvil de tanto ataque?* (MS, Mex.,  
 dialogue)

There were also a lot of girl students in  
 jeans and T-shirts  
 It seemed wonderful to me to see so many  
 soldiers  
 What was the reason for so many attacks?

The GDLE, 1.2.3.5, says that to enter a busy parking lot looking for a space and to say *hay mucho coche* sounds more pessimistic than *hay muchos coches* 'there are lots of cars'.

## 2.3 Number agreement rules

This section covers various aspects of number agreement, mainly with nouns. For further remarks on the agreement of adjectives see 5.6. For the agreement of possessive adjectives, see 9.3.1–2. For agreement with *cuyo* see 39.7. For tense agreement see 17.8 and 20.8.

### 2.3.1 Number agreement with collective nouns

(a) Adjectives that modify a collective noun (a noun referring to a group of persons or things) are singular and the verb is singular when it immediately follows the noun. In other words, Spanish always says *la policía británica busca* 'the British police "is" seeking', *la gente dice* 'people "says"' . . ., not '*buscan*', '*dicen*'. British English tends to use the plural after collective nouns:

*El gobierno considera . . .*  
*La tripulación está a su disposición*  
*El resto de mis bienes es ya vuestro* (AG, Sp.)

The government consider(s) . . .  
 The crew are/is at your disposal  
 The rest of my goods is yours now



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*La mayoría de las personas se quedó boquiabierta cuando lo vio entrar* (MS, Mex.)

Most people were gaping when they saw him come in

(b) When a collective noun is linked to a plural noun, usually by *de*, the safest option is to make the adjective or verb plural: *un grupo de vecinos airados* ‘a group of angry neighbours’, *una mayoría de españoles creen que . . .* ‘a majority of Spaniards think that . . .’, *un mínimo de 13 presos habían sido asistidos de heridas* (El País, Sp.) ‘a minimum of 13 prisoners had been treated for injuries’, *la mayoría de las personas que se manifestaron son albañiles* (La Jornada, Mex.) ‘the majority of persons who demonstrated are builders’.

But singular agreement is possible: *el resto de los presentes soportaba con estoicismo la elevada temperatura* (LS, Ch.) ‘the rest of those present were bearing the high temperature stoically’. The question of agreement in such cases is controversial. Seco (1998), 126, recommends the plural, but *El País* recommends the singular wherever possible. Seco’s is the best advice since it avoids nonsense like \**un grupo de mujeres rubio* \*‘a blond group of women’ for *un grupo de mujeres rubias* ‘a group of blond women’.

(1) When collective nouns are separated from the verb by intervening words, plural agreement is much more common: *cundo la policía llegó al apartamento, se encontraron con la cómica, aunque desagradable escena . . .* (La Vanguardia, Sp., quoted GDLE 1.4.4) ‘when the police reached the apartment they were met with the comical but disagreeable spectacle . . .’

Native speakers sometimes hesitate over agreement with collective nouns: *una pareja amiga que se llama/llaman Mario y Ana* ‘a couple who are friends of ours and are called Mario and Ana’.

(2) For constructions like *la mayoría son españoles, el comité son unos mentirosos*, see 2.3.3.

### 2.3.2 Plural noun after *tipo de*, etc.

After *tipo de* and similar phrases (e.g. *clase de, género de . . .*), countable nouns are usually made plural:

*¿Por qué hacen los hombres este tipo de cosas?*  
(CRG, Sp.)

Why do men do this kind of thing?

*Ese tipo de relaciones son siempre difíciles*  
(MS, Mex., dialogue)

That kind of relationship is always difficult

### 2.3.3 *Esto son lentejas, todo son problemas, el jefe eres tú*, etc.

When *ser* and a few other verbs like *volverse* have a singular subject and a plural noun for their predicate, as in ‘everything is problems’, they agree in number with the predicate: *todo son problemas, eso son malas noticias* ‘that’s bad news’. This most often occurs after neuter pronouns like *lo que . . .* ‘what . . .’, *todo* ‘everything . . .’, *esto* ‘this . . .’, etc. A similar phenomenon is found in French and German, which say ‘it are lies’: *ce sont des mensonges, es sind Lügen*:

*El escrito eran nuestras condiciones*  
*Primero todo fueron bromas* (EP, Mex.)

The document was our conditions

*—¿Cuánto le debo? —Son cien euros*

At first it was all jokes

*Lo demás fueron un par de detalles burocráticos*  
(ABE, Pe.)

‘How much do I owe you?’ ‘That’s 100 euros’

The rest was a couple of bureaucratic details

*Su morada más común son las ruinas* (JLB, Arg.)  
*Lo que llega son series de números* (MC, Mex., dialogue)

Their most usual dwelling-place is ruins

What arrives is series of numbers

(1) This rule is not always applied: *lo único que no falta es cigarrillos* (MVLL, Pe., for *son cigarrillos*) ‘the only thing that isn’t lacking is cigarettes’, *lo primero que vi fue policías* (ABE, Pe.) ‘the first thing I saw was policemen’, *lo que mejor se ve es las casas de enfrente* (MP, Arg., dialogue) ‘what you can see best is the houses opposite’.

(2) For the rule to be applied, the predicate must really refer to a collection of different things. In the following example Mario is really only one complex person: *Mario es en realidad muchas personas diferentes* ‘Mario is really a lot of different people’.

(3) The same – or a similar – rule also applies to other persons of the verb: *la persona más importante eres tú* ‘the most important person is you’ (not *\*es tú*), *el que manda soy yo* (not *\*es yo*) ‘I’m the one who gives the orders’, *la mayoría somos cubanos* ‘most of us are Cubans’, *los responsables sois vosotros* (Spain only, Lat. Am. . . . *son ustedes*) ‘you’re the responsible ones’.

### 2.3.4 Agreement with nouns linked by *y*, *o* and phrases meaning ‘as well as’

(a) Nouns linked by *y* require plural agreement unless they form, or are felt to form, a single concept. Compare *su padre y su madre estaban preocupados* ‘his father and mother were worried’ (different people) and *Ángela era su mujer y secretaria* ‘Angela was his wife and secretary’ (one person, so obviously not *sus*).

When several things can optionally be viewed as one, either singular or plural agreement is in fact usually possible:

*El derrumbe del socialismo y la desaparición  
de la URSS causó el mayor daño* (FC, Cu.,  
or *causaron*)

The collapse of socialism and the  
disappearance of the Soviet Union  
caused the greatest damage

(b) With *o* ‘or’, agreement is optional if the verb comes first, but the singular stresses the idea of ‘one or the other’ more than the plural: *viene(n) Mario o Antonia* ‘either Mario or Antonia is coming’, but *Mario o Antonia vendrán* ‘Mario or Antonia are coming’.

(c) Agreement after phrases that mean ‘as well as’, ‘likewise’, etc., seems to be optional, although the plural is more common: *tanto Mario como María pensaba(n) que* ‘both Mario and Maria thought that . . .’.

# 3 The definite article

The main points discussed in this chapter are

- Forms of the definite article (*el/la/los/las*) (Section 3.1)
- The use of *el/un* before certain feminine nouns (Section 3.1.2)
- Uses and omission of the definite article (Section 3.2)

Articles are words meaning ‘the’ (‘definite article’) or ‘a’/‘an’ (‘indefinite article’). Both English and Spanish have articles, but they are not always used in the same way.

This chapter discusses the forms and uses of the definite article (*el/la/los/las*). The indefinite article, *un/una/unos/unas*, is discussed in Chapter 4.

For the use of the definite article to replace a possessive adjective, e.g. *María se ha roto la* (not ‘su’) *muñeca* ‘María’s broken her wrist’, *me dejé la cartera en casa* ‘I left my wallet at home’, see 9.3.4. For the definite article in phrases like ‘the most interesting book’ see 6.3. For the ‘neuter article’ *lo* see 8.2.

## 3.1 Forms of the definite article

### 3.1.1 Masculine and feminine definite articles

	Masculine	Feminine
Singular	<i>el</i>	<i>la</i> ( <i>el</i> before feminine nouns beginning with a stressed <i>a</i> sound. See 3.1.2)
Plural	<i>los</i>	<i>las</i>

(1) *La* is not shortened to *l’* in modern Spanish: compare *la artista* ‘woman artist’ with Italian *l’artista*, French *l’artiste*. Nor is the *a* of *la* dropped in pronunciation before words beginning with a vowel other than *a*: *la emisora* ‘radio station’ is pronounced [lae-mi-só-ra], not [le-mi-só-ra]. The *a* and *e* are run together to form one syllable in a way that English-speakers find difficult to imitate. Compare *la amiga* [la-mí-ya] ‘female friend’, *la avioneta* [la-βyo-né-ta] ‘light aeroplane’.

### 3.1.2 Use of *el* and *un* before certain feminine nouns

**Important:** on both continents and in all styles *el* and *un* must be used immediately before singular feminine nouns beginning with stressed *a-* or *ha-*: *el agua* ‘water’, *el/un haya* ‘beech-tree’, *el aforo del aula* ‘the capacity of the lecture room’, etc. This does not affect their gender, which remains feminine. Some common examples:

*el/un abra* mountain pass  
(Lat. Am. Sp. *el puerto*)  
*el África moderna* modern  
Africa  
*el/un águila* eagle  
*el/un alba* dawn  
*el/un alma* soul

*el/un alza* rise/increase  
*el/un ancla* anchor  
*el/un área* area  
*el/un arma* weapon  
*el/un arpa* harp  
*el Asia de hoy* Asia today  
*el/un asma* asthma

*el/un ave* large bird  
*el/un habla* speech-form  
*el/un hacha* axe/US ax  
*el/un hada* fairy  
*el/un hambre* hunger  
*el hampa* the criminal  
underworld

The plural is always with *las/unas*: *las águilas* ‘eagles’, *las hachas* ‘axes’ and adjectives are feminine in form: *un aula oscura* ‘a dark lecture hall’. The feminine article must also be used if any word comes between the definite article and the noun: *una peligrosa arma* ‘a dangerous weapon’, *la misma agua* ‘the same water’. Compare the following words which do not begin with a stressed *a*:

*la/una amnistía* amnesty  
*la/una apertura* opening

*la arena* sand  
*la/una arroba* at-sign: @;  
also an old measure  
of weight = 11.502 kg

*la/una hacienda* ranch  
*la/una hamburguesa* hamburger

**Exceptions:** *la/una a* ‘letter a’, *la/una app* ‘app’ (in computing), *la/una hache*, ‘letter h’, *la/una aya* children’s governess, *La Haya* ‘the Hague’, *la/una árabe* ‘Arab woman’, *la/una ácrata* ‘anarchist woman’, *la/una árbitra* ‘female referee’ (approved by the Academy); abbreviations – see note 3. The Spanish high-speed train, *el AVE* (*Alta Velocidad Española*) is masculine because of underlying *el tren*.

(1) One sees and hears mistakes like *\*otro aula* ‘another lecture room’ for *otra aula* or *\*a raíz del último alza del petróleo* (*Abc*, Sp., quoted Seco 1998, 176, properly *la última alza*) ‘... following the latest rise in oil prices’. *?Tengo un hambre bárbaro* ‘I’m starving hungry’ or *?tengo mucho hambre* ‘I’m very hungry’ are heard in relaxed speech on both continents for ... *hambre bárbara*, ... *mucha hambre*. The masculine forms are banned from careful language.

(2) **Important:** use of the masculine article occurs only before nouns, not before adjectives beginning with stressed *a-* or *ha-*:

*una amplia estancia* (FU, Sp.)

wide room

*una alta mujer* (JLB, Arg.)

a tall woman

*¿Vas a comprar un móvil? La amplia gama*

Are you buying a mobile/cell phone?

*de modelos complica la decisión* (El País, Sp.)

The wide range of models makes deciding  
more difficult

(3) The rule does not apply to abbreviations. *La ACA* = *la Agencia Catalana de Agua* ‘Catalan Water Authority’.

(4) *El* and *un* are often used before feminine compound nouns whose first element would have begun with a stressed *a* had it stood alone: *aguamarina* ‘aquamarine’, *aguanieve* ‘sleet’, *avemaría* ‘Ave Maria’. However, the Academy recommends *la* (NGLE 14.2u).

(5) The use of *un* in writing before these nouns is a recent development although it has a long history in spoken Spanish. The Academy’s Dictionary adopted it only after 1970, so forms like *una alma* for *un alma* ‘a soul’ are therefore still sometimes found.

(6) for *alguna* or *algún* ‘some’ before nouns beginning with stressed *a-* or *ha-* see 10.4.1 note 2. For *ninguna* ‘no’ see 27.5.5. For the colloquial use of *este* ‘this’, *ese* and *aquel* ‘that’ before these nouns, see 7.1 note 3.

(7) *La* is also used before *Ángela*, *Ana* and other women’s names beginning with stressed *A*, but use of the article before names is unusual in most regions. See 3.2.21.

(8) Note *la/una haz* or *el/un haz*, feminine, ‘surface’/‘face’, e.g. *por el haz y por el envés* ‘on the surface and on the reverse side’, *el haz* being most common in Spain. But *el haz*, masculine = ‘bundle’ or ‘beam of light’.

### 3.1.3 *Del and al*

*De* plus *el* is shortened to *del* ‘of the’ – *del libro* ‘of the book’ – and *a* plus *el* is shortened to *al* ‘to the’: ‘*al libro*’ to the book’. *De él* ‘of him’ and *a él* ‘to him’ are not abbreviated in modern Spanish. The abbreviated forms are not used – at least in writing – if the definite article is part of a proper name:

*la primera página de El Comercio*

*Viajaron a El Cairo*

*en el último número de El Vocero Cristiano*

(J JA, Mex.)

page one of *El Comercio*

They travelled to Cairo

in the latest number of *The*

*Christian Spokesman*

## 3.2 Uses and omission of the definite article

### 3.2.1 General remarks on the use of the definite article

The use of the articles is notoriously difficult to explain: why *does* one say *en la práctica* ‘in practice’ but – usually – *en teoría* ‘in theory’? Use of the definite articles also varies slightly from region to region, so the rules given here must be supplemented by careful study of good writing and educated speech. What follows should make it clear to readers who know French that, despite many similarities, the Spanish definite article is less used than its French counterpart, and apparently less now than before about 1950.

### 3.2.2 The French and Spanish definite articles

The following summary of the main differences and similarities may be useful.

French	Spanish
Used with unqualified names of countries, regions: <i>l’Espagne est un beau pays, vive la France!, la Normandie</i> , etc.	Not used, with exceptions shown at 3.2.17. <i>España es un hermoso país, ¡viva Francia!</i> ,
Used when addressing people: <i>salut les gars!, oui, monsieur le Président</i>	Not used: <i>¡hola muchachos!, sí, señor Presidente</i>
Not used in sentences like <i>il viendra mardi</i>	Used: <i>vendrá el martes</i>
Not used in time expressions of the type <i>il est huit heures</i>	Used: <i>son las ocho</i>
Used with generic nouns: <i>le vin est mauvais pour le foie</i> ‘wine is bad for the liver’	Very similar, but not identical (see 3.2.6): <i>el vino es malo para el hígado</i>
Replaces possessives with parts of body: <i>il ferme les yeux, il lui caresse les cheveux, il a les yeux bleus</i> , etc.	Similar, but also with clothing and personal possessions: <i>cierra los ojos</i> ‘he shuts his eyes’, <i>le acaricia el pelo</i> ‘(s)he strokes his/her hair’, <i>he perdido la agenda</i> ‘I’ve lost my diary’, <i>te he aparcado el coche</i> ‘I’ve parked your car’. See 9.3.4
Double article in superlatives when adjective follows noun: <i>le livre le plus intéressant</i>	Only one article, <i>el libro más interesante</i> . See 6.3
Used with superlative adverbs: <i>c’est lui qui chante le mieux</i>	Not used: <i>él es quien mejor canta</i> ; see 6.4
Used in phrases like <i>cinq euros le kilo</i>	Same: <i>cinco euros el kilo</i>
<i>De</i> used before partitive nouns (i.e. to express ‘some’): <i>il boit de l’eau, il y avait de la neige, des monnaies</i>	No article or preposition: <i>bebe agua, había nieve</i> , or <i>unos</i> used: <i>unas monedas</i>

### 3.2.3 A useful generalization about the Spanish definite article

With three important exceptions, if the definite article is used in English it is also used in Spanish:

<i>la caída del gobierno</i>	the fall of the government
<i>El gato se ha comido las salchichas</i>	The cat's eaten the sausages

#### Exceptions:

(a) Ordinal numbers with kings, popes, etc.: *Fernando VII* (*Fernando séptimo*) 'Ferdinand the Seventh', *Carlos III* (*Carlos tercero*) 'Charles the Third', *Juan XXIII* (*Juan veintitrés*).

(b) Some set phrases in Spanish have no definite article whereas in English they usually do.

<i>a corto/largo plazo</i> in the short/long run	<i>de plantilla</i> on the payroll/staff
<i>a gusto de</i> to the liking of	<i>en alta mar</i> on the high seas
<i>a título de</i> in the capacity of: <i>a título de información</i> 'to whom it may concern'	<i>en manos de</i> at/in the hands of
<i>a voluntad de</i> at the discretion of	<i>en nombre de</i> in the name of
<i>cuesta abajo</i> down (the) hill	<i>hacia oriente</i> , etc. towards the east (but <i>hacia el este</i> , <i>sur</i> , etc.)
<i>cuesta arriba</i> up (the) hill	

Note also *a fuerza de* 'by dint/means of', and *a la fuerza/por fuerza* 'by force'.

(c) The word *Internet* is usually used with no article: *bajar/descargar un fichero de Internet* 'to download a file from the Internet'.

### 3.2.4 Definite article with more than one noun

Two or more nouns should have their own definite article if they refer to different things (but see 3.2.7 for an exception). In this respect, Spanish differs from English which allows phrases like 'the sun and moon', 'a dog and cat', 'those men and women'. Spanish says *el sol y la luna*, *un perro y un gato*, *esos hombres y esas mujeres*. ?*Un gato y perro* suggests a cross between a cat and a dog, and \**mi hermano y hermana* 'my brother and sister' is not good Spanish:

<i>el padre y la madre</i>	the father and mother
<i>entre el hotel y la playa</i>	between the hotel and beach
<i>El desorden callejero y las piedras son contrarios a la democracia</i> (La Época, Ch.)	Street disorders and stones are contrary to democracy

But if the nouns are felt to form a single complex idea, which is often the case when they are joined by *o* 'or', all but the first article may be omitted, especially in writing:

<i>el misterio o enigma del origen</i> . . . (OP, Mex.)	the mystery or enigma of the origin
<i>los laboratorios, equipos, bibliotecas, aulas, sistemas audiovisuales indispensables para cumplir con su trabajo.</i> (MVLI, Pe.),	. . . the laboratories, equipment, libraries, lecture rooms, audio-visual systems indispensable for them to do their work

(1) Nouns may represent similar things in one context and not in another. One says *voy a comprar un libro y una revista* 'I'm going to buy a book and a magazine' (two different things), but *los libros y (las) revistas están en el estante de arriba* 'the books and magazines are on the top shelf'. Here books and magazines are seen as varieties of one thing, i.e. 'publications'.

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(2) Pairs of humans or animals must have separate articles: *el abuelo y la abuela* 'grandfather and grandmother', *el padre y el hijo* 'father and son', *el/un toro y la/una vaca* 'the/a bull and (the/a) cow'; **never** \**el abuelo y abuela*, \**el padre e hijo*, \**el/un toro y vaca*.

(3) Constructions like \**los y las alumnos* or \**las y los alumnos* for *los alumnos y las alumnas* '(the male and female students)' are not Spanish, but they are more acceptable with nouns that are not marked by their ending for gender, as in *los y las estudiantes* (*el/la estudiante* = 'student'), *los y las clientes* 'customers'/'clients'.

### 3.2.5 Omission of articles in proverbs

Articles, definite and indefinite, are often dropped in proverbs and in remarks that are meant to sound like proverbial wisdom:

*Gato escaldado del agua fría huye*

*Oveja que bala, bocado que pierde*

*Turista que se enoja, no regresa* (LS, Mex.,

dialogue. *Enojarse* = *enfadarse* in Spain)

A scalded cat runs from cold water

A bleating sheep misses a nibble (i.e.  
you miss out if you talk too much)

An angry tourist doesn't come back

### 3.2.6 Definite article with generic nouns

With the exceptions noted at 3.2.10, the definite article is used before nouns that refer to something in general ('generic' nouns). In this respect, Spanish differs completely from English. These nouns are typically:

(a) Abstract nouns referring to a concept in general:

*la democracia*

*el catolicismo español/la sociedad cubana*

*Mi relato será fiel a la realidad* (JLB, Arg.)

*El debate sobre la cultura, los derechos,  
y la autonomía indígena* (La Reforma, Mex.)

democracy

Spanish Catholicism/Cuban society

My story will be true to reality

The debate about culture, rights and  
Native-American autonomy

Sentences like \**reforma electoral es la única solución* 'electoral reform is the only solution', are a common mistake of English-speakers and must be rewritten *la reforma electoral es . . .*

(b) Substances in general:

*El salvado es bueno para la digestión*

*El acero inoxidable es carísimo*

*La sangre no tiene precio*

Bran is good for the digestion

Stainless steel is extremely expensive

Blood has no price

(c) Countable nouns which refer to all the members of their class:

*Los belgas beben mucha cerveza*

*Los automovilistas debían contentarse con escuchar  
la radio* (La Nación, Arg., refers to all the  
the drivers involved in the jam)

*El tigre es un animal peligroso*

*El periodista escribe para el olvido* (JLB, Arg.,  
dialogue)

Belgians (in general) drink a lot of beer

Car-drivers had to make do with  
listening to their radios

The tiger is ('tigers are') a dangerous animal

Journalists write for oblivion (i.e. 'to be  
forgotten')

Sentences like *\*italianos comen más ajo que noruegos* 'Italians eat more garlic than Norwegians' are not Spanish, though they are seen in Latin-American press headlines. One says *los italianos comen más ajo que los noruegos*.

(1) Colours belong to the class of abstract nouns and require the definite article: *el azul* 'blue', *el negro* 'black', *el amarillo no me gusta* 'I don't like yellow'. A sentence like *¿te gusta el rojo?* is therefore ambiguous: 'do you like the red **one**' or 'do you like (the colour) red?' Illnesses are also treated as abstract nouns: *el sida* 'AIDS', *la diabetes* 'diabetes', *el sarampión* 'measles', *la gripe* (often *la gripa* in Mexico) 'flu'.

(2) These rules apply especially when the noun is the subject of a verb. The definite article must not be omitted in the following sentences (but see 3.2.7 for the omission of the definite article from lists of two or more generic nouns): *no me gusta la manzanilla* 'I don't like camomile', *el azúcar es malo para los dientes* 'sugar is bad for the teeth', *los portátiles cuestan más* 'laptops cost more'. But when the noun is the object of a verb or is preceded by a preposition, the definite article is sometimes omitted. See 3.2.10 for examples.

(3) Sentences like *me gusta el vino*, *me gustan las cerezas* are ambiguous out of context: 'I like the wine/the cherries' or 'I like wine/cherries'. Context or intonation makes the meaning clear, or a demonstrative – *este vino* 'this wine', *estas cerezas* 'these cherries' – can be used for the first meaning.

(4) Use of a singular count noun with a generic meaning is more frequent in Spanish than in English, where it may sound old-fashioned: *el español*, *cuando está de vacaciones, come mucho marisco* 'Spaniards, when they're on holiday, eat a lot of shellfish', rather than 'the Spaniard, when on holiday, eats ...'.

(5) The Academy disapproves of the recent tendency to omit the definite article after *mayoría* 'majority' and *la mayor parte* 'the greater part of', as in *la mayoría/mayor parte de personas* for *la mayoría/mayor parte de las personas* 'the majority/greater part of persons/people'.

### 3.2.7 Omission of the definite article in lists

When two or more nouns follow one another all the definite articles may be omitted, especially, but not exclusively, in literary style. One must say *los hombres se exaltan al escucharlo* '(the) men get worked up listening to him', but one can say *hombres y mujeres se exaltan al escucharlo* (EP, Mex.) 'men and women get excited ...'. Further examples:

*el debate entre ciencia y religión*  
*Ingleses y franceses creyeron que la*  
*sola exhibición de sus imponentes,*  
*naves bastaría para ... (La Nación, Arg.)*  
*Tanto tripulación como oficialía se habían*  
*convertido en sus amigos (SG, Mex.)*

the debate between science and religion  
 The English and French thought that  
 merely displaying their imposing ships  
 would be enough to ...  
 Both crew and officers had become his  
 friends

A similar rule exists in literary English: 'but dog and cat soon fell out' is the same as 'but the dog and (the) cat soon fell out'.

### 3.2.8 Omission of the definite article before partitive nouns (see Glossary)

The definite article is not used before nouns that refer only to part of something or to some members of a set, i.e.:



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(a) before partitive mass (uncountable) nouns, e.g. substances and abstractions:

<i>Quiero cerveza</i>	I want (some) beer
<i>Eso necesita valor</i>	That needs courage
<i>No hay agua</i>	There isn't any water/There's no water
<i>Su móvil no tiene cobertura</i>	His/her/your mobile/cell phone has no signal

But the difference between generic and partitive mass nouns is not always obvious, as in the sentence *no como carne* 'I don't eat meat', where *carne* apparently refers to meat in general. See 3.2.10 for further comments on the subject.

(b) Before partitive count nouns, i.e. countable nouns that in English could normally be preceded by 'some':

<i>No se te olvide traer clavos</i>	Don't forget to bring (some) nails
<i>Incluso nos dieron flores</i>	They even gave us (some) flowers
<i>Llevan armas</i>	They're carrying weapons

(1) French and Italian regularly use 'of' before partitive nouns: *il a des roses rouges/ha delle rose rosse* = *tiene rosas rojas* '(s)he's got some red roses'. *De* is not used in this way in Spanish, although it may occasionally appear before words meaning 'this' or 'that' to make it clear that 'some of' rather than 'all of' is meant. Compare *tráenos de ese vino tan bueno que nos serviste ayer* 'bring us some of that really good wine you served us yesterday', and *tráenos ese vino tan bueno que nos serviste ayer* 'bring us that really good wine you served us yesterday'.

### 3.2.9 Definite article required before nouns modified by a qualifier

As in English, a noun that does not require the definite article when it stands alone usually requires it when it is qualified or modified by a following word or phrase. Compare

<i>Estamos hablando de religión</i>	We're talking (about) religion
<i>Está hecho de oro</i>	It's made of gold

and

<i>Estamos hablando de la religión de los antiguos persas</i>	We're talking about the religion of the ancient Persians
<i>Está hecho del oro que trajeron de las Indias</i>	It's made from the gold they brought from the Indies

**Important:** this rule overrides any of the rules of article omission that follow. However, a qualifier does not always make a noun specific: the resulting noun phrase may still be generic in its own right and have no definite article, and these nouns can only be learned with practice:

<i>Está hecho de oro macizo</i>	It's made of solid gold
<i>Estamos hablando de religión antigua</i>	We're talking about ancient religion
<i>No hablo con traidores de su patria</i>	I don't talk to traitors to their own country

### 3.2.10 Apparent exceptions to the rules outlined in 3.2.6

The general rule given at 3.2.6 – that generic nouns require the definite article – has exceptions. For example, in *yo no como carne* 'I don't eat meat', *carne* is apparently generic since it refers to meat in general. These exceptions – or apparent exceptions – usually occur in the following contexts:

(a) After prepositions. Nouns following prepositions are often really partitive: they denote a part or an aspect of the thing they refer to. If this is the case, they take no definite article:

<i>Le gusta salir con ingleses</i> (one or a few at a time, not the whole species)	(S)he likes going out with English people
<i>Ella siempre acaba hablando de sexo</i> (SP, Sp., dialogue)	She always ends up talking about sex
<i>... las polémicas sobre diálogos regionales con la guerrilla</i> (El Tiempo, Col.)	... the disputes about regional talks with the guerrilla forces
<i>El Ministerio de Aviación/Agricultura</i>	The Ministry of Aviation/Agriculture

(b) After certain verbs, e.g. of consuming, desiring, producing:

<i>Los lagartos comen moscas</i>	Lizards eat flies
<i>Claro que uso jabón</i>	Of course I use soap
<i>Queremos paz</i>	We want peace

**Important:** but if the verb really affects the whole of its object in general – usually the case with verbs of human emotion like ‘love’, ‘hate’, ‘admire’, ‘criticize’, ‘censure’, ‘reject’, etc. – then the definite article is obligatory:

<i>Odio las películas violentas</i>	I hate violent movies
<i>Me encanta el helado de vainilla</i>	I love vanilla ice cream
<i>Hay que combatir el terrorismo</i>	Terrorism must be fought

(c) In many adverbial phrases

The definite article is not used in numerous adverbial phrases involving a preposition plus a noun:

<i>la confusión por antonomasia</i>	confusion personified/par excellence
<i>a cántaros</i>	in pitcherfuls
<i>por avión</i>	by plane
<i>en tren/coche</i>	by train/car
<i>Estamos aquí de observadores</i>	We’re here as observers
<i>De niña yo solo/sólo hablaba catalán</i>	As a little girl I only spoke Catalan

(1) Omission or retention of the definite article with abstract and mass nouns after a preposition like *de* or *sobre* often depends on the point of view of the speaker. One can say either *publicó tres artículos sobre poesía* ‘(s)he published three articles on poetry’ or *... sobre la poesía* ‘on Poetry’. The latter implies the universal concept ‘Poetry’; the former implies ‘aspects of poetry’. The difference is slight and the strong modern tendency is to avoid using the definite article, although with nouns referring to more abstract concepts the definite article is more likely, as in *una conferencia sobre la libertad* ‘a lecture on Freedom’. For further details about omission after the preposition *de*, see 3.2.11.

(2) Spanish usage differs from French with respect to the names of ministers and ministries: *el ministro de agricultura* / *le ministre de l’agriculture*, *el Ministerio de Defensa* / *le Ministère de la Défense*, etc.

### 3.2.11 The definite article after *de*

**Important:** when two nouns are joined by *de* to express a new concept, the definite article is not normally used before the second noun. Compare *la rueda del coche* ‘the wheel of/from the car’ and *una rueda de coche* ‘a car wheel’, *la carne de la vaca* ‘the meat of the cow’ and *la carne de vaca* ‘beef’, *los sombreros de las mujeres* ‘the women’s hats’ and *los sombreros de mujer* ‘women’s hats’. Further examples:

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*el dolor de muelas*  
*la Edad de (la) Piedra*, but usually  
*la Edad del Hierro*  
*un tren de mercancías*  
*la bandeja de entrada*  
*el reconocimiento de voz*  
... *la tristeza de flor de cementerio que dan*  
*los lirios* (MP, Arg.)

toothache  
the Stone Age, the Iron Age  
  
a freight train  
in-box (in email software)  
voice recognition (computing)  
... the cemetery-flower sadness that  
irises give off

English often expresses these combinations by a compound noun: compare *la noche de la fiesta* 'the night of the party' and *la noche de fiesta* 'party night'.

(1) Latin-American Spanish, particularly in newspapers, sometimes uses *de* constructions without the definite article that are rejected in Spain, cf. *el problema de orden público es cada día más grave* (*El Tiempo*, Col., Sp. *el problema del orden público*) 'the problem of public order gets more serious every day'.

#### 3.2.12 Use of the definite article after *haber* ('there is'/'there are')

Spanish does not often use the definite article after *haber*: *hay agua* 'there's water', *hubo una tormenta* 'there was a storm', but *ahí está el cartero* 'there's the postman'/'the postman's arrived'. See 34.2.1 note 4.

#### 3.2.13 Omission of the definite articles in titles of books, films, etc.

In titles of books and films, etc., the definite article is often omitted before nouns that are not felt to be unique entities (for the non-use of capital letters in book titles, see 44.3.2d):

*Política y estado bajo el régimen de Franco*  
*Casa de campo*, de José Donoso  
*Vida de don Quijote*

*Politics and the State under the Franco Regime*  
*The Country House*, by José Donoso  
*The Life of Don Quixote*

But with unique things or proper names the definite article is retained:

*La casa verde*, de Mario Vargas Llosa  
*La Iglesia en España hoy y mañana*

*The Green House*, by Mario Vargas Llosa  
*The Church in Spain today and tomorrow*

#### 3.2.14 Omission of definite articles in headlines

In Spain the grammar of headlines is fairly normal, but Latin-American headlines often follow the English practice of omitting articles (for the word order of these Latin-American headlines see 42.9.1 note 3):

*Gobierno no toca alta burocracia* (*La Época*, Mex.)  
*Urbes italianas prohíben festejos con pirotecnia*  
(*El Mercurio*, Mex. *Urbes* = *ciudades* in Spain)  
*Afirma divorcios producen temblor*  
(*Última Hora*, Dom. Rep.)

Government leaves Top Bureaucrats  
untouched  
Italian cities ban celebrations with fireworks  
'Divorces cause Earthquake' Claim

This kind of language is spreading to Spain. The *NGLE* 15.12f notes examples like *Presunto delincuente hiere a dos policías* (*El País*, Sp.) 'alleged criminal wounds two policemen'.

### 3.2.15 The definite article with names of unique entities

Use of the definite article with unique entities (things of which there is only one) is more or less the same as in English, e.g. *la Casa Blanca* 'the White House', *el Atlántico* 'the Atlantic', *la Virgen* 'the Virgin', *el Camino de Santiago* 'the Milky Way' (*la Vía Láctea*, lit. 'St James's Way', also the name of the pilgrims' route), *la estratosfera* 'the stratosphere', *el sol* 'the Sun'; but, as in English, no article is used with names of planets: *Mercurio*, *Júpiter*, *Venus*, etc. For the definite article with names of languages and countries, see 3.2.16 and 3.2.17.

(1) Spanish uses the definite article with mountains, volcanoes and with Heaven and Hell: *el Infierno* 'Hell', *el Cielo/el Paraíso* 'Heaven'/'Paradise', *el Everest*, *el Vesubio*.

(2) As in English, the definite article is not used with personal names as opposed to epithets, titles or nicknames: *Dios* 'God', *Cristo* 'Christ' (rarely *el Cristo*), *Jesucristo* 'Jesus Christ', *Satanás* 'Satan', but *el Salvador* 'the Saviour', *la Inmaculada* 'the Blessed Virgin', 'el Che' "'Che" Guevara'. For the definite article before ordinary personal names see 3.2.21 below.

### 3.2.16 Definite article with names of languages

Usage is capricious and departures from the following rules may occur:

(a) no article after *en*, or, usually, after *saber*, *aprender*, *hablar*:

<i>en español</i> , <i>en inglés</i>	in Spanish, in English
<i>Sé quechua</i>	I know Quechua
<i>Aprendo alemán/Habla griego</i>	I'm learning German/(S)he speaks Greek

But when the verb is modified by an adverb the definite article is often used: *habla correctamente el francés* '(s)he speaks French fluently', *hablaba bien el italiano* (JLB, Arg.).

(b) Optional definite article after *entender* 'understand', *escribir* 'write', *estudiar* 'study':

<i>Entiendo (el) inglés</i>	I understand English
<i>Escribe (el) italiano</i>	(S)he writes Italian

(c) After other prepositions, the definite article is used:

<i>traducir del español al francés</i>	to translate from Spanish to French
<i>una palabra del griego</i>	a word from Greek
<i>Comparado con el ruso, el español parece poco complicado</i>	Compared with Russian, Spanish seems uncomplicated

(d) After *de* meaning 'of', the definite article is used only if the whole language is meant: *curso de español* 'Spanish course' (really only 'aspects of Spanish'), but *dificultades del español* 'difficulties of Spanish' (in general), *las sutilezas del japonés* 'the subtleties of Japanese'.

(e) After *dominar* 'master', *chapurrear* 'speak badly', *destrozar* 'murder' and other verbs not discussed above, the definite article is used: *domina perfectamente el portugués* '(s)he's a complete master of Portuguese', *chapurrea el inglés* '(s)he speaks broken English'.

(f) If the language is the subject of a verb it requires the definite article: *el francés es difícil* 'French is difficult', *el español es una lengua hermosa* 'Spanish is a beautiful language'.

(g) If the language is qualified by a following word or phrase, the definite article is required: *el español de Colombia* 'the Spanish of Colombia', *el inglés que se habla en Tennessee* 'the English spoken in Tennessee'.

### 3.2.17 Definite article with names of countries

This is problematic since spoken usage varies and is often out of line with modern written styles. Unless the definite article is part of the name (as in *El Salvador*), *El País* orders its journalists to write all countries without the definite article except *la India* and *los Países Bajos* 'the Low Countries', and use of the definite article is in decline, especially in Spain. The rules of everyday spoken language seem to be:

(a) Obligatory: *El Salvador* (capital *E* because the *El* is part of the name), *los Países Bajos* 'the Low Countries', *La República Checa* 'Czech Republic', *la República Dominicana*.

(b) Optional but frequently seen: *el Camerún* 'Cameroon', *el Reino Unido* 'the United Kingdom' (but the article is nowadays often dropped), *los Estados Unidos*, *la India*, *el Líbano* '(the) Lebanon', *la China*, *el Oriente Medio* 'The Middle East', *el Senegal*, *el Sudán*, *el Yemen*.

(c) Optional: (*la*) *Arabia Saudí*, (*la*) *Argentina* (article usual in Argentina), (*el*) *Brasil*, (*el*) *Canadá*, (*el*) *Ecuador*, (*las*) *Filipinas* 'the Philippines', *la Guinea*, (*el*) *Irak*, (*el*) *Irán*, (*el*) *Japón*, (*el*) *Nepal*, (*el*) *Pakistán*, (*el*) *Paraguay*, (*el*) *Perú*, (*el*) *Tíbet*, (*el*) *Uruguay*, (*el*) *Vietnam*. The tendency in Spain is to omit the definite article, but it is often seen in Latin America.

Other countries do not take the definite article: *tres años en Australia/Egipto/Noruega* 'three years in Australia/Egypt/Norway'.

(1) 'The United States' is either *los Estados Unidos*, plural agreement or, more usually, *Estados Unidos*, singular agreement and no article – the only form allowed in *El País* (Sp.). *Gran Bretaña* 'Great Britain' does not take the definite article.

(2) In older texts, particularly in solemn diplomatic language, names of countries occasionally appear with the definite article: *la Francia*, *la Inglaterra*, etc.

(3) All place names require the definite article when they are qualified or restricted by a following adjective, phrase or clause, unless the qualifying word is part of an official name: *la España contemporánea* 'contemporary Spain', *la Suecia que yo conocía* 'the Sweden I knew'; but *en Australia Occidental* 'in Western Australia', *en Irlanda del Norte* 'in Northern Ireland'.

(4) Names of some well-known regions, as opposed to countries, tend to be variable: (*la*) *Europa Central*, *América del Sur*, the definite article being less usual nowadays.

### 3.2.18 Definite article with provinces, regions, cities and towns

Some place names include the definite article as an inseparable feature:

<i>La Rioja</i>	<i>La Haya</i> the Hague	<i>La Paz</i>	<i>Los Ángeles</i>
<i>El Cairo</i>	<i>la Mancha</i>	<i>la Plata</i>	
<i>la Habana</i> , less often	<i>La Meca</i> Mecca, or	<i>La Coruña</i> or simply	
simply <i>Habana</i>	simply <i>Meca</i>	<i>Coruña</i>	

Otherwise the definite article is not used, unless 3.2.9 applies, as happens in *el Buenos Aires de hoy* 'Buenos Aires today', *la Roma de Cicerón* 'Cicero's Rome', etc.

### 3.2.19 Definite article before names of streets, roads, squares, etc.

The definite article is used before roads, squares, avenues, lanes, alleys and similar places:

<i>Vive en la plaza/la calle de la Independencia</i>	(S)he lives in Independence Square/Street
<i>la Embajada de los EE.UU., en la avenida</i>	the US Embassy on Wilson Avenue
<i>Wilson (Caretas, Pe.)</i>	

(1) *La calle de* and similar phrases are often omitted in speech: *vive en Independencia, ... en Serrano 29, etc.*

### 3.2.20 Definite articles with days of the week, months and years

(a) The definite article appears with days of the week:

<i>Llegan el martes</i>	They're arriving on Tuesday
<i>cerrado los viernes</i>	closed on Friday(s)
<i>Los domingos las calles están casi vacías</i>	On Sundays the streets are nearly empty
<i>(MB, Ur., dialogue)</i>	
<i>Odio los lunes</i>	I hate Mondays
<i>El miércoles es cuando habrá menos gente</i>	Wednesday's the day there'll be fewest people
<i>a partir del domingo</i>	after Sunday / from Sunday on

(b) The definite article is not used with the names of months, but it is used with the words *mes* 'month', *año* 'year', *mañana* 'morning', *tarde* 'afternoon/evening', *noche* 'night', and *madrugada* 'dawn', except in phrases like *a fin* (less commonly *a finales*) *de mes* 'at the end of the month', *a principios de año* 'at the beginning of the year':

(c) With years preceded by a preposition, the definite article is usually omitted – *en 2018* – although with shortened years the definite article is used: *en el 92* 'in '92'. When the year is the subject of a verb the definite article is usual: *el 2017 fue un año difícil* '2017 was a difficult year'.

(1) The definite article is not used when the day is the predicate of *ser* 'to be', as in *hoy es lunes*. But if *ser* means 'to happen', the definite article appears: *fue el sábado por la tarde* 'it was/happened on Saturday afternoon'.

When the day of the week is preceded by *de* meaning 'of', the definite article is used: *ocurrió en la noche del viernes* 'it happened on Friday night'. Compare *trabajo de lunes a jueves* 'I work **from** Mondays to Thursdays'.

(2) The definite article is also not used in dates: *lunes 18 de octubre de 2021* 'Monday (the) 18<sup>th</sup> of October 2021'.

### 3.2.21 Definite article with personal names

The definite article sometimes appears before the surname of very famous women: *la Loren, la Callas, la Pardo Bazán, tengo que estar en Nueva York para el funeral de la Garbo* (TM, Sp., dialogue) 'I have to be in New York for Greta Garbo's funeral'. But it is not used in this way before men's surnames.

Use of the definite article before first names, e.g. *la María, la Josefa, el Mario*, is considered sub-standard or regional, unless the name is qualified, as in *la simpática Inés* 'the kindly Inés'. The definite article usually appears before nicknames: *el Che nunca fue derrotado* "'Che" (Guevara)

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was never defeated' (*Cuba Internacional*, Cu.), *detuvieron a Ramón Pérez "el Duque"* 'they arrested Ramón Pérez "the Duke"' (notorious criminals usually have aliases or nicknames).

(1) In the Spanish of Chile and Catalonia use of the definite article before first names is common, even in educated speech, e.g. *el Mario*, *la Dorotea*, but foreign learners should avoid this since it may suggest the person is notorious. Students of Portuguese should also avoid the definite article: *o António quer um café* = *Antonio quiere un café*.

### 3.2.22 Definite article with sports teams

The masculine article is used before sports teams: *el Granada* 'Granada FC', *el Manchester United*, *el Real Madrid*, all masculine because of underlying *el equipo* 'team'.

### 3.2.23 Definite article before nouns of family relationship

*Abuelo/abuela* takes the definite article: *el abuelo no parecía dispuesto a soltarme* (SP, Sp.) 'grandfather didn't seem inclined to let me go', *la abuelita llamó a un sacerdote* (AM, Mex., dialogue) 'grandma called a priest'.

*Tío/tía* 'uncle/aunt' also takes the definite article: *el tío Enrique casi da un manotazo sobre la mesa* (SP, Sp.) 'uncle Enrique nearly slapped the table with his hand'. But the definite article is not used by everyone when referring to their own relatives: *le di un beso a tía Julia* 'I kissed aunt Julia' (but *a la tía* is common).

Latin-American usage also seems to be uncertain, although it overwhelmingly favours use of the definite article: *La tía Julia y el escritor* (title of novel by MVLL, Pe.) 'Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter', *la tía Verónica era una niña de ojos profundos y labios delgados* (AM, Mex.) 'Aunt Veronica was a girl with deep eyes and thin lips'. In rural areas *tío/tía* may be used before the first names of local worthies: *el tío José/la tía Paca* 'old José'/'old Paca'.

(1) The definite article is not normally used with *papá*, *mamá*: *dale un beso a papá* 'give daddy a kiss' (not *al papá*).

### 3.2.24 Definite article with personal titles

The definite article is used before the title of a person being talked about: *el señor Moreira*, *el profesor Smith*, *el general Rodríguez*, *el presidente Trump*, *el doctor Fleming*, *el padre Blanco* 'Father Blanco'. It is also used to refer to a couple: *los señores Barral* 'Mr and Mrs Barral'. But it is not used if the person is directly spoken to: *pase usted*, *señor Sender/señor Presidente/padre Blanco* 'come in Mr Sender/Mr President/Father Blanco'.

The definite article is not used before *don*, *doña*, *fray*, *san*, *santa*, *sor*, or before foreign titles like *míster*, *monsieur*, *herr*: *don Miguel*, *fray Bentos*, *santa Teresa*, *sor Juana*, *míster Smith*, etc. Note that these titles are not written with capital letters.

For the military forms of address *mi general* 'General', *mi coronel* 'Colonel' see 9.3.3.

(1) *Don/doña* are sometimes used – but much less than in the past – before the first names, or the first name followed by one or both surnames, of older persons to show respect, and on envelopes (less now than formerly): *señor don Miguel Ramírez*, *doña Josefa*, *don Miguel*. The first name must be included after *don*, so not simply \**don Ramírez*.

### 3.2.25 Definite article in apposition

The definite article is usually omitted in apposition (see Glossary) when the following phrase is non-restrictive – i.e. it explains but does not limit the meaning of the previous phrase:

<i>Madrid, capital de España</i>	Madrid, the capital of Spain
<i>Lázaro Conesal, propietario del hotel</i> (MVM, Sp.)	Lázaro Conesal, the owner of the hotel
<i>Ricardo Balbín, jefe de la Unión Cívica</i> <i>Radical</i> (MSQ, Arg.)	Ricardo Balbín, head of the Radical Civic Union
<i>Amilpa, nuevo jefe de la CTM</i> (JA, Mex.)	Amilpa, the new head of the CTM (Confederation of Mexican Workers)

But it is retained:

(a) if the following phrase is restrictive, i.e. it is used to remove a possible confusion of identity: *Miró, el autor* 'Miró the author' (not the painter); *Córdoba, la ciudad argentina* 'Cordoba, the Argentine city' (not the Spanish one);

(b) usually if the apposition is qualified by a following word or adjectival phrase: *Javier Marcos, el arquitecto que diseñó las dos fuentes* 'Javier Marcos, the architect who designed the two fountains'.

### 3.2.26 Definite article with numbered nouns

Unlike English, nouns identified by a number take the definite article:

<i>Vivo en el piso</i> (Lat. Am. <i>el apartamento/el departamento</i> ) 38 ( <i>piso</i> = 'ground' in Lat. Am.)	I live in apartment 38
<i>Vive en la calle Serrano, en el 23/en el 23 de la calle Serrano</i> (but <i>vive en Serrano</i> 23)	(S)he lives at 23 Serrano Street
<i>una disposición del artículo 277 de la Constitución</i>	a provision of Art. 277 of the Constitution
<i>unas fotos del 93</i>	some photos from 1993
<i>el diez por ciento de los peruanos</i>	ten per cent of Peruvians

For more on this subject see 11.11.

### 3.2.27 Definite article in phrases denoting place

The following often appear with the definite article in Spanish whereas their English equivalents do not. Brackets show that the article is optional:

<i>en (la) cama</i> in bed	<i>en el espacio</i> in space
<i>en (el) Palacio</i> at the Palace	<i>debajo de la tierra</i> (but <i>bajo tierra</i> ) underground
<i>a/en/de la iglesia</i> to/in/from church	<i>al/en el/del hospital</i> to/in/from hospital
<i>en la televisión</i> on television ( <i>la</i> optional)	<i>en la cárcel/en la iglesia</i> in prison/at church
<i>al/en el/del cielo/infierno</i> to/in/from Heaven/ Hell	<i>en el colegio/en el trabajo</i> at school/at work

Many other phrases resemble English, e.g. *sobre cubierta* 'on deck', *en contexto* 'in context', *salir de (la) prisión* 'to get out of prison', *en/a clase* 'in/to class', *a misa* 'to Mass', *sobre cubierta* (*sobre la cubierta* in Latin America) 'on deck'. *A/en/de casa* 'at/in/from home' are often expressed by *a/en/de la casa* in Latin America and sometimes also in Spain.



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(1) Many speakers differentiate *en cama* ‘in bed sick’ and *en la cama* ‘in bed resting’, but the distinction is not universal.

### 3.2.28 Definite article after the verb *jugar*

*Jugar* takes *a* plus the definite article in Spain: *jugar a la pelota* ‘to play ball/with a ball’, *jugar al ajedrez/a las cartas/al escondite* ‘to play chess/cards/hide-and-seek’. The Academy (DPD, 382) seems to disapprove of Catalans omitting the definite article, but accepts it as valid in many parts of Latin America, cf. *mi padre no juega golf y mi madre no juega bridch* (LO, Cu., dialogue; the usual spelling is *bridge*) ‘my father doesn’t play golf and my mother doesn’t play bridge’, *jugar tenis con él era como un consejo de ministros* (GGM, Col., dialogue) ‘playing tennis with him was like (being at) a Cabinet Meeting’. But *ya sea fumando una pipa o jugando al ajedrez ...* (MP, Arg., dialogue) ‘either smoking a pipe or playing chess’.

### 3.2.29 Definite article with personal pronouns

The definite article is required after first- and second-person plural pronouns in phrases like the following: *ustedes los uruguayos* ‘you Uruguayans’, *nosotros los pobres* ‘we poor people’, *vosotras/ustedes las españolas* ‘you Spanish women ...’. It is also used when the pronoun is not present:

*Los ingleses siempre ocultáis vuestras  
emociones*

You English always hide your emotions

*Las mujeres de los mineros siempre estamos  
en vilo pensando en los hombres  
(ALS, Sp., dialogue)*

We miners’ wives are always on  
tenterhooks thinking about the men

### 3.2.30 Colloquial use of *la de*

In familiar language, *la de* may mean ‘lots of’:

*... con la de números de abogados que  
vienen en la guía ...*

... with all the dozens of lawyers’ numbers  
there are in the phone book ...

*... la de veces que han dicho eso*

... the number of times they’ve said that!

*... la de lágrimas que solté (LS, Ch., dialogue)*

... the quantity of tears I shed ...

# 4 The indefinite article

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- The forms and uses of the indefinite article (Section 4.1)
- Uses of *unos/unas* (Section 4.2)

The Spanish indefinite article, *un/una* corresponds to the English words 'a'/'an'.

## 4.1 Forms and uses of the indefinite article

### 4.1.1 Forms of the Spanish indefinite article

	Masculine	Feminine
Singular	<i>un</i>	<i>una</i>
Plural	<i>unos</i>	<i>unas</i>

**Important:** *un* is used before feminine nouns beginning with a stressed *a*, e.g. *un arma* 'a weapon', *un águila* 'an eagle', *un haba* 'a bean'. See 3.1.2.

### 4.1.2 Use of the indefinite article: general

The Spanish indefinite article is used much like 'a' or 'an' in English, but there are two important differences:

(a) it is not used before singular countable nouns in certain contexts described below at 4.1.5ff, e.g. *tengo coche* 'I've got a car', *Mario es ingeniero* 'Mario's an engineer', *lo abrió sin llave* '(s)he opened it without a key', *es mentira* 'it's a lie'.

(b) It can appear in the plural: *unos pantalones* 'a pair of trousers/US pants', *son unos genios incomprensidos* 'they're misunderstood geniuses'. See 4.2 for details.

(1) *Un* 'a' must be carefully distinguished from *uno* 'one' when a masculine singular noun or adjective is involved. Compare *un verde* 'a Green' (i.e. environmentalist) and *uno verde* 'a green one'; *un parecido* 'a resemblance', *uno parecido* 'a similar one'. The difference is not made in the feminine or in the plural: *una verde* = 'a female "Green"/environmentalist' or 'a green one'.

### 4.1.3 The indefinite article in French and Spanish

The French and Spanish indefinite articles compared

French	Spanish
The plural indefinite article is <i>des</i> , cf. <i>des gants</i> , <i>ce sont des clowns</i> , <i>je lui ai donné des roses</i>	The plural is <i>unos/unas</i> : <i>unos guantes</i> , <i>son unos payasos</i> , but omitted in many cases: <i>le di (unas) rosas</i> . See 3.2.8, 4.2.2

French	Spanish
<i>De</i> used in the negative: <i>elle ne porte pas de casque, je n'ai pas de crayon</i>	No article: <i>no lleva casco, no tengo lápiz</i>
Not used after 'to be' before professions: <i>je suis professeur</i> , but used after other verbs, e.g. <i>il a une femme</i>	Same: <i>soy profesor</i> , and omitted in many other cases, e.g. <i>tiene esposa</i> . See 4.16ff.
Usually required before each noun: <i>un homme et <b>une</b> femme</i>	Same: see next section

#### 4.1.4 Indefinite article before more than one noun

When more than one noun occurs in a sequence, the indefinite article is necessary before each noun. English often omits the second article: *un hombre y una mujer* 'a man and (a) woman' (\**un hombre y mujer* is a cross between a man and a woman), *compré una máquina de escribir y una papelería para mi despacho* 'I bought a typewriter and wastepaper basket for my office'.

But omission occurs when the nouns refer to the same thing or to different aspects of the same thing:

*una actriz y cantante*  
*un cuchillo y abrelatas*

*Este libro está escrito con una maestría y (una)*  
*delicadeza insólitas*

an actress and singer (same woman)

a combined knife and tin-opener

This novel is written with unusual skill  
and delicacy

#### 4.1.5 Omission before singular nouns: general

*Un/una* is often omitted before singular count nouns. This happens whenever the generic or universal features of the noun are being emphasized. Compare *Pepe tiene coche* 'Pepe's got a car' (like many people) and *Pepe tiene un coche francés* 'Pepe's got a French car'. Section 4.1.7 covers some of the cases in which this type of omission occurs.

#### 4.1.6 Indefinite article not used before professions, occupations, social status, sex

**Important:** *un/una* is not used before nouns which describe profession, occupation, social status, and it is often omitted before nouns denoting sex. In these phrases, the noun can be thought of as a sort of adjective that simply indicates a general type:

*Soy piloto/Son buzos*

*Es soltero/Es casada* (compare *está casada*  
'she's married'; see 33.4.1a)

*Se hizo detective*

... *y aunque Alejandra era mujer* (ES, Arg.) ...

I'm a pilot/They're divers

He's a bachelor/She's a married woman

(S)he became a detective

... and although Alejandra was a woman

(1) Nouns denoting personal qualities rather than membership of a profession or other group require the indefinite article: *es carnicero* 'he's a butcher (by trade)', *es un carnicero* 'he's a butcher (i.e. murderous)'; *es Supermán* 'he is Superman', *es un supermán* 'he's a superman'; *el sargento se decía: "No es un ladrón. Es un loco"* (MVLL, Pe.) 'the sergeant said to himself "he's not a thief. He's a madman."'

(2) If a noun of this type is qualified it usually becomes specific (non-generic) and therefore requires the indefinite article. Compare *es actor* 'he's an actor' and *es un actor que nunca encuentra trabajo* 'he's an actor who never finds work'; *me han dicho que usted es un hombre que se ha quedado*

*solo* (ABE, Pe., dialogue) ‘they tell me that you are a man who has ended up alone’. But the resulting noun phrase may still be a recognized profession or generic type, so no definite article will be used: *soy profesor de español*. See 4.1.9 for discussion.

(3) The definite article is used if it means ‘one of . . .’: —¿Quién es ese/ése que ha saludado? —Es un profesor/es uno de los profesores “‘Who was that who said hello?’ “‘He’s one of the teachers’”.

### 4.1.7 Omission of the indefinite article with *ser* and nouns not included in 4.1.6

Omission of the indefinite article after *ser* is frequent (a) in certain common phrases, e.g. *hoy es fiesta*; (b) in literary styles: a rare English counterpart is the optional omission of ‘a’ with ‘part’: ‘this is (a) part of our heritage’ *esto es (una) parte de nuestro patrimonio*. Omission is more common in negative sentences and apparently more frequent in European Spanish than in Latin-American. In the following phrases omission seems to be optional, and it produces a slightly more literary or emphatic tone:

<i>Es (una) coincidencia</i>	It’s a coincidence
<i>Es (una) cuestión de dinero</i>	It’s a question of money
<i>Es (una) víctima de las circunstancias</i>	(S)he’s a victim of circumstances

But the indefinite article is retained in many common phrases like *es una lata* (colloquial) ‘it’s a nuisance’, *es una pena/lástima* ‘it’s a pity’, *es un problema* ‘it’s a problem’, *es un desastre* ‘it/(s)he’s a disaster’, *ha sido un éxito* ‘it was a success’. Omission may occur after a negative verb even though it is not usual after the positive verb:

<i>No es molestia/problema</i>	It’s no bother/problem
<i>No es exageración</i>	It’s no exaggeration
<i>No es desventaja</i>	It’s not a disadvantage

In the following three cases, omission produces a literary or formal effect:

<i>La codorniz es # ave tiernísima</i> (MD, Sp.),	The quail is an extremely tender bird (to eat)
<i>Es # mar de veras</i> (MVL Pe., dialogue)	It’s (a) real sea
<i>¡Esta/ésta es # cuestión que a ustedes no les importa!</i> (JI, Mex., dialogue)	This is an affair that has nothing to do with you!

In all the above examples the appropriate gender of *un* or *una* could have been used at the points marked with #, but the original texts did not use the article.

(1) If the following noun is not generic but merely implies the possession of certain qualities *un/una* must be used: *el hombre es un lobo para el hombre* ‘man is a wolf to man’ (but not a member of the wolf species), *Mercedes es un terremoto* ‘Mercedes is an earthquake’ (i.e. a hell-raiser), *está hecho una foca* ‘he’s got really fat’ (*la foca* = ‘seal’, the animal).

(2) Omission of the indefinite article before a qualified noun tends to produce an archaic or literary effect, or it may make the sentence sound like stage instructions as in *entra una señora con sombrero verde con plumas de avestruz* ‘a lady with a green hat with ostrich feathers comes in’, where *un sombrero verde* would nowadays be much more normal. Where Unamuno wrote, in the early twentieth century, *era un viejecillo . . . con levitón de largos bolsillos* ‘he was a little old man in a large frock-coat with deep pockets’, a modern writer might prefer *un levitón*.

(3) In formal literary styles, omission of *un/una* is normal in definitions when the subject comes first: *novela es toda obra de ficción que . . .* ‘a novel is any work of fiction that . . .’.

### 4.1.8 Omission of *un/una* after other verbs

Spanish does not use *un/una* after a number of verbs such as *tener* 'to have', *comprar* 'to buy', *sacar* 'to take/draw out' (with cinema tickets, etc. 'to buy' or 'to book'), *buscar* 'to look for', *llevar* 'to wear', *haber* 'there is/are', when their direct object is a noun referring to things of which one would normally have or carry only one: umbrella, pen, nanny, valet, cook, hat, etc. Omission is normal when the object is something typical or expected. As the NGLE 15.13e points out, one would say *María tiene perro* 'María has a dog', but *María tiene una tortuga* 'María has a tortoise'.

<i>Manuel tiene pareja</i>	Pepe's got a partner (female or male)
<i>Mi ordenador/computadora tiene ratón óptico</i>	My computer has an optical mouse
<i>Hay mercado/subasta</i>	There's a market/auction
<i>Vamos a buscarle novia</i>	Let's look for a girlfriend for him
<i>Siempre lleva anillo</i>	(S)he always wears a ring
<i>Barcelona tiene puerto y parque y tranvía y metro y autobús y cine (LG, Sp.)</i>	Barcelona has a port, park, tramway, metro, buses and cinema(s)
<i>Hubo quien se ofendió y sacó pistola (MVLL, Pe.)</i>	One person took offence and pulled a gun
<i>Ya he sacado entrada</i>	I've already got a ticket*

\*For the various Spanish equivalents of 'ticket', see 44.1.5 note 1.

(1) *Un/una* is usual if the object has special characteristics: *llevaba (una) falda blanca* 'she was wearing a white skirt', *tenía . . . una carita de chico pecoso . . .* (FU, Sp.) 'she had a cute face like a freckled boy's'. But the indefinite article does not always exclude the possibility of a generic meaning. The NGLE 15.9e points out that *siempre escribe sus novelas con un bolígrafo* '(s)he always writes his/her novels with a ball-point pen' either means 'with a certain ball-point pen' or 'with any ball-point pen'; . . . *con bolígrafo* limits the meaning to 'any ball-point pen'. Note also *tengo móvil desde hace años* 'I've had a mobile phone/cell phone (one or more) for years', where *un móvil* could imply one specific phone.

(2) Use of *un/una* with unqualified nouns may hint at some suppressed comment: *tiene un coche/una casa . . .* 'you should see his car/house . . .', *tiene unos ojos . . .* 'you should see his/her eyes . . .'. This may sound admiring or insinuating when applied to people, e.g. *marido* 'husband', *novio* 'boyfriend', *novia* 'girlfriend', e.g. *tiene una mujer . . .* 'he's got a wife (and is she . . .)'.

(3) If it would be normal to have more than one of the things denoted, or if the idea of 'one' is relevant, the indefinite article must be used: *tiene mujer y un hijo* (EP, Mex., dialogue) 'he's got a wife and one child', *¿tienes un dólar?* (obviously not \*¿tienes dólares?) 'do you have a dollar?', *tiene un novio en Burgos y otro en Huelva* '(s)he's got one boyfriend in Burgos and another in Huelva'.

### 4.1.9 Retention of indefinite article before qualified nouns

When nouns are modified by a clause, phrase or adjective, they become specific and the indefinite article may be obligatory (brackets indicate where it is optional): *tengo padre* 'I've got a father' but *tengo un padre que es inaguantable* 'I've got an unbearable father', *era (un) hombre de costumbres cuidadosas* (AM, Mex.) 'he was a man of prudent customs', *han organizado unas manifestaciones pacíficas* 'they've organized peaceful demonstrations'. But if the resulting noun phrase is still generic, the indefinite article may still be omitted: *tú eres (un) hombre respetable* 'you're a respectable man', *es pastor protestante* 'he's a Protestant minister', *el doctor Urdino es hombre serio, además de buen gerente* (El Tiempo, Col.) 'Doctor Urdino is a serious man as well as a good manager'.

(1) This rule also applies in the plural: *es un ejemplo/son unos ejemplos que hemos encontrado en tu novela* 'it's an example/they're examples we found in your novel', *en seguida me llené de unos celos juveniles hacia él* (FU, Sp.) 'I was immediately filled with juvenile jealousy towards him', *nos convidó unas galletas de agua con queso fresco* (MVL, Pe., in Spain *convidó a unas . . .*) 'he offered us some water biscuits/US crackers with fresh cheese'.

#### 4.1.10 Omission of indefinite article in apposition

The indefinite article is not normally used in apposition (see Glossary), at least in literary language:

<i>El Español de hoy, lengua en ebullición</i>	<i>Spanish Today, a Language in Ferment</i> (book title)
<i>Estuvimos quince días en Acapulco, lugar que nunca olvidaré</i>	We spent two weeks in Acapulco, a place I'll never forget
<i>Luego fue secuestrado Jorge Money, periodista del diario La Opinión</i> (MSQ, Arg.)	They then kidnapped JM, a journalist from the daily newspaper <i>La Opinión</i>
<i>Buenos Aires, ciudad que no me atrae</i> (JLB, Arg., dialogue)	Buenos Aires, a city that doesn't attract me
<i>Ahora, a buscar un digno sustituto de Pedro, tarea nada fácil</i> (JJA, Mex., dialogue)	Now let's start looking for a worthy substitute for Pedro; not an easy task

(1) But in informal language, or if the noun in apposition is qualified by an adjective or clause, the article may be retained: *recurrió a Videla, un militar liberal y antiperonista* (MSQ, Arg.) 'he sought the aid of Videla, a liberal and anti-Peronist member of the military'.

#### 4.1.11 Indefinite article to distinguish nouns from adjectives

Many Spanish nouns are indistinguishable in form from adjectives: use of *un/una* indicates that the noun is meant:

<i>Juan es cobarde/Juan es un cobarde</i>	John is cowardly/John is a coward
<i>Papá es (un) fascista</i>	Father is a fascist
<i>Soy extranjero/un extranjero</i>	I'm foreign/I'm a foreigner

(1) Use of the indefinite article often implies a stronger value judgement. *Eres cutre* (Sp., colloquial = *tacaño, avaro*) = 'you're mean', *eres un cutre* = 'you're a mean person'; *eres tonto* 'you're silly', *eres un tonto* 'you're a fool/idiot'; *es vaga* (Sp., colloquial = *perezosa*) 'she's lazy', *es una vaga* 'she's a lazy person'. *Unos/unas* is used in the plural to retain the distinction: *son desgraciados* 'they're unhappy', *son unos desgraciados* 'they're wretches' (the meaning changes and is quite strong: *un desgraciado* = 'a wretch', 'a "creep"').

#### 4.1.12 Omission after *como, a modo/manera de, por, sin, con*

(a) The indefinite article is not used after *a manera de, a modo de* and after *como* when it means 'in the capacity of' or 'by way of':

<i>a manera de prólogo</i>	by way of a prologue
<i>a modo de bastón</i>	as/like a walking stick
<i>como ejemplo</i>	as an example
<i>Utilicé mi zapato como martillo</i>	I used my shoe as a hammer
<i>Renunció . . . "como único medio de conseguir la tranquilidad"</i> (JA, Mex.)	He resigned . . . 'as the only way of achieving tranquillity'

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(b) It is not used after *por* when it means ‘instead of’, ‘in place of’ or ‘for’ in phrases like: *por respuesta le dio un beso* ‘(s)he gave him/her a kiss as a reply’, *no acepten un No por respuesta. ¿Entendido?* (MS. Mex., dialogue) ‘don’t take a “no” for an answer. Understood?’

(c) It is not usually used after *sin* without:

*No vas a cortarlo sin cuchillo*

You won’t cut it without a knife

*A veces se manchaba los anteojos sin marco*

Sometimes he smeared his frameless glasses

(CF, Mex. In Spain *los anteojos* = *las gafas*)

*Ha venido sin camisa*

(S)he’s come without a shirt on

*un gato sin cola*

a cat without a tail

But if the idea of ‘one’ is emphasized, or, in most cases, if the noun is qualified by an adjective or clause, the indefinite article is required: *sin un céntimo* ‘without a (single) cent’, *sin un amigo a quien contar sus problemas* ‘without a friend to tell his problems to’.

(d) It is not used after *con* when it means ‘wearing’, ‘equipped with’, and in many other adverbial phrases:

*Siempre va con abrigo*

(S)he always wears an overcoat

*una casa con jardín*

a house with a garden

*La Esfinge es un león con cabeza de hombre*

The Sphinx is a lion with a man’s head

(JLB, Arg.)

*Lo escribí con (un) lápiz*

I wrote it with a pencil

### 4.1.13 Omission in exclamations, after *qué*, and before *tal*, *medio*, *cierto*, *otro*, *semejante*

The indefinite article is omitted in the following types of phrase:

*¡Extraña coincidencia!*

What a strange coincidence!

*¡Menudo follón!*

What a mess!

*¡Qué cantidad!/¡qué ruido!/¡qué pena!*

What a quantity/noise/pity!

*¿Cómo ha podido hacer tal/semejante cosa/  
una cosa así?*

How could (s)he have done such a thing?

*media pinta/medio kilo*

half a pint/kilo

*cierta mujer/otra cerveza*

a certain woman/another beer

See 10.7 for *cierto* and 10.13 for *otro*.

## 4.2 Unos/Unas

The Spanish indefinite article can be used in the plural with a variety of meanings (for a comparison of *algunos* and *unos*, which may sometimes both mean ‘some’, see 10.4.2. For the pronoun *uno*, see the Index).

### 4.2.1 Uses of *unos/unas*

(a) before numbers, ‘approximately’:

*Costó unos treinta y cinco dólares*

It cost about thirty-five dollars

*... y unos cinco minutos después se detuvo*  
(GGM, Col.)

and about five minutes later it stopped

(b) before plural nouns, 'some' or 'a few', or sometimes 'a set of':

*De momento no, pero si me invitas a unas copitas a lo mejor me lo pienso*  
(CORPES, Arg.)

Not right now, but if you buy me a couple of drinks, maybe I'll think about it

*Todavía tenía unos restos de fe*  
*Sonrei . . . pero fue peor: unos dientes amarillos aparecieron* (CRG, Sp.)

(S)he still had some vestiges of faith  
I smiled, but it was worse: a set of yellow teeth appeared

*La compañía anunció unos resultados mucho peores de lo que esperaban los inversores* (El País, Sp.)

The company announced a set of results much worse than investors expected

*Está a unas calles de sus casas*  
(La Jornada, Mex.)

It's a few streets away from their houses

When used thus it may simply moderate the force of a following noun. It can therefore add a modest note:

*Mira estas fotos—son unas vistas tomadas en Guadalajara*  
*Se sintió viejo, triste, inútil, y con unos deseos de llorar tan urgentes que no pudo hablar más* (GGM, Col.)

Look at these photos – they're a couple of shots taken in Guadalajara  
He felt old, sad, useless, and with an urge to weep that was so urgent that he could speak no more

(c) Before nouns that appear in the plural, *unos* shows that only one is meant. If the noun denotes symmetrical objects like trousers, binoculars, scissors, or before pairs of articles like gloves, shoes, *unos/unas* means 'a pair of':

*Me caí por unas escaleras/por una escalera*  
*Voy a tomarme unas vacaciones*  
*unos pantalones/unas gafas/unas cortinas*  
*Llevaba unas botas de ante azul* (ES, Mex.)

I fell down some stairs  
I'm going to have a holiday/vacation  
a pair of trousers (US pants)/glasses/curtains  
She was wearing a pair of blue suede boots

(d) Use of *unos/unas* may show that the plural noun following is not being used generically:

*Son payasos*  
*Son unos payasos*  
*Son zorros*  
*Son unos zorros*

They're (circus) clowns  
They're (acting like) clowns  
They're foxes (species)  
They're really cunning/like foxes

(e) *Unos/unas* may be needed to show that the following noun is a noun and not an adjective or noun used as an adjective, as in *son místicos* 'they're mystic(al)', *son unos místicos* 'they're mystics/day-dreamers'. See 4.1.11 for examples.

(1) Sometimes use of *unos* makes little difference: *el pacifismo debería traducirse en unos comportamientos políticos que no tuviesen ninguna indulgencia con los violentos* (La Vanguardia, Sp., *unos* optional) 'pacifism ought to be translated into (a set of) patterns of political behaviour which show no indulgence towards the violent'.

(2) *Unos* cannot be used to answer *¿cuántos?* 'how many?' The NGLE 20.3u notes that to the question *¿cuántos estudiantes había?* one can reply *algunos*, *pocos*, *unos cuantos*, *varios* ('several') or with a number, but not *\*unos*, just as one would probably not reply 'some' in English.

(3) *Unos cuantos/unas cuantas* may be used to mean 'a few', 'couple of': *si un mesero tardaba demasiado en traernos la cuenta daba unos cuantos gritos en francés* (ES, Mex., dialogue; *mesero* = *camarero*)



in Spain) ‘if a waiter took too long to bring us the bill/check she uttered a couple of shouts in French’.

#### 4.2.2 Omission of *unos/unas*

There is a widespread tendency in written Spanish, especially in newspapers, to avoid the use of *unos* (and of *algunos*) in sentences of the kind *expertos americanos afirman que . . .* ‘American experts claim that . . .’. This journalistic trick hides the fact that only a few experts were actually consulted. Spoken Spanish requires *los* if the meaning is ‘all American experts’, *algunos* if the meaning is ‘some’.

In other cases, omission produces a literary effect: *eléctricas letras verdes intermitentes anunciaron la salida del vuelo* (MVM, Sp.) ‘flashing green electric lights announced the departure of the flight’, where *unas letras verdes* would have been more usual. Also *días después, una noche, luces verdes parpadearon en los cristales de mis balcones* (JMa, Sp.) ‘one night a few days later green lights flickered in my balcony windows’.

# 5 Adjectives

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- The forms of adjectives (Section 5.2)
- Compound adjectives like ‘light blue’, ‘socio-political’ (Sections 5.2 and 5.4)
- Shortened adjectives (e.g. *buen* for *bueno*) (Section 5.5)
- Agreement of adjectives (Section 5.6)
- Adjectives of place (e.g. *americano*, *madrileño*) (Section 5.7)
- The suffix *-ísimo* (Section 5.8)
- The position of adjectives (Section 5.10)
- ‘Relational’ adjectives like *industria hotelera* ‘hotel industry’ (see Glossary) (Section 5.11)

## 5.1 General remarks about Spanish adjectives

(a) Nearly all Spanish adjectives agree with nouns and pronouns in number, and many also agree in gender. They therefore either have two forms, e.g. *natural/naturales*, or four, e.g. *bueno/buena/buenos/buenas*. A few, e.g. *macho* ‘male’, *violeta* ‘violet’, are invariable in form.

(b) The position of adjectives is a subtle question, the difference between *un problema difícil* and *un difícil problema* ‘a difficult problem’ being virtually untranslatable in English.

(c) It is necessary to distinguish ‘descriptive’ adjectives (*adjetivos calificativos*), e.g. ‘a big book’, ‘a blond girl’ from ‘relational’ adjectives (*adjetivos relacionales*), e.g. ‘a nuclear power-station’, ‘a pedestrian crossing’. See Glossary for definitions.

(d) Many, but not all, Spanish adjectives become nouns if a determiner (see Glossary) is added: *joven/estas jóvenes* ‘young’ / ‘these young women’; see 5.9b. Nouns can also occasionally be used like adjectives, as in *ella es más mujer que Julia* ‘she’s more (of a) woman than Julia’ (or ‘more feminine’); see 5.9a.

However, adjectives are formed in unpredictable ways from nouns, e.g. *automóvil* – *automovilístico*, *metal* – *metálico*, *leche* ‘milk’ *lechal*, *lechoso* and *lácteo*.

(e) Some adjectives can be used with object pronouns and the verb *ser*: *me es fácil* ‘it’s easy for me’, *nos son imprescindibles* ‘they’re indispensable to us’; but most cannot. See 14.6.3 for discussion.

(f) Adjectival participles ending in *-ante*, *-iente*, e.g. *vinculante* ‘binding’, *preocupante* ‘worrying’, are discussed under participles at 23.6.

(g) The gerund in *-ndo* is a verb form and must not be used as an adjective: *una muñeca que anda* or *una muñeca andante* ‘a walking doll’, not *una muñeca andando* ‘a doll walking’. For two exceptions to this rule, see 5.3. For a discussion of the Gerund see Chapter 24.

(h) Spanish adverbs are invariable in form, even when they look like adjectives: *los teléfonos están fatal* ‘the phones are in a dreadful state’, *estamos mejor* ‘we’re feeling better’. See 35.3.3. for discussion.

## 5.2 Forms of adjectives

There are three types of Spanish adjectives:

- Type 1 adjectives agree in number and gender with the noun or pronoun (5.2.1)
- Type 2 adjectives agree in number but not gender (5.2.2)
- Type 3 adjectives do not change their form: they are not numerous (5.2.3 and 5.2.4)

### 5.2.1 Type 1 adjectives (agree in number and gender)

These include adjectives that end with: *-o*, *-án*, *-és*, *-ín*, *-ón*, *-or* (with the exceptions like *inferior* listed below), *-ote* and *-ete*.

For *macho*, *modelo*, *oro* see 5.2.3–4; for *cortés*, *descortés*, *montés*, *afín* and *marrón* see 5.2.2.

How to form the feminine singular of type 1 adjectives:

	Masculine singular	Feminine singular
ends with a vowel	<i>bueno</i>	<i>buen</i> a 'good'
ends with a consonant	<i>hablador</i>	<i>hablad</i> ora 'talkative'

	Masculine plural	Feminine plural
ends with a vowel	<i>buenos</i>	<i>buen</i> as
ends with a consonant	<i>hablad</i> ores	<i>hablad</i> oras

**Important:** in writing, a final *-z* is replaced by *c* before *e*. Any accent on the final vowel of the masculine singular disappears, as in the cases of *inglés*, *musulmán*, *pillín* in the following chart:

Further examples of type 1 adjectives (agreeing in number and gender)

Singular		Plural		
Masculine	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine	
<i>redondo</i>	<i>redonda</i>	<i>redondos</i>	<i>redondas</i>	round
<i>inglés</i>	<i>inglesa</i>	<i>ingleses</i>	<i>inglesas</i>	English
<i>musulmán</i>	<i>musulmana</i>	<i>musulmanes</i>	<i>musulmanas</i>	Muslim
<i>pillín</i>	<i>pillina</i>	<i>pillines</i>	<i>pillinas</i>	mischievous
<i>regordete</i>	<i>regordeta</i>	<i>regordetes</i>	<i>regordetas</i>	plump/chubby
<i>español</i>	<i>española</i>	<i>españoles</i>	<i>españolas</i>	Spanish
<i>andaluz</i>	<i>andaluza</i>	<i>andaluces</i>	<i>andaluzas</i>	Andalusian
<i>batallador</i>	<i>batalladora</i>	<i>batalladores</i>	<i>batalladoras</i>	battling/fighting

(1) *Español* and *andaluz* are type 1 adjectives and have a feminine in *-a*: *española*, *andaluza*, but other adjectives ending in *-z* or *-l* belong to type two, e.g. *feroz* 'ferocious', *natural*.

(2) Eleven adjectives that end with *-or* and have a comparative meaning are type 2, i.e. they have no separate feminine form. These are (singular-plural):

*anterior* – *anteriores* previous  
*exterior* – *exteriores* outer

*inferior* – *inferiores* lower/inferior  
*interior* – *interiores* inner/interior

*mayor* – *mayores* greater/older

*mejor* – *mejores* better

*menor* – *menores* minor/smaller/younger

*peor* – *peores* worse

*posterior* – *posteriores* later/subsequent

*superior* – *superiores* upper/superior

*ulterior* – *ulteriores* later/further

**Exception:** *la madre superiora* ‘mother superior’ of a religious order.

(3) *Cortés*, ‘courteous’ and *descortés* ‘discourteous’ are type 2 adjectives, i.e. they have no feminine form. *Montés* ‘wild’, i.e. not domesticated, is often type 2: *la cabra montés* ‘wild goat’, but also *la cabra montesa*. These are the only adjectives ending in *-és* that have no separate feminine form.

(4) *Marrón* ‘brown’ and *afín* ‘related’/‘similar’ are type 2 and therefore have no feminine form: *una camisa marrón*, ‘a brown shirt’, *ideas afines* ‘related ideas’.

### 5.2.2 Type 2 adjectives (no separate feminine form)

No difference between masculine and feminine. This class includes: (a) nearly all adjectives whose masculine singular ends with a consonant, except those ending in *-ín*, *-án*, *-ón*, *-or*, *-és*, which are nearly all type 1; (b) adjectives whose singular ends with *-a*, *-e*, *-ú*, *-í*.

The plural is formed: (a) if the adjective ends in a consonant or *-í* or *-ú*, by adding *-es*. In writing, a final *-z* is replaced by *c* before *e*; (b) in all other cases, by adding *-s*.

Singular and plural of type 2 adjectives

Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
<i>socialista</i>	<i>socialistas</i> socialist	<i>azul</i>	<i>azules</i> blue
<i>grande</i>	<i>grandes</i> big	<i>gris</i>	<i>grises</i> grey/gray
<i>imponente</i>	<i>imponentes</i> imposing	<i>feliz</i>	<i>felices</i> happy
<i>útil</i>	<i>útiles</i> useful	<i>nacional</i>	<i>nacionales</i> national
<i>iraní</i>	<i>iraníes/iranís</i> Iranian	<i>feroz</i>	<i>feroces</i> fierce
<i>hindú</i>	<i>hindúes</i> (Asian) Indian	<i>ruin</i>	<i>ruines</i> despicable
<i>cortés</i>	<i>cortes</i> courteous	<i>regular</i>	<i>regulares</i> regular/‘so-so’

(1) Adjectives ending in *-í* usually make their plural in *-ís* in spontaneous speech and often in print, e.g. *pakistanís*, *israelís*; but the ending *-ies* is the formal written form. Some words, e.g. *maorí*/*maoríes* or *maorís* ‘Maori’ are uncertain, but at the present stage of the language, *-ies* is still felt to be the correct formal plural of most adjectives ending in *-í* and is recommended by the Academy although the forms in *-ís* are now accepted.

(2) If a diminutive or augmentative suffix is added to a type 2 adjective it then becomes type 1: *mayor* ‘large’/‘older’-*mayorcito/mayorcita* ‘grown-up’; *grande* ‘big’-*grandote/grandota* ‘extremely large’; *vulgar* ‘vulgar’-*vulgarzote/vulgarzota* ‘pretty vulgar’.

(3) *Dominante* occasionally forms a very colloquial feminine *dominanta* ‘bossy’/‘domineering’. A few other popular or slang forms in *-nta* occur, e.g. *atorrante/atorranta* (Lat. Am.) ‘lazy’/‘loafer’; but other adjectives ending in *-nte* are not marked for gender whereas some nouns ending in *-nte* are. See 1.2.7 and 23.6 for further discussion. The very common colloquial Mexican adjective *padre* ‘great’/‘fantastic’ is type 2: *¡qué padres están esos lentos!* (Sp. *las gafas*) ‘those glasses (i.e. spectacles, eye-glasses) look great!’

### 5.2.3 Type 3 adjectives (marked for neither number nor gender)

These have only one form and are not numerous: *una rata macho* 'male rat', *unas ratas macho* 'male rats'. (See also 2.1.9 for discussion of the plural of compound nouns like *perros policía* 'police dogs', *hombres rana* 'frogmen'.) Other examples are: *alerta\** 'alert' (*estamos alerta* 'we're alert'), *los puntos clave\** 'the key issue(s)', *encinta\** 'pregnant' (literary: Seco recommends plural *encintas*), *estándar* 'standard', *extra\** 'extra', *hembra* 'female' (see 1.3), *gratis* 'free' (i.e. cost-free); *modelo* 'model', *monstruo* 'monster', *sport* (*los coches sport* 'sports cars'), *tabú\** 'taboo', *ultra\** 'extreme right-wing' (the noun *los ultras* often = 'hooligans'). Foreign words like *light*, *heavy* and *crack* (= 'brilliant', 'outstanding') are also invariable, as, usually, is *porno*.

(1) This group is unstable, and the words asterisked often agree in the plural: *los problemas claves*, *los pagos extras*, *los temas tabúes*, *nuestra obligación es vivir constantemente alertas* (MVLl, Pe.) 'our obligation is to live constantly alert'.

(2) Although they look like nouns, *maestro*, *virgen*, *perro*, *gigante* and *esnob* agree like normal adjectives: *llaves maestras* 'master keys', *tierras vírgenes* 'virgin territories', *¡qué vida más perra!* 'what a rotten life!', *berenjenas gigantes* 'giant aubergines' / US 'eggplants'.

(3) Type 3 (invariable) adjectives also occur in French, cf. *des chemises marron* 'brown shirts', but French words like *violète*, *extra*, *tabou*, *modèle*, *rose* have separate plural forms.

### 5.2.4 Invariable colour adjectives

The more common colour adjectives – e.g. *negro* 'black', *rojo* 'red', *azul* 'blue' – are ordinary type 1 or type 2 adjectives. However, any suitable noun, preceded by *color*, *de color* or *color de*, can be used: *ojos color (de) humo* 'smoke-coloured eyes', *color barquillo* 'wafer-coloured'. The phrase with *color* is sometimes dropped and the noun is then used like a type 3 adjective, i.e. it does not agree in number and gender: *tres botones naranja/rosa/malva/violeta/esmeralda* 'three orange/pink/mauve/violet/emerald buttons', *corbatas salmón* 'salmon-colour ties', *cintas fresa* 'strawberry-coloured ribbons'. Similar nouns are:

<i>añil</i> indigo	<i>canela</i> cinnamon	<i>granate</i> dark red	<i>turquesa</i> turquoise
<i>azafrán</i> saffron	<i>chocolate</i> chocolate	<i>lila</i> lilac	<i>vino</i> wine-coloured
<i>beis</i> beige	brown	<i>oro</i> gold	<i>violeta</i> violet
<i>azur</i> azure	<i>escarlata</i> scarlet	<i>paja</i> straw	
<i>café</i> coffee brown	<i>grana</i> dark red	<i>sepia</i> sepia	

(1) Colloquially, and in some writers, especially Latin-American, *naranja*, *rosa*, *malva*, *violeta* and a few others may be pluralized: *flores malvas* 'mauve flowers', *las uñas violetas* 'violet fingernails' (CB, Sp.), . . . *los ojos violetas eran de Mary* (CF, Mex.) 'the violet eyes were Mary's', *rayos ultravioletas* (*Granma*, Cu.) 'ultraviolet rays'. But this generally seems to be avoided, especially in Spain: *pliegos de papel azules, malva, rosa, verdes* (FU, Sp.) 'blue, mauve, pink, green folds of paper', *rayos ultravioleta* (*El País*, Sp.), *la muchacha de ojos violeta* (CF, Mex.) 'the girl with violet eyes'. *Carmesí* 'crimson' is usually invariable but is occasionally type 2 (i.e. *carmesíes*), but cf. *grandes rosas carmesí* (AG, Sp.) 'large, crimson roses'.

(2) These adjectives are not placed before a noun. *Como sonreía la rosa mañana . . .* (Antonio Machado, Sp., pre-1910) 'as pink dawn was smiling . . .' is a rare exception.

(3) *Color* or *de color* is usually inserted before the more exotic hues: *eran ambas prendas de color salmón* (JM, Sp.) 'both articles of clothing were salmon colour', *la pantalla de moaré color geranio* (IA, Sp.) 'the geranium-coloured moiré lampshade'.

(4) *Beige* is pronounced as in French or English in Latin America, *beis* in Spain. The latter spelling is recommended by *El País* and the Academy.

### 5.2.5 Compound adjectives of colour

All compound colours of the type 'dark blue', 'light green', 'signal red' are usually invariable in form (in this respect Spanish resembles French, e.g. *des yeux bleu clair*):

<i>hojas verde oscuro</i>	dark green leaves
<i>calcetines rojo claro</i>	pale/light red socks
<i>una masa gris castaño</i>	a grey/US gray-brown mass
[ <i>Mis ojos</i> ] <i>son azul pálido</i> (EP, Mex.)	My eyes are pale blue

The NGLE 13.7n reports examples of pluralization in good writers, e.g. *ojos azules claros* 'bright blue eyes', but prefers the invariable forms.

(1) Well-known compound adjectives of this kind may be used on their own, but new or unusual formations may require the addition of *de color*, e.g. *una mancha de color rojo apagado* 'a dull red stain/patch', not ?*una mancha rojo apagado*.

(2) There are special words for some common mixed colours: *verdirrojo* 'red-green', *verdiblanco* 'greenish-white', *verdinegro* 'very dark green', *blanquiazul* 'bluish-white', *blanquinegro* 'black-and-white'. These agree like normal adjectives: *verdinegros/verdinegras*, etc.

(3) There is no single word for 'brown' in European Spanish. *Marrón* (type 2) is chiefly used for artificial things like shoes and also for eyes. *Castaño* is used for hair and eyes: *pelo castaño*, *ojos castaños*. 'Brown skin' is *piel morena*. 'Brown earth' is *tierra parda* or *tierra rojiza*. *Café* (no agreement) or *color café* is used for 'brown' in many parts of Latin America.

## 5.3 *Hirviendo* and *ardiendo*

Gerunds (see Glossary) cannot be used as adjectives in Spanish: one cannot say \**un objeto volando* for 'a flying object' which is *un objeto volante*; see 24.3 for details. But there are two exceptions, *hirviendo* 'boiling' and *ardiendo* 'burning' which look like gerunds but can be used as adjectives:

<i>Tráeme agua hirviendo</i>	Bring me some boiling water
<i>Tienes la frente ardiendo</i>	Your forehead is burning
<i>Yo más bien soy un carbón ardiendo</i> (i.e. sexually excited; MVLL, Pe., dialogue)	I'm more like a burning coal

(1) *Hirviendo*, *ardiendo* are invariable in form, take no suffixes and cannot appear before a noun. *Chorreando* 'dripping wet' may be another exception in *llevo la ropa chorreando* 'my clothes are dripping wet'. *Hirviente* for *hirviendo* is heard in Latin America.

## 5.4 Adjectives formed from two words

Some compound adjectives are made into single words and behave like any adjective: *muchachas pelirrojas* 'red-haired girls' from *pelo* 'hair' and *rojo* 'red', *cuernos puntiagudos* 'sharp-pointed horns' from *punta* 'point' and *agudo* 'sharp'.

(1) In adjectives joined by hyphens only the second word agrees with the noun: *movimientos político-militares* ‘political-military movements’, *teorías histórico-críticas* ‘historical-critical theories’. Such examples excepted, use of hyphens to join words is nowadays rare in Spanish; cf. *contrarrevolucionario* ‘counter-revolutionary’, *latinoamericano* ‘Latin-American’. See 44.4.6 for the use of the hyphen in these words.

## 5.5 Short forms of some adjectives

**Important:** a number of common adjectives lose their final syllable in certain circumstances.

(a) *Grande* is shortened to *gran* before any noun: *un gran momento* ‘a great moment’, *una gran comida* ‘a great meal’. The *-de* is occasionally retained in formal literary styles, especially before a vowel. This archaism is rare nowadays, but cf. *¿busca un nuevo grande amor?* (JCC, Sp.) ‘is he seeking a new great love?’, . . . *y con un grande alboroto de pitos y timbales* (GGM, Col.) ‘. . . and with a great din of whistles and kettledrums’.

(b) The following lose their final vowel when placed before a singular **masculine** noun or combination of adjective and masculine noun:

<i>alguno</i> : algún remoto día some remote day	<i>postrero</i> : tu postrer día (archaic) your last day
<i>bueno</i> : un buen cocinero a good cook	
<i>malo</i> : un mal ingeniero a bad engineer	<i>primero</i> : mi primer amor my first love
<i>ninguno</i> : en ningún momento at no moment	<i>tercero</i> : el tercer hombre the third man

In all cases, the full form is used if a conjunction or adverb separates the adjective from the noun or noun phrase: *esta grande pero costosa victoria* ‘this great but costly victory’, *un bueno aunque agrio vino* ‘a good though sour wine’.

(1) *Grande* is not shortened if *más precedes*: *el más grande artista de su especialidad en América* (EP, Mex.) ‘the greatest artist in his field in America’ (or *el mayor artista*), *la más grande ofensiva de terrorismo dinamitero* (GGM, Col.) ‘the biggest terrorist bombing campaign’. After *tan*, *gran* is usual – *tan gran desastre* ‘such a great disaster’ – but *grande* is found in very literary styles.

(2) Popular speech, especially Latin-American, sometimes uses short forms of adjectives before feminine nouns. This is also seen in some good Spanish writers of the first half of the twentieth century, but it is nowadays avoided: *la primera mujer* ‘the first woman’, not *\*la primer mujer*, *buena parte de* ‘a good part of’, not *\*buen parte de*. But if an adjective comes between *primero* or *tercero* and a masculine noun, either form is allowed: *su primer(o) y único amor* ‘his/her first and only love’, but only *su primera y única novela* (examples from NGL 21.4f).

(3) *Santo* ‘saint’ is shortened to *san* before the names of all male saints except those beginning with *Do-* or *To-*: *san Juan*, *san Blas*, *santo Tomás*, *Santo Domingo*. It is not shortened when it means ‘holy’: *el santo Padre* ‘the Holy Father’, *todo el santo día* ‘the whole day through’, *el Santo Oficio* ‘the Holy Office’ (i.e. the Inquisition).

(4) For *alguna* and *ninguna* before feminine nouns beginning with a stressed *a-* or *ha-* see 3.1.2, 10.4 and 27.5.5. For *cualquiera* see 10.8. For the short forms of *tanto* and *cuánto* (*tan* and *cuán*) see 10.16 and 28.6.2.

## 5.6 Agreement of adjectives

Some questions of number agreement of adjectives are also discussed under 2.3, particularly agreement with collective nouns (2.3.1). For the agreement of adjectives with titles like *Alteza* 'Highness', *Excelencia* 'Excellency' see 1.2.11.

### 5.6.1 Agreement of adjectives that follow the noun

(a) One or more masculine nouns require a masculine adjective: *un elefante asiático* 'an Asian elephant', *platos combinados* (Sp.) 'single-dish courses', usually mystifyingly translated in Spanish restaurants as 'combined plates': it means meat and vegetables served foreign-style on one plate; *cien mil pesos mexicanos*, '100,000 Mexican pesos'.

(b) One or more feminine nouns require a feminine adjective: *la Grecia antigua* 'ancient Greece', *películas chinas y rusas* 'Russian and Chinese films', *mi madre es inglesa* 'my mother's English'.

(c) Two or more nouns of different gender require a masculine plural adjective: *profesores y profesoras ingleses* 'English male and female teachers', *puentes y casas decrepitos* 'derelict bridges and houses'.

(1) French rejects a masculine adjective following a feminine noun: *\*des hommes et des femmes gros* is incorrect, but *hombres y mujeres gordos* 'fat men and women' is good Spanish.

(2) Seco (1998), 124, notes the possibility of singular agreement with two or more nouns denoting a single complex idea, e.g. *talento y habilidad extremada* 'extreme talent and skill' for *talento y habilidad extremados*.

(3) If several adjectives follow a plural noun and each adjective refers to only one individual item, the adjective will be singular: *los presidentes peruano y venezolano* 'the Peruvian president and the Venezuelan president'. *Los presidentes venezolanos y peruanos* means 'the presidents of Venezuela and the presidents of Peru'.

(4) Adverbs that have the form of adjectives are invariably masculine singular in form: *María habla muy claro* 'Maria speaks very clearly', *estamos fatal* 'we're in a terrible state/fix'. See 35.3.3 for further discussion.

### 5.6.2 Agreement with nouns joined by *o* or *ni*

(a) With the conjunction *o* agreement is optional. Plural agreement emphasizes the fact that the *o* is not exclusive (i.e. either one or the other or possibly both) and it indicates that the adjective refers to both nouns:

<i>Buscaban una tienda o un restaurante abiertos</i> (abiertos clearly refers to both)	They were looking for an open store or (an open) restaurant
<i>Buscaban la mujer o el hombre capaces de asumir el cargo</i> (for the absence of personal <i>a</i> see 26.2)	They were looking for the woman or man capable of taking on the job

(b) With *ni* 'nor' a plural verb is usual: *ni Mario ni Juan eran tontos* 'neither Mario nor Juan was stupid'.



### 5.6.3 Agreement with collective nouns

An adjective that modifies a collective noun is usually singular: *la mayoría está convencida* . . . ‘the majority is/are convinced’; but there are exceptions, discussed at 2.3.1.

### 5.6.4 Agreement of adjectives placed before a noun

When an adjective precedes two or more nouns and qualifies them all, it usually agrees only with the first. This avoids the awkward combination of a plural adjective with a singular noun or a masculine adjective with a feminine noun, e.g. to avoid the peculiar *?frescos rosas* . . . below:

<i>su habitual sabiduría y tolerancia</i> (ES, Arg.)	his usual wisdom and tolerance
<i>esas frescas rosas y claveles</i> (JLB, Arg.)	those fresh roses and carnations

(1) The plural may appear to avoid ambiguities: *sus amados hijo y nieto* ‘his beloved son and grandson’ (both beloved), *pobres Mario y Jean Pierre* (ABE, Pe., dialogue) ‘poor Mario and Jean Pierre’.

(2) French does not allow this construction. Compare *una profunda inspiración y reflexión* and *une inspiration et une réflexion profondes* ‘deep inspiration and reflection’.

### 5.6.5 ‘Neuter’ agreement

An adjective that refers to no noun in particular is neuter in gender and masculine singular in form:

<i>Es absurdo hacerlo sin ayuda</i>	It’s absurd to do it without help
<i>Es peligroso, pero lo haré</i>	It’s dangerous, but I’ll do it
<i>La miseria no tiene nada de sano y placentero</i> (MVL, Pe.)	Extreme poverty has nothing healthy or agreeable about it

(1) Neuter agreement is sometimes found even where a noun is present: *tampoco es bueno demasiada natación* (LG, Sp., dialogue) ‘too much swimming isn’t good either’. Here the adjective does not qualify the noun *natación* but the general idea of *hacer demasiada natación*; *buena* would also be correct. This phenomenon is quite common in everyday speech when the noun is not accompanied by a determiner (see Glossary), e.g. *mucha comida así no es bueno* (or *buena*) ‘a lot of that sort of food isn’t good’, but always *esa comida no es buena* ‘that food’s not good’.

(2) In the local language of Asturias, *el bable*, mass nouns have neuter gender to distinguish them from nouns referring to individual items. This sometimes creeps into the Castilian of that region, cf. *una cebolla fresca* ‘a (single) fresh onion’ and *cebolla fresco* ‘fresh onion’ (i.e. a quantity of onions), . . . *fresca* in standard Spanish.

(3) For adjectives with the article *lo* (*lo bueno*, *lo grande*, etc.) see 8.2.

## 5.7 Formation of adjectives of place

### 5.7.1 Adjectives referring to countries and regions

These are formed unpredictably, as in English. The following are noteworthy (for the use of the definite article with the names of countries, see 3.2.17):

<i>Afganistán: afgano</i>	<i>Europa: europeo</i>	<i>Méjico/México: mejicano /</i>
<i>Alemania: alemán</i> German	<i>Finlandia: finlandés</i>	<i>mexicano.</i> See note 4
<i>Arabia Saudí/ Saudita:</i>	<i>Francia: francés</i>	<i>Nueva Zelanda/ Nueva</i>
<i>saudita/saudí</i>	<i>Gales: galés</i> Wales, Welsh	<i>Zelandia: neozelandés.</i>
<i>Argelia: argelino</i> Algerian	<i>Galicia: gallego</i>	<i>Nueva Zelanda in Spain,</i>
<i>Argentina: argentino</i>	<i>Gibraltar: gibraltareño</i>	<i>both in Lat. Am. The</i>
<i>Australia: australiano</i>	<i>Gran Bretaña: británico</i>	<i>Academy rejects</i>
<i>Austria: austriaco or austríaco</i>	<i>Grecia: griego</i>	<i>*neocelandés</i>
<i>Bélgica: belga</i> Belgian	<i>Guatemala: guatemalteco</i>	<i>Nicaragua: nicaragüense</i>
<i>Bolivia: boliviano</i>	<i>Holanda: holandés</i>	<i>Noruega: noruego</i> Norwegian
<i>Brasil: brasileño</i>	<i>Honduras: hondureño</i>	<i>Panamá: panameño</i>
<i>Canadá: canadiense</i>	<i>Hungría: húngaro</i>	<i>Paraguay: paraguayano</i>
<i>Canarias: canario</i>	<i>(la) India: indio/hindú.</i>	<i>Perú: peruano</i>
<i>Castilla: castellano</i> Castile/	See note 3	<i>Polonia: polaco</i> Polish
Castilian. See (2)	<i>Inglaterra: inglés</i> , often used	<i>Portugal: portugués</i>
<i>Cataluña: catalán</i>	for ‘British’	<i>Puerto Rico: puertorriqueño /</i>
<i>Chile: chileno</i>	<i>Irak: iraquí</i>	<i>portorriqueño</i>
<i>China: chino</i>	<i>Irán: iraní</i>	<i>El Salvador: salvadoreño</i>
<i>Colombia: colombiano</i>	<i>Irlanda: irlandés</i>	<i>Rumanía or Rumania:</i>
<i>Costa Rica: costarricense,</i>	<i>Israel: israelí</i>	<i>rumano</i>
<i>costarricense</i>	<i>Italia: italiano</i>	<i>Rusia: ruso</i>
<i>Dinamarca: danés</i> Danish	<i>Japón: japonés</i>	<i>Suecia: sueco</i> Swedish
<i>Ecuador: ecuatoriano</i>	<i>Letonia (not *Latvia): letón</i>	<i>Suiza: suízo</i> Swiss
<i>Egipto: egipcio</i> (not *egipciano)	Latvian	<i>Uruguay: uruguayano</i>
<i>Escocia: escocés</i> Scottish	<i>Lituania: lituano</i>	<i>Vascongadas, el País Vasco:</i>
<i>España: español.</i> See (2)	<i>Marruecos: marroquí</i>	<i>vasco</i> Basque; see (5)
<i>Estados Unidos:</i>	Moroccan (moro is	<i>Venezuela: venezolano</i>
<i>estadounidense.</i> See note 1	pejorative)	

(1) There is much vagueness surrounding words for the Americas. The adjective from *América Latina* or *Latinoamérica* is *latinoamericano*, and is much used by Latin-Americans to refer to themselves; it also includes Brazil and the French-speaking countries. *Hispanoamericano* or ‘Spanish-American’ is a linguistically more accurate but ethnically inaccurate term for the Spanish-speaking peoples of Latin America, but it is avoided by Latin-Americans.

In Latin America *norteamericano* means our ‘American’, though it logically includes Canadians. *Estadounidense* is often used for the adjective from *Estados Unidos*, also *estadunidense* in Mexico and in some near-by republics. For agreement with *Estados Unidos*, see 3.2.17 note 1.

*Americano* is often assumed to mean *latinoamericano* in Latin-America, but it usually means our ‘American’ in Spain, although according to the Academy it should only mean ‘Latin-American’.

The adjective from *América del sur* or *Sudamérica* (or *Suramérica*) ‘South America’ – which does not include Central America, Mexico or the Caribbean – is *sudamericano*. Seco (1998), 421, says that the forms *Suramérica*, *suramericano* are generally thought ‘less acceptable’ in Spain; *El País* (*Libro de estilo* 2014) has changed its mind and now prefers the prefix *sud-*, e.g. *Sudáfrica*, but insists on *suroeste* ‘South-West’, *sureste* ‘South-East’, etc. *Sudamérica* and *sudamericano* are often used informally in Spain to refer to anywhere south of the Río Grande.

*Gringo* is constantly used colloquially by Latin-Americans to refer to North Americans and by some to refer also to Europeans. It is not always unfriendly.

(2) *El castellano* is the Castilian language, i.e. what is described in this book, strictly speaking the dialect of Old Castile which became the majority language of Spain. Catalans, Basques, Galicians and some Latin-Americans sometimes object to *el castellano* being called *el español*.

(3) In Latin America the word *indio* is assumed to mean Native American, so *hindú* is constantly used for Asian Indian, although it properly means Hindu: *los empleados hindús del raj británico* (CF, Mex., dialogue), ‘the Indian employees under the British Raj’ (for *hindús* versus *hindúes* see 2.1.3c). *El País* insists on *indio* for Asian Indian. *Los hinduistas* is nowadays often used for ‘Hindus’. In Spain *indios americanos* or, less commonly, *amerindios*, is used for Native Americans. *Indiano* is used to denote a ‘colonial’ who made money in Latin America and returned to Spain.

(4) Mexicans write *México/mexicano* even though they are pronounced *Méjico, mejicano*: the *x* commemorates the Mexica or Aztecs. The Latin-American press and *El País* (Sp.) and *El Mundo* (Sp.) use these forms, and the Academy prefers them, but the spellings with *j* are common in Spain: *Abc* and *La Vanguardia* of Spain use them. A few other Mexican place names are similarly affected, e.g. Oaxaca, Xalapa (or Jalapa). *El País* insists on the spelling *Texas* and on the pronunciation [té-xas]; the adjective is *tejano* [te-χá-no]; the Academy accepts *Tejas* and *Texas*. *X* is pronounced ‘sh’ in some Mexican place names, e.g. Xcaret, Tlaxcala.

(5) The Basque words *Euskadi* ‘Basque Country’ (*el País Vasco*), *euskalduna* ‘Basque’/‘Basque-speaker’, *euskera* ‘the Basque language’, are commonly seen in Spanish newspapers.

### 5.7.2 Adjectives referring to towns

There is no general rule for forming adjectives referring to towns, and some places pride themselves on obscure forms, e.g. *Huelva* – *onubense*, *El Escorial* – *gurriato* or *escurialense*. There are hundreds of these demonyms or *gentilicios*: the Spanish version of Wikipedia includes them in its articles on towns and cities. A few common examples are:

<i>Álava</i> : <i>alavés</i>	<i>Florencia</i> : <i>florentino</i>	<i>La Paz</i> : <i>paceño/pacense</i>
<i>Alcalá</i> : <i>complutense</i> .	<i>Granada</i> : <i>granadino</i>	<i>Quito</i> : <i>quiteño</i>
See note 1	<i>La Habana</i> : <i>habanero</i>	<i>Río de Janeiro</i> : <i>carioca</i>
<i>Ávila</i> : <i>abulense</i>	<i>Lima</i> : <i>limeño</i>	<i>Roma</i> : <i>romano</i>
<i>Badajoz</i> : <i>pacense</i>	<i>Lisboa</i> : <i>lisboeta</i> Lisbon	<i>Salamanca</i> : <i>salmantino/salamanqués</i>
<i>Barcelona</i> : <i>barcelonés</i>	<i>Londres</i> : <i>londinense</i> (not * <i>londiniense</i> )	<i>San Francisco</i> : <i>sanfranciscano</i>
<i>Berlín</i> : <i>berlinés</i>	<i>Los Ángeles</i> : <i>angelino</i>	<i>San Sebastián</i> : <i>donostiarra</i>
<i>Bilbao</i> : <i>bilbaíno</i>	<i>Madrid</i> : <i>madrileño</i>	<i>Santander</i> : <i>santanderino</i>
<i>Bogotá</i> : <i>bogotano</i>	<i>Málaga</i> : <i>malagueño</i>	<i>Santiago</i> : <i>santiagouno</i>
<i>Boston</i> : <i>bostoniano</i>	<i>Miami</i> : <i>miamense</i>	(Ch.), <i>santiagués</i> (Sp.)
<i>Buenos Aires</i> : <i>porteño/</i> <i>bonaerense</i> . See note 2	<i>Moscú</i> : <i>moscovita</i>	<i>Segovia</i> : <i>segoviano</i>
<i>Burgos</i> : <i>burgalés</i>	<i>Murcia</i> : <i>murciano</i>	<i>Sevilla</i> : <i>sevillano</i>
<i>Cádiz</i> : <i>gaditano</i>	<i>Nápoles</i> : <i>napolitano</i>	<i>Toledo</i> : <i>toledano</i>
<i>Caracas</i> : <i>caraqueño</i>	<i>Nueva York</i> : <i>neoyorquino</i>	<i>Valencia</i> : <i>valenciano</i>
<i>Córdoba</i> : <i>cordobés</i>	<i>Pamplona</i> : <i>pamplonés/</i> <i>pamplonica</i> invariable	<i>Valladolid</i> : <i>vallisoletano</i>
<i>La Coruña</i> : <i>coruñés</i>	<i>París</i> : <i>parisiense</i> . See note 3	<i>Washington</i> : <i>washingtoniano</i>
<i>Dublín</i> : <i>dublinés</i>		<i>Zaragoza</i> : <i>zaragozano</i>

(1) *La complutense* is the old university of Alcalá de Henares, now located in Madrid.

(2) *Bonaerense* refers to the province of Buenos Aires, *porteño* only to the city, although *bonaerense* is sometimes also used for the city.

(3) *El País* bans the use of *parisién* and *parisino* in its columns, but they are heard colloquially. The Academy accepts *parisino*.

## 5.8 Intensive forms of the adjective

### 5.8.1 The suffix *-ísimo*: meaning and formation

The suffix *-ísimo* can be added to many adjectives. It intensifies the original meaning – *Ana es riquísima* ‘Ana is extremely rich’, from *rico* – and it should be used sparingly. This suffix is sometimes misnamed a ‘superlative’ suffix, but it cannot be used in comparisons and is best thought of simply as an intensifier. The modern tendency is to prefer *muy* ‘very’ plus a normal adjective.

*-ísimo* cannot be added to all adjectives and there are irregularities. *-ísimo* is added after removing any final vowel: *grande* – *grandísimo*, *guapa* – *guapísima*. The following spelling changes occur:

(a) adjectives ending in *-co/-ca* and *-go/-ga* require a silent *u* to keep the hard sound of the *c* or *g*: *rico* – *riquísimo* ‘rich’, *vago* – *vaguísimo* ‘vague’ / ‘lazy’.

(b) Adjectives ending in *-z* change the *z* to *c*: *feliz* – *felicísimo* ‘happy’.

(c) For adjectives ending in two vowels, see 5.8.2.

(d) Adjectives ending in *-ble* change this ending to *-bil*: *amable* – *amabilísimo* ‘friendly’, *posible* – *posibilísimo* ‘possible’.

### 5.8.2 Adjectives which do not take *-ísimo*

The following adjectives do not take the suffix *-ísimo*:

(a) those ending in *-í*, *-uo*, *ío* or *eo* if not stressed on the *e*: *baladí* ‘trivial’, *arduo* ‘arduous’, *espontáneo* ‘spontaneous’, *rubio* ‘blond’ (*rubísimo* is possible but infrequent), *tardío* ‘late’.

**Exceptions:** *agrio* – *agrísimo* ‘sour’, *amplio* – *amplísimo* ‘wide’ / ‘extensive’, *frío* – *fríísimo* ‘cold’, *limpio* – *limpísimo* ‘clean’, *pío* – *piísimo* ‘pious’, *sucio* – *sucísimo* ‘dirty’.

(b) Words stressed on the last syllable but two (*palabras esdrújulas*) ending in *-ico*, *-fero*, *-éneo*, *-voro*, *político* ‘political’, *mamífero* ‘mammal(ian)’, *homogéneo* ‘homogeneous’, *carnívoro* ‘carnivorous’.

(c) Diminutives and comparatives: *grandote* ‘enormous’, *menor* ‘smaller’ / ‘younger’. But *mayorcísimo* ‘very old’ is heard, e.g. *es mayorcísima* ‘she’s very old / ancient’.

(d) Compound adjectives, e.g. *patizambo* ‘knock-kneed’, *ojituerto* ‘one-eyed’.

(e) Many adjectives of more than three syllables ending in *-ble*: *inexplicable*, *incontestable* ‘unquestionable’, *desmontable* ‘collapsible’. There are a few exceptions, e.g. *agradable* – *agradabilísimo* ‘agreeable’, *hábil* – *habilísimo* ‘skilful’.

(f) Those whose meaning cannot be further intensified: *fantástico*, *ideal*, *infinito*, *inmortal* ‘immortal’, *total*, etc. **Exceptions:** *mismo* – *mismísimo* ‘very’ (*la mismísima persona* ‘the very same person’), *singular* – *singularísimo* ‘singular’.

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(g) Time and number adjectives: *anual* 'annual', *diario* 'daily', *nocturno* 'night-time', *semanal* 'weekly', *quinto* 'fifth', *último* 'last', *vigésimo* 'twentieth', etc. **Exception:** *primero* – *primerísimo* 'first' / 'very first of all'.

(h) *Hirviendo* 'boiling' and *ardiendo* 'burning'.

(i) Technical and scientific adjectives and most adjectives ending in *-ista*, e.g. *decimal*, *termonuclear* 'thermo-nuclear', *transformacional* 'transformational', *separatista* 'separatist', *nacionalista* 'nationalist', etc.

### 5.8.3 Irregular intensive forms

(a) The following are best learned as separate words:

<i>antiguo</i> : <i>antiquísimo</i> ancient	<i>mayor</i> : <i>máximo</i> supreme/greatest
<i>áspero</i> harsh <i>aspérrimo</i> rough	<i>menor</i> : <i>mínimo</i> slightest/least
<i>cursi</i> : <i>cursilísimo</i> affected/pseudo-refined	<i>mejor</i> : <i>óptimo</i> superb (literary)
<i>inferior</i> : <i>ínfimo</i> (literary) inferior/least/lowest	<i>peor</i> : <i>pésimo</i> bad/dreadful
<i>joven</i> : <i>jovencísimo</i> young	<i>superior</i> : <i>supremo</i> superior/supreme
<i>lejos</i> : <i>lejísimos</i> distant/far	

(b) Some of the following forms are occasionally found in older texts and/or in flowery written styles: the current form (if any) follows the literary form:

<i>amigo</i> friendly/keen <i>amicísimo/amiguísimo</i>	<i>libre</i> free <i>libérrimo/muy libre</i>
<i>célebre</i> famous <i>celebérrimo</i>	<i>magnífico</i> magnificent <i>magnificentísimo</i>
<i>cruel</i> cruel <i>crudelísimo/cruelísimo</i>	<i>pobre</i> poor <i>paupérrimo/pobrísimo</i>
<i>fértil</i> fertile <i>ubérrimo/fertilísimo</i>	<i>sabio</i> wise <i>sapientísimo</i>
<i>fiel</i> faithful <i>fidelísimo/fidelísimo</i>	<i>sagrado</i> sacred <i>sacratísimo</i>

(c) The old rule whereby the diphthongs *ue* and *ie* are simplified to *o* or *e* when *-ísimo* is added is nowadays usually ignored, although *novísimo* 'very recent' must be distinguished from *nuevísimo* 'very new'. Bracketed forms are literary:

<i>bueno</i>	<i>buenísimo</i>	( <i>bonísimo</i> )	good
<i>cierto</i>	<i>ciertísimo</i>	( <i>certísimo</i> )	certain
<i>diestro</i>	<i>diestrísimo</i>	( <i>destrísimo</i> )	skilled
<i>fuerte</i>	<i>fuertísimo</i>	( <i>fortísimo</i> )	strong
<i>reciente</i>	<i>recentísimo</i>	( <i>recentísimo</i> )	recent
<i>tierno</i>	<i>tiernísimo</i>	( <i>ternísimo</i> )	tender

In some words the diphthong is never modified, e.g. *viejo* – *viejísimo* 'old', *cuerto* – *cuerdísimo* 'sane'.

## 5.9 Use of nouns as adjectives and adjectives as nouns

(a) Nouns may occasionally be used as adjectives:

<i>Tienes que ser más persona decente</i>	You've got to be more of a decent person
<i>Este libro es menos novela que el otro</i>	This book is less of a novel than the other

Such nouns are invariable in form, and when they are modified by words like *más*, *menos*, *tan*, they are not accompanied by a definite or indefinite article. See 28.4.1 for nouns and adjectives modified by *qué*: *¡qué bandido eres!* 'what a villain you are!'; *¡qué guapa estás!* 'you look great!'

(b) Spanish adjectives can very often be made into nouns by using a determiner (see Glossary): *valiente/un valiente* 'brave'/'a brave man', *viejo/tres viejas* 'old'/'three old women', *extranjero/los extranjeros* 'foreign'/'the foreigners'. The noun may acquire a special meaning, as in *impreso/un impreso* 'printed'/'a printed form', *helado/un helado* 'frozen'/'an ice-cream', *rojo/un rojo* 'red'/'a Communist'.

Some noun forms are simply not used: *\*sale con un feliz* is not said for '(s)he's going out with a happy man' = *sale con un hombre feliz*; *llegó con una chica guapa* '(s)he arrived with an attractive girl', not *\*con una guapa*, etc. The NGLÉ notes that nouns of negative meaning – *enfermo*, *calvo* 'bald', *ciego* 'blind', *discapacitado* 'handicapped', *manco* 'one-armed', *sordo* 'deaf', *malvado* 'wicked' – are more likely to be used as nouns than 'positive' ones, but only dictionary practice and reading can guide learners in this matter.

(1) *Uno* and not *un* is used for the masculine of adjectives when the latter are used as nouns. Thus *un parecido* = 'similarity', but *uno parecido* = 'a similar one', as in *le voy a encargar a alguna modista que haga uno parecido* (ABV, Sp., dialogue) 'I'm going to get a dressmaker to make one like it'. Cf. also *prefiero esta taza a una rota* 'I prefer this cup to a broken one'.

(2) See 4.1.11 on the use of the indefinite article to distinguish nouns from adjectives, as in *es grosero* 'he's rude' and *es un grosero* 'he's a rude person'.

## 5.10 Position of adjectives in relation to nouns

### 5.10.1 General

For the position of *alguno*, *ninguno*, *cualquiera*, *mismo*, possessive adjectives, etc., consult these words in the index. For the position of ordinal number adjectives, e.g. *primero* 'first', *sexto* 'sixth', see 11.12.3.

The position of Spanish adjectives before or after the noun they modify is more variable than in English ('a good book' but never *\*a book good*), and a good deal more variable than in French. But the underlying rules that determine whether one says *un lejano ruido* or *un ruido lejano* 'a distant noise' are difficult to explain.

The basic rule for all adjectives other than ordinal numbers seems to be:

(a) **Restrictive adjectives follow the noun.**

(b) **Non-restrictive adjectives may precede or follow the noun. Some always precede the noun.**

'Restrictive' adjectives narrow the scope of the noun that precedes them: *vino espumoso* 'sparkling wine' is a restricted or specific type of wine; *las salchichas inglesas* 'English sausages' refers only to a specific kind of sausage. Non-restrictive adjectives refer to the whole of the thing denoted by the noun: *las aburridas conferencias del decano* 'the dean's boring lectures' and *la poco apetitosa cocina británica* 'unappetizing British cooking' are both generalizations and apply to every member or aspect of the thing referred to. Unfortunately the distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive adjectives is not always clear, so the decision about where to put the adjective sometimes relies on a feel for the language rare among non-natives.

(1) As a useful, though not absolutely fool proof, guide to whether an adjective is restrictive, native speakers of English can apply the following test:

If an English adjective sounds correct when spoken with a heavy stress – ‘I don’t like **sour** apples, but I do like **sweet** apples’ – then it is almost certainly restrictive and its Spanish equivalent must follow the noun: *no me gustan las manzanas agrias, pero sí me gustan las manzanas dulces*. If an English adjective sounds wrong when stressed, it is probably non-restrictive and its Spanish counterpart may well precede the noun. If one stresses ‘beautiful’ in ‘the beautiful sun of Spain’, it suggests that there is another less beautiful Spanish sun. This is absurd, so the Spanish adjective will probably precede the noun: *el hermoso sol de España*. Ordinal number adjectives do not follow this rule, cf. *está en el quinto capítulo, no en el cuarto* ‘it’s in the fifth chapter, not in the fourth’. See 11.12.3.

### 5.10.2 Examples of restrictive adjectives

The following adjectives are restrictive and therefore always follow the noun:

(a) those that create a new type or sub-set of the thing described by the noun:

<i>el pan integral</i> wholemeal bread	<i>la teoría cuántica</i> quantum theory
<i>el calentamiento global</i> global warming	<i>la tracción delantera</i> front-wheel drive
<i>los cazas computerizados</i> computerized	<i>el vino tinto</i> red wine
fighter aircraft	
<i>la religión cristiana</i> the Christian religion	<i>los canales digitales</i> digital channels

All the other examples in this section are in fact instances of this type of adjective, which can be thought of as a transformed clause: *la poesía romántica* = *aquella poesía que es romántica*, *las manzanas verdes* = *aquellas manzanas que están/son verdes*.

(b) Those used for purposes of contrast, whether explicit or implied:

<i>Tráigame una cuchara limpia</i>	Bring me a clean spoon (i.e. not a dirty one)
<i>Tengo una camisa verde y otra azul</i>	I have a green shirt and a blue one
<i>No queremos agua salada</i>	We don’t want salty water

(c) Scientific or technical adjectives:

<i>la gramática transformacional</i>	<i>el laboratorio lingüístico</i> language
transformational grammar	laboratory
<i>la conexión inalámbrica</i> wireless connection	<i>el soporte técnico</i> technical support
<i>el correo electrónico</i> email*	<i>la pantalla táctil</i> touch screen

\**El email* and, colloquially, *el mail* are common in spoken Spanish, but the Academy recommends *el correo electrónico*.

(d) Relational adjectives. These express the origin, substance, contents or purpose of a noun. Their use is discussed at 5.11:

<i>el túnel ferroviario</i> railway tunnel	<i>la nave espacial</i> spaceship
<i>la energía eólica</i> wind energy	<i>la televisión infantil</i> children’s TV

(e) Adjectives of place, nationality, affiliation, which are almost always restrictive:

<i>el clima argentino</i> the Argentine climate	<i>el Partido Democrático</i> the Democratic
<i>el campo inglés</i> the English countryside	Party

*los monumentos mayas* the Mayan  
monuments

*el nacionalismo vasco* Basque nationalism  
*la doctrina cristiana* Christian doctrine

(1) Only the most far-fetched styles would use such scientific or technical adjectives poetically or as epithets, though some, e.g. *unilateral*, *microscópico*, (*p*)*sicoanalítico*, *materialista*, might conceivably be used as epithets (see 5.10.4a).

(2) Adjectives of nationality can occasionally be used as epithets when they express allegedly typical qualities (see 5.10.4a for a discussion of epithets): *mi española impulsividad me hace escribir estas líneas* (reader's letter, Sp.) 'my Spanish impulsiveness makes me write these lines'; *su británica reserva* 'her/his British reserve'. Adjectives of place are sometimes pre-posed in journalism before very well-known features, as in *la madrileña calle de Alcalá* 'the (typically) Madrid Alcalá street'.

### 5.10.3 Adjectives put before a noun to indicate impression, reaction or subjective assessment

The most common reason for putting an adjective before the noun is to emphasize its emotional content, e.g. *una tremenda tragedia* 'a tremendous tragedy', *un gran poeta* 'a great poet', *el inquietante problema del efecto invernadero* 'the worrying problem of the greenhouse effect'. These adjectives are non-restrictive in context because the speaker wants to eliminate any allusion to another tragedy, poet or problem: in the previous example there is obviously no non-worrying greenhouse effect.

These pre-posed adjectives can describe the speaker's impression, assessment or evaluation of a thing, or its appearance. They include a vast range of adjectives indicating shape, distance, size, colour, texture, passage of time, praise, mood, blame or subjective appraisal of any kind. The more emotional the language, therefore, the more pre-posed adjectives are likely to occur, as in poetry, poetic prose, journalism and advertising. Examples:

*las magníficas ruinas de Machu Picchu*  
*¡No voy a permitir que a tu hija la envenenes*  
*con las ideas de tu enferma cabeza!*  
(LE, Mex., dialogue)

the magnificent ruins at/of Macchu Picchu  
I'm not going to let you poison your  
daughter with the ideas in your sick head!

*un profesor, dueño de una amplísima cultura*  
(SPL, Mex., dialogue)

a teacher, a highly educated man

*¡Sensacional promoción de verano!*  
*esta popular y veterana suite de diseño*  
*gráfico . . .*

Sensational Summer Offer!  
this popular and time-tested graphic design  
suite . . .

*¡Convierte tus vídeos en auténticas películas!*

Turn your videos into real films!

Sometimes the difference of meaning between post-posed and pre-posed adjectives can be important, as in *el poético lenguaje de Lorca* 'the poetic language of Lorca' (aesthetic opinion) and *el lenguaje poético de Lorca* 'the language of Lorca's poetry' (factual), or *las decimonónicas actitudes del ministro* 'the nineteenth-century attitudes of the minister' (an opinion) and *la novela decimonónica* 'the nineteenth-century novel' (factual). But very often a pre-posed adjective is merely more poetic or dramatic, a post-posed one more matter-of-fact. The following examples will help to train the ear:

*el casi olvidado nombre de James*  
*MacPherson* (JLB, Arg.)  
*Hay barcos anclados en permanente contacto*  
*con los aviones nocturnos* (GGM, Col.)  
*La revolución significó para mí una justa*  
*redistribución de la riqueza* (MVL, Pe.)

the almost forgotten name of James  
MacPherson  
There are boats anchored at sea in  
permanent contact with the night aircraft  
The revolution meant for me a just  
redistribution of wealth



<i>una guirnalda de blancas flores</i> (LG, Sp.)	a wreath of white flowers
<i>La pera es de fácil digestión</i> (cookery book, Spain)	Pears are easily digested
<i>el creciente costo de la tierra urbana</i>	the rising cost of land in the cities

(1) The position of adjectives is fixed in many set phrases: *Alto Egipto* 'Upper Egypt', *el Sumo Pontífice* 'the Pope', *Baja California* 'Lower California' (cf. *América Central*, *los Estados Unidos*, *la China Popular*, 'People's China', etc.), *la banda ancha* 'broadband', *altos hornos* 'blast-furnaces', *en alta mar* 'on the high seas', *Dios Todopoderoso* 'Almighty God', *sentido común* 'common sense', etc.

(2) If an adjective is qualified by an adverb it usually follows the noun in ordinary styles: *esta noticia altamente reveladora* 'this highly revealing news item', *una chica frígidamente agresiva*, 'a frigidly aggressive girl', *con tres amigos igualmente roñosos* 'with three equally stingy friends'. Compare *anuncian una útil linterna* (not *linterna útil*) 'they are advertising a useful torch/US flashlight' and *anuncian una linterna muy útil* 'they are advertising a very useful torch/flashlight'. With *más* and *menos* either position is possible: *el más popular presentador de la TV italiana* 'the most popular presenter on Italian TV', or *el presentador más popular de la TV italiana*.

However, constructions like *la altamente reveladora noticia* 'the highly revealing news item', *esa siempre sorprendente inteligencia de los perros* (SG, Mex.) 'that ever surprising intelligence of dogs', *la sorprendente y para Julián desconocida noticia . . .* (IA, Sp.) 'the surprising and – for Julian – unknown news . . .' are quite common in literary styles.

#### 5.10.4 Other uses of adjectives placed before the noun

The following types of adjectives are also placed before the noun:

(a) Epithets, i.e. adjectives used to describe typical or predicted qualities. These are not common in everyday or matter-of-fact language except in set phrases, but they are very common in literary, poetic, advertising or other types of emotive language:

<i>mi distinguido colega</i>	my distinguished colleague
<i>el peligroso tigre asiático</i>	the dangerous Asian tiger
<i>un valiente torero</i>	a brave bullfighter
<i>los volubles dioses romanos</i>	the fickle Roman gods

Epithets describe predictable or typical qualities. One can say *un enorme elefante* 'an enormous elephant' but only *un elefante cojo* 'a lame elephant' since elephants are not typically lame; *mi leal amigo* 'my loyal friend' but only *mi amigo vegetariano* 'my vegetarian friend'; *un difícil problema* or *un problema difícil* 'a difficult problem', but only *un problema (p)sicológico*, since problems are not all or typically psychological.

(b) Adjectives that clearly refer to every one of the items denoted by a plural noun: *a Kevin lo único que le interesa son sus tontos juguetes y sus cómics* 'the only thing that interests Kevin is his stupid toys and his comics'. (JV, Mex.), where his sister is claiming that all his toys are stupid. More examples: *muchas gracias por las magníficas rosas* 'many thanks for the magnificent roses', *sus evasivas respuestas empezaban a irritarme* 'his/her evasive replies were starting to irritate me', *las simpáticas peticiones de nuestros oyentes* 'our listeners' kind requests'.

For this reason, adjectives applied to unique entities are likely to be pre-posed, unless they apply only to an aspect or part of the thing:

*Se veía el imponente Everest  
el izquierdista Frente Farabundo Martí  
tu alarmante edad . . .*

One could see imposing Mount Everest  
the left-wing Farabundo Martí Front  
your alarming age . . . (you only have one age)

But

*Hay una Argentina montañosa y otra llana  
También visitamos la ciudad moderna*

There is a mountainous Argentina and a flat one,  
We also visited the modern (part of the) city

(c) Intensifiers, hyperboles and swear words – the latter are extreme examples of adjectives used emotively and usually devoid of all real meaning:

*mi increíble suerte  
jeste maldito ordenador! (Lat. Am.  
computadora or computador)  
Valiente soldado eres tú  
tu dichosa familia  
estas condenadas hormigas  
cinco cochinos/piojosos euros*

my incredible luck  
this damned computer!  
A great soldier you are (I don't think . . .)  
your blessed family . . .  
these damned ants  
five lousy euros

### 5.10.5 Position of adjectives with nouns connected by *de*

Choice of position here depends on whether the noun phrase is a compound word, i.e. a new concept, or merely a loose cluster of words. Thus *las flores de España* 'the flowers of Spain' is not a compound, so one says *las flores silvestres de España* 'the wild flowers of Spain' not *\*las flores de España silvestres*. But *una casa de muñecas* 'a dolls' house' is a compound and is inseparable: *una casa de muñecas barata* 'a cheap dolls' house', not *\*una casa barata de muñecas*. Only long familiarity with Spanish provides a guide as to what is or is not a compound noun. Some noun phrases are uncertain: one can say *una bicicleta amarilla de hombre* or *una bicicleta de hombre amarilla* 'a yellow man's bicycle' (the Spanish is unambiguous!). Further examples:

*un buque de asalto anfíbio  
un curso básico de informática  
un libro lleno de curiosas referencias de  
índole personal (JLB, Arg.)*

an amphibious assault craft  
a basic course in computing  
a book full of curious references of a  
personal nature

In the case of adjectives that could come before the noun (see preceding sections), various solutions are possible: *una increíble cantidad de oro*, *una cantidad increíble de oro*, *una cantidad de oro increíble* 'an incredible amount of gold' are all possible.

(1) Relational adjectives (see 5.11) cannot be separated from their nouns: one cannot say *\*un virus peligroso informático* for *un peligroso virus informático* or *un virus informático peligroso* 'a dangerous computer virus'.

### 5.10.6 Position of *bueno*, *malo*, *grande*, *pequeño*

The general rule applies: when they are clearly restrictive, they follow the noun. When used restrictively, they usually indicate objective qualities. When they precede the noun they usually express a subjective evaluation – which is usually the case, but see note 4 for the special case of *pequeño*.

According to the *GDLE*, 3.4.2.2, in the case of *bueno* and *malo*, the pre-posed adjective may unambiguously refer to competence rather than moral qualities. So *un buen poeta* may be a scoundrel

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but a competent poet, whereas *un poeta bueno* may be a good poet and a good person. Likewise *un mal músico* and *un músico malo* ‘a bad musician’, *un buen amigo* = ‘good as a friend’ and *un amigo bueno* = ‘a good friend and a good person’.

### (a) Objective qualities

*Tengo un abrigo bueno para los fines de  
semana, y uno regular para los laborables*  
*Oscar Wilde dijo que no hay libros buenos o  
malos sino libros bien o mal escritos*  
(JLB, Arg., contrast)

*Ponlo debajo del árbol grande*  
*Trae el martillo grande*  
*mi hermana mayor/menor*

I’ve got a good coat for weekends, and  
a so-so one for weekdays  
Oscar Wilde said there are no good or bad  
books only well or badly written books

Put it under the big tree  
Bring the big hammer  
my elder/younger sister

### (b) Subjective qualities

*un buen carpintero*  
*un gran éxito*  
*un gran ruido/poeta/embustero*  
*los grandes narcotraficantes*  
*un pequeño problema* (see note 4)  
*el mayor poeta mexicano*  
*ni la menor impresión de insinceridad*

a good carpenter  
a great success  
a great noise/poet/fraud  
the major drug dealers  
a slight problem  
the greatest Mexican poet  
not even the slightest impression of insincerity

(1) With *hombre* and *mujer*, *bueno* tends to mean ‘good’ after the noun and ‘harmless’ before: *un buen hombre* means ‘a harmless/simple man’. *Malo* is weaker before the noun, e.g. *pasamos un mal rato* ‘we had a bad time’.

(2) There are many set expressions: *lo hizo de buena gana* ‘(s)he did it willingly’, *oro de buena ley* ‘pure gold’, *en buen lío te has metido* ‘you’re in a fine mess’, *a mí siempre me pone buena cara* ‘(s)he always makes an effort with me’, *¡qué mala pata!* ‘what bad luck’, etc.

(3) *Grande* is pre-posed when it means ‘great’, but it may mean ‘big’ in either position as in *estaba sentada cerca del gran ventanal/del ventanal grande* ‘she was sitting near the big window’.

(4) *Un pequeño problema* is normal since *problema* is an abstract noun. However *una pequeña casa* is less usual than *una casita*. For discussion of this phenomenon see 43.2.

## 5.10.7 Position of *nuevo* and *viejo*

The usual explanation is that *nuevo* is put before the noun when it means ‘another’ and *viejo* is put before the noun when it means ‘previous’/‘long-standing’: *tenemos un nuevo presidente/un presidente nuevo* ‘we’ve got a new president’, *nuevos progresos técnicos* ‘new (i.e. more) technological developments’. Similarly *un viejo amigo* ‘is an old friend’ (i.e. long-standing) and *un amigo viejo* is old in years.

*Nuevo* is usually put after the noun when it means ‘brand-new’ as is *viejo* when it means ‘not new’: *un coche nuevo* ‘a brand-new car’, *un coche viejo* ‘an old car’. But *viejo* may nevertheless be pre-posed when it means ‘not young’: *un viejo americano* ‘an old American’. This distinction is overridden for purposes of contrast: *prefiero el coche nuevo al viejo* ‘I prefer our new (i.e. latest) car to the old (i.e. previous) one’.

### 5.10.8 Adjectives whose meaning varies according to position

The following are some common cases of changes of meaning determined by adjective position, but in many cases the distinction is not rigid and a good dictionary should be consulted for further information:

	After noun	Before noun
<i>antiguo</i>	ancient	former or ancient
<i>cierto</i>	sure/unquestionable	a certain . . .
<i>falso</i>	forged/falsified	not real, 'pseudo-'
<i>medio</i>	average	half
<i>pobre</i>	poor (i.e. not rich)	miserable/wretched
<i>raro</i>	strange/rare	rare
<i>rico</i>	rich	delicious
<i>semejante</i>	similar	such a . . .
<i>simple</i>	simple-minded	simple (i.e. mere)
<i>triste</i>	sad	wretched
<i>valiente</i>	courageous	'great' (ironic)
<i>verdadero</i>	truthful	real/authentic
<i>varios</i>	assorted/various	several

For *mismo* see 10.11, *propio* 10.14, *solo/sólo* 10.15.

### 5.10.9 Adjectives that occur only in front of the noun

The following phrases contain adjectives that normally occur only in front of a noun:

<i>Lo haré en ambos casos</i> I'll do it in both cases	<i>pocas veces</i> rarely, <i>poca paciencia</i> not much patience
<i>las llamadas democracias</i> the so-called democracies	<i>el pretendido/presunto autor</i> the alleged/supposed author
<i>la mera mención del asunto</i> the mere mention of the topic	<i>un sedicente budista</i> a self-styled Buddhist
<i>Llevaba mucho dinero</i> (S)he was carrying a lot of money	<i>Trajerón sendos paquetes</i> (literary) Each one brought a parcel
<i>Busquemos otro médico</i> Let's look for another doctor	<i>el supuesto ladrón</i> the alleged thief
<i>Me dejó en pleno centro</i> (S)he left me right in the town centre	<i>ante tamaña tontería</i> in the face of such stupidity
<i>menudo pájaro . . . /menudo follón . . .</i> some guy . . . /some mess . . . (sarcastic tone)	<i>No puedo comer tanta cantidad</i> I can't eat such a quantity

## 5.11 Relational adjectives

'Relational' adjectives are usually equivalent to *de* plus a noun: *la vida familiar* = *la vida de familia* 'family life'. Spanish has numerous relational adjectives formed from nouns cf. *mañana* 'morning' – *matinal* (*la televisión matinal* 'breakfast TV'), *impuesto* 'tax' – *impositivo* (*política impositiva* 'taxation policy'), *agua* 'water' – *hidráulico* (*avión hidráulico* 'fire-fighting aircraft that sprays water'), or *acuático*: *plantas acuáticas* 'water-plants' / 'aquatic plants'.

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Relational adjectives cannot normally precede a noun (*\*matinal televisión* is not Spanish). They usually cannot be made comparative by using *más* or *menos*, and many of them cannot be predicates of verbs like *ser*: one can say *tasas universitarias* 'university fees', but not *\*estas tasas son universitarias*. There are exceptions. like *constitucional*, *acuático*: *estas enmiendas no son constitucionales* 'these amendments are not constitutional'.

New relational adjectives constantly appear, probably because the combination noun + adjective more effectively translates English compound nouns of the type 'computer virus' (*virus informático*), 'film text' (*texto filmico*). Some of these formations are short-lived or are rejected as journalese or jargon.

There is no fixed rule for forming relational adjectives from nouns, and Latin-American coinages occasionally differ from Peninsular ones, cf. Sp. *presupuestario*, Lat. Am. *presupuestal* 'budget'; Sp. *programa de radio*, Lat. Am. *programa radial* 'radio program(me)'. In a few cases, e.g. *viento-eólico* 'wind' as in *la energía eólica* 'wind energy' (from *Eolo* 'Aeolus', the Greek god of the winds), *roca-rupestre* 'rock'/'cave' as in *el arte rupestre* 'cave art', *caza-cinegético* 'hunting' as in *club cinegético* 'hunting club', the adjective is derived from a completely different root. The following are taken from various printed sources:

### **de + noun**

*carestía del petróleo*  
*crisis de la banca*  
*defectos del oído*  
*industria de automóviles*  
*industria de hoteles*  
*peces de río*  
*política de energía*  
*programa de televisión*

*sindicato de pilotos*  
*centro de deportes*

### **Relational adjective**

*la carestía petrolera* high oil prices  
*la crisis bancaria* bank crisis  
*los defectos auditivos* hearing deficiencies  
*la industria automovilística* car industry  
*la industria hotelera* hotel industry  
*los peces fluviales* river-fish  
*la política energética* energy policy  
*el programa televisivo* television  
programme  
*el sindicato piloteril* pilots' union  
*el centro deportivo* sports centre  
*el sistema operativo* operating system  
*la contaminación lumínica* light pollution

**(1) Important:** in both languages an adjective may be descriptive or relational according to context: compare 'theatrical equipment' (relational = 'theatre equipment') and 'theatrical behaviour' (descriptive). Such pairs seem to be more common in Spanish and they may confuse English-speakers, who tend to forget that a word like *infantil* can mean 'children's' as well as 'childish'. Further examples:

*una cantidad masiva* a massive quantity  
*una persona nerviosa* a nervous person  
*un gesto hospitalario* a hospitable gesture  
*la política defensiva* defence policy  
*la poesía amorosa* love poetry

*los medios masivos* the mass media  
*el gas nervioso* nerve gas  
*un centro hospitalario* a hospital centre  
*la actitud defensiva* defensive attitude  
*una sonrisa amorosa* a loving smile

## 5.12 Translating the English prefix 'un-'

The Spanish prefix *in-* is less common than the English 'un-' and English speakers must resist the temptation to invent imaginary words like *\*ineconómico* from 'uneconomical' (*poco económico*). The two languages often coincide: *indeseable* 'undesirable', *inimaginable* 'unimaginable', *insobornable*

'unbriable', *insoporable* 'unbearable', *intocable* 'untouchable', *irreal* 'unreal', *improbable* 'improbable'. But often a solution with *poco*, *no* or *sin* must be found:

*no autorizado/sin autorizar* unauthorized

*no usado/sin usar* unused

*poco amistoso* unfriendly

*poco apetitoso* unappetizing

*poco atractivo* unattractive

*poco caritativo* uncharitable

*poco inteligente* unintelligent

*poco profesional* unprofessional

*sin comprender* uncomprehending

*sin convencer* unconvinced

*sin principios* unprincipled

*sin probar* untried

(1) The above list shows that *poco*, like the French *peu*, negates an adjective: *poco cansado* means 'not tired', not 'a bit tired'. A preceding indefinite article restores the meaning 'little': *un poco cansado* 'a bit tired'/'slightly tired'.

# 6 Comparison of adjectives and adverbs

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- Comparison of adjectives and adverbs (how to say ‘more/less beautiful’), etc. (Sections 6.1–2)
- The superlative of adjectives (‘most/least beautiful’, etc.). (Section 6.3)
- The superlative of adverbs (‘most fluently’/‘least convincingly’, etc.). (Section 6.4)
- The difference between *más/menos que* and *más/menos de*. (Section 6.5)
- When to use *más/menos del/de la/de los/de las que* and *más/menos de lo que*. (Section 6.6)
- *Mayor* and *menor*. (Sections 6.8–6.9)
- Comparisons of equality: ‘as . . . as . . .’, ‘the same as. . .’, etc. (Section 6.15)

Comparison of adjectives in Spanish is not complicated, but English-speaking students are often affected by interference from French, which encourages misuse of the article in the superlative and failure to use *tanto como* ‘as . . . as’ in comparisons of equality (cf. French *aussi . . . que*).

**Important:** English and French-speakers must remember to use subject personal pronouns after comparisons: *es más rubia que yo/tú* = *elle est plus blonde que moi/toi* ‘she’s blonder than me/you’, never \* . . . *que mí/ti*.

## 6.1 Regular comparison of adjectives and adverbs

With the exception of the five adjectives and adverbs listed at 6.2, all adjectives and adverbs form the comparative with *más . . . que* ‘more . . . than’ or *menos . . . que* ‘less . . . than’:

*Los limones son más agrios que las cerezas*  
*Tú andas más despacio que yo*  
*Más vale solos que mal acompañados*  
(MVLL, Pe., dialogue)

Lemons are bitterer than cherries  
You walk more slowly than me  
Better alone than in bad company

(1) For the difference between *más que/menos que* and *más de/menos de* see 6.5.

(2) **Important:** before clauses, verb phrases and neuter adjectives and participles, *más/menos de lo que* or the appropriate gender and number of *más/menos del que* are required, as in *es más joven de lo que parece* ‘(s)he’s younger than (s)he looks’. See 6.6 for discussion.

(3) Some people require that *más* and *menos* should be repeated before adjectives and adverbs, as in *hablamos del artista más famoso y más buscado del arte urbano* (APR, Sp., dialogue) ‘we’re talking about the most famous and (most) sought-after wall artist (i.e. graffiti artist)’, *es menos tímido y menos callado que su hermano* ‘he’s less shy and (less) quiet than his brother’. But this rule is not respected everywhere: *nunca he visto ojos más limpios y felices . . .* (CF, Mex., dialogue) ‘I’ve never seen clearer and happier eyes . . .’, . . . *uno de los intelectuales marxistas más analítico, filósofo y racional de la izquierda comunista* (CR, Mex.) ‘one of the most analytical, philosophical and rational Marxist intellectuals on the communist left’.

(4) The comparative of adverbs and, in some circumstances, of adjectives, has the same form as the superlative. See 6.3.2 for discussion.

(5) ‘... than ever ...’ is translated ... *que nunca* (but not *\*que jamás*): *¡estás más joven que nunca!* ‘you’re younger than ever!’ This use of *nunca* and of other negative words used with a positive meaning is discussed at 27.4.

(6) The verb *llevar*, which has numerous meanings (see Index), is used in personal comparisons involving age or height: *me lleva dos años/dos centímetros* ‘(s)he’s two years older/two centimetres taller than me’, *aunque me llevaba muchos años mi actitud estaba teñida de un extraño y respetuoso deseo de protegerla* (JM, Sp.) ‘although she was many years older than me my attitude was coloured by a strange and respectful desire to protect her’, *¿Cuántos años le llevas, se puede saber?* (MVLL, Pe., dialogue) ‘how many years older than her are you, may one know?’

## 6.2 Irregular comparative forms

There are five adjectives and adverbs that have irregular comparative forms:

Adjective	Adverb		Comparative singular	Comparative plural (adjective only)	
<i>bueno</i>	good	<i>bien</i> well	<i>mejor</i>	<i>mejores</i>	better
<i>malo</i>	bad	<i>mal</i> badly	<i>peor</i>	<i>peores</i>	worse
<i>pequeño</i>		small	<i>menor/más pequeño</i>	<i>menores/más pequeños</i>	smaller
<i>grande</i>		big	<i>mayor/más grande</i>	<i>mayores/más grandes</i>	greater/bigger
<i>poco</i>		few/not much	<i>menos</i>	<i>menos</i> (invariable)	less/fewer

**Important:** these comparative forms have no separate feminine forms.

(1) when the above words are used as adverbs only the singular form is used:

*Sus hermanas hablan mejor que ella*  
*Aquí estamos mejor*

Her/His sisters speak better than she does  
It’s better for us here/We’re better off here

(2) *Menos* and *más* can be adjectives or adverbs: *hablas más/menos que antes* ‘you talk more/less than before’ (adverbs), but *somos más/menos* ‘there are more/fewer of us’ (lit. ‘we are more/fewer’).

(3) Use of *más* or *menos* with these comparative forms, e.g. *\*más mejor*, is as incorrect as English forms like *\*‘more better’*, *\*‘less worse’*. One says *mucho mejor/peor* ‘much better/worse’.

(4) The uses of *mayor* and *menor* are discussed at 6.8 and 6.9.

(5) *Más bueno*, *más malo* are used of moral qualities though *mejor/peor* are more usual. See 6.3.1 note 3.

(6) *No más que* means ‘only’: *no tengo más dinero que el que ves aquí* ‘the only money I’ve got is what you see here’.

(7) *Más bien* means ‘rather’ or ‘more than anything’ in sentences like *esto más bien favorecía al gobierno* ‘this rather/more than anything favoured the government’.



## 6.3 Superlative of adjectives

See 6.4 for the superlative of adverbs. See 39.15.5. for the use of the subjunctive after superlative expressions.

### 6.3.1 Superlative of adjectives formed with the definite article

In statements of the type 'the nearest station', 'the smallest tree', the superlative of adjectives (but not of adverbs) is formed with *el/la/los/las/lo* plus *más* or *menos*: *él es el más inteligente/el mejor/el menos tímido* 'he's the most intelligent/the best/the least shy':

<i>una infernal espiral de sangre y muertes</i>	an infernal spiral of blood and deaths
<i>que nos ha convertido en el país más</i>	that has turned us into the most unsafe
<i>inseguro y violento del mundo, con la más</i>	and violent country in the world,
<i>alta tasa de homicidios (El Tiempo, Col.)</i>	with the highest murder rate
<i>lo mejor/peor que te puede suceder . . . (See</i>	the best/worst thing that can happen
<i>Chapter 8 for the uses of lo)</i>	to you . . .
<i>el mejor restaurante de Madrid (See note 2)</i>	the best restaurant in Madrid

However, in certain cases, listed at 6.3.2, the definite article is not used.

(1) Students of French must avoid repeating the article: *l'exemple le plus intéressant = el ejemplo más interesante* or *el más interesante ejemplo*. \**El ejemplo el más interesante* is not Spanish.

(2) Sentences like 'the best restaurant in Madrid' usually require *de Madrid*, not *en*. See 38.8.3 note 1 for discussion.

(3) *Más bueno/malo* can be used of moral qualities instead of *mejor/peor*: *a mí no me gusta pegar a los niños . . . pero es que este/éste es el más malo de todos* (EA, Sp., dialogue) 'I don't like hitting children, but this one's the worst of all', *tu papá es el más bueno de todos, más bueno que el mío* (MP, Arg., dialogue) 'your father's the nicest of all, nicer than mine'.

### 6.3.2 Superlative of adjectives formed without the definite article

The definite article is not used in superlative constructions in the following cases:

(a) When a possessive adjective precedes *más* or *menos* (contrast French *mon ami le plus loyal*):

<i>mi más leal amigo/mi amigo más leal</i>	my most loyal friend
<i>Pero mi capa más profunda se entristeció</i>	But the deepest layer in me (lit. 'my deepest
(ES, Arg.)	layer') was saddened

(b) After *ponerse* and other verbs of becoming, including *quedar(se)*:

<i>María se pone más nerviosa</i>	Maria gets most nervous
<i>Queda mejor así</i>	It's best/better like that

Such sentences could also be understood as comparatives. The superlative meaning can be made clear by using *ser + el que* or *quien*: *María es la que/quien se pone más nerviosa, este/éste es el que queda mejor*.

(c) When the superlative does not involve comparison with another noun (this includes cases in which something is compared with itself):

*El idealismo siempre es más fácil  
cuando uno es joven  
Los domingos es cuando la lluvia es  
más deprimente  
Aquí es donde el Rin es más romántico  
  
No recuerdo cuándo fui más feliz*

Idealism is always easiest (or 'easier')  
when one's young  
It's on Sundays that the rain is most  
depressing  
This is where the river Rhine is at its most  
romantic (the Rhine compared with itself)  
I don't remember when I was happiest

Compare the following where true comparison with another noun is involved: *el amor sin celos es el más noble* (compared with other loves) 'love without jealousy is the noblest', *las pizzas con anchoas son las mejores* 'pizzas with anchovies are (the) best'.

(e) In the construction *qué . . . más* 'what a . . .!':

*Qué hombre más cabeza dura . . .  
(MP, Arg., dialogue)  
¡Qué respuesta más cínica!*

What an obstinate man . . .  
  
What a cynical answer!

## 6.4 Superlative of adverbs (including *más* and *menos*)

The definite article cannot be used to form the superlative of an adverb (including *más* and *menos* used as adverbs). Students of French must remember not to use the article: compare *c'est Richard qui danse le mieux* and *Ricardo es quien mejor baila*. Examples:

*Cuando más rápido habla es cuando está nervioso  
Era el cuento que mejor nos permitía pelear  
(ABE, Pe.)*

*. . . el ser que más lo amaba y al que más  
amaba (GGM, Col.)*

*El patrón fue uno de los que más peces  
capturó (Granma, Cu.)*

It's when he's nervous that he talks fastest  
It was the short story that allowed us to  
quarrel most (lit. 'best'; i.e. 'short stories  
provoked our greatest quarrels')  
. . . the person who loved him most and  
whom he loved most  
The skipper was one of those who caught  
most fish

(1) The difference between *el que más me gusta* and *el que me gusta más* 'the one I like more/most' is one of emphasis, the former being stronger and therefore more likely to carry a superlative meaning. Note that with the verb *gustar*, *más* must be used, not *mejor*; contrast English 'I like this one best/most'.

## 6.5 Más/menos que or más/menos de?

**Important:** *más de* is used before numbers or quantities:

*Mi abuelo tiene más de cien años  
Son más de las tres y media  
Estaba seguro de que no aguantarías  
quieta durante más de seis meses  
(AM, Mex., dialogue)*

My grandfather is more than 100 years old  
It's past three thirty  
I was sure you wouldn't stay still for more  
than six months

Compare the following examples in which the expression following *más* or *menos* is not a quantity:

*Este restaurante es más caro que antes  
Cansa más el viaje que el empleo*

This restaurant is dearer than before  
The commuting is more tiring than the job

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*Le escriben de Italia más que a nosotros*  
(MP, Arg., dialogue)

They write to him from Italy more than  
they do to us

(1) *No más de* 'not more than' must not be confused with *no . . . más que . . .* meaning 'only'. Contrast *Juan no compró más de veinte libros* 'Juan bought twenty books' or 'fewer/not more than twenty' and *Juan no compró más que veinte libros* 'Juan bought only twenty books'. Also *no he pasado en Marbella más que unos días* (SP, Sp., dialogue) 'I've only spent a couple of days in Marbella', *las clases de pintura no eran más que una manera más entretenida de pasar el tiempo* (GGM, Col.) 'the art classes were only a more entertaining way of killing time'.

(2) In the following examples *que* must be used, even though a number follows: *tiene más fuerzas que tres hombres juntos* '(s)he's stronger than three men together', *habló más que las otras cinco personas* '(s)he talked more than the other five people'. Here the comparison is not with the numbers but with the *strength* of three men, *the talking* done by five people. Spanish thus avoids an ambiguity that affects English: compare *comió más que tres personas* '(s)he ate more than three people (would eat)' and *comió (a) más de tres personas* '(s)he ate more than three people' (cannibalism).

## 6.6 When to use *más/menos del/de la/de los/de las que* and *más/menos de lo que*

**Important:** the following sentence can be translated in two ways: 'the bookshop sells more books in September than (it sells) in February':

- (a) *la librería vende más/menos libros en septiembre que en febrero*
- (b) *la librería vende más libros en septiembre de los que vende en febrero*

Just as in English 'it sells' can be dropped so sentence (b) could be replaced by sentence (a).

However, this short cut is not possible in Spanish if the second verb is a different word, and often impossible if the verb is repeated but is in a different tense. In such cases, a special construction is obligatory in Spanish, but not in English:

- (c) *La librería vende más libros en septiembre de los que compra en febrero*  
The bookshop sells more books in September than it buys in February
- (d) *La librería ha vendido más libros de los que vendió el año pasado*  
The bookshop has sold more books than it sold last year

English-speakers constantly produce incorrect translations of sentences like (c) and (d), e.g. *\*. . . vende más libros en septiembre \*\*que compra en febrero* 'sells more in September than it buys in February' or *\*has traído más harina \*\*que necesitamos* for the correct *has traído más harina de la que necesitamos* 'you've brought more flour than we need'. The rule is:

(a) If a comparison is made with a clause which contains a **gendered** direct object *del que* must be used and it must agree in number and gender with the noun or pronoun it refers to:

*Tiene más zapatos de los que tiene su madre*  
(could be shortened to *tiene más zapatos que su madre* but the rest of these examples require a form of *del que*)

(S)he's got more shoes than her/his mother has

*La conozco desde hace aún más años de los que lleva fuera de España* (JM, Sp., dialogue)  
. . . *más novedades de las que Diego hubiera podido imaginar* (AM, Mex.)

I've known her for even more years than she has been out of Spain  
. . . more novelties than Diego could have imagined

Tienen mejores posibilidades **de las que** yo  
podría tener jamás (EP, Mex. dialogue)

... al frente de trescientos hombres

armados — muchos **más de los que** ha  
mandado nunca ... (MVLL, Pe.)

... **más dinero del que** harías en el resto de tu  
vida en Miami o donde sea (CP, Arg.)

They have better opportunities than I  
could ever have

... at the head of 300 armed men – many  
more than he has led before

... more money than you'd make in the  
rest of your life in Miami or anywhere else

(b) If the comparison is made with a **genderless** word or phrase, e.g. a verb phrase, the invariable phrase **de lo que** must be used:

Es menos tonto **de lo que** crees  
(crees is genderless)

Nos lo explicarán mejor **de lo que** se lo  
explicaron a ellos (se lo explicaron is  
genderless)

El viento me vuelve mucho **más loca de lo que**  
mi marido y exmaridos dicen que estoy  
(CRG, Sp. 'Dicen que estoy' is genderless)

No estás ni la mitad de moreno **de lo que**  
está Celia (genderless phrase *está Celia*)

No me lo agradezcas **más de lo que** merezco  
(LS, Sp., dialogue. Genderless *merezco*)

Así que ... **debía de ser aún más rico de lo que**  
me imaginaba (JM, Sp., dialogue)

Convertirse en inversionista es **más fácil**  
**de lo que** crees (Excelsior, Mex.)

He's less stupid than you think

They will explain it to us better than they  
explained it to them

The wind drives me much crazier than  
my husband and ex-husbands say I am

You're not half as brown/tanned as Celia is

Don't thank me for it more than I deserve

So he must have been even richer than  
I'd imagined

Becoming an investor is easier than you  
think

(1) Popular English also uses a similar construction in comparisons: ?'she's smarter than *what* you think', ?'you've brought more than *what* we need' for the standard '... than you think', 'than we need'.

(2) The use of *del que* or *de lo que* seems unnecessary to English-speakers, but Spanish needs it because *más/menos de* can only precede noun phrases, and also because *más que* before a verb or adjective usually means 'rather than' or 'instead of': *gasta más que gana* '(s)he spends more (i.e. 'rather') than earns', i.e. (s)he isn't an earner but a spender. Compare *gasta más de lo que gana* '(s)he spends more (money) than (s)he earns'.

(3) *Que* alone was sometimes used in these sentences in good writers in the past, cf. Unamuno (Sp., writing before 1920), *porque España ha tenido un proceso mucho más homogéneo que se cree* 'because Spain has had a much more homogeneous process than is believed'; nowadays ... *de lo que se cree*.

(4) French is free of the problems raised by *del/de lo que*, but, unlike Spanish, it uses a redundant negative in comparisons with a clause: *il en sait plus qu'il n'avoue* = *él sabe más de lo que admite* 'he knows more than he admits'.

## 6.7 Más as a colloquial intensifier

*Más* is often used as an intensifier without a comparative meaning in familiar speech on both continents, e.g. *está más borracho* ... 'is he *drunk*!' See 35.4.4.

For the standard construction *qué vida más triste* ‘what a sad life!’, *¡qué hombre más guapo!* ‘what an attractive man!’, see 6.3.2e.

## 6.8 Uses of *mayor*

*Mayor*, which means both ‘greater’ and ‘bigger’, is used as follows:

(a) In the same way as *más grande* ‘bigger’ in comparisons involving physical objects, although it is not normally used of small things like pins and insects, etc., and its use for physical comparisons is more characteristic of written language:

*Esta aula es más grande/mayor que la otra*  
*Mallorca es la más grande/la mayor de las*  
*Baleares*  
*¡Sácale el mayor partido a tu PC!*

This lecture room is bigger than the other  
 Majorca is the biggest of the Balearic Islands  
 Get the most out of your personal computer!

(1) One cannot say \**lo mayor*: *lo más grande lo ponemos abajo* ‘let’s put the biggest things underneath’.

(b) To translate ‘older’ or ‘oldest’ when applied to people:

*Mi hermano es mayor que el tuyo*  
*mi hermano mayor*  
*Es ya mayor que su hermana mayor . . .*  
*en realidad mayor de lo que fue nunca Teresa*  
 (JM, Sp., dialogue)  
*Era cuatro años mayor que Daniel* (AM, Mex.)

My brother is older than yours  
 My elder brother  
 She’s already older than her elder sister  
 . . . actually older than Teresa ever was  
 He was four years older than Daniel

*Mayor* is also a euphemism for *viejo*: *una señora mayor* ‘an elderly lady’.

(c) *Mayor* is used to mean ‘greater’ or ‘greatest’: *su mayor éxito* ‘his greatest success’, *el mayor criminal del mundo* ‘the greatest criminal in the world’, *el mayor peligro* ‘the greatest danger’, *su mayor preocupación/alegría* ‘his/her greatest worry/joy’.

(d) Before nouns denoting sizes, intensity, frequency, power or quantity, *mayor* or *más* can be used, with *mayor* considered more elegant: *mayor/más anchura* ‘greater width’, *mayor/más intensidad*, *mayor/más fuerza* ‘greater strength’, *mayor/más potencia* ‘more power’, *mayor/más frecuencia* ‘greater frequency’, *mayor/más peso* ‘more weight’. Further examples:

*Más acentuado será el sabor del ajo, cuanta*  
*mayor cantidad lleve* (cookery book, Sp.)  
*A mayor servicio prestado, mayor dignidad*  
 (El Diario de Hoy, ES)  
*Deseo recibir mayor información*

The greater the quantity it contains, the more  
 pronounced the garlic flavour will be  
 The greater the service done, the greater  
 the dignity  
 I would like to receive more information

In all the examples under (d) *más* is possible and much more usual in relaxed styles.

(e) Before *número* or words and phrases indicating number, *mayor* is obligatory: *en el mayor número de casos* ‘in a greater number of cases’, *mayor índice de mortalidad infantil* ‘a higher rate of infant mortality’, *mayor incidencia de accidentes de tráfico* ‘a higher rate of traffic accidents’, *la mayor parte de las víctimas* ‘the majority of the victims’. Note the agreement of *mucho* in *mucha mayor velocidad* ‘much greater speed’. See 10.12. note 1.

(f) Set phrases: *mayor de edad* ‘of age’, *hacerse mayor* ‘to get old’, *ganado mayor* ‘livestock’ (horses, cows, mules only), *calle mayor* ‘high street’.

(g) *Más grande* can be used as a superlative: *el más grande/el mayor pensador moderno* 'the greatest modern thinker', but not in pejorative statements: *el mayor granuja del país* 'the biggest rogue in the country' (not *el más grande*).

## 6.9 Uses of *menor*

*Menor*, unlike *mayor*, is not used for physical size: *esta habitación es más pequeña que esa/ésa*, not *\*menor que esa/ésa*; *ella es más pequeña de tamaño/más baja* 'she's smaller in size', not *\*menor de tamaño*. However, it can be used for dimensions where English would allow 'less': *el área es menor de lo que parece* 'the area is less/smaller than it looks'. Note also *mi hermano menor/pequeño* 'my younger brother', but *mi hermano es más joven/pequeño que yo* 'my brother is younger than me'. Also *el más pequeño de la familia* 'the youngest in the family', not *\*el menor de la familia*.

\**Lo menor* is also impossible: *lo más pequeño* 'what's smallest' / 'the smallest things'.

*Menor* is used in the same contexts as *mayor* in (b), (c), (d) and (e) in the previous section. Examples:

<i>Diego es tres años menor que Martita y cuatro que Sergio</i> (CRG, Sp.)	Diego is three years younger than Martita and four years younger than Sergio
<i>Virginia era unos meses menor que yo</i> (AM, Mex., dialogue)	Virginia was a few months younger than me
<i>Usted no tendrá la menor dificultad (or mínima or más pequeña)</i>	You won't have the slightest difficulty
<i>El riesgo de un enfrentamiento es cada vez menor</i>	The risk of a confrontation is declining

(1) Common set phrases: *menor de edad* 'under age', *apto para menores* 'suitable for minors/young people', *menores de 18 años* 'under 18 years old'.

## 6.10 *Mucho más, mucho menos, poco más, etc.*

**Important:** before *más*, *menos*, *mayor* and *menor*, when these four words qualify a noun, *mucho* and *poco* are adjectives and must agree in number and gender with the following noun – a point that English-speakers tend to forget: *tienen muchos menos hijos que tú* 'they have far fewer children than you'. See 10.12 note 1 for a discussion.

## 6.11 'The more . . . the more . . .'/ 'the less . . . the less . . .'

*Cuanto más . . . más . . .*, *cuanto menos . . . menos . . .* are the standard formulas on both continents (no accent on *cuanto*):

<i>cuantas más fotos, mejor</i>	the more photos the better
<i>cuantos más chicos vengan, mejor</i>	the more boys who come the better
<i>Cuanto mayor sea la distancia de una galaxia a la Tierra, más deprisa se aleja</i> (Abc, Sp. For <i>deprisa/de prisa</i> see 35.3.1)	The greater the distance of a galaxy from the Earth, the faster it recedes
<i>Cuanto más pensaba más me afligía</i> (JC, Arg., dialogue)	The more I thought, the more upset I got

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(1) Use of *mientras* in this construction is less frequent in Spain but is very common in Latin America. *Contra* is heard in popular speech in many places including Spain but it is stigmatized. *Entre más/menos* is considered correct in Mexico and Central America but is stigmatized elsewhere:

*Mientras más pienses en ella, más tuya la harás* (CF, Mex., dialogue)  
... *la cabeza gacha, entre menos me vea, mejor* (EP, Mex., dialogue)  
*?Aquí, contra menos somos, peor avenidos estamos* (MD, Sp., rural speech)

The more you think of her, the more you will make her yours  
... with my head bowed, the less he sees of me the better  
Here, the fewer of us there are the worse we get on

(2) The NGLE 205j notes but does not recommend a popular tendency in Latin America to make *cuanto* invariable in phrases like *?cuanto más fotos mejor*, for *cuantas más* ...

(3) 'Not so much ... but that ...' may be translated by *tanto ... cuanto*: *no es tanto que entre dos personas ... no haya secretos porque así lo deciden ... cuanto que no es posible dejar de contar ...* (JM, Sp.) 'it's not so much that there are no secrets between two people because they decide that it should be that way, but that it's not possible to avoid telling'.

## 6.12 'More and more ...', 'less and less ...'

*Cada vez más/menos* are the usual Spanish equivalents:

*Está cada vez más delgado*  
*Yo vengo cada dos o tres años y cada vez está peor* (JPG, Cu., dial.)

He's getting thinner and thinner  
I come [to Cuba] every two or three years and it gets worse and worse

## 6.13 Superlative time expressions

A neuter construction with *lo* may be required:

*Lo más tarde que cenamos es a las ocho*  
*Lo antes/Lo más temprano que puedo salir de casa es a la una ...*  
*La boda tenía que ser lo más pronto posible* (ES, Mex., dial)

We have dinner/supper at eight at the latest  
The earliest I can leave home is at one ...  
The wedding had to be as soon as possible

## 6.14 Miscellaneous translations of English comparatives and superlatives

*Todos le interesaban, el párroco no el que menos*  
*Ninguno trabaja mucho, y tú menos que todos*  
*lo menos que podrías hacer ...*  
*Estoy agradecidísimo/muy agradecido*  
*De los dos, este libro es el que más se lee*  
*En esas circunstancias la gastronomía es lo de menos* (MVM, Sp.)

All the men interested her/him, not least the parish priest  
None of them works much, and you least of all  
the least you could do ...  
I'm most/extremely grateful  
Of the two, this book is read more/the most  
In those circumstances gastronomy is the least important part of it

<i>Dale cuanto dinero puedas/Dale todo el dinero que puedas</i>	Give him/her as much money as you can
<i>la mejor solución posible</i>	the best possible solution
<i>el segundo mejor/peor</i>	the second best/worst
<i>la segunda mujer más guapa del mundo</i>	the second most attractive woman in the world
<i>Sabe sacar el mejor partido de todo</i>	(S)he knows how to make the most of everything
<i>Tan duquesa es como mi padre</i>	She's as much a duchess as I am . . . (ironic; lit. 'she's as much a duchess as my father')

## 6.15 Comparisons of equality

### 6.15.1 *Tan como, tanto como*

The formula is *tan . . . como* or *tanto . . . como* 'as . . . as', not *tanto . . . que* which means 'so much that', as in *rio/se rio tanto que por poco revienta* '(s)he laughed so much (s)he nearly burst'. *Tan* is used before adjectives, adverbs and nouns used as adjectives; *tanto* is used before *como* itself, before nouns and when nothing follows:

<i>No soy tan joven como tú</i>	I'm not as young as you
<i>Usted lo sabe tan bien como yo</i> (MVLI, Pe., dialogue)	You know as well as I do
<i>No eres tan hombre como él</i>	You're not as much of a man as he is
<i>No hablo tanto como tú</i>	I don't talk as much as you
<i>Tanto los chicos como las chicas</i>	Both boys and girls

(1) *Tanto como* can also indicate contrasting equality: *trabaja tanto para divertirse como para ganar dinero* '(s)he works as much for amusement as to earn money'. *Tanto . . . cuanto* can be used instead in literary styles. This construction is not used when there is no implied contrast: *Manuel y Teresa trabajan en informática* 'M. and T. work in computing', not *tanto M. como T . . .*

### 6.15.2 *Igual que, lo mismo que, tal como*

These are used to express equality. *Igual que* is used after verbs, not *igual a* (for which see 6.15.3):

<i>Escribe igual que/lo mismo que tú</i> (not <i>*igual como, *lo mismo como</i> )	(S)he writes the same way as you
<i>Me trató igual que siempre</i> (GGM, Col.)	She treated me the same as always

(1) Comparison of equality with verb phrases can also be expressed by the formula *del mismo modo que/de la misma manera que/de igual modo que/de igual manera que*: *argüía de la misma manera que muchos filósofos de la época* '(s)he argued in the same way as many philosophers of the day'.

(2) *Diferente, distintos*: *es diferente del que tú tienes* 'it's different to/from the one you have', *esta silla es diferente de la otra* 'this chair's different to/from the other', *es diferente/distinto a ti* 'he's different to/from you'. The construction *diferente a* is found in Latin America and is heard in Spain, although Seco (1998), 164, says it is uncommon in educated usage in European Spanish. *Diverso* takes *de* in Spain, either *de* or *a* in Latin America.

(3) Note the following translations of 'exactly/just as . . .': *lo hice tal como me lo dijiste/lo hice exactamente como me lo dijiste* 'I did it just as you told me to/exactly as you told me'.



### 6.15.3 *Igual* or *igualmente*?

*Igualmente* means ‘equally’, but *igual*, as well as being an adjective meaning ‘equal’, is an invariable adverb in its own right meaning ‘the same’. Compare *otros problemas igualmente difíciles* ‘other equally difficult problems’ and *una bata que le caía igual que hecha a medida* (LG, Sp.) ‘a housecoat that fitted her exactly as if made to measure’. Further examples:

<i>Cuando te conozcan sabrán apreciarte igual que yo</i> (LO, Cu., dialogue)	When they get to know you they’ll value you the same way as I do
<i>Eres igual a tu padre</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue)	You’re just like your father
<i>Es igual que tú</i> (also <i>igual a ti</i> )/ <i>Es lo mismo que tú</i>	(S)he’s the same as you
<i>Tú eres igualmente delgado/Tú eres igual de delgado</i>	You’re just as slim
<i>Lo hace igual de bien que tú</i>	(S)he does it as well as you

(1) Latin-American colloquial, but not formal styles, tend to make the adverb *igual* agree in number: *son iguales de grandes* for *son igual de grandes* ‘they’re equally large’.

(2) In Spain, *igual* may be used colloquially to mean ‘maybe’ (i.e. the same as *quizá*, *tal vez* or *a lo mejor*). See 20.2.4.

### 6.15.4 *Como para* . . .

*Como para* (or simply *para*) is used after *bastante* and *lo suficiente*, as in *eBay ha vendido suficientes automóviles como para rodear la luna más de cuatro veces* (Excélsior, Mex.) ‘eBay has sold enough cars to go round the Moon more than four times’.

# 7 Demonstrative adjectives and pronouns

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- Forms of the demonstratives (Section 7.1)
- The position of demonstrative adjectives (Section 7.2)
- When should one write demonstrative with an accent? (Section 7.3)
- The difference between *este/ese/aquel* and *éste/ése/aquél* (Section 7.4)
- Uses of *aquel* (Section 7.4.2)
- Translating 'the former' and 'the latter' (Section 7.4.3)
- Some translation problems involving demonstratives (Section 7.5)

Demonstrative adjectives and pronouns are those that mean 'this', 'that', 'these', 'those'.

Spanish differs from French, German and English in having two words for 'that', *ese* and *aquel*, depending on the distance in time or space between the speaker and the thing referred to. The demonstratives have neuter forms, *esto*, *eso* and *aquello*, which are discussed separately in Chapter 8, though it is worth repeating here that these should not be used to refer to people: *este/éste es mi nuevo profesor*, not *\*esto es mi nuevo profesor* 'this is my new teacher'.

## 7.1 Forms of demonstrative adjectives and pronouns

	this	that (near)	that (far)
<b>masculine</b>	<i>este</i>	<i>ese</i>	<i>aquel</i>
<b>feminine</b>	<i>esta</i>	<i>esa</i>	<i>aquella</i>
<b>neuter</b>	<i>esto</i>	<i>eso</i>	<i>aquello</i>
	these	those (near)	those (far)
<b>masculine</b>	<i>estos</i>	<i>esos</i>	<i>aquellos</i>
<b>feminine</b>	<i>estas</i>	<i>esas</i>	<i>aquellas</i>

(1) See 7.3 for when to write these with an accent.

(2) **Important:** the masculine singular forms do not end in -o!

(3) *Esta*, *esa* and *aquella* should be used before feminine nouns beginning with stressed *a-* or *ha-*: *esta agua* 'this water', *esa aula* 'that lecture hall', *aquella haya* 'that beech tree over there' (see 3.1.2 for a list of these nouns). This is the practice of well-edited texts everywhere, but forms like *este arma* 'this weapon', *este área* 'this area' are very common in spontaneous speech and quite often appear in informal writing.

(4) In Latin America *este* is used and abused like the English 'er ...' to fill pauses while the speaker is thinking.

(5) When two or more nouns are involved, the demonstratives are repeated unless the nouns refer to the same thing: *este hombre y esta mujer* ‘this man and (this) woman’ but *este poeta y filósofo* ‘this poet and philosopher’ (same man).

## 7.2 Position of demonstrative adjectives

Normally before the noun: *esta miel* ‘this honey’, *ese árbol* ‘that tree’, *aquellas regiones* ‘those regions’. In spoken language they may appear after the noun, in which case they strongly imply that the thing referred to is familiar. This may imply sarcasm and the construction should be used cautiously. Compare *esa mujer* ‘that woman’ (neutral tone) and *la mujer esa* ‘that woman . . .’ (sarcastic or insinuating). Nevertheless, the construction may simply indicate a reference to something well-known, as in *¿quiere la bata esta?* *Se va a enfriar* (CMG, Sp., dialogue) ‘do you want this dressing gown/US bathrobe? You’ll get cold’. Further examples:

*Pero con la agencia esa que ha montado, se  
está forrando el riñón* (ABV, Sp., dialogue)

*El tipo ese anda ya muy cerca de nuestra pista*  
(GZ, Mex., dialogue)

*Me voy de aquí, no resisto el frío este*  
(interview, Granma, Cu.)

*. . . desde la tarde aquella en que me ayudaron  
a llenar los formularios de ingreso a la  
seguridad social* (ABE, Pe., Sp. *rellenar un  
formulario*)

But with that agency he’s set up, he’s  
simply raking it in

That guy’s already hot on our trail

I’m leaving. I can’t stand this cold (i.e.  
New York’s)

. . . after that afternoon when they  
helped me fill in my Social Security  
application forms

(1) **Important:** *el/la/los/las* are obligatory when a demonstrative adjective follows the noun: *la gente aquella*.

(2) The demonstrative after a noun remains an adjective, so it is not written with an accent: never *\*la gente aquélla*. In apposition (see Glossary), a following demonstrative is a pronoun: *su novia tosía mucho, síntoma este/éste que le preocupaba intensamente* ‘his girlfriend was coughing a lot, this being a symptom that worried him intensely’, so traditionalists would use an accent. See the next section for the optional accent on *éste*.

## 7.3 When should one write *éste, ése, aquél*?

Our recommendation is *never*. This has been the advice of the Academy since 1959, reaffirmed in 2010, and it is supported by most well-known Hispanic grammarians, including Seco.

But many reputable publishers, including *El País*, and millions of ordinary citizens still refuse to accept this time-saving rule and continue to distinguish the adjectives from the pronouns by always writing the latter with an accent: *un libro como éste/ése/aquél* ‘a book like this one/that one’, *prefiero éstas a aquellas* ‘I prefer these ones (fem.) to those ones’.

In this book, we show both possibilities, e.g. *un libro como ese/ése* ‘a book like that one’, but we strongly urge students to omit the accent, since misusing it on a demonstrative adjective and writing *\*éste libro* for *este libro* looks illiterate.

(1) There is an inconsistency in the traditional system. It has always been the practice, even among conservative writers, to omit the accent from demonstrative pronouns that are the antecedent of a relative clause or act as nominalizers (*aquel que, este de*, etc. (See Glossary for the terminology); the reason for this is not entirely clear. So one writes *esta novela es mejor que aquella en*

*que* . . . ‘this novel is better than that in which . . .’, *este/ese que* . . . ‘this/that one that . . .’, *aquel de ayer* . . . ‘the one from yesterday . . .’, etc.

(2) Omitting the accent can theoretically cause ambiguities like *esta compra* ‘this purchase’ and *ésta compra* ‘this woman is buying’, but in practice such clashes are rare enough to be ignored or are clarified by context.

(3) Traditionalists should recall that other languages do not need to differentiate demonstrative adjectives and pronouns: cf. Italian *questo libro* ‘this book’, *un libro come questo* ‘a book like this’, Spanish traditional spelling *este libro/un libro como éste*.

## 7.4 Uses of *este*, *ese* and *aquel*

### 7.4.1 Uses of the demonstrative adjectives/pronouns

(a) *Este/esta/estos/estas* refers to things near to or associated with the speaker and is equivalent to ‘this’: *este libro* ‘this book’, *estos arbustos* ‘these bushes’, *esta catástrofe* ‘this catastrophe (that has just happened)’, *estas circunstancias* ‘these circumstances (that have just arisen/that we are talking about here)’.

(b) As far as physical distance is concerned, *ese/esa/esos/esas* means ‘that’: *ese libro* ‘that book’, *esos árboles* ‘those trees’. It can refer to objects at any distance from the speaker and can therefore in practice always replace *aquel* when space rather than time is involved. But *aquel* cannot always replace *ese* since *aquel* is not used for things close to the hearer or speaker.

(c) *Aquel/aquella/aquellos/aquellas* resembles the old English ‘yonder’ or the modern ‘that/those over there’. Spatially it suggests distance and it is rarely obligatory. It is discussed in detail at 7.4.2.

<i>este/éste de aquí</i>	this one here
<i>ese/ése de ahí</i>	that one just there
<i>aquel/aquél de allí</i> (see 35.6.1 for the difference between <i>ahí</i> and <i>allí</i> ).	that one over there
<i>no ese/ése sino aquel/aquél</i>	not that one, but that one over there
<i>Alcánzame ese/aquel libro rojo</i>	Pass me that red book
<i>Prefiero ese que tú tienes</i>	I prefer that one (masc.) that you have
<i>En aquel tiempo era un acontecimiento cumplir los quince, de veras entraba una en sociedad</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue)	In those days your fifteenth birthday was an event, you were really entering society
<i>¿Cómo se llama aquella/esa estrella?</i>	what’s that star (up there) called?
<i>¿Quién se acuerda ya de aquellas tardes sin televisión?</i>	who can still remember those evenings without television?

### 7.4.2 *Aquel* or *ese*?

*Aquel* seems to be dying out when it refers to distance in space rather than time: some grammarians complain about a tendency to use *ese* where *aquel* is more elegant. For this reason, learners, when in doubt, should probably translate ‘that’ as *ese* as it is almost always correct. *Aquel* is used:

(a) **When distances in space are compared**, *aquel* implies the more distant item, and it is usual:

—¿Quién plantó ese árbol?	‘Who planted that tree?’
—¿Ese/Ése? —No, aquel/aquél	‘That one?’ ‘No, the one behind’
No esa torre sino aquella/aquella	Not that tower but the one further away

Even in these cases *ese*, perhaps reinforced by some phrase like *ese/ése de detrás* or *ese de más allá*, could have been used.

(b) **When only one item is involved**, it is optionally but usually used to indicate something at some distance from the speaker. The difference between *ese libro* and *aquel libro* is about the same as between ‘that book’ and ‘that book over there’:

<i>Tráeme aquella/esa taza</i>	Bring me that cup (from over there)
<i>¿Ve a aquel hombre que está tragando ron? (EM, Mex. dial. Or ese)</i>	Do you see that man (over) there swallowing rum?

(c) **As far as time is concerned**, *aquel* indicates the past and it is much used for distant memories. *En aquella época* ‘at that time’ seems more distant than *en esa época*. Once an event in the past has been mentioned, *ese* can be used in subsequent references to it:

<i>Debe de haber andado ya por los sesenta años cuando se embarcó con aquel horror de mujer (SP, Mex., dialogue; ese would imply that he is still with her)</i>	He must have been getting on for sixty when he fell in with (lit. ‘set sail with’) that frightful woman
<i>Quise llorar aquella noche pero no pude (CSG, Mex., dialogue)</i>	I wanted to weep that night but I couldn’t
<i>... aquellas estrellas como un hielo hecho añicos (LG, Sp. Aquellas for a childhood memory)</i>	... those stars like shattered ice
<i>¡qué noche aquella/aquella!</i>	What a night that was!
<i>¡qué tiempos aquellos/aquéllos! (not esos/ésos)</i>	Those were the days!

(1) *Aquel* cannot be used for the future: *ese lejano día* can mean ‘that distant day yet to come’. *Aquel lejano día* refers to the past.

(2) *Aquel que* (no written accent) is used and not *el que* when a preposition plus a relative pronoun follows (as in ‘the one in which . . .’ *aquel/aquella en el que/la que*, not *\*el/la en el/la que*). See 7.5c and 39.13 for discussion.

(3) *Aquel* should not be used with a historic present since it is absurd to stress both the remoteness and the closeness of an action: not *\*en aquel año Cervantes escribe el Quijote* ‘in that year Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote*’ but either *en ese año Cervantes escribe el Quijote*, or *en aquel año Cervantes escribió el Quijote*.

(4) For the neuter pronoun *aquello* see 8.5.

### 7.4.3 ‘The former, the latter’

Since *aquel/aquél* denotes something remote and *este/éste* something close, they conveniently translate ‘former’ and ‘latter’:

<i>Existían dos partidos, el conservador y el liberal, este/éste anticlerical y aquel/aquél partidario de la Iglesia</i>	There were two parties, the conservatives and the liberals, the latter anticlerical and the former a supporter of the Church
--	--

(1) *Este/éste* is much used in writing on its own for ‘the latter’: *uno de los guardaespaldas se inclinó hacia el inválido, y este/éste dirigía el brillo de sus gafas oscuras hacia Ornella (LS, Ch.)* ‘one of the

bodyguards leaned over to the invalid, and the latter directed the glint of his sunglasses towards Ornella'.

## 7.5 Translation problems involving demonstratives

(a) 'The . . . which/who', 'those . . . who', etc.

*El que* or *quien* are the usual equivalents. *Aquel que* (no accent) is used in formal language: *que se ponga de pie la que* (or *aquella que*) *ha dicho eso* 'stand up the girl who said that', etc. See Chapter 40 (Nominalizers) for discussion.

(b) 'Those of them', 'those of you', etc. *Aquellos de* is frowned on, except perhaps before *ustedes* or *vosotros*:

*Los que aplaudieron ayer*  
*Los nicaragüenses que sabemos la verdad*

Those of them who applauded yesterday  
those of us Nicaraguans who know the  
truth

*Aquellos de (entre) ustedes que afirmen eso*  
*Los que no hayan firmado el formulario*  
(\**los de ellos* or \**aquellos de ellos* in this  
context are not Spanish)

those of you who claim that  
those (of them/you) who haven't signed  
the form

(c) 'The one in which', 'those where', etc.

*Aquel que*, written without an accent, is a literary alternative for *el que* when a preposition comes before a relative pronoun. One writes *la habitación era más cómoda que aquella en que había dormido antes* 'the room was more comfortable than the one he had slept in before'. Spoken language usually repeats the noun: *la habitación era más cómoda que la habitación en la que/donde había dormido antes*; \**en la en (la) que* is not possible. See also 39.13.

(d) 'This/that is why . . .', 'this/that is where', 'this/that's who', 'this/that was when', etc. Translating these phrases may involve the problem of 'cleft' sentences, e.g. *fue por eso por lo que pagó demasiado* (Lat. Am. *fue por eso que pagó . . .*) 'that's why he paid too much'. See 41.3 for a discussion. A simpler solution is *por eso pagó demasiado . . .*

# 8 Neuter article and neuter pronouns

This chapter discusses:

- *lo bueno, lo más rápido posible* (Section 8.2.1)
- *lo inteligentes que son . . .* (Section 8.2.2)
- *ello* (Section 8.3)
- Neuter *lo* as in *no lo sé* (Section 8.4)
- *vérselas, arreglárselas*, etc. (Section 8.4.4)
- *esto, eso, aquello* (Section 8.5)

## 8.1 Neuter gender: general

Spanish nouns are either masculine or feminine, but a few pronouns and an article have neuter as well as masculine and feminine gender and they are important in the modern language.

Neuter gender is considered necessary in Spanish to refer to concepts, ideas or statements (e.g. a preceding remark or a sentence) which have no grammatical gender. Masculine and feminine articles and pronouns can refer only to nouns or pronouns, present or implied, and nouns and pronouns other than neuter pronouns must be either masculine or feminine. Examples should make this clear:

*No quiero hablar de aquel/aquél/aquella/  
aquélla* (for the optional accent on these  
pronouns see 7.3)  
*No quiero hablar de aquello*  
*No me gusta ese/ése/esa/ésa*  
*No me gusta eso*  
*los nuevos/las nuevas*  
*lo nuevo*

I don't want to talk about that one  
(i.e. some masculine or feminine noun.  
French *celui-là/celle-là*)  
I don't want to talk about **that** (Fr. *cela*)  
I don't like that one (Fr. *celui-là/celle-là*)  
I don't like that (Fr. *cela*)  
the new ones (masc.)/the new ones (fem.)  
what is new

For *lo que, lo cual* as relative pronouns (meaning 'which . . .'), see 39.6. For *lo que* and *lo de* as nominalizers (i.e. 'the thing that/of . . .'), see 40.1.5 and 40.1.3. For the humorous *la que . . .* for *lo que . . .* see 40.1.4. For the colloquial *la de* meaning 'the quantity of . . .' see 3.2.30. For the neuter pronouns *todo* 'everything', *algo* 'something', *mucho* 'a lot' and *poco* 'a little' see Chapter 10.

## 8.2 The 'neuter article' *lo*

### 8.2.1 *Lo* with masculine singular adjectives and participles and adverbs

(a) With adjectives and participles:

*Lo* followed by a masculine singular adjective or pronoun, or *lo de . . . plus* a noun or adverb, may become a sort of abstract noun. This is often an equivalent of an English adjective + 'thing', but the translation may require some thought:

*Lo importante es que digan la verdad*  
*Lo bueno de tu casa es que tiene*  
*mucha luz*  
*Para lo único que encontraba tiempo*  
*era para los tres caballos (EP, Mex.)*  
*Intenta olvidar lo sucedido*  
*en busca de lo más parecido a un local comercial*  
*(CP, Arg.)*  
*lo ya dicho en el capítulo anterior*  
*lo nunca visto en Estados Unidos*  
*desde lo alto de la escala de Jacob (AO, Mex.)*  
*Papá se ha enterado de lo nuestro*  
*Lo mío ha sido igual de duro que*  
*lo de ustedes (GGM, Col., dialogue)*  
*Felicitas había estudiado lo justo (SP, Sp.)*

*Baja lo de allí arriba*  
*Ya te contaré lo de mi amiga Josefina*

The important thing is that they tell the truth  
 The good thing about your house is that it's  
 full of light  
 The only thing he found time for was  
 the three horses  
 Try to forget what happened  
 in search of something most closely  
 resembling commercial premises  
 what was said in the previous chapter  
 what has never been seen before in the USA  
 from the top of Jacob's ladder  
 Father has found out about us  
 What happened to me was as tough as  
 what happened to you  
 Felicitas had studied just as much as was  
 necessary  
 Take down the things from up there  
 I'll tell you later about (what happened to)  
 my friend Josefina

(b) With adverbs or adverbial phrases:

Combinations of *lo* + *más/menos* + an adverb + some phrase meaning 'as possible' are particularly common and useful:

*Cuélgalo lo más arriba que puedas*  
*lo más atrás posible*  
*lo antes posible . . .*  
*Lo antes que puedo salir de casa es a las seis*  
*Siempre hacen lo menos posible*

Hang it as high/as far up as you can  
 as far back as possible  
 as soon as possible . . .  
 The earliest I can leave home is six o'clock  
 They always do the minimum

(1) *En/a lo de Antonio* means 'in/to Antonio's house' (*en/a casa de . . .*) in Argentina.

(2) In sentences with *ser* and a few other verbs, the verb agrees with the predicate: *lo mejor de la película son los actores* (not . . . *es los actores*) 'the best thing in the film is (lit. 'are') the actors': see 2.3.3.

(3) Other Romance languages lack this useful distinction between gendered and neuter adjectives. In French *le plus tragique* can mean both 'the most tragic thing' and 'the most tragic one (masc.)'. The Italian *il bello e il brutto* can mean 'beauty and ugliness' (*lo bello y lo feo*) or 'the beautiful one (masc.) and the ugly one' (*el bello y el feo*).

(4) For the choice between the indicative and the subjunctive in constructions with *lo* + adjective + *es que*, e.g. *lo increíble/lo curioso es que . . .*, see 20.3.14.

(5) *Lo* is sometimes found with a noun used adjectivally: *pues sí, Diego, ya sabes lo desastre que soy* (CMG, Sp., dialogue) 'well yes, Diego, you know what a disaster I am', *ya te salió lo mujer* (AM, Mex., dialogue) 'here comes the woman in you' (lit. 'the woman in you came out'), *uno de mis tíos dio un discurso sobre lo buen hermano que fue mi padre* (DES, Mex.) 'one of my uncles made a speech about what a good brother my father was'.

(6) When *bastante* and *suficiente* occur in phrases like 'clever enough to . . .', 'she did it well enough to . . .' they are preceded by *lo* and followed by *para*: *el cuello de su gabardina estaba lo bastante abierto para permitirme contemplar el collar de perlas* (JM, Sp.) 'the collar of her raincoat was open enough to



let me see her pearl necklace', *ya tenía lo suficiente para aquellos paseos* (SG, Mex.) 'he already had enough (money) for those excursions'. *Como* may optionally precede the *para*, especially when an infinitive follows: *era lo suficientemente ingenua como para tragarse cualquier cuento* (LS, Ch.) 'she was naive enough to swallow any story'.

### 8.2.2 *Lo plus* adjectives or adverbs translating 'how', etc.

*Lo* with an adjective or adverb often translates the English 'how' or some similar word plus an adjective or adverb. In this case the adjective must agree with the noun. The construction often occurs after verbs of perception ('see', 'realize', 'understand', 'know') and after verbs of liking or disliking:

#### (a) with adjectives:

*¿No se ha fijado en lo delgada que se ha quedado?* (ABV, Sp., dialogue)  
*Lo que resulta increíble es lo modernos y antiguos que son al mismo tiempo* (ABE, Pe)  
*Ya se sabe lo curiosos que somos los periodistas* (JV, Mex., dial.)

Haven't you noticed how thin she's become?  
 What's incredible is how modern and ancient they are at the same time  
 People know how curious we journalists are

#### (b) with adverbs and adverbial phrases

*Yo llegué confiando en lo bien que lo iba a pasar*  
*Haga que hablen de usted por lo bien que habla inglés* (advertisement, Sp.)  
*Si vieras lo mal que patina*  
*Hay que ver lo tarde que es*

I arrived sure of what a good time I was going to have  
 Get them talking about you because you speak English so well  
 If you could see how badly (s)he skates  
 I can't believe how late it is (lit. 'you have to see how late it is')

(1) A common colloquial construction is *con lo* + adjective. Translation varies with context: *¿con lo caro que está todo qué me voy a andar comprando un reloj?* (EM, Mex., dialogue. Spain probably *¿con lo caro que está todo me iba yo a comprar un reloj?*) 'with everything costing so much am I going to be buying a watch?', *tú, con lo inteligente que eres, a ver si lo puedes abrir* 'you're so intelligent, let's see if you can open it', . . . *con lo metomentado que es* ' . . . since (s)he's such a nosy-parker'.

(2) *De lo más* + an adjective is found in familiar speech as an intensifying phrase: *viene de lo más arregladita* 'she's coming all dressed up', *tomaban su cerveza de lo más tranquilos* (MVLL, Pe., dialogue) 'they were drinking their beer really quietly', *hice un pudín de pan. Mi marido me dijo que estaba de lo más bueno* (AA, Cu., dialogue) 'I made a bread pudding. My husband said it was really delicious'.

The adjective may remain in the masculine singular form in this construction, e.g. *Lucía viene de lo más arreglado* 'Lucy's coming all dressed up', *las chicas vienen de lo más arreglado* 'the girls are coming all dressed up', *estos dos son de lo más diplomático* (MS, Mex., dialogue) 'these two are so diplomatic'.

(3) In expressions of cause *por* or *de* can be used before *lo* + adjective: *no pudieron pasar por lo gordos que estaban*/. . . *de (lo) gordos que estaban* 'they couldn't get through because they were so fat'.

## 8.3 *Ello*

This is a neuter third-person pronoun. It is invariable in form and can only be used to translate ‘it’ when this pronoun does not refer to a specific noun. Compare *en cuanto al régimen militar, prefiero no hablar de él* ‘as for the military regime, I prefer not to talk about it’ (*régimen* is masculine singular) and *todo fue tremendamente violento, y prefiero no hablar de ello* ‘it was all tremendously embarrassing, and I prefer not to talk about it’ (neuter).

*Ello* can be used as a subject pronoun or it can be combined with a preposition, but *lo* is its direct object form and *le* its indirect object form: *yo lo sabía* = ‘I knew it’, never \**yo sabía ello*; *¿qué le vamos a hacer?* (indirect object) ‘what can we do about it?’ (not \*... *a ello*)

*No te preocupes por ello, que no se me olvida*  
(see 37.4.4b for this use of *que*)  
*Por ello ya no se fía de nadie*

Don’t worry about it – I haven’t  
forgotten it (or ‘I won’t forget’)  
Because of that (s)he doesn’t trust  
anybody any more

*Las cosas que no importan no se entienden*  
*porque no se pone uno a ello* (CMG, Sp.)

Things that don’t matter aren’t  
understood because we don’t  
apply our minds to it

*Yo era un autómatas del trabajo y de la escuela*  
*y fuera de ello nada me interesaba* (EP, Mex.)

I thought of nothing but work and school  
(lit. ‘I was an automaton of . . .’) and apart  
from that nothing interested me

(1) When it is the subject of a verb it is usually translated ‘this’ and it clearly refers to the whole of the preceding utterance (*esto* could often be used instead).

*Habité un siglo en la Ciudad de los*  
*Inmortales. Cuando la derribaron,*  
*aconsejó la fundación de otra. Ello no debe*  
*sorprendernos . . .* (JLB, Arg.)

He dwelt for a century in the City of the  
Immortals. When they demolished it  
he recommended the foundation of  
another. This should not surprise us . . .

(2) **Important:** if *ello* is omitted in such sentences, the following verb will take a nearby gendered noun or pronoun as its subject and the meaning may change: *el director dijo que no vamos excedidos con el presupuesto, pero ello no permite que podamos ser extravagantes* ‘the director said that we’re not over-budget, but **this fact** does not allow us to be extravagant’. . . . *pero no permite que seamos extravagantes* would mean ‘. . . but **he** doesn’t allow us to be extravagant’.

## 8.4 *Lo* as a neuter pronoun

### 8.4.1 General uses

As was stated in the preceding section, *lo* is the direct object pronoun corresponding to *ello* (but *lo* can also mean ‘him’ or ‘it’ referring to masculine nouns; see Chapter 14).

*Lo* as a neuter pronoun does not refer to a noun, but to an idea, action, situation, clause or sentence:

*¿Lo hacemos o no?*  
—*¿No sabíais/sabían que estaba prohibido?*  
—*No, no lo sabíamos*

Are we going to do it or not?  
‘Didn’t you know it was forbidden?’  
‘No, we didn’t know (it)’

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*Soy incapaz de hacer eso porque mi orgullo  
de trabajadora femenina me lo impide  
(CMG, Sp.)  
El ministro lo tiene difícil*

I'm incapable of doing that because  
my pride as a woman worker  
prevents me  
The minister is in a difficult situation

(1) *Lo* is the indirect object form of *lo*: *¿qué le vamos a hacer?* 'what can be done about it?', *no le hace* (Southern Cone) 'it's got nothing to do with it' (Sp. *no tiene (nada) que ver*).

(2) *Lo* is sometimes used with *todo* to make the latter more specific. Compare *Miguel lo sabe todo* 'Miguel knows it all/all about it' and *Miguel sabe todo* 'Miguel knows everything'.

(3) For Latin-American *se los dije* 'I said it to them', standard Spanish *se lo dije*, see 14.9.2.

### 8.4.2 'Resumptive' *lo*

**Important:** *lo* is used to echo or resume the predicate of *ser*, *estar* and *parecer*, the object of transitive verbs and of *haber* 'there is/are'. Spanish does not like to leave these verbs isolated, as English does in a sentence like *¿tolera estar solo, o tolera la necesidad que tenga su cónyuge de estarlo?* (quiz on marriage in *Abc*, Sp.) 'can you stand being alone, or can you stand your partner's need to be?'. Compare also *lo hacían sentirse estúpido*. *Pensó: "lo soy"*. *Lo era, demostró serlo* (MVLl, Pe., dialogue) 'they made him feel stupid. He thought "I am." He was. He'd shown that he was'; . . . *era hermosa como yo no lo sería nunca* 'she was beautiful in a way that I would never be' (LP, Mex., dialogue), *puede que tengan sus neuronas en pleno funcionamiento, pero no lo parece* (*La Jornada*, Mex.) 'maybe their neurones are working flat-out, but it doesn't look that way'.

**Exception:** this 'resumptive' *lo* is not used when a gerund is dropped after *estar*: —*¿estás escribiendo otra novela?* —*Sí, estoy/Sí, lo estoy haciendo* (not \**lo estoy*) 'are you writing another novel?' 'Yes, I am.'

(1) See 34.2.2 for more about resumptive *lo* with *haber* 'there is/are'.

### 8.4.3 Colloquial use of *la* for *lo*

*La* is used in a few colloquial set phrases where one would expect *lo*. This seems to be more frequent in Latin America than in Spain: *la vamos a pasar muy rico* (SG, Mex., dialogue; Sp. *lo vamos a pasar bien*) 'we're going to have a great time', *si los matan la pagarán también ustedes, la pagarán sus familias* (GGM, Col., dialogue; Sp. *lo pagarán*), 'if they kill them you'll pay for it too, your families will pay', *te la estás jugando* 'you're taking a big risk' (Spain also), *se la está pegando con su primo* '(s)he's cheating on him with her/his/your cousin' (Spain also), *te la vas a ganar* 'you're asking for trouble'.

### 8.4.4 *Vérselas, arreglárselas, habérselas*, etc.

The feminine plural *las* is used idiomatically with a few *se* verbs where we would expect *lo*. Some of these verbs have unexpected meanings. The most common are:

*agenciárselas* to 'fix' ('something')  
*apañárselas\** to manage/to cope  
*arreglárselas* to find a way to do something  
*cantárselas* to tell someone a few home truths  
*dárselas de* to fancy oneself as  
*echárselas de* to fancy oneself as  
*entendérselas con* to get to grips with  
*habérselas con* to be faced with

*ingeniárselas para* to manage things so that  
*jugárselas* to risk everything  
*prometérselas muy felices* to have high hopes  
*traérselas* to be difficult/treacherous  
*vérselas con* to have it out with  
*vérselas y deseárselas\** to find something difficult

**(2) Important:** in some sentences the pronoun can refer either to a situation or to a specific noun, in which case the neuter and gendered forms are interchangeable: *no tengo ni talento, ni fuerza. Esa/Ésa es la verdad* (ES, Arg., dialogue; *eso* also possible) ‘I have neither talent nor strength. That’s the truth’; *esto es una operación militar* (GGM, Col., dialogue. *Esta/ésta es . . .* also possible) ‘this is a military operation’. Note also: *¿qué es esto?* ‘what’s this?’, *¿quién es este/éste?* ‘who’s this (man or boy)?’, *este/éste es el problema* ‘this is the problem’, *esto es un problema* ‘this is a problem’.

When the subject of the verb is a noun, the pronoun agrees with it: *la verdad es esta/ésta* ‘the truth is this’, *los problemas son estos/éstos* ‘the problems are these’.

**(3)** The neuter forms should not be used to refer to living things. One says *esta/ésta es la mujer/la esposa de Miguel* ‘this is Miguel’s wife’, not *esto es . . .*; *ese/ése es el perro del vecino* ‘that’s the neighbour’s dog’, not ‘*eso es . . .*’ (= ‘that thing is . . .’). But *esto es el móvil de mi hijo* ‘this is my son’s mobile phone/cell phone’. The neuter form is insulting when applied to a person: *si esto es un marido que venga Dios y lo vea* ‘if this (thing) is a husband, let God come and see it!’ (exasperated wife).

**(4)** *Aquello de (que)* or *eso de (que)* often corresponds to ‘the saying that’: *Spengler dijo aquello de que “la civilización en última instancia siempre es salvada por un puñado de soldados”* ‘Spengler made that remark that “in the final instance civilization is always saved by a handful of soldiers”’, *pensé que lo más parecido que existe a eso de ir por lana y volver trasquilado era . . .* (ABE, Pe.) ‘I thought that the nearest thing to that saying “to go for wool and come back fleeced” was . . .’.

*Esto de que* also has a similar meaning: *. . . pero esto de que ha ganado cinco mil euros, no lo creo* ‘but as for him/her saying (s)he’s won five thousand euros, that I don’t believe . . .’.

All are in use on both continents except those marked with an asterisk, which seem to be confined to Spain. Examples:

*Si haces eso te las vas a tener que haber  
conmigo or te las vas a tener que ver conmigo  
Él se las echa/se las da de ligón (colloquial,  
Spain)*

*Eso me pasó por dárme las de genio  
(GGM, Col., dialogue)*

*A pesar del susto se las arregló para dejarles una  
azucarera y una jarrita con leche en el centro  
de la mesa (MS, Mex.)*

*Tenía que ingeniárselas para mantener  
ocupados a sus guardianes (GGM, Col.)*

*Por eso te digo que ella también se las trae  
(CRG, Sp., dialogue)*

*La Policía se las ve y se las desea para  
controlarlos*

If you do that you're going to have to  
have it out with/face up to me  
He fancies himself as a great womanizer

That happened to me because I  
figured I was a genius

Despite the fright he managed to leave them  
a sugar bowl and a small jug of milk in the  
middle of the table

She had to do her best to keep her  
guards occupied

That's why I'm telling you that she's  
difficult too

The police have a hard time controlling them

(1) The first-person present plural of *habérselas* is *nos las habemos*, not the expected *nos las hemos*: *en don Luis nos las habemos nuevamente con el Hombre y la Mujer* (J. Montesinos, Sp., quoted Seco 1998, 237) 'in Don Luis we are dealing once again with Man and Woman'.

## 8.5 Neuter demonstrative pronouns

These take the invariable forms *esto*, *eso* and *aquello*. Since they cannot be confused with demonstrative adjectives they *never* have a written accent – something that both learners and native speakers constantly forget. They refer to no noun in particular (cf. Fr. *ceci, cela*).

The difference between *esto* 'this', *eso* 'that' and *aquello* 'that' (distant) reflects the difference between *este*, *ese* and *aquel*, discussed at 7.4:

*¿Quién ha hecho esto?*

—*Quisiera llamar a cobro revertido.*

—*De eso nada*

*Había comprendido cómo todo aquello jamás  
tuvo nada que ver con el humor ni con el  
buen humor (ABE, Pe.)*

*¿Qué hay de aquello/eso de los billetes falsos?*

*¿Conocía el significado de aquello? (JV, Mex.)*

*¿Cómo podía yo pensar que aquello que  
parecía tan mentira era verdadero?  
(JC, Arg., dialogue)*

Who did this?

'I'd like to make a reverse-charge/US  
collect call.' 'No way/out of the question'

I had understood how all that never  
had anything to do with humour  
or good temper

What's happening about that business  
of the forged notes?

Did he know the meaning of that business?

How could I think that that thing  
which seemed such a lie was true?

(1) **Important:** the difference between a neuter or non-neuter demonstrative may be crucial. Compare *esto es un desastre* 'this (situation) is a disaster' and *este/éste es un desastre* – 'this (man, boy, book or some other masc. noun) is a disaster'. If the speaker is thinking of a specific noun, the masculine or feminine pronoun must be used as appropriate unless the speaker is referring to a *type* of thing. Pointing to a coat in a shop window one could say *eso es lo que quiero* 'that's the (type/sort of) thing I want' or *ese/ése es el que quiero* 'that's the *one* I want'.

# 9 Possessive adjectives and pronouns

This chapter deals with words meaning ‘my’, ‘your’, ‘his’, ‘her’, ‘our’, ‘their’; ‘mine’, ‘yours’, etc.

The main points discussed are:

- Forms of possessive adjectives and pronouns (Section 9.2)
- Uses of *mi*, *tu*, *su*, *nuestro*, *vuestro*, *su* (Section 9.3)
- Replacement of possessive adjectives by *el/la/los/las* (Section 9.3.4)
- Uses of *mío*, *tuyo*, *suyo* (Section 9.4)
- *Detrás mío*, *delante suyo* for *detrás de mí*, *delante de él/ella/usted* (Section 9.7)

## 9.1 General

Spanish possessives have two forms. The short forms, *mi*, *tu* (no accents!), *su*, etc., appear in front of a noun or noun phrase and correspond to the English ‘my’, ‘your’, ‘his’, ‘her’, etc. The full forms, *mío*, *tuyo*, *suyo*, etc. roughly correspond to ‘mine’, ‘yours’, ‘hers’, etc., and can only follow a noun or stand alone.

In all cases, the possessive agrees with the number and in some cases the gender of the thing possessed, not of the possessor.

Since the possessives do not in themselves indicate the gender of the possessor, *su libro* can mean ‘his book’, ‘her book’, ‘your book’ (*de usted* or *de ustedes*) or ‘their book’.

The most important difference between English and Spanish is that the latter frequently uses the definite article (*el/la/los/las*) and not a possessive adjective when the identity of the possessor is obvious: *me he roto el brazo* ‘I’ve broken my arm’, *dame la mano* ‘give me your hand’ (see 9.3.4). This occurs more frequently than in French and it sometimes confuses English speakers.

## 9.2 Forms of the possessives

### 9.2.1 ‘my’, ‘your’, ‘his’, ‘her’, ‘our’, etc. (possessive adjectives)

Personal pronoun	Singular	Plural	Translation
<i>yo</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>mis</i>	my
<i>tú</i> (and <i>vos</i> , where it is used)	<i>tu</i> (no accent!)	<i>tus</i>	your (familiar)
<i>él/ella</i>	<i>su</i>	<i>sus</i>	his/her/its
<i>usted</i>	<i>su</i>	<i>sus</i>	your (formal)
<i>nosotros/nosotras</i>	<i>nuestro</i> (masc.) <i>nuestra</i> (fem.)	<i>nuestros</i> (masc.) <i>nuestras</i> (fem.)	our
<i>vosotros/vosotras</i>	<i>vuestro</i> (masc.) <i>vuestra</i> (fem.)	<i>vuestros</i> (masc.) <i>vuestras</i> (fem.)	your (familiar. Spain only)

Personal pronoun	Singular	Plural	Translation
<i>ellos/ellas</i>	<i>su</i>	<i>sus</i>	their
<i>ustedes</i>	<i>su</i>	<i>sus</i>	your (formal)

(1) **Important:** in Latin America *su/sus* is the only second-person plural possessive since *vuestro* is not used outside Spain; see 9.6 for discussion. For the use of *vos* for *tú* see 11.3.

### 9.2.2 'Mine', 'yours', 'hers', 'his', 'ours', etc. (possessive pronouns)

The following forms are marked for number and gender (*vuestro* is not used in Lat. Am.). See 9.4 for the use of these words.

Personal pronoun	Masc. singular and plural	Fem. singular and plural	Translation
<i>yo</i>	<i>mío – míos</i>	<i>mía – mías</i>	mine
<i>tú/vos</i>	<i>tuyo – tuyos</i>	<i>tuya – tuyas</i>	yours (familiar)
<i>él/ella</i>	<i>suyo – suyos</i>	<i>suya – suyas</i>	his/hers/its
<i>usted</i>	<i>suyo – suyos</i>	<i>suya – suyas</i>	yours (formal)
<i>nosotros/nosotras</i>	<i>nuestro – nuestros</i>	<i>nuestra – nuestras</i>	ours
<i>vosotros/vosotras</i>	<i>vuestro – vuestros</i>	<i>vuestra – vuestras</i>	yours (familiar)
<i>ellos/ellas</i>	<i>suyo – suyos</i>	<i>suya – suyas</i>	theirs
<i>ustedes</i>	<i>suyo – suyos</i>	<i>suya – suyas</i>	yours (formal)

## 9.3 Uses of the possessive adjectives (*mi, tu, su, nuestro, etc.*)

### 9.3.1 Basic uses

These words agree in number with the thing possessed. *Nuestro* and *vuestro* agree in gender as well with the thing possessed. This is counter-intuitive for English speakers and also for Spanish-speaking learners of English who quite often say things like 'she has forgotten "his" handbag' for 'her handbag', presumably because *el bolso* 'handbag' is masculine:

<i>mi padre/mis padres</i>	my father/my parents
<i>mi madre/mis flores</i>	my mother/my flowers
<i>¿Dónde está tu coche?</i>	Where's your car?
<i>¿Dónde están tus zapatos?</i>	Where are your shoes?
<i>Me fío de su amigo</i>	I trust his/her/your/their friend
<i>Me fío de sus amigos</i>	I trust his/her/your/their friends
<i>nuestro dinero/nuestra dignidad</i>	our money/our dignity
<i>vuestra casa/vuestras casas (Sp.)</i>	your house/your houses
<i>Usted dejó sus cosas aquí</i>	You (sing.) left your/his/her/their things here.
<i>Ustedes dejaron sus cosas aquí</i>	You (plur.) left your/his/her/their things here.
<i>Si ellos no quieren dejarnos su cortacésped . . .</i>	If they don't want to lend us their/your/his/her lawnmower . . .

(1) As can be seen, *su* and *sus* mean several things. 9.5a shows how to remove the ambiguities.

### 9.3.2 Possessives with more than one noun

If more than one noun is involved, Spanish differs from English in that the former uses one possessive only when the nouns refer to the same, or to aspects of, the same thing. One says *mi padre y mi madre* 'my father and mother' (different persons), *mi chaqueta y mi corbata* 'my jacket and tie' (different things), but *mi amigo y compañero* 'my friend and colleague' (same person), *su paciencia y valor* 'his/her patience and courage' (aspects of a single virtue).

### 9.3.3 Possessive in military usage

In military circles, possessives are used to address officers: *sí, mi general* 'yes, General', *no, mi coronel* 'no, Colonel', *a sus órdenes mi teniente* 'awaiting orders Lieutenant!'.

### 9.3.4 Definite article instead of possessives

**Important:** Spanish frequently uses the definite article where English uses possessive adjectives. *Saqué mi pañuelo de mi bolsillo* 'I took my handkerchief out of my pocket' is not incorrect but it sounds unnatural: *saqué el pañuelo del bolsillo* (provided it is from my own pocket) is more idiomatic. The Academy's *Esbozo* . . . , 3.10.9a, says that sentences like *pase sus vacaciones en la playa de X*, 'spend your holidays/vacation on the beach at X' for *pase las vacaciones* . . . sound foreign.

The definite article is used when a verb, pronoun, or context make it clear who the possessor is. The article is therefore much used with parts of the body, and is normal with clothing and other close possessions, e.g. wristwatches, purses, wallets, pens, glasses, etc.

This may confuse English speakers. 'Have you got the passport' normally implies that we do not know whose it is. In *¿tienes el pasaporte?* the second person of the verb shows that the sentence probably means 'have you got your passport' – unless context shows that someone else is involved. In the following sentence only the fact that purses are associated with women makes us translate *el monedero* as 'my purse' (the speaker is female): *metí en una bolsa de playa el bronceador, las toallas, la radio portátil, el libro que estoy leyendo, dos camisetas, el monedero* . . . (CRG, Sp.) 'I put the suntan lotion, the towels, the portable radio, the book I'm reading, two T-shirts, my purse . . . in a beach-bag'. Further examples:

*Cierre/Cierra los ojos*  
*Diego metió la pata*  
*Ignacio está mal de la rodilla*  
*Se te ha colgado el ordenador* (Lat. Am. *la computadora* or *el computador*)  
*Llegaba a pensar que Alicia había perdido la razón* (SP, Sp.)  
*Introduje la mano izquierda en el bolsillo derecho del pantalón* (ABE, Pe.)  
*Todas las chicas andan con la tripa al aire*  
  
*Bébetelo café/Arréglate el pelo*  
*La rabia le puso las orejas coloradas y los ojos húmedos* (AM. Mex.)  
*Me pica la nariz* or *me pican las narices*

Shut your eyes  
 Diego put his foot in it  
 Ignacio's got a problem with his knee  
 Your computer's crashed  
  
 I was starting to think that Alicia had lost her mind  
 I inserted my left hand in the right pocket of my trousers [*sic*]  
 All the girls are all going round with their midriff/stomachs showing  
 Drink your coffee/Tidy your hair  
 Rage made his ears red and his eyes damp  
  
 My nose is itching

(1) But if no word makes clear who the possessor is, a possessive adjective must be used: *mis ojos son azules* 'my eyes are blue' (but *tengo los ojos azules* because the verb shows who is the



possessor), *tus medias tienen carreras en las dos piernas* ‘your stockings/tights are laddered in both legs’ (*medias* usually means ‘socks’ in Latin America), *he corregido tu redacción* (cf. *te he corregido la redacción*) ‘I’ve marked/graded your essay’.

With clothes, use of the possessive may suggest that the thing is not being worn: *he visto tu nueva falda en el dormitorio/en una tienda* ‘I saw your new skirt in the bedroom/(on sale) in a shop/store’.

(2) When the thing possessed is emphasized, contrasted or particularized by context, or by an adjective or some other words, or whenever ambiguity must be avoided, the possessive adjective usually reappears:

<i>Usted póngase su camisa, no la mía</i>	You put on your shirt, not mine
<i>Vi sus ojos grandes, fatigados, sonrientes y como lacrimosos</i> (FU, Sp.)	I saw her eyes, big, tired, smiling and seemingly tearful
<i>Acerqué mi cabeza a la suya</i> (CF, Mex., dialogue; contrast)	I moved my head closer to his
<i>X deja sus/tus manos suaves y perfumadas</i> (or <i>le/te deja las manos . . .</i> )	X leaves your hands soft and perfumed
<i>Toco tus labios . . .</i> (popular song)	I touch your lips . . .

(3) Use of the definite article downplays the thing possessed. *Te toco los labios* can sound accidental or matter-of-fact. A mother says *dame la mano, que vamos a cruzar la calle* ‘hold my hand, we’re going to cross the road’, but an old-fashioned lover might say *dame tu mano y te haré feliz* ‘give me your hand (in marriage) and I will make you happy’.

In polite speech one therefore avoids the definite article when the thing possessed is a human being: *¡cuánto echo de menos a mis hijas!* ‘I miss my daughters so much!’, *siempre voy de vacaciones con mi mujer/mi novia* (?*con la mujer/la novia* is humorous or ironic, cf. popular British ‘. . . with “the” wife’) ‘I always go on holiday/vacation with my wife/girlfriend’.

(4) In spoken Latin-American Spanish, especially Mexican, possessive adjectives are sometimes combined with indirect object pronouns: *les pintamos su casa* (street sign, Oaxaca, Mex.) ‘we’ll paint your house for you’; *me duele mi cabeza* (colloquial Mexican) ‘my head aches’, standard Spanish *me duele la cabeza*; *¿te quitas tu ropa?* (EP, Mex., dialogue) ‘why don’t you take your clothes off?’, standard Spanish *¿te quitas la ropa?*

(5) Unlike English, Spanish normally uses the singular when each person possesses one each of a thing: *les sellaron el pasaporte* ‘they stamped their passports’. See 2.2.4.

(6) One says *me quité la camisa* ‘I took my shirt off’, not *quité la camisa* (= ‘I removed the shirt’/‘I took the shirt away’), because one’s shirt does not come off by itself and effort is required. For this reason one says *abrí los ojos* ‘I opened my eyes’ (they opened naturally) whereas *me abrí los ojos* suggests that your eyelids were stuck together and had to be separated.

## 9.4 Uses of *mío, tuyo, suyo*, etc.

### 9.4.1 Basic uses of *mío, tuyo, suyo*, etc.

The pronominal forms *mío, tuyo, suyo*, etc. are used:

(a) to translate English ‘. . . of mine/yours/his/ours’, etc.:

<i>un amigo mío</i>	a friend of mine
<i>un conocido tuyo</i>	an acquaintance of yours

*un poema muy malo mío* (Granma, Cu.,  
Sp. *un poema mío muy malo*)  
*Marco ha vuelto a hacer una de las tuyas*  
*una actitud muy suya*

a very bad poem of mine  
Marco's up to his usual tricks again  
(lit. 'a thing of his')  
a very typical attitude of his/hers/yours/theirs

(b) as a literary, rather stilted alternative for a possessive adjective:

*en mi novela/en la novela mía*  
*nuestro pan/el pan nuestro de cada día*

in my novel/in this novel of mine  
our daily bread

(c) in Spain, in these rather formal phrases (see note 1):

*Bueno, hijo mío/hija mía, me voy*  
*Te aconsejo que no, amigo mío*

Well, dear, I'm off  
I advise you not to, my friend

(d) to translate the pronouns 'mine', 'yours' (see the following section for the use of the definite article in this construction):

—¿De quién es este bloc? —Mío  
*Este garabato es tuyo*  
*Este/éste es el vuestro, ¿verdad?*

'Whose notepad is this?' 'Mine'  
This scrawl is yours  
This one is yours, isn't it?

(e) In a number of set phrases:

*de nuestra parte/de parte*  
*nuestra* for our part  
*a pesar mío/suyo* despite  
*me/despite him/her/you*

*a costa mía* at my cost  
*en torno suyo* around him/  
her/them/you  
*a propuesta suya* at his/  
her/your/their suggestion

*muy señor mío* (S. Cone de  
*mi consideración*) Dear  
Sir (in letters)

(1) Latin-American Spanish typically says *mi hijo, mi hija, mi amigo*: no, *mi amiga, me quedaré en casa. Iré otro día* (AA, Cu., dialogue) 'no my friend. I'll stay at home. I'll go another day'. This gives rise to forms like *mijita* (= *mi hijita*), etc. In Spain a number of loving expressions also optionally use the normal order, e.g. *mi vida/vida mía, mi cielo/cielo mío, mi amor/amor mío, mi cielín*, etc. 'darling' /US 'honey', etc.

### 9.4.2 Definite article with *mío, tuyo, suyo*, etc.

The definite article is obligatory in the following cases:

(a) after prepositions. Compare —¿De quién es el coche? —Mío 'Whose car is it?' 'Mine' and —¿En qué coche vamos? —En el mío "'Which car are we going in?'" "In mine"". Further examples:

*A tu primo sí lo/le conozco, pero no al suyo*  
*Si algo malo te ocurre, yo me haría cargo de*  
*los tuyos* (MS, Mex., dialogue)

I know your cousin, but not his/hers  
If something bad happens to you I'd look  
after your loved ones

(b) when the pronoun is the subject or object of a verb (even though the verb may not be present):

*Toma el mío*  
*Tu padre te deja salir, el mío no*  
*Qué vida tan triste la suya*  
*Los dos DVDs son buenos, pero el nuestro*  
*es mejor*

Take mine  
Your father lets you go out, mine doesn't  
What a sad life his/hers/yours/theirs is  
The two DVDs are good but ours is better

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(c) after *ser* 'to be', omission of the article emphasizes actual possession:

*la casa de Jeremiah Saint-Amour, que desde  
ahora era suya* (GGM, Col.)  
*Pero estas cualidades eran mucho más suyas  
que mías* (ABE, Pe.)

Jeremiah Saint-Amour's house, which  
from now on was hers  
But these qualities were much more  
hers than mine

### 9.4.3 The neuter article with *lo mío, lo suyo, etc.*

The neuter form of the possessive has various meanings:

*Mi marido sabe lo nuestro*  
*Ahora estás en lo tuyo*  
*Lo vuestro/suyo fue alucinante*  
*No tuve hijos y nada me impedía dedicarme  
a lo mío* (ES, Mex., dialogue)  
*Lo mío es confundir* (M. de Unamuno, Sp.)

My husband knows about us  
Now you're in your element  
What happened to you was mind-boggling  
I didn't have any children and nothing was  
stopping me from doing my own thing  
Confusing people is what I do

## 9.5 Clarification or replacement of possessive by *de* + pronoun

In some cases *de* + a pronoun may be used instead of a possessive, and when *su/sus* refer to *usted* or *ustedes*, *de usted* or *de ustedes* are often added. This happens:

(a) When it is necessary to clarify the meaning of *su/suyo*, which can mean 'his', 'her', 'its', 'your' (*usted*), 'their', 'your' (*ustedes*). Context nearly always makes ownership clear, but it can be emphasized or clarified by using *de él/ella, de usted, de ellos/ellas, de ustedes*: *los paraguas de ustedes* 'your (plural) umbrellas', *la camisa de él* 'his shirt'.

The possibility of ambiguity is illustrated by the question 'is this handkerchief yours or hers?', where one would probably say *¿este pañuelo es de usted o de ella? ¿Este pañuelo es suyo?* 'is this handkerchief yours?' is clear if one is talking directly to a person.

(b) When *de* means 'from' and not 'of', as in *hace tiempo que no tengo noticias de vosotros* (or *noticias vuestras*) 'it's been some time since I've had news from you'.

(1) In Spain, *su* is assumed out of context to be third-person, so that *de usted/ustedes* may be needed to show that the meaning is 'your'. (For Latin-American usage, see 9.6.)

## 9.6 Possessives: Latin-American usage

Latin-American usage differs from European Spanish in a number of ways:

(a) Where *vos* is used instead of *tú* (especially Argentina and much of Central America), *tu/tuyo* are the possessive forms: *vos tenés tu bolígrafo* (Arg.) 'you've got your ballpoint pen', in Spain *tú tienes tu bolígrafo*.

(b) Since *vosotros* is not used in everyday Latin-American Spanish (see 12.3.1 for details), *su/sus* is the only second-person plural possessive in all styles.

(c) In Latin America *su/suyo* is assumed, out of context, to mean *de usted/de ustedes* 'of you'. Third-person possession may be represented in everyday speech by *de él* 'his'/'its' (masc.), *de ella* 'her'/'its' (fem.), *de ellos* 'their' (masc.), *de ellas* 'their' (fem.):

*¿Quieres que vayamos al cuarto de él a ver si está?* (Costa Rican dialogue, quoted Kany, 69; Sp. *a su cuarto/habitación*)  
*En la oficina de ella no hay la mitad de trabajo que en la mía* (MP, Arg., dialogue; Sp. *en su oficina*)

Do you want to go to his room to see if he's there?

There isn't half the work in her office that there is in mine

(d) *De nosotros for nuestro* is also common in Latin-American speech: *la casa de nosotros está en la esquina* (Colombian informant, standard Spanish *nuestra casa*) 'our house is on the corner', —*¿A quién se lo entregó?* —*Al jefe de nosotros* (VdeC, Cu.) "'Who did you hand it over to?" "To our boss"', standard Spanish *a nuestro jefe* or *al jefe*.

(e) In popular Spanish in Mexico and the Andes there is a tendency to use *su/sus* in phrases of the type noun + *de* + noun, e.g. *su libro de Juan* 'Juan's book', *su casa de mi amigo* 'my friend's house', standard Spanish *el libro de Juan*, *la casa de mi amigo*.

## 9.7 Possessives after prepositions and adverbs

A common construction in spoken Latin-American Spanish, also increasingly favoured by the younger generations in Spain, is the use of the possessive pronoun forms (*mío, tuyo*, etc.) after prepositions that usually require *de* + a pronoun, and after some adverbs: *?detrás mío* = *detrás de mí* 'behind me', and even, in sub-standard speech, *?entró antes mío* '(s)he went in before me', for *entró antes que yo*. Examples:

*Adentro mío yo soy igual que todos los reaccionarios* (MP, Arg. dialogue; Sp. *dentro de mí* or *por dentro*)  
*Quiero estar cerca tuyo* (ibid., Sp. *cerca de ti*)  
*No lo consiguió por lo intimidado que estaba en mí delante* (MVLL, Pe., dialogue; rare in written Spanish. Sp. *delante de mí*)  
*Pero un segundo autobús que iba por detrás suyo lo embistió con gran violencia* (El País, Sp., better *detrás de él*)

Inside (me) I'm the same as all the reactionaries

I want to be near you  
 He was so intimidated in my presence that he didn't manage it

But a second bus travelling behind collided violently with it

and also (the bracketed forms are used in standard Spanish):

<i>?encima mía</i>	( <i>encima de mí</i> )	above/over me
<i>?enfrente suyo</i>	( <i>enfrente de él/ella/usted</i> <i>ustedes/ellos/ellas</i> )	opposite him/her/you/them
<i>?aparte suyo</i>	( <i>aparte de él/ella</i> , etc.)	apart from him/her, etc.
<i>?fuera suyo</i>	( <i>fuera de él/ella</i> , etc.)	apart from him/her, etc.

(1) This construction is found in the best writers in Argentina, but it is considered colloquial in other Latin-American countries and incorrect in Mexico. It is spreading in Spain but older speakers may disapprove. However, *en torno nuestro* (literary) 'around us' is considered correct, as is *alrededor mío* for *alrededor de mí* 'around me'.

(2) Both *contra mí/ti* and *en contra mía/tuya*, 'against me/you', etc. are correct, but there is a tendency to make the possessive precede in Latin America and this seems to be spreading in Spain: *está en mi contra* (Peanuts cartoon, Arg.) '(s)he/it's against me', *el hecho de que el teléfono se hubiera puesto en mi contra* . . . (SP, Sp.) 'the fact that the phone had turned against me . . . '.

# 10 Miscellaneous adjectives and pronouns

This chapter discusses a series of important words that may cause problems for English-speaking learners:

<i>ajeno</i> 10.1	<i>cada</i> 10.6	<i>mismo</i> 10.11	<i>tanto</i> 10.16
<i>algo</i> 10.2	<i>cierto</i> 10.7	<i>mucho</i> and <i>poco</i> 10.12	<i>todo</i> 10.17
<i>alguien</i> 10.3	<i>cualquier(a)</i> 10.8	<i>otro</i> 10.13	<i>varios</i> 10.18
<i>alguno</i> 10.4	<i>demasiado</i> 10.9	<i>propio</i> 10.14	
<i>ambos</i> 10.5	<i>medio</i> 10.10	<i>solo</i> 10.15	

## 10.1 *Ajeno*: adjective, marked for number and gender

A rather literary word meaning 'someone else's': *el dolor ajeno* (= *el dolor de otros*) 'other people's sorrow', *en casa ajena* (= *en casa de otra persona*) 'in someone else's house':

<i>Te preocupas demasiado por lo ajeno</i>	You concern yourself too much with other people's business
<i>Que a la gente no le dé envidia el éxito ajeno</i> (Miss Universe, in <i>Excélsior</i> , Mex.)	People shouldn't envy the success of others

(1) *Ajeno* often translates 'a stranger to', 'remote from': *problemas ajenos a mi responsabilidad* 'problems outside my responsibility', . . . *una mujer adulta ajena, aparentemente, a todo* (CRG, Sp.) ' . . . an adult woman apparently oblivious to everything', [*El Papa*] *no será ajeno a los desafíos de México* (*Excélsior*, Mex.) 'The Pope will not be indifferent to the challenges facing Mexico'.

## 10.2 *Algo*: invariable pronoun or adverb

Used as a pronoun, it usually means 'something' or 'anything' in questions and after *poco* and a few other words:

<i>Detrás se veía algo grande, negro</i>	Behind one could see something big, black
<i>A ver si se te ocurre algo</i>	Try and think of something
<i>Esa casa tiene algo de siniestro</i>	That house has something sinister about it
<i>Aquella frase era el preámbulo de algo muy grave</i> (G GM, Col.)	That phrase was the prelude to something very serious
<i>¿Ves algo?</i>	Can you see anything?
<i>¿Sabes algo que yo no sepa?</i> (EM, Mex., dialogue)	Do you know something that I don't know?
<i>Serán pocos los que hayan traído algo</i>	There probably won't be many who have brought anything

(1) **Important:** used as an adverb it means 'rather', 'somewhat', although *un poco*, *un tanto* or *más bien* are as common in speech: *Estamos algo/un poco/más bien inquietos* 'we're rather/a bit worried', . . . *de hermosas piernas, aunque algo cargada de caderas* (LO, Cu.) ' . . . lovely legs, although she was rather heavy in the hips', *queda algo lejos* 'it's rather a long way away'.

(2) The English question-opener ‘do you know something . . .?’ is *¿sabes una cosa?* The phrase *¿sabes algo?* means ‘do you know anything?’

(3) *Algo así, algo así como*, are translations of ‘something like . . .’: *pesa algo así como siete kilos* ‘it weighs around seven kilos’, *se llama Nicanora, o algo así* ‘she’s called Nicanora, or something like that’.

(4) In negative sentences *nada* translates ‘anything’ as well as ‘nothing’: *no sabe nada* ‘(s)he doesn’t know anything’, *yo no sé dónde está nada en esta casa* ‘I don’t know where anything is in this house’. See 27.4.

(5) *Algo* is neuter in gender, so one says *algo en lo que podían creer* ‘something they could believe in’, *hay algo en lo que estoy totalmente de acuerdo contigo* (JH, Mex.) ‘there’s something I agree totally with you about’.

### 10.3 *Alguien*: invariable pronoun

It means ‘someone’, ‘somebody’, as in *vi a alguien* ‘I saw someone’ (note personal *a* before *alguien*; see 26.4.1). It also translates ‘anyone’, ‘anybody’ in questions and certain other types of sentence. It is not marked for gender:

*Le pidió a Andrés que se quedara en casa  
por si alguien llamara* (GGM, Col.)  
*¿Conoces a alguien que pueda darme un  
presupuesto para reparar el coche?*  
*Siempre viene alguien entre semana*

He asked Andrés to stay at home in  
case someone phoned  
Do you know anyone/someone who can  
give me an estimate for fixing my car?  
Someone always comes on weekdays

(1) \**Alguien de los estudiantes*, \**alguien de ellos* are rejected by grammarians, including the Academy, (DPD 38) in favour of *alguno de los estudiantes*, *alguno de (entre) ellos*, but *alguna de entre ellas* ‘one of the girls/women’. Occasionally *alguien de* is necessary since, unlike *alguno*, it does not indicate gender: *yo creo que alude a alguien de esta casa* ‘I think (s)he’s alluding to someone in this house’, *alguien de la familia vendrá a recogerlo* ‘someone from the family will come to pick it/him/you up’.

(2) María Moliner notes that ?*darle una cosa a alguien que él no desea* is awkward since *alguien* is too vague to be specifically masculine: *dar a alguien una cosa que no desea* ‘to give something to someone who doesn’t want it’ avoids the problem.

(3) ‘Give it to someone else’ is *dáselo a algún otro/alguna otra/alguna otra persona*. \**Alguien otro* is not Spanish.

(4) *Uno* is sometimes colloquially used for ‘someone’ when gender is an important part of the message (for other uses of *uno* as a pronoun see 32.7.1): *se ha peleado con uno en la calle* ‘(s)he’s had a fight with some man in the street’, *se casó con una de Valencia* ‘he married some girl from Valencia’.

### 10.4 *Algún, alguno, algunos, alguna, algunas*: adjective or pronoun marked for number and gender

#### 10.4.1 General uses of *alguno*

(a) As an adjective:

The usual translation is ‘some’, French *quelque(s)*. It is shortened to *algún* before a singular masculine noun or noun phrase: *algún día* ‘some day’, *¿o si te gusta algún otro?* (ABV, Sp., dialogue) ‘or if you like some other man!’, but *alguna región* ‘some region’.

In the singular, *alguno* often means a vague ‘one or another’, ‘one or more . . .’. (For the difference between *unos* and *algunos*, see 10.4.2):

<i>en algún momento de la historia de Perú</i>	at one time or another in the history of Peru
<i>Alguna vez la echaba de menos</i> (SP, Sp.)	From time to time he used to miss her
<i>Deben cuidar bien esos platos. Alguna vez, en el futuro, podrían donarlos a un museo</i> (LO, Cu., dialogue)	You should look after those plates well. Some time in the future you could donate them to a museum
<i>Mira a ver si queda alguna botella de vino</i>	Look and see whether there is a bottle of wine left

(b) *Alguno* as a pronoun (the short form *algún* is not used as a pronoun):

Again, the meaning may be a vague ‘one or more . . .’ or ‘one or two’:

<i>Alguno lo sabrá</i>	One or other of them will know
—¿Has recibido cartas de tu familia?	‘Have you had any letters from your family?’
—Bueno, alguna, sí	‘Well, one or two, yes’
<i>Una noche la policía entró y nos palpó. Alguno tuvo que ir a la comisaría</i> (JLB, Arg., dialogue; Sp. ‘to frisk = <i>cachear</i> )	One night the police came in and frisked us. At least one had to go to the police station
<i>Alguno habrá en la oficina que te guste</i>	There must be some man at the office you like

In the plural ‘some’ or ‘a few’ are the usual translations:

<i>Con algunos de tercero vas a tener que hacer ejercicios de verbos irregulares</i>	You’re going to have to do irregular verb exercises with some of the third year
<i>Algunos ya están deseando marcharse</i>	Some already want to go
<i>Mateo Alemán (a quien algunos llamaban “el Ratón Miguelito”) (JA, Mex.),</i>	(President) Mateo Alemán, whom some called ‘Mickey Mouse’

(1) **Important:** in formal, mainly written styles *alguno* may follow a noun, in which case it is an emphatic equivalent of *ninguno*, ‘none’, ‘no. . . at all’: *no cultivaba forma alguna de contacto con el pueblo* (JMs, Sp.) ‘he cultivated absolutely no kind of contact with the common people’, *ninguna autoridad militar quiere dar explicación alguna* (La Prensa, Bol.) ‘no military authority wishes to give any explanation whatsoever’, *no puede tolerar pregunta alguna* (EP, Mex.) ‘she can’t stand any questions at all’. However, NGLÉ 48.4k notes that *ninguno* is becoming more usual in this construction i.e. *ninguna forma/forma ninguna*.

(2) **Important:** *alguna* is nowadays usually pronounced and written *algún* immediately before feminine nouns beginning with a stressed *a-* or *ha-*. The Academy no longer disapproves of this (DPD 38, NGLÉ 19.5h): *algún/alguna alma perdida* ‘some lost soul’, *algún/alguna arma defensiva* ‘some defensive weapon’.

(3) When followed by *que* and a masculine noun phrase, either *algún* or *alguno* may be used (DPD 38): *algún que otro libro* or *alguno que otro libro* ‘some book or other’. Only *alguna que otra* is allowed with feminine nouns.

(4) When the singular *alguno/alguna* is combined with a second-person pronoun, the verb is optionally either second- or third-person, the latter being more usual and recommended by the Academy (DPD 38): *si alguno de vosotros lo sabéis/lo sabe* ‘if any of you know(s) it’. In the plural, agreement is with the pronoun: *algunas de vosotras lo sabéis* ‘some of you women know’, *algunas de nosotras generalmente caminamos despacito* (La Jornada, Mex.) ‘some of us women generally walk slowly’. But note *algunos de nosotros han muerto* (JP, Mex.) ‘some of us have died’, which obviously excludes the speaker.

(5) **Important:** the English ‘some’ (and ‘any’) have no equivalent in Spanish when they come before a noun that refers to only a part or quantity of something, as in ‘give me some water’ *dame agua/un poco de agua*, ‘you haven’t bought any pins’ *no has comprado alfileres*, ‘have you got any wholemeal bread?’ *¿tiene usted pan integral?*

In some cases, *un poco* or *ninguno* may be good translations of ‘some’: *yo también quiero un poco* ‘I want some (a little) too’, *¿chuletas de ternera? No tenemos* ‘veal chops/cutlets? We haven’t got any’, *no tenemos ninguna* ‘we haven’t got a single one’; *no queda apenas ninguna* ‘there are hardly any left’. ‘Any’ in the sense of ‘it doesn’t matter which’ is *cualquiera* (see 10.8): *comidas a cualquier hora* ‘meals at any time’.

(6) When *alguno* is the direct or indirect object of a verb and it comes before the verb for purposes of focus, agreement may be governed by the number of an accompanying noun or pronoun or it may be third-person: *a alguno de vosotros os/lolle quisiera ver yo en un lío como este/éste* ‘I’d like to see one of you in a mess like this’.

### 10.4.2 *Unos and algunos contrasted*

These two plural words are not always easily distinguished (*unos* has other uses discussed at 3.4).

(a) The two words are interchangeable in the phrase *algunos/unos . . . otros*:

*Algunos/Unos vinieron, otros no*  
 . . . *las explicaciones teológicas que hacían*  
*plausible la venta de unos terrenos y la*  
*compra de otros* (AM, Mex., or *algunos*  
*terrenos*)  
*En algunas semanas [la morera] estaría*  
*llena de frutas* (SA, Arg., or *unas*)

Some came, others didn’t  
 . . . the theological (i.e. obscure)  
 explanations that made acceptable the  
 the sale of some plots of land and the  
 purchase of others  
 In a few weeks the mulberry tree would be  
 full of fruit

(b) Only *algunos* is possible in the phrase *algunos de: salí a cenar con algunos de los alumnos* ‘I went out to dinner with some of the students’.

(c) Only *unos/unas* can be used to make non-generic nouns and adjectives: compare *son payasos* ‘they are clowns (by profession)’, *son unos payasos* ‘they are (acting like) clowns’. See 4.2.1c for details.

(d) Only *unos* can be used in plural reciprocal construction: *se admiran los unos a los otros* ‘they admire one another’.

(e) **Important:** *algunos* is used when no implication of ‘a few’ is intended: *algunos mexicanos hablan tres idiomas* ‘some Mexicans speak three languages’ (since *unos* here would mean ‘a certain small group of’). When ‘a few’ is intended, the two are interchangeable and *unos* is usually followed by *cuantos*: *me dio unas (cuantas)/algunas monedas de un euro* ‘(s)he gave me a couple of one-euro coins’, . . . o *cuando arriesgábamos algunos dólares en el casino* (ABE, Pe., or *unos cuantos*) ‘. . . or when we gambled a few dollars in the casino’.



## 10.5 *Ambos*: adjective or pronoun marked for number and gender

'Both', though it is rather literary and *los/las dos* is more usual in speech.

<i>en ambos/los dos casos</i>	in both cases
<i>... cuando ambos se vinieron a vivir</i>	... when both of them came from Acapulco
<i>a la capital desde Acapulco (GZ, Mex.)</i>	to live in the capital
—¿Cuál de los dos es correcto? — <i>Ambos/Los dos</i> 'Which of the two is correct?' 'Both'	

(1) **Important:** the definite article is not used with *ambos*: *ambas chicas* 'both/both (of) the girls', never *\*ambas las chicas*. 'One of both' is: *uno/a de los/las dos*.

(2) Note also the following: *sus dos hijas/primos* 'both his/her daughters/cousins', 'his/her two daughters/cousins'. *He hablado con tus dos hermanos* 'I spoke with both your brothers', not *\*tus ambos hermanos*, etc. *Tanto el profesor como los alumnos lo oyeron* 'both the teacher and the students heard it' – never *\*ambos el profesor y ...*. which is a bad translation of the English 'both the ... and ...'.

## 10.6 *Cada*: invariable adjective and pronoun

'Each', 'every'. *Cada* always precedes the noun:

<i>Cada loco con su tema</i>	'Each to his/her own' (lit. 'every madman with his obsession')
<i>cada uno de los alumnos ...</i>	each of the students ...
<i>un libro por cada tres alumnos</i>	one book for every three students
<i>El fenómeno ocurre cada década</i>	The phenomenon occurs roughly every decade
<i>aproximadamente (La Jornada, Mex.)</i>	
<i>Cada día me preocupa más esto de la taquicardia (ABE, Pe.)</i>	Every day I'm more worried by this tachycardia business (increased heart rate)
—¿Quiere de lana o de seda? — <i>Uno de cada</i> (colloquial; pronoun)	'Do you want wool or silk?' 'One of each.'

(1) *Cada vez más/menos* usually translate 'more and more' and 'less and less': *es cada vez más complicado* 'it gets more and more complicated', *era cada vez menos generosa* 'she was less and less generous', *para entonces cada vez se alejaban más las posibilidades de que México tuviera nuevos presidentes militares* (JA, Mex.) 'by then the possibility that Mexico would have more military presidents was becoming ever more remote'. English speakers should avoid using *\*más y más*, *\*menos y menos*.

(2) In colloquial speech in Spain and Latin America *cada* is an equivalent of 'all sorts of ...': *dice cada tontería* 'the nonsense (s)he talks ...', *hay cada ladrón por ahí* 'there are all sorts of thieves there ...', *¡me hace usted cada pregunta!* (SP, Mex., dialogue), 'the things you ask me!'.

(3) 'Each one', 'each person': *que cada uno* (or *cada cual/cada quien*) *haga la lectura que le parezca conveniente* 'let each person read it as it suits him/her'. *Cada quien* is frequent in Mexican texts.

(4) *?Me baño cada día* or *?voy cada mañana* for ... *todos los días*, ... *todas las mañanas* are widespread, but are rejected by some speakers as Catalanisms, but the construction is increasingly accepted and is correct in certain contexts. See 10.17.

(5) Note *salía cada poco con ella* ‘he went out with her occasionally/now and then’, i.e. *de vez en cuando*; also *cada poco me decía que me quería* ‘(s)he kept telling me that (s)he loved me’.

(6) The phrase *cada que* ‘every time that’ is heard in Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela and Paraguay: *tomamos café cada que viene al Puerto* (from NGL 19.9d) ‘we have coffee every time he comes to the port’; elsewhere . . . *cada vez que viene*. *Cada que* is not used in Spain.

## 10.7 **Cierto**: adjective, marked for number and gender

‘Certain’, i.e. ‘specific’. Used thus it precedes the noun:

*en ciertos casos*

in certain cases

*cierto alemán*

a certain German

. . . o en ciertos periodos de la presidencia

. . . or at certain periods during the

*Fernández (La Jornada, Mex.)*

Fernández presidency

*Y esto, claro, flotaba de cierta manera*

And this, of course, was to some extent

*en el ambiente (ABE, Pe),*

floating in the atmosphere

(1) *Determinado* is a more formal synonym: *en determinados trenes existe un servicio de camareros* ‘on certain trains waiter service is provided’.

(2) *Un cierto/una cierta* for ‘a certain’ are sometimes condemned as borrowings from French or English but are common in all styles; the Academy does not now object. *Un cierto* is found before partitive nouns — *yo era consciente de (una) cierta tendencia suya a exagerar* ‘I was aware of a certain tendency of his/hers to exaggerate’ – and as a less common colloquial alternative to *un tal*: *se casó con un cierto/un tal Dionisio de México* ‘she married a certain Dionisio from Mexico’.

(3) Placed after a noun or after a verb like *ser* or *parecer*, *cierto* means ‘fixed’, ‘accurate’, ‘true’: *hemos tenido noticias ciertas de otro enfrentamiento* ‘we have received accurate reports of another clash’, *¿Está enfermo? ¿Es cierto o no?* (MP, Arg., dialogue) ‘Is he ill/sick? Is it true or not?’, *si eso es cierto es un pecado* (GZ, Mex., dialogue) ‘if that’s true it’s a sin’.

## 10.8 **Cualquier, cualquiera, cualesquiera**: adjective or pronoun, marked for number

As an adjective ‘any’; as a pronoun ‘anybody’/‘anyone’ (Fr. *n’importe quel*).

(a) As an adjective

Before any noun or noun phrase, the *a* of *cualquiera* (but optionally of *cualesquiera*) is dropped: *en cualquier momento* ‘at any moment’, *cualquier mujer* ‘any woman’.

*Cualquier(a)* normally precedes the noun: *duerme a cualquier hora del día* ‘(s)he sleeps at any hour of the day’, *se puede pagar con cualquier moneda* ‘one can pay in any currency’. The idea of random choice is strengthened if it follows the noun, cf. English ‘any at all’. When used thus of people the effect is often pejorative, as is the English ‘any old’:

. . . no una muerte cualquiera, sino la  
muerte propia (MB, Ur.)

. . . not any old death, but one’s own  
death

*Un martes cualquiera . . . él dijo de un modo  
que apareciera casual* (GGM, Col.

One Tuesday (i.e. ‘one Tuesday out of the  
blue’) he said, in a way intended to seem  
casual

*Sp. pareciera casual*)

*Vamos a pasear por una calle cualquiera*  
*Su esposa no es una mujer cualquiera*

Let's just walk down any street  
 His wife isn't just any woman (i.e. she  
 is something special)

(b) As a pronoun (the final *-a* is always retained):

*Cualquiera de los tres temas era*  
*un terreno espinoso (MS, Mex.)*  
*Cualquiera que sea el resultado*  
*Cualquiera diría que eres millonario*  
*... la necesidad en que se ven de*  
*desahogarse con cualquiera (ABE, Pe.)*  
*No cualquiera tiene un auto como el de*  
*nosotros (SV, Ch., dialogue. Sp.)*  
*un coche como el nuestro)*

Any of the three topics was thorny territory

Whatever the result is  
 Anybody would think you're a millionaire  
 ... the need they find themselves in to let  
 off steam in front of anybody  
 Not everyone (lit. 'not anyone') has a car  
 like ours

*Era un hombre como otro cualquiera (LP, Mex.)*  
*Cualesquiera que sean los desafíos en el camino*  
*de la construcción del comunismo (FC, Cuba)*

He was a man like any other  
 Whatever the challenges along the path  
 towards the building of Communism ...

(1) The plural adjective *cualesquiera* is nowadays uncommon since the idea can be expressed by a singular noun: *cualquier mujer que no simpatice con el feminismo* ... 'any woman who doesn't/any women who don't sympathize with feminism' ...

There is a tendency in spontaneous speech and in informal writing to use the singular *cualquiera* where the plural is needed. This applies to both the pronoun and the adjective: *se les garantiza plaza escolar a sus hijos cualquiera que sean sus estudios* (El País, Sp., better *cualesquiera*) 'their children are guaranteed school places, whatever their studies' (i.e. whatever they have studied). Careful speakers, and the Academy (NGLE 20.4e), reject this, and the plural is normally used in writing.

(2) One occasionally hears *cualquiera* used instead of *cualquier* before a feminine noun, especially in Latin America, but foreigners should probably avoid this: *?de cualquiera manera* (CF, Mex., dialogue) *?y más malvados que cualquiera otra tribu* (MVL, Pe., dialogue) 'and more wicked than any other tribe'. This use is seen in Ortega y Gasset, Valera and a few other pre-mid-twentieth-century Spanish stylists.

(3) *Cualquier cantidad* is heard in most of Latin America, but not in Spain, with the meaning 'a great quantity of', e.g. *cualquier cantidad de flores* 'a great quantity of flowers', Spain ... *una gran cantidad de* ...

(4) Note the subjunctives in ... *cualquiera que sea la explicación que él dé* 'whatever explanation he gives'; see 39.15.2 and 20.5.4 for an explanation.

## 10.9 **Demasiado**: adjective and pronoun marked for number and gender, or invariable adverb

As an adjective 'too many'/'too much'; as an adverb 'too'/'too well'.

(a) As an adjective it must agree in number and gender:

*Has comido demasiadas uvas*  
*Pero el calor era demasiado hasta*  
*para una danza tan calma (MP, Arg.,*  
*dialogue)*

You've eaten too many grapes  
 but the heat was too much even  
 for such a slow dance

*Has traído demasiados pocos tornillos*  
(*demasiado* is treated as an adjective  
before *poco*)

You've brought too few screws

Nowadays *demasiado* is always placed before the noun.

**(b) As an adverb (invariable in form)**

*Tú hablas demasiado*  
*A ese/ése me lo conozco demasiado*  
*... ahora puede que sea demasiado tarde*  
(*La Jornada*, Mex.)  
*Esto es demasiado difícil*

You talk too much  
I know him only too well  
... it may be too late now  
  
This is too difficult

**(1)** The adverb and the adjective mean different things: *demasiado* (adv.) *buenas intenciones* = 'intentions that are too good', but *demasiadas* (adj.) *buenas intenciones* = 'too many good intentions' (from *NGLE* 20.5n).

**(2)** In some Lat. Am. countries, e.g. Peru, the adverb *demasiado* may mean 'a lot' in popular speech, so *la quiero demasiado* means *la quiero muchísimo* 'I'm really in love with her' (*NGLE* 20.8b).

## 10.10 *Medio* adjective and adverb

On both continents this word functions as an adverb (invariable in form) or as an adjective (inflected for number and gender), both meaning 'half':

adverb:

*Están medio borrachos*  
*Yo tenía medio abandonados a los santos*  
(*PJG*, Cu.)  
*Déjame. Estoy medio dormido*

They're half-drunk  
I'd more or less given up the Saints (i.e.  
'I was no longer a believer')  
Leave me alone. I'm half asleep

adjective

*media pinta/media luna*  
*Incautan media tonelada de marihuana*  
*en Tijuana* (*Excélsior*, Mex. *Marihuana*  
elsewhere)  
*el americano medio*  
*las clases medias*

half a pint/half-moon  
Half a ton of marihuana seized in Tijuana  
  
the average American  
the middle classes

**(1)** It is often used colloquially in Latin America to mean 'rather', 'pretty' (Sp. *bastante*, *más bien*) as in *es medio linda* (Sp. *guapa*) 'she's pretty good-looking', *son medio tontos* 'they're pretty stupid', *yo también estoy medio enredado estos días* (*LO*, Cu., dialogue) 'I'm pretty tied up too these days'.

**(2)** In the Canary Islands and much of Latin America there is a strong popular tendency, sometimes seen in print in Latin America, to make the adverb agree in gender: *ellas son medias locas* 'they (fem.) are half crazy', for *medio locas*; *llegó media desilusionada* (popular Mexican, quoted Kany, 55) 'she arrived pretty disillusioned', *la tenía media atragantada* (*MP*, Arg., popular dialogue) '... she had it stuck half way down her throat'. The Academy advocates *medio* for the adverb in all contexts.

## 10.11 *Mismo* (and Latin-American variants): adjective marked for gender and number

### (a) 'The same'

When it means 'the same', which is its usual meaning on both continents, it is always placed before the noun or noun phrase that it qualifies:

<i>Lleváis/Llevan la misma blusa</i>	You're wearing the same blouse
<i>... con los mismos mozos, pero un día griegos, otro andaluces, otro franceses, aunque vinieran de donde vinieran (ABE, Pe.</i>	... with the same waiters, but (dressed as) Greeks one day, Andalusians another, French on yet another, regardless of where they came from
<i>In Spain mozos = camareros, Mex. meseros)</i>	
<i>Estos dos casos son el mismo</i>	These two cases are the same (i.e. identical)
<i>Estos dos son los mismos</i>	These two are the same (i.e. as before)
<i>—¿Es usted don Francisco? —El mismo</i>	'Are you Don Francisco?' 'I am indeed'

### (b) Placed either before or after a noun, *mismo* means 'self-same' / 'very' / 'right':

<i>Vivo en Madrid mismo/en el mismo Madrid</i>	I live in Madrid itself
<i>Aparca el helicóptero en su mismo jardín/en su jardín mismo</i>	(S)he parks the helicopter right in his/her garden

To avoid ambiguity, *mismo* must be placed after the noun if it means 'very', 'self-same': *el mismo Papa* 'the Pope himself' or 'the same Pope', *el Papa mismo* = only 'the Pope himself'. See also *propio*, 10.14b.

### (c) Placed after a pronoun it emphasizes the pronoun e.g. *yo mismo* 'I myself', *ella misma* 'she herself':

<i>—¿Quién construyó el chalet?</i>	'Who built the house?' 'I did myself'
<i>— Yo mismo/misma</i>	
<i>(el chalet = 'detached house' in Spain)</i>	
<i>No se llora por los demás. Se llora por una misma (ES, Mex., dialogue)</i>	One doesn't weep for others. One weeps for oneself (woman speaking)

### (d) Placed after an adverb or adverbial phrase, *mismo* is itself an adverb and is therefore invariable:

<i>por eso mismo</i>	for that very reason
<i>ahora mismo/ya mismo</i>	right now / right away
<i>aquí mismo</i>	right here
<i>Mañana mismo empiezo a escribir</i>	I'll start writing <i>tomorrow</i> without fail
<i>(ABE, Pe. Mañana is an adverb here)</i>	
<i>Estoy al lado mismo del súper</i>	I'm right next to the supermarket
<i>(?mismo al lado de is dialect)</i>	

But if the adverbial phrase contains a noun not accompanied by the definite article *mismo* may or may not agree with it. Agreement seems always to be correct and is recommended:

<i>esta noche mismo/misma</i>	this very night
<i>Vino esta mañana mismo/misma</i>	(S)he/it came this very morning
<i>En España mismo/misma no se pudo evitar la llegada del bikini</i>	In Spain itself it was impossible to prevent the arrival of the bikini

When the definite article is used, *mismo* is an adjective and must agree in number and gender: *lo descubrieron en la chimenea misma* ‘they found it in the chimney itself’.

(1) *Lo mismo* may mean *la misma cosa*, or it may be adverbial: *como me vuelvan a decir lo mismo/la misma cosa* . . . ‘if they say the same thing to me again . . .’, *lo mismo vendían sardinas que libros de mecánica* (AM, Mex.) ‘they as readily sold sardines as books on mechanics’, *no nos divertimos lo mismo que si hubieras estado tú* ‘we didn’t have such a good time as we would have if you’d been there’. \**Lo mismo como* is sub-standard for *lo mismo que* ‘the same as’. For *lo mismo* as a familiar European Spanish word for ‘perhaps’ see 20.2.4.

(2) Note the following difference: *esa casa es lo mismo que (igual que) aquella/aquella* ‘that house is the same as that other one’ (i.e. the same thing is true of it, not the same house), *esa casa es la misma que compró Agustín* ‘that house is the same one that Agustín bought’.

(3) *Mismísimo* is a colloquial emphatic form of *mismo* in sense (b): *el mismísimo presidente lo/le felicitó* ‘the President himself congratulated him’.

(4) Mexican and Central-American everyday speech often uses *mero* in contexts under (b): *en la mera (misma) esquina* ‘right on the corner’, *lo hizo él mero (él mismo)* ‘he did it himself’, *ya mero (ahora mismo)* ‘right now’. In various parts of Latin America, from Chile to Mexico, *puro* may be used: *en la pura cabeza (en la misma cabeza)* ‘right on the head’, etc. (from Kany, 57ff), *a puro Villa* (bus-driver in Tabasco, Mex.) ‘(I’m going) only to Villahermosa’ (Sp. *solo/sólo a*) . . .; *había puras mujeres* (colloquial Chilean) ‘there were only women there’ (Sp. *no había más que mujeres*).

(5) *Mismamente* (= *igual*) is rustic or jocular.

## 10.12 ***Mucho* and *poco*: adjectives and pronouns marked for number and gender, or invariable adverbs**

‘Much’ or ‘many’, and ‘little’ or ‘few’. Used as adjectives they agree in number and gender. Used as adverbs they are invariable.

(a) As adjectives and pronouns:

*Mis hijos no me hacen mucho caso*  
*En el patio hay muchos limoneros*  
*Pon poca pimienta*  
*Somos muchos/pocos*  
*su poca paciencia*  
 —¿Cuánta harina has comprado?  
 —Poca/Mucha  
*Lo poco gusta, lo mucho cansa*

My children don’t pay much attention to me  
 There are a lot of lemon trees on the patio  
 Don’t put much pepper on/in it  
 There are a lot/not many of us  
 her/his scant patience  
 ‘How much flour have you bought?’  
 ‘Not much/A lot’

*Muchas se quejan de las nuevas horas*  
*de apertura* (pronoun)

Brevity is the soul of wit (lit. ‘little  
 pleases, much tires’)  
 Many women are complaining about  
 the new opening hours

(b) Adverbial uses:

*Estoy añorando mucho a mi patria*  
*Poco antes de las siete llegó su hijo Andrés*  
 (GGM, Col.)

I’m missing my home country a lot  
 Shortly before seven his son Andrés  
 arrived

*Sale poco últimamente*  
*La lechuga podría ser mucho más*  
*dañina de lo que crees (Excélsior, Mex.)*  
*Por poco que lo quieras*  
*No sabes lo poco que me gusta ese hombre*

(S)he hasn't been out much lately  
 Lettuce could be a lot more damaging  
 (to your health) than you think  
 However little you want it  
 You don't know how little I like that man

(1) **Important:** before *más*, *menos*, *mayor* and *menor*, when these are followed by a noun (present or implied), *mucho* or *poco* agree in number and gender – a fact that English speakers are prone to forget: *tienen muchos más hijos que tú/tienen muchos más que tú* 'they have many more children than you'/'they have many more than you', *no en balde han transcurrido 27 años, hay mucha más experiencia, mucha más madurez* (FC, Cu.) 'twenty-seven years have not passed in vain, there is much more experience, much more maturity', *Eduardo tiene mucha menos paciencia* 'Eduardo has much less patience', *a mucha mayor velocidad* 'at much greater speed'. This construction is apparently not obligatory in Latin America: *cuando me jubile, me pasarán sin duda mucho menos cosas* (MB, Ur., Sp. *muchas menos cosas*) 'when I retire, no doubt a lot fewer things will happen to me'. Informants from Peru and Mexico found this acceptable, but it is rejected by Spaniards.

Before adjectives and adverbs, *mucho* and *poco* are adverbs and invariable in form: *los problemas eran mucho mayores* 'the problems were much greater'.

(2) One should avoid *mucho* or *mucha* without a following noun in sentences like ?*mucho viene de Venezuela* 'A lot [of crude oil] comes from Venezuela', correctly ... *gran parte viene de Venezuela*.

(3) In the following sentences *mucho* and *poco* do not agree with the preceding noun, but refer to the general idea underlying the sentence: *¿trescientos mil dólares? Es mucho* '300,000 dollars? That's a lot', *¿tres cajas de ciruelas? Es poco* 'three boxes of plums? That's not much'. Compare *mil cajas para cien días son pocas* '1000 boxes for 100 days isn't/aren't a lot', *y será mucha la cerveza que consumirán, para provecho del dueño* (MP, Arg., dialogue) 'and great will be the quantities of beer that they'll consume, to the owner's profit'.

(4) *Muy* 'very' can be thought of as a shortened form of *mucho*, used before adjectives and adverbs. The full form therefore reappears when it is used alone: —*¿Es laborioso?* —*Mucho*. "'Is he hard-working?" "Very"'.

(5) *Muy de* is quite often used in expressions like *esa calle es muy de farmacias* 'that street's got a lot a pharmacies in it', *no soy muy de ir a misa* 'I'm not a great one for going to Mass', *uno solo vino muy de traje y corbata* (MSQ, Arg.) 'only one came, all dressed up in a suit and tie'.

(6) *Poco* (but not *un poco*) negates a following adverb or adjective: *poco frecuente* = 'infrequent'. See 5.12.

(7) 'Very much' = *muchísimo*. *Muy mucho* is archaic or jocular.

(8) *Un poco de* is invariable, but phrases like ?*una poca de sal* 'a bit of salt' are heard in popular or humorous speech, especially in Latin America.

### 10.13 Otro: adjective/pronoun, marked for number and gender

Adjectivally 'other'/'another'; pronominally 'another one'/'others'. Like the English 'another' *otro* is often ambiguous: *voy a pedir otro café* 'I'm going to have another coffee' may mean that you want more coffee (i.e. *otro café más*) or that you want your coffee replaced.

*Otra persona no te creería*  
*Ponle otro sello (Lat. Am. otra estampilla)*  
*en circunstancias otras que aquellas en que . . .*

Another person wouldn't believe you  
 Put another (or 'an extra') stamp on it  
 in circumstances other than those in  
 which . . .

*¿Qué otro político habría dicho eso?*  
*El que lo hizo fue otro*  
*Otros 40 inmigrantes en el barco lograron*  
*nadar hasta la costa (La Jornada, Mex.)*  
*Se lanzaban la pelota unos a otros*

What other politician would have said that?  
 The one who did it was someone else  
 Another 40 immigrants in the boat managed  
 to swim to the shore  
 They were throwing the ball to one another

(1) \**Un otro* for 'another' (Fr. *un autre*) is a constant mistake of English speakers: *dame otro* 'give me another', not \**dame un otro*. *Un otro* is occasionally found in colloquial speech in Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America (NGLE 13.10p). Catalans sometimes say *un otro* because of the influence of *un altre* in their own language.

(2) The possessives *mi, tu, su, nuestro, vuestro* precede *otro*, as do *alguno, ninguno*; but other adjectives follow it, although *mucho* may appear in either position: *tu otro pantalón* 'your other trousers', *en algún/ningún otro lugar* 'in some/no other place', *sé que estoy manipulada como otra mucha gente* (interview, Sp., also *mucha otra . . .*) 'I know I'm being manipulated like a lot of other people', . . . *cosa que sólo celebraron Carmen Serdán y otras cuatro maestras* (AM, Mex., dialogue) ' . . . something that only Carmen Serdán and four other women teachers greeted enthusiastically'; *en otros pocos casos* (cf. *en pocos otros casos* 'in not many other cases') 'in a few other cases'; *otros varios millones de campesinos* (MVLL, Pe.) 'several million other peasants'. The order number + *otros/as* is sometimes seen in Latin America, i.e. *dos otros* for *otros dos*.

(3) *Los/las demás* may be a synonym of *los otros/las otras* if the latter means 'the rest'/'the remainder': *todos los demás países europeos* 'all the other European countries', . . . *Talavante, un torero distinto a los demás* (El Economista, Mex.) 'Talavante, a bullfighter unlike the rest'.

(4) *El resto de* also means 'the others' in the sense of 'the remainder'. The usual construction is with the definite article – . . . *las leyes, que debemos acatar como el resto de los ciudadanos* (Libro de estilo de El País, 2014) 'the laws, which we should respect like the rest of the citizens' – but the definite article after the *de* is often omitted nowadays: . . . *el resto de instituciones que rigen la vida profesional de El País* (ibid.) 'the rest of the institutions that govern the professional life of El País'.

(5) The phrase *alguno . . . que otro* is noteworthy: *en México beber una copa con el desayuno podría generar caras de sorpresa y alguno que otro reclamo* (Excélsior, Mex.) 'in Mexico drinking a glass of something alcoholic with breakfast might create surprised looks and a protest or two'. For the choice between *algún que otro* and *alguno que otro* before masculine nouns, see 10.4.1 note 3.

(6) The archaic adverb *otramente* 'otherwise' is now virtually extinct and is replaced by *de otra manera/de otro modo*.

## 10.14 *Propio*: adjective, marked for number and gender

(a) Usually it means 'own', as in:

*mi propio taxi/tus propias convicciones*  
*Cada quien se crea su propio infierno (EP, Mex.)*  
*Si no lo veo con mis propios ojos no lo creo*  
*en defensa propia*

my own taxi/your own convictions  
 Everyone creates their own Hell  
 If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I  
 wouldn't have believed it  
 in self-defence



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(b) It can also mean 'self-same', 'very', etc. (the same as *mismo* at 10.11b.):

*Las tachaduras son del propio autor*  
*Nos dio audiencia el propio obispo*

The crossings-out are by the author himself  
The bishop himself granted us an audience

*Propio* is not used after pronouns: *lo hizo ella misma*, not *\*ella propia*.

(c) 'Appropriate', 'right', 'peculiar', 'characteristic':

*Ese olor es propio del butano*  
*Ese lenguaje no es propio de un diplomático*  
*Es propio de él llegar tres horas tarde*

That smell is characteristic of butane  
That language is not suitable for a diplomat  
It's like him/typical of him to arrive  
three hours late

(1) *Lo propio* can be an alternative for *lo mismo* 'the same thing': *Miguel dijo lo mismo/lo propio* 'Miguel said the same', *sucedió lo mismo/lo propio en casa de Toni* 'the same thing happened in Toni's house'.

## 10.15 *Solo*: adjective, marked for number and gender; *sólo* or *solo*: invariable adverb

The adjective means 'alone', the adverb 'only' (i.e. *solamente*). The adverb was always marked with a written accent, but in 1959 the Academy decreed that the accent is needed only for clarity. In 2010, this 'decree' was downgraded to a 'recommendation'. Ambiguity is possible only with the masculine singular adjective, e.g. *un hombre solo/un hombre sólo* 'a man alone'/'only one man', *solo en casa/sólo en casa* 'alone at home'/'only at home'. *Solamente* is an unambiguous alternative for *sólo*. *El País* always prints *sólo* for the adverb.

(a) Adjectival uses:

*Yo me quedé solo*  
*Octavia me dijo que tenía que regresar sola*  
(ABE, Pe.)  
*En esta casa cada quien se sirve solo* (AO, Mex.)  
  
*dos cafés solos*  
(cf. *dos cafés solo/sólo*)

I was left alone  
Octavia told me she had to go back  
alone  
In this house everyone helps themselves to  
food  
two black coffees  
only two coffees)

(b) Adverbial examples (unless indicated otherwise, *solamente* could be used instead):

*Solo/sólo así se solucionarán estos*  
*problemas*  
*Millones de personas disfrutan de la luz*  
*eléctrica con solo/sólo accionar un*  
*simple conmutador*  
*Tan solo/sólo se me ocurrió en ese instante*  
*lo que podría haber pedido Graciela*  
(MP, Arg., dialogue. Not *\*tan solamente*)

Only in this way will these problems  
be solved  
Millions of people enjoy electric light  
simply at the press of a switch  
  
It only occurred to me at that moment  
what Graciela might have asked for

(1) A negative + *más... que* means 'only' (cf. French *ne... que*...): *no hizo más que reírse* 'all he did was laugh', *no piensa más que en sí misma* 'she only thinks of herself'. It must not be confused with *más de*, used with numbers to mean 'more than'. See 6.5.

(2) *A solas* strictly means ‘alone’ (i.e. with no one else present), and is occasionally required for the sake of clarity to avoid confusion between *sólo* and *solo*, as in *necesito estar a solas/solo contigo* ‘I want to be alone with you’ (*solo* might be heard as *sólo* ‘only with you’), or *lo solucionó a solas* ‘(s)he solved it alone (no one else present)’ and *lo solucionó solo* ‘he solved it alone’ (without help). Cf. also *pero nunca había fumado a solas* (GGM, Col.) ‘but she had never smoked on her own’, *la primera noche en que quedó a solas con él* (EP, Mex.) ‘the first night she’s found herself alone with him’.

*A solas* is not normally used with inanimate things. *Estuve a solas con mis pensamientos* ‘I was alone with my thoughts’ is an elegant, rather poetic alternative to *solo*.

(3) ‘Not only . . . but also’ is *no solo/sólo . . . sino*. See 37.1a.

(4) ‘The only . . .’, ‘the only one . . .’, ‘his only’, etc. *Único* is required if no noun follows: *él es el único que sabe conducir* ‘he’s the only one who can drive’, *es lo único concreto que tenemos* (LO, Cu.) ‘it’s the only real thing we have’, *lo único es que no sé nadar* ‘the only thing is I can’t swim’, *es hijo único* ‘he’s an only child’. Compare *el único/solo ser por quien deseo vivir* ‘the only person I want to live for’, *son el único/solo sustento del gobierno* ‘they’re the government’s only support’.

(5) In some Latin-American countries, e.g. Cuba, *único* may be used as an adverb meaning ‘only’, where other regions use *únicamente*, cf. *único* (for *únicamente/solamente/sólo*) *en esta región* ‘only in this region’.

## 10.16 *Tanto*: adjective and pronoun, marked for number and gender; or invariable adverb

For the use of *tanto* and *tan* in comparisons see 6.15.1. *Tanto* basically means ‘so much’, ‘so many’ (French *tant de*).

(a) As an adjective it must agree in number and gender:

<i>tanta nieve/tanto dinero/tantos problemas</i>	so much snow /so much money /so many problems
<i>. . . uno de tantos consuelos del pobre</i> (MP, Arg., dialogue)	. . . one of the many consolations of the poor

It can also function as a noun or pronoun (invariable in form as *tanto*):

<i>No creí que se atreviera/atreviese a tanto</i>	I didn’t think (s)he/you would be that daring
<i>Cobran un tanto por ciento de comisión</i>	They take a certain percentage as commission

(b) As an adverb it is invariable in form:

—Hay más de tres kilos—. ¡No tanto!	‘There are more than three kilos.’ ‘Not that much’
Corrió tanto que no podía hablar	(S)he ran so much that (s)he couldn’t speak
Tanto era así que . . . (see note 2 for <i>tan era así</i> . . .)	So much was it so that . . .
<i>tanto mejor/tanto peor para ellos</i>	all the better /so much the worse for them
—Es nada menos que de cincuenta pesos— ¡Tanto mejor! (J JA, Mex. Dialogue)	‘It’s 50 pesos no less.’ ‘So much the better
<i>Es tanto un problema para la oposición como para el gobierno</i>	It’s as much a problem for the opposition as for the government

(1) *Un tanto* (invariable) can mean *un poco*: *Manolo es un tanto raro* 'Manolo is a bit strange', *los reportes muestran resultados positivos aunque un tanto limitados* (*Excélsior*, Mex. Sp. *los informes for reportes*) 'the reports reveal positive albeit rather limited results'. The *NGLE* 20.7j notes that the variant *un tanto cuanto* . . . is current in Mexico.

(2) Before adjectives or adverbs, *tan* is required: *usted ha sido tan acogedor* 'you've been so welcoming', *se levanta tan de mañana que nadie lo/le ve salir* 'he gets up so early in the morning that no one sees him leave', *tan a propósito* 'so much on purpose'/'so relevantly', *te lo enviaré tan pronto como pueda* 'I'll send it to you as soon as I can'.

One can say *tan poco* – *me decepcionó que viniese tan poca gente* 'I was disappointed that so few people came' – but not *\*tan mucho/a/os/as*: *me alegré de que viniera tanta gente* 'I was glad so many people came'.

One must distinguish between phrases like *tan* (adverb) *buena voluntad* 'such good will/kindness' and *tanta buena voluntad* 'so much good will/kindness'.

Before *mejor*, *peor*, *mayor* and *menor* the full form is used: *tanto mejor/peor para usted* 'so much the better/worse for you', *el peligro era tanto mayor debido a la radiactividad* 'the danger was all the greater due to radioactivity'.

(3) *Tan* before verbs instead of *tanto* is found on both continents, although *tanto* is more common in Spain: *tan es así* = *tanto es así* 'it was so true', *tan no la conocen que la dejan morir de hambre* (EP, Mex., Sp. *tanto* . . ., *tan poco la conocen*) 'they know so little about her that they let her starve to death'.

(4) *Tanto* plus a singular noun is colloquial and often sarcastic for 'lots of', 'so many': *hay tanto ricacho por aquí* 'there are loads of stinking-rich people round here'.

(5) *Tanto* . . . *que* for 'as much as' is not Spanish: *no viaja tanto como tú* '(s)he doesn't travel as much as you'. *Tanto* . . . *que* can only mean 'so much . . . that'. See 6.15.1.

(6) *Qué tanto* and *qué tan* are considered correct in Latin America outside the Southern Cone for 'how much?', 'to what extent?': *¿qué tan posible es que llegue a ser presidente?* (*Excélsior*, Mex.) 'how possible is it that he'll get to be President?', *qué tanto te gusta?* 'how (much) do you like it?'. In Spain one might say *¿cuál es la posibilidad de que llegue a ser presidente?* or *¿qué posibilidad tiene de llegar a ser . . .?*, *¿cuánto te gusta?*

## 10.17 **Todo**: adjective/pronoun, marked for number and gender

'All', 'every', 'the whole of', 'any'.

(a) When not followed by a definite or indefinite article it usually means 'every' or 'any':

<i>todo producto alimenticio que contenga</i>	any food product containing artificial
<i>colorantes artificiales . . .</i>	colouring . . .
<i>todo español sabe que . . .</i>	every Spaniard knows that . . .
<i>en todo caso</i>	in any case

In all these cases *cualquier* could be used instead of *todo*.

(b) With the definite article, possessives or demonstratives, or before proper names, its usual meaning is 'the whole of'/'all':

<i>toda la noche/durante todo aquel año</i>	all night/during all that year
<i>todos los cinco</i>	all five of them
<i>Varadero. Es una playa increíble. Todos los extranjeros nos envidian (LO, Cu., dialogue)</i>	Varadero. It's an incredible beach. All the foreigners envy us
<i>Incluso Ricardo, con toda su paciencia, se salió del seminario</i>	Even Ricardo, with all his patience, walked out of the seminar
<i>Todo Barcelona habla de ello (see 1.3.9 note 1 for the gender of <i>todo</i> here)</i>	All Barcelona's talking about it

The order noun + *todo/a/os/as*, as in *los comensales todos . . .* for *todos los comensales* 'all the dinner guests' or *la casa toda . . .* for *toda la casa* 'the whole house' is literary in style

(c) Followed by the definite article and plural periods of time it means 'every':

<i>El veterinario viene todos los meses</i>	The vet comes every month
<i>todos los viernes/años</i>	every Friday/year

(d) Pronominally, the singular means 'everything', the plural 'everyone'/'everybody'/'all of them': *se enfada por todo* '(s)he gets cross about everything', *es todo propaganda* 'it's all propaganda:

—¿Dónde están las fresas? —Me las he comido todas	'Where are the strawberries?' 'I've eaten them all'
Pago por todos	I'm paying for everyone

(e) Agreement of *todo* should be noted in the following cases:

When an adjectival phrase follows *todo*, the latter agrees with the subject: *la verja está toda oxidada* 'the railings are all rusty', *estaba toda cubierta de harina* 'she was completely covered in flour'. But when a noun follows there is some uncertainty: *su cara era toda pecas* 'his/her face was all freckles', *el cielo era todo nubes* 'the sky was all clouds', *esa niña es toda ojos* (from Moliner, II, 1930), 'that girl's all eyes'; but *su madre es todo* (or *toda*) *corazón* 'his/her mother is all heart' (GDLE 16.6.5).

Women usually say *soy toda oídos* 'I'm all ears' but one hears *todo . . .*; also *es toda/todo sonrisas esta mañana* 'she's all smiles this morning'. Cf. also *estas chuletas son todo hueso* 'these chops/cutlets are all bone'. In such cases the Academy admits both constructions.

(f) Relative clauses involving *todo*

The following sentences illustrate some translation problems:

<i>todos los que dicen eso</i>	all who say that
<i>todo el que diga eso/todo aquel que diga eso</i> (the latter is literary)	anyone who says that
<i>Son todo cuentos</i>	It's all stories/make-believe
<i>Cuanto/Todo cuanto escribe es bueno</i> (literary) or <i>todo lo que escribe es bueno</i>	Everything (s)he writes is good
<i>este poeta, cuyas palabras todas quedarán grabadas en nuestro corazón</i>	this poet, whose every word will remain engraved on our hearts
<i>el césped, por toda cuya superficie crecían malas hierbas</i>	the lawn, over all of whose surface weeds were growing
<i>esta ciudad, de la que conozco todas las iglesias</i>	this city, all of whose churches I know
<i>estas novelas, todas las cuales he leído</i>	these novels, all of which I have read

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*estos niños, los padres de todos los cuales yo conozco*

these children, all of whose parents I know

*estas páginas, escritas todas ellas en japonés*

these pages, all of which are written in Japanese

*el palacio, del que no hay habitación que yo no haya visitado*

the palace, all of whose rooms I have visited

(1) **Important:** one says *todos los profesores estamos contentos* or *los profesores estamos todos contentos* 'all of us teachers are pleased' / 'we teachers are all pleased', and *todos (nosotros) estamos contentos* 'we're all pleased', but **not** \**todos nosotros los profesores estamos contentos*. Note also *todas las tres chicas* 'all three girls', not \**todas tres chicas*.

(2) *Cada* is used if the actions are new ones rather than repetitions, or when the period of time is preceded by a number: *cada día sale con una chica nueva* 'every day he goes out with a new girl', *cada diez minutos sale con alguna nueva burrada* 'every ten minutes (s)he comes out with some new nonsense', *tres gotas cada cuatro horas* 'three drops every four hours'.

(3) Moliner, II, 1330, notes that *al . . .* is more elegant than *todos los . . .* to indicate rate or quantity per period of time in sentences like: *se fuma cuatro paquetes al día* '(s)he smokes four packets/US packs a day', *lee un par de novelas a la semana* '(s)he reads a couple of novels a week', etc.

(4) *Cuanto* may be used to translate 'absolutely every': *no es cosa de obligar a leer cuanto libro se ha escrito* (ES, Arg., interview) 'it's not a question of obliging people to read every book that was ever written'.

*Cuanto* or *todo cuanto* may also mean 'absolutely everything': *heredó de él una tremenda bronca a (todo) cuanto sonara a autoridad* (LS, Ch., in Spain *bronca* means 'row' / 'argument' and *rabia* would be used here) 'he inherited from him a tremendous rage against everything that sounded like authority', . . . *quejándose de cuanto hay . . .* (*Excelsior*, Mex.) 'complaining about everything that exists'.

(5) After a neuter *todo*, Spanish usually makes the verb *ser* (and one or two others) agree with a following plural noun: *con nuestro nuevo plan de ahorros, todo son ventajas* 'with our new savings plan it's all advantages'. See 2.3.3.

(6) *Todo* occasionally follows the noun in flowery styles: *el cielo todo estaba sembrado de estrellas* 'the whole sky was strewn with stars', *el mundo todo le parecía un jardín encantado* 'the whole world seemed to him an enchanted garden'.

(7) *Todo el mundo* (singular agreement) is a set phrase meaning 'everybody': *todo el mundo los conoce* 'everyone knows them'.

(8) *Todo* followed by the indefinite article often translates 'a whole . . .': *se comió toda una tarta de melocotones* '(s)he ate a whole peach tart', *hubo toda una serie de malentendidos* 'there was a whole series of misunderstandings'.

## 10.18 **Varios:** adjective and pronoun, marked for number and gender

(a) 'Several', in which case it normally – but not always – precedes the noun: *en varias partes del país* 'in several parts of the country', *mis motivos son varios* 'my motives are various', *los aspectos varios de la cuestión* (literary: from Moliner, II, 1442) 'the several (different) aspects of the question'.

(b) 'Various', 'varied', in which case it can also follow or precede the noun. When used with *hay* or *ser* it precedes the noun:

*flores de varios colores/de colores varios*

(the second option is more literary)

*La fauna de esta zona es muy varia/variada*  
*tapas varias*

flowers of various colours

The fauna of this zone is very varied  
selection of tapas (snacks)

(c) Translating 'various': *en diversas ocasiones* 'on various occasions', *en diferentes puntos de los Andes* 'in various places in the Andes'.

# 11 Numerals

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- Numbers 1 to a billion (Section 11.1)
- Gender of numbers (Section 11.2)
- Agreement of *uno* and *cientos* (Section 11.3)
- Millions and billions (Section 11.4)
- *Un* or *uno*? (Section 11.5)
- *Cien* or *ciento*? (Section 11.6)
- Percentages (Section 11.7)
- ‘Score’, ‘dozen’, etc. (Section 11.8)
- Fractions (Section 11.10)
- Ordinal numbers (first, second, third, etc.) (Section 11.12)
- Rules for writing numbers (Section 11.16)
- Phone numbers (11.17)

Spanish numerals are simple and regular, although this makes the three unexpected forms *quinientos* 500 (not \**cinco cientos*), *setecientos* 700 (not \**setecientos*) and *novecientos* 900 (not \**nuevecientos*) easy to forget. Remember also that 16–29 are rather arbitrarily written as one word (*dieciséis*, *veintidós*, etc.) whereas other tens plus units, i.e. 31–99, are joined by *y*: *treinta y uno*, *ochenta y seis*, etc.

## 11.1 Cardinal numbers: forms

Spanish cardinal numerals (the numbers used for counting) do not change their form, except for *uno* ‘one’ and *-cientos* ‘hundreds’, which agree in gender with the thing counted:

0 <i>cero</i>	12 <i>doce</i>	23 <i>veintitrés</i>	41 <i>cuarenta y</i>
1 <i>uno/una</i>	13 <i>trece</i>	24 <i>veinticuatro</i>	<i>uno/una/un</i>
2 <i>dos</i>	14 <i>catorce</i>	25 <i>veinticinco</i>	50 <i>cincuenta</i>
3 <i>tres</i>	15 <i>quince</i>	26 <i>veintiséis</i>	60 <i>sesenta</i>
4 <i>cuatro</i>	16 <i>dieciséis</i>	27 <i>veintisiete</i>	70 <i>setenta</i>
5 <i>cinco</i>	17 <i>diecisiete</i>	28 <i>veintiocho</i>	80 <i>ochenta</i>
6 <i>seis</i>	18 <i>dieciocho</i>	29 <i>veintinueve</i>	90 <i>noventa</i>
7 <i>siete</i>	19 <i>diecinueve</i>	30 <i>treinta</i>	100 <i>cien/ciento</i>
8 <i>ocho</i>	20 <i>veinte</i>	31 <i>treinta y uno/</i>	101 <i>ciento uno/una/un</i>
9 <i>nueve</i>	21 <i>veintiuno/a/</i>	<i>una/un</i>	102 <i>ciento dos</i>
10 <i>diez</i>	<i>veintiún</i>	32 <i>treinta y dos</i>	
11 <i>once</i>	22 <i>veintidós</i>	40 <i>cuarenta</i>	
185 <i>ciento ochenta y cinco</i>	400 <i>cuatrocientos/</i>	1001 see note 5	
200 <i>doscientos/doscientas</i>	<i>cuatrocientas</i>	1006 <i>mil seis</i>	
205 <i>doscientos cinco/</i>	500 <i>quinientos/quinientas</i>	1107 <i>mil ciento siete</i>	
<i>doscientas cinco</i>	600 <i>seiscientos/seiscientas</i>	1998 <i>mil novecientos/as</i>	
300 <i>trescientos/trescientas</i>	700 <i>setecientos/setecientas</i>	<i>noventa y ocho</i>	
357 <i>trescientos/as</i>	800 <i>ochocientos/ochocientas</i>	2022 <i>dos mil veintidós</i>	
<i>cincuenta y siete</i>	900 <i>novecientos/novecientas</i>	5000 <i>cinco mil</i>	
	1000 <i>mil</i>	11.000 <i>once mil</i>	
500.014 <i>quinientos/as mil catorce</i>		936.357 <i>novecientos/as treinta y seis mil</i>	
		<i>trescientos/as cincuenta y siete</i>	
1.000.000 <i>un millón</i>		100.000.000 <i>cien millones</i>	

\$1.000.000 *un millón de dólares* (for the use of *de* see 11.4a)

7.678.456 *libras: siete millones seiscientas setenta y ocho mil cuatrocientas cincuenta y seis libras*

1.000.000.000 *mil millones*      1.000.000.000.000 *un billón* (see 11.4b)

**(1) Important:** 16–29 are written as one word, as are 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, 800 and 900. Forms like *diez y seis* for *dieciséis* are old-fashioned. ‘*Nuevecientos*’ for *novecientos* is heard in rural speech in some countries.

The numbers 31 to 99 are often written as one word in Chile *cuarentaiocho* for *cuarenta y ocho*, *sesentaiste* for *sesenta y siete*; the daily newspaper *El Mercurio* of Santiago adopts this spelling. The Academy (NGLE 21.2k) prefers the forms with *y*. The Academy condemns omission of the *a*, as in ?*cuarentiocho*, ?*sesentisiete*, even though this is common in casual speech in some countries, less so in Spain.

**(2) Important:** *uno* is not used before *ciento* or *mil*: *una pareja de ratas es capaz de procrear más de ciento veinte crías por año* ‘a pair of rats is capable of producing more than 120 offspring per year’, *más de mil colegios equipados con televisores en color* ‘more than one thousand schools equipped with colour TV sets’. But *un* is used to distinguish between different meanings, as in *trescientos/as un mil ochenta y cuatro* 301.084 and *trescientos/as mil ochenta y cuatro* 300.084. However, the NGLE reports that *un mil* . . . is common in the media in Latin America, cf. *pagamos por ello un mil trece millones de dólares* (*Excélsior*, Mex. quoted NGLE 21.3e) ‘we paid 1013 million dollars for it’, Spain *mil trece millones* . . .

**(3) Important:** the Academy (DPD, 462) now recommends separating every three decimal places by a space: 8 567 876 = the English 8,567,876. Spaces are used in Cuba: *los más de 1 200 000 niños y niñas que integran la Organización de Pionerosí (Juventud Rebelde, Cu.)* ‘the more than 1,200,000 boys and girls belonging to the Pioneers Organization’. Years, street numbers, and zip codes should not contain spaces: 2015, *Avenida Maragall 3230 Madrid*.

However, a full stop (US ‘period’) is used in Spain and most South-American countries to separate thousands: 19.000 *dólares* = \$19,000. Typists sometimes write years with a point, e.g. 1.998, but the grammarians disapprove. The Academy states that a comma should be used to separate decimals: 3,45 (pronounced *tres coma cuarenta y cinco*, not ‘*tres coma cuatro cinco*’) = British and American ‘three point four five’. This system is in general use in Spain and south of Panama.

To confuse matters more, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and the Central-American countries generally, but not Cuba, use the system of the English-speaking world, i.e. 1.25, pronounced *uno punto veinticinco* for decimals and commas to separate thousands: 5,000 *cinco mil*.

**(4)** 1001 is theoretically *mil uno* and this form is used when counting and no noun follows. Seco (1998), 446, notes that *mil y uno* comes from the famous book *Las mil y una noches* ‘One Thousand and One Nights’ and is correct only in the vague sense of ‘a lot’: *tengo mil y una cosas que hacer* ‘I’ve got a thousand and one things to do’, *las mil y una aplicaciones domésticas permiten descansar al propietario* (*El País*, Sp.) ‘the innumerable electronic household appliances allow the owner to rest’. However, *mil y uno/a* is usual before nouns: *mil y un euros* ‘1001 euros’, *las mil y una sonrisas de Robin Williams* (*Excélsior*, Mex.) ‘the 1001 smiles of Robin Williams’. Forms like *mil un euros* are found in formal writing.

**(5)** Certain forms ending in *-ón* are used, with a faint pejorative meaning, to refer to people of a specific age: *un cuarentón* ‘a forty-year-old man’, *un cincuentón* ‘a fifty-year-old’, *una sesentona* ‘a sixty-year-old woman’. Forms ending in *-añero* are merely descriptive, e.g. *un quinceañero* ‘a fifteen-year-old boy’, *una veinteañera* (CMG, Sp.) ‘a twenty-year-old woman’.



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(6) *El País's Libro de estilo* 2014, 2.1.9, says that *el/la joven* or *el/la adolescente* is a person aged between 13 and 18, so they are close equivalents of our 'teenager'.

(7) Roman numerals are written with centuries: *el siglo XXI = el siglo veintiuno*, although ordinary numerals are increasingly seen.

(8) Traditionally the word 'or' – *o* – was written with an accent between digits to avoid confusion with zero. The Academy now rules that one should write 5 o 6, not 5 ó 6. See 37.2.

(9) English-speakers should not assume that signs like £, \$ or € are clear to Spanish-speakers everywhere. Write 50 dólares, 179 libras, mil euros not \$50, £179. €1000.

(10) For *otros dos . . .* versus *dos otros . . .* see 10.13 note 2.

## 11.2 Gender of numbers

Numbers are masculine, unlike the letters of the alphabet, which are feminine:

<i>Yo puse un siete, no un nueve</i>	I put a 7, not a 9
<i>Los dos ochos del anuncio giraban</i>	The two 8s on the advertisement were
<i>velozmente en sentido contrario (CMG, Sp.)</i>	spinning rapidly in opposite directions
<i>un cinco de bastos</i>	a five of clubs
<i>Tú eres el cuatro</i>	You're number four

This is also true of *cientos* and *miles* when used as nouns (i.e. when followed by *de*):

<i>los miles de víctimas de los tifones</i>	the thousands of victims of the typhoons
<i>los escasos cientos de personas que</i>	the few hundred persons present at the
<i>asistían a la manifestación</i>	demonstration

(1) In informal styles *miles de* is very often made feminine before feminine nouns: *las miles de aves* (*La Vanguardia*, Sp.) 'the thousands of birds', *las miles de víctimas* (*El Economista*, Mex.) 'the thousands of victims'. Seco (1998), 297, says *las miles* is 'abnormal' and the Academy disapproves of it, but the construction is frequently heard and seen.

## 11.3 Agreement of *uno* and *cientos*

**Important:** *uno* and *cientos* (but not *ciento/cien*) agree in gender with the noun counted. Foreign students constantly forget to make *cientos* agree:

<i>un peso/una libra</i>	one peso/one pound
<i>veintiuna casas</i>	twenty-one houses
<i>quinientos dólares</i>	five hundred dollars
<i>setecientas mujeres</i>	seven hundred women
<i>aprobaron trescientos un alumnos</i>	301 students passed
<i>en la página quinientas catorce</i>	on page 514
<i>Yo duermo en la cuatrocientas</i>	I'm sleeping in (room) 400
<i>(habitación omitted)</i>	

(1) Combinations of tens plus one and thousands (21,000, 31,000, 41,000, etc.) are problematic. Logically one should say *veintiuna mil mujeres* '21,000 women' since the nouns are feminine and *mil* is an adjective: *se han visto afectadas treinta y una mil personas* 'thirty-one thousand people have been affected' (TVE broadcast). However, forms like *veintiún mil pesetas*, *treinta y un mil mujeres*

'31,000 women', etc., are in common use, and many speakers do not accept *veintiuna/treinta y una mil*. Seco (1998), 445, notes that the masculine is in fact the traditional form and the Academy approves of both.

When thousands are multiplied by hundreds the expected gender agreement must be used: *doscientas mil mujeres* '200,000 women', never *\*doscientos mil mujeres*.

## 11.4 Millions, billions and trillions

(a) **Important:** *millón*, *billón* and the little used *trillón* are masculine nouns and are connected by *de* to the following noun or noun phrase: *visitarían para fin de año más de 13 millones de turistas el DF (Excélsior, Mex.)* '13 million tourists will probably visit Mexico City by end of the year' (DF = *Distrito Federal*, but see note 3).

(b) **Important:** the Hispanic *billón* and *trillón* do not have the values they have in the USA and in most other places in the English-speaking world:

Spain and Latin America	USA, Britain, etc.
<i>un millón</i> = 1.000.000	same
<i>mil millones</i> = 1.000.000.000 (see note 2)	one billion (a thousand million)
<i>un billón</i> = 1.000.000.000.000 ( $10^{12}$ )	one trillion (a million million)
<i>un trillón</i> = <i>un millón de billones</i> ( $10^{18}$ )	a million trillion

The left-hand column shows the values used throughout the Hispanic world, but it makes sense to enquire which system is being used when talking about national debts or stars, galaxies, atoms, etc. In Britain 'billion' and 'trillion' had their Hispanic values until the official adoption of the US system in 1974, and some people are still confused about their exact meaning.

(1) The phrase *un millón/billón/trillón de* is singular, so a following verb or noun should agree accordingly: *el millón y medio restante fue invertido . . .* 'the remaining million and a half were/was invested . . . '.

'A million and one' is *un millón y uno/una*, and *y* is used whenever a single number-word follows: *un millón y cien, tres millones y mil*, but *un millón doscientos mil* = 'one million two hundred thousand'.

(2) The term *un millardo* has been proposed for the English-speaking world's billion (a thousand million) but it seems not to have caught on outside Venezuela.

(3) Mexico City's name was officially changed in January 2016 from *Distrito Federal* to *la Ciudad de México*, often abbreviated to CDMX.

## 11.5 *Un or uno?*

*Uno* loses its final vowel before a masculine noun or noun phrase, as does *una* before nouns beginning with stressed *a-* or *ha-*. *Veintiuno* is shortened to *veintiún* in the same contexts:

<i>un tigre, dos tigres, tres tigres</i>	one tiger, two tigers, three tigers (a tongue-twister)
<i>veintiún mil hombres</i>	21,000 men
<i>veintiún mil mujeres</i> (see 11.3 note 1)	21,000 women
<i>un águila, veintiún armas, treinta y un hachas</i>	one eagle, 21 weapons, 31 axes

In the following examples the final vowel is retained since no noun follows the number: *no hay más que veintiuno* 'there are only twenty-one', *párrafo ciento uno* 'paragraph 101', *Inglaterra, país tradicional de los fantasmas, ve uno nuevo por sus calles* 'England, the traditional land of ghosts, is witnessing a new one in its streets'.

## 11.6 *Cien* or *ciento*?

*Ciento* is shortened to *cien* before another numeral which it multiplies, or before a noun or noun phrase:

<i>cien mil bolívares</i>	100,000 bolivares
<i>cien millones</i>	100 million
<i>la iniciativa de eliminar cien de los</i> <i>500 diputados (La Jornada, Mex.)</i>	the proposal to remove 100 of the 500 deputies
but	
<i>ciento once</i>	one hundred and eleven
<i>en la página ciento dieciocho</i>	on page one hundred and eighteen

(1) The old rule was that *ciento* should be used when the number stands alone: —¿Cuántos son? —Ciento "How many are there?" "A hundred". This rule is obsolete everywhere, so the answer is now *cien*. Further examples: *yo vivo en el cien* 'I live in number 100', *pues faltan cien o sobran cincuenta* (AM, Mex., dialogue) 'well, there are either a hundred missing or fifty too many'. However, *ciento* is still used in percentages: see next section.

## 11.7 Expression of percentages

*Por ciento* is recommended by the Academy (NGLE 21.2m) and is usual in written language, though *por cien* is common in speech. *Cien por cien* is often used for 'completely', 'absolutely', although *ciento por ciento* is also found:

<i>el cuarenta y tres por ciento</i>	forty-three per cent
<i>tanto por ciento</i>	so much per cent
<i>El PCE sólo obtuvo el 8 y pico por ciento</i> <i>de los votos (El País, Sp.)</i>	The Spanish Communist Party only obtained just over 8% of the votes
<i>Se pronostica 60 por ciento de intervalos</i> <i>de chubascos en Chiapas y Oaxaca</i> <i>(La Jornada, Mex.)</i>	There is a 60% forecast of periods of showers in Chiapas and Oaxaca
<i>... la seguridad, cien por cien, de que los</i> <i>vertidos son inocuos (El País, Sp.)</i>	... the hundred-per-cent guarantee that the waste matter is harmless
<i>Estoy ciento por ciento tranquilo por la</i> <i>investigación (interview, La Jornada, Mex.)</i>	I'm 100% reassured by the investigation
<i>Promete compromiso y profesionalidad al</i> <i>ciento por ciento (El País, Sp.)</i>	He promises 100% commitment and professionalism

(1) For the use of *el* with percentages see 11.11.

## 11.8 'Score', 'dozen', etc. (collective numerals)

There is a series of collective numerals, cf. our 'score', sometimes used to express approximate quantities:

*un par de veces* a couple of times  
*una decena* about ten  
*una docena* a dozen (often approximate,  
 used less than in English)  
*una veintena* a score/about twenty

*una cuarentena* about forty/quarantine  
*una cincuenta* about fifty  
*un centenar* about a hundred  
*un millar* about a thousand

(1) **Important:** like all collective nouns, collective numerals are often treated as singular: *una veintena de casas se ordenaba formando una calle frente al río* (LS, Ch.) ‘a score of houses were laid out to form a street in front of the river’, *lo esperaba una treintena de hombres con rifles* (ES, Mex.) ‘about thirty men with rifles were waiting for him’. See 2.3.1 for further remarks on collective nouns.

(2) *Cuatro* is much used colloquially in Spain and Mexico, and no doubt elsewhere, to mean ‘a couple’/‘a handful’: *no hay más que cuatro gatos* ‘there are only a couple of people around’ (lit. ‘... only four cats’), *no son más que cuatro desgraciados los que ponen las pegatinas fascistas* ‘it’s only a handful of wretches who put up fascist stickers’.

(3) *Centenar* and *millar* are used for expressing rate: *mil dólares el centenar/millar* ‘1000 dollars the hundred/the thousand’, or, more colloquially, ... *cada cien/por cada cien, cada mil*.

(4) An informal way of expressing ‘slightly above’ is by using *y pico*, as in *el piso veintipico* (MVM, Sp.) ‘flat/apartment twenty-something’, *treinta y pico* ‘thirty and a bit’. Note also *son las cinco y pico* ‘it’s just after/gone five o’clock’.

## 11.9 Mathematical expressions

*Dos y (or dos más) tres son cinco*  
*Dos por tres son seis*  
*Ocho dividido por dos son cuatro*  
 (or *ocho entre dos* . . .)  
*Once menos nueve son dos*  
*Tres es la raíz cuadrada de nueve*  
*Nueve es el cuadrado de tres*  
*Forma un cuadrado de diez metros*  
*dos metros cuadrados*  
*tres metros cúbicos*  
*menos veinte*

Two plus three equals five  
 Two times three equals six  
 Eight divided by two is four  
 Eleven minus nine equals two  
 Three is the square root of nine  
 Nine is three squared  
 It’s ten metres square  
 two square metres  
 three cubic metres  
 minus twenty

The division sign is a colon, e.g.  $3:6 = 0,5$  (*tres dividido por seis son cero coma cinco*) ‘ $3/6 = 0.5$ ’ (0.5 *cero punto cinco* in Mexico).

## 11.10 Fractions

There are nouns to express some lower fractions, e.g. *la/una mitad* ‘the/a half’, *el/un tercio* ‘the/a third’, *dos tercios* ‘two-thirds’, *el/un cuarto* ‘the/a quarter’.

From ‘fifth’ to ‘tenth’ the masculine ordinal numeral can be used: *un quinto/sexta/séptimo/octavo/noveno/décimo* ‘a fifth/sixth/seventh/eighth/ninth/tenth’, but this is more typical of mathematical, technical or sporting language although it is heard also in educated speech: *ganó por tres quintos de segundo* ‘(s)he won by three-fifths of a second’.

Everyday language uses the forms *quinta parte*, *sexta parte*, *séptima parte*, etc., although usage is fickle in a few cases and the *parte* may be dropped. Note *tengo unas décimas de fiebre* ‘I’ve got a

couple of tenths of a degree of fever', *unas décimas de segundo después* 'a few tenths of a second later'. *Un décimo* is a tenth share in a Spanish national lottery ticket. *La tercera parte* is usual in non-mathematical speech for *el tercio*. Examples:

<i>La mitad se salvó</i>	Half were saved
<i>un cuarto (de) kilo</i>	a quarter (of a) kilo
<i>Un tercio/La tercera parte de los</i> <i>españoles piensa(n) que . . .</i>	A third of Spaniards think that . . .
<i>Alaska y Venezuela sólo nos aseguran</i> <i>las dos terceras partes de ese</i> <i>suministro (CF, Mex., dialogue)</i>	Alaska and Venezuela only guarantee us two-thirds of that supply

Complicated fractions like 'four twenty-sevenths' are usually nowadays expressed as decimals. If fractions must be used, the usual practice in Spain is to use the ordinary cardinal numbers: ' $1/20^{\text{th}}$ ' = *la veinte parte*, ' $1/90^{\text{th}}$ ' = *la noventa parte*, ' $1/53^{\text{rd}}$ ' = *la cincuenta y tres parte*. Forms like *la vigésima parte* ' $1/20^{\text{th}}$ ', *la nonagésima parte* ' $1/90^{\text{th}}$ ', *la quincuagésima tercera parte* ' $1/53^{\text{rd}}$ ', are avoided in all but formal language.

Masculine ordinal forms can be used for high fractions: *un milésimo de litro* 'a thousandth of a litre/liter'. Ordinals with *parte* are also often used for hundredths, thousandths, millionths and billionths: *la centésima/milésima/millonésima parte*, *tres doscentésimas* ' $3/200^{\text{th}}$ s'; the word *parte* is often dropped.

<i>A partir de la primera cienmilésima de</i> <i>segundo, el Universo empieza a cobrar</i> <i>un aspecto conocido (Abc, Sp.)</i>	After the first one hundred-thousandth of a second the Universe begins to take on a familiar appearance
<i>La tasa de desempleo mostró una</i> <i>baja marginal de una centésima</i> <i>(Excélsior, Mex.)</i>	The unemployment rate showed a marginal decline of $100^{\text{th}}$ of a point
<i>Bolt ganó por una centésima de segundo</i> <i>(La Jornada, Mex.)</i>	Bolt won by $100^{\text{th}}$ of a second

(1) The tinier fractions can alternatively be expressed – and generally are in mathematical language – by adding the suffix *-avo* to the cardinal number: *la veinticincoava parte* ' $1/25^{\text{th}}$ ', *tres ochenta y seisavas partes* ' $3/86^{\text{th}}$ s'. Mathematical language may use the masculine noun form, e.g. *tres ochenta y seisavos*. If two *a*'s come together when *-avo* is added, one can optionally be dropped and usually is in non-mathematical language: *treinta(a)vo* ' $30^{\text{th}}$ '.

(2) *Medio/a/os/as* is the adjectival form for 'half': *una media docena/pinta* 'a half-dozen/half-pint'; *la mitad* is the noun 'the half'. *Cuarto* may function as an adjective or noun: *un cuarto kilo* or *un cuarto de kilo* ' $1/4$  kilo', but always *un cuarto de hora* 'a quarter of an hour'.

(3) The optional use of *con* should be noted in this example: *cuesta ocho euros (con) cincuenta y siete* 'it costs eight euros and fifty-seven cents'.

## 11.11 Articles with numbers

Certain common numerical expressions, especially percentages, appear with *el* or *un*. This is particularly true when the numerical value is preceded by a preposition, and after *cumplir*, *al llegar a* . . . meaning 'to reach the age of':

<i>Vivo en el cinco</i>	I live in number five
<i>Cuando George Burns cumplió los noventa</i> <i>años . . . (La Jornada, Mex.)</i>	When George Burns reached the age of ninety

*Lo dijo al llegar a los ochenta años*  
*... una reducción del 55% en el*  
*total de sentencias dictadas y un*  
*incremento del 102% en la suma de*  
*causas archivadas (La Nación, Arg.)*  
*El 20 por ciento de los mexicanos dice(n) ...*  
*un treinta por ciento de la población activa*

(S)he said it when (s)he reached eighty  
 ... a 55% drop in the number of  
 sentences handed out and a 102%  
 rise in the total number of shelved  
 prosecutions  
 20% of Mexicans say ...  
 30% of the active population

But

*Ha costado entre tres mil y cinco mil euros*  
*Tengo cuarenta y tres años*

It cost between 3,000 and 5,000 euros  
 I'm forty-three (years old)

(1) The article is not used everywhere with percentages: *el año pasado el gasto programable representó 18.2 por ciento del PIB (La Jornada, Mex.* Mexico uses points and commas as in English) 'last year the predicted cost represented 18.2% of GDP', *acaba de obtener 46,4% del total de votos (El Nacional, Ven.)* 'he has just obtained 46.4% of the total votes'.

## 11.12 Ordinal numbers

### 11.12.1 Ordinal numerals first to tenth

These translate 'first', 'second', 'third', etc. They agree in number and gender: *el quinto libro, la quinta casa* 'the fifth book', 'the fifth house'. The special ordinal forms first to tenth are in everyday use, but the cardinal numbers encroach even on them in phrases like *el siglo nueve/noveno* 'the ninth century', the ordinal being considered more correct:

<i>primer(o)</i> first	<i>quinto</i> fifth	<i>octavo</i> eighth
<i>segundo</i> second	<i>sexto</i> sixth	<i>noveno</i> ninth
<i>tercer(o)</i> third	<i>séptimo/sétimo</i> 'seventh'	<i>décimo</i> tenth
<i>cuarto</i> fourth		

*el tercer hombre* the third man  
*Isabel II (segunda)* Elizabeth II  
*Fernando VII (séptimo)* Ferdinand VII

*la tercera vez* the third time  
*el siglo X (décimo/diez)* the tenth century

(1) *Primero* and *tercero* lose their final vowel before a masculine singular noun or noun phrase: *el primer récord mundial* 'the first world record', *el tercer gran éxito* 'the third great success'. For more details see 5.5b.

(2) *Séptimo* is often pronounced *sétimo* and the Academy approves of this spelling. Many people, especially in Spain, find it unacceptable.

(3) *Nono* is used for *noveno* when referring to Popes: *Pío nono* 'Pope Pius IX'.

(4) In the titles of royalty and Popes, the usual rule is that the ordinal number is used below eleven, the cardinal for numbers above ten: *Enrique V (Enrique Quinto)* 'Henry the Fifth', but *Juan XXIII (Juan Veintitrés)* 'John 23rd'.

(5) See 32.9.1 for how to say and write dates.

### 11.12.2 Ordinal numbers above tenth

The use of the special ordinal forms listed below is declining and they are now mainly found only in official or formal language. The forms in bold type are used for fractions in technical language: *tres doceavos* ‘three-twelfths’. They are also often used as ordinal numbers in Latin America: *la doceava parte de un sexenio* (CF, Mex., dialogue) ‘one twelfth of six years’, and occasionally in Spain, although this is condemned by Seco (1998), 70, by the *Libro de estilo* of *El País* and by the Academy, NGLE 21.1d.

11 <sup>th</sup> <i>undécimo</i> <b>onceavo</b>	60 <sup>th</sup> <i>sexagésimo</i> <b>sesenta(a)vo</b>
12 <sup>th</sup> <i>duodécimo</i> <b>doceavo</b>	70 <sup>th</sup> <i>septuagésimo</i> <b>setenta(a)vo</b>
13 <sup>th</sup> <i>decimotercero</i> <b>treceavo</b>	80 <sup>th</sup> <i>octogésimo</i> <b>ochenta(a)vo</b>
14 <sup>th</sup> <i>decimocuarto</i> <b>catorceavo</b>	90 <sup>th</sup> <i>nonagésimo</i> <b>noventa(a)vo</b>
15 <sup>th</sup> <i>decimoquinto</i> <b>quinceavo</b>	100 <sup>th</sup> <i>centésimo</i> (in common use) <b>centavo</b>
16 <sup>th</sup> <i>decimosexto</i> <b>dieciseisavo</b>	200 <sup>th</sup> <i>ducentésimo</i>
17 <sup>th</sup> <i>decimoséptimo</i> <b>diecisieteavo</b>	300 <sup>th</sup> <i>tricentésimo</i>
18 <sup>th</sup> <i>decimoctavo</i> <b>dieciochoavo</b>	400 <sup>th</sup> <i>cuadringentésimo</i>
19 <sup>th</sup> <i>decimonoveno</i> / <i>decimonono</i> <b>diecinueveavo</b>	500 <sup>th</sup> <i>quingentésimo</i>
20 <sup>th</sup> <i>vigésimo</i> <b>veinteavo</b>	600 <sup>th</sup> <i>sexcentésimo</i>
21 <sup>th</sup> <i>vigésimo/a primero/a</i>	700 <sup>th</sup> <i>septingentésimo</i>
25 <sup>th</sup> <i>vigésimo/a quinto/a</i> etc. <b>veinticincoavo</b>	800 <sup>th</sup> <i>octingentésimo</i>
30 <sup>th</sup> <i>trigésimo</i> <b>treinta(a)vo</b>	900 <sup>th</sup> <i>noningentésimo</i>
36 <sup>th</sup> <i>trigésimo/a sexto/a</i> <b>treintiseisavo</b>	1000 <sup>th</sup> <i>milésimo</i> (in common use)
40 <sup>th</sup> <i>cuadragésimo</i> <b>cuarenta(a)vo</b>	2000 <sup>th</sup> <i>dosmilésimo</i>
50 <sup>th</sup> <i>quincuagésimo</i> <b>cincuenta(a)vo</b>	400 <sup>th</sup> <i>cuatrocientosmilésimo</i>
	1,000,000 <sup>th</sup> <i>millonésimo</i>

(1) **Important:** in informal styles, written and spoken, these ordinal forms over tenth are avoided and the ordinary cardinal numbers are used, e.g. *commemoran dieciocho aniversario de la muerte de Myrna Mack Chang* (*La Hora*, Guat.) ‘18th anniversary of death of Myrna M. Chang commemorated’, *la trescientas cincuenta reunión del comité* ‘the 350th meeting of the committee’, *faltaban quince días para mi cincuenta cumpleaños* (CMG, Sp., dialogue) ‘there were fifteen days to go to my fiftieth birthday’, *el tren de alta velocidad español está a punto de contabilizar su pasajero medio millón* (*El País*, Sp., instead of *quinientosmilésimo pasajero*) ‘the Spanish High Speed Train (AVE) is about to get (lit. ‘enter in its accounts’) its 500,000th passenger’. Some newspapers, e.g. *La Nación* of Argentina and *El Mercurio* of Chile print the ordinal forms, e.g. *el 65o* [*sexagésimo quinto*] *aniversario*, others, e.g. *La Jornada* of Mexico and *El País* of Spain use the cardinal forms, i.e. *el 65* [*sesenta y cinco*] *aniversario*.

(2) *Decimoprimer*o, *decimosegundo*, for *undécimo*, *duodécimo*, were traditionally condemned, but the Academy now accepts them (NGLE 21.4i) although *El País* does not.

(3) Forms like *décimo tercero*, *décimo cuarto* are nowadays old-fashioned, although *El País* accepts them. Joined forms like *vigesimoquinto/a*, *vigesimoséptimo/a*, etc. are also common for ‘21st’ to ‘29th’. If the words are separated, both elements should agree in gender and number: *la vigésima sexta respuesta* or *la vigesimosexta respuesta* ‘the twenty-sixth reply’.

(4) For the first of a month one can say either *el uno de . . .* or *el primero de . . .* the latter being more common in Latin America but often heard in Spain.

**11.12.3 Position of ordinal numbers**

They usually precede:

*en el tercer capítulo/en el capítulo tercero*  
*la compleja relación entre ciencia y política*  
*bajo el Tercer Reich (El País, Sp.)*

*por la enésima vez*  
*los tres primeros párrafos/párrafos*  
*primeros*

in the third chapter  
 the complex relationship between  
 science and politics under the Third  
 Reich  
 for the umpteenth time  
 the first three paragraphs

**11.13 Distribution**

*cada cinco meses*  
*Cada uno paga lo suyo*  
*Di mil pesos a cada uno de ellos*  
*Los actores entraban de dos en dos*  
*Subió las escaleras de tres en tres*  
*(from NGLE 21.8c)*  
*Traían sendos ramilletes de flores (literary*  
*style, informally cada uno traía un*  
*ramillete)*  
*Uno de sus empleados nos ofrecía sendas*  
*copas de vino (JV, Mex.)*

every five months  
 Each pays his share  
 I gave 1000 pesos to each of them  
 The actors came in two by two  
 (S)he went up the stairs three steps at a time  
 Each bore a bouquet of flowers/Each  
 one was carrying a bouquet  
 One of his employees offered each of us  
 a glass of wine

(1) The NGLE notes that *sendos* 'each'/'one each' is dying out everywhere, but it is quite often seen in Latin-American newspapers.

**11.14 Single, double, treble, etc.**

*un billete (Lat.-Am. boleto) de ida*  
*una habitación individual*  
*todos y cada uno de los problemas*  
*con una sola/única excepción*  
*ni uno solo*  
*El aire contiene el doble de óxido de*  
*nitrógeno que en Washington (Granma, Cu.)*  
*Mi sueldo es el doble del suyo*  
*el doble acristalamiento*  
*una cama de matrimonio*  
*Duplicaron la suma*  
*Esta cantidad es el triple de esa/ésa*

a one-way ticket  
 a single room  
 every single problem  
 with a single exception  
 not a single one  
 The air contains twice more nitrous  
 oxide than in Washington  
 My salary is double his  
 double glazing  
 double bed  
 They doubled the sum  
 This quantity is triple that

**11.15 Dimensions and other numerical expressions**

*Este cuarto mide 2,5 (dos coma cinco) por*  
*3,75 (tres coma setenta y cinco)*  
*El área es de tres metros cuadrados*  
*Forma un cuadrado de dos metros*  
*mil centímetros cúbicos*

This room measures 2.5 by 3.75  
 The area is three square metres  
 It's two metres/meters square  
 1000 cc



*El cable tiene cien metros de largo/de longitud*  
*Tiene cinco metros de hondo/ancho*  
*un motor de ocho caballos*  
*un motor de dos tiempos*  
*un ángulo de treinta grados*  
*Forma un ángulo recto*  
*Debe de haber cinco bajo cero*  
*números pares/impares/primos*  
*dos nueveavos dividido por tres sieteavos*  
 (see 11.12.2 for discussion of -avo)  
*diez elevado al cubo/sexta/noveno*

The cable's 100m long  
 It's five metres/meters deep/wide  
 an 8-horsepower engine  
 a two-stroke engine  
 a 30-degree angle  
 It makes a right-angle  
 It must be five degrees below zero  
 even/odd/prime numbers  
 two-ninths divided by three-sevenths  
 ten to the third/sixth/ninth ( $10^3$ ,  $10^6$ ,  $10^9$ )

## 11.16 Numerals: rules for writing

There is no universal agreement about the rules for writing numbers, but the following recommendations are abridged, with a few additions, from the Academy's *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* and apply to non-technical works.

Digits are used:

- (a) for all numbers that consist of four or more digits: 56 982, 5 073, 2019, etc.
- (b) for all numbers that include a decimal value: 2,8 kilos, 21,5 kilómetros;
- (c) for percentages above 10: 11 por ciento, 67,5 por ciento;
- (d) for numbers preceded or followed by an abbreviated unit or a symbol: 64km (*sesenta y cuatro kilómetros*), 24° (*veinticuatro grados*), 45 págs. (*cuarenta y cinco páginas*), €90 (*noventa euros*).
- (e) for dates: *el 23 de marzo de 2023*; see 36.9 for more on the format of dates. Numbers are used for years (1998, 2005) but not for decades: *los años noventa* 'the nineties';
- (f) when a number follows a noun and expresses a value in a series (this includes addresses): *Avenida de la Libertad 7, 2° izquierda* '7 Liberty Avenue, second floor apartment, left-hand door', N-342 'National Highway 342', *habitación 378* 'room 378'.

Letters are used:

- (a) for numbers that can be written with one word: *quince, diecisiete, veinticuatro, doscientos*, etc.;
- (b) for round numbers expressible in two words: *tres mil, cien millones*;
- (c) for numbers up to 99 joined by *y*: *setenta y ocho, noventa y nueve*;
- (d) for all approximate numbers: *unos setenta mil dólares* 'about 70,000 dollars', *¡te lo he dicho cien veces!*, 'I've told you a hundred times!', *tengo mil y una cosas que hacer* 'I've got a thousand and one things to do';
- (e) for numbers that are quoted as spoken by someone: *me dijo que quería comprar setecientos cincuenta* '(s)he told me (s)he wanted to buy seven hundred and fifty';
- (f) for telling the time other than in timetables: *llegó a las diez y media/a las cuatro cuarenta y cinco* '(s)he arrived at 11.30'/'at 4.45'.

(1) *El País* says in its *Libro de estilo* 2014, 11.10, that one should not begin a sentence with a number except in headlines and abbreviated messages. It forbids its journalists to open with *Diez personas resultaron heridas . . .* 'Ten persons were injured . . .'; better *Un total de diez personas resultaron heridas*. This is not observed everywhere: *Tres personas murieron y 22 quedaron heridas . . .* (*El Comercio*, Pe.).

## 11.17 Telephone numbers

The *Libro de estilo* of *El País*, 2014, 11.24, recommends that telephone numbers should be expressed by pairs: 54 06 72, spoken as *cincuenta y cuatro – cero seis – setenta y dos*, and this is the usual way that phone numbers are said in Spanish. If the number of figures is uneven, the first group is written, and may be said, as a combination of hundreds: 542 67 22, spoken as *quinientos cuarenta y dos – sesenta y siete – veintidós*, or, usually, *cinco – cuarenta y dos – sesenta y siete – veintidós*. Extensions are sometimes written in brackets: 033 527 76 89 (19). Phone numbers are often written with hyphens separating the figures that are spoken as single numbers.

However, there is no objection to saying phone numbers as separate figures – *siete dos cuatro uno tres ocho nueve* – 7241389 – which is easier for foreigners.

# 12 Personal pronouns, subject

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- Forms of personal subject pronouns (Section 12.1)
- Use of subject pronouns (Section 12.2)
- Formal and informal modes of address (*tú*, *vos* and *usted(es)*) (Section 12.3)
- *Nosotros* (Section 12.4)
- Pronouns and agreement (Section 12.5)

This chapter deals with the Spanish pronouns *yo*, *tú* and *vos*, *usted*, *él*, *ella*, *nosotros/as*, *vosotros/as*, *ustedes*, and *ellos/ellas*. These are the pronouns used as the subject of verbs, as in *yo canto* 'I sing', *usted habla* 'you're speaking'. However, they are used much less than their English equivalents for the reasons explained at 12.2.1.

Object pronouns are discussed in Chapter 14. The use of the third-person object pronouns *le/les* and *lo/la/los/las* is discussed separately in Chapter 15. For possessive adjectives and pronouns, see Chapter 9. For the pronoun *se* and pronominal verbs (see Glossary), see Chapters 30 and 32.

## 12.1 Classification and forms

'Subject' pronouns are used to emphasize the subject of a verb: *yo hablo*, 'I am talking', *él duerme* 'he is sleeping'. See 12.2.1 for details about their use.

### Personal Pronouns, Subject

#### SINGULAR

Person			Remarks
1st	<i>yo</i>	I	
2nd	<i>tú</i> (note accent!)	you	informal: see 12.3.2
	<i>vos</i>	you	informal. Only in some Lat. Am. countries. see 12.3.1
	<i>usted</i>	you	formal: see 12.3.2
3rd masc.	<i>él</i> (note accent!)	he, it	see 12.2.1–2
3rd fem.	<i>ella</i>	she, it	see 12.2.1–2

#### PLURAL

1st masc.	<i>nosotros</i>	we	see 12.4
1st fem.	<i>nosotras</i>	we	see 12.4
2nd masc.	<i>vosotros</i>	you	informal, Spain only: see 12.3.3
2nd fem.	<i>vosotras</i>	you	informal, Spain only: see 12.3.3
2nd formal	<i>ustedes</i>	you	formal in Spain; formal or familiar in Lat. Am. See 12.3.3
3rd masc.	<i>ellos</i>	they	see 12.2.1–2
3rd fem.	<i>ellas</i>	they	see 12.2.1–2

(1) For the third-person neuter pronoun *ello* see 8.3.

## 12.2 Use of subject pronouns

### 12.2.1 Emphasis and contrast

**Important:** the identity of the subject of a Spanish verb is usually obvious from the verb's ending: *hablo* 'I speak', *habló* 'he/she/you/it spoke', *vendimos* 'we sold', *salieron* 'they/you (ustedes) went out', etc. The forms *yo/tú/él/ella/usted(es)/ellos/ellas* are therefore usually only required for emphasis or contrast.

It is a bad mistake, common among English speakers, to use Spanish subject pronouns unnecessarily. \*\**Yo me vestí, y después yo fui a recoger a mi hijo, pero yo llegué tarde* is completely unacceptable for 'I got dressed, then I went to pick up my son, but I arrived late'. All the *yos* must be deleted except, perhaps, the first, and then only if it is needed for one of the reasons given in this section. The subject pronouns are used only:

**(a) when the pronoun appears without a verb:**

—¿Quién ha venido? —Ellos	'Who's come?' 'They have/Them'
—¿Quién lo ha hecho? —Nosotros/as	'Who did it?' 'We did'
—¿Quién es? —Yo	'Who is it?' 'Me'

**(b) When there is a change of subject, not necessarily within the same sentence, and the subjects are contrasted with one another:**

Great confusion is caused by English speakers who ignore this rule. *Mi hermana es médica y ella nunca está en casa* means 'my sister's a doctor and *she* (i.e. someone else) is never at home', whereas '*... y nunca está en casa* refers to my sister.

<i>Tú eres listo, pero ella es genial</i>	You're clever but she's a genius
<i>Mi mujer trabaja y yo me quedo en casa con los niños</i>	My wife works and I stay at home with the children
<i>¿Mami le cuenta a Dios que Mita no va a misa y que yo me porto mal? (MP, Arg., dialogue)</i>	Does Mummy tell God that Mita doesn't go to Mass and that I misbehave?
<i>Él estaba con unos amigos y yo con un cliente (GZ, Mex., dialogue)</i>	He was with some friends and I was with a customer

**(c) To emphasize the subject:**

<i>Pues yo no quiero salir</i>	Well I don't want to go out (i.e. even if you do)
<i>Tú haz lo que te dé la gana</i>	You do whatever you like (implies 'I don't care')
<i>Ríete de mí, pero tú vas a llegar muy alto (ES, Mex., dialogue)</i>	Laugh at me (if you like), but <i>you're</i> going to go a long way (lit. 'very high')

**(d) To clarify ambiguous verb endings:** *yo tenía/él tenía* 'I had'/'he had', *que yo fuese/que él fuese* 'that I should go/be'/'that he should go/be', *yo estaba trabajando* 'I was working'. However, in most cases context makes the meaning clear and the pronoun is not needed.

**(e) In the phrases** *soy yo* 'it's me', *eres tú* 'it's you' (Arg. *sos vos*), *es él/ella/usted* 'it's him/her/you', *somos nosotros/nosotras* 'it's us', *sois vosotros/vosotras* 'it's you', *son ellos/ellas/ustedes* 'it's them/you'.

**(1) Important:** English can emphasize almost any word simply by pronouncing it louder, e.g. 'you need to talk to **her** not to her **brother**', but this use of loudness or stress usually produces

an unfortunate effect in Spanish. The latter uses other devices, e.g. cleft sentences (*es con ella con la que deberías hablar, no con su hermano*; see 41.3) or changes of word order: *deberías hablar con ella, no con su hermano*.

Further examples (bold type in English shows stress and loudness): ‘where are **you** going?’; *tú adónde vas?*/¿adónde **vas** tú?, ‘I’m talking to **you**’ *contigo es con quien estoy hablando/te estoy hablando a ti*, ‘what’s **he** doing?’; *¿y él qué está haciendo?*/¿qué está haciendo él?, ‘**you’re** not coming with **us**’ *con nosotros no vienes/tú con nosotros no vienes*. See 42.1.2 for more remarks on this subject.

## 12.2.2 Subject pronouns for inanimate nouns

*Él/ella/ellos/ellas* may translate ‘it’ or ‘they’ when applied to non-living things, especially after prepositions: *no fuera de la casa sino dentro de ella* ‘not outside the house but in it’, *me gusta tu sombrero pero estarías mejor sin él* ‘I like your hat, but you’d be better without it’. But they are taken to stand for human beings when they are used as the subject of a verb. One cannot therefore shorten *el viento sopla* ‘the wind’s blowing’ to *él sopla*, which means ‘(s)he’s blowing’; *sopla* means ‘it’s blowing’. Nor can one say *\*compré una mesa y un sillón. Él tiene tapizado de cuero y ella es de diseño italiano* for *el sillón tiene . . . y la mesa es de . . .* ‘I bought a table and an armchair. The chair is leather-covered and the table is of Italian design’ (example from *GDLE* 19.2.2).

Subject pronouns are, however, sometimes used in Latin America for a non-living subject where Peninsular speakers would use either no pronoun at all or an appropriate form of *este/éste* ‘this’/‘the latter’ or *ese/aquel* (or *ése/aquél*) ‘the former’:

*La “oposición” ha desaparecido de la radio,  
de la televisión y de la prensa diaria . . .  
Ella subsiste, mínima, hostigada,  
desde las columnas de todos  
los periódicos (MVLL, Pe.)*

The ‘opposition’ has vanished from  
radio, television and the daily press.  
It operates, minimal and harassed,  
from the opinion columns of all  
the newspapers

## 12.3 Formal and informal modes of address

### 12.3.1 *Voseo*

In Spain *vos* for ‘you’ is archaic, but it is used instead of *tú* in many parts of Latin America. *Vos* for *tú* is universal in speech and writing in Argentina and students of this variety should use it; but see 20.12.5 for the subjunctive forms used with *vos*. It is accepted in most social circles in Uruguay, Paraguay, Eastern Bolivia and in most of Central America including the extreme south of Mexico: in Costa Rica, for example, *tú* is considered unnatural. It occurs locally in Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela and is possibly spreading there, but it may be considered ‘lower-class’ or provincial, although attitudes vary locally. In Chile it is shunned by the middle and upper classes. It is not usual in Peru, Panama, Cuba, central and northern Mexico and in Puerto Rico, but there are pockets of *voseo* in some of these countries.

The possessive adjective for *vos* is *tu/tus*, the object pronoun is *te*, and the prepositional form is *vos*: *¿te das cuenta de que estoy hablando de vos y de tu amiga?* ‘do you realize I’m talking about you and your friend?’

The verb forms used with *vos* fluctuate according to region and are best learned locally. For the verb forms used in Buenos Aires see 16.7.1 note 2 and 21.2.3.

*Vos* was once used as a polite second-person singular pronoun in Spain and it is still used there in ritual language in official documents, in some prayers, when addressing the King on very

formal occasions, and in pseudo-archaic styles, e.g. in Buero Vallejo's play *Las meninas*. In Spain this archaic *vos* takes the normal verb endings for *vosotros*, and the possessive adjective/pronoun is *vuestro/a/os/as*.

### 12.3.2 *Tú (vos) or usted?*

**Important:** in Spain *tú* is nowadays used for persons with whom one is on first-name terms (but see note 2), i.e. between friends, fellow workers, family members, to children and animals, and in prayers. It is also much used between strangers under the age of about 40, and even the over-40s will find that young waiters or shop-workers call them *tú*. *Tú* is therefore used far more than the French *tu* or German *Du*, and it is much more common than 70 years ago

*Tú* (or *vos* in parts of Latin America) should not be used anywhere to persons in authority. e.g. the police, or to elderly strangers unless they encourage its use. Use of *tú* where *usted* is expected may express contempt or threat: muggers call their victims *tú*, not *usted*.

In most of Latin America *tú* or *vos* is used less readily than in Spain and learners should probably err on the side of caution by sticking to *usted* (with strangers). A not very educated female character in a Mexican novel complains that *los españoles aunque no se conozcan se gritan y se tutean* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'Spaniards shout at one another and call people *tú* even when they don't know them'.

(1) In Chile *usted* and *tú* can be mixed together for familiar address. In the following extract an upper-class mother on the beach calls to her little son *Alvarito*, *métase un poco al agua. Mójese las patitas siquiera . . . ¿Ves que es rica el agüita?* (SV, Ch.) 'Alvarito, go into the water a bit. At least get your feet wet. Do you see how lovely the water is?'

A similar phenomenon is found in Colombia where *usted* is used even for informal address, i.e. where only *tú* or *vos* would be used elsewhere; this phenomenon is called *ustedeo*.

(2) *Usted* and a first name can be combined when one wishes to mark a distance from someone who is familiar, e.g. an employee: *bueno, Pura, pues hasta mañana. Y cierre al salir* (CMG, Sp., spoken to the maid) 'Right, Pura, well, see you tomorrow. And shut the door on the way out'. *Usted* is also used to elderly persons when they are addressed respectfully as *don* + their first name: *¿cómo está usted, don Roberto?*

(3) In some families, especially in rural areas, *usted(es)* is used to address parents and grandparents, but the custom is dying out.

### 12.3.3 *Vosotros/as or ustedes?*

**Important:** *vosotros (vosotras* when speaking to females) is the plural of *tú* and is used in Spain for two or more persons in the same circumstances as *tú* is used for one person. It is normal in Spain but in Latin America *vosotros/as* is not used in everyday language and is replaced by *ustedes*, a phenomenon also found in the Canary Islands and locally in popular speech in Southern Spain. A Latin-American mother addresses her child as *tú* or, in some places, *vos*, and her children as *ustedes*. Even animals are called *ustedes* in Latin America.

Foreigners must remember to use *vosotras* to two or more females, but *vosotros* when the groups include at least one male.

*Vosotros* and its possessive *vuestro* are sometimes found in Latin America in business correspondence, flowery speeches and similar solemn texts, cf. . . . *dada la recomposición de relaciones entre la*

*Argentina y vuestro país* '... given the re-establishment of relations between Argentina and your country' (from a business letter sent to Britain).

### 12.3.4 Use of *usted/ustedes*

*Usted* is a formal or polite pronoun meaning 'you' and is similar to the French *vous*, German *Sie*, although French and German usage is a poor guide: see 12.3.2–3. In Spain *ustedes* is the plural of *usted* and is reserved for formal situations, but in Latin America *ustedes* is the plural of *usted* and also of *tú/vos*. It is therefore the only second-person plural subject pronoun in daily use.

Since they descend from the archaic formula *Vuestra Merced* 'Your Grace', they require third-person verb forms: *usted habla* 'you speak', *ustedes hablan* 'you (plural) speak'. *Usted/ustedes* used to be abbreviated to *V./Vs.*, *Vd./Vds.*, or *Ud./Uds* in official documents or business letters, but the full, lower-case forms *usted/ustedes* are now usual and recommended. Object forms of *usted/ustedes* are discussed under third-person pronouns in Chapters 14 and 15.

(1) As subject pronouns *usted/ustedes* need only appear once at the beginning of a text or utterance and then occasionally thereafter to recall the polite tone. Whereas total omission of *usted/ustedes* may sound too informal, constant repetition may sound grovelling.

### 12.4 *Nosotros/as, nos*

The first-person plural is constantly used in books and articles when the author is modestly referring to her/himself. It is less pompous than the English 'royal We': *en este trabajo hemos procurado enfocar el problema de la inflación desde ...* 'in this work I ('we') have tried to approach the problem of inflation from ...'.

(1) **Important:** when the subjects of the verb are exclusively females, *nosotras* must be used.

(2) The following construction is found in the Southern Cone: *fuimos con mi hermano ...* (elsewhere *fui con mi hermano/mi hermano y yo fuimos*) 'I went with my brother' (lit. 'we went with my brother'), *y así nos fuimos a la Patagonia, con Matilde* (ES, Arg., interview; Sp. *fui con Matilde / Matilde y yo fuimos*) 'so Matilde and I went to Patagonia'.

(3) *Nos* for *nosotros* is obsolete, but is used by popes, bishops and monarchs in official documents or ritual language.

### 12.5 Pronoun agreement in English and Spanish

Verbs sometimes agree with personal pronouns in ways strange to English speakers:

*Soy yo/Somos nosotros/Fuisteis  
vosotros/Fueron ellos*

It's me/It's us/It was you/It was them  
(lit. 'I am me', 'we are we', 'you were  
you', 'they were they')

*El guapo de la foto eres tú  
Debería volver a escribir, pero no tiene  
estímulos ya. Y luego que tampoco la  
ayudamos nadie* (CMG, Sp., dialogue)  
—¿Quién ha dicho eso? —*He sido yo*  
[any second- or third-person] *y yo* or  
*nosotros vamos*

The handsome one in the photo is you  
She ought to start writing again, but  
there's nothing to stimulate her any more.  
And after all, none of us helps her either  
'Who said that?' 'It was me'  
You/(S)he and I are going

*Tú or vosotros y [usted(es) or third person]*      You and (s)he/you are going  
*van*  
*Él y usted(es) [or any third-person pronoun]*      He and you/they are going  
*van*

When answering the phone one says *soy Ana* 'it's Ana', literally 'I'm Ana', *soy Antonio* 'it's Antonio speaking'. *Es Ana* 'it's Ana' is only possible when someone else is talking about her.



# 13 Personal pronouns used with prepositions

This short chapter discusses:

- The forms of pronouns after prepositions (Section 13.1)
- *Conmigo* and *contigo* (Section 13.2)
- The pronoun *sí* and the form *consigo* (Section 13.3)

## 13.1 Forms of pronouns after prepositions

*Yo, tú* and *se* have separate forms used after prepositions: *mí, ti* and *sí* (this pronoun is discussed at 13.3). In the other cases the normal subject forms, *él, ella, ello, usted, nosotros/as, vosotros/as, ustedes, ellos/ellas*, are used after prepositions.

**Important:** *mí* and *sí* have an accent to distinguish them from *mi* 'my' and *si* 'if'. *Ti* has no accent – a fact constantly forgotten by foreigners and natives alike:

<i>No sabe nada de mí</i>	(S)he knows nothing about me
<i>No tengo nada contra ti</i>	I've nothing against you
<i>Entre más cerca de ti estoy, más energía recibo por minuto (EP, Mex., dialogue)</i>	The closer I am to you the more energy I get every minute
(entre más is normally <i>cuanto más</i> elsewhere)	
<i>Creo en vos (Arg. Sp. and Mex. . . . en ti)</i>	I believe in you
<i>no delante de usted/ustedes</i>	not in front of you
<i>Me refiero a él/ella</i>	I'm referring to him/her
<i>Confiamos en ustedes/vosotros/vosotras</i>	We trust/rely on you
<i>Corrió tras ellos</i>	(S)he ran after them
<i>aparte de ellas</i>	except for them (fem.)

Seven prepositions or preposition-like words take the ordinary form of all the subject pronouns (but the pronoun *se* obeys slightly different rules: see 13.3 note 4). These are: *entre* 'between'/'among' (but see note 5), *excepto* 'except', *hasta* when it means 'even' rather than 'as far as', *incluso* 'including'/'even', *menos* 'except', *salvo* 'except'/'save', *según* 'according to':

<i>Todos lo hicieron menos/excepto/salvo tú</i>	They all did it except/save you
<i>Que se quede entre tú y yo</i>	Let's keep it between you and me
<i>Es un asunto entre Hernán y yo (GZ, Mex.)</i>	It's something between Hernán and me
<i>Hasta tú puedes hacer eso</i>	Even you can do that
<i>Según tú no sé nada de la vida</i>	According to you I know nothing about life
(ES, Mex., dialogue)	

(1) **Important:** English-speakers must avoid errors like *\*excepto mí* for *excepto yo*, *\*entre ti y mí* for *entre tú y yo*, etc.

(2) **Important:** the preposition is repeated after conjunctions (*y, o*): *para ti y para mí* ‘for you and me’, not \**para ti y mí*; *para Mamá y para ti* ‘for Mother and you’, not \**para Mamá y ti*.

(3) Note the set phrases *de tú a tú* ‘on equal terms’, *hablar de tú* (i.e. *tutear*) ‘to address someone as *tú*’.

(4) For constructions like ?*detrás tuyo* for *detrás de ti* ‘behind you’, or ?*delante mío* for *delante de mí* ‘in front of me’, see 9.7.

(5) *Mí* is used after *entre* in the set phrase *entre mí* as in *esto va a acabar mal, decía entre mí* ‘this is going to end badly, I said to myself’.

There is a popular tendency in some regions to use the prepositional forms with *entre* when this refers to actual spatial location: *esta noche a la Inés la voy a poner a dormir en mi cama, entre mí y la Pelusa* (MP, Arg., dialogue; Sp. *entre la Pelusa y yo*) ‘tonight I’m going to put Inés to sleep in my bed between me and Pelusa’ (*la Inés* for *Inés* is popular style; see 3.2.21).

(6) *Vos* is the prepositional form used instead of *ti* in Argentina and other regions of *voseo*: *¿querés que mienta por vos?* (CP, Arg., dialogue, i.e. *¿quieres que mienta por ti?*) ‘do you want me to lie for you?’

## 13.2 *Conmigo, contigo*

**Important:** *conmigo* and *contigo* are special forms used instead of *con + yo*, *con + tú*: *¿vienes conmigo?* ‘are you coming with me?’, *no quiero discutir contigo* ‘I don’t want to argue with you’. In areas of *voseo*, *contigo* is rarely heard: *no quiero discutir con vos* ‘I don’t want to argue with you’. In the popular speech of some Latin-American countries one hears ?*con mí*, *con yo*, *con ti*, but these forms should be avoided.

## 13.3 *Sí, consigo*

*Sí* (with an accent) and *consigo* are special prepositional forms of the pronoun *se*. *Sí* is used after prepositions other than *con*. *Consigo* is used for *con + se* and means ‘with himself/herself/yourself’ or ‘with yourselves/themselves’.

*Sí* is combined with *mismo* when it is used reflexively: *se lavan a sí mismos* ‘they wash themselves’. In other cases use of *mismo* with *sí* is variable, with no clear agreement among native speakers.

*No se refiere a sí misma*  
*Este fenómeno ya es muy interesante*  
*de por sí*  
*Un brillante que para sí lo quisieran*  
*muchos (advert., Sp.)*  
*Volvió en sí (see note 3)*  
*Colocó el vaso junto a sí (LOr, Cu.)*  
*... tan perezosa que difícilmente era capaz*  
*de leer por sí sola*  
*No puede dar más de sí*  
*Una siempre debe estar segura de sí misma*  
*(ES, Mex., dialogue)*  
*Se dedicaba a destruir dentro de sí todo lo*  
*que antes había amado (EP, Mex.)*  
*Está disgustado consigo mismo*

She’s not referring to herself  
 This phenomenon is in itself very  
 interesting  
 A diamond many would like for  
 themselves  
 (S)he came round (regained consciousness)  
 He put the glass next to himself  
 ... so lazy that she was hardly able to  
 read by herself  
 (S)he’s doing the best (s)he can  
 One should always be sure of oneself  
 (woman speaking)  
 He dedicated himself to destroying within  
 himself everything he had once loved  
 He’s cross with himself

(1) Some speakers insist on adding *mismo* to *sí* and do not accept phrases like *junto a sí* without it.

(2) *Se* is unique in being the only pronoun requiring a prepositional form after *entre*: *entre tú y yo* ‘between you and me’, but *entre sí* ‘among themselves’: *hablan castellano entre sí* (or *entre ellos*) ‘they speak Spanish among themselves’, *los agentes se miraron entre sí* (EM, Mex.) ‘the policemen looked at one another’. *Decía Juan entre sí* means ‘John was saying to himself’.

(3) There is a strong colloquial tendency, criticized by the Academy (NGLE 16.4d), to use *sí* in the first and second persons of *volver en sí* ‘to regain consciousness’, *dar de sí* ‘to give of oneself’ and of a few other constructions. One hears *?volví en sí*, and the correct *volví en mí* is often avoided, even by educated speakers. The last of the following examples reflects the hesitation of some people: *volví en sí ya estando en la clínica* (interview, *El Nacional*, Mex.) ‘I came round when I was (lit. ‘already being’) in the clinic’, —*Perdona, ¿no te importa ponerte de pie para que te veamos?* —*Estoy de pie, es que no doy más de sí* (EA, Sp., dialogue) ‘Excuse me, would you mind standing up so we can see you?’ ‘I am standing up. This is all there is of me’, *cuando volví en sí, o en mí, escuché un rumor* (SP, Sp., dialogue) ‘when I came round I heard a noise’.

(4) There is disagreement about *sí* in the modern language. *Sí* is required when it does not refer to identified persons as in *hay personas que hablan mucho de sí (mismas)* ‘there are people who talk about themselves a lot’. It should be used (NGLE 16.4n) in reflexive sentences where it is the reinforced direct object of the verb: *se lava a sí mismo* ‘he’s washing himself’, *se criticaron a sí mismos* ‘they criticized themselves’; rather than . . . *a él mismo, a ellos mismos* . . .

But in other cases when *sí* refers to a specific person, the modern tendency is to use a non-reflexive prepositional pronoun. In answer to a questionnaire, the great majority of informants (professional people and students from Spain) rejected *sí* in the following sentences: *hablan francés entre ellos* (for *entre sí*) ‘they speak French among themselves’, *lo mantuvo contra ella con uno de sus brazos* (ES, Arg., for *contra sí*) ‘she held him against herself with one arm’, *tenía las manos apoyadas en la barra, delante de él (ante sí)* ‘his hands were resting on the bar, in front of him(self)’.

In the previous example, *ante sí* is tolerable, since *ante* is itself literary; but *delante de él* is normal in speech, although some speakers respect the difference between *ante sí* ‘in front of him(self)’ and *ante él* ‘in front of him’ (someone else). *Sí* is obligatory in set phrases like *de por sí* ‘in itself’, *por sí, en sí (mismo)* ‘in itself’.

(5) *Sí* seems to be avoided with *usted*, probably because the latter is felt to be second person while *sí* is third person: *usted tiene ante usted a un hombre que . . .* (interview, *El Nacional*, Mex.) ‘you have before you a man who . . .’, *guárdese para usted* ‘keep it for yourself’, *yo sé que usted toca para usted misma* (JC, Arg., dialogue) ‘I know you play (music) for yourself’.

(6) The French pronoun *soi* has suffered a similar decline over the years, and has been replaced in many contexts by *lui-même, elle-même (él mismo, ella misma)*.

# 14 Personal pronouns, object

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- Forms of object pronouns (Section 14.1)
- Uses of object pronouns (Section 14.2)
- Order of object pronouns (Section 14.2.4)
- Position of object pronouns (Section 14.3)
- *Quiero verlo* or *lo quiero ver*? (Section 14.3.4–5)
- Emphasizing object pronouns (Section 14.4)
- Limits on the possible combinations of object pronouns (Section 14.5)
- Object pronouns and verbs of motion (Section 14.6.1)
- *Resultar* and *ser* with personal pronouns (Section 14.6.2–3)
- Resumptive *lo* with *ser* and *estar* (Section 14.7)
- Object pronouns used to show personal involvement (Section 14.8)
- Replacement of *le* by *se* (the ‘rule of two I’s’) (Section 14.9)
- Latin-American *se los* for *se lo* (Section 14.9.2)
- Redundant object pronouns (Section 14.10)

This chapter deals with the ‘object’ forms of personal pronouns: *me, te, lo, la, le, nos, os, los, las, les*. These pronouns can cause problems for English-speaking students.

The controversial issue of the difference between *lo/la/los/las* and *le/les* is discussed separately in Chapter 15.

## 14.1 Forms of object pronouns

The term ‘object pronouns’ is used in this book to refer to *me, te, lo, la, le, nos, os, los, las, les* and *se*.

Traditional grammars often divide these pronouns into two lists, ‘direct object’ pronouns and ‘indirect object’ pronouns, but only the third-person set has two forms, *lo/la/los/las* and *le/les*, and the difference between them is not always the same as the traditional distinction between ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ objects. See Chapter 15.

For ‘pronominal’ verbs like *irse, caerse, lavarse* (often misleadingly called ‘reflexive’ verbs), see Chapter 30.

### SINGULAR

Subject pronoun	Object pronoun	English equivalent
<i>yo</i>	<i>me</i>	me
<i>tú</i> (and <i>vos</i> )	<i>te</i>	you (familiar)
<i>él, ella, usted</i>	<i>lo/le</i> (masc.), <i>la/le</i> (fem.)	him, her, it, you (see note 1)

## PLURAL

<i>nosotros, nosotras</i>	<i>nos</i>	us
<i>vosotros, vosotras</i>	<i>os</i>	you (familiar, Spain only)
<i>ellos, ellas, ustedes</i>	<i>los/les</i> (masc.), <i>las/les</i> (fem.)	them, you (see note 1)

(1) The difference between the direct object third-person forms (*lo/la/los/las*) and *le/les* is discussed in Chapter 15.

(2) *Usted/Ustedes* take third-person object pronouns: *los* (in Spain also *les*) *vi* (*a ustedes*) *ayer* 'I saw you (plural) yesterday'.

(3) *Te* is the object form of *tú* and also of *vos* where *vos* is used: see 12.3.1.

(4) *Os* corresponds to *vosotros/vosotras* and is therefore not heard in Latin America, where *ustedes* is used for both polite and familiar address: see 12.3.3.

## 14.2 Rules governing the use of object pronouns

### 14.2.1 The vagueness of Spanish object pronouns

**Important:** the strangest feature of Spanish object pronouns for English speakers is the vagueness of their meanings. Spanish object pronouns merely indicate the person or thing 'affected' in some way by a verb phrase, but they do not themselves show *how* the object is affected: this must be worked out from the meaning of the verb, from context or by common sense. Typical examples are *te pedí un tequila* which means either 'I asked for a tequila **for you**' or 'I asked **you** for a tequila', or *me operé de apendicitis*, which will surely mean 'I was operated on for appendicitis' but could have the unlikely meaning 'I operated on myself for appendicitis'. This vagueness can be seen in these 15 different translations of the Spanish word *me*:

*Me han visto* They've seen **me**  
*Me dejó una finca* (S)he left an estate **to me**  
*Me ha aparcado el coche* (S)he's parked the car **for me**  
*Me compró una agenda* (S)he bought a diary **off me/for me**  
*Me sacaron tres balas* They took three bullets **out of me**  
*Me pusieron un marcapasos* They put a pacemaker **in me**  
*Me han quitado a mis hijos* They've taken my children **from me**  
*Me tiene envidia* (S)he's envious **of me**

*Me tiró una bola de nieve* (S)he threw a snowball **at me**  
*Me encontraron mil dólares* They found \$1000 **on me**  
*Me echaron una manta* They threw a blanket **over me**  
*Voy a buscarme un hotel* I'm going to find **myself** a hotel  
*Siempre me pone pegas* (S)he always finds fault **with me**  
*Me rompí el brazo* I broke **my** arm  
*Se me ha roto el lavavajillas* The dishwasher has broken down **'on'** me

(1) A special case arises when the object pronoun and the subject pronoun (usually indicated by the verb ending) refer to the same person or thing as in *me lavo* 'I'm washing (myself)', *te equivocaste* 'you were mistaken', *Miguel se va* 'Miguel's leaving', *nos caímos* 'we fell over'. We call such verbs 'pronominal verbs' and discuss them in Chapter 30.

### 14.2.2 The difference between direct object and indirect object pronouns

**Important:** there is no difference in **form** between first- and second-person direct object pronouns, and indirect object pronouns as can be seen from these examples:

Mario **me/te/nos** vio

Mario **me/te/nos** dio un regalo

Mario saw **me/you/us** (direct obj.)

Mario gave a present **to me/you/us** (indirect object)

The crucial difference is that English indirect objects can only receive something, Spanish indirect objects **can receive or lose**. English and Spanish both say *te enviaron un paquete* 'they sent you a parcel'. But English does not allow \*'they confiscated you a parcel' whereas Spanish does: *te confiscaron un paquete*. This basic difference between the two languages must be remembered at all times.

### 14.2.3 Use of third-person object pronouns for *usted/ustedes*

Third-person object pronouns also have a second-person meaning since they are used for *usted/ustedes* 'you':

Doctora Smith, le aseguro que la llamé  
ayer

Le vi ayer (Spain only; see 15.5.1 and 2)

Lo vi ayer (Latin America and,  
optionally, Spain too)

Los/las vi ayer

Dr Smith (fem.), I assure you I rang  
you/her yesterday

I saw you/him yesterday

I saw it/him/you yesterday

I saw you/them yesterday

### 14.2.4 Order of object pronouns

**Important:** when more than one object pronoun appears, their invariable order is:

1	2	3	4
<i>se</i>	<i>te/os</i>	<i>me/nos</i>	<i>le/lo/la/les/los/las</i>

i.e. *se*, if it occurs, comes first, second person precedes first person, and third-person pronouns come last:

*María te lo dijo*

*Me lo encontré el otro día* (GZ, Mex., dialogue)

*No querían comunicárnoslo*

*Se te ha caído la tinta*

*Nos los vamos a comprar*

*Se nos ha vuelto listísimo*

*Yo me le fui encima* (JC, Arg., Sp. *yo me le eché encima*)

Maria told it to you

I met him by chance the other day

They didn't want to tell it to us

You've dropped the ink

We're going to buy them for ourselves

He's turned into a genius 'on us'

I lunged at her

(1) As explained in Chapter 15, in Spain *le* is constantly used as a **direct** object pronoun referring to human males: *no le conozco* for *no lo conozco* 'I don't know him'.

(2) Reversal of the correct order with *se*, e.g. *?me se ha caído* for *se me ha caído* 'I've dropped it' (lit. 'it's fallen down "on me"'), \**¿me se oye?* for *¿se me oye?* 'can anyone hear me?'/'is anyone listening?', is a well-known mistake of uneducated speech, sometimes imitated by comedians to raise a laugh.

(3) In all the examples given, the pronouns are in the order indirect object – direct object (*te lo doy* ‘I give it to you’, *se lo tragaron* ‘they swallowed it’, etc.).

However, if *te me criticaron* means ‘they criticized you to me’, how does one say ‘they criticized me to you’? Apparently, the same order is used for both meanings, so *te me recomendaron/alabaron/criticaron/presentaron* ‘they recommended/praised/ criticized/introduced you to me’ could also be understood as ‘... me to you’; the *GDLE* 19.5.7 can find no explanation for this strange ambiguity. In practice the problem is avoided, e.g. by simply saying *me recomendaron*, etc. There is no problem if the verb form makes the meaning clear: *¡qué guapa te me has puesto!* can only mean ‘how attractive you have made yourself for me!’ and *iba a llamarte pero te me anticipaste* can only mean ‘I was going to phone/call you but you called me first/got in first’.

(4) **Important:** one can never join these unstressed pronouns with ‘and’, ‘but’ or any other word: ‘I saw him and her’ is **never** *\*lo y la vi*. The only possibility is to use the contrastive forms (14.4): *lo/le vi a él y la vi a ella* or *los vi a él y a ella*. ‘I saw him but not her’ is *lo/le vi a él pero no a ella*.

(5) Identical pronouns cannot appear side by side, so combinations like *me me*, *se se* cannot occur (see 30.11 for how to avoid the latter).

## 14.3 Position of object pronouns

The position of object pronouns in relation to a verb depends on the form of the verb.

### 14.3.1 Pronouns with finite verbs

Pronouns appear in the order given at 14.2.4 immediately before finite verbs, i.e. all verb forms except for the infinitive, gerund, past participle and imperative:

<i>Se los entregamos</i>	We gave them (masc.) to him/her/ it/them/you (for <i>se</i> here see 14.9)
<i>Te los enviaré luego</i>	I’ll send them (masc.) to you later
<i>Nos las guardan</i>	They’re keeping/keep them (fem.) for us

In compound tenses (i.e. tenses formed with *haber* plus the past participle) the pronouns are placed before *haber*:

<i>Lo he comprado</i>	I’ve bought it
<i>Nos habían visto</i>	They had seen us

(1) No word may come between the object pronouns and a verb so a sentence like *\*la siempre había admirado* is impossible for *siempre la había admirado* ‘I had always admired her’.

In pronunciation these pronouns are always unstressed: *me lo ha escrito* is pronounced as one word [me-lo-aes-krí-to].

(2) In pre-twentieth-century literary style, object pronouns were sometimes joined to finite verbs: *contestoles así* ‘(s)he answered them thus’ = *les contestó así*, *encontrábase exiliado* ‘he found himself exiled’ = *se encontraba exiliado*, *ocurriósele* ‘it occurred to him/her’ = *se le ocurrió*. Rules for this construction are omitted here since it is now extinct except in a few set phrases, e.g. *habrase visto* ... ‘well, did you ever ...’ (usually written with an unnecessary accent *habráse visto*), *díriase* (literary) ‘one might say’, *dícese* (literary) ‘it is said’. *Dícese que* survives in various forms in spoken Latin-American Spanish, e.g. *dizque*; see 32.4.1 note 8.

Pronouns attached to finite forms are occasionally seen, with declining frequency, in solemn headlines in some Latin-American countries: *Enrédanse gobiernos de Washington y Londres en mentiras sobre Irak* (Granma, Cu.) ‘Governments in Washington and London bogged down in lies over Iraq’.

### 14.3.2 Position of object pronouns with imperatives

Object pronouns are added to positive (not negative) imperatives: *dámelo* ‘tell it to me’, *cómprenoslo* ‘buy it for us’, but *no me lo digas*, *no nos lo compre*. See Chapter 21 for a full discussion.

### 14.3.3 Position of object pronouns with infinitives

(a) If the infinitive is not preceded by a finite verb, pronouns are suffixed to it in the usual order:

<i>Sería una locura encenderlo</i>	It would be crazy to set fire to it
<i>Rechazaron el proyecto por considerarlo demasiado caro</i>	They rejected the project on the grounds it was too expensive
<i>Estamos hartos de oírtelo</i>	We’re fed up with hearing it from you
<i>... amplios sectores que no están dispuestos a permitírselo (La Jornada, Mex.)</i>	broad sections of the population who are not prepared to allow them to do it

**Important:** as the examples show, when two or more pronouns are attached to an infinitive, a written accent is needed to show that the position of the stress has not changed. Compare *quitar* and *quitármela*.

(b) If the infinitive depends on a finite verb, there are two possibilities:

**Either** join the pronouns to the infinitive, as in the previous examples:

<i>Quiero hacerlo</i>	I want to do it
<i>Pudieron salvarla</i>	They managed to save her
<i>Intentaron robárnoslo</i>	They tried to steal it from us
<i>Propusieron alquilárnoslos</i>	They suggested renting them to us
<i>No tomé nada, alguien debió dármelo (Informador, Mex.)</i>	I didn’t take anything, someone must have given it to me

This is the safest option for students as it is always correct.

**Or** put the pronouns before the finite verb: *lo quiero hacer*, *te lo acabo de dar*, etc. See the following section for a discussion of this possibility.

### 14.3.4 *Quiero verlo* or *lo quiero ver*?

Students will constantly hear constructions with ‘shifted’ pronouns as in *lo voy a hacer*, *lo quieren comprar* instead of *voy a hacerlo*, *quieren comprarlo* ‘I’m going to do it’, ‘they want to buy it’. Both forms are equally acceptable, but the shifted forms are more common in spontaneous speech. The following verbs frequently appear in this construction, but many other verbs also allow it (see 22.2.2):

<b>querer</b>	
<i>Te la quiero enviar/Quiero enviártela</i>	I want to send it (fem.) to you
<i>Por mucho que yo se lo quiera dar/quiera dárselo, no puedo</i>	However much I want to give it (masc.) to you/him/her/them, I can’t



**poder**

*No puedo atenderle/No le puedo*

*atender en este momento*

*Usted no me lo puede quitar/no puede*

*quitármelo*

I can't attend to you/her/him at this moment

You can't take it/him away from me

**deber**

*Deberías explicárnoslo/Nos lo deberías explicar*

You ought to explain it to us

**tener que**

*Tiene que devolvértelo/Te lo tiene que*

*devolver*

(S)he has to give it back to you

**acabar de**

*Pero acabo de verlo/lo acabo de ver*

But I've just seen him!

**llegar a**

*Incluso llegué a caerme/me llegué a caer*

*por unas escaleras*

I even managed to fall down a flight of stairs

**haber de**

*He de consultarlo/Lo he de*

*consultar con la almohada*

I'd better sleep on it (lit. 'consult my pillow')

**dejar de**

*No dejes de llamarla/No la dejes de llamar*

Don't forget to phone her

**ir a**

*Me temía que Roberto fuera a contárselo/*

*se lo fuera a contar a mamá*

I was worried that Roberto would go and tell it to mother

**volver a**

*Como vuelvas a decírmelo/Como me lo*

*vuelvas a decir, me voy*

If you say it to me again, I'm going

### 14.3.5 When is the shifted construction not allowed?

The 'shifted' construction is not possible with all verbs: the list at 22.2.2 shows most of the verbs that allow the construction.

There are several situations in which the shifted construction is not allowed with any verbs or has restrictions:

(1) When pronouns are joined to an infinitive they must stay together if they are shifted. *Tienes que decírmelo* can be shifted to *me lo tienes que decir* 'you have to tell it to me', but not to *\*me tienes que decirlo*.

(2) If the finite (non-infinitive) verb already has an object pronoun, shifting is not allowed. In *te interesa hacerlo* 'it's in your interest to do it' the *te* goes with *interesa*, so *\*te lo interesa hacer* is not possible.

Some verbs, notably those meaning 'to allow' and also *ver*, are exceptions to this rule. *Me lo permitieron hacer* is informal for *me permitieron hacerlo* 'they allowed me to do it', *me la dejaron ver* is possible for *me dejaron verla* 'they let me see her/it'. *Nos ha visto hacerlo* for *nos lo ha visto hacer* '(s) he saw us do it' is also possible, but colloquial in tone.

(3) No other word can be placed in a shifted construction between the finite verb and the infinitive: *preferiría no hacerlo* 'I'd prefer not to do it' but not *\*lo preferiría no hacer*, *quiero mucho verla*, but not *\*la quiero mucho ver* 'I really want to see her', etc. **Exceptions:** a few common verb phrases that include a preposition, usually *a* or *de*, or the conjunction *que* allow shifting in colloquial speech: *lo trató de hacer/trató de hacerlo* '(s)he tried to do it', *lo empezó a hacer/empezó a hacerlo* '(s)he began to do it', *no le tengo nada que envidiar* 'I've got nothing to envy him/her/you for', *el que no se tiene que andar metiendo eres tú* (AM, Mex., dialogue) 'the one who shouldn't go round getting involved is you'.

(4) If the main verb is a positive imperative (and is therefore not strictly speaking a *finite* verb form), shifting is not allowed: *procura hacerlo* 'try to do it', *venga a verla* 'come and see her/it', not *\*lo procura hacer*, *\*la venga a ver*. Colloquial speech may break this rule with *dejar*: *déjame lo hacer a mi estilo* (ABV, Sp., dialogue, for *déjame hacerlo* . . .) 'let me do it my way'.

With negative imperatives, shifting may occur in familiar speech: *no intentes hacerlo/no lo intentes hacer* 'don't try to do it', *cuidado, no vayas a mancharlo/no lo vayas a manchar* 'be careful not to make it dirty', *no te empieces a incluir tú en las culpas* (CMG, Sp., dialogue) 'don't start feeling guilty' / 'don't start blaming yourself as well' for *no empieces a incluirte tú en las culpas*.

(5) *Hay que* in any of its tenses does not allow pronoun shifting in educated speech, although sentences like *?lo hay que hacer* (for *hay que hacerlo*) are heard in popular speech in certain regions. The NGLE 28.6s disapproves. *Parecer* also does not allow shifting: *parecía reconocerla* '(s)he seemed to recognize her', not *\*la parecía reconocer*.

(6) If the finite verb means saying, believing, claiming, etc., shifting is not allowed: *creen saberlo todo* but not *\*lo creen saber todo*, 'they think they know everything', *negabas haberlo hecho* but not *\*lo negabas haber hecho* 'you denied having done it' (GDLE 19.5.5).

(7) If more than one infinitive is involved in a construction that allows pronoun shifting, several solutions are possible, the first being safest for foreigners:

<i>No quiero volver a decírtelo/No quiero volvértelo a decir/No te lo quiero volver a decir</i>	I don't want to tell you it again
<i>Puedes empezar a hacerlo/Puedes empezarlo a hacer/Lo puedes empezar a hacer</i>	You can start to do it
<i>Debes tratar de hacerlo/Debes tratarlo de hacer (lo debes tratar de hacer is colloquial)</i>	You must try to do it

### 14.3.6 Position of pronouns with the gerund

(a) In combination with *estar* (continuous verb forms) and a few other verbs, e.g. *andar*, *ir*, *venir*, *quedarse*, the pronouns may be either attached or shifted:

<i>Te lo estoy contando/Estoy contándotelo</i>	I'm telling you it/telling it to you
<i>Se estaba dejando ganar por la autocompasión (MVLL, Pe., or estaba dejándose ganar)</i>	He was giving in to self-pity
<i>Os lo estoy diciendo/Estoy diciéndooslo</i>	I'm telling you
<i>(Spain only: note the double o. Lat. Am. se lo estoy diciendo/estoy diciéndoselo)</i>	
<i>Se lo va contando a todos/Va contándoselo a todos</i>	(S)he goes around telling it to everyone
<i>Se lo/le quedó mirando/Se quedó mirándolo/le</i>	(S)he stood gazing at him

(b) In nearly all other cases the pronouns are attached to the gerund: *disfruta mirándolos* ‘(s)he enjoys himself/herself by looking at them’, *hay muchos usuarios esperándolo* (Excélsior, Mex.), ‘there are lots of users waiting for it’.

(1) Attaching pronouns to the gerund is slightly more formal and probably safer for foreign students. If the auxiliary verb is an infinitive preceded by one of the verbs that allow pronoun shifting (see 14.3.4–5), several solutions are possible: *debe estar recordándolo/?debe estarlo recordando/lo debe estar recordando* ‘(s)he must be remembering it/him’, *tenían que seguir observándolos/los tenían que seguir observando/?tenían que seguirlos observando* ‘they had to go on observing them’.

(2) *Seguir* allows both constructions, but a number of native speakers would not accept pronoun shifting with *continuar*: *se seguían viendo/seguían viéndose* ‘they went on seeing one another’, *nos siguen faltando* 43 (Excélsior, Mex.) ‘we’re still missing 43 (people)’, *ella lo siguió encontrando todo muy natural* (ABE, Pe.) ‘she continued to find it all very natural’; but *continuaban viéndose, continúa dándome la lata* ‘(s)he’s still being a nuisance to me’ rather than \**se continuaban viendo, \*me continúa dando* . . .

### 14.3.7 Position of object pronouns with past participles

Pronouns come before the auxiliary verb:

*Se ha equivocado*

*Se lo han traído de China*

*Te lo hemos mandado ya*

(S)he’s made a mistake

They’ve brought it from China

We’ve already sent it to you

(1) In phrases in which pronoun shifting is possible (discussed at 14.3.4–5), there are two options: *se lo hemos tenido que vender/hemos tenido que vendérselo* ‘we had to sell it to him/her’, *la he vuelto a ver/he vuelto a verla* ‘I’ve seen her again’, *no he podido abrirlo/no lo he podido abrir* ‘I wasn’t able to open it’, *ha debido de hablarle/le ha debido de hablar* ‘(s)he must have spoken to him/her’.

(2) Literary language used to join personal pronouns to past participles, especially when the auxiliary verb was omitted. Kany, 156, cites *un accidente ocurridole en el corral de yeguas* ‘an accident that happened to him in the yard where the mares are kept’ from Uruguay. Seco (1998), 334, says this is ‘inelegant’, and the sentence would now be written *un accidente que le había ocurrido* . . .

## 14.4 Emphasis of object pronouns

### 14.4.1 Emphasis of object pronouns in non-reflexive phrases

The object pronouns may be emphasized by adding *a* + the prepositional form of the pronoun (i.e. the forms shown at 13.1):

*La vi a ella, pero no a él*

*Te lo darán a ti, pero no a ella*

*¡A mí me lo dices!*

*Si me retirara, pues, tampoco lo vería a usted*

(SG, Mex., dialogue)

I saw **her** but not **him**

They’ll give it **to you**, but not **to her**

You’re telling **me**!

If I retired, well, I wouldn’t see **you**

either

(1) English speakers are tempted to omit the unstressed pronoun in these constructions, but \**vi a ella* is not Spanish for *la vi a ella* ‘I saw her’. However, *usted* occasionally appears alone: *¿en qué puedo servir a usted?* (example from GDLE 19.4.1) ‘how can I help you’, more often . . . *servirles a ustedes*.

### 14.4.2 Emphasis of object pronouns in reflexive phrases

'Reflexive' phrases may be emphasized by the appropriate number and gender of *mismo* added to a prepositional pronoun. Reciprocal sentences (i.e. meaning 'one another') can be emphasized by the appropriate form of *el uno* and *el otro*:

*Se lavaron a sí mismos*  
*Es difícil vivir con quien no se*  
*estima a sí mismo (Abc, Sp.)*

*Se quieren el uno al otro*  
*Se quieren la una a la otra (two females)*  
*Sólo nos tenemos los unos a los otros*  
*(La Jornada, Mex.)*

They washed **themselves**  
 It is difficult to live with someone who  
 does not value himself/herself  
 They love one another  
 They love one another  
 All we have is one another (i.e. our  
 fellow humans)

(1) If a male and a female are involved in a reciprocal action one might expect *el uno a la otra* or *la una al otro*, but both pronouns are normally left in the masculine: *Rubén y María se quieren el uno al otro* 'Ruben and Maria love one another', but *María y Laura se quieren la una a la otra* (two females).

## 14.5 Combinations of object pronouns

### 14.5.1 Limits on the possible combinations of object pronouns

Spanish allows the following combinations of object pronouns before a verb or attached to an infinitive, imperative or gerund; (a), (b) and (c) are very common:

(a) One direct object pronoun: *la vi* 'I saw her/it', *sin conocerlos* 'without knowing them'

(b) One indirect object pronoun *me dijiste* 'you said to me', *estaban enseñándonos la muestra* 'they were showing us the sample';

(c) An indirect object pronoun followed by a direct object pronoun *me lo diste* 'you gave it to me', *¿puedo probármelo?* 'can I try it on?', *cómpratelo* 'buy it for yourself'.

The following two combinations are less common:

(d) Two indirect object pronouns: *me le has estropeado la camisa* 'you've spoilt his/her shirt for me!', *sírvamele un helado al niño* 'serve the little boy an ice-cream for me', *échamele un vistazo a esta carta* 'have a look at this letter for me'. This combination of two indirect objects is avoided when the first pronoun is not *me*, so sentences like *\*nos te pusieron una multa* 'they gave you a fine "on us"' are avoided. It also sounds very strange when the second pronoun is not *le/les*: *\*me nos has roto el teléfono* 'you've broken the telephone "on us"' would be avoided in both languages.

(e) A direct object followed by an indirect object, as in *¡qué borde te nos has puesto!* 'how unpleasant you've made yourself for us!' / 'you've really become unpleasant towards us!'

(1) The combination of two *direct* object pronouns is not possible in Spanish and is awkward in English, cf. ?'he was declared president, and after they declared **him it**, he went on to . . .', which would have to be recast in Spanish: *después de que lo/le nombraran presidente, pasó a . . .*. This constraint on the use of direct object pronouns in Spanish clarifies the difference between passive and impersonal *se*. See 32.5.2.

(2) For the impossibility of *\*lo y la vi* for 'I saw him and her', see 14.2.4 note 4.

## 14.6 Object pronouns with verbs of motion and with *ser* and *resultar*

### 14.6.1 Object pronouns with verbs of motion

Object pronouns are not used when mere physical arrival or approach is involved: *voy a la reunión—voy allí* (not *\*le voy*) ‘I’m going to the meeting’ – ‘I’m going to it’, *se acercó a la mesa > se acercó a ella*, not *\*se le acercó*.

*todo el occidente que vino a nosotros . . .*  
(MVLl, Pe.)  
*Suele recurrir a él cuando no le queda más remedio*  
*¿Cómo piensan la universidad los que acuden a ella?* (La Jornada, Mex. A rare transitive) use of *pensar*)

the whole of the west (i.e. western world) which came to us . . .  
(S)he usually turns to him when (s)he has no alternative  
What do those who go to it think of university? (i.e. what do students think of university?)

However, exceptions occur colloquially with the following verbs, particularly if the verb is third person:

*Él se le acercó por la espalda* (JMs, Sp.)  
*Ella se le reunió al doblar la esquina* (LG, Sp.)  
*No te le acerques* (EP, Mex., dialogue)  
*No sólo los sollozos de los niños se alzaron entonces, sino que se les unieron los de los sirvientes* (JD, Ch.)

He approached her from behind  
She caught up with him as she turned the corner  
Don’t go near him  
Not only did the children’s sobs ring out, but the servants’ sobbing was added to it

(1) This construction is rare in the first and second persons: *se le opuso* ‘(s)he opposed him/her’ for *se opuso a él* is possible, but *te opusiste a él* ‘you opposed him’ rather than *\*te le opusiste*. First- and second-person forms are more common in Latin America, especially Mexico (J. Lope Blanch, 1991, 20), so one quite often finds sentences like *te ruego que te nos incorpores* (for . . . *que te incorpores a nosotros*) ‘I’m asking you to join us’.

(2) *Se le puso delante, se me puso delante* ‘(s)he stood in front of him/her’, ‘(s)he/you stood in front of me’ frequently occur colloquially for *se puso delante de él/se puso delante de mí*, and are more dramatic in tone.

(3) **Important:** the example above from JD (José Donoso – *se les unieron . . .*) unusually breaks the rule that object pronouns are not used with such verbs when the sentence refers to non-human things. The normal construction would be *se unieron a ellos*. Donoso’s example may be a case of personification, in which case the *les* is explicable.

(4) Object pronouns are used with *llegar*, *venirse* and *venir con* when their object is human: *cuando me llegó la noticia de su triunfo . . .* ‘when news of his/her/your triumph reached me . . .’, *el armario se le vino encima* ‘the cupboard/US closet collapsed on him/her/you’, *a mí no me venga usted con cuentos porque yo todo lo sé* (ABE, Pe., dialogue) ‘don’t come to me with stories because I know all about it’.

(5) In *le viene a decir que . . .* ‘(s)he’s coming to tell him/her that . . .’ the *le* belongs to the *decir*: *viene a decirle que . . .* In *le viene bien* ‘it suits him/her’ and *¿qué tal te va?* ‘how are things going’ / ‘how’re you doing?’, advantage, not motion, is involved.

### 14.6.2 Pronouns with *ser*, *resultar* and adjectives

This section covers the difficult question of why one can say *esta herramienta me es útil* 'this tool is useful to me' but not *\*esta casa me es oscura*? 'this house is dark to me'. English has similar complications: why can one say 'she was always kind to me' but not *\*'she was always shy to me'* (for ... always shy *with me*)?

*Ser* + an object pronoun is possible only with certain kinds of adjective:

<i>Nos era imprescindible contactar a tus padres</i>	We absolutely had to contact your parents
<i>Le era más fácil soportar los dolores ajenos que los propios</i> (GGM, Col.)	It was easier for him to put up with other people's suffering than his own
<i>Voy a serle muy franca</i> (ABE, Pe., dialogue)	I'm going to be very frank with you
<i>Para serte sincero me repele Lombardo Toledano</i> (EP, Mex., dialogue)	To be honest with you, Lombardo Toledano repels me

The following list shows some other adjective that can take object pronouns with *ser*:

<i>agradable/desagradable</i>	<i>grato/ingrato</i> pleasing/	<i>posible/imposible</i> possible/
agreeable/ disagreeable	displeasing	impossible
<i>ajeno</i> strange	<i>indiferente</i> indifferent	<i>rentable</i> profitable
<i>conocido/desconocido</i>	<i>leal</i> loyal	<i>sabido</i> known
known/unknown	<i>lícito</i> permitted	<i>simpático/antipático</i> nice/
<i>doloroso</i> painful	<i>natural</i> natural	nasty (of persons)
<i>fácil/difícil</i> easy / difficult	<i>necesario/innecesario</i>	<i>sincero, franco</i> sincere, frank
<i>familiar</i> familiar	necessary / unnecessary	<i>suficiente/insuficiente</i>
<i>favorable</i> favourable	<i>permitido/prohibido</i>	sufficient
<i>fiel/infiel</i> faithful / unfaithful	allowed / prohibited	<i>útil/inútil</i> useful / useless

The problem is made more complicated by the existence of two other Spanish verbs, *resultar* and *quedar(se)*, that can also be used with object pronouns and adjectives as in *le resultaba barato* 'it seemed cheap to her/him', *pero me ha quedado claro que tendrás lo que quieras* 'but it's clear to me that you'll get what you want' (LS, Sp., dialogue). *Quedar(se)* is discussed in more detail at 30.7.33, and *resultar* is discussed further at 31.3.7. Examples of the use of *resultar* with adjectives and object pronouns:

<i>Me resulta muy triste la situación que está viviendo</i> (Excélsior, Mex., not <i>me es</i> . . .)	I find the situation he's living through very sad
<i>. . . un gesto que siempre me resulta llamativo</i> (LS, Sp.)	. . . a gesture that I always find striking
<i>Me resulta difícil y absurdamente arriesgado comprar algo para quien conozco poco</i> (CP, Arg.)	I find it difficult and absurdly risky to buy something for someone I don't know well
<i>. . . envuelta en una sábana, pues ahora su desnudez le resultaba insostenible</i> (ES, Mex.)	. . . wrapped in a sheet because she now found her nakedness unbearable

The following are adjectives that often appear in the construction object pronoun + *resultar* + adjective:

<i>aburrido</i> boring	<i>conveniente</i> suitable	<i>gracioso</i> funny
<i>apropiado</i> appropriate	<i>divertido</i> amusing	<i>imposible</i> impossible
<i>atractivo</i> attractive	<i>emocionante</i> exciting	<i>insólito</i> unusual
<i>cara</i> expensive	<i>evidente</i> evident	<i>inteligible</i> intelligible
<i>cómodo</i> comfortable	<i>familiar</i> familiar	<i>interesante</i> interesting

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*molesto* bothersome  
*peligroso* dangerous

*pesado* annoying  
*pintoresco* picturesque

*sorprendente* surprising  
*sospechoso* suspicious

Some of these adjectives can also be used with *ser*, e.g. *me era/resultaba imposible/familiar/lejano* ‘I found it impossible/familiar/distant’, etc.

The difference between these adjectives and those that can appear in the construction *me/te/le/nos/os/les*. + *ser* + adjective seems to be that *ser* is used with adjectives that involve a higher level of personal emotional involvement, e.g. *leal* ‘loyal’, *fiel* ‘faithful’, *sincere* ‘sincere’. But we admit that it is often very difficult to explain why some phrases, e.g. *les era útil* ‘it was useful for them’ sound correct and others, like *\*me es emocionante* sound wrong whereas *me resulta emocionante* ‘I find it exciting’ is normal.

(1) Many adjectives can also be constructed with *para*: *¿tan difícil te es vivir conmigo?* (ABV, Sp., dialogue) or *¿tan difícil es para ti vivir conmigo?* ‘is it so hard for you to live with me?’, *es conveniente para ellos/les resulta conveniente* ‘it’s suitable for/to them’

(2) The nuance conveyed by *resultar* is often almost untranslatable. Compare *es feo* = ‘it/he’s ugly’ and *resulta feo* ‘the effect is ugly’/‘he/it is ugly as a result’; also *el Senador resultó más tímido de lo que esperaba* ‘the Senator turned out to be shyer than she had expected’ (ES, Mex.). See 31.3.7 for more details.

### 14.6.3 *Ser* and *resultar* plus object pronouns and nouns:

*Si le es molestia, dígamelo*

If it’s a nuisance for you, tell me

*Nos es de interés . . .*

It’s of interest to us . . .

*Me/Le era un gran placer/Era un gran placer*

It was a great pleasure for/to me/him, etc.

*También tu hermano resultó un traidor*

Your brother turned out to be a traitor too

(ES, Mex., dialogue)

*Mujeres rubias que al final resultaron ser  
también hombres rubios* (APR, Sp.)

Blond women who eventually turned  
out to be blond men as well

*La salina resultó un buen negocio* (MVLL, Pe.)

The salt mine/salt works turned out to be  
a good business

*Pues atrévase a contarla . . . Resultaría una  
gran novela* (CMG, Sp., dialogue)

Well, have the courage to tell it [la  
. . . historia]. It would make a great novel

(1) Spanish does not allow a pronominal construction in translations of sentences like ‘I was always a good mother to him’: *siempre fui una buena madre para él* (not *\*siempre le fui . . .*).

## 14.7 ‘Resumptive’ *lo* with *ser*, *estar*, *parecer* and *hay*

The predicate of *ser*, *estar* and *parecer* is echoed or resumed by *lo*: —*Parece buena la tierra desde aquí—*. *Lo es*. “‘The land looks good from here.” “It is.”” This construction is discussed at 8.4.2. For *lo hay*, *los hay*/*las hay*, etc., see 34.2.2.

## 14.8 Object pronouns used to denote personal involvement

Object pronouns may simply show that a person is emotionally affected, as in the indignant Frenchman’s *regardez-moi ça!* ‘just look at that for me!’. Usually the effect is untranslatable into standard English, but popular English sometimes uses ‘on me’, ‘on you’, etc., to include the person affected: *se me han ido de casa* ‘they’ve left home “on me”’, *se le ha averiado el coche* ‘his/her car’s broken down “on him/her”’:

*Pues, yo eché a una porque me fumaba y  
ahora tengo otra que, además de fumar,  
me bebe* (EA, Sp., dialogue, colloquial)  
*Los alumnos se me habían largado a una  
manifestación* (ABE, Pe., dialogue),  
*¿No estará pensando embalsamarnos al  
Presidente . . . ?* (I A, Ch., dialogue)  
*Mi suegra compró un reloj y al mes no le  
caminaba* (AA, Cu., dialogue; Sp. *no le  
funcionaba*)  
*¡Me le has estropeado tres camisas!*  
(popular style)  
*Cuidenme mucho a este niño* (EP, Mex.)  
*Péiname a la niña*

Well, I fired one [maid] because she  
smoked 'on me' and now I've got another  
who not only smokes but drinks 'on me'  
The students had gone off to  
a demonstration  
You aren't thinking of having the  
President embalmed for us?  
My mother-in-law bought a watch and  
a month later it didn't work ('on her')  
You've spoilt three of his shirts for me!  
Look after this child well for me  
Do the little girl's hair for me

(1) This device of including an emotionally involved person is used more in parts of Latin America than in Spain. *Me le pintaste la mesa* 'you painted the table for him/her for me' is acceptable for some Latin-American speakers, but, with some exceptions, European Spanish tends to avoid clusters of two indirect object pronouns. See 14.5.

(2) If the person involved is in the third person, *le* or *les* must be used, not *lo/la/los/las*: *se le murió un hijo* 'one of his/her children/sons died'.

## 14.9 'The Rule of Two L's'

### 14.9.1 Replacement of *le* by *se*

**Important:** two pronouns beginning with *l* cannot stand side by side. The *le* or *les* must be replaced by *se*: *le doy* 'I give to him/her/you' + *lo* 'it' > *se lo doy* 'I give it to him/her/you', **never** \**le lo doy*:

<i>Quiero dárselo</i>	I want to give it to him/her/you/them
<i>Se lo dije a ella</i>	I told it to her
<i>Se lo dije a ellos</i>	I told it to them (masc.)
<i>¿Quiere usted que se lo envuelva?</i>	Do you want me to wrap it for you?
<i>Anne quiso ayudarnos con la maleta . . .</i>	Anne wanted to help us with the suitcase.
<i>No se lo permitimos</i> (JH, Mex., dialogue)	We didn't let her

(1) This phenomenon, which has no counterpart in French, Italian or Portuguese, is sometimes explained by the 'ugliness' of too many *l*'s. This explanation is implausible, but it reminds students that in Spanish two object pronouns beginning with *l* can **never** stand side by side. This is a very strong rule, observed throughout the Spanish-speaking world in all styles of language.

### 14.9.2 Latin-American *se los* for *se lo*

The combination *se* + neuter *lo* is very ambiguous. *Se lo dije* may mean 'I told it to him, to her, to you (*usted*)', 'to them' (*ellos* or *ellas*) or 'to you' (*ustedes*). *A él/ella/usted/ellos/ellas/ustedes* may be added if context does not make the issue clear: *se lo dije a ustedes* 'I told you', etc.

There is a very widespread tendency in Latin America to show that *se* stands for *les* by pluralizing the direct object pronoun, i.e. *se los dije*, for *se lo dije a ellos/ellas* 'I told it to them':



*A un policía le había gustado más bien poco  
la gracia y se los había dicho* (JC, Arg.,  
dialogue, for *se lo había dicho*)  
*Si eso es cierto es un pecado y  
se los voy a prohibir* (GZ, Mex., dialogue)

One policeman really didn't like  
the joke and told them so

If that's so, then it's a sin and I will  
forbid them to do it

DeMello (1992), 1, reports that in Mexico City this construction is of about equal frequency in educated and uneducated speech and it is on the way to being accepted as correct throughout Latin America; but it is less common in Lima, La Paz and a few other places. This construction is not used in Spain where only *se lo* is possible in this context.

## 14.10 Redundant object pronouns

Spanish constantly uses object pronouns even when the thing they refer to is already named by a noun. In this respect, it is very different from French and English. Some of these redundant pronouns are virtually obligatory; others are more typical of informal styles.

### 14.10.1 Redundant object pronouns when the objects precede the verb

If, for purposes of emphasis or focus, a direct or indirect object precedes a verb, a redundant pronoun is obligatory except in the cases mentioned in note 1. Compare *compré esta casa hace cinco años* and *esta casa la compré hace cinco años* 'I bought this house five years ago'. Examples:

*Eso no me lo negarás  
El dinero me lo llevo yo* (CF, Mex., dialogue)  
*A alguno de vosotros os quisiera ver  
yo en un buen fregado* (DS, Sp. dialogue)

You won't deny me that  
I'm taking the money with me  
I'd like to see one of you in a real mess

(1) **Important:** redundant pronouns are not used with *indefinite* direct objects, i.e. by ones not accompanied by *el/la/los/las, este/ese/aquel*, or some word meaning 'my', 'your', 'her', etc.: *mucha prisa ha debido tener* '(s)he must have been in a hurry', *carne no como* 'meat I don't eat!', *aviones tenemos aquí que han costado millones* 'we've got planes here that cost millions . . .', *¡cuántas tonterías dices!* 'what a lot of nonsense you talk!'; but *los libros los dejo aquí* 'I'll leave the books here'.

Use of *las* in the following example would be incorrect: —¿compraste flores? — Sí, compré (GDLE 24.2.1, not *las compré*) "Did you buy flowers?" "Yes, I did" (*las compré* answers ¿compraste *las* flores?). GDLE 5.3.2.4 and 5.5 notes that sentences like *¿fiebre no la tiene* are heard in northern dialects in Spain.

A numeral on its own does not always make a noun definite: *mil euros te doy por el cuadro* 'I'll give you 1000 euros for the painting', but, usually, *los mil euros te los doy* 'I'll give you the thousand euros'.

(2) The redundant pronoun is not used after *eso* in such phrases as *eso creo yo* 'that's what I think', *eso digo yo* 'that's what I think' (but compare *eso lo digo yo* 'that's what I say').

(3) For a discussion of the effect of putting the object before the verb see Chapter 42, especially 42.9.2.

### 14.10.2 Redundant pronouns and indirect objects

When an indirect object **follows** a verb, a redundant pronoun is also very frequently used:

<i>Bueno, si no le dicen a uno cómo hay que hacerlo</i>	Well, if they don't tell one how to do it . . .
<i>Esta solución le pareció a doña Matilde la más acertada</i> (JMG, Sp.)	This solution seemed to be the best one to Doña Matilde
<i>Se le notan cada vez más los años a José</i>	You can tell José's age more and more
<i>Les tenía mucho miedo a los truenos</i>	(S)he was very frightened of thunder
<i>No le ha dicho nada a su madre</i> (GZ, Mex., dialogue)	He hasn't told his mother anything
<i>Tráigale un jugo de naranja a la niña</i> (AM, Mex., dialogue. <i>Jugo</i> = meat juice in Spain; <i>el zumo</i> = fruit juice)	Bring the girl an orange juice

(1) Absence of the redundant pronoun in such cases depersonalizes the indirect object and would be natural in official documents or business letters when a formal tone is required: *escriba una carta al Ministerio de Hacienda* 'write a letter to the Ministry of Finance', *El gobierno no ocultará al Papa Francisco los problemas internos del país* (UnoMásUno, Mex.) 'the Government will not conceal the internal problems of the country from Pope Francis', *esto no corresponde a Odradek* (JLB, Arg. Odradek is a non-human creature) 'this is not a trait of Odradek's'; *es necesario dar cera a este tipo de suelo todas las semanas* 'this type of floor must be waxed every week'.

In most other cases the redundant pronoun is used, more so than 50 years ago and almost always with proper names: *dáselo a Mario* 'Give it to Mario', *se lo robaron a Muriel* 'they stole it from Muriel' (*robar a . . .* 'to steal from . . .'). However, the redundant pronoun is sometimes omitted with other nouns for stylistic reasons, cf. *una forma estudiada de acentuar la ironía que gusta a todas las mujeres* (JM, Sp.) 'a studied way of emphasizing the irony that all women like', where *les gusta a las mujeres* is less literary; or *todo lo que sobra de esta mañana lo podés dar a las gallinas* (MP, Arg., dialogue; or *se lo podés dar a las gallinas*. Spain *puedes* for the *vos* form *podés*) 'you can give the chickens everything left over from this morning'. The GDLE, 19.4.1, says that omission is very rare, although slightly more frequent with *decir* and *dar*.

(2) This rule does not apply – at least in Spain – to *direct* objects that follow the verb as in *Ana vio a Julia* 'Ana saw Julia'. See 14.10.4.

### 14.10.3 Le for redundant les

There is a strong tendency in spontaneous language everywhere to use the singular *le* in this construction for the plural *les*. DeMello (1992), 2, reports that in Latin America it is equally common with non-human and humans, but Peninsular informants generally reported it as less acceptable with humans:

<i>Cualquiera le da vuelta a las razones por las que te viniste conmigo</i> (JMG. Sp., dialogue)	Anyone might ponder on the reasons why you came to me
<i>no darle importancia a los detalles</i>	not to ascribe importance to details
<i>¿Quieres devolverle la isla de Manhattan a los Algonquins?</i> (CF, Mex., dialogue)	Do you want to give Manhattan Island back to the Algonquins?
<i>?Le viene natural a los niños</i> (educated Spaniard, overheard)	It comes naturally to children
<i>Quiero dejarle un México mejor a mis nietos</i> (EP, Mex., dialogue)	I want to leave a better Mexico to my grandchildren

(1) Sentences like *él les* (for *le*) *da mucha importancia a las apariencias* '(s)he ascribes a lot of importance to appearances' may sound odd to some speakers. But use of the singular *le* for *les* is technically 'wrong', and should be avoided in formal writing – e.g. in this sentence by omitting the redundant pronoun altogether.

#### 14.10.4 Redundant direct object pronouns

As was said at 14.10.1, a redundant pronoun is usually obligatory when a direct object precedes the verb, as in *las flores las compré ayer* 'I bought the flowers yesterday'. When the direct object follows the verb, use of a redundant object pronoun is common with *todo*: *ahora me lo tienes que contar todo* 'now you have to tell me everything'. It is also required when it is necessary to reinforce an object pronoun, e.g. *la vi a ella pero no a él* 'I saw her but not him' (not *\*vi a ella*).

In other cases use of a redundant pronoun with *direct* objects is generally avoided in Spain, but it is common in Latin America in spontaneous speech and also in written language in Argentina:

<i>Le quiere mucho a ese hijo</i> (Spain, familiar)	(S)he loves that son a lot
<i>Morgan también lo mandó llamar a Abdulmalik</i> (JLB, Arg., dialogue; Sp . . . <i>mandó llamar a Abdulmalik</i> )	Morgan also had Abdulmalik sent for
<i>No lo conocen a Perón en Córdoba, lo confunden con un cantante de tangos</i> (JA, Arg., dialogue; Sp. <i>no conocen</i> )	They've never heard of Perón in Cordoba. They confuse him with a tango singer
<i>Convénzalo a su amigo de que acepte la beca</i> (MVLI, Pe., dialogue; Sp. <i>convenza a su amigo</i> . . .)	Persuade your friend to accept the grant

This is less usual, but not unknown, with non-human direct objects.

#### 14.10.5 Redundant pronouns in relative clauses

Redundant pronouns occur in spoken Spanish in relative clauses to 'resume' or echo a direct or indirect object relative pronoun, especially in non-restrictive clauses (see 'restrictive' in the Glossary), and they may appear in writing, particularly if several words separate the *que* and the verb that depends on it:

<i>Los gramáticos aconsejan muchas cosas que nadie las dice</i> (Sp., informant)	Grammarians recommend lots of things that no one says
<i>Te voy a hacer una confesión que nunca me animé a hacerla a nadie</i> (Latin-American, from Kany, 150)	I'm going to make you a confession I never had the courage to make to anybody
<i>Sólo por ti dejaría a don Memo a quien tanto le debo</i> (CF, Mex., dialogue)	Only for you would I leave Don Memo, whom I owe so much

DeMello (1992), 4, shows that the construction is very widespread, even in quite formal speech in Spain and Latin America, but it may sound uneducated to some, especially in restrictive clauses (the first two examples), and it is best left to native speakers.

# 15 *Le/les* and *lo/la/los/las*

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- Basic rules for choice between *lo/la/los/las* and *le/les* (Section 15.2)
- The uses of *le/les* as an indirect object pronoun (Section 15.3)
- The uses of *lo/la/los/las* as direct object pronouns (Section 15.4)
- The *le/lo* controversy and regional variants (Section 15.5)
- Use of *le/les* as direct object pronouns in standard Spanish everywhere (Sections 15.6–10)

This chapter is devoted exclusively to the problem of the relationship between the third-person object pronouns *le/les* and *lo/la/los/las*. For first- and second-person pronouns (including *usted* and *ustedes*) and for third-person subject pronouns (*él, ella, ellos, ellos*), see Chapter 12.

## 15.1 The *le/lo* controversy: summary of the arguments contained in this chapter

The rules governing the correct choice of third-person object pronouns vary a great deal in everyday spoken language throughout the Spanish-speaking world: the 80 pages that the *GDLE* devotes to the subject reveal that spoken usage sometimes even differs between places less than 50 kilometres apart.

However, the situation in the written language is fairly stable, and can be summarized (albeit somewhat over-simplified) as follows:

the pronoun used for third-person *direct objects*, human and non-human, in more than 90 per cent of the Spanish-speaking world is *lo/la* for the singular and *los/las* for the plural. *Le* and *les* are used for indirect objects as defined at 14.2.2 and 15.3. This scheme is recommended for learners because it usually produces acceptable sentences on both continents.

However, there are exceptions to the above rule – some of them important. They are discussed below in Sections 15.5 and 15.6–10.

## 15.2 Third-person object pronouns: basic rules

Beginners can apply the following scheme, valid for all of Latin America and acceptable to, though not necessarily preferred by, most Spaniards. These rules will produce correct sentences in over 90 per cent of cases.

## Third-person object pronouns

	Direct object	Indirect object
	<b>SINGULAR</b>	
<b>Masculine</b>	<i>lo</i>	<i>le</i>
<b>Feminine</b>	<i>la</i>	<i>le</i>
	<b>PLURAL</b>	
<b>Masculine</b>	<i>los</i>	<i>les</i>
<b>Feminine</b>	<i>las</i>	<i>les</i>

The following sentences exemplify these rules:

<i>Ángela vio a Antonio</i> Angela saw Antonio	<i>Lo vio</i> She saw him
<i>Antonio vio a Ángela</i> Antonio saw Angela	<i>La vio</i> He saw her
<i>Vio el libro</i> (S)he saw the book	<i>Lo vio</i> (S)he saw it
<i>Vio la casa</i> (S)he saw the house	<i>La vio</i> (S)he saw it
<i>María dijo hola a Juan</i> María said hello to Juan	<i>Le dijo hola</i> She said hello to him
<i>Juan dijo hola a María</i> Juan said hello to María	<i>Le dijo hola</i> He said hello to her
<i>Vio a los hombres</i> (S)he saw the men	<i>Los vio</i> (S)he saw them
<i>Vio a las mujeres</i> (S)he saw the women	<i>Las vio</i> (S)he saw them
<i>Vio los libros</i> (S)he saw the books	<i>Los vio</i> (S)he saw them
<i>Vio las casas</i> (S)he saw the houses	<i>Las vio</i> (S)he saw them
<i>Dijo hola a María y a José</i> (S)he said hello to María and José	<i>Les dijo hola</i> (S)he said hello to them
<i>Dijo hola a María y a Ángela</i> (S)he said hello to Maria and Angela	<i>Les dijo hola</i> (S)he said hello to them

(1) European Spanish, especially in central and northern areas, prefers the form *le* for a singular human male direct object: *le vi* 'I saw him': see 15.5.1 for details.

(2) **Important:** *usted* and *ustedes* 'you' (polite) takes third-person object pronouns: *lo vi ayer* 'I saw him/it/you yesterday', *le vi ayer* (Spain) 'I saw you (masc.)/him yesterday', *la vi ayer* 'I saw you/her yesterday' (fem.), *los vi ayer* 'I saw them/you yesterday', *las vi ayer* 'I saw them/you (fem.)/yesterday'. This possibility that a third-person object pronoun may also refer to *usted(es)* must be borne in mind since it is not systematically shown in the translations in this book.

### 15.3 Use of *le/les* as 'indirect object' pronouns: detailed rules

*Le/les* are often described as third-person 'indirect object' pronouns (*pronombres de complemento indirecto*). But 'indirect object' is a term that covers many meanings in Spanish, and the basic principle underlying the use of *le/les* is that *le/les* can replace any person or thing gaining from **or losing** by the action described in the verb phrase. As we have said more than once elsewhere, in English an indirect object can only gain or receive: we cannot say \*'they stole him fifty dollars' but *le robaron cincuenta dólares* is good Spanish.

Whatever departures from these examples they may hear, foreign students are advised to use *le/les* in the following contexts:

**List A: Typical uses of *le/les***

(In the translations, 'you' appears as a reminder that *lo/los/la/las* and *le/les* can refer to *usted* or *ustedes* as well as to 'him', 'her', 'it' or them'.)

**(a) Receiving or acquiring any thing, impression or sensation**

<i>Le di/mandé la carta</i>	I gave/sent her/him/you the letter
<i>No les dije la verdad</i>	I didn't tell you/them the truth
<i>Le tirábamos bolas de nieve</i>	We were throwing snowballs at him/her/you
<i>Le pusieron una inyección</i>	They gave you/him/her an injection
<i>Esa chaqueta le va</i>	That jacket suits him/her/you
<i>La secretaria le cayó bien</i>	(S)he took a liking to the secretary
<i>Les gusta la miel</i>	They/You like honey

and also words meaning 'to happen to', e.g. *suceder, acontecer, sobrevenir, pasar: les sobrevino una tragedia* 'they/you suffered a tragedy', *no le pasó nada* 'nothing happened to him/her/you'.

**(b) Loss or removal from**

<i>Les han robado un millón de pesos</i>	They've stolen a million pesos from them/you
<i>Le están sacando una muela</i>	They're taking one of her/his teeth out
<i>Se le cae el pelo</i>	His/Her hair's falling out
<i>Se le pasa pronto</i>	(S)he gets over it quickly/You get over . . .
<i>No le puedo aceptar tanto dinero</i>	I can't accept so much money from you/him/her

Also, in Latin America, *recibir: desolado porque esta/ésta no aceptó recibirle el presente de amor* (popular press, Ch.) 'distraught because she refused to accept the love gift from him', Sp . . . *esta/ésta se negó a aceptarle el regalo de amor*.

**(c) Sufficiency, insufficiency, lack, excess**

<i>Les basta decir que sí</i>	All they/you have to do is say 'yes'
<i>Le faltan mil pesos</i>	(S)he's/You're 1000 pesos short
<i>Veinte dólares al día le alcanzaban para vivir</i>	(S)he/you were managing to live on 20 dollars a day
<i>El traje de Marco le está grande</i>	Marco's suit is too big for him

**(d) Requesting, requiring, ordering**

<i>Le hicieron varias preguntas</i>	They asked him/her/you several questions
<i>Les pidieron nuestras señas</i>	They asked them/you for our names and addresses
<i>Les rogaron que se sentasen/sentaran</i>	They/You requested them/you to sit down
<i>Les ordenamos rendirse</i>	We ordered them/you to surrender

Compare *le mandó que comprara/comprase pan* '(s)he ordered her/him to buy bread' and *la mandó a comprar pan* '(s)he sent her to buy bread'.

**(e) Numerous phrases involving *tener* plus an emotion:**

<i>Le(s) tengo miedo a los murciélagos</i> (see 14.10.3)	I'm afraid of bats
<i>Ana le tiene ojeriza</i>	Ana has it in for him/her/you
<i>Le tenías un cariño tremendo</i>	You were enormously fond of her/him

(f) Numerous set phrases consisting of *hacer* plus a noun

*El frío les hacía mucho daño*  
*El chico le hizo una mueca*  
*No les hacíamos el menor caso*

The cold did them/you a lot of harm  
 The boy pulled a face at him/her/you  
 We didn't give them/you the slightest  
 attention

*Tienes que hacerle frente a la realidad*  
*Le hacía falta reflexionar*

You have to face up to reality  
 (S)he/You needed to reflect

(g) To indicate persons or things affected by something done to a part of their body or to some intimate possession. For further details about this construction and for the omission of the possessive adjective with parts of the body and intimate possessions, see 9.3.4:

*¡Le estás pisando los pies!*  
*A esa edad se les ablanda el cerebro*  
*Tú no le viste los zapatos que llevaba*

You're treading on his/her feet!  
 Their brains go soft at that age  
 You didn't see the shoes (s)he was wearing

(h) In a number of less easily classified cases which may all be seen to convey ideas of 'giving', 'removing', 'benefiting', 'involving', 'affecting intimately'

*¿Qué le vamos a hacer?*  
*No le hace* (Southern Cone; Sp.  
*no viene a cuento*)  
*¡Dale!*  
*¡Y dale con el tema!*  
*No le oigo nada*  
*Le agradezco*  
*La respuesta del abogado le afectó mucho*  
 (see 15.6 for more on this use of *le*)

What can be done about it?  
 That's irrelevant  
 Hit him!/Go on!/Get moving!  
 Oh no, not again! (i.e. we heard it before)  
 I can't hear a thing (s)he's saying  
 I thank you  
 The lawyer's reply affected him/her a lot

This multiplicity of meanings can give rise to ambiguities: *le compré un vestido* 'I bought a dress from her/for her', *Ángel les robó una manzana* 'Ángel stole an apple from/for them/you'. Context nearly always makes the sense plain, or the sentence can be recast: *compró una calculadora para él* '(s)he bought a calculator for him', etc.

## 15.4 Uses of *lo/la/los/las*

*Lo/la/los/las* are the third-person 'direct object' pronouns, 'direct' object understood here as the person or thing directly affected by a verb phrase but not 'losing' or 'gaining' in the ways described in List A above.

### List B: Contexts normally requiring *lo/la/los/las* (direct object)

The use of *lo* for human males in this list reflects standard Latin-American usage. The second of the alternative forms reflects widespread, preferred, but not obligatory usage in most of Spain: see 15.5.1 for discussion. 'You' in the translation reflects the possibility of *usted/ustedes*.

(a) Direct physical actions (although there are a few exceptions, like *le pega* '(s)he beats him/her'; see 15.6.4):

*Lo/Le interrogaron*  
*La operaron*  
*Coge estos papeles y quémalos*

They interrogated him/you  
 They operated on her/you  
 Take these papers and burn them

*A usted lo durmieron con algún  
mejunje en la sidra* (JLB, Arg., dialogue;  
Sp. *le* or *lo*)

They put you to sleep with some potion in  
the cider

(b) Verbs of perception, e.g. ‘seeing’, ‘hearing’, ‘knowing’, etc.

*Al director no lo/le conozco*  
*La vi ayer en el mercado*  
*El padre lo miraba con orgullo* (IA, Sp., or *le*)  
*A uno de ellos lo identifiqué*  
*enseguida* (JM, Sp., or *le*)

I don’t know the director  
I saw her/you yesterday in the market  
His father gazed at him with pride  
I identified one of them immediately

(c) Praise, blame, admiration, love, hatred and other actions denoting attitudes towards a person or thing:

*Sus profesores lo/le alaban*  
*A las monjas las envidio mucho*  
*Su marido la adora*  
*Yo la quiero mucho*

His/her/your teachers praise him/you  
I envy nuns a lot  
Her/Your husband adores her/you  
I love her/you a lot

For some speakers *lo quieren* = ‘they want him/you/it’, *le quieren* = ‘they love him/you’.

(d) ‘Naming’, ‘nominating’, ‘describing’ (but see 15.6.4 for the verb *llamar*):

*Los denominaron “los decadentes”*  
*Lo/Le nombraron alcalde*  
*Las describió en términos cariñosos*  
  
*Lo calificó de éxito*

They named them/you ‘the decadents’  
They nominated him/you mayor  
(S)he described them/you (fem.) in  
affectionate terms  
(S)he described it as a success

(1) *Lo/la/los/las* agree in gender with the noun they stand for. If there is no gendered noun, *lo* is used: *dijo que llegaría a las siete, pero no lo creo* ‘(s)he said (s)he’d arrive at seven, but I don’t believe it’, *esto no lo aguanta nadie* ‘no one can stand this’. This neuter use of *lo* is discussed at 8.4.

(2) The first- and second-person pronouns *me/te/nos/os* could be used in any of the above sentences in place of the third-person pronoun, provided the result makes sense.

## 15.5 The *le/lo* controversy: general remarks

The use of *le/les* as direct object pronouns has always been controversial. Beginners may follow the scheme given in 15.2, but they will come across at least some of the variants described hereafter. Some of these are dialect, but some are basic features of certain varieties of Spanish and foreigners can use them. Section 15.5 describes regional variations. Sections 15.6–10 describes certain subtleties in the use of *le* and *lo* found in the best written and spoken Spanish.

### 15.5.1 *Le* for *lo* in Spain: further details

**Important:** the most prestigious styles in Spain, i.e. the variety used in publishing, in most media, and by most speakers in central and northern Spain, favours *le vi* for *lo vi* when the sentence means ‘I saw him’ as opposed to ‘I saw it’:

—¿Has visto a Miguel? —No, no *le* he visto

‘Have you seen Miguel?’ ‘No, I haven’t seen him’

—¿Has visto mi lápiz? —No, no *lo* he visto

‘Have you seen my pencil?’ ‘No, I haven’t seen it’



(1) The Academy has itself changed its mind about this phenomenon more than once in the last 150 years and now accepts this use of *le*.

Students may hear some Spaniards claim that *lo vi* applied to a human male sounds vaguely regional. They will also note much inconsistency in Spain in the use of *le* or *lo* with reference to human males, *lo* being more frequent in the South and not uncommon elsewhere. *El País* (*Libro de estilo* 2014, 13.3.4), accepts the use of *le* for human male direct objects but prefers *lo* because it is used throughout the Spanish-speaking world except northern and central Spain – though even here *lo* is commonly heard.

(2) This use of *le* for *lo* usually sounds incorrect to Latin Americans, but Sections 15.6.1–5 will show that, although less common, the use of *le* in Latin America for human direct objects is in fact more widespread than is often claimed.

(3) It is surprising that feminists have not been more irritated by the fact that in the *leísta* system of central and northern Spain only males are exalted above non-living masculine objects by the use of *le* instead of *lo*. *La vi* means both ‘I saw her’ and ‘I saw it’.

### 15.5.2 *Les for los in Spain*

Use of *les* for *los*, e.g. *les vi* for *los vi* ‘I saw them’ (masc. or masc. and fem.) is very common in Spain when the pronoun refers to human males, but it is not recommended by the Academy (NGLE 16.8j). Careful writers use *los* in sentences like *los vi* ‘I saw them’, but use of *les* in such contexts is so common in Spain in speech and writing that foreign students need not worry too much about the rule: *les* (for *los*) *llevaron a una casa donde estuvieron encerrados mucho rato* (JB, Spain) ‘they took them to a house where they were locked in for a long time’, *la colonización les explotó* (PLE, Spain) ‘colonization exploited them’, *hay mucha evidencia circunstancial y comentarios de gente que les conocía mucho* (RM, Sp.) ‘there is plenty of circumstantial evidence and comments from people who knew them well’.

### 15.5.3 *Le for la in Spain: regional usage*

Speakers from north and north-western Spain, especially Navarre and the Basque provinces, often use *le* and *les* for female human direct objects as well as for males: *le vi* = both ‘I saw him’ and ‘I saw her’, *les vi* = ‘I saw them (females)’ but *lo vi* (masc.) and *la vi* (fem.) = ‘I saw it’. This usage sometimes appears in literature but the Academy disapproves of it (DPD 393) and foreign learners should avoid it. The same phenomenon is sporadically heard elsewhere, e.g. in Valencia and in Paraguay.

### 15.5.4 *La for le (a ella) in Spain (laísmo)*

People from central Spain, including Madrid, may use *la* for the *indirect* object pronoun to refer to a female:

?Yo la dije la verdad (for yo le dije la verdad)	I told her the truth
?Yo la alabo el gusto (MD, Sp., dialogue, for yo le alabo el gusto)	I praise her taste

Schoolteachers have waged war for years on this type of *laísmo* and the Academy rejects it (NGLE 16.10c). Foreigners should avoid it.

### 15.5.5 *Lo* for *le* in Latin America

Extreme *loísmo*, i.e. use of *lo* for the indirect object, is reported in popular speech in many parts of Latin America: Kany, 137, cites from Guatemala *ya no tarda en llegar. ¿Quiere hablarlo?* ‘he won’t be long now. Do you want to speak to him?’ (for *hablarle*). The same phenomenon is occasionally heard in dialects in Spain, but it should not be imitated.

### 15.5.6 *Le* for *lo/la* applied to inanimate objects in Spain

In familiar speech in Madrid, in Quito, Ecuador, and in pre-twentieth-century texts, one finds *le* used as the direct object pronoun even for inanimate nouns: *¿no le he leído todavía* ‘I haven’t read it [el libro] yet’, *¿unos niegan el hecho, otros le afirman* ‘some deny the fact, others assert it’ (B. Feijoo, Sp., mid-eighteenth century, for *lo afirman*). This construction is nowadays stigmatized.

## 15.6 *Le* used for human direct objects throughout the Spanish-speaking world

Even when all the regional and dialectal factors are taken into account, *le* is nevertheless quite often used as a *direct* object pronoun in the best styles in Spain where *la/las* would be expected, and in Latin America where either *lo/los* or *la/las* would be expected.

This can be seen from the translation of the following sentences, in both of which ‘her’ is the direct object of ‘flattered’: (a) ‘he flattered her’, (b) ‘the joke flattered her’. We expect the Spanish translations to be (a) *él la halagó*, (b) *la broma la halagó*, and this is what many native speakers accept. However, many speakers, Spanish and Latin-American, translate (b) as *la broma le halagó*, this being the more common form in educated speech. As a result, although the rules for the use of *le/les* already given at 15.3 and the rules for *lo/la/los/las* given at 15.2 and 15.4 will enable foreign learners to form sentences that are acceptable to the majority of native speakers, they do not always explain the day-to-day use of these pronouns.

### 15.6.1 *Le* to denote respect (*le de cortesía*)

In certain areas some speakers use *le* for human direct objects as a mark of respect. Spaniards who say *lo vi* for ‘I saw him’ may prefer *le vi* for the *usted* form ‘I saw you’. Argentine informants were convinced that they would say *no quería molestarle* ‘I didn’t mean to bother you’ when speaking to their boss, but *molestarlo* when speaking about him; the GDLE 24.5 reports the phenomenon in Chile, Venezuela and Ecuador. Colombian informants said *molestarlo* in both cases.

(1) García (1975) reports that some speakers in Buenos Aires see a difference between *le llevaron al hospital* and *lo llevaron al hospital* ‘they took him to the hospital’, the former implying that the patient was walking or co-operative, the latter that he was carried; and it seems that some Spaniards also accept the distinction. For Colombian informants only *lo llevaron* was possible and *leista* Spaniards would usually say only *le llevaron* in both cases.

### 15.6.2 *Le/les* preferred when the subject of the verb is inanimate

*Le* or *les* are often the preferred direct object pronouns in Spain and Latin America when they denote a human being and the subject of the verb is non-living. Compare the following sentences: *la espera su marido* ‘her husband’s waiting for her’ and *le espera una catástrofe* ‘a catastrophe awaits her/him’. *Le* is most often used when the human direct object is reacting emotionally, as in sentences like ‘it surprised him’, ‘it shocked her’.

The phenomenon is vividly illustrated in this Peruvian sentence where *le* reflects a lifeless subject (a tooth) with a human direct object, but the *lo* reflects both a human subject, the dentist, and a human direct object: *si [la muela] le molesta mucho, lo puedo atender hoy mismo* (from *Variedades*, 238) ‘if it [the tooth] is troubling you a lot, I can attend to you today’. Further examples:

*Le amargaba la idea de haber estrangulado  
las palabras que estaba a punto de  
dirigirle* (CC, Sp.)

*Él se miraba la sangre que le había  
salpicado* (MVLl, Pe.)

*Sin embargo, le molestaba encararse con  
Parodi* (JLB, Arg.)

*Le encantaría recibirlo en su casa* (ES, Mex.,  
dialogue)

She was embittered by the idea of having  
choked back (lit. ‘strangled’) the words  
that she was about to say to him

He looked at the blood that had spattered  
him

Yet it troubled him to come face to face  
with Parodi

He’d be delighted to receive you at his home

The following pairs further illustrate the rule:

*La angustia le acompañaba siempre  
Yo la acompañaba siempre*

*A Consuelo le admiró que no contestase  
A Consuelo la admiro mucho*

*Le alcanzan mil euros para vivir  
No pude alcanzarla*

*El gas les hace reír  
Yo los haré reír*

Anguish went with her/him always  
I always went with her

It surprised Consuelo that he did not reply  
I admire Consuelo a great deal

1000 euros are enough for him/her to live on  
I couldn’t catch up with her

The gas makes them laugh  
I’ll make them laugh

(1) The following verbs are also especially likely to be affected: *acometer* ‘to assail’ (doubts, etc.), *afligir* ‘to afflict’ (pain, etc.), *asustar* ‘to frighten’, *ayudar* ‘to help’, *calmar* ‘to calm’, *coger* ‘to catch’, *complacer* ‘to please’, *convencer* ‘to convince’, *distracer* ‘to amuse’/‘distract’, *encantar* ‘to enchant’/‘charm’, *estorbar* ‘to impede’/‘get in the way of’, *exasperar* ‘to exasperate’, *fascinar* ‘to fascinate’, *fatigar* ‘to fatigue’, *indignar* ‘to outrage’, *inquietar* ‘to worry’, *molestar* ‘to trouble’, *preocupar* ‘to worry’, *seducir* ‘to charm’, *tranquilizar* ‘to calm’, etc.

(2) The rules given in this section reflect usage in Spain, the Southern Cone and Mexico, but many native speakers do not exploit all the potential of these subtleties so they may disagree about the correct pronoun to use. Strongly *loísta* speakers, e.g. Colombians, may use *lo/la* where others prefer *le*.

### 15.6.3 Preference for *le/les* after impersonal *se* (see 32.5 for this construction)

If impersonal *se* precedes a third-person object pronoun there is a widespread tendency to prefer *le/les* when the object is human.

*Se le notaba tímida y cortada* (LG, Sp.)

*Entonces se le leerá como se le debió  
leer siempre . . .* (MVLl, Pe.),

*Hola doctor, ¡qué bien se le ve!*

(Peruvian speaker, *Variedades* 238)

*Se le nota triste* (JH, Mex., dialogue)

One could see she was timid and  
embarrassed

Then he will be read as he always should  
have been read . . .

Hello, doctor, you’re looking well!

She seems sad/You can see she’s sad

(1) Use of *le/les* for the direct object removes the ambiguities caused in Spanish by the shortage of distinctive object pronoun forms. Use of *lo/la* after *se* invites us to read *se* as a substitute for *le* by the strong rule that two object pronouns beginning with *l* cannot occur side by side (14.9). Thus *le cortaron la cabeza* ‘they cut his/her head off’ is pronominalized *se la cortaron* ‘they cut it off (him/her)’ (*never \*le la cortaron!*). For this reason *se la notaba pálida* may suggest ‘(s)he noticed that his/her/their hand, face, head, cheek, chin (or some other feminine noun) was pale’; *se le notaba* shows that the whole person is meant.

(2) Use of *la* after impersonal *se* to refer to a female and of *lo* to refer to a male is not, however, impossible: *la luz se apagó y apenas se lo veía* (MVLl, Pe.) ‘the light went out and one could scarcely see him’, *se lo veía pálido en las fotos* (JM, Sp.) ‘he looked pale in the photographs’, —*No se le acusa de ningún hecho—. Y entonces ¿de qué se lo acusa?* (interview *La Nación*, Arg.) ‘“He’s not being accused of any action.” “What is he being accused of then?”’ (both forms used).

(3) In Spain *le/les* is occasionally seen even for non-human direct objects after impersonal *se*, although in this example *los* would have been more usual and more correct: *a los esperpentos de Valle-Inclán siempre se les ha considerado ejemplos de expresionismo español* (ABV, Sp.) ‘Valle-Inclán’s *esperpentos* have always been considered examples of Spanish expressionism’.

(4) The verb *llevarse* encourages use of *lo* for human and non-human direct objects. Most informants from the strongly *leísta* regions of Madrid, Segovia and Valladolid preferred *lo* to *le* in *se rompió una pierna y se lo/le llevaron al hospital en ambulancia* ‘he broke a leg and they took him to hospital in an ambulance’ (*lo* 75%, *le* 25%); *a mi padre me lo/le voy a llevar a pasar las vacaciones con nosotros* ‘I’m going to take my father on vacation with us’ (*lo* 62%, *le* 38%). This is apparently a peculiarity of the verb *llevar*: *le* is reserved for the meaning ‘carry to him/her’, and *lo* for the meaning ‘to take’ as in *se lo llevó a casa* ‘(s)he took it home’.

#### 15.6.4 *Le/les* preferred with certain verbs

Some verbs usually take *le* for what English-speakers probably would take to be their direct object when this object is human. This removes some of the ambiguities of the Spanish object pronoun system or it may clarify the meaning of the verb (see, for instance, *pegar*):

**Creer** ‘to believe’: *yo no le creo, señora*, ‘Señora, I don’t believe you’, but *sí que lo creo* ‘I do believe it’.

**Discutir** ‘to argue’/‘to discuss’, when it means ‘to answer back’: *¿desde cuándo le discutía?* ‘since when had she been answering him back?’ (MVLl, Per., dialogue).

**Enseñar** ‘to teach’/‘to show’: *les enseñaba* ‘(s)he taught them (human direct object)/showed them’ but *lo enseñaba* ‘(s)he showed it/taught it’.

**Entender** ‘to understand’: *no le entiendo* ‘I don’t understand him/her/you’ but *lo entiendo* ‘I understand it’.

**Gustar/agradar/complacer/placer** ‘to please’, and all verbs of similar or opposite meaning: *le gusta la miel* ‘(s)he/it likes/you like honey’, *le disgustaba encontrarse sola* ‘she disliked finding herself alone’.

**Importar** ‘to matter’, **concernir** ‘to concern’ and verbs of similar meaning: *no les importa que no tengan dinero* ‘they don’t care that they have no money’; *eso no le concierne a usted* ‘that doesn’t concern you’.

**Interesar** ‘to interest’: *por si le interesa, estudié en la escuela Mártires de Tacubaya* (ES, Mex., dialogue) ‘in case you’re interested, I studied at the Martyrs of Tacubaya school’.

**Lllamar** ‘to call’. Many speakers prefer *le/les* when the verb means ‘to give a name’, although *lo/la* are also common: *por eso le llaman mami* (ABV, Sp., dialogue) ‘that’s why they call her “mummy”’, *se nos informó en un “briefing”, que le llaman* (TV interview, Cu.) ‘we were told in a “briefing”, as they call it’; but this usage is not universal: *al más alegre lo llamaban el Trompo* (GGM, Col.) ‘they called the most cheerful one “Spinning Top”’. For christening, educated usage says *le pusieron de nombre María* ‘they called her “María”’.

*La/lo/(le)/los/las* are the usual object pronouns used when the verb means ‘phone’ or ‘call’: *yo la llamaré apenas haya alguna novedad* ‘I’ll call you/her as soon as there’s news’, but *le* is possible: *ella le llamó ocho veces* (EM, Mex., dialogue) ‘she called him eight times’. *Telefonar* takes *le/les*.

**Obedecer** ‘to obey’: *¿le han obedecido a Mademoiselle Durand?* ‘did you obey Mlle Durand?’ (EP, Mex., dialogue), although the verb is also found with *la/lo*.

**Pegar** ‘to beat’: . . . *con maridos que les pegan* (JEP, Mex.) ‘. . . with husbands that beat them’, *¿le pegarías a una mujer?* (EM, Mex., dialogue) ‘would you hit a woman?’. *Pegarlo/pegarla*, etc., is assumed to mean ‘to stick (i.e. glue) it’.

*La pegaba* for ‘(s)he beat her’ is heard in familiar language, cf. *luego él cambió y le daba achares y la pegaba* (RM, Sp.) ‘then he changed and made her jealous and hit her’, *la insultaba y la pegaba* (SP, Sp.) ‘he insulted her and hit her’. The NGLE 41.2e considers this ‘rustic’.

**Preocupar, inquietar** ‘to worry’: *le preocupa* ‘it worries him/her/you’.

**Recordar**: when it means ‘to remind’: *la recuerdo* ‘I remember her’, but *recuérdale que viene esta noche* ‘remind her/him that (s)he’s coming tonight’.

**Tirar** when it means ‘to pull’ rather than to ‘throw’ or ‘throw away’: *la amiga le tiraba de la mano* (JM, Sp.) ‘his/her friend was pulling her/him/you by the hand’. Compare *lo/la tiró* ‘(s)he threw it/(s)he threw it away’.

**Tocar** when it means ‘to be the turn of’ rather than ‘to touch’: compare *le toca a usted, señora* ‘it’s your turn, Señora’ and *la tocó a usted, señora* ‘(s)he touched you, Señora’.

### 15.6.5 *Le/les* in double accusative constructions

In *Juan la oyó* ‘John heard her’ *la* is normal. In ‘John heard her sing an aria’ there are two objects, one non-living, ‘aria’, which is obviously less active than the other human object ‘her’. Spanish speakers tend to use *le* to denote the more active object: *Juan le oyó cantar un aria* (*la* occurs, particularly in Spain, but may be rejected by educated speakers). Questionnaires, based on examples from García (1975), elicited the following replies from 20 educated *madrileños*, which confirmed García’s finding with Latin-American-speakers: *María no quería venir, pero. . . obligamos a venir* (*la* 70%, *le* 30%) ‘Maria didn’t want to come, but we obliged her to come’ (single accusative); *pobre María, su padre siempre. . . obliga a decir la verdad* (*la* 35%, *le* 65%) ‘poor Maria, her father always obliges her to tell the truth’ (two objects, ‘her’ and *la verdad*).

(1) *Ver* normally takes *lo* (in Spain *le*)/*la/los/las*: *yo me quedé con ella porque quería verla firmar el contrato* ‘I stayed with her because I wanted to see her sign the contract’.

(2) *Dejar* ‘to let’ tends to take *la* (and in Latin America *lo*) when the following infinitive is intransitive: *lo/la dejaron ir* ‘they let him/her go’ (*le dejaron* for ‘him’ in *leísta* Spain). If the infinitive is transitive *le* is more frequent: *le dejaron comprar un helado* ‘they let him/her buy an ice cream’. The same is true of *hacer*: *la hice bajar a su estudio* ‘I made her go down to her study’ but *le hice tomar un café* ‘I made her/him drink a coffee’ (from DPD 194).

*Permitir* takes *le*: *le permitieron hacerlo*.

## 15.7 Pronouns with verbs of motion

For *acude a ella* '(s)he goes to her', *se les acercó* '(s)he approached them', see 14.6.1.

## 15.8 'Resumptive' or 'echoing' *lo* with *ser*, *estar* and *haber*

The predicate of *ser*, *estar*, *parecer* and *haber* is resumed or 'echoed' by *lo*: *parecía italiana y lo era* 'she looked Italian, and she was'. See 8.4.2 and 34.2.2 for details.

## 15.9 *Se* for *le/les* when they are followed by *lo/la/los/las*

For the obligatory replacement of *le* by *se* when it precedes *lo/la/los/las*, as in *se lo di* 'I gave it to him' (never \**le lo di*), see 14.9.

## 15.10 Latin America *se los* for *se lo*

For the very frequent colloquial Latin-American form ?*se los dije* 'I told them/you (plural)', for the standard *se lo dije a ellos/ellas/ustedes*, see 14.9.2.

## 15.11 *Le* for *les*

For the universal colloquial tendency to use *le* for *les* when the latter is a 'redundant' pronoun, as in *siempre le digo la verdad a mis padres* 'I always tell my parents the truth', for *les digo la verdad*, see 14.10.3.

# 16 Forms of Spanish verbs

This chapter discusses the following topics:

- The three conjugations (Section 16.1.1)
- Overview of the Spanish verb system (Section 16.2)
- The conjugation of regular verbs (Section 16.3)
- Spelling changes affecting all verbs (Section 16.4)
- Irregular verbs: introduction (Section 16.5)
- Radical-changing verbs (Section 16.6)
- Notes on the various verb forms (Section 16.7)
- Regional variations affecting verbs (Section 16.8)
- Verbs and the written accent (Section 16.9)
- Verbs ending in *-cer* or *-cir* (Section 16.10)
- Forms of model irregular and radical-changing verbs (Section 16.11)
- List of irregular verbs (Section 16.12)
- Formation of the compound tenses: an example (Section 16.13)

Readers of this book should already know the forms of the regular verbs and of the most important irregular verbs, but they are listed in this chapter for the sake of completeness.

Argentine *vos* forms are mentioned since they are standard usage in that country and normal in some other places. See 12.3.1 for details.

**(1) Important:** the translations of verbs listed in this chapter usually show only the most obvious meanings. Many of the verbs have several meanings which must be sought in a good dictionary.

## 16.1 The three conjugations

Spanish verbs belong to one of three conjugations or verb-types, distinguished by the vowel of the infinitive: (1) *-ar* (2) *-er* (3) *-ir*, or *-ír* in the case of the verbs listed at 16.6.6. The full conjugation of three typical regular verbs in *-ar*, *-er* and *-ir* is shown at 16.3.

## 16.2 Overview of the Spanish verb system

**(a) Important:** there are important, predictable spelling changes that affect certain verbs, regular and irregular. They are discussed at 16.4.

**(b) Important:** *vosotros* forms are not used in Latin-American Spanish: *ustedes* forms replace them in speech and writing. Students of Latin-American Spanish will not need to use *vosotros* forms, but they are constantly used in Spain.

**(c) Important:** all compound tenses (*he hablado*, *habían visto*, etc.) are formed with the auxiliary *haber* (see 16.11.22) and the past participle. The latter is invariable in form in these tenses, unlike in French and Italian. For an example of the conjugation of the compound tenses see 16.13.

**(d)** The future subjunctive is almost obsolete. See 16.7.7 and 20.9.

## 16.3 Conjugation of regular verbs

The three verbs *hablar* 'to speak', *comer* 'to eat' and *vivir* 'to live' are completely regular and are not affected by any spelling changes: they must be learned first. The *-ir* conjugation differs from the *-er* conjugation only in the forms shown in bold type:

Stem	<i>habl-</i>	<i>com-</i>	<i>viv-</i>
<b>Infinitive</b>	<i>hablar</i>	<i>comer</i>	<i><b>vivir</b></i>
<b>Gerund</b>	<i>hablando</i>	<i>comiendo</i>	<i>viviendo</i>
<b>Past participle</b>	<i>hablado</i>	<i>comido</i>	<i>vivido</i>
<b>Imperative</b>			
(tú)	<i>habla</i>	<i>come</i>	<i>vive</i>
(vos)	<i>hablá</i>	<i>comé</i>	<i>viví</i> (Argentine forms: see 12.3.1)
(vosotros/as)	<i>hablad</i>	<i>comed</i>	<i><b>vivid</b></i> (Spain only)
(usted)	<i>hable</i>	<i>coma</i>	<i>viva</i>
(ustedes)	<i>hablen</i>	<i>coman</i>	<i>vivan</i>

**INDICATIVE (i.e. non-subjunctive) FORMS.** Their use is discussed in Chapter 17.

### Present

The bracketed forms are Argentine *vos* forms: see 16.7.1.

<i>hablo</i>	<i>hablamos</i>	<i>como</i>	<i>comemos</i>	<i>vivo</i>	<i><b>vivimos</b></i>
<i>hablas (hablás)</i>	<i>habláis</i>	<i>comes (comés)</i>	<i>coméis</i>	<i>vives (vivís)</i>	<i><b>vivís</b></i>
<i>habla</i>	<i>hablan</i>	<i>come</i>	<i>comen</i>	<i>vive</i>	<i>viven</i>

### Perfect (see 16.13)

See 16.11.22 for the conjugation of *haber*.

*he hablado*, etc.      *he comido*, etc.      *he vivido*, etc.

### Imperfect

<i>hablaba</i>	<i>hablábamos</i>	<i>comía</i>	<i>comíamos</i>	<i>vivía</i>	<i><b>vivíamos</b></i>
<i>hablabas</i>	<i>hablabais</i>	<i>comías</i>	<i>comíais</i>	<i>vivías</i>	<i><b>vivíais</b></i>
<i>hablaba</i>	<i>hablaban</i>	<i>comía</i>	<i>comían</i>	<i>vivía</i>	<i>vivían</i>

### Preterite

<i>hablé</i>	<i>hablamos</i>	<i>comí</i>	<i>comimos</i>	<i>viví</i>	<i><b>vivimos</b></i>
<i>hablaste</i>	<i>hablasteis</i>	<i>comiste</i>	<i>comisteis</i>	<i>viviste</i>	<i><b>vivisteis</b></i>
<i>habló</i>	<i>hablaron</i>	<i>comió</i>	<i>comieron</i>	<i>vivió</i>	<i><b>vivieron</b></i>

### Pluperfect (see 16.13)

*había hablado*, *comido*, *vivido*, etc.

### Pretérito anterior (rarely used. See 16.13)

*hube hablado*, *comido*, *vivido*, etc.

### Future

<i>hablaré</i>	<i>hablaremos</i>	<i>comeré</i>	<i>comeremos</i>	<i><b>viviré</b></i>	<i><b>viviremos</b></i>
<i>hablarás</i>	<i>hablaréis</i>	<i>comerás</i>	<i>comeréis</i>	<i><b>vivirás</b></i>	<i><b>viviréis</b></i>
<i>hablará</i>	<i>hablarán</i>	<i>comerá</i>	<i>comerán</i>	<i><b>vivirá</b></i>	<i><b>vivirán</b></i>

### Future perfect (see 16.13)

*habré hablado*, *comido*, *vivido*, etc.



### Conditional

<i>hablaría</i>	<i>hablaríamos</i>	<i>comería</i>	<i>comeríamos</i>	<i>viviría</i>	<i>viviríamos</i>
<i>hablarías</i>	<i>hablaríais</i>	<i>comerías</i>	<i>comeríais</i>	<i>vivirías</i>	<i>viviríais</i>
<i>hablaría</i>	<i>hablarían</i>	<i>comería</i>	<i>comerían</i>	<i>viviría</i>	<i>vivirían</i>

### Perfect conditional (see 16.13)

*habría hablado, comido, vivido, etc.*

## SUBJUNCTIVE (discussed in Chapter 20)

### Present subjunctive

<i>hable</i>	<i>hablemos</i>	<i>coma</i>	<i>comamos</i>	<i>viva</i>	<i>vivamos</i>
<i>hables</i>	<i>habléis</i>	<i>comas</i>	<i>comáis</i>	<i>vivas</i>	<i>viváis</i>
<i>hable</i>	<i>hablen</i>	<i>coma</i>	<i>coman</i>	<i>viva</i>	<i>vivan</i>

See 20.12.5 for the subjunctive forms preferred in Argentina, where the pronoun *vos* is used instead of *tú*.

### Perfect subjunctive (See 16.13)

*haya hablado, haya comido, haya vivido, etc.*

### Imperfect subjunctive

Spanish has two forms of the imperfect subjunctive, more or less interchangeable (see 20.1.3)

#### (a) -ra form

<i>hablara</i>	<i>habláramos</i>	<i>comiera</i>	<i>comiéramos</i>	<i>viviera</i>	<i>viviéramos</i>
<i>hablaras</i>	<i>hablarais</i>	<i>comieras</i>	<i>comierais</i>	<i>vivieras</i>	<i>vivierais</i>
<i>hablara</i>	<i>hablaran</i>	<i>comiera</i>	<i>comieran</i>	<i>viviera</i>	<i>vivieran</i>

#### (b) -se form

<i>hablase</i>	<i>hablásemos</i>	<i>comiese</i>	<i>comiésemos</i>	<i>viviese</i>	<i>viviésemos</i>
<i>hablases</i>	<i>hablaseis</i>	<i>comieses</i>	<i>comieseis</i>	<i>viviese</i>	<i>vivieseis</i>
<i>hablase</i>	<i>hablasen</i>	<i>comiese</i>	<i>comiesen</i>	<i>viviese</i>	<i>viviesen</i>

### Pluperfect subjunctive (see 16.13)

*hubiera hablado, comido, vivido, etc.*  
*hubiese hablado, comido, vivido, etc.*

### Future subjunctive (more or less obsolete, see 20.9)

<i>hablare</i>	<i>habláremos</i>	<i>comiere</i>	<i>comiéremos</i>	<i>viviere</i>	<i>viviéremos</i>
<i>hablares</i>	<i>hablareis</i>	<i>comieres</i>	<i>comiereis</i>	<i>vivieres</i>	<i>viviereis</i>
<i>hablare</i>	<i>hablaren</i>	<i>comiere</i>	<i>comieren</i>	<i>viviere</i>	<i>vivieren</i>

## 16.4 Spelling changes affecting verbs

The spelling rules described in this section apply to all Spanish verbs.

**16.4.1 Infinitive ends in -zar**

Z is written *c* before *e*: *rezco* 'I pray', *recé* 'I prayed', *recemos* 'let us pray', etc.

**16.4.2 Infinitive ends in -car or -quir**

C is written *qu* before *e*: *saco* 'I take out', *saqué* 'I took out', *saquemos* 'let's take out', etc.

(1) If the infinitive ends in *-quir*, *qu* is written *c* before *o* or *a*: *delinquir* 'to commit a crime', *delinco* 'I commit a crime', etc. *Delinquir* is used in formal styles, but the other verbs ending in *-quir* are rarely seen or heard.

**16.4.3 Infinitive ends in -gar**

G is written *gu* before *e*: *pago* 'I pay', *pagué* 'I paid', *paguemos* 'let's pay', etc.

**16.4.4 Infinitive ends in -guar**

*Averiguar* 'to find out', *aguar* 'to water down'/'to spoil' (a party/fun), *apaciguar* 'to pacify/placate' and other verbs ending in *-guar* are conjugated as regular *-ar* verbs and the *u* is never stressed (i.e. it is always pronounced /w/). But a dieresis (two dots) is written over the *u* before a following *e* in order to preserve the pronunciation /gw/. The only forms with a dieresis are (bracketed forms are unaffected):

- Imperative: (*usted*) *averigüe*, (*ustedes*) *averigüen*
- Preterite: *averigüé*, (*averiguaste*), (*averiguó*), (*averiguamos*), (*averiguasteis*), (*averiguaron*)
- Present subjunctive: *averigüe*, *averigües*, *averigüe*, *averigüemos*, *averigüéis*, *averigüen*

**16.4.5 Infinitive ends in -cuar**

See 16.9.3.

**16.4.6 Infinitive ends in -ger or -gir**

G is written *j* before *o* or *a*: *proteger* 'to protect', *protejo* 'I protect', *protejamos* 'let's protect', etc. *Fingir* 'to pretend', *finjo* 'I pretend', *finjamos* 'let's pretend', etc.

**16.4.7 Infinitive ends in -guir**

Gu is written *g* before *o* or *a*: *seguir* 'to follow', *sigo* 'I follow', *sigamos* 'let's follow'.

This affects the verbs *erguir*, *conseguir*, *seguir*, *perseguir* and *proseguir*, all of which are irregular in other ways: see 16.6.5.

**16.4.8 Infinitive ends in -cer**

Most of these verbs have a slight irregularity. See 16.10.1 for a discussion.

**16.4.9 Infinitive ends in -cir**

These also may have a slight irregularity, see 16.10.2.

### 16.4.10 Infinitive ends in *-ñer, ñir, -llir*

*ie* is written *e* and *ió* is written *ó* after *ñ* or *ll*. The combinations *\*ñie*, *\*ñió*, *\*llie*, *\*llió* do not occur in Spanish:

*tañer* 'to chime'  
*tañendo*  
*tañó*  
*tañeron*  
*tañera*  
*tañese*

*gruñir* 'to grunt'  
*gruñendo*  
*gruñó*  
*gruñeron*  
*gruñera*  
*gruñese*

*zambullirse* 'to dive'  
*zambulléndose*  
*se zambulló*  
*se zambulleron*  
*se zambullera*, etc.  
*se zambullese*, etc.

### 16.4.11 Infinitive ends in *-eer, -uir, -aer, -oer*

When unstressed *i* appears between two vowels it is written *-y-*.

See *poseer* 'to possess' 16.11.36, *construir* 'to build' 16.11.13, *traer* 'to bring' 16.11.47, *roer* 'to gnaw' 16.11.41. This rule also applies to *oír* 'to hear' 16.11.29. Examples *construyendo*, *trayendo*, *oyendo*, etc.

## 16.5 Irregular verbs: general remarks

Only about two dozen Spanish verbs – not counting verbs formed from them – are traditionally defined as truly irregular. These are:

*andar* to walk 16.11.5  
*asir* to seize (rarely used) 16.11.6  
*caber* to fit into 16.11.8  
*caer* to fall (and some compounds) 16.11.9  
*dar* to give 16.11.15  
*decir* to say (and a few compounds) 16.11.16  
*estar* to be 16.11.21  
*haber* auxiliary verb or 'there is/are' 16.11.22

*hacer* to do/to make 16.11.23  
*ir* to go 16.11.24  
*oír* to hear 16.11.29  
*poder* to be able 16.11.34  
*poner* to put (and several compounds) 16.11.35  
*producir* to produce (and all verbs ending in *-ducir*) 16.11.37  
*querer* to want 16.11.38  
*saber* to know 16.11.42

*salir* to go out 16.11.43  
*ser* to be 16.11.45  
*tener* to have (and several compounds) 16.11.46  
*traer* to bring (and a few compounds) 16.11.47  
*valer* to be worth (and compounds) 16.11.48  
*venir* to come (and compounds) 16.11.49  
*ver* to see 16.11.50

## 16.6 Radical-changing verbs

'Radical-changing' verbs are numerous: several hundred are in everyday use, although many of them are derived from more familiar verbs, e.g. *descontar* 'to discount' is conjugated like *contar* 'to count' / 'to tell a story'. Radical-changing verbs have regular endings, but a vowel in the stem is modified in some forms, cf. *contar* 'to tell a story' > *cuenta* '(s)he tells', *perder* 'to lose' > *pierdo* 'I lose', *sentir* 'to feel' > *siente* '(s)he feels' > *sintió* '(s)he felt', etc.

These verbs must be learned separately since their infinitive is no guide to whether they are radical-changing. Compare *renovar* 'to renovate' and *tender a* 'to tend to', which are radical-changing verbs, and *innovar* 'to innovate', *pretender* 'to claim/intend' which are not.

The following list shows the common types of radical-changing verbs and a selection of verbs that occur constantly and should be learned first.

### 16.6.1 Conjugated like *contar* 'to tell'/'to count', 16.11.14

*Acordarse* 'to remember', *acostarse* 'to go to bed', *apostar* 'to bet', *aprobar* 'to approve', *avergonzarse* 'to be ashamed', *colarse* 'to slip through'/'to gate-crash', *colgar* 'to hang', *comprobar* 'to check', *consolar* 'to console', *costar* 'to cost', *demostrar* 'to demonstrate' (a fact or technique), *desaprobar* 'to disapprove', *encontrar* 'to find'/'to meet', *esforzarse* 'to make an effort', *mostrar* 'to show', *probar* 'to prove'/'to try' (i.e. 'to sample'/'to test'), *recordar* 'to remember'/'to remind', *renovar* 'to renew', *rodar* 'to roll'/'to make a film', *soltar* 'to release'/'let out', *sonar* 'to sound', *soñar* 'to dream', *tronar* 'to thunder', *volar* 'to fly'.

### 16.6.2 Conjugated like *cerrar* 'to close', 16.11.11

*Acertar* 'to get right'/'to hit the mark', *apretar* 'to squeeze/tighten', *atravesar* 'to cross', *calentar* 'to heat', *comenzar* 'to begin', *confesar* 'to confess', *despertar(se)* 'to wake up', *empezar* 'to begin', *encontrar* 'to lock/shut in', *enterrar* 'to bury', *gobernar* 'to govern', *helar* 'to freeze' (liquids), *manifestarse* 'to demonstrate' (i.e. protest), *negar* 'to deny', *nevar* 'to snow', *pensar* 'to think', *recomendar* 'to recommend', *sentarse* 'to sit down', *temblar* 'to tremble', *tropezar* 'to stumble'.

### 16.6.3 Conjugated like *mover* 'to move', 16.11.28

*Desenvolver* 'to unwrap', *devolver* 'to give back', *disolver* 'to dissolve', *doler* 'to hurt', *envolver* 'to wrap up', *llover* 'to rain', *morder* 'to bite', *oler* 'to smell' (see 16.11.30), *remover* 'to stir up' (Lat. Am. 'to remove'), *resolver* 'to resolve', *soler* 'to be accustomed to' (+ infinitive), *volver(se)* 'to return'/'to become'.

(1) Verbs ending in *-olver* have an irregular past participle: *vuelto*, *devuelto*, *resuelto*, etc.

### 16.6.4 Conjugated like *perder* 'to lose', 16.11.32

*Atender* 'to attend' (i.e. pay attention), *defender* 'to defend', *encender* 'to light/set fire to', *entender* 'to understand', *extenderse* 'to extend/stretch' (over a distance), *tender a* 'to tend to'.

### 16.6.5 Conjugated like *pedir* 'to ask for', 16.11.31

*Competir* 'to compete', *concebir* 'to conceive', *conseguir* 'to achieve'/'to manage', *corregir* 'to correct', *derretirse* 'to melt', *despedir* 'to say goodbye to', *elegir* 'to elect'/'to choose', *gemir* 'to groan', *impedir* 'to hinder'/'to impede', *medir* 'to measure', *perseguir* 'to persecute'/'to chase', *perseguir* 'to continue' (a course of action), *rendirse* 'to surrender', *repetir* 'to repeat', *reñir* 'to scold' (see 16.11.40), *seguir* 'to follow', *servir* 'to serve'/'to be useful', *vestir(se)* 'to wear'/'to dress'.

### 16.6.6 Conjugated like *reír* 'to laugh', 16.11.39

*Desleír(se)* 'to dissolve/melt', *engreírse* 'to grow conceited', *(re)freír* 'to fry', *sonreír* 'to smile'.

### 16.6.7 Conjugated like *sentir* 'to feel', 16.11.44

*advertir* 'to warn', *arrepentirse* 'to repent', *consentir* 'to consent', *convertir* 'to convert', *convertirse en* 'to turn into', *desmentir* 'to deny', *disentir* 'to dissent', *divertir(se)* 'to amuse oneself', *herir* 'to wound', *interferir* 'to interfere', *invertir* 'to invest', *mentir* 'to tell lies', *preferir* 'to prefer', *referirse a* 'to refer to', *sugerir* 'to suggest'.

**16.6.8 *dormir* 'to sleep' and *morir* 'to die', 16.11.18****16.6.9 *jugar* 'to play', 16.11.25****16.6.10 *adquirir* 'to acquire', 16.11.3****16.6.11 Conjugated like *discernir* 'to discern', 16.11.17**

*cernir* 'to sieve' (*cernirse* = 'to hover'/'to loom'), *concernir* 'to concern' (third-person only).

**16.6.12 Radical-changing verbs that are sometimes or often regular**

(a) A few verbs are uncertain or have become regular. These include: *cimentar* 'to cement', conjugated like *cerrar* or, more usually, regular. *Derrocar* 'to overthrow' is nowadays regular. *Mentar* 'to mention' is increasingly made regular but educated usage still prefers to conjugate it like *cerrar*. *Plegar* 'to fold' is conjugated like *cerrar* or is optionally regular.

(b) The following variant meanings are noteworthy: *apostar* means 'to post a sentry' when regular but when conjugated like *contar* means 'to bet'. *Aterrar* is regular when it means 'to terrorize', but is conjugated like *cerrar* when it means 'to flatten'/'to raze to the ground' (rare). *Asolar* means 'to parch' when regular but conjugated like *contar* it means 'to level/raze to ground' (nowadays often always regular).

**16.7 Notes on the various tense forms**

These sections emphasize the predictable features of verbs and may assist the learning process.

Unless otherwise mentioned, Argentine *vos* forms are the same as the standard *tú* forms.

**16.7.1 Forms of the present indicative**

The endings of the present indicative of regular verbs and of all but a few irregular verbs are shown at 16.3. However, there are numerous verbs in the *-er* and *-ir* conjugations in which the first-person singular ending is attached to an irregular stem, e.g. *producir* 'to produce' > *produzco* 'I produce', *poner* 'to put' > *pongo* 'I put', etc. These must be learned separately.

(1) **Important:** four irregular verbs have a first-person singular ending in *-y*: *dar* 'to give' > *doy*, *estar* 'to be' > *estoy*, *ir* 'to go' > *voy*, *ser* 'to be' > *soy*.

(2) The Argentine *vos* forms of the present indicative tense are made by dropping any *unaccented i* from the ending of the European Spanish *vosotros* form: *vosotros habláis* > *vos hablás* 'you speak', *vosotros sois* > *vos sos* 'you are', *vosotros teméis* > *vos temés* 'you fear'; but *vosotros vivís* > *vos vivís* 'you live', *vosotros decís* > *vos decís* 'you say'. The verb forms used with *vos* in other areas of *voseo*, e.g. much of Central America, may differ slightly from the Argentine forms and should be learned locally.

**16.7.2 Forms of the imperfect indicative**

The endings of the imperfect indicative are shown at 16.3. These endings are added to the stem left after removing the infinitive ending. There are only three exceptions:

*ser* 'to be': *era, eras, era, éramos, erais, eran*  
*ir* 'to go': *iba, ibas, iba, íbamos, ibais, iban*

*ver* 'to see': *veía, veías, veía, veíamos, veíais, veían* (not the expected\* *vía, \*vías*, etc.)

### 16.7.3 Forms of the preterite (US 'preterit') tense

The endings of the preterite tense (*tú* and *vos*) of regular and radical-changing verbs are shown at 16.3.

(1) **Important:** the third-person plural ending is *-eron* (not *-ieron*) in the case of the preterite of:

- *conducir* 'to drive', and all verbs whose infinitive ends in *-ducir*: *condujeron, redujeron*
- *decir* 'to say': *dijeron*
- *ser* and *ir* 'to be' and 'to go': *fueron*
- *traer* 'to bring': *trajeron*

and all verbs whose infinitive ends in *-ñir*, *-ñer* or *-llir*: see 16.4.10.

(2) **Important:** most of the irregular verbs listed at 16.5 have irregular preterite stems and many of them have unexpected first-person and third-person singular endings with no accent on the final vowel. *Hacer* 'to do' and *traer* 'to bring' are typical: *hacer*: *hice, hiciste, hizo, hicimos, hicisteis, hicieron*; *traer*: *traje, trajiste, trajo, trajimos, trajisteis, trajeron*.

(3) **Important:** verbs conjugated like *sentir* 'to feel', *pedir* 'to ask', and *dormir* 'to sleep' have irregularities in the third person of the preterite and therefore in the imperfect subjunctives:

*sintió > sintieron*  
*sintiera/sintiese*

*pidió > pidieron*  
*pidiera/pidiese*

*durmió > durmieron*  
*durmiera/durmiese*

(4) The forms used with *vos* are the same as the standard *tú* forms, but see 16.8.1c for a popular and stigmatized tendency to add *-s* to the second-person singular forms.

### 16.7.4 Forms of the future and the conditional

The endings for the future and the conditional tenses (*tú* and *vos*) are the same for all verbs, regular and irregular: they are shown at 16.3. These endings are added to the infinitive except in the cases of the following 12 verbs which have a special future/conditional stem, shown in bold:

*caber* 'to fit in': ***cabr-***  
*decir* 'to say': ***dir-***  
*haber* (aux. verb): ***habr-***  
*hacer* 'to do/make': ***har-***

*poder* 'to be able': ***podr-***  
*poner* 'to put': ***pondr-***  
*querer* 'to want': ***querr-***  
*saber* 'to know': ***sabr-***

*salir* 'to go out': ***saldr-***  
*tener* 'to have': ***tendr-***  
*valer* 'to be worth': ***valdr-***  
*venir* 'to come': ***vendr-***

**Example:** Future: *haré, harás, hará, haremos, haréis, harán*. Conditional: *haría, harías, haría, haríamos, haríais, harían*.

### 16.7.5 Forms of the present subjunctive

The endings of the present subjunctive are easily memorized:

**-ar** verbs: the endings are the same as those of the present indicative of regular *-er* verbs except that the first-person ending is *-e*: *hable, hables, hable, hablemos, habléis, hablen*.

**-er** and **-ir**: the endings are the same as those of the present indicative of regular *-ar* verbs, except that the first-person ending is *-a*. *coma/viva, comas/vivas, coma/viva, comamos/vivamos, comáis/viváis, coman/vivan*.

(1) **Important:** as far as regular verbs and most irregular verbs are concerned, these endings are added to the stem left after removing the *-o* of the first-person present indicative: e.g. *vengo*

'I come' > *venga*, *conduzco* 'I drive' > *conduzca*, *quepo* 'there's room for me' > *quepa* (from *caber*, 16.11.8), etc. There are six exceptions:

*dar* 'to give'

*dé, des, dé, demos, deis, den.* (the accent on *dé* distinguishes it from *de* 'of')

*estar* 'to be'

*esté, estés, esté, estemos, estéis, estén*

*haber*

*haya, hayas, haya, hayamos, hayáis, hayan*

*ir* 'to go'

*vaya, vayas, vaya, vayamos, vayáis, vayan*

*saber* 'to know'

*sepa, sepas, sepa, sepamos, sepáis, sepan*

*ser* 'to be'

*sea, seas, sea, seamos, seáis, sean*

(2) In the case of radical-changing verbs, the usual vowel changes occur, e.g. *cuenta*, *cuentes*, *cuenta*, *contemos*, *contéis*, *cuenten* (from *contar*; see 16.11.14), *pida*, *pidas*, *pida*, etc. (from *pedir*; see 16.11.31). Verbs like *sentir* 'to feel' have another irregularity in the present subjunctive: *sienta*, *sientas*, *sienta*, *sintamos*, *sintáis*, *sientan*. This verb must not be confused with *sentar/sentarse* 'to seat'/'to sit down' which is conjugated like *cerrar*.

*Morir* 'to die' and *dormir* 'to sleep' also show extra irregularities in the present subjunctive. See 16.11.18 for details.

(3) In Argentina, and even more so in Uruguay, the *vos* forms of the present subjunctive used by careful speakers are the same as the standard *tú* forms of the present subjunctive. See 20.12.5 for a discussion of this point.

### 16.7.6 Forms of the imperfect subjunctive

There are two sets of imperfect subjunctive endings: the imperfect subjunctive in *-ra* and the imperfect subjunctive in *-se*. They are shown at 16.3. When used as subjunctive forms, these two sets of forms are interchangeable, the *-ra* form being more common, but there are some differences between their other uses: see 20.1.3.

The imperfect subjunctive endings are always added to the stem of the third-person singular of the preterite indicative. In the case of regular verbs this stem is found by removing the infinitive ending, e.g. *habl(ar)* > *habl-*: *yo hablara/hablase*, *tú hablaras/hablases*, *él hablara/hablase*, etc. But in the case of irregular verbs the preterite stem is often irregular, e.g.

Infinitive	Preterite stem	Imperfect subjunctives
<i>sentir</i> 'to feel' and verbs like it	<i>sint(ió)</i>	<i>sintiera/sintiese</i> , etc.
<i>pedir</i> 'to request' and verbs like it	<i>pid(ió)</i>	<i>pidiera/pidiese</i> , etc.
<i>ser</i> 'be'	<i>fu(e)</i>	<i>fuera/fuese</i> , etc.
<i>producir</i> 'to produce', and all verbs ending in <i>-ducir</i>	<i>produj(o)</i>	<i>produjera/produjese</i> , etc.
<i>tener</i> 'to have'	<i>tuv(o)</i>	<i>tuviera/tuviese</i> , etc.

(1) *Morir* and *dormir* have the third-person preterite stems *mur(ió)* and *durm(ió)*, so the past subjunctives are *muriera/muriese*, *durmiera/durmiese*, etc.

(2) The forms *-ese*, *-era*, etc., not *-iese*, *-iera*, are used with the following verbs:

*decir* 'to say'

*dijera/dijese*, etc.

*ser* 'to be'

*fuera/fuese*, etc.

*traer* 'to bring'

*trajera/trajese*, etc.

all verbs whose infinitive ends in *-ducir*  
all verbs whose infinitive ends in *-ñir*,  
*-ñir* or *-llir*

*condujera, produjese*, etc.  
*tañese, bullera*, etc.

### 16.7.7 Forms of the future subjunctive

The future subjunctive is virtually obsolete and foreign learners can ignore it. Its limited surviving uses are discussed at 20.9. It is formed the same way as the imperfect subjunctive in *-ra* except that last *a* becomes *e*. *-ar* verbs: *-are*, *-ares*, *-are*, *-áremos*, *-areis*, *-aren*. *-er* and *-ir* verbs: *-iere*, *-ieres*, *-iere*, *-iéremos*, *-iereis*, *-ieren*. The future subjunctive of the verbs shown at 16.7.6 note 2 has the endings *-ere*, *-eres*, *-ere*, *-éremos*, *-ereis*, *-eren*.

### 16.7.8 Forms of the imperative

See 16.3 for the regular forms, and Chapter 21 for irregular forms and the use of the imperative.

(1) The *vos* forms used in Argentina and most other areas of *voseo* can be found by removing the *-d* of the European *vosotros* imperative: *contad* > *contá*, *decid* > *decí*, etc. The *vos* imperative of *ir* 'to go' is *andá*.

### 16.7.9 Forms of the past participle

The forms and uses of the past participle are discussed in Chapter 23.

### 16.7.10 Forms of the compound tenses

The forms of the compound tenses, e.g. *he hablado* 'I have spoken', *has visto* 'you've seen', *habían tenido* 'they'd had', *habrán hecho* 'they'll have made', etc., are always predictable if one can conjugate *haber* (see 16.11.22) and one knows the past participle of the verb. For this reason, individual compound tenses are not listed, but the full compound tense forms of a typical verb are shown at 16.13.

The uses of the compound tenses are discussed at 18.2–6.

(1) **Important:** unlike French, Italian and German, modern Spanish does not form the compound tenses of any verbs with 'to be'. Compare French *je suis venu(e)*, Italian *sono venuto(a)*, German *ich bin gekommen* and Spanish *he venido*.

### 16.7.11 Forms of the gerund (see 24.2)

### 16.7.12 Forms of the adjectival participle

This refers to forms like *preocupante* 'worrying', *convinciente* 'convincing', discussed at 23.6.

### 16.7.13 Continuous forms of verbs

Spanish has a full range of continuous forms, e.g. *estoy hablando* 'I'm talking', *estuve esperando* 'I was waiting'/'I waited for a time', etc. They are all formed from the appropriate tense of *estar* (see 16.11.21) and the invariable gerund. Their use is discussed in Chapter 19.



### 16.7.14 Forms of the passive

The passive with *ser*, e.g. *fuleron vistos* 'they were seen', *ha sido reconocida* 'she has been recognized', etc., is formed with the appropriate tense of the verb *ser* (16.11.45) and the past participle, which agrees in number and gender with the subject of *ser*.

There is another passive form, called *pasiva refleja*: *se publicó en 2019* 'it was published in 2019'. Both forms are discussed in Chapter 32.

## 16.8 Regional variations affecting verbs

### 16.8.1 Colloquial variants

The Spanish verb system is remarkably stable throughout the Hispanic world despite the large number of forms and exceptions. Popular regularizations of irregular forms, e.g. *\*cabo* for *quepo* (from *caber* 'to fit into'), *\*produció* for *produjo* (from *producir* 'to produce'), *\*andé* for *anduve* (from *andar* 'to walk') are stigmatized.

Four colloquial or popular forms are worth noting:

(a) Use of *vos* instead of the pronoun *tú* in many parts of Latin America, especially in Argentina. It is discussed in 12.3.1;

(b) use of the infinitive for the *vosotros* form of the imperative (used in Spain only): *dar* for *dad* 'give', *callaros* for *callaos* 'shut up!'/'be quiet', *iros* for *idos* 'go away', etc. For discussion see 21.9a;

(c) addition of -s to the second-person preterite singular, e.g. *?distes* for *diste* 'you gave', *?hablastes* for *hablaste* 'you spoke'. This is common in popular speech on both continents, but it is stigmatized and avoided in careful speech;

(d) pluralization of forms *haber* (other than *hay*) when it means 'there is'/'there are', e.g. *?habían muchos* for *había muchos* 'there were many'. This is more or less accepted in speech in Latin America but it is avoided in formal writing and is rejected in Spain. See 34.2.1;

(e) a tendency in some popular Latin-American dialects to make radical-changing verbs regular, e.g. *\*cuentamos* for *contamos* 'we tell', *\*detiénete* for *detente* 'stop'. Such forms sometimes appear in the dialogue of novels, but they are strongly stigmatized;

(f) use of a special *tú* form of the present indicative in popular Chilean speech (never in formal styles or careful speech), e.g. *estay* for *estás*, *soy* for *eres*.

## 16.9 Verbs and the written accent

This section deals with the rules for writing the acute accent on verbs.

### 16.9.1 Spelling and pronunciation of *aislar*, *reunir*, *prohibir*, *rehuir* and similar verbs whose stem contains a diphthong

When the last syllable but one of an infinitive contains a falling diphthong (one whose second letter is *i* or *u* pronounced *y* or *w*), this diphthong may or may not be broken into two syllables when it is stressed, e.g.

**Pronunciation**

(See the Preface for the phonetic symbols)

<i>prohibir</i> to prohibit	[proy-βír] (two syllables)
<i>prohíbe</i> (s)he prohibits	[pro-í-βe] (three syllables)
<i>reunir</i> to join together	[rrew-nír] (two syllables)
<i>reúnen</i> they join	[rre-ú-nen] (three syllables)
<i>rehuir</i> to flee from	[rre-wír] (two syllables)
<i>rehúye</i> s(h)e flees from	[rre-ú-ye] (three syllables)

Compare the following verb in which the diphthong is not broken:

<i>causar</i> to cause	[kaw-sár] (two syllables)
<i>causa</i> it causes	[káw-sa] (two syllables)

Since 1959, the stressed vowel in such broken diphthongs has been written with an accent; in the Academy's view the fact that *-h-* appears between the two vowels makes no difference. *Aislar* 'to isolate', *reunir* 'to bring together', and *prohibir* 'to prohibit' are common examples. The ruling affects the following forms of the verb (bracketed forms are not affected):

Tú imperative:	<i>aísla</i>	<i>reúne</i>	<i>prohíbe</i>
Usted(es) imperative:	<i>aísle/aíslen</i>	<i>reúna/reúnan</i>	<i>prohíba/prohíban</i>
Present indicative	<i>aíslo, aíslos, aísla (aislamos), (aisláis), aíslan</i> <i>reúne, reúnes, reúne (reunimos), (reunís), reúnen</i> <i>prohíbe, prohíbes, prohíbe (prohibimos), (prohibís), prohíben</i>		
Present subjunctive:	<i>aísle, aísles, aísle, (aislemos), (aisléis), aíslen</i> <i>reúna, reúnas, reúna, (reunamos), (reunáis), reúnan</i> <i>prohibir: prohíba, prohíbas, prohíba, (prohibamos), (prohibáis), prohíban</i>		

The following verbs are similarly affected, but bracketed verbs are now archaic or rare:

<i>(ahijar</i> to adopt)	<i>aullar</i> to howl	<i>judaizar</i> to Judaize
<i>(ahilar</i> to line up)	<i>aunar</i> to unite	<i>maullar</i> to meow
<i>(ahincar</i> to urge)	<i>aupar</i> to help up	<i>prohijar</i> to adopt
<i>(ahitar</i> to cloy)	<i>cohibir</i> to restrain	<i>rehilar</i> to quiver
<i>ahumar</i> to smoke (food)	<i>(desahitarse</i> to digest)	<i>rehusar</i> to refuse
<i>(airar</i> to anger)	<i>enraizar</i> to take root	<i>sobrehilar</i> to over-cast (in sewing)
<i>(amohinar</i> to vex)	<i>europaizar</i> to Europeanize	
<i>arcaizar</i> to archaize	<i>hebraizar</i> to Hebraicize	

(1) This Academy's spelling rule is now generally obeyed everywhere in print, but many people still omit the accent in handwriting.

(2) In other verbs, the diphthong is not broken. When the diphthong is stressed, the accent falls on its first vowel so no written accent is needed, e.g. *arraigarse* 'to take root' > *arraigo*, *encausar* 'to sue' > *encausa*, etc. Similar are *amainar* 'to die down', *causar* 'to cause', *desahuciar* 'to evict' / 'to give up hope for' (variable, usually the diphthong is retained), *desenvainar* 'to unsheathe', *embaucar* 'to swindle', *embaular* 'to pack' (a trunk/suitcase: variable), *envainar* 'to sheathe', *peinar* 'to comb' / 'to do someone's hair', *reinar* 'to reign', etc.

### 16.9.2 Verbs whose infinitive ends in *-iar*

There are two types. The majority conjugate like *cambiar* ‘to change’: the *-ia* survives as a diphthong throughout and is always pronounced [ya], so the verb is conjugated like a regular *-ar* verb and no accent is written on the *i*.

But about 50 verbs conjugate like *enviar* ‘to send’. These are conjugated like *cambiar* – i.e. regularly – except that the *i* of the diphthong is stressed and written with an accent in the following cases (bracketed forms are not affected):

- Imperative: (tú) *envía*, (usted) *envíe*, (vosotros *enviad*), (ustedes) *envíen*
- Present indicative: *envío*, *envías*, *envía*, (*enviamos*), (*enviáis*), *envían*
- Present subjunctive: *envíe*, *envíes*, *envíe*, (*enviemos*), (*enviéis*), *envíen*

The following list shows common verbs which conjugate like *enviar*:

<i>agriar</i> to sour (but often like <i>cambiar</i> )	<i>desliar</i> to untie	<i>mecanografiar</i> to type
<i>aliar</i> to ally	<i>desvariar</i> to rave	<i>paliar</i> to palliate
<i>amnistiar</i> to amnesty	<i>desviar</i> to divert	(often like <i>cambiar</i> )
<i>ampliar</i> to expand/enlarge	<i>enfriar</i> to chill	<i>piar</i> * to cheep (like a bird)
<i>ansiar</i> to yearn for	<i>enviar</i> to send	<i>porfiar</i> to insist
<i>arriar</i> to flood/to haul down	<i>espíar</i> to spy	<i>radiografiar</i> to X-ray
<i>ataviar</i> to array (with clothes)	<i>expatriarse</i> to emigrate	<i>reconciliar</i> to reconcile
<i>autografiar</i> to autograph	(also like <i>cambiar</i> )	usually like <i>cambiar</i> )
<i>auxiliar</i> to aid (usually like <i>cambiar</i> )	<i>expiar</i> to expiate	<i>repatriar</i> to repatriate (also like <i>cambiar</i> )
<i>averiar</i> to damage	<i>extasiar</i> to make ecstatic	<i>resfriar</i> to cool
<i>aviar</i> to fit out	(usually like <i>cambiar</i> )	<i>rociar</i> to sprinkle
<i>biografiar</i> to write the biography of	<i>extraviar</i> to mislead	<i>telegrafiar</i> to telegraph
<i>conciliar</i> to reconcile (usually like <i>cambiar</i> )	<i>fiar</i> * to confide	<i>vaciar</i> to empty
<i>contrariar</i> to counter	<i>fotografiar</i> to photograph	<i>vanagloriarse</i> to be boastful (almost always like <i>cambiar</i> )
<i>criar</i> * to breed/raise	<i>gloriar(se)</i> to glory	<i>variar</i> to vary
<i>desafiar</i> to challenge	<i>guiar</i> * to guide	<i>vidriar</i> to glaze (also like <i>cambiar</i> )
<i>desacreditar</i> to misdirect	<i>hastiar</i> to weary	
	<i>historiar</i> to chronicle	
	(also like <i>cambiar</i> )	
	<i>inventariar</i> to inventory	
	<i>liar</i> * to tie/bundle	

\* The Academy has new rules about the spelling of some forms of the verbs marked with an asterisk. See 44.2.4.

### 16.9.3 Verbs whose infinitive ends in *-uar*

Nearly all conjugate like *actuar* ‘to act’, i.e. the *u* may be stressed and is then written with an accent. The only forms affected are (bracketed and unlisted forms are not affected):

- Imperative: (tú) *actúa*, (usted) *actúe*, (ustedes) *actúen*
- Present indicative: *actúo*, *actúas*, *actúa*, (*actuamos*) (*actuáis*) *actúan*
- Present subjunctive: *actúe*, *actúes*, *actúe*, (*actuemos*), (*actuéis*), *actúen*

Verbs that conjugate like *actuar*:

<i>acentuar</i> to emphasize	<i>conceptuar</i> to deem	<i>desvirtuar</i> to spoil
<i>atenuar</i> to attenuate	<i>continuar</i> to continue	<i>devaluar</i> to devalue

*efectuar* to carry out  
*evaluar* to assess  
*exceptuar* to except  
*extenuar* to emaciate  
*fluctuar* to fluctuate  
*graduar* to grade  
*habituat* to habituate

*individuuar* to individualize  
*infatuuar* to infatuate  
*insinuuar* to hint  
*perpetuar* to perpetuate  
*preceptuar* to establish as a  
 norm/precept

*puntuuar* to punctuate/to  
 assess  
*redituar* yield (profit, etc.)  
*situuar* to situate  
*valuuar* to value

(1) For verbs whose infinitive ends in *-guar* see 16.4.4.

(2) Verbs ending in *-cuar*, e.g. *evacuuar* 'to evacuate' and *adecuuar* 'to adapt (a policy /to a situation, etc.)' were traditionally conjugated regularly, i.e. like *averiguuar* but without the dieresis; this is the solution preferred by *El País*. But conjugation like *actuuar* is now so common that the Academy accepts it (NGLE 4.9i).

### 16.9.4 Verbs ending in *-ear*

All are regular. The combination *ee* is never written with an accent except in the *vosotros* endings of the present subjunctive and in first-person singular preterite, e.g. *paseé*. *Pasear* 'to go for a walk' is conjugated thus:

- Present indicative: *paseo, paseas, pasea, paseamos, paseáis, pasean*
- Present subjunctive: *pasee, pasees, pasee, paseemos, paseéis, paseen*
- Preterite: *paseé, paseaste, paseó, paseamos, paseasteis, pasearon*

## 16.10 Other verbs with slight irregularities

### 16.10.1 Verbs ending in *-cer*

If the infinitive ends in *-cer* the spelling change *c > z* before *a* or *o* is applied in the case of a few verbs. However, the only verbs ending in *-cer* that are conjugated in this way are:

(a) those in which the *c/z* occurs after a consonant:

*coercer* to coerce  
*convencer* to convince  
*destorcer* to untwist

*ejercer* to practise  
*(re)torcer* to twist (radical  
 changing: see 16.11.12)

*vencer* to defeat

(b) the following exceptional verbs:

- *(re)cocer* to boil (food) (radical-changing; see 16.11.12)
- *escocer* to sting (intransitive), conjugated like *cocer*; *picar* 'to sting' is more usual
- *mecer* to rock/swing; *mecerse* to sway

The rest are like *parecer*, i.e. *-zc-* appears before *-o* or *-a*. See 16.11.10. For *hacer, placer, yacer* see the list of verbs at 16.12.

### 16.10.2 Verbs ending in *-cir*

The spelling change *c > z* before *a* or *o* applies in the case of the regular verbs *esparcir* 'to scatter/strew', *fruncir* 'to pucker/wrinkle' (the eyebrows), *resarcir* 'to repay (effort)', *uncir* 'to yoke' and *zurcir* 'to darn'/'to sew together'. Any others, e.g. *producir, lucir*, should be viewed with suspicion, and checked in the list at 16.12.

## 16.11 Model irregular and radical-changing verbs

### 16.11.1 Forms: general

Irregular verbs and model radical-changing verbs are listed in alphabetical order. The list omits oddities like the archaic *abarse*, found only in the form *ábate* 'get thee hence!', or *usucapir* 'to acquire property rights through customary use', used in legal jargon and only in the infinitive. In general, only the irregular forms are shown, except in the cases of some very common verbs.

### 16.11.2 *Abolir* 'to abolish'

Traditionally considered a 'defective verb': only those forms are used in which the verb ending begins with *-i*:

Infinitive: <i>abolir</i>	Gerund: <i>aboliendo</i>	Past participle: <i>abolido</i>
Imperative: <i>abolid</i> (* <i>abole</i> is not used)		
Present indicative: only <i>abolimos</i> and <i>abolís</i> are used		
Present subjunctive: not used		

However, the *NGLE* 4.14d and *El País* now accept all forms of this verb, conjugated regularly (i.e. *abole* not \**abuele*), although those shown above are more frequently used.

All other tenses are regular. Other verbs or constructions can replace little-used forms, e.g. *sin que se abola* by *sin que sea abolido*. A few other verbs are defective, but only *abolir*, *agredir* and *transgredir* (see 16.11.4) are common nowadays:

<i>agredir</i> see 16.11.4	<i>empedernir</i> 'to harden'/'to petrify' (only
<i>arrecirse</i> (Lat. Am.) 'to be frozen stiff'	the participle, <i>empedernido</i> , is in current
	use)
<i>aterirse</i> 'to be numb with cold' (only	<i>garantir</i> 'guarantee' ( <i>garantizar</i> in Spain,
infinitive and participle in current use)	but still used in Peru and the Southern
<i>blandir</i> 'to brandish'	Cone, where it is often conjugated
	regularly)

### 16.11.3 *Adquirir* 'to acquire' (also *inquirir* 'to enquire')

The infinitive was once *adquerir*, hence the *-ie-* when the stem vowel is stressed. Bracketed forms are regular, as are all forms not shown, e.g. *adquirí*, *adquiría*, *adquiriré*, *adquiriera*, etc.

- Imperative: (*tú*) *adquiere*, (*usted*) *adquiera*, (*vosotros adquirid*), (*ustedes*) *adquieran*
- Present indicative: *adquiero*, *adquieres*, *adquiere*, (*adquirimos*), (*adquirís*), *adquieren*
- Present subjunctive: *adquiera*, *adquieras*, *adquiera*, (*adquiramos*), (*adquiráis*), *adquieran*

### 16.11.4 *Agredir* 'to assault'/'to attack'

Classified by some as defective (like *abolir*; see 16.11.2), by others as a regular *-ir* verb. The new Academy dictionary declares it to be a normal *-ir* verb, and *El País* agrees. *Transgredir* 'to transgress' is also now considered to be regular.

### 16.11.5 *Andar* 'to walk'/'to go about'

A regular *-ar* verb except for the preterite and the past subjunctives:

Preterite: *anduve*, *anduviste*, *anduvo*, *anduvimos*, *anduvisteis*, *anduvieron*

Imperfect subjunctive (*-ra*): *anduviera*, *anduvieras*, *anduviera*, *anduviéramos*, *anduvierais*, *anduvieran*

Imperfect subjunctive (*-se*): *anduviese*, *anduvieses*, *anduviese*, *anduviésemos*, *anduvieses*, *anduviesen*

Preterite forms like *\*andé*, *\*andaste* are heard, but they are strongly stigmatized.

### 16.11.6 *Asir* 'to grasp'/'to seize'

This verb is dying out and *agarrarse* is now much more common. Forms that contain a *g* are avoided, but other forms are heard, e.g. *me así a una rama para no caerme* 'I clutched hold of a branch so as not to fall'. It is conjugated like a regular *-ir* verb except for (bracketed forms are regular):

Imperative: (*usted*) *asga*, (*vosotros*) *asid*, (*ustedes*) *asgan*

Present indicative: *asgo*, (*ases*, *ase*, *asimos*, *asís*, *asen*)

Present subjunctive: *asga*, *asgas*, *asga*, *asgamos*, *asgáis*, *asgan*

### 16.11.7 *Balbucir* 'to stammer'

Nowadays found only in those forms whose ending begins with *i*, e.g. *balbucía*, *balbució*. For other forms the regular *balbucear* is used and is the usual verb in spontaneous speech.

### 16.11.8 *Caber* 'to fit in'

Numerous irregularities:

Gerund: *cabiendo*

Past participle: *cabido*

Imperative: (*tú*) *cabe*, (*vosotros*) *cabed*, (*usted*) *quepa*, (*ustedes*) *quepan*

Present indicative: *quepo*, *cabes*, *cabe*, *cabemos*, *cabéis*, *caben*

Imperfect (regular): *cabía*, *cabías*, *cabía*, *cabíamos*, *cabíais*, *cabían*

Preterite: *cupe*, *cupiste*, *cupo*, *cupimos*, *cupisteis*, *cupieron*

Future: *cabré*, *cabrás*, *cabrá*, *cabremos*, *cabréis*, *cabrán* Conditional: *cabría*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *quepa*, *quepas*, *quepa*, *quepamos*, *quepáis*, *quepan*

Imperfect subjunctive (*-ra*): *cupiera*, *cupieras*, *cupiera*, *cupiéramos*, *cupierais*, *cupieran*

Imperfect subjunctive (*-se*): *cupiese*, *cupieses*, *cupiese*, *cupiésemos*, *cupieseis*, *cupiesen*

(1) Usage: *¿quepo yo?* 'is there room for me?', *no cabe* 'it won't fit', *no cabíamos* 'there wasn't room for us', *no cupo en el clóset la ropa de las dos* (ES, Mex. In Spain *clóset* = *el armario*) 'there was no room in the closet/cupboard for the two women's clothes', *no cabe la menor duda de que . . .* 'there isn't room for the slightest doubt that . . . '.

### 16.11.9 *Caer* 'to fall'

Gerund: *cayendo* Past participle: *caído*

Imperative: (*tú*) *cae*, (*vosotros*) *caed*, (*usted*) *caiga*, (*ustedes*) *caigan*

Present indicative: *caigo*, *caes*, *cae*, *caemos*, *caéis*, *caen*

Imperfect (regular): *caía*, *caías*, *caía*, *caíamos*, *caíais*, *caían*

Preterite: *caí, caíste, cayó, caímos, caísteis, cayeron*

Future (regular): *caeré*, etc. Conditional (regular): *caería*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *caiga, caigas, caiga, caigamos, caigáis, caigan*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *cayera, cayeras, cayera, cayéramos, cayerais, cayeran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *cayese, cayeses, cayese, cayésemos, cayeseis, cayesen*

### 16.11.10 Verbs ending in -cer

All verbs ending in -cer conjugate like *agradecer* 'to thank', shown below, except the regular verbs *coercer, ejercer, (con)vencer* and *mecer* and the radical-changing verbs *escocer, (re)cocer* and *(re)torcer*. These are discussed at 16.10.1. In all other verbs ending in -cer, *c > zc* before *a* or *o*. All forms are as for a regular -er verb except for (bracketed forms are regular)

Imperative: (*usted*) *agradezca, (vosotros agradece)*, (*ustedes*) *agradezcan*

Present indicative: *agradezco, (agradeces, agradece, agradece, agradece, agradece)*

Present subjunctive: *agradezca, agradezcas, agradezca, agradezcamos, agradezcáis, agradezcan*

### 16.11.11 Cerrar 'to shut'/'to close'

A common type of radical-changing verb. The endings are those of regular -ar verbs, but the *e* of the stem changes to *ie* when stressed. All forms are as for a regular -ar verb, save (bracketed forms are regular):

Imperative: (*tú*) *cierra, (usted) cierre, (vosotros cerrad)*, (*ustedes*) *cierren*

Present indicative: *cierro, cierras, cierra, (cerramos), (cerráis), cierran*

Present subjunctive: *cierre, cierres, cierre, (cerremos), (cerréis), cierren*

### 16.11.12 Cocer 'to boil' (food)

This, and three verbs like it, *torcer* 'to twist', *destorcer* 'to untwist' and *retorcer* 'to wring'/'to twist', conjugate exactly like *mover* save for the predictable spelling change *c > z* before *a*, *o* (bracketed forms are regular):

Imperative: (*tú*) *cuece, (usted) cueza, (vosotros coced)*, (*ustedes*) *cuezan*

Present indicative: *cuezo, cueces, cuece, (cocemos), (cocéis), cuecen*

Present subjunctive: *cueza, cuezas, cueza, (cozamos), (cozáis), cuezan*

### 16.11.13 Construir 'to build'

Verbs ending in -uir are quite common. An unstressed *i* between vowels is spelt *y*, e.g. *construyó* for the expected \**construio* and an unexpected *y* is inserted in a number of forms, e.g. *construyes* for the predicted \**construes*.

Gerund: *construyendo* Past participle: *construido* (no accent! See 44.2.3 for explanation)

Imperative: (*tú*) *construye, (vosotros) construid, (usted) construya, (ustedes) construyan*

Present indicative: *construyo, construyes, construye, construimos (no accent!), construís, construyen*

Imperfect (regular): *construía, construías, construía, construíamos, construíaís, construían*

Preterite: *construí, construiste, construyó, construimos, construisteis, construyeron*

Future (regular): *construiré*, etc. Conditional (regular): *construiría*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *construya, construyas, construya, construyamos, construyáis, construyan*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *construyera, construyeras, construyera, construyéramos, construyerais, construyeran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *construyese, construyeses, construyese, construyésemos, construyeseis, construyesen*

(1) *Argüir* 'to argue (a point)' is spelt with a dieresis whenever the *u* is followed by *i*. This preserves the pronunciation [gwi]: *arguyo, argüimos, argüi, argüía*, but *arguya, arguyeron*, etc.

(2) *Huir* 'to flee' (but not *rehuir* 'to avoid/shun') and *fluir* 'to flow' are affected by the Academy's new spelling recommendations. See 44.2.4.

### 16.11.14 **Contar** 'to count'/'to tell a story'

A common type of radical-changing verb: the *o* of the stem changes to *ue* when it is stressed. All forms are as for a regular -ar verb except (bracketed forms are regular):

Imperative: (*tú*) *cuenta*, (*usted*) *cuenta*, (*vosotros* *contad*), (*ustedes*), *cuenten*

Present indicative: *cuento, cuentas, cuenta, (contamos), (contáis), cuentan*

Present subjunctive: *cuenta, cuentas, cuenta, (contemos), (contéis), cuenten*

### 16.11.15 **Dar** 'to give'

Gerund: *dando*

Past participle: *dado*

Imperative: (*tú*) *da*, (*vosotros*) *dad*, (*usted*) *dé*, (*ustedes*) *den*

Present indicative: *doy, das* (also used with *vos*), *da, damos, daís, dan*

Imperfect (regular): *daba, dabas, daba, dábamos, dabais, daban*

Preterite: *di* (no accent!), *diste, dio* (no accent!), *dimos, disteis, dieron*

Future (regular): *daré*, etc. Conditional (regular): *daría*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *dé, des, dé, demos, deis, den*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *diera, dieras, diera, diéramos, dierais, dieran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *diese, diese, diese, diésemos, dieseis, diesen*

(1) The accent on the present subjunctive forms distinguishes them from the preposition *de* 'of'. This accent becomes unnecessary - although it is seen in print and often in handwriting - when a pronoun is added: *deme* 'give me', *dele* 'give him/her', *denos* 'give us'.

### 16.11.16 **Decir** 'to say'

Gerund: *diciendo*

Past participle: *dicho*

Imperative: (*tú*) *di*, (*vosotros*) *decid*, (*usted*) *diga*, (*ustedes*) *digan*

Present indicative:  *digo, dices, dice, decimos, decís, dicen*

Imperfect (regular): *decía, decías, decía, decíamos, decíais, decían*

Preterite: *dije, dijiste, dijo, dijimos, dijisteis, dijeron*

Future: *diré, dirás, dirá, diremos, diréis, dirán* Conditional: *diría*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *diga, digas, diga, digamos, digáis, digan*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *dijera, dijeras, dijera, diéramos, dijerais, dijeran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *dijese, dijese, dijese, diésemos, dijeseis, diesen*

(1) *Predecir* 'to foretell' and *contradecir* 'to contradict' are conjugated regularly in the future, conditional and *tú* imperative forms: *predeciré*, etc., *predeciría*, etc., *tú* imperative *predice*, etc. Forms like *prediré*, *contradiría* are said by Seco (1998), 351, to be 'rare' but the Academy (NGLE 4.11a) accepts them.



(2) *Desdecir* (e.g. *desdecirse de* 'to go back on') has the *tú* imperative *desdice*, but is otherwise regular, although rarer forms like *desdeciré*, *desdeciría* are not considered incorrect. The same is true of *contradecir* 'to contradict': *contradice*, *contradiré*, *contradiría*, rarely *contradeciré*, *contradeciría*.

### 16.11.17 *Discernir*, 'to discern'

This shows the common radical-changing modification *e > ie*, but verbs like *discernir* are very unusual in the *-ir* conjugation: only *cernirse* 'to hover'/'to loom', *concernir* (third-person only) 'to concern' and *hendir* (in Spain also *hender*, like *entender*) 'to cleave' are conjugated like it. Bracketed forms are regular:

Imperative: (*tú*) *discierne*, (*usted*) *discierna*, (*vosotros discernid*), (*ustedes*) *disciernan*  
 Present indicative: *discierno*, *disciernes*, *discierne*, (*discernimos*), (*discernís*), *disciernen*  
 Preterite (regular): *discerní*, *discerniste*, *discernió\**, *discernimos*, *discernisteis*, *discernieron\**  
 Present subjunctive: *discierna*, *disciernas*, *discierna*, (*discernamos*), (*discernáis*), *disciernan*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-*ra*) (regular): *discirniera*, etc.  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-*se*) (regular): *discirniese*, etc.

\*Not the expected *\*discirnió*, *\*discirnieron*

All other forms are as for a regular *-ir* verb.

### 16.11.18 *Dormir* 'to sleep', *morir* 'to die'

*Dormir* and *morir* are the only verbs of this kind. Apart from the common change *o > ue* when the *o* is stressed, the third-person preterite stem vowel is *u*. The *u* also appears in the first and second-person plural of the present subjunctive and in the gerund. Forms in brackets are regular:

Gerund: *durmiendo* Past participle: *dormido*, but *muerto* is the past participle of *morir*  
 Imperative: (*tú*) *duerme*, (*vosotros dormid*), (*usted*) *duerma*, (*ustedes*) *duerman*  
 Present indicative: *duermo*, *duermes*, *duerme*, (*dormimos*), (*dormís*), *duermen*  
 Imperfect (regular): *dormía*, *dormías*, *dormía*, *dormíamos*, *dormíais*, *dormían*  
 Preterite: (*dormí*), (*dormiste*), *durmió*, (*dormimos*), (*dormisteis*), *durmieron*  
 Future (regular): *dormiré*, etc. Conditional (regular): *dormiría*, etc.  
 Present subjunctive: *duerma*, *duermas*, *duerma*, *durmamos*, *durmáis*, *duerman*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-*ra*): *durmiera*, *durmieras*, *durmiera*, *durmiéramos*, *durmierais*, *durmieran*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-*se*): *durmiese*, *durmieses*, *durmiese*, *durmiésemos*, *durmieseis*, *durmiesen*

(1) In literary and journalistic styles the participle *muerto* is sometimes used instead of *matado* 'killed' when human beings are involved: *un total de tres soldados fueron muertos por un dispositivo explosivo* 'a total of three soldiers were killed by an explosive device'.

### 16.11.19 *Erguir(se)* 'to rear up'/'to sit up straight'

This verb has alternative forms in some of its tenses, the forms with *y-* being preferred nowadays. Forms in brackets are regular:

Gerund: *irguiendo* Past participle: *erguido*  
 Imperative: (*tú*) *yergue* / *irgue*, (*vosotros erguid*), (*usted*) *yerga* / *irga*, (*ustedes*) *yergan* / *irgan*  
 Present indicative: *yergo* / *irgo*, *yergues* / *irgues*, *yergue* / *irgue*, (*erguimos*), (*erguís*), *yerguen* / *irguen*  
 Imperfect (regular): *erguía*, *erguías*, *erguía*, etc.

Preterite: (*erguí*), (*erguiste*), *irguió*, (*erguimos*), (*erguisteis*), *irguieron*

Present subjunctive: *yerga/irga*, *yergas/irgas*, *yerga/irga*, *yergamos/irgamos*, *yergáis/irgáis*, *yergan/irgan*

Imperfect subjunctive (-*ra*): *irguiera*, *irguieras*, *irguiera*, *irguiéramos*, *irguierais*, *irguieran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-*se*): *irguiese*, *irguieses*, *irguiese*, *irguiésemos*, *irguieseis*, *irguiesen*

(1) All other forms are regular. Usage: *no te agaches—ponte erguido* ‘stop slouching – sit up straight’, *se irguió como una serpiente* ‘it rose/reared up like a snake’, *el perro irguió las orejas* ‘the dog pricked up its ears’, *él se irguió un momento, recostándose sobre la almohada* (JV, Mex.) ‘he sat up for a moment, leaning back against the pillow’.

### 16.11.20 **Errar** ‘to wander’/‘err’

This verb conjugates like *cerrar*, i.e. *e > ie* when stressed, but the *ie* is written *ye*. It is, however, regular in the Southern Cone and Colombia and in some other parts of Latin America, i.e. *erro*, *erras*, *erra*, etc. Conjugated like a regular *ar* verb except for (bracketed forms are regular):

Imperative: (*tú*) *yerra*, (*usted*) *yerre*, (*vosotros errad*), (*ustedes*) *yerren*

Present indicative: *yerro*, *yerras*, *yerra*, (*erramos*), (*erráis*), *yerran*

Present subjunctive: *yerre*, *yerres*, *yerre*, (*erremos*), (*erréis*), *yerren*

### 16.11.21 **Estar** ‘to be’

This verb is used very frequently. The difference between it and *ser*, which both mean ‘to be’, is discussed in Chapter 33.

Gerund (reg.): *estando* Past participle (reg.): *estado*

Imperative: (*tú*) *está*, (*vosotros estad*, reg.), (*usted*) *esté*, (*ustedes*) *estén*

Present indicative: *estoy*, *estás*, *está*, *estamos*, *estáis*, *están*

Imperfect (regular): *estaba*, *estabas*, *estaba*, *estábamos*, *estabais*, *estaban*

Preterite: *estuve*, *estuviste*, *estuvo*, *estuvimos*, *estuvisteis*, *estuvieron*

Future (reg.): *estará*, etc. Conditional (reg.): *estaría*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *esté*, *estés*, *esté*, *estemos*, *estéis*, *estén*

Imperfect subjunctive (-*ra*): *estuviera*, *estuvieras*, *estuviera*, *estuviéramos*, *estuvierais*, *estuvieran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-*se*): *estuviese*, *estuvieses*, *estuviese*, *estuviésemos*, *estuvieseis*, *estuviesen*

(1) The imperative is often formed from the pronominal (i.e. ‘reflexive’) form, i.e. *estate*, *estaos*, *estese*, *estense*. These are frequently – but unnecessarily – spelt with an accent, e.g. *estáte*. See 21.2.6.

### 16.11.22 **Haber**, auxiliary verb, and also ‘there is’, ‘there are’, ‘there were’, etc.

This common verb is used to form the compound tenses of all regular and irregular verbs (for a discussion of the compound tenses, e.g. *he hablado*, *habían visto*, see Chapter 18). It is also used in the third person only as the main ‘existential’ verb, cf. *había muchos* ‘there were a lot’, *habrá menos de cinco* ‘there will be less than five’. When used thus its present indicative form is *hay*: see Chapter 34 for a discussion of its use.

Gerund: *habiendo*

Past participle: *habido*

Imperative: (not used)

Present indicative: *he*, *has* (also used with *vos*), *ha* (*hay*), *hemos*, *habéis*, *han*

Imperfect (regular): *había*, *habías*, *había*, *habíamos*, *habíais*, *habían*

Preterite: *hube, hubiste, hubo, hubimos, hubisteis, hubieron*

Future: *habré, habrás, habrá, habremos, habréis, habrán*

Conditional: *habría, habrías, habría, habríamos, habríais, habrían*

Present subjunctive: *haya, hayas, haya, hayamos, hayáis, hayan*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *hubiera, hubieras, hubiera, hubiéramos, hubierais, hubieran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *hubiese, hubieses, hubiese, hubiésemos, hubieseis, hubiesen*

(1) The past subjunctive in -ra is also much used to form the conditional perfect, i.e. *te hubiera llamado* for *te habría llamado* 'I would have phoned you'. See 17.7.5 for discussion.

(2) When it means 'there is/was/will be', etc., this verb is singular: *había cinco* 'there were five'. Forms like ?*habían cinco* are unacceptable in Castilian-speaking Spain and in writing everywhere, but they are heard in spoken Spanish in Catalonia and Latin America.

(3) *Habemos* is used in the phrase *nos las tenemos* 'we're dealing with'. See 8.4.4 note 1 for an example. In other contexts, the form *habemos* is stigmatized. See 34.2.1 note 2.

(4) The form ?*haiga* is sometimes heard for the subjunctive *haya* but it is stigmatized as rustic or illiterate.

### 16.11.23 *Hacer* 'to do'/'to make'

There are several compounds, e.g. *deshacer* 'to undo', *contrahacer* 'to counterfeit'

Gerund: *haciendo*

Past participle: *hecho*

Imperative: (tú) *haz*, (vosotros) *haced*, (usted) *haga*, (ustedes) *hagan*

Present indicative: *hago, haces, hace, hacemos, hacéis, hacen*

Imperfect (regular): *hacía, hacías, hacía, hacíamos, hacíais, hacían*

Preterite: *hice, hiciste, hizo, hicimos, hicisteis, hicieron*

Future: *haré, harás, hará, haremos, haréis, harán* Conditional: *haría*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *haga, hagas, haga, hagamos, hagáis, hagan*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *hiciera, hicieras, hiciera, hiciéramos, hicierais, hicieran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *hiciese, hicieses, hiciese, hiciésemos, hicieseis, hiciesen*

(1) *Satisfacer* 'to satisfy' is conjugated like *hacer* – *satisfará, satisfizo*, etc. – although the *tú* imperative can be either *satisfaz* or *satisface*.

(2) The form *ha* for *hace* is obsolete, but occasionally seen in archaic phrases like *años ha* 'years ago' for *hace años*.

### 16.11.24 *Ir* 'to go'

Numerous irregularities:

Gerund: *yendo*

Past participle: *ido*

Imperative: (tú) *ve* (see note 2), (vosotros) *id* (see note 1), (usted) *vaya*, (ustedes) *vayan*

Present indicative: *voy, vas* (also used with *vos*), *va, vamos, vais, van*

Imperfect: *iba, ibas, iba, íbamos, ibais, iban*

Preterite: *fui* (no accent!), *fuiste, fue* (no accent!), *fuimos, fuisteis, fueron*

Future (regular): *iré, irás, irá, iremos, iréis, irán* Conditional (regular): *iría*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *vaya, vayas, vaya, vayamos, vayáis, vayan*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *fuera, fueras, fuera, fuéramos, fuerais, fueran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *fuese, fueses, fuese, fuésemos, fueseis, fuesen*

(1) The *vosotros* imperative of *irse* is irregularly *idos* (for the predicted \**íos*). See 21.2.4 for further discussion of this form.

(2) The standard Argentine *vos* imperative of *ir* is *andá*. The predicted *vos* imperative *i* is reportedly heard in popular speech in north-eastern Argentina but it is stigmatized (NGLE 4.13j). We have never seen it in written Spanish.

### 16.11.25 **Jugar 'to play' (a game).**

This verb is unique in that *u>ue* when stressed. Note also *g>gu* before *e*. All forms are as for a regular *-ar* verb except (bracketed forms are regular):

Imperative: (tú) *juega*, (usted) *juegue*, (vosotros) *jugad*, (ustedes) *jueguen*  
 Present indicative: *juego*, *juegas*, *juega*, (jugamos), (jugáis), *juegan*  
 Preterite (regular): *jugué*, *jugaste*, *jugó*, *jugamos*, *jugasteis*, *jugaron*  
 Present subjunctive: *juegue*, *juegues*, *juegue*, (juguemos), (juguéis), *jueguen*

### 16.11.26 **Lucir 'to look good', 'to wear' as in *lucía un vestido nuevo* 'she was wearing a new dress'**

*C > zc* before *a* or *o*. All other forms are as for a regular *-ir* verb (bracketed forms are also regular):

Imperative: (tú) *luce*, (usted) *luzca*, (vosotros) *lucid*, (ustedes) *luzcan*  
 Present indicative: *luzco*, (luces, luce, lucimos, lucís, lucen)  
 Present subjunctive: *luzca*, *luzcas*, *luzca*, *luzcamos*, *luzcáis*, *luzcan*

(1) Verbs ending in *-ducir* are conjugated like *producir*, shown at 16.11.37.

### 16.11.27 **Maldecir 'to curse', bendecir 'to bless'**

Conjugated like *decir* in some tenses, and regularly in others. Forms that differ from *decir* are shown in bold type:

Gerund: *maldiciendo* Past participle: ***maldecido*** (for *maldito*, *bendito* see 23.2.1)  
 Imperative: (tú) ***maldice***, (vosotros) *maldecid*, (usted) *maldiga*, (ustedes) *maldigan*  
 Present indicative: *maldigo*, *maldices*, *maldice*, *maldecimos*, *maldecís*, *maldicen*  
 Imperfect (regular): *maldecía*, etc.  
 Preterite: *maldije*, *maldijiste*, *maldijo*, *maldijimos*, *maldijisteis*, *maldijeron*  
 Future (regular): ***maldeciré***, ***maldecirás***, ***maldecirá***, ***maldeciremos***, ***maldeciréis***, ***maldecirán***  
 Conditional (regular): ***maldeciría***, ***maldecirías***, ***maldeciría***, ***maldeciríamos***, ***maldeciríais***, ***maldecirían***  
 Present subjunctive: *maldiga*, *maldigas*, *maldiga*, *maldigamos*, *maldigáis*, *maldigan*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-*ra*): *maldijera*, *maldijeras*, *maldijera*, *maldijéramos*, *maldijerais*, *maldijeran*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-*se*): *maldijese*, *maldijeses*, *maldijese*, *maldijésemos*, *maldijeseis*, *maldijesen*

### 16.11.28 **Mover 'to move'**

A common type of radical-changing verb. The *o* of the stem changes to *ue* when stressed. All other forms (including bracketed ones) are as for regular *-er* verbs:

Imperative: (tú) *mueve*, (usted) *mueva*, (vosotros moved), (ustedes) *muevan*  
 Present indicative: *muevo*, *mueves*, *mueve*, (movemos), (movéis), *mueven*  
 Present subjunctive: *mueva*, *muevas*, *mueva*, (movamos), (mováis), *muevan*

### 16.11.29 *Oír* 'to hear' (also *desoír* 'to disregard', 'to turn a deaf ear to a request')

Gerund: *oyendo* Past participle: *oído*  
 Imperative: (tú) *oye*, (vosotros) *oíd*, (usted) *oiga*, (ustedes) *oigan*  
 Present indicative: ***oigo***, *oyes*, *oye*, *oímos*, *oís*, *oyen*  
 Imperfect (regular): *oía*, *oías*, *oía*, *oíamos*, *oíais*, *oían*  
 Preterite: *oí*, *oíste*, *oyó*, *oímos*, *oísteis*, *oyeron*  
 Future (regular): *oiré*, etc. Conditional (regular): *oiría*, etc.  
 Present subjunctive: *oiga*, *oigas*, *oiga*, *oigamos*, *oigáis*, *oigan*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *oyera*, *oyeras*, *oyera*, *oyéramos*, *oyerais*, *oyeran*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *oyese*, *oyeses*, *oyese*, *oyésemos*, *oyeseis*, *oyesen*

(1) There is a confusing and spreading tendency everywhere to replace *oír* by *escuchar*, which properly means 'to listen' and not 'to hear'. One hears answerphone messages like *deja un mensaje cuando escuches la señal* for *cuando oigas la señal* 'leave a message when you hear the tone'.

### 16.11.30 *Oler* 'to smell'

*Oler* is conjugated like *mover* but shows the predictable spelling *hue* for *ue* when this diphthong is at the beginning of a word. All forms, including bracketed ones, as for a regular -er verb except:

Imperative: (tú) *huele*, (usted) *huela*, (vosotros oled), (ustedes) *huelan*  
 Present indicative: *huelo*, *huelas*, *huele*, (olemos), (oléis), *huelen*  
 Present subjunctive: *huela*, *huelas*, *huela*, (olamos), (oláis), *huelan*

### 16.11.31 *Pedir* 'to ask for'

The endings are regular, but the *e* of the stem changes to *i* when stressed, and also in the gerund, third-person preterite and imperfect subjunctive:

Gerund: *pidiendo* Past participle: *pedido*  
 Imperative: (tú) *pide*, (vosotros) *pedid*, (usted) *pida*, (ustedes) *pidan*  
 Present indicative: *pido*, *pides*, *pide*, *pedimos*, *pedís*, *piden*  
 Imperfect (regular): *pedía*, *pedías*, *pedía*, *pedíamos*, *pedíais*, *pedían*  
 Preterite: *pedí*, *pediste*, *pidió*, *pedimos*, *pedisteis*, *pidieron*  
 Future (regular): *pediré*, etc. Conditional (regular): *pediría*, etc.  
 Present subjunctive: *pida*, *pidas*, *pida*, *pidamos*, *pidáis*, *pidan*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *pidiera*, *pidieras*, *pidiera*, *pidiéramos*, *pidierais*, *pidieran*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *pidiese*, *pidieses*, *pidiese*, *pidiésemos*, *pidieseis*, *pidiesen*

### 16.11.32 *Perder* 'to lose'

A common type of radical-changing verb. The endings are regular, but the *e* of the stem changes to *ie* when stressed. All forms, included bracketed ones, are as for a regular -er verb except:

Imperative: (tú) *pierde*, (usted) *pierda*, (ustedes) *pierdan*

Present indicative: *pierdo*, *pierdes*, *pierde*, (*perdemos*), (*perdéis*), *pierden*

Present subjunctive: *pierda*, *pierdas*, *pierda*, (*perdamos*), (*perdáis*), *pierdan*

### 16.11.33 *Placer* 'to please'

Found only in the third person and nowadays rare but not quite extinct: *gustar* (regular) is the usual word for 'to please'. It is conjugated like *agradecer* (see 16.11.10) except that archaic irregular alternatives, none nowadays used, existed for the following third-person forms:

Preterite  
sing. *plugo*, plur. *pluguieron*

Present subjunctive  
*plega(n)*

Imperfect subjunctive  
*pluguiera(n)/pluguiese(n)*

### 16.11.34 *Poder* 'to be able'

Gerund: *pudiendo*

Past participle: *podido*

Imperative: not used

Present indicative: *puedo*, *puedes*, *puede*, *podemos*, *podéis*, *pueden*

Imperfect (regular): *podía*, *podías*, *podía*, *podíamos*, *podíais*, *podían*

Preterite: *pude*, *pudiste*, *pudo*, *pudimos*, *pudisteis*, *pudieron*

Future: *podré*, *podrás*, *podrá*, *podremos*, *podréis*, *podrán* Conditional: *podría*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *pueda*, *puedas*, *pueda*, *podamos*, *podáis*, *puedan*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *pudiera*, *pudieras*, *pudiera*, *pudiéramos*, *pudierais*, *pudieran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *pudiese*, *pudieses*, *pudiese*, *pudiésemos*, *pudieseis*, *pudiesen*

### 16.11.35 *Poner* 'to put'

Gerund: *poniendo*

Past participle: *puesto*

Imperative: (tú) *pon*, (vosotros) *poned*, (usted) *ponga*, (ustedes) *pongan*

Present indicative: *pongo*, *pones*, *pone*, *ponemos*, *ponéis*, *ponen*

Imperfect (regular): *ponía*, *ponías*, *ponía*, *poníamos*, *poníais*, *ponían*

Preterite: *puse*, *pusiste*, *puso*, *pusimos*, *pusisteis*, *pusieron*

Future: *pondré*, *pondrás*, *pondrá*, *pondremos*, *pondréis*, *pondrán* Conditional: *pondría*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *ponga*, *pongas*, *ponga*, *pongamos*, *pongáis*, *pongan*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *pusiera*, *pusieras*, *pusiera*, *pusiéramos*, *pusierais*, *pusieran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *pusiese*, *pusieses*, *pusiese*, *pusiésemos*, *pusieseis*, *pusiesen*

(1) Also compounds like *componer* 'to compose', *imponer* 'to impose', *proponer* 'to propose', *descomponer* 'to split something up', *suponer* 'to suppose', etc. An accent is written on the *tú* imperative of these compounds, e.g. *componer* 'to compose' > *compón*, *posponer* 'to postpone' > *pospón*.

### 16.11.36 *Poseer* 'to possess'

This verb and others like it, e.g. *leer* 'to read', *creer* 'to believe', requires that a *y* sound between vowels should be written *y* and not *i*. This is a spelling rule, not an irregularity:

Gerund: *poseyendo*

Past participle: *poseído*

Imperative: (tú) *posee*, (vosotros) *poseed*, (usted) *posea*, (ustedes) *posean*

Present indicative: *poseo*, *posees*, *posee*, *poseemos*, *poseéis*, *poseen*

Imperfect (regular): *poseía*, *poseías*, *poseía*, *poseíamos*, *poseíais*, *poseían*

Preterite: *poseí, poseíste, poseyó, poseímos, poseísteis, poseyeron*  
 Future (regular): *poseeré*, etc. Conditional (regular): *poseería*, etc.  
 Present subjunctive: *posea, poseas, posea, poseamos, poseáis, posean*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *poseyera, poseyeras, poseyera, poseyéramos, poseyerais, poseyeran*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *poseyese, poseyeses, poseyese, poseyésemos, poseyeseis, poseyesen*

### 16.11.37 *Producir* 'to produce'

Conjugated like *lucir* except for the preterite and for forms based on the preterite stem. The preterite endings, and therefore the past and future subjunctive endings are -*eron*, -*era*, -*ese*, etc., not -*ieron*, -*iera*, -*iese*.

Imperative: (tú) *produce*, (vosotros) *producid*, (usted) *produzca*, (ustedes) *produzcan*  
 Present indicative: *produzco, produces, produce, producimos, producís, producen*  
 Imperfect (regular): *producía*, etc.  
 Preterite: *produje, produjiste, produjo, produjimos, produjisteis, produjeron*  
 Future (regular): *produciré*, etc. Conditional (regular): *produciría*, etc.  
 Present subjunctive: *produzca, produzcas, produzca, produzcamos, produzcaís, produzcan*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *produjera, produjeras, produjera, produjéramos, produjeráis, produjeran*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *produjese, produjeses, produjese, produjésemos, produjeseis, produjesen*

(1) Preterite forms like *\*produció*, *\*conducí* are common mistakes in popular speech, but they are stigmatized.

### 16.11.38 *Querer* 'to want'/'to love'

Gerund: *queriendo* Past participle: *querido*  
 Imperative (rarely used): (tú) *quiere*, (vosotros) *quered*, (usted) *quiera*, (ustedes) *quieran*  
 Present indicative: *quiero, quieres, quiere, queremos, queréis, quieren*  
 Imperfect (regular): *quería, querías, quería, queríamos, queríais, querían*  
 Preterite: *quise, quisiste, quiso, quisimos, quisisteis, quisieron*  
 Future: *querré, querrás, querrá, querrémos, querréis, querrán* Conditional: *querría*, etc.  
 Present subjunctive: *quiera, quieras, quiera, queramos, queráis, quieran*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *quisiera, quisieras, quisiera, quisieramos, quisierais, quisieran*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *quisiese, quisieses, quisiese, quisiésemos, quisieseis, quisiesen*

### 16.11.39 *Reír* 'to laugh'

This verb is in fact conjugated in almost the same way as *pedir*, although the absence of a consonant between the vowels obscures the similarity:

Gerund: *riendo* Past participle: *reído*  
 Imperative: (tú) *ríe*, (vosotros) *reid*, (usted) *ría*, (ustedes) *rían*  
 Present indicative: *río, ríes, ríe, reímos, reís, ríen*  
 Imperfect (regular): *reía, reías, reía, reíamos, reíais, reían*  
 Preterite: *reí, reíste, rio,\* reímos, reísteis, rieron*  
 Future (regular): *reiré, reirás, reirá, reiremos, reiréis, reirán* Conditional (regular): *reiría*, etc.  
 Present subjunctive: *ría, rías, ría, ríamos, ríais\*, rían*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *riera, rieras, riera, riéramos, rierais, rieran*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *riesa, rieses, riesa, riésemos, rieseis, riesen*

\*The Academy now recommends that these forms should be written without an accent. See 44.2.4. This applies only to *reír* and *freír* to 'fry'. In other verbs whose infinitive ends in *-eír* the final vowel of the third-person singular preterite is written with an accent, e.g. *sonrió*, *sofrío*, etc.

### 16.11.40 *Reñir* 'to scold'

This and other verbs in *-eñir* are conjugated like *pedir*, except that, as usual, *ie > e* and *ió > ó* after *ñ*; see 16.4.10. Only the forms that differ from *pedir* are shown, and bracketed forms are also regular

Gerund: *riñendo*

Preterite: (*reñí*), (*reñiste*), *riñó*, (*reñimos*), (*reñisteis*), *riñeron*

Imperfect subjunctive (*-ra*): *riñera*, *riñeras*, *riñera*, *riñéramos*, *riñerais*, *riñeran*

Imperfect subjunctive (*-se*): *riñese*, *riñeses*, *riñese*, *riñésemos*, *riñeseis*, *riñesen*

### 16.11.41 *Roer* 'to gnaw'

The bracketed forms are little-used alternatives. In practice the first-person singular indicative is avoided and may be expressed by *estoy royendo* 'I'm gnawing'.

Gerund: *royendo*

Past participle: *roído*

Imperative: (*tú*) *roe*, (*vosotros*) *roed*, (*usted*) *roa* (*roiga/roya*), (*ustedes*) *roan* (*roigan/royan*)

Present indicative: *roo* (*roigo/royo*; the Academy prefers *roo*), *roes*, *roe*, *roemos*, *roéis*, *roen*

Imperfect (regular): *roía*, *roías*, *roía*, *roíamos*, *roíais*, *roían*

Preterite: *roí*, *roíste*, *royó*, *roímos*, *roísteis*, *royeron*

Future (regular): *roeré*, etc.

Conditional (regular): *roería*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *roa* (*roiga/roya*; the Academy prefers *roa*), *roas* (*roigas/royas*), *roa* (*roiga/roya*), *roamos* (*roigamos/royamos*), *roáis* (*roigáis/royáis*), *roan* (*roigan/royan*)

Imperfect subjunctive (*-ra*): *royera*, *royeras*, *royera*, *royéramos*, *royerais*, *royeran*

Imperfect subjunctive (*-se*): *royese*, *royeses*, *royese*, *royésemos*, *royeseis*, *royesen*

### 16.11.42 *Saber* 'to know'

Gerund: *sabiendo*

Past participle: *sabido*

Imperative (rarely used): (*tú*) *sabe*, (*vosotros*) *sabed*, (*usted*) *sepa*, (*ustedes*) *sepan*

Present indicative: *sé*, *sabes*, *sabe*, *sabemos*, *sabéis*, *saben*

Imperfect (regular): *sabía*, *sabías*, *sabía*, *sabíamos*, *sabíais*, *sabían*

Preterite: *supe*, *supiste*, *supo*, *supimos*, *supisteis*, *supieron*

Future: *sabré*, *sabrás*, *sabrás*, *sabremos*, *sabréis*, *sabrán*

Conditional: *sabría*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *sepa*, *sepas*, *sepa*, *sepamos*, *sepáis*, *sepan*

Imperfect subjunctive (*-ra*): *supiera*, *supieras*, *supiera*, *supiéramos*, *supierais*, *supieran*

Imperfect subjunctive (*-se*): *supiese*, *supieses*, *supiese*, *supiésemos*, *supieseis*, *supiesen*

### 16.11.43 *Salir* 'to go out'/'to leave'

Gerund: *saliendo*

Past participle: *salido*

Imperative: (*tú*) *sal*, (*vosotros*) *salid*, (*usted*) *salga*, (*ustedes*) *salgan*

Present indicative: *salgo*, *sales*, *sale*, *salimos*, *salís*, *salen*

Imperfect (regular): *salía*, *salías*, *salía*, etc.

Preterite (regular): *salí*, *saliste*, *salíó*, etc.

Future: *saldré*, *saldrás*, *saldrá*, *saldremos*, *saldréis*, *saldrán*

Conditional: *saldría*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *salga*, *salgas*, *salga*, *salgamos*, *salgáis*, *salgan*



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Imperfect subjunctive (-ra) (regular): *saliera*, etc.

Imperfect subjunctive (-se) (regular): *saliese*, etc.

### 16.11.44 *Sentir* 'to feel'

A common type of -ir verb. The endings are regular, but the stem vowel changes to *ie* or to *i* in certain forms:

Gerund: *sintiendo*

Past participle *sentido*

Imperative: (tú) *siente*, (usted) *sienta*, (vosotros) *sentid*, (ustedes) *sientan*

Present indicative: *siento*, *sientes*, *siente*, (sentimos), (sentís), *sienten*

Preterite: (sentí), (sentiste), *sintió*, (sentimos), (sentisteis), *sintieron*

Present subjunctive: *sienta*, *sientas*, *sienta*, *sintamos*, *sintáis*, *sientan*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *sintiera*, *sintieras*, *sintiera*, *sintiéramos*, *sintierais*, *sintieran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *sintiese*, *sintieses*, *sintiese*, *sintiésemos*, *sintieseis*, *sintiesen*

### 16.11.45 *Ser* 'to be'

A very common verb with several irregularities. For its relationship with *estar* see Chapter 33. Its preterite and also the past subjunctive forms are the same as those of *ir* 'to go':

Gerund: *siendo*

Past participle: *sido*

Imperative: (tú) *sé* (see note), (vosotros) *sed*, (usted) *sea*, (ustedes) *sean*

Present indicative: *soy*, *eres* (see note 2) *es*, *somos*, *sois*, *son*

Imperfect: *era*, *eras*, *era*, *éramos*, *erais*, *eran*

Preterite: *fui* (no accent!), *fuiste*, *fue* (no accent!), *fuimos*, *fuisteis*, *fueron*

Future (regular): *seré*, *serás*, *será*, *seremos*, *seréis*, *serán* Conditional (regular): *sería*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *sea*, *seas*, *sea*, *seamos*, *seáis*, *sean*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *fuera*, *fueras*, *fuera*, *fuéramos*, *fuerais*, *fueran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *fuese*, *fueses*, *fuese*, *fuésemos*, *fueseis*, *fuesen*

(1) The accent on the imperative *sé* distinguishes it from the pronoun *se*.

(2) In Argentina and most other places where *vos* is used for *tú*, the present indicative form is *sos*: *sos muy inteligente* 'you're very intelligent', i.e. *eres muy inteligente*.

### 16.11.46 *Tener* 'to have'

Note the irregular preterite and future:

Gerund: *teniendo*

Past participle: *tenido*

Imperative: (tú) *ten*, (vosotros) *tened*, (usted) *tenga*, (ustedes) *tengan*

Present indicative: *tengo*, *tienes*, *tiene*, *tenemos*, *tenéis*, *tienen*

Imperfect (regular): *tenía*, *tenías*, *tenía*, *teníamos*, *teníais*, *tenían*

Preterite: *tuve*, *tuviste*, *tuvo*, *tuvimos*, *tuvisteis*, *tuvieron*

Future: *tendré*, *tendrás*, *tendrá*, *tendremos*, *tendréis*, *tendrán* Conditional: *tendría*, etc.

Present subjunctive: *tenga*, *tengas*, *tenga*, *tengamos*, *tengáis*, *tengan*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *tuviera*, *tuvieras*, *tuviera*, *tuviéramos*, *tuvierais*, *tuvieran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *tuviese*, *tuvieses*, *tuviese*, *tuviésemos*, *tuvieseis*, *tuviesen*

(1) The *tú* imperative of compounds like *retener* 'to retain', *detener* 'to stop', has an accent: *retén*, *detén*. The accent should be dropped if a pronoun is added: *detente*, *retenlo*, etc.

### 16.11.47 **Traer 'to bring'**

Gerund *trayendo* Past participle *traído*  
 Imperative (tú) *trae*, (vosotros) *traed*, (usted) *traiga*, (ustedes) *traigan*  
 Present indicative: *traigo*, *traes*, *trae*, *traemos*, *traéis*, *traen*  
 Imperfect (regular): *traía*, *traías*, *traía*, *traíamos*, *traíais*, *traían*  
 Preterite: *traje*, *trajiste*, *trajo*, *trajimos*, *trajisteis*, *trajeron* (**not** \**trajieron*)  
 Future (regular): *traeré*, etc. Conditional (regular): *traería*, etc.  
 Present subjunctive: *traiga*, *traigas*, *traiga*, *traigamos*, *traigáis*, *traigan*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-*ra*): *trajera*, *trajeras*, *trajera*, *trajéramos*, *trajerais*, *trajeran*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-*se*): *trajese*, *trajeses*, *trajese*, *trajésemos*, *trajeseis*, *trajesen*

(1) The preterite *truje*, *trujiste*, etc., is found in Golden-Age texts and occasionally in dialects.

### 16.11.48 **Valer 'to be worth'**

Gerund: *valiendo* Past participle: *valido*  
 Imperative: (tú) *vale*, (vosotros) *valed*, (usted) *valga*, (ustedes) *valgan*  
 Present indicative: *valgo*, *vales*, *vale*, *valemos*, *valéis*, *valen*  
 Imperfect (regular): *valía*, *valías*, *valía*, *valíamos*, *valíais*, *valían*  
 Preterite (regular): *valí*, *valiste*, *valió*, *valimos*, *valisteis*, *valieron*  
 Future: *valdré*, *valdrás*, *valdrá*, *valdremos*, *valdréis*, *valdrán* Conditional: *valdría*, etc.  
 Present subjunctive: *valga*, *valgas*, *valga*, *valgamos*, *valgáis*, *valgan*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-*ra*): *valiera*, *valieras*, *valiera*, *valiéramos*, *valierais*, *valieran*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-*ra*): *valiese*, *valieses*, *valiese*, *valiésemos*, *valieseis*, *valiesen*

### 16.11.49 **Venir 'to come'**

Gerund: *viniendo* Past participle: *venido*  
 Imperative (tú) *ven*, (vosotros) *venid*, (usted) *venga*, (ustedes) *vengan*  
 Present indicative: *vengo*, *vienes*, *viene*, *venimos*, *venís*, *vienen*  
 Imperfect (regular): *venía*, *venías*, *venía*, *veníamos*, *veníais*, *venían*  
 Preterite: *vine*, *viniste*, *vinó*, *vinimos*, *vinisteis*, *vinieron*  
 Future: *vendré*, *vendrás*, *vendrá*, *vendremos*, *vendréis*, *vendrán* Conditional: *vendría*, etc.  
 Present subjunctive: *venga*, *vengas*, *venga*, *vengamos*, *vengáis*, *vengan*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-*ra*): *viniera*, *vinieras*, *viniera*, *viniéramos*, *vinierais*, *vinieran*  
 Imperfect subjunctive (-*se*): *viniese*, *vinieses*, *viniese*, *viniésemos*, *vinieseis*, *viniesen*

(1) The *tú* imperative and the third-person plural present indicative of compounds like *prevenir* 'to forewarn'/'to forecast' have an accent: *se prevén tormentas intensas* 'intense storms are forecast'.

### 16.11.50 **Ver 'to see'**

Gerund: *viendo* Past participle: *visto*  
 Imperative: (tú) *ve*, (vosotros) *ved*, (usted) *vea*, (ustedes) *vean*  
 Present indicative: *veo*, *ves*, *ve*, *vemos*, *veis*, *ven*  
 Imperfect: *veía*, *veías*, *veía*, *veíamos*, *veíais*, *veían*  
 Preterite: *vi* (no accent!), *viste*, *vio* (no accent!), *vimos*, *visteis*, *vieron*  
 Future (regular): *veré*, etc. Conditional (regular): *vería*, etc.  
 Present subjunctive: *vea*, *veas*, *vea*, *veamos*, *veáis*, *vean*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *viera, vieras, viera, viéramos, vierais, vieran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *viese, vieses, viese, viésemos, vieses, vieses*

(1) The root verb is stressed in compound form in the first-person and third-person singular of the preterite and the third-person singular present indicative, e.g. *entreví* 'I glimpsed', *entrevió* '(s)he glimpsed', *prevé* '(s)he foresees', *previó* '(s)he foresaw'.

(2) The imperfect is slightly irregular since the expected forms would be *\*vía, \*vías, \*vía*, etc.

### 16.11.51 **Yacer 'to lie' (as in 'he lay there') (US 'to lay')**

Almost never used nowadays except on gravestones: *estar tumbado, estar acostado* are the usual translations. It is conjugated like *agradecer* (16.11.10), except for the alternative forms shown in brackets (regular forms sometimes appear in literary styles):

Imperative: (usted) *yazca* (*yaga/yazga*), (ustedes) *yazcan* (*yagan/yazgan*)

Present indicative: *yazco* (*yago, yazgo*), other persons regular

Present subjunctive: *yazca* (*yaga/yazga*), etc.

## 16.12 List of irregular verbs

A number of very rare verbs have been omitted, but this is no guarantee that all of the verbs listed are in common use today. Bracketed forms indicate verbs which are found in the infinitive or past participle forms, which are often the only surviving remains of the verbs that are otherwise obsolete (cf. *aterirse*). For verbs beginning with the prefix in *re-* that are not listed here see the root verb.

*abastecer*: -cer 16.11.10

*abolir*: 16.11.2

*aborrecer*: -cer 16.11.10

*abrir*: past participle

*abierto*

*absolver*: mover 16.11.28

past participle *absuelto*

*abstenerse*: tener 16.11.46

*abstraer*: traer 16.11.47

*acaecer*: -cer 16.11.10

*acertar*: cerrar 16.11.11

*acontecer*: -cer 16.11.10

*acordar*: contar 16.11.14

*acostar(se)*: contar 16.11.14

*acrecentar*: cerrar 16.11.11

*adherir*: sentir 16.11.44

*adolescer*: -cer 16.11.10

*adormecer*: -cer 16.11.10

*adquirir*: 16.11.3

*aducir*: producir 16.11.37

*advertir*: sentir 16.11.44

*agradecer*: -cer 16.11.10

*agredir*: 16.11.4

*alentar*: cerrar 16.11.11

*almorzar*: contar 16.11.14

z > c before e

*amanecer*: -cer 16.11.10

*amoblar*: contar 16.11.14, but

sometimes like *amueblar*:

reg. in Latin America

*andar*: 16.11.5

*anochecer*: -cer 16.11.10

*anteponer*: poner 16.11.35

*apacentar*: cerrar 16.11.11

*aparecer*: -cer 16.11.10

*apetecer*: -cer 16.11.10

*apostar*: contar 16.11.14

reg. in meaning 'to

post a sentry'

*apretar*: cerrar 16.11.11

*aprobar*: contar 16.11.14

*argüir*: construir 16.11.13

(*arrecirse*: abolir 16.11.2)

*arrendar*: cerrar 16.11.11

*arrepentirse*: sentir 16.11.44

*ascender*: perder 16.11.32

*asentar*: cerrar 16.11.11

*asentir*: sentir 16.11.44

*asir*: 16.11.6

*asolar*: contar 16.11.14 if it

means 'to parch', but

Academy allows regular

conjugation for all

meanings

*atañer*: see 16.4.10

*atender*: perder 16.11.32

*atenerse*: tener 16.11.46

*aterrar*: like cerrar 16.11.11

when = 'to knock down',

reg. when = 'to terrify'

(*aterirse*: abolir 16.11.2)

*atraer*: traer 16.11.47

*atravesar*: cerrar 16.11.11

*atribuir*: construir

16.11.13

*avenir*: venir 16.11.49

*aventar*: cerrar 16.11.11

*avergonzar*: contar 16.11.14

z > c before e: diphthong

spelt *üe*, e.g. subjunctive

*avergüence*, etc.

*balbucir*: 16.11.7

*bendecir*: maldecir 16.11.27

(*blandir*: abolir 16.11.2)

*bruñir*: gruñir see 16.4.10,

*bullir*: zambullir(se) see

16.4.10

*caber*: 16.11.8

*caer*: 16.11.9  
*calentar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*carecer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*cegar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
     *g > gu* before *e*  
*ceñir*: *reñir* 16.11.40  
*cerner*: *perder* 16.11.32  
*cernir*: *discernir* 16.11.17  
*cerrar*: 16.11.11  
*circunscribir*: irreg. past  
     participle *circuncrito*  
*cocer*: 16.11.12  
*colar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*colegir*: *pedir* 16.11.31  
     -*g > j* before *a, o*  
*colgar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
     *g > gu* before *e*  
*comenzar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
     *z > c* before *e*  
*compadecer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*comparecer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*competir*: *pedir* 16.11.31  
*complacer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*componer*: *poner* 16.11.35  
*comprobar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*concebir*: *pedir* 16.11.31  
*concernir*: *discernir* 16.11.17  
*concertar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*concluir*: *construir* 16.11.13  
*concordar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*conscender*: *perder*  
     16.11.32  
*condolerse*: *mover* 16.11.28  
*conducir*: *producir* 16.11.37  
*conferir*: *sentir* 16.11.44  
*confesar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*confluir*: *construir* 16.11.13  
*conmover*: *mover* 16.11.28  
*conocer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*conseguir*: *pedir* 16.11.31  
     *gu > g* before *a, o*  
*consentir*: *sentir* 16.11.44  
*consolar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*consonar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*constituir*: *construir* 16.11.13  
*constreñir*: *reñir* 16.11.40  
*construir*: 16.11.13  
*contar*: 16.11.14  
*contender*: *perder* 16.11.32  
*contener*: *tener* 16.11.46  
*contradecir*: 16.11.16  
*contraer*: *traer* 16.11.47

*contrahacer*: *hacer* 16.11.23  
*contraponer*: *poner* 16.11.35  
*contravenir*: *venir* 16.11.49  
*contribuir*: *construir* 16.11.13  
*controvertir*: *sentir* 16.11.44  
*convalecer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*convenir*: *venir* 16.11.49  
*convertir*: *sentir* 16.11.44  
*corregir*: *pedir* 16.11.31  
     *g > j* before *a, o*  
*corroer*: *roer* 16.11.41  
*costar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*crecer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*creer*: *poseer* 16.11.36  
*cubrir*: irreg. past part:  
     *cubierto*  
*dar*: 16.11.15  
*decaer*: *caer* 16.11.9  
*decir*: 16.11.16  
*decrecer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*deducir*: *producir* 16.11.37  
*defender*: *perder* 16.11.32  
*deferir*: *sentir* 16.11.44  
*degollar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
     diphthong spelt *üe*  
*demoler*: *mover* 16.11.28  
*demostrar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*denegar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
     *g > gu* before *e*  
*denostar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*deponer*: *poner* 16.11.35  
*derretir*: *pedir* 16.11.31  
*derrocar*: nowadays  
     regular: *c > qu* before *e*  
*desacertar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*desacordar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*desagradecer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*desalentar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*desandar*: *andar* 16.11.5  
*desaparecer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*desapretar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*desaprobar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*desasosegar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
     *g > gu* before *e*  
*desatender*: *perder* 16.11.32  
*desavenir*: *venir* 16.11.49  
*descender*: *perder* 16.11.32  
*desceñir*: *reñir* 16.11.40  
*descolgar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
     *g > gu* before *e*  
*descollar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*descomponer*: *poner* 16.11.35

*desconcertar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*desconocer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*desconsolar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*descontar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*desconvenir*: *venir* 16.11.49  
*describir*: past participle  
     *descrito*  
*descubrir*: past participle  
     *descubierto*  
*desdecir*: 16.11.16  
*desempedrar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*desengrosar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*desentenderse*: *perder*  
     16.11.32  
*desenterrar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*desenvolver*: *mover* 16.11.28  
     past part: *desenvuelto*  
*desfallecer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*desgobernar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*deshacer*: *hacer* 16.11.23  
*deshelar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*desherrar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*desleír*: *reír* 16.11.39  
*deslucir*: *lucir* 16.11.26  
*desmembrar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*desmentir*: *sentir* 16.11.44  
*desmerecer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*desobedecer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*desoír*: *oír* 16.11.29  
*desollar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*despedir*: *pedir* 16.11.31  
*despedrar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*despertar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*despezar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
     usually *despiezar*,  
     reg. *z > c* before *e*  
*desplacar*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*desplegar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
     *g > gu* before *e*; now often  
     regular  
*despoblar*: *contar* 16.11.14  
*desproveer*: *poseer* 16.11.36  
     past participle  
     *desprovisto / desproveído*  
*desteñir*: *reñir* 16.11.40  
*desterrar*: *cerrar* 16.11.11  
*destituir*: *construir* 16.11.13  
*destruir*: *construir* 16.11.13  
*desvanecer*: -*cer* 16.11.10  
*desvergonzarse*: *contar*  
     16.11.14 *z > c* before *e*;  
     diphthong spelt *üe*

*detener: tener* 16.11.46  
*detraer: traer* 16.11.47  
*devenir: 16.11.49*  
*devolver: mover* 16.11.28  
     past participle *devuelto*  
*diferir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*digerir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*diluir: construir* 16.11.13  
*discernir: 16.11.17*  
*disentir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*disminuir: construir* 16.11.13  
*disolver: mover* 16.11.28;  
     past participle *disuelto*  
*disponer: poner* 16.11.35  
*distender: perder* 16.11.32  
*distraer: traer* 16.11.47  
*distribuir: construir* 16.11.13  
*divertir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*doler: mover* 16.11.28  
*dormir: 16.11.18*  
*elegir: pedir* 16.11.31  
     *g > j before a, o*  
*embebecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*embellecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*embestir: pedir* 16.11.31  
*embravecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*embrutecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*empedrar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*empequeñecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*empezar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
     *z > c before e*  
*empobrecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*enaltecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*enardecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*encanecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*encarecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*encender: perder* 16.11.32  
*encerrar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*encomendar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*encontrar: contar* 16.11.14  
*encubrir: past participle*  
     *encubierto*  
*endurecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*enflaquecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*enfurecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*engrandecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*engreírse: reír* 16.11.39  
*engrosar: contar* 16.11.14  
     now often reg. Academy  
     prefers irreg. conjugation  
*engullir: zambullir* see 16.4.10  
*enloquecer: -cer* 16.11.10

*enmendar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*enmohecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*enmudecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*ennegrecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*ennoblecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*enorgullecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*enriquecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*enronquecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*ensangrentar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*ensoberbecer(se): -cer* 16.11.10  
*ensordecir: perder* 16.11.32  
*enternecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*enterrar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*entreabrir: past participle*  
     *entreabierto*  
*entrededir: decir* 16.11.16  
*entreoír: oír* 16.11.29  
*entretener: tener* 16.11.46  
*entrever: ver* 16.11.50  
*entristecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*entumecer(se): -cer* 16.11.10  
*envanecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*envejecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*envilecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*envolver: mover* 16.11.28  
     past participle *envuelto*  
*equivaler: valer* 16.11.48  
*erguir: 16.11.19*  
*errar: 16.11.20*  
*escabullirse: zambullirse* see  
     16.4.10  
*escarmentar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*escarnecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*escocer: cocer* 16.11.12  
*escribir: past participle*  
     *escrito*  
*esforzar. contar* 16.11.14  
     *z > c before e*  
*establecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*estar: 16.11.21*  
*estremecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*estreñir: reñir* 16.11.40  
*excluir: construir* 16.11.13  
*expedir: pedir* 16.11.31  
*exponer: poner* 16.11.35  
*extender: perder* 16.11.32  
*extraer: traer* 16.11.47  
*fallecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*favorecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*floreecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*fluir: construir* 16.11.13

*fortalecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*forzar: contar* 16.11.14  
     *z > c before e*  
*fregar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
     *g > gu before e*  
*freír: reír* 16.11.39  
     past participle *freído/frito*  
*gemir: pedir* 16.11.31  
*gobernar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*gruñir: see* 16.4.10  
*guarecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*guarnecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*haber: 16.11.22*  
*hacer: 16.11.23*  
*heder: perder* 16.11.32  
*helar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*henchir: pedir* 16.11.31  
*hender: perder* 16.11.32  
*hendir: discernir* 16.11.17  
*herir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*herrar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*hervir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*holgar: contar* 16.11.14  
     *g > gu before e*  
*hollar: contar* 16.11.14  
*huir: construir* 16.11.13  
*humedecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*impedir: pedir* 16.11.31  
*imponer: poner* 16.11.35  
     imp: sing: *impón*  
*incensar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*incluir: construir* 16.11.13  
*indisponer: poner* 16.11.35  
*inducir: producir* 16.11.37  
*inferir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*influir: construir* 16.11.13  
*ingerir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*injerir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*inquirir: adquirir* 16.11.3  
*inscribir: past participle*  
     *escrito*  
*instituir: construir* 16.11.13  
*instruir: construir* 16.11.13  
*interferir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*interponer: poner* 16.11.35  
*intervenir: venir* 16.11.49  
*introducir: producir* 16.11.37  
*intuir: construir* 16.11.13  
*invernar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
     Academy prefers  
     regular conjugation  
*invertir: sentir* 16.11.44

*invertir: pedir* 16.11.31  
*ir:* 16.11.24  
*jugar:* 16.11.25  
*languidecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*leer: poseer* 16.11.36  
*llover: mover* 16.11.28  
*lucir:* 16.11.26  
*maldecir:* 16.11.27  
*manifestar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*mantener: tener* 16.11.46  
*medir: pedir* 16.11.31  
*mentar: cerrar* 16.11.11 (often regular)  
*mentir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*merecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*merendar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*moler: mover* 16.11.28  
*morder: mover* 16.11.28  
*morir:* 16.11.18  
*mostrar: contar* 16.11.14  
*mover:* 16.11.28  
*mullir: zambullir* see 16.4.10  
*nacer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*negar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
     *g > gu* before *e*  
*nevar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*obedecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*obscurecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*obstruir: construir* 16.11.13  
*obtener: tener* 16.11.46  
*ofrecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*oír:* 16.11.29  
*oler:* 16.11.30  
*oponer: poner* 16.11.35  
*oscurecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
     (*obscurecer* is an older spelling)  
*pacar: -cer* 16.11.10  
*padecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*palidecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*parecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*pedir:* 16.11.31  
*pensar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*perecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*permanecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*perseguir: pedir* 16.11.31  
     *gu > g* before *a, o*  
*pertenecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*pervertir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*placer:* 16.11.33  
*plegar: cerrar* 16.11.11

*g > gu* before *e*  
*poblar: contar* 16.11.14  
*poder:* 16.11.34  
*podrir:* variant of *puerir*, accepted in Lat. Am.  
     rare in Spain: *-u-* used for all other forms  
     save past part: *podrido*  
*poner:* 16.11.35  
*poseer:* 16.11.36  
*posponer: poner* 16.11.35  
     *tú* imperative *pospón*  
*predecir:* 16.11.16  
*predisponer: poner* 16.11.35  
*preferir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*prescribir: past participle prescrito*  
*presuponer: poner* 16.11.35  
*prevalecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*prevaler: valer* 16.11.48  
*prevenir: venir* 16.11.49  
*prever: ver* 16.11.50  
*probar: contar* 16.11.14  
*producir:* 16.11.37  
*proferir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*promover: mover* 16.11.28  
*proponer: poner* 16.11.35  
*proseguir: pedir* 16.11.31  
     *gu > g* before *a*  
*prostituir: construir* 16.11.13  
*proveer: poseer* 16.11.36  
     past participle *provisto / proveído*  
*provenir: venir* 16.11.49  
*puerir: regular; see also podrir*  
*quebrar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*querer:* 16.11.38  
*raer: caer* 16.11.9 (*rayo* is a rarer alternative to *raigo*)  
*reaparecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*reblandecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*recaer: caer* 16.11.9  
*recluir: construir* 16.11.13  
*recocer: cocer* 16.11.12  
*recomendar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*reconocer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*reconvenir: venir* 16.11.49  
*recordar: contar* 16.11.14  
*recostar(se): contar* 16.11.14  
*reducir: producir* 16.11.37

*reelegir: pedir* 16.11.31  
     *g > j* before *a, o*  
*referir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*reforzar: contar* 16.11.14  
     *z > c* before *e*  
*refregar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
     *g > gu* before *e*  
*regar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
     *g > gu* before *e*  
*regimentar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
     also regular  
*regir: pedir* 16.11.31  
     *g > j* before *a, o*  
*rehacer: hacer* 16.11.23  
*rehuir: construir* 16.11.13  
*reír:* 16.11.39  
*rejuvenecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*remendar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*remorder: mover* 16.11.28  
*remover: mover* 16.11.28  
*rendir: pedir* 16.11.31  
*renegar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
     *g > gu* before *e*  
*renovar: contar* 16.11.14  
*reñir:* 16.11.40  
*repetir: pedir* 16.11.31  
*replegar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
     *g > gu* before *e*  
*repoblar: contar* 16.11.14  
*reponer: poner* 16.11.35  
*reprobar: contar* 16.11.14  
*reproducir: producir* 16.11.37  
*requerir: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*requerir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*resentirse: sentir* 16.11.44  
*resollar: contar* 16.11.14  
*resolver: mover* 16.11.28  
     past participle *resuelto*  
*resonar: contar* 16.11.14  
*resplandecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*restablecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*restituir: construir* 16.11.13  
*restregar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
     *g > gu* before *e*  
*retemblar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*retener: tener* 16.11.46  
*reteñir: reñir* 16.11.40  
*retorcer: cocer* 16.11.12  
     *c > z* before *a, o*  
*retraer: traer* 16.11.47  
*retribuir: construir* 16.11.13  
*retrotraer: traer* 16.11.47

*reventar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*reverdecen: -cer* 16.11.10  
*reverter: perder* 16.11.32  
*revestir: pedir* 16.11.31  
*revolar: contar* 16.11.14  
*revolcar(se) contar* 16.11.14  
*c > qu before e*  
*revolver: mover* 16.11.28  
 past participle *revuelto*  
*robustecer: -cer* 16.11.10  
*rodar: contar* 16.11.14  
*roer: contar* 16.11.41  
*rogar: contar* 16.11.14  
*g > gu before e*  
*romper: past participle*  
*roto*  
*saber: contar* 16.11.42  
*salir: contar* 16.11.43  
*satisfacer: hacer* 16.11.23  
*seducir: producir* 16.11.37  
*segar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*g > gu before e*  
*seguir: pedir* 16.11.31  
*gu > g before a or o*  
*sembrar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*sentar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*sentir: contar* 16.11.44  
*ser: contar* 16.11.45  
*serrar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*servir: pedir* 16.11.31  
*sobre(e)ntender:*  
*perder* 16.11.32  
*sobreponer: poner* 16.11.35  
*sobresalir: salir* 16.11.43  
*sobrevenir: venir* 16.11.49  
*sofreír: reír* 16.11.39, past

participle *sofrito*  
*soldar: contar* 16.11.14  
*soler: mover* 16.11.28  
 future, conditional and  
 past and future  
 subjunctives not used  
*soltar: contar* 16.11.14  
*sonar: contar* 16.11.14  
*sonreír: reír* 16.11.39  
*soñar: contar* 16.11.14  
*sosegar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*g > gu before e*  
*sostener: tener* 16.11.46  
*soterrar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*subarrendar: cerrar*  
 16.11.11  
*subscribir: see suscribir*  
*subvenir: venir* 16.11.49  
*subvertir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*sugerir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*suponer: poner* 16.11.35  
*suscribir past participle*  
*suscrito*  
*sustituir: construir*  
 16.11.13  
*sustraer: traer* 16.11.47  
*tañer: see* 16.4.10  
*temblar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*templar usually regular*  
 but often like  
*cerrar* 16.11.11 in Mex:  
*tender: perder* 16.11.32  
*tener: contar* 16.11.46  
*tentar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*teñir: reñir* 16.11.40  
*torcer: cocer* 16.11.12

*c > z before a, o*  
*tostar: contar* 16.11.14  
*traducir: producir* 16.11.37  
*traer: contar* 16.11.47  
*transcribir: past participle*  
*transcrito*  
*transferir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*transgredir: contar* 16.11.4  
*transponer: poner* 16.11.35  
*trascender: perder* 16.11.32  
*trasegar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*g > gu before e*  
*traslucir: lucir* 16.11.26  
*trasponer: poner* 16.11.35  
*trastocar: contar* 16.11.14  
*c > qu before e*  
*trocarse: contar* 16.11.14  
*c > qu before e*  
*tronar: contar* 16.11.14  
*tropezar: cerrar* 16.11.11  
*z > c before e*  
*tullir: see* 16.4.10  
*valer: contar* 16.11.48  
*venir: contar* 16.11.49  
*ver: contar* 16.11.50  
*verter: perder* 16.11.32  
*vestir: pedir* 16.11.31  
*volar: contar* 16.11.14  
*volcar: contar* 16.11.14  
*c > qu before e*  
*volver: mover* 16.11.28  
 past participle *vuelto*  
*yacer: contar* 16.11.51  
*zaherir: sentir* 16.11.44  
*zambullir: see* 16.4.10, item 6

## 16.13 The formation of the compound tenses

The forms of the compound tenses are completely predictable provided one knows the full conjugation of *haber* (16.11.22) and the past participle of the verb:

The conjugation of the compound tenses of *ver* 'to see' is shown here as an example: Note the irregular past participle, *visto*:

### INDICATIVE

#### Perfect 'I have seen', etc.

<i>he visto</i>	<i>hemos visto</i>
<i>has visto</i>	<i>habéis visto</i>
<i>ha visto</i>	<i>han visto</i>

#### Pluperfect 'I had seen', etc.

<i>había visto</i>	<i>habíamos visto</i>
<i>habías visto</i>	<i>habíais visto</i>
<i>había visto</i>	<i>habían visto</i>

**Future perfect 'I shall have seen', etc.**

<i>habré visto</i>	<i>habremos visto</i>
<i>habrás visto</i>	<i>habréis visto</i>
<i>habrá visto</i>	<i>habrán visto</i>

**Conditional 'I would have seen', etc.**

<i>habría visto</i>	<i>habríamos visto</i>
<i>habrías visto</i>	<i>habríais visto</i>
<i>habría visto</i>	<i>habrían visto</i>

**Pretérito anterior 'I had seen', etc. (infrequently used. See 18.4)**

<i>hube visto</i>	<i>hubimos visto</i>
<i>hubiste visto</i>	<i>hubisteis visto</i>
<i>hubo visto</i>	<i>hubieron visto</i>

**SUBJUNCTIVE****Perfect**

<i>haya visto</i>	<i>hayamos visto</i>
<i>hayas visto</i>	<i>hayáis visto</i>
<i>haya visto</i>	<i>hayan visto</i>

**Imperfect****-ra form**

<i>hubiera visto</i>	<i>hubiéramos visto</i>
<i>hubieras visto</i>	<i>hubierais visto</i>
<i>hubiera visto</i>	<i>hubieran visto</i>

**-se form**

<i>hubiese visto</i>	<i>hubiésemos visto</i>
<i>hubieses visto</i>	<i>hubieseis visto</i>
<i>hubiese visto</i>	<i>hubiesen visto</i>



# 17 Use of indicative (non-continuous) verb tenses

The indicative tenses discussed in this chapter are:

- The present tense (*hablo, vamos*, etc.) (Section 17.3)
- The preterite tense (*hablé, fuimos*, etc.) (Section 17.4)
- The imperfect tense (*hablaba, íbamos*, etc.) (Section 17.5)
- The future tense (*hablaré, iré*, etc.) (Section 17.6)
- The conditional tense (*hablaría, iría*, etc.) (Section 17.7)

Continuous verb forms (*estoy hablando, estamos trabajando*, etc.) are discussed in Chapter 19. The subjunctive is discussed in Chapter 20.

The compound indicative tenses – *he hablado, había visto, hubo hecho, habrá escrito, habría ido, hubiera pensado*, etc. – are discussed separately in Chapter 18. The forms of regular and irregular verbs are shown in Chapter 16.

## 17.1 Names of the tenses

There is little agreement among grammarians about the names of the Spanish tenses. Another source of confusion for English speakers is the fact that *pretérito* simply means ‘past’ (*las glorias pretéritas* = ‘bygone/past glories’), whereas the English ‘preterite’ (US ‘preterit’) refers to a specific Spanish past tense. Common variants are listed below; the Academy’s current usage is in bold:

Name used in this book	Example	Spanish names
Present indicative	<i>hablas, tienes</i>	<b>presente de indicativo</b>
Imperfect indicative	<i>hablaba, tenías</i>	<b>pretérito imperfecto, copretérito</b>
Preterite	<i>hablé, tuviste</i>	<b>pretérito perfecto simple</b> , <i>pretérito indefinido, pretérito, perfecto absoluto</i>
Perfect indicative	<i>he hablado, has tenido</i>	<b>pretérito perfecto compuesto</b> , <i>pretérito perfecto actual, antepresente</i>
Pluperfect indicative	<i>había hablado, habías tenido</i>	<b>pretérito pluscuamperfecto, antecopretérito</b>
Future indicative	<i>hablaré, tendrás</i>	<b>futuro simple</b> , <i>futuro imperfecto</i>
Conditional	<i>hablaría, tendrías</i>	<b>condicional simple</b> , <i>pospretérito, potencial, futuro hipotético</i>

## 17.2 Tense in Spanish: general remarks

The following points are important:

(a) The name ‘present tense’ for forms like *hablo, voy*, is misleading since this form can also express future, past, and timeless statements. See 17.3.

(b) The name ‘future tense’ for forms like *hablaré, irá*, is misleading since it can also be used for suppositions and estimates, and there is also more than one way of expressing the future. See 17.6.

(c) The difference between the imperfect and the preterite tenses, e.g. between *hablaba* and *hablé*, may confuse English speakers since both can be translated by the English simple past, e.g. ‘I spoke’, even though they mean different things: see 17.4.

(d) Spanish resembles English and differs from French, German and Italian in having a full range of continuous forms: *está lloviendo* ‘it’s raining’, *estabas pensando* ‘you were thinking’, *he estado comiendo* ‘I have been eating’. However, the similarity to the English progressive forms (‘I’m going’, ‘you’re waiting’, etc.) is misleading; see 19.1.2 for details.

(e) The difference in meaning between the preterite *hablé* ‘I spoke’ and the perfect *he hablado* ‘I have spoken’ is respected in Spanish and English, but blurred or lost in spoken French, Italian and German. However, the relationship between the Spanish tenses is not exactly the same as between ‘I spoke’ and ‘I have spoken’: see particularly 18.2. Use of the perfect tense is also much affected by regional variations.

## 17.3 Uses of the present indicative tense

For the use of the present indicative in conditional sentences, e.g. *si sales, compra pan* ‘if you go out, buy some bread’, see 29.1–2. For the use of the present indicative as a future tense see 17.6.3.

### 17.3.1 Present indicative tense to indicate timeless or habitual events that still occur

The present indicative tense is used to express eternal or timeless truths, or habitual states or events that are still occurring in the present:

<i>Llueve mucho en Irlanda</i>	It rains a lot in Ireland
<i>Fumo más de cuarenta al día</i>	I smoke more than forty a day
<i>Marta es venezolana</i>	Marta’s Venezuelan
<i>Tengo tarjeta de crédito</i>	I have a credit card
<i>Me deprime comer sola (CMG, Sp.)</i>	Eating on my own depresses me
<i>Yo me sé de memoria tus chistecitos</i>	I know your feeble jokes by heart

(ES, Mex., dialogue. See 30.2.1 note 3 for this use of *me*)

(1) As in English, use of a continuous tense for a habitual event can make it in some way unusual, surprising or temporary, i.e. not necessarily a habit: *Alicia estaba bebiendo más últimamente* (GZ, Mex.) ‘Alicia was drinking more lately’, *estás fumando mucho* ‘you’re smoking a lot (lately)’.

### 17.3.2 The present indicative tense for events happening *now*

The Spanish non-continuous present indicative can also show that an action is actually happening *now*: *duermen* means ‘they are sleeping’ as well as ‘they sleep’. English speakers are often confused by this overlap with the continuous: to say ‘he comes’ for ‘he is coming’ sounds archaic.

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See Chapter 19 for more on this point. The following examples show that there is often only a slight difference between the simple present and the continuous present:

<i>Escribe/Está escribiendo una novela</i>	(S)he's writing a novel
<i>¿Qué haces?/¿Qué estás haciendo? (they mean the same when they express surprise)</i>	What are you doing?
<i>Nieva/Está nevando (but see 19.1.3)</i>	It's snowing
<i>La puerta necesita/está necesitando una mano de pintura (from NGLE 23.5f)</i>	The door needs a coat of paint

In the last example, the NGLE notes that the continuous form makes the need more urgent.

### 17.3.3 Present indicative used for states as opposed to actions

The simple present, not the continuous, is normally used for states rather than actions, e.g. *parece cansada* 'she seems tired/she's looking tired', *brilla la luna* 'the moon is shining'. See 19.3b for discussion.

### 17.3.4 Present tense used for very recent or imminent events

The simple present is much used for events that happen in the present but are not necessarily actually in progress *now*, e.g. for imminent or very recent events:

<i>Me caso</i>	I'm getting married
<i>¿Qué dices? (= ¿qué estás diciendo? when indignation or surprise are intended)</i>	What did you say (just then)?' or 'What do you say?' or 'What are you saying?'
<i>¡Que me ahogo/caigo!</i>	I'm drowning/falling!
<i>¡Ya voy!</i>	I'm coming!
<i>Merino pasa la pelota a Andreas</i>	Merino passes the ball to Andreas
<i>¿Vienes?</i>	Are you coming?

**(1) Important:** in the above examples the events are either imminent or have just happened. English speakers constantly misuse the Spanish continuous for this sort of statement, as in *?mi hermano se está casando* 'my brother's getting married' when they mean *se casa* or *se va a casar*. See 19.1.2–3 for further discussion.

### 17.3.5 The *presente histórico* or historic present

The present tense is used much more than in English to refer to the past as a way of dramatizing a story. This device is common in popular English ('Annie walks in and says to me . . .') and it may sound unfortunate in formal English styles, but it is common in both literary and spoken Spanish:

<i>¿Cuántos pozos quedan por los alrededores?</i> — <i>Sólo dos por ver —el rastreador hace un gesto escéptico—: No creo que valga la pena—. No importa, verifiquen —lo interrumpe el capitán—. Tienen que estar de vuelta antes de que oscurezca, sargento.</i>	'How many wells are there left round here?' 'Only two left to inspect.' The tracker makes a sceptical gesture. 'I don't think it's worth the trouble.' 'It doesn't matter. Check them.' the captain interrupts him 'You've got to be back before it gets dark,
<i>Bueno, pues me llama y me dice que por qué no nos vemos. ¿Vernos? ¿Dónde?, le digo yo. En cualquier sitio, me dice. Pero, ¿qué es lo que les pasa a tus amiguitas?, le</i>	Anyway, he calls me and asks me why we don't meet. 'Meet?' Where?', I say to him. 'Anywhere,' he says. 'But what's happening to

*digo. Es que no son tan guapas como tú, me dice. A buenas horas lo has descubierto, le digo* (SP, Sp., dialogue. Woman about her ex-husband)

your lady friends?' I say to him.  
'Actually they're not as attractive as you,' he tells me. 'A fine time to discover that,' I say to him

(1) As in English, this use of the historic present is frequent in headlines: *el Papa carga contra el laicismo de España* '(El País, Sp.) 'Pope attacks secularism of Spain' (he had done this the day before), *Perfecciona mexicano cirugía fetal* (*La Reforma*, Mex.) 'Mexican perfects foetal surgery'.

(2) The historic present is almost always used after *por poco* 'all but/nearly' (in Mexico often *por poco y . . .*), and often after *casi* 'nearly': *me caí por unas escaleras y por poco/casi me rompo el tobillo* 'I fell down some stairs and nearly broke my ankle', *casi me mata, lo cual no era nada difícil por aquel entonces* (ABE, Pe.) 'she nearly killed me, which wasn't at all difficult at that time', *por poquito y no me caso* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'I very nearly didn't get married'. Exceptions can be found on both continents: *por poco me hizo llorar de lo cariñosa que es* (MVLL, Pe., dialogue) 'she's so affectionate she nearly made me cry'.

(3) A kind of historic present can occur in contexts in which the meaning is 'not yet'. Standing on the platform, one could say *el tren no llega* 'the train's not here yet' for *no ha llegado todavía* (in parts of Latin America . . . *no llegó todavía*). This use of the present in such sentences is common in Chile and Argentina, but less common elsewhere (NGLE 23.6i).

### 17.3.6 Present tense used as an imperative

This is frequently used in everyday speech to make strong orders: *tú te callas* 'you just keep quiet'. All matters connected with the imperative are discussed in Chapter 21.

### 17.3.7 Use of the present to ask permission

The present is much used when asking for someone's consent:

*¿Te lo mando yo?*  
*¿Escribo a los abuelos?*  
*¿Nos vamos?, preguntó él, y ella en respuesta le tomó la mano y sin soltársela salieron del restaurante* (EP, Mex. dialogue)

Shall/Should I send it to you?  
Should I write to our grandparents?  
'Shall we go?' he asked, and in reply she took his hand and without letting go of it they left the restaurant.

### 17.3.8 Use of the present as a future tense

Spanish makes constant use of the simple present to refer to the future: *mañana vamos a California* 'we're going to California tomorrow', *te veo luego* 'I'll see you later'. See 17.6.3.

### 17.3.9 Present in sentences like 'it's the first time I've seen him' and other expressions of time

English uses the perfect in sentences of the type 'this is the first time that . . .' and 'I've been . . . for *n* days/weeks', etc. Spanish uses the present:

*Es la primera vez que la veo*  
*Desde hace dos días estoy tratando de comunicarme con el señor Morales* (*Prensalibre*, Guat., dialogue)

It's the first time I've seen her  
I've been trying to contact Mr Morales for two days

The past tense used in such constructions is the imperfect: see 17.5.3. See 36.2 for more on the tenses used in expressions of time.

## 17.4 The preterite: general remarks

The Spanish preterite describes events that were completed in the past or are *viewed* as completed in the past (see 17.4.3 for the reason for this distinction). Occasionally it highlights the fact that an event is beginning in the past: see 17.4.7.

English constantly fails to distinguish the preterite from the imperfect: 'I drank' may be *bebí* – *bebí el café de un tirón* 'I drank my/the coffee in one gulp' – or *bebía*: *estuve pensando mientras bebía el café* 'I was thinking as I drank (i.e. 'was drinking') my/the coffee'.

Some students seem to think that the preterite refers to events that are 'further in the past' than the imperfect, but both preterite and imperfect tenses are past tenses. The difference is not a question of recency versus remoteness: *los pterodáctilos tenían alas* 'pterodactyls had wings' is correct; \*... *tuvieron alas* is not.

The preterite is used in many varieties of Latin-American Spanish where the perfect tense is used in Spain and in some other countries, e.g. Peru and Bolivia: *Miguel no llegó todavía* sounds Latin-American to persons from Central Spain who say ... *no ha llegado todavía* just as 'they didn't arrive yet' sounds American to Britons who say 'they haven't arrived yet'. See 18.2 for discussion.

**(1) Technical note:** many grammarians describe the preterite as 'perfective' in aspect (i.e. it denotes completion of an event). The Academy considers that aspect plays an important part in the grammar of the Spanish verb (NGLE 23.2c), but some linguists deny this. Whatever the truth of the matter, we avoid the terms 'perfective' and 'imperfective' aspect on the grounds that they may confuse learners, as explained at 17.4.3.

### 17.4.1 Preterite used to indicate single events or states or sets of events or states completed in the past

A single completed past event or state, or a set of completed past events or states, is expressed by the preterite. This is the basic use of the preterite:

<i>La Segunda Guerra Mundial empezó en 1939</i>	World War Two began in 1939
<i>Hubo una explosión</i>	There was an explosion
<i>Donde antes hubo césped, ahora había una tierra resquebrajada y seca</i> (RM, Sp.)	Where once there was a lawn there was now a patch of broken, dry earth
<i>A nadie le gusta contratar a un hombre que estuvo en la cárcel</i> (EM, Mex., dialogue)	No one likes to hire a man who was/has been in jail
<i>Lo primero que escribí fue un cuento</i> (AGa, Sp.)	The first thing I wrote was a short story
<i>Martín la llamó cuatro veces</i>	Martín called her four times
<i>Lo escribió ochenta veces</i>	(S)he wrote it eighty times

**(1)** The preterite is used to describe a series of completed events that occurred separately (in whichever order), as in *di un paseo, fui a casa, sentí miedo, y aquí estoy* (LS, Ch., dialogue) 'I went for a walk, went home, felt scared, and here I am'. In lists of events the imperfect tense suggests that they occurred simultaneously or habitually. Compare *lloraba, gritaba, se reía* ... '(s)he was weeping, shouting, laughing' (at the same time) or '(s)he used to weep', etc.

(2) The ‘historic present’ – *Laura entra y me dice . . .* ‘Laura comes in and says to me . . .’ – can also be used for completed events, but it is either literary in style or colloquial. See 17.3.5.

(3) The imperfect is occasionally also used in newspaper language for single completed events. See 17.5.8.

(4) Compare *lo hicimos tres veces* ‘we did it three times’ and *lo hacíamos tres veces* ‘we used to do it three times’. The latter does not refer to a specific total number of events.

### 17.4.2 Preterite for events occurring throughout a finite period

The preterite tense must be used for events that continued throughout a finite period of time. By ‘finite’ is meant a period of time of a specific length, i.e. one whose beginning and end are stated or clearly implied:

<i>Estuve destinado en Bilbao dos años</i>	I was stationed in Bilbao for two years
<i>Durante el viaje, Eugenio estuvo muy comunicativo</i> (SP, Spain).	During the journey Eugenio was very communicative
<i>Los dinosaurios reinaron sobre la tierra durante millones de años</i>	The dinosaurs reigned on earth for millions of years
<i>Te olvidas de los años que trabajamos juntos</i>	You’re forgetting the years we worked together
<i>Durante esos días Lorenzo se sintió muy cerca de Erro</i> (EP, Mex.)	During those days Lorenzo felt very close to Erro
<i>Durante años no pudimos hablar de otra cosa</i> (GGM, Col., dialogue)	For years we could talk of nothing else
<i>La fiesta fue un éxito</i>	The party was a success (from start to finish)
<i>Fue un día magnífico</i>	It was a magnificent day (from start to finish)

(1) **Important:** the question is whether the period ended, not the action: *habló durante dos horas, y luego continuó hablando durante tres horas más* ‘(s)he talked for two hours and then went on talking for three more hours’ is possible. For the optional alternative *estuvo hablando durante dos horas* see 19.2.3.

(2) Compare the last two examples in the columns with *cuando llegué vi que la fiesta era/estaba siendo un éxito* ‘when I arrived I saw that the party was a success’ (it wasn’t over yet), and *como hacía un día magnífico, fuimos al zoo* ‘as it was a lovely day, we went to the zoo’ (but it may have rained later in the day).

(3) Words like *siempre* and *nunca* often indicate actions or states continuing throughout the whole of a period of time: *siempre procuré pasarlo bien* ‘I always tried to have a good time’, *siempre estuve muy agradecido con él* (EM, Mex., dialogue) ‘I was always very grateful to him’, *nunca Fermín Eguren me pudo ver* (JLB, Arg., dialogue) ‘Fermín Eguren never was able to stand me’ (i.e. throughout the time I’m referring to, but his hostility may still last into the present). But they may refer to habitual actions that occur over no specified period and therefore require the imperfect, as in *antes siempre ibas a misa* ‘you always used to go to Mass’, *nunca hacía tanto calor como ahora* ‘it never used to be as hot as now’.

(4) In sentences involving phrases like *todos los días*, *todos los años*, either tense may be possible: see the next section.

(5) Actions performed throughout a period of time can be habitual, in which case the imperfect is used, as in *hablaba durante tres horas* (or *solía hablar durante tres horas*) ‘(s)he used to speak for three hours’, i.e. on an unspecified number of different occasions, *Mario siempre se quedaba tres*

*días en mi casa* ‘Mario always stayed at my house for three days’, also an unspecified number of occasions.

### 17.4.3 Use of the preterite to denote habitual events

The imperfect tense is usually used to describe habitual events in the past (see 17.5.2), but the preterite can also describe habitual or prolonged events in the past and this often confuses students.

In *mi padre fumaba/fumó mucho cuando era joven* ‘my father smoked a lot when he was young’, either tense is possible, whether or not he carried on smoking after his youth and whether or not he is still alive – it is this possibility that makes the linguistic terms ‘perfective’ or ‘completed aspect’ and ‘imperfective’ or ‘non-complete aspect’ unhelpful for learners of Spanish.

The imperfect tense views the habit as in progress *at the time* referred to. The preterite looks back on it as an event viewed as a whole, i.e. something that continued *throughout a period*, e.g. his youth, those years, that period I’m talking about, etc., even though it may have continued thereafter. English ignores this difference of viewpoint so in the following examples the difference between the preterite and imperfect is virtually untranslatable:

<i>Mi niñez fue/era feliz</i>	My childhood was happy
<i>Recuerdo que llovió/llovía mucho cuando vivíamos en Canadá</i>	I remember it rained a lot when we lived in Canada
<i>Alonso se levantó/se levantaba todos los días a las ocho para ir al trabajo (usually levantaba)</i>	Alonso got up every day at eight to go to work
<i>Cuando vivíamos juntos no tuvimos/teníamos problemas (teníamos) more usual</i>	When we lived together we had no problems
<i>Siempre dormía como durmió su padre, con el arma escondida dentro de la funda de la almohada (G GM, Col. Durmió como dormía . . . su padre would have meant the same)</i>	He always used to sleep as his father (had) slept, with his gun hidden in his pillowcase
<i>El nuevo secretario fue el poeta Jaime Torres Bodet, quien declaró: “Yo no soy político” (JA, Mex.)</i>	The new secretary was JTB who declared ‘I’m not a politician’
<i>Stalin fue una presencia habitual en la casa de los Alliluyev (RM, Sp.)</i>	Stalin was a habitual visitor in the Alliluyevs’ house

(1) Truly permanent characteristics – e.g. ethnicity, permanent size, identity – are expressed by the imperfect since they tend to be part of a general background. Thus *la casa era muy grande* ‘the house was very big’, *mi padre era indio/blanco* ‘my father was Indian/white’, *Miguel hablaba vasco* ‘Miguel could speak Basque’. But if the qualities are acquired or developed, *fue* is not impossible: cf. *su padre fue un hombre muy alto, muy guapo, muy inteligente* (AG, Sp.).

However, students are advised to use the imperfect in such sentences since use of the preterite can sound very literary, as in *Sir Thomas Browne (1605–82) supo el griego, el latín, el francés, el italiano y el español, y fue uno de los primeros hombres de letras que estudiaron anglosajón* (JLB, Arg., more usually *sabía* . . .) ‘Sir Thomas Browne (1605–82) knew Greek, Latin, French, Italian and Spanish, and was one of the first men of letters to study Anglo-Saxon’; in this case *fue* is possible for *era*, but *supo* sounds strange.

### 17.4.4 Use of the preterite to denote an event that has reached completion

The preterite may indicate that a process has finally reached completion, as in:

<i>Una vez el dinero estuvo en mis manos, compré la casa</i>	As soon as the money came into my hands, I bought the house
<i>No reconocí a Selina hasta que estuvo delante de mí (SP, Sp.)</i>	I didn't recognize Selina until she was in front of me
<i>Una vez que estuvo mar adentro encendió el Evinrude (EM, Mex.)</i>	Once he was out at sea he started up the Evinrude (outboard motor)
<i>La conversación se fue espaciando (ir + gerund indicates a longish process; fue shows it ended)</i>	The conversation gradually petered out

### 17.4.5 Use of the preterite to indicate an event that actually happened

The preterite can clearly indicate that an event happened whereas the imperfect does not give us this information. Compare: *tuvimos que atravesar dos desiertos para llegar al oasis* 'we had to cross two deserts to get to the oasis' (and we did), and *teníamos que atravesar dos desiertos para llegar al oasis* 'we had (still) to cross two deserts to get to the oasis' (no information whether we did or not). This construction is common with *ser* and with modal verbs like *poder*, *querer*, *tener que*, for which see Chapter 25. Further examples:

<i>Fue un error decírselo</i>	It was a mistake to tell him/her (we committed it)
<i>Era un error decírselo</i>	It was a mistake to tell him/her (we may or may not have committed it)
<i>Fue una presa fácil</i>	(S)he/It was an easy prey (and was caught)
<i>Era una presa fácil</i>	(same translation, but the victim may have escaped)
<i>Costó trabajo conseguirlo</i>	It was hard work getting it (but we did)
<i>Costaba trabajo conseguirlo</i>	It was hard work to get it (we may or may not have tried to get it)
<i>El tren llegó a las ocho</i>	The train arrived at eight
<i>El tren llegaba a las ocho</i>	The train was due at eight (but may or may not have arrived then)

(1) For this reason *\*fue un error devolverle el dinero, por eso no lo hice* has the absurd meaning 'I made the mistake of giving him back the money, so I didn't'; . . . *era un error* . . . must be used.

### 17.4.6 Preterite to denote a rapid or short-lived event

The preterite can sometimes show that an event lasted only a moment. The imperfect would, in these cases, indicate an event that had not yet ended at the time referred to:

<i>Hubo una nota de alarma en su voz</i>	There was a (brief) note of alarm in his/her voice
<i>Cuando abrí el horno, sentí una ráfaga de calor</i>	When I opened the oven I felt a gust of heat
<i>Estuvo a punto de pensar que esas manos no eran suyas (CF, Mex.)</i>	(For a moment) he was on the verge of thinking that those hands weren't his own



### 17.4.7 Preterite used to indicate the beginning of a state or action

The preterite may indicate the beginning of an action. Compare *mi hija anduvo a los once meses* (i.e. *empezó a andar*) 'my daughter started walking at eleven months', and *mi hija andaba a los once meses* 'my daughter was walking by eleven months'. Also:

<i>Me cayó bien</i> (cf. <i>me caía bien</i> 'I was getting on well with him/her')	I took a liking to her/him
<i>Rosa me gustó desde el primer momento</i>	I liked ('took a liking to') Rosa right from the first moment
<i>Fue niña y le pusimos Rita</i> (M. Rodoreda, Castilian translation, Sp.)	It was a girl and we named her Rita
<i>Todo lo que había dentro me pareció lejano y ajeno</i> (LS, Ch.)	Everything inside (suddenly) seemed to me distant and alien
<i>... desde 1957, cuando por primera vez estuve consciente de la Revolución Cubana</i> (interview, <i>Granma</i> , Cu., Sp. <i>fui consciente</i> )	... since 1957, when I first became aware of the Cuban Revolution ...

### 17.4.8 Preterite used to indicate certainties in the future

The preterite is occasionally used in set phrases in Spain to indicate an absolute certainty in the future:

<i>Cuando llegue, llegó</i>	(S)he'll be here when (s)he's here (and that's that!)
<i>Cuando se acabe, se acabó</i>	When it's finished, it's finished

(1) This construction is more common in Latin America. The following three examples are not heard in Spain:

<i>Para las dos ya lo acabé</i> (Mex., from Lope Blanch, 1991; Sp. <i>ya lo tendré/habré acabado</i> )	I'll have it finished by two o'clock
<i>Mañana ya llegó el día</i> (LRS, PR, dialogue Sp. <i>mañana es el día</i> )	Tomorrow's the day!
<i>Nos fuimos</i> (colloquial Lat. Am., Sp. <i>nos vamos</i> )	We're going/We're leaving right now (lit. 'we're gone')

### 17.4.9 Special meanings of the preterite of some verbs

Some verbs require special translations when they appear in the preterite. This is especially true of the modal auxiliary verbs *deber*, *poder*, *querer*, *saber*, discussed in Chapter 25. Two other verbs affected are:

(a) *Tener*: the preterite may mean 'to receive'/'to get', the imperfect means 'had' in the sense of 'was in my/your, etc., possession':

<i>tuve la impresión de que ...</i>	I got the impression that ...
<i>tenía la impresión de que ...</i>	I had the impression that ...
<i>Tuve una carta/Tenía una carta</i>	I received a letter/I had a letter
<i>Cuando tuvo ocasión de estudiar consiguió con la universidad a distancia el título de ingeniero</i>	When (s)he got the chance to study, (s)he graduated as an engineer from the Open University

This does not override the rule given at 17.4.2 that the preterite must be used for actions continuing throughout a finite period: *tuvo fiebre durante tres días* '(s)he had a fever for three days'.

(b) *Conocer*: *Alejo conoció a Rafael* 'Alejo met Rafael' (for the first time), *Alejo conocía a Rafael* 'Alejo knew Rafael'.

### 17.4.10 Preterite used to distinguish events from descriptive background

The preterite is sometimes used to show that an event is a part of a story while the imperfect shows that it is descriptive background. This is clear for English-speakers in a sentence like *tuvieron tres niños* 'they had (i.e. "produced"/"gave birth to") three children', which is usually three separate events, and *tenían tres niños*, which is a state of affairs, not an event. Less obvious is the difference between *querían hacerlo* 'they wanted to do it', which is a state of mind, and *quisieron hacerlo*, which is an event with an outcome, i.e. they wanted to do it *and tried to*, successfully or not.

In the following example, the preterite (in bold type) presents the publication of the statistics as events while the imperfect paints the background:

*En noviembre se **registraron** 85 320 contratos, de los cuales 83 419 **fueron** indefinidos. Es decir, las colocaciones han caído significativamente respecto a la cifra récord del pasado octubre, que **fue** de más de un millón. El paro ha caído en 157 444 personas desde noviembre de 1996, cuando la tasa de paro era del 14,04%*

85,320 job contracts were registered in November, of which 83,419 were long-term. In other words, the number of persons hired has fallen significantly compared with last October's record figure, which was more than a million. Unemployment has fallen by 157,444 persons since November 1996, when the unemployment rate stood at 17.04%

(1) English speakers find this distinction confusing when the verb is *ser*. María Luz Gutiérrez Araus (1995, 32), cites an interesting example from García Márquez (Col.): *un perro . . . mordió a cuatro personas que se le atravesaron en el camino. Tres eran esclavos negros. La otra fue Sierva María* 'a dog bit four people who got in its way. Three were black slaves. The other was Sierva María'. The preterite brings Sierva María into the foreground – she is a major character in the novel. The imperfect pushes the other three characters into the descriptive background. But such clear-cut examples are rare and literary: in ordinary language one would say . . . *era Sierva María*.

## 17.5 The imperfect: general

The Spanish imperfect form indicates a past event or state viewed as continuing at the time referred to. Compare *M. estaba en el ejército* 'M. was in the army' (at the time: imperfect) and *M. estuvo en el ejército* 'M. was in the army' (i.e. for a time in the past: preterite). It is therefore much used to describe something that was already in progress when something else happened (17.5.1), and to express habitual events in the past (17.5.2), although the preterite can also sometimes describe habitual events, as explained at 17.4.3.

In colloquial language the Spanish imperfect may be a substitute for the conditional. See 17.5.4 and 29.5 for a discussion.

The following remarks should be read in conjunction with the comments on the preterite tense in Section 17.4.

### 17.5.1 Imperfect tense to denote past events and states already in progress when something else happened

The imperfect is used for background descriptions; the preterite is used for the events set against the background (imperfects in bold type):

*Yo **volvía** del cine cuando vi a Niso*

I was coming back from the cinema  
when I saw Niso

*Miró por encima del hombro para estar segura  
de que nadie la **acechaba** (GGM, Col.)*

She looked over her shoulder to be  
sure that no one was lying in wait for her

*Cuando entré en el cuarto noté que **olía** a  
quemado*

When I entered the room I noticed  
there was a smell of burning

*Volví a la sala, pero él ya no **estaba**  
(AM, Mex., dialogue)*

I went back to the living room, but he  
was no longer there

(1) For the possible use of the continuous imperfect in some of these sentences, e.g. *estaba acechando*, instead of the non-continuous imperfect, see 19.2.1b.

### 17.5.2 Imperfect used to denote events that continued in the past for an unspecified period

The imperfect can indicate that an event continued in the past for an unspecified period (and may or may not have continued). It is thus much used to describe characteristics, situations, habitual actions and other events that had no clear beginning and end:

*Los griegos adoraban a muchos dioses  
Cada vez que os veáis lo decía  
(IA, Sp. dialogue)*

The Greeks worshipped many gods  
He used to say it every time you met

*Le exasperaban estas comidas mexicanas de  
cuatro o cinco horas de duración (CF, Mex.)*

These four or five-hour Mexican  
lunches exasperated him

*A veces le dolían el aire y la tierra que pisaba,  
el sol del amanecer, las cuencas de los ojos  
(AM, Mex.)*

Sometimes the air and the ground she  
trod on hurt her, the morning sun,  
the sockets of her eyes

(1) But the preterite must be used if a period of time is specified, as in 'she was (*fue*) president for four years'; see 17.4.2.

### 17.5.3 Imperfect in sentences like 'I hadn't seen her for years', 'it was the first time that . . .'

English-speakers should note the use of the imperfect in the following type of sentence where English uses the pluperfect tense (for the tenses used in sentences of this type see 17.3.9):

*Hacía tres años que no se veían (AM, Mex.)  
Era la primera vez que la veía  
Me venía siguiendo desde hacía una semana*

They hadn't seen one another for three years  
It was the first time I had seen her  
S(he) had been following me for a week

### 17.5.4 Imperfect for the conditional

The imperfect is often used in familiar speech instead of the conditional. This most commonly occurs in four cases:

(a) When the conditional would refer to an immediate future. In this case Spanish resembles English: one can say 'he said he would come' or 'he said he was coming':

<i>Prometieron que venían/vendrían</i>	They promised they were coming/ would come
<i>Juró que lo hacía/haría</i>	(S)he swore (s)he'd do it
<i>Pensaba que ya no venías/vendrías</i>	I thought you weren't coming/ wouldn't come any more
<i>Sabíamos que los refuerzos llegaban/llegarían de un momento para otro</i> (see note 1)	We knew the reinforcements were arriving/ would arrive at any moment

(b) With *deber* and *poder*, in which case the imperfect is slightly more colloquial:

<i>Podía ser una solución, mira . . .</i> (CMG, Sp., dialogue; or <i>podría</i> )	It could be a solution, you know . . .
<i>Debías/Deberías hacerlo ahora</i> (see note 2)	You should do it now

(c) In conditional sentences in familiar Spanish (see 29.5 for details, and see note 3):

<i>Incluso si no tuvieras dinero, me casaba/casaría contigo</i>	I'd marry you even if you had no money
<i>Yo que tú compraba una nueva</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue)	If I were you I'd buy a new one

(d) In familiar Spanish, to express a wish or denial:

<i>Yo le decía yo cuatro verdades</i>	I wouldn't mind giving him/her a piece of my mind! (lit. 'telling him/her four truths')
<i>Tenían que hacer un monumento al tío* que inventó el café</i> (MD, Sp., dialogue)	They ought to build a monument for the guy who invented coffee
<i>Yo ahora me tomaba un helado y me quedaba tan bien</i>	I'd like to have an ice-cream now and I'd feel great
<i>. . . ni loca me casaba con un español</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue)	I wouldn't marry a Spaniard even if I were crazy (Mexican woman speaking)
<i>A primera vista, el hombre no mataba una mosca</i>	At first sight the man wouldn't kill a fly

\**Tío*, which properly means 'uncle', is constantly used in popular language in Spain for 'guy', though many people consider it vulgar. The female equivalent is *tía*.

(1) This is not possible if the future is not immediate: *juró que me amaría siempre* (not *amaba . . .*) '(s)he swore (s)he would love me for ever'.

(2) This is especially frequent with *poder* and *deber* to show that someone should or could have acted differently in the past, e.g. *podías/podrías haberlo hecho, ¿no?* 'you could have done it, couldn't you?'; see 25.2.3 and 25.3.3 for details.

(3) The imperfect cannot replace the conditional when the latter indicates a guess or estimate, as explained at 17.7.2.

### 17.5.5 *Hablaba or estaba hablando?*

If the action is not habitual and is truly past (e.g. 'I was leaving the next day' is in fact a future in the past), the difference between the continuous and non-continuous imperfect is often blurred: *yo*

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*hablaba/estaba hablando con los vecinos cuando llegaron los bomberos (estaba hablando preferred)* 'I was talking to the neighbours when the firemen arrived'. See Chapter 19 for more on the continuous.

However, the verbs *ir* and *venir* and a few others are not much used in the continuous form: see 19.3c.

### 17.5.6 Imperfect in children's language

An interesting use of the imperfect called the *imperfecto lúdico* or 'imperfect of play' is found in children's language: *vamos a jugar a que yo era un vaquero y tú eras un indio* 'let's pretend I'm a cowboy and you're an Indian'.

### 17.5.7 Imperfect to make courteous requests

The imperfect can be used to show courtesy in requests and enquiries:

*¿Qué deseaba?*

What would you like?

*Perdone, quería hablar con el director*

Excuse me, I'd like to talk to the manager

### 17.5.8 Imperfect used for preterite in literary styles

In newspaper language, the imperfect is sometimes used as an alternative to the preterite for dramatic effect. Normally, the sentence includes an adverb of time that shows that the action is a single completed event:

*Poco después, la policía francesa arrestaba a DM, de 56 años (El País, Sp.)*

Shortly after, the French police arrested 56-year-old DM

*Un día antes, en Santiago de Cuba, era asesinado Frank País (Granma, Cu.)*

The day before, in Santiago de Cuba, Frank País was murdered

(1) *Arrestó* and *fue* would have been more normal in both of these examples. This construction, called *el imperfecto dramático*, is also found in literary French.

## 17.6 Future tense: general

Spanish, like English, has several ways of expressing the future, and the so-called 'future tense' (*hablaré, vendrás*) is not the most common in everyday speech, from which it is said to be disappearing except in its 'suppositional' role described at 17.6.5:

(a) *Esta noche vamos al cine*

Tonight we're going to the cinema

(b) *Esta noche vamos a ir al cine*

Tonight we're going to go to the cinema

(c) *Esta noche iremos al cine*

Tonight we'll go to the cinema

(d) *Esta noche hemos de ir al cine*

Tonight we're due to go to the cinema

(a) describes an event which is prearranged or scheduled;

(b) is a foreseen or 'intentional' future and it is also often an informal substitute for the future-tense proper *iremos, será*, etc.;

(c) often excludes the idea of pre-arrangement or a scheduled event. Consequently it may sound rather uncertain or, depending on tone and context, may sound like an order or a promise;

(d) is discussed at 25.4.1. It is sometimes heard in Latin America with a future meaning, but in Castilian-speaking areas of Spain it usually implies obligation and is now slightly old-fashioned, rather like the English ‘tonight we are to go to the cinema’. It is common in Mexico as an alternative to *deber de*; see 25.4.1b.

### 17.6.1 Uses of the future-tense form to denote future time

Often, particularly in informal speech, the present and future forms are interchangeable. However, the future is used:

(a) For provisional or less certain statements about the future, e.g. for forecasts, or for statements where context does not make it clear that the future is meant:

*Si llueve se aplazará el partido*  
*En el remoto futuro el sol se apagará*  
*Para entonces todos estaremos calvos*

If it rains the match will be postponed  
 In the remote future the sun will go out  
 We'll all be bald by then (said of something that will take a long time)  
 (S)he gave me 100 euros. I'll manage with that until next week. Then we'll see

*Me ha dado cien euros. Con esto tiraré hasta la semana próxima, y luego veremos (luego vemos is impossible here)*  
*Nos veremos mañana en Palacio, ¿no es cierto? (CF, Mex., dialogue. Nos vemos would imply more certainty)*

We'll see one another tomorrow at the Presidential Palace won't we?

(b) The future is much used for promises or predictions, especially long-term ones, since these by nature are not pre-arrangements:

*Ten confianza en mí. No te decepcionaré ¡No pasarán!*  
*No tenga miedo . . . ya nadie le hará daño (EM, Mex., dialogue)*  
*Pero cuidalo como si fuera ya mío, porque en ese caso algún día será de mis hijas (ABE, Pe., dialogue)*  
*Una verdadera revolución no admitirá jamás la impunidad (VdC, Cu.)*

Trust me. I won't disappoint you  
 They shall not pass!  
 Don't be afraid . . . no one is going to hurt you any more  
 But look after it as though it already belonged to me, because in that case one day it will belong to my daughters  
 A true revolution will never allow crimes to go unpunished

(1) The difference between sentences like *te veo mañana* and *te veré mañana* ‘I'll see you tomorrow’ may be merely one of tone. Some informants claimed they would use the present tense in *te veo mañana* (informal) and the future in *lolle veré (a usted) mañana* (formal).

(2) For the tense form used after words meaning ‘perhaps’/‘probably’/‘possibly’ see 20.2.1.

(3) The present tense can be used colloquially (but not with *ser* ‘to be’) for short-term promises presented as pre-arrangements, e.g. *no te preocupes, te lo devuelvo* (or *devolveré*) *mañana* ‘don't worry, I'll give it back to you tomorrow’, *bueno, te llamo* ‘OK, I'll call you’.

### 17.6.2 Future tense used for commands

As in English, the future is occasionally used for stern commands:

*No matarás*  
*No saldrás de esta casa hasta que yo no te lo permita (see 27.2.4c for the second no)*

Thou shalt not kill  
 You will not leave this house until I allow you to

### 17.6.3 Present tense with future meaning

The present tense is much used in informal language to refer to the future. If the subject is human this conveys an idea of pre-arrangement and is therefore especially used for fixtures or scheduled events, cf. English 'I'm going to Spain next year', 'we attack tomorrow'. If the subject is non-living, the action is foreseen as a certainty or a fixture, e.g. *el tren sale mañana a las 7* 'the train leaves tomorrow at 7' (scheduled departure). Compare *mañana el tren saldrá a las siete* 'tomorrow the train will leave at seven', which suggests an unscheduled or unexpected departure.

The fact that the verb refers to the future is normally shown by some time phrase like *mañana, esta noche, el año que viene*. The following examples are informal in tone:

*Vamos a Bolivia el año que viene*  
*Te llamo/Nos vemos*  
*Esta noche hay tormenta, verás*  
*El día menos pensado le tiran a tu*  
*madre la casa (CMG, Sp., dialogue)*  
*Ahorita vengo, voy por el dinero*  
 (ES, Mex., dialogue. In Spain *ahorita*  
 = *ahora mismo*)

We're going to Bolivia next year  
 I'll call you/See you later  
 Tonight there'll be a storm, you'll see  
 One fine day (lit. 'the day least expected') they're  
 going to demolish your mother's house  
 I'll be right back. I'll go and get the money

(1) This use of the present tense is particularly common with verbs of motion like *ir, venir, salir, llegar*.

(2) Events predicted in an unspecified future are by nature less certain, so the present tense should not be used: *si las cosas continúan así, ya no habrá árboles* 'if things go on like this there will be no more trees'.

(3) If there is nothing in the sentence or context that clearly shows that the statement refers to the future, the present tense is assumed to be a true present and the future must be shown by some unambiguous form, e.g. *ir a* plus an infinitive or the future tense proper. Compare *me parece que no hay sitio* 'I think there's no room' and *me parece que no habrá/va a haber sitio* 'I think there won't be room'.

(4) The present tense of *ser* is usually used for the future only in calendar statements: *mañana es jueves/fiesta* 'tomorrow is Thursday/a fiesta', but *mañana el discurso será pronunciado por el presidente* 'tomorrow the speech will be delivered by the president', not *\*es pronunciado*.

### 17.6.4 *Ir a* . . . + infinitive

The future is very often expressed by *ir a* + the infinitive. This may express firm intention or it may simply be a colloquial alternative for the future tense – but not for the suppositional future mentioned at 17.6.5: *espéreme tantito, voy a ver quién toca . . .* (ES, Mex., dialogue. *Tantito* = *un momentito* in Spain) 'hang on a moment, I'll go and see who's knocking on the door'.

*Ir a* . . . virtually replaces the ordinary future-tense form in the speech of many people. Kany, 192, gives several Latin-American examples like *ya va usted a querer pelear con nosotros por semejante porquería* (Pe., popular; Spain *se va usted a pelear con nosotros por . . .*) 'sure, you'll want to fight us over a bit of rubbish like this', *¿cuánto va a querer, señor?* (Mex., popular; Sp. *¿cuánto va a ser?/¿cuánto quiere?*) 'how much will you want, Sir?'. But the future tense is by no means extinct in speech, as can be seen in this passage of colloquial Cuban:

—¿Y qué harás entre estas cuatro paredes?  
 —Limpiaré el cuarto, me lavaré la cabeza,  
 plancharé una blusita para ir al trabajo el lunes,  
 me sentaré en la butaca, sacaré un crucigrama,  
 me asomaré al balcón, cocinaré, me comeré las  
 uñas. ¡No tengo ni un solo minuto libre!  
 (AA, Cu., dialogue; Sp. *haré un crucigrama*)

‘And what’ll you do (shut up) between these  
 four walls?’ ‘I’ll clean my room, wash my  
 hair, iron a blouse for work on Monday, sit in  
 the armchair, do a crossword, look out of the  
 window, cook, chew my nails . . . I don’t have  
 a single minute free!’

(1) The imperfect *iba a*, etc. may also be used as a future in the past. See 17.7.3.

(2) Omission of the *a*, e.g. *va llamarla* ‘(s)he’s going to call her’, is heard in familiar Latin-American speech but should be avoided.

### 17.6.5 Future tense used for guesses and approximations

**Important:** one use of the future tense is to express guesses or approximations. This use of the future often produces much more idiomatic Spanish than sentences involving *aproximadamente* or *alrededor de*. In questions, the future expresses wonder, incredulity or conjecture:

*Serán las nueve y media, por ahí*  
 (CMG, Sp., dialogue)

It must be around 9.30

*Ya habrás comido, ¿no?*

I guess you’ve already eaten, haven’t you?

*Un par de años hará . . . Gannon me escribió de*  
*Guaeguaychu* (JLB, Arg.)

It must be a couple of years ago that

*Pase usted, por favor. Siéntese. Estará*  
*cansado* (JJM, Pan., dialogue)

Gannon wrote to me from Guaeguaychu  
 Please come in. Sit down. You must be tired

—¿Dónde está tu monedero? —*Me lo habré*  
*dejado en casa*

‘Where’s your purse?’ ‘I must have left  
 it at home’

*¿Qué hora será?* (Lat. Am. *¿Qué horas serán?*)

I wonder what the time is?

*Eh, no querrás que mi jefe vea eso*  
 (JM, Sp., dialogue)

Hey, you don’t want my boss to see  
 that, do you?

*¿Qué estará pensando de todo esto?*  
 (CF, Mex., dialogue)

‘What *can* he be thinking of all this?’

(1) Kany, 190, notes that this use of the future is more common in Spain than in Latin America, where *deber* (*de*) . . . is more usual: *deben* (*de*) *ser las cinco* = *serán las cinco* or *deben* (*de*) *ser las cinco*. See 25.3.2 for *deber de*, which is also used in Spain. The NGLE 23.14s notes the suppositional use of *ir a* in Latin-American Spanish: *¿qué irá a ocurrir cuando pasen los años?* (Sp. *ocurrirá*) ‘what will happen when years have gone by?’

(2) For the use of the future perfect tense for conjectures, e.g. *¿cuánto habrán pagado?* ‘I wonder how much they paid?’, see 18.6a.

### 17.6.6 Two cases where the future tense is *not* used

(a) As in English, the future tense is not used after ‘if’/ *si*: *\*si vendrás mañana*/\*‘if you will come tomorrow’ is incorrect in both languages for *si vienes mañana*/\*‘if you come tomorrow’. An exception to this rule is mentioned at 29.8.1 note 3. This does not apply to the emphatic use of *si* described at 35.4.8: *¡si será tonto!* ‘wow, is he stupid!’



(b) Students must avoid using the future after *cuando* in sentences like *comeremos cuando llegue Julia* (present subjunctive) 'we'll eat when Julia arrives', not *\*cuando llegará Julia*. Learners who know French or Italian are likely to succumb to this temptation. See 20.4.7 for more details.

## 17.7 The conditional: general

For the forms of the conditional see 16.3 and 16.7.4.

The name 'conditional' is accurate insofar as it often shows that an event is conditional on some other factor, as in *podríamos ir mañana* 'we could go tomorrow' (if the weather's nice, if we're free, etc.). But it has other functions that have nothing to do with the idea of conditionality, especially the expression of suppositions or approximations in the past (17.7.2) and the expression of the future in the past (17.7.3).

(1) **Important:** for the purpose of agreement, the conditional counts as a past tense, so the subjunctive in a subordinate clause governed by the conditional must also be in the past. Compare *es absurdo que vengas mañana* 'it's absurd for you to come tomorrow' and *sería absurdo que vinieras/vinieses mañana* 'it would be absurd for you to come tomorrow' (see 20.8 for detailed discussion).

(2) Colloquial language may use the imperfect instead of the conditional especially in conditional sentences (see 17.5.4 and 29.5 for discussion).

(3) For replacement of the imperfect subjunctive by the conditional in some regions, e.g. *?si yo tendría dinero* for *si yo tuviera dinero* 'if I had some money' see 20.12.2.

### 17.7.1 Uses of the conditional to express conditions

The conditional is also used for implied conditions, i.e. conditional statements which contain no if-clause:

*Sería una locura ponerlo en marcha sin aceite*  
*Lo único que no tendría en su despacho sería*  
*una cocina* (GZ, Mex., dialogue)

It would be crazy to start it up with no oil  
 The only thing he wouldn't have in his  
 office would be a cooking stove

(1) For the conditional in conditional sentences, e.g. *si hiciera menos frío iríamos a la playa* 'if it were less cold we'd go to the beach' see Chapter 29.

### 17.7.2 Conditional tense used for suppositions or guesses about the past

The conditional is used for guesses and approximations about the past in the same way as the future is for guesses about the present or future (see 17.6.5):

*Serían alrededor de las seis de la mañana*  
 (EM, Mex.)

It must have been about six in the morning

*Tendría (or tenía/debía de tener) unos treinta*  
*años*

(S)he must have been about thirty

*Los guardé algún tiempo . . . luego supongo*  
*que los quemaría* (CMG, Sp., dialogue)

I kept them (*los diarios* – 'the diaries')  
 for a while . . . then I must have burnt them

*Gregorius habría nacido en Glasgow (JC, Arg.)  
un fósil de molusco o gasterópodo —tipo  
caracol— que pertenecería a la época del  
Cuaternario*

Gregorius was reportedly born in Glasgow  
a fossil of a mollusc or gastropod  
– of the snail type – that probably  
belonged to the Quaternary period

(1) In newspapers, more so in Latin America than in Spain, the conditional is used for rumours or unsubstantiated reports. This construction is condemned by many grammarians and by the editors of *El País*, but the Academy now accepts it:

*Ese dinero . . . sería resultado del esquema  
de sobornos y desvíos (La Jornada, Mex.)  
La desaparición de los etarras estaría  
motivada por cuestiones de seguridad  
(Abc, Sp.)*

That money is said to be a result of the  
scheme of bribes and illicit payments  
Security reasons are said to be the  
motive for the disappearance of the  
ETA members (*ETA*: a now defunct Basque  
separatist movement)

(2) For the use of *deber de* for suppositions see 25.3.2.

(3) In questions, the conditional perfect may express amazement or anxiety. See 18.6b.

### 17.7.3 Conditional for the future in the past

As in English, the conditional is used to express the future in the past, i.e. as a close equivalent of *iba a* + an infinitive:

*Yo sabía que papá bajaría/iba a bajar a las once  
Cerró la puerta con cuidado; su mujer dormía  
profundamente. Dormiría hasta que el sol  
hiciera su primera presencia en la ventana  
(IA, Sp.)*

I knew father would come down at 11 o'clock  
He shut the door carefully; his wife  
was fast asleep. She would sleep until  
the sun first showed at the window

*En un rato todo el mundo se iría a dormir  
la siesta (AM, Mex., dialogue;  
Sp. Dentro de un rato)*

Soon everyone would go and take a  
siesta

(1) When the conditional refers to an event known to have taken place – which it does not in the preceding three examples – the effect is literary: *el treinta de abril de aquel año Hitler se suicidaría en su búnker* ‘on April 30 of that year Hitler was to/would commit suicide in his bunker’, *andando el tiempo ostentaría varias carteras ministeriales* (JC, Sp.) ‘in due time he would hold several ministerial appointments’.

### 17.7.4 Conditional in rhetorical questions

As in English, the conditional is much used for questions to which the speaker already knows the answer:

*¿Hay alguien que se atrevería a ir a un  
estadio o auditorio para ver a una chica  
virtual cantando? (La Jornada, Mex.)*

Is there anyone who'd bother (lit. 'dare') to  
go to a stadium or concert hall to see a  
'virtual' girl singing?

### 17.7.5 Replacement of the pluperfect conditional tense by pluperfect subjunctive tense

The pluperfect subjunctive verb form (*hubiera sido*, *hubieran visto*, etc.) is quite often used as an alternative to the conditional perfect, *habría sido*, *habrían visto*. This is possible only when the verb is truly a conditional in the past and not a suppositional form (17.7.2) or a future in the past (17.7.3). This use of the pluperfect subjunctive form is slightly more formal or bookish in tone and, according to the Academy, is more common in Latin America than in Spain:

*Hubiera podido ser una buena novela de misterio . . .* (CMG, Sp., dialogue)

It could have been a good mystery novel

*El mal lo mismo se hubiera colado por alguna grieta de las piedras del castillo* (MP, Arg., dialogue)

The disease would have crept in just the same through some crack in the walls of the castle

*A lo mejor me hubiera hecho mucho bien seguir con la terapia* (AM, Mex.)

Perhaps it would have done me a lot of good to continue with therapy

*Habría* could have been used for *hubiera* in all these examples.

(1) Use of the *-se* subjunctive form instead of the *-ra* form of *haber* to form the pluperfect conditional is rejected by the grammarians: *El País's Libro de estilo* 2014, 13.27, bans it and the NGLE 23.15v and 24.2c disapproves. The *-ra* form is overwhelmingly more usual, but the *-se* form is nevertheless found, especially in Mexico and Spain: *cualquiera hubiese creído que de verdad estaba excitada* (ES, Mex., for *hubiera/habría creído*) 'anyone would have believed she was really excited', *Eva adoraba las fiestas; le hubiese encantado acompañarle a la ópera* (RM, Spain) 'Eva [Perón] loved parties; she would have been thrilled to accompany him to the opera', *y hubiese sido muy sospechoso que yo me negase* (MP, Arg., dialogue) 'and it would have been very suspicious if I'd refused'.

### 17.7.6 Use of the *-ra* imperfect subjunctive form for the conditional tense

(a) With *querer* and *deber*, the imperfect subjunctive form may be used instead of the conditional, as in *yo querría/quisiera hacerlo* 'I'd like to do it', *deberías/debieras haberlo hecho* 'you should have done it'. The subjunctive form is more formal. With *poder*, use of the imperfect subjunctive is literary: *en un país que bien pudiera ser Chile* (CORPES, Ch.) 'in a country that might/could well be Chile'. See Chapter 25 for a further discussion of these modal verbs.

(b) With other verbs, use of the imperfect subjunctive for the conditional is nowadays uncommon and archaic: *Abril, sin tu asistencia clara, fuera invierno de caídos esplendores . . .* (Juan Ramón Jiménez, poetry; i.e. *sería . . .*) 'April, without thy bright presence, would be a winter of fallen splendours', *un libro fuera poco . . . para dar cauce a un país como La Mancha* (C JC, Sp.) 'a book would be little (lit. 'were little . . .') to do justice to (lit. 'to give channel to') a land like La Mancha'.

(1) The imperfect subjunctive used for the conditional tense is found in the Latin-American literary formula *pareciera que . . .* (for *parecería que . . .*) 'it would seem that . . .': *pareciera que sabes un poco de todo lo que comentamos* (MC, Mex., dialogue) 'it would seem that you know a bit about everything we mention'. Such use of the *-ra* subjunctive is rather more common in spontaneous speech in Venezuela and Central America where one hears sentences like *en ese caso yo lo hiciera* for *. . . lo haría* 'in that case I would do it'.

(2) In pre-eighteenth-century Spanish, the use of the *-ra* form for the conditional tense with all verbs was very common: *y si estas calamidades no me acontecieran, no me **tuviera*** (modern Spanish *tendría*) *yo por caballero andante (Don Quijote)* ‘and had these calamities not befallen me, I would not consider myself a knight errant’. Compare the archaic English equivalent ‘... I had not considered myself a knight errant’.

## 17.8 Tense agreement

Tense agreement with the subjunctive is discussed in full at 20.8.

As far as the indicative tenses are concerned, Spanish is stricter than English about the agreement of past with past. In sentences like ‘John said he is/was coming’, English seems to use either tense in the subordinate clause. Spanish requires *Juan dijo que **venía***. Sentences like ?*Juan dijo que viene* usually sound careless or sub-standard. The present is, however, possible with the perfect tense when John’s arrival is still awaited: *Juan ha dicho que viene* ‘Juan said he’s coming’.

# 18 Use of indicative (non-continuous) compound tenses

The following topics are discussed in this chapter:

- General remarks on the compound tenses (Section 18.1)
- Uses of the perfect tense (*he hablado, hemos ido*, etc.) (Section 18.2)
- Uses of the pluperfect tense (*había hablado, habían ido*, etc.) (Section 18.3)
- The *-ra* pluperfect (Section 18.3.2)
- The *pretérito anterior*: *hubo terminado*, etc. (Section 18.4)
- The pluperfect subjunctive (*hubiera/hubiese hablado*, etc.) (Section 18.5)
- The future perfect and conditional perfect: *habrá hecho, habría hecho*, etc. (Section 18.6)

## 18.1 Compound tenses: general remarks

Compound tenses are tenses formed from *haber* plus the past participle. See 16.13 for the conjugation of the compound tenses of a typical verb.

All of the tenses, except the *pretérito anterior*, can also appear in the continuous form: see Chapter 19:

Perfect	<i>he estado hablando, etc.</i>	I've been speaking
Pluperfect	<i>había estado hablando, etc.</i>	I had been speaking
Future perfect	<i>habré estado hablando, etc.</i>	I will have been speaking
Conditional perfect	<i>habría estado hablando, etc.</i>	I would have been speaking
Perfect subjunctive	<i>haya estado hablando, etc.</i>	No exact translation
Pluperfect subjunctive	<i>hubiera/hubiese estado hablando, etc.</i>	No exact translation

(1) **Important:** compound tenses all use the auxiliary *haber* or, much less commonly and the *pretérito anterior* excepted, *tener* (see 18.1.3). French, Italian and German form the compound tenses of certain verbs with 'to be' as the auxiliary: *je suis allé/allée, sono andato/andata, ich bin gegangen*. Verbs in modern Spanish form compound tenses only with *haber*. *Llegar, ir* and *venir* are very rare archaic or journalistic exceptions, cf. *el verano es ido* 'Summer is gone', normally *se ha ido*.

(2) Unlike French and Italian, the past participle is invariable in form. Compare French *je l'ai vue* 'I saw her' and Spanish *la he visto*. This does not apply if *tener* is used instead of *haber*: see 18.1.3.

### 18.1.1 Compound tenses: word order

**Important:** no words should be inserted between *haber* and the past participle: compare French *j'ai toujours dit* and *siempre he dicho*. *He siempre dicho* is not heard in normal Spanish, but the rule is occasionally broken in literary style with such words as *ni siquiera, incluso, todavía, aún, ya, nunca, jamás, más que, quizá(s), tal vez*:

*Se habrá tal vez olvidado*  
*Se ha más que duplicado la cifra*

You may have forgotten  
The figure has more than doubled

... *en buena parte por no habérselo aún  
propuesto con entera seriedad* (SP, Mex.)

... to a great extent because he had not  
yet suggested it to him in all seriousness

(1) **Important:** when *haber* is in the infinitive or the gerund form, personal pronouns are attached to it: ... *antes de habérselo propuesto* '... before suggesting it to him/her/you', *habiéndonoslos enviado* 'having sent them to us'. \**Me arrepiento de te lo haber dicho* is not Spanish for 'I regret having said it to you', correctly *me arrepiento de habértelo dicho*.

(2) For the now obsolete construction *había comprado la casa y pintádola* for *había comprado la casa y la había pintado* '(s)he had bought the house and painted it', see 14.3.7 note 2.

### 18.1.2 Omission of *haber* and of the past participle in compound tenses

The auxiliary verb *haber* may optionally be omitted before a second or subsequent past participle to avoid repetition:

*Yo también he pasado por baches y conocido  
la duda* (LG, Sp., dialogue)  
*No sólo había tocado la mano y mirado los  
ojos de la mujer que más le gustaba tocar y  
mirar del mundo ...* (CF, Mex.)

I've been through rough patches as  
well and known doubt  
Not only had he touched the hand and  
looked at the eyes of the woman he most  
liked to touch and look at in the world ...

(1) The past participle may be deleted in English, but not in Spanish: 'Have you tried the sausages?' 'Yes, I have'. —*¿Has probado las salchichas?* —*Sí* or —*Sí, las he probado*, but not \**sí, las he*. However, deletion occasionally occurs with the pluperfect tense: *¿se había reído?* *Sí, se había. Pero esta vez sin sarcasmo* (MVLL, Pe., dialogue) 'Had he laughed? Yes, he had. But without sarcasm this time'.

### 18.1.3 *Tengo hecho, tengo comprado, etc.*

*Tener* can be used as an auxiliary, like the English 'to have got', to denote the successful acquisition of some object or the fulfilment of some task. Compare *he hecho mis deberes* 'I've done my homework' and *tengo hechos mis deberes* 'I've got my homework done'. The participle must agree in number and gender with the object of the verb, and the verb must be transitive and have a direct object (\**tengo sido* for *he sido* 'I have been', Portuguese *tenho sido*, is not Spanish):

*Ya tengo compradas las entradas  
Yo tenía concertada hora con el jefe  
Que persigan a los pillos que tienen  
tomadas las calles* (El Tiempo, Col.)  
*Tenía pensado cruzar a la orilla derecha*  
(JC, Arg., dialogue)  
*Los cuicos tenían rodeado el coche*  
(CF, Mex. *Cuico* is Mexican slang)

I've already bought the tickets  
I had arranged an appointment with the boss  
Let them chase after the hoodlums that have  
taken over the streets  
I had planned to cross to the right bank [of  
the Seine]  
The cops had the car surrounded

(1) *Llevar* is also occasionally used in the same way: *Llevo tomadas tres aspirinas, pero todavía me duele la cabeza* 'I've taken three aspirins, but my head's still aching', ... *y le llevan encontradas ya creo que hasta tres calaveras en la catedral de Lima* (ABE, Pe., dialogue; Sp. *y llevan encontradas ...*) 'I think they've already found three of his skulls in Lima Cathedral' (refers to a famous saint), *yo llevo vendidos cuatrocientos* (Mexico City, overheard) 'I've sold four hundred', *llevo veintiún asesinatos investigados. Una sola mujer* (LS, Sp., dialogue) 'I've investigated twenty-one murders. Only one [murderer] was a woman.'

(2) In Galicia one sometimes hears sentences like *\*no la tengo visto*. This is not Castilian but a borrowing from the Galician *non a teño visto*. It should be *no la he visto*.

## 18.2 The perfect indicative tense

Spanish differs from spoken French, German and Italian, and broadly resembles English, in respecting the difference between *hablé* 'I spoke', and *he hablado* 'I've spoken'. Students of languages in which the difference is blurred must not imitate sentences like *je l'ai vu hier*, *ich habe ihn gestern gesehen*, *l'ho visto ieri* 'I saw him yesterday' to produce questionable Spanish like *\*lo/le he visto ayer*, correctly *lo/le vi ayer*.

European Spanish usually uses the perfect wherever English does, but the converse is not true: the European Spanish perfect often requires translation by the English simple past. Moreover, in most of the Spanish-speaking world (Galicia, Asturias, the Canaries and most of Latin America) the preterite is in fact more common than the perfect, cf. *ya llegó* (Latin America) '(s)he has already arrived' (some varieties of American English are like Latin-American Spanish in preferring the simple past to the compound perfect: '(s)he already arrived', British '(s)he's already arrived'). In Spain one says *ya ha llegado*.

Use of the perfect tense seems to be most developed in Madrid and is noticed by persons from other regions. A. Moreira Rodríguez, one of the authors of this book, recalls an eight-year-old girl from Galicia rebuking her little cousin from Madrid: *¡siempre dices "he corrido", "he visto", "he ido". Hablas mal. Hay que decir "corrí", "vi", "fui"!*

(1) **Important:** the English perfect tense is ambiguous: 'I've lived in London for ten years' can mean either that you no longer live there or that you still live there. Out of context, *he vivido diez años en Londres* is assumed to mean that you no longer live there. *Llevo diez años viviendo en Londres* clearly means that you still live there. This rule can be overridden by context or by words like *siempre*, cf. *aquí nací y aquí he vivido siempre* (EM, Sp., dialogue) 'I was born here and I've always lived here' (see the next section for details).

### 18.2.1 Perfect to denote events occurring in a period that includes the present

The perfect is used for events that have happened in a period of time that is still current, e.g. today, this afternoon, this week, this month, this year, this century, always, already, never, still, yet. In this respect, English – especially British English – and European Spanish coincide, and the construction is also very common in written Latin-American Spanish:

*No he visto a tu madre esta semana*  
*Hemos ido dos veces este mes*  
*En sólo dos generaciones se ha desertizado un*  
*43% de la superficie terrestre (Abc, Sp.)*  
*Desde el año 2000 han sido asesinados*  
*en México 91 reporteros (La Jornada,*  
*Mex., Feb. 2016. Sp. 91 periodistas . . .)*  
*Ya han llegado*  
*Siempre he pensado que . . .*  
*Aún/Todavía no han llegado*  
*He pensado en ti tantas veces*

I haven't seen your mother this week  
 We've been twice this month  
 In only two generations 43% of the  
 earth's surface has been reduced to desert  
 Since the year 2000, 91 journalists have been  
 murdered in Mexico  
 They've already arrived  
 I have always thought that . . .  
 They haven't arrived yet  
 I've thought of you so often

(1) The preterite may be used to break the link between the event and the present moment. Compare *vi a tu suegra esta mañana* and *he visto a tu suegra esta mañana* 'I saw/have seen your mother-in-law this morning'; there is little difference in meaning. Use of the preterite suggests either that the statement was made after midday (the most likely explanation), or that the speaker feels that the event is by now further in the past, or that the speaker comes from a region that makes less use of the perfect tense.

(2) In all the examples given, Latin Americans may prefer the preterite: see 18.2.8. But use of the perfect tense to describe a lasting life experience is more or less universal: *gané la lotería, así que he vivido bien* 'I won the lottery, so I've lived well'.

### 18.2.2 Perfect for events whose effects are still relevant in the present

As in English, the perfect is used for recent past events that are relevant to or explain the present, or whose effects persist in the present. This is also common in written Latin-American Spanish:

*Alguien ha fumado un cigarrillo aquí. Huelo  
el humo  
¿Quién ha roto esta ventana?  
Todo el mundo habla de Fulano porque ha  
publicado otra novela  
Estoy orgulloso de lo que han hecho con  
este muchacho—, dijo —se ha convertido  
en un hombre (DES, Mex., dialogue)*

Someone has smoked a cigarette here.  
I can smell the smoke  
Who's broken/Who broke this window?  
Everyone's talking about so-and-so  
because he's published a new novel  
I'm proud of what they've done with  
this boy,' he said. 'He's become a man'

(1) Latin-American speech (outside the regions mentioned in 18.2.3 note 1) may use the preterite in such sentences. See 18.2.8 for discussion.

(2) The perfect is sometimes used in European Spanish together with some word or phrase that refers to a past not continuing into the present, e.g. 'yesterday', 'two months ago'. This may express the idea that an event is relevant to or explains something in the present, as in *está en muy mala edad para cambiar. Ha cumplido cincuenta años en junio* (CMG, Sp., dialogue) 'he's really not the best age for changing. He was fifty last June'. Seco (1998), 357, says that this shows that the action took place in what for the speaker is the 'psychological present', but many Spaniards from the north and many Latin Americans insist on the preterite in such cases and in sentences like the following:

*Pero el padre murió, y la madre ha muerto  
hace unos años (ABV, Sp., dialogue:  
makes her death more immediate)  
?Bueno, he ido a hacerme el análisis hace  
quince días (Madrid interviewee.  
Popular style)  
A mí todo lo que me ha sucedido me ha  
sucedido ayer, anoche a más tardar  
(JC, Arg., dialogue)*

But the father died, and the mother  
died a few years ago  
Anyway, I went and had the test done two  
weeks ago  
Everything that has happened to me  
happened yesterday, last night at  
the latest

(3) De Mello (1994), 1, reports the same phenomenon in the speech of Lima and La Paz, but he finds virtually no other Latin-American examples. Bolivian Spanish is particularly likely to use the perfect tense in these contexts, as is colloquial Spanish in Madrid.



(4) The NGLE (23.7g) notes that the sentence *Carlos Gardel ha sido el mejor intérprete del tango* ‘Carlos Gardel was the best of the tango performers’ is correct because it is still true in the present. However, *?Einstein ha visitado España en 1928* (for *visitó*) ‘Einstein visited Spain in 1928’ sounds odd because it no longer describes something true in the present.

### 18.2.3 Perfect of recency

In Spain, but rarely in Latin America outside Bolivia and Peru, the perfect may optionally be used for any very recent event, in practice any event that has happened since midnight. Very recent events (e.g. seconds ago) are almost always expressed by the perfect tense in European Spanish:

<i>Esta mañana me he levantado/me levanté a las seis</i>	I got up at six this morning
<i>Han sonado hace poco dos tiros. ¿Los has oído?</i> (ABV, Sp., dialogue)	There were two shots a moment ago. Did you hear them?
— <i>¿Quién ha dicho eso?</i> — <i>No he sido yo. Ha sido él</i>	‘Who said that (just now)?’ ‘It wasn’t me. It was him’
<i>La he visto hace un momento</i>	I saw her a moment ago
<i>No he podido hacerlo</i>	I couldn’t do it
<i>Perdone, no he entendido bien lo que ha dicho</i> (CMG, Sp., dialogue)	Sorry, I didn’t fully understand what you said (just now)

(1) The perfect of recency seems to be a fairly recent innovation of European Spanish, although Kany, 200, notes its colloquial use in Bolivia and Peru, cf. *te he hecho daño porque no has entendido nada* (ABE, Pe., dialogue) ‘I hurt you because you didn’t understand a thing’. Other Latin-American regions favour the preterite in these examples.

Many persons from northern Spain use the preterite in sentences like those shown above.

(2) European Spanish freely uses the perfect of recency with verbs like *querer*, *ser*: *no he querido hacerlo* ‘I didn’t want to do it’, *¿quién ha sido el gracioso que se ha llevado las llaves?* ‘who was the clown that took the keys away?’

(3) European Spanish thus differs from English in that the perfect is used of any very recent event, completed or not. English allows ‘have you heard the news?’ since the news can still be heard, but not \*‘have you seen the flash?’ (assuming it is not going to be repeated): *¿habéis visto el relámpago?* ‘did you see the flash?’

(4) Despite the frequency of the perfect of recency, Spanish radio announcers often end programmes with remarks like *escucharon* *ustedes la novena sinfonía de Beethoven* ‘you have been listening to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony’ (more usually *acaban de escuchar* . . .). Seco, p.357, disapproves of this use of the preterite.

### 18.2.4 Perfect in time phrases

The perfect is often used in Spain – at least in the Madrid region – in negative time phrases of the sort *hace años que no te he visto* (or *no te veo*; Latin Americans and Spaniards from the north-west may not accept the perfect) ‘I haven’t seen you for years’. Positive sentences of this type usually require the present tense: *hace años que lo/le veo todos los días* ‘I’ve been seeing him every day for years’. See Chapter 36, especially 36.3.2, for more on this subject.

### 18.2.5 Use of the perfect for famous quotations

The perfect is sometimes used for famous quotations, e.g. *Aristóteles ha dicho que . . .* 'Aristotle said that . . .'. The present, preterite or imperfect are also possible.

### 18.2.6 Perfect used for future certainties

The perfect is occasionally used in familiar spoken European Spanish, at least in central Spain, for future actions that are described as certainties: *cuando vuelvas ya he acabado* 'I'll have finished by the time you get back'. Formal usage requires the future perfect . . . *ya lo habré acabado*. See 17.4.8 for the Latin-American tendency to use the preterite (*ya acabé*) in similar sentences.

(1) A curiosity of colloquial Ecuadorean Spanish is the use of the perfect for future certainties: *el año que viene ha sido bisiesto* 'next year's a leap year' for . . . *es/será bisiesto*. This seems to be unknown elsewhere.

### 18.2.7 Perfect with future reference in conditional sentences

As in English, the perfect may refer to the future in the if-clause of a conditional sentence: *si la situación no ha cambiado para el viernes, avísame* 'if the situation hasn't changed by Friday, let me know'.

### 18.2.8 The perfect tense in Latin America: further remarks

In general, in formal written Spanish, the rules governing the use of perfect tense seem to be the same on both continents.

As far as spoken language is concerned, the rules for its use in central Spain also apply – with some slight differences – to the spoken language of Bolivia and Peru. In most of the rest of Latin America, however, and also in Galicia and Asturias, completed actions tend to be expressed in everyday language by the preterite tense. This solution is so favoured in informal styles in some parts of Latin America that the perfect tense is rarely heard:

*Ya nos llegó la moderna solución (El Tiempo, Col., Sp. ha llegado)*

—¿Ya organizaste? —le pregunté.

—Sí, ya organicé (AM, Mex., dialogue; Sp. lo has organizado/lo he organizado)

¿Nunca te fijaste en eso? (ibid., Sp. nunca te has fijado)

Now we've got the modern answer!

'Have you organized it?', I asked him. 'Yes, I've organized it'

Haven't you ever noticed/Didn't you ever notice that?

(1) The perfect tense seems to be least popular in everyday speech in Buenos Aires city and is said to sound 'bookish' there: the preterite is preferred.

(2) In the spoken language of Mexico, and many other places, the perfect tense may express incomplete actions. *Estudié mucho este mes* means 'I've done a lot of studying this month' (and now I've stopped), *nos podemos ir. El maestro no vino* 'we can go. The teacher hasn't come' (and won't be coming now). But *he estudiado mucho este mes* 'I've been doing a lot of studying this month (and I still am)', *les he escrito* = 'I have been writing to them and still am', *el maestro no ha venido* 'the teacher hasn't come yet' (but he may still come).

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For Spaniards *les he escrito* is a completed action: 'I wrote/have written to them'. The difference in Mexican Spanish is visible, as the *NGLE* 23.7r notes, in the polite Mexican question *¿cómo has estado?* which clearly means 'how have you been keeping?' (up to and including now) and excludes the meaning 'how were you?', which is how Spaniards understand it.

With words like *aún, todavía* the event can still happen, so the perfect is used as in Spain: *aún/todavía no ha llamado* '(s)he hasn't phoned yet' (but may still phone).

### 18.2.9 The perfect and imperfect subjunctive

In general, the perfect subjunctive, *haya dicho, hayamos contestado*, etc., is used where Spanish grammar requires that a perfect indicative verb must be put in the subjunctive mood: *creo que lo he visto – no creo que lo **haya** visto*. But it often seems that the perfect and imperfect subjunctives can be used interchangeably:

*Es imposible que lo haya hecho/que lo hiciera/hiciese*

It's impossible that (s)he did it

*Niega que su mujer le abriera/abriese/le haya abierto la puerta*

He denies that his wife opened the door for him/her

*Algunos no aceptan que Colón descubriera/descubriese/haya descubierto América*

Some people don't accept that Columbus discovered America

## 18.3 The pluperfect: general

The pluperfect is formed with the imperfect of *haber* plus a past participle: *habías comido* 'you had eaten', *habían llegado* 'they/you had arrived'. The *-ra* imperfect subjunctive form of the verb can also sometimes have an indicative pluperfect meaning in literary Spanish: see 18.3.2.

### 18.3.1 Uses of the pluperfect

The use of the Spanish pluperfect corresponds quite closely to the English pluperfect. It is used for events or states that preceded some past event and are felt to be relevant to it.

*Ya habían encendido las luces cuando yo llegué*

They had already switched on the lights when I arrived

*Sabíamos que ya había vendido el coche*

We knew that (s)he had already sold the car

*Los patrones estaban celebrando que habían llegado a un acuerdo (EM, Mex., dialogue)*

The bosses were celebrating the fact that they had reached an agreement

*Yo me había levantado, duchado y desayunado cuando sonó el teléfono (ABE, Pe.)*

I had got up, showered and breakfasted when the phone rang

(1) Colloquially, especially in Latin America, the pluperfect may be expressed by the preterite or, when it refers to habitual actions, by the imperfect: *lo encontré donde lo dejé* (for ... *donde lo había dejado*) (J. M. Lope Blanch, 1991, 152) 'I found it where I'd left it/where I left it', *le faltaban dos dientes y nunca se puso* (Sp. *se había puesto*) *a dieta ni fue* (Sp. *había ido/iba*) *al gimnasio* (AM, Mex., dialogue) 'he had two teeth missing and he had never been on a diet or gone to the gym', *cuando terminábamos* (for *habíamos terminado*) *volvíamos a casa* (habitual) 'when we had finished, we used to return home'.

(2) The pluperfect is occasionally used to make polite enquiries: *¿usted me había pedido otro té?* 'did you ask for another tea?'

### 18.3.2 Pluperfect in *-ra*

The *-ra* imperfect subjunctive form of Spanish verbs – *hablara, dijera, fuera*, etc. – descends from the Latin indicative pluperfect: the Latin *fueram* (Spanish *fuera*) meant ‘I had been’. The Spanish *-ra* form gradually acquired a subjunctive meaning and for most purposes it is now identical in use to the *-se* imperfect subjunctive and is replacing it: see 20.1.3 for further details. But its old indicative pluperfect meaning survives in literature and journalism as a supposedly elegant alternative for the ordinary pluperfect with *había*. This is a common construction in Latin America, but it is also found in Spain in the media and in writers who fancy themselves as stylists. Lorenzo (1980, 135) complains that it sounds affected.

When used thus, the *-ra* form has no subjunctive meaning. However, this construction occurs only in subordinate, chiefly relative clauses: *el libro que había leído* ‘the book he had read’ can be recast in ‘elegant’ style as *el libro que leyera*, but the sentence *había leído el libro* ‘(s)he had read the book’ cannot be rewritten *\*leyera el libro*. Examples:

<i>Fue el único rastro que dejó en el que fuera su hogar de casada por cinco horas</i> (GGM, Col., for <i>había sido</i> )	It was the only trace she left in what had been her marital home for five hours
<i>Personajes de televisión recuerdan el que fuera su juguete especial</i> (El Universo, Ec.)	TV personalities recall what was their favourite toy
<i>China investiga al que fuera su máximo responsable de seguridad</i> (La Jornada, Mex.)	China investigates person who was its head of security
<i>Parece ser además que en el solar donde se construyera el hotel se alzaba antes el palacio</i> (AG, Sp.)	It seems, moreover, that the palace once stood on the land where the hotel had been built

*Había sido, se había construido* would have been equally correct in the previous examples and preferable for many people.

(1) One even finds examples of the imperfect subjunctive in *-se* used as an indicative pluperfect in the same contexts as the *-ra* form described above: *así había dado con el hombre capaz, muy versado en asuntos económicos, que conociese en la Logia* (AC, Cu., for *había conocido* or *conociera*) ‘he had thus come across the able man, well-versed in economic matters, whom he had met in the (Masonic) Lodge’. But this is rare on both continents and rather forced.

(2) Use of the *-ra* pluperfect in spoken Spanish is typical of Galicians since the *-ra* form still has an indicative pluperfect meaning in Galician (and in Portuguese).

### 18.3.3 *-ra* and *-se* verb forms after *después (de) que, desde que, luego (de) que*, etc.

The rule for the choice of verb form after *después (de) que, desde que* and *luego (de) que* ‘after’, and *a los pocos/dos/cinco días de que* ‘a few/two/five days after’ is: subjunctive for as yet unfulfilled events – *comeremos después de que lleguen los demás* ‘we’ll eat after the rest arrive’ – and indicative for fulfilled events: *comimos después de que llegaron los demás* ‘we ate after the rest arrived’. If the subject of both verbs is the same *después (de) que* is replaced by *después de* + infinitive: *nos fuimos después de haber hecho todo* ‘we left after we had done everything’. Further examples:

<i>... después de que las hijas mayores la ayudaron a poner un poco de orden en los estragos de la boda</i> (GGM, Col.)	... after the elder daughters (had) helped her to put a bit of order in the devastation left by the wedding
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<i>después de que Victoriano Huerta mató a Madero</i> (AM, Mex., dialogue)	... after Victoriano Huerta killed Madero
<i>Desde que se casó, Octavia nunca volvió a besarme</i> (ABE, Pe. Or <i>después de que</i> ...)	From the moment she got married, Octavia never kissed me again

However, we find the *-ra* or more rarely the *-se* verb forms frequently used even for fulfilled events in the past and even with subordinators like *desde que* 'from the moment that ...', which usually introduces fulfilled events. This is presumably a survival of the *-ra* pluperfect discussed at 18.3.2:

... <i>después de que Nigeria hiciese pública su decisión de firmar el acta</i> (El País, Sp.)	... after Nigeria made public its decision to sign the communiqué/minutes
<i>Vargas Llosa, que conserva muchos amigos en Barcelona desde que residiera en España</i> (Abc, Sp.)	Vargas Llosa, who has kept many friends in Barcelona from when he lived in Spain
<i>La corte frenó la ejecución luego que la Corte Suprema declarara la inconstitucionalidad del sistema de pena de muerte</i> (Excélsior, Mex.)	The court suspended the execution after the Supreme Court declared the system of the death penalty unconstitutional

## 18.4 *Pretérito anterior: hube hablado, hube acabado, etc.*

This tense, which has no equivalent in English, is formed with the preterite of *haber* plus the past participle and is used to indicate that an event terminated just before another past event. It is normally confined to literature and is now extremely rare in speech:

<i>Cuando hubieron terminado de reírse, examinaron mi situación personal</i> (A. Cancela, quoted <i>Esbozo</i> , 3.18.7)	When they had finished laughing, they examined my personal situation
<i>Le escribió el mismo día, no bien se hubo marchado</i> (LG, Sp.)	He wrote to her the same day, when she had only just left
... <i>así que, una vez que me hube quitado la blusa</i> ... (ES, Arg., dialogue)	... so, as soon as I had taken my blouse off
<i>Cuando se hubo fumado el último de sus cigarros</i> (MS, Mex.)	When he had smoked the last of his cigars (or 'cigarettes')

(1) This tense is used after *después (de) que* 'after', *luego que*, *así que*, *no bien*, *enseguida que*, *en cuanto*, *tan pronto como* and *apenas*, all translatable as 'as soon as', and after *cuando* and other phrases of similar meaning, to emphasize that the event was completed just before the main event in the sentence. In ordinary language it is expressed by the preterite: *tan pronto como llegamos, pasamos al comedor* 'as soon as we (had) arrived, we went through to the dining room', *pero apenas entró cambió de opinión* (JI, Mex., dialogue) 'but he'd hardly entered when he changed his mind', *apenas terminamos el almuerzo llegó Casals* (MP, Arg., dialogue) 'we'd scarcely finished lunch when Casals arrived'. It can also be replaced by the pluperfect: *apenas había ordenado el señor juez el levantamiento del cadáver para llevarlo al depósito judicial, rompieron el silencio unos gritos de mujer* (FGP, Sp.) 'the judge had scarcely ordered the removal of the body to the official morgue when the silence was broken by women shouting' (or 'a woman shouting').

(2) The *pretérito anterior* refers to a single completed event. After the same time phrases, repeated or habitual events are expressed by the ordinary pluperfect: *en cuanto habíamos terminado el trabajo, volvíamos a casa* 'as soon as we had finished work, we used to return home' or, colloquially, by the imperfect: *en cuanto terminábamos el trabajo, volvíamos a casa*.

(3) The French equivalent of *hube terminado* is *j'eus fini*, or in popular French *j'ai eu fini*. This tense survives in French, but the *pretérito anterior* is virtually obsolete in spoken Spanish and is not very common in written styles.

## 18.5 The pluperfect subjunctive

Normally this form, e.g. *hubiera hablado*, *hubiese hablado*, is used when Spanish grammar requires that a pluperfect indicative form be put in the subjunctive form. Compare *yo estaba convencido de que Raúl lo había hecho* 'I was convinced Raúl had done it' and *yo no estaba convencido de que Raúl lo hubiera/hubiese hecho* 'I wasn't convinced that Raúl had done it'.

(1) **Important:** students must remember that forms like *hubiera sido*, *hubiéramos contestado* may be alternative forms of the perfect conditional *habría sido*, *habría contestado*. See 17.7.5.

## 18.6 The future perfect and conditional perfect

The future perfect, *habré hecho* 'I will have done' and the conditional perfect *habría hecho* 'I would have done' are used in more or less the same ways as their English equivalents. But the following points are worth noting:

(a) the future perfect is very often used to express conjecture or, in questions, mystification or perplexity: *se lo habrá dicho Miguel* 'Miguel must have told him/her/you', *¿dónde lo habrás puesto?* 'where can you have put it?'

The negative expresses a conjecture or may make a statement rhetorical, i.e. it expects or hopes for the answer 'of course not': *no lo habrán hecho* . . . 'I guess they haven't done it' or 'they can't have done it, can they?' In questions, the negative may make a tentative suggestion: *¿no se le habrá olvidado la reunión?* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'you don't think he may have forgotten the meeting?' It may also make a question rhetorical, i.e. it expects or hopes for the answer 'no': *¿no la habrás vuelto a llamar?* 'you haven't called her again, have you?!' It may also simply suggest mystification: *¿por qué no se habrá casado?* (EM, Mex., dialogue) 'I wonder why he didn't get married'.

(b) the conditional pluperfect frequently occurs in conditional sentences of the type 'if I'd had enough money I would have bought it' *si hubiera tenido suficiente dinero, lo **habría/hubiera comprado***'. Use of the *-ra* subjunctive form of *haber* in this tense is a common alternative, as explained at 17.7.5.

The conditional pluperfect with *habría*, etc., but not with the *-ra* form of *haber*, may also express a guess or supposition about the past: *se lo habría dicho Miguel* 'Miguel must have told him/her'. In questions, it adds a note of perplexity or anxiety: *¿no se lo habría dicho Miguel?* 'it couldn't be that Miguel told her, could it?', *¿la habría oído?* (CMG, Sp., dialogue) 'could he possibly have heard her?', *en el saco no estaba, tampoco en la mesa. ¿Lo habría perdido?* (ES, Mex. *Saco* = *la chaqueta* in Spain) 'it [the watch] wasn't in his jacket or on the table either. Could he have lost it?'

(1) As far as we know, use of the perfect for the future perfect (i.e. to mean 'will have done something') is confined to colloquial language in Madrid and central Spain: *para mañana ya lo he acabado* = . . . *ya lo habré acabado* 'I'll have finished it by tomorrow'. See 17.4.8 for Latin-American alternatives.

# 19 Continuous forms of verbs

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- *Estoy hablando, están cenando*, etc., compared with English 'I'm talking', 'they're having dinner' (Section 19.1.2)
- Uses of the Spanish continuous forms (Section 19.2)
- The preterite continuous (*estuve hablando*, etc.) (Section 19.2.3)
- Restrictions on the use of the Spanish continuous (Section 19.3)
- The continuous form of *ser* (Section 19.4)
- Continuous forms in Latin-American Spanish (Section 19.5)

## 19.1 The continuous: general

### 19.1.1 Forms and equivalents of the continuous

The continuous forms of Spanish verbs are formed with the appropriate tense of *estar* 'to be' and the gerund: *estoy hablando* 'I'm talking', *estaban comiendo* 'they were eating', *estaremos escribiendo* 'we'll be writing', etc. The forms of the gerund are discussed at 24.2.

Spanish continuous forms can appear in any tense except the *pretérito anterior* (discussed at 18.4). Spanish thus differs from French, which has no continuous verb forms, and Italian, which uses the continuous only in the present and imperfect tenses.

The Spanish continuous is becoming increasingly common, which may reflect the influence of English. The Academy's *Esbozo* . . . , 3.12.5, complains about the modern over-use of the continuous. One unnecessary Anglicism is found in letters in sentences like *le estamos abonando en su cuenta la cantidad de dos mil pesos* 'we are depositing in your account the sum of 2,000 pesos' (for *le abonamos* . . .) or *en este paquete te estoy mandando los libros que me pediste* 'I'm sending the books you asked me for in this parcel' (for *te mando* . . . Examples from NGLE 28.12s).

**(1) Important:** the verb *estar* is itself never used in the continuous form: *\*está estando* is not Spanish. *Está siendo* is however possible: see 19.4.

### 19.1.2 The Spanish continuous and the English progressive compared

English speakers tend to assume that Spanish continuous forms, e.g. *estoy leyendo, estaban hablando*, etc. are the equivalent of the much-used English progressive verb forms like. 'I'm reading', 'they were talking'. However, there are several important differences:

(a) the present and imperfect tenses of the Spanish continuous refer to actions that are or were actually in progress (i.e. have or had already begun) or are or were being repeated, whereas the English progressive is constantly also used as a future tense and also, sometimes, to express habits:

*Estoy comiendo*  
*Estabas hablando*

I'm (actually) eating (right now)  
You were (in the middle of) talking

But

*Llegamos mañana*  
*Si te pones así, me voy*  
*Mi hijo va a un colegio mixto*

*Te envío esta carta para decirte que . . .*

*Se casan* (*se están casando* suggests they  
 are in mid-ceremony)  
*Yo salía a la mañana siguiente para París*

*Hoy el Barça juega en casa*

**We're arriving** tomorrow (future)  
 If you get like that, **I'm going** (future)  
 My son **is going** to a mixed (i.e. co-  
 educational) school (habitual)  
**I'm sending** you this letter to tell you that . . .  
 (really means 'I'm about to send')  
**They're getting** married (i.e. they are  
 going to get married)  
**I was leaving** the following morning  
 for Paris (future in the past)  
 Today Barcelona **is/are playing** at  
 home (*está jugando* possible if the  
 game has begun)

See 19.5b for exceptions to this rule in the spoken Spanish of some Latin-American regions.

(b) The Spanish continuous is rarely used with the common verbs *ir*, *venir*, *volver* (but see 19.5a for exceptions in parts of Latin America):

*¿Adónde vas?*  
*Viene la policía*  
*Yo volvía cuando te vi*  
*Ya voy* (see note 1)

Where are you going?  
 The police are coming  
 I was coming back when I saw you  
 I'm coming (see note 1)

(c) The Spanish continuous adds a nuance to, but does not always radically alter the meaning of the non-continuous verb form, so the two are sometimes virtually interchangeable. This tends to confuse English speakers, who sense a clear difference between 'she smokes' and 'she's smoking':

*¡Que se queman/se están quemando las*  
*salchichas!*  
*Yo hablaba con Mario*  
*Yo estaba hablando con Mario*  
 —*¿Qué haces?* —*Leo esta revista* (SV, Ch.,  
 dialogue; or —*¿Qué estás haciendo?*  
 —*Estoy leyendo . . .*)  
*No te conocía, ¿qué te pasa? Hablas raro*  
 (CMG, Sp., dialogue)  
*No sé qué te pasa por la mente, Carlitos. No sé*  
*en qué piensas* (MS, Mex., dialogue)  
*El otro hombre está sentado en un sillón. Fuma*  
 (El País, Sp.)

The sausages are burning!  
 I was talking to Mario/I used to talk  
 to Mario  
 I was talking to Mario (but not 'I used to . . .')  
 'What are you doing?' 'I'm reading  
 this magazine.'  
 I didn't recognize you. What's the  
 matter with you? You're talking strangely  
 I don't know what's going through your,  
 mind, Carlitos. I don't know what you're  
 thinking about  
 The other man is seated/is sitting in an  
 armchair. He is smoking

As the NGLE 28.12g points out, in spoken Spanish the continuous form is nowadays preferred when the action is already in progress. Thus *no me molestes*, *estoy trabajando* is more usual than . . . *trabajo* 'don't bother me. I'm working'.

(d) A number of common Spanish verbs do not appear in the continuous form, whereas their English counterparts do. See 19.3 for discussion.



(1) One says *voy* or *ya voy* for 'I'm coming' (in answer to the question 'where are you?') because one is leaving the place one is at, not coming towards it. English uses 'go' and 'come' vaguely, cf. 'are you coming/going to Sally's party?' Spanish clearly distinguishes between *venir* 'to come' and *ir* 'to go'.

### 19.1.3 Further remarks on the relationship between the simple present tense and the present continuous

The simple present tense, *escribo*, *hago*, etc., is imprecise: it may indicate present, future, habitual events, eternal truths or even past events (see 17.3 and 17.6.3). Present continuous forms are much more specifically present: compare *fuma* '(s)he smokes' or '(s)he's smoking' and *está fumando* '(s)he's (actually) smoking (now)'.

An action must be perceived to have started for the continuous to be possible. Spanish informants said *está lloviendo* on seeing rain through a window, and thought that *llueve*, in this case, sounded vaguely poetic or archaic. But most avoided the continuous in the sentences *asómate a ver si llueve* 'look out and see if it's raining' and *¿llueve o no llueve?* 'is it raining or not?', the reason apparently being that the speaker has not seen or heard rain falling (in this and several other cases, Latin-American informants tended to use the continuous more readily). Similarly, when someone up a tree shouts in English 'I'm falling!', (s)he literally means 'I'm going to fall', not 'I'm already in mid-air', so a Spanish speaker shouts *¡que me caigo!*, not *\*¡que me estoy cayendo!*

(1) With some verbs that refer to actions that are more or less prolonged events, e.g. *leer* 'to read', *charlar* 'to chat', *dormir* 'to sleep', or where the duration of an action is emphasized, the continuous makes better Spanish than the simple form. Most informants thought that *está leyendo* 'he's reading' was better than *lee* in reply to the question *¿qué hace Miguel?* 'what's Miguel doing?'.

(2) When an action is of very short duration, i.e. it cannot be extended, as is the case with verbs like *toser* 'to cough', *romper* 'to break', *firmar* 'to sign', *golpear* 'to hit', etc., the continuous can normally only indicate a series of repeated actions, as in English: *estaba tosiendo* '(s)he was coughing'. See 19.2.4.

## 19.2 Uses of the continuous forms

### 19.2.1 Continuous used to emphasize events in progress

The main use of the continuous forms is to emphasize that an event has or had already begun and is or was continuing at the time:

*Ahora no se puede poner—está haciendo sus cuentas* (not . . . *hace sus cuentas*)

*Estaba dándole una propina al mozo que me había subido la maleta cuando sonó el teléfono* (LSP, Ch.)

*¿No será que usted ha olvidado de qué le estoy hablando?* (CF, Mex., dialogue)

*Pero ¡si te estoy escuchando!/¡si te escucho!*

*El rostro de María sonreía. Es decir, ya no sonreía, pero había estado sonriendo un décimo de segundo antes* (ES, Arg.)

(S)he can't come to the phone now —  
(s)he's doing his/her accounts

I was (just) giving a tip to the boy  
who'd carried my bags up when  
the phone rang

It couldn't be, could it, that you've forgotten  
what I'm talking to you about?

But I *am* listening to you!

Maria's face was smiling. I mean, it  
wasn't smiling now, but it had been  
smiling a tenth of a second before

(1) In the case of the imperfect tense, the continuous and non-continuous are more or less interchangeable if they really refer to the past and the action is not habitual; i.e. *pensaba* and *estaba pensando* both mean 'I/(s)he was thinking'/'you were thinking'. See 17.5.5 for discussion.

(2) For the preterite continuous, *estuve durmiendo/pensando*, etc. See 19.2.3.

### 19.2.2 Continuous used to denote temporary or surprising events

The continuous may optionally be used to show that an action is temporary or in some way unusual or surprising:

*Vive en París, pero últimamente está  
viviendo/vive en Madrid*

*¡Qué sueño me está entrando!* (CMG, Sp.,  
dialogue)

*¿Me estás diciendo que un hombre civilizado,  
un filósofo para colmo, prefiere convertirse en  
soldado?* (JV, Mex., dialogue)

—*¿En qué estábamos pensando tú y yo  
cuando engendramos a estos seres, me  
quieres explicar?*—*le pregunta la madre  
al padre* (CRG, Sp., dialogue; or *en qué  
pensábamos*)

(S)he lives in Paris, but at the moment

(s)he's living in Madrid

I suddenly feel so sleepy!

Are you telling me that a civilized  
man, a philosopher on top of that,  
prefers to become a soldier?!

'Would you mind explaining to me what  
were we thinking of when we conceived  
these creatures?' the mother asks the father

### 19.2.3 The preterite continuous

The preterite continuous, *estuve hablando/comiendo* 'I was speaking/eating for a time' has no counterpart in English. It adds a nuance to the non-continuous preterite, i.e. that an action was prolonged over a period but is also viewed as finished. The non-continuous preterite simply states that the event happened. (For more on the use of the preterite for finite periods see 17.4.2):

*Estuve hablando dos horas con tu hermano  
Estuve andando hasta el amanecer* (SP, Sp.)  
*Aquí está el libro que me hizo perder pie . . . lo  
estuve buscando antes no sé cuánto rato*  
(CMG, Sp., dialogue)

*Acuérdense, el señor ese con el que  
estuvimos tomando nieves en el zócalo de  
Atlixco* (AM, Mex., dialogue; *nieves* =  
*helados* in Spain)

I spent two hours talking to your brother

I was walking/walked until dawn

There's the book I tripped over . . . I don't  
know how long I spent looking for it

Remember, that gentleman we had an  
ice-cream with in the main square in  
Atlixco . . .

(1) When a period is viewed as finished the action itself may still continue: *estuve leyendo durante tres horas, y después continué leyendo hasta el amanecer* 'I read for three hours and afterwards I went on reading until morning'.

(2) The preterite continuous is really only possible with verbs that refer to naturally drawn-out actions, e.g. 'think', 'talk', 'read', 'wait', 'eat', etc. Verbs that refer to instantaneous actions cannot be extended: *\*estuvo rompiendo una ventana* '(s)he was breaking a window (for a certain time)' is not possible. Instantaneous actions can, however, be repeated over a period of time: *estuvo disparando al aire durante tres minutos* '(s)he spent three minutes firing into the air'.

This tense is not used with *ser*: *fui policía durante diez años* 'I was a policeman/woman for ten years', never *\*\*estuve siendo . . .*

### 19.2.4 Continuous to express repeated events

The continuous may emphasize the idea that an event is or has been constantly recurring. In this case the event may not actually be occurring at the moment:

*Está yendo mucho al cine estos días*  
*En sus diarios siempre está hablando de la*  
*familia (JC, Sp.)*  
*Lleva años que se está yendo pero nunca acaba*  
*de irse*  
*Está haciendo frío*

*Pero está usted tomando muy seguido esas*  
*hierbas y seguido hacen daño (AM, Mex.*  
 Dialogue. See 35.3.3 note 2 for this  
 adverbial use of *seguido*)

(S)he's going to the cinema a lot these days  
 In his diaries he's always talking about the  
 family  
 (S)he's been leaving for years but  
 never gets round to going  
 It's been cold lately / The weather's  
 cold at the moment  
 But you're taking those herbs over  
 long periods, and they cause harm  
 when taken continuously

(1) In general, *ir* and *venir* are little used in the continuous form except to denote repetition: *había estado yendo y viniendo con charolas de tragos y botanas toda la tarde* (GZ, Mex.) 'he'd been coming and going with trays of drinks and snacks all afternoon and evening' (in Spain *charolas* = *bandejas*, *tragos* = *bebidas* and *botanas* = *pinchos*). Continuous forms of *ir* and *venir* are somewhat more common in Latin America. See 19.5.

(2) *Tener* is also found in the continuous to refer to repeated events: *estoy teniendo problemas con los vecinos* 'I'm having problems with the neighbours'. But the continuous is not used for single events: *tiene un problema con el vecino*, not \**está teniendo un problema con el vecino* (s)he's got a problem with the neighbour'.

### 19.2.5 Future and conditional continuous

The future continuous is used either (a) to describe events which will already have begun at a certain time in the future, or (b) to conjecture about what may actually be happening at this moment:

*Mañana a estas horas estaremos volando*  
*sobre el Pacífico*  
*¿Qué sabes tú lo que es vivir para ponerle*  
*las zapatillas a un hombre? Pruébalo dos*  
*meses y al tercero ya estarás maldiciendo*  
*tu destino (TM, Sp., dialogue)*  
*Estarán comiendo a estas horas*  
*¿Qué estará haciendo ahora el hombre en la*  
*Estación Espacial Mir? (DES, Mex.,*  
 dialogue)  
*Pero, ¿vas a estar esperándola todo el día?*

Tomorrow at this time we'll be flying  
 over the Pacific  
 What do you know about living in  
 order to put a man's slippers on?  
 Try it for two months and by the  
 third you'll be cursing your fate!  
 They'll probably be eating at this time of day  
 I wonder what the man in the Mir Space  
 Station is doing now  
 But are you going to keep on waiting  
 for her all day?!

(1) The future perfect continuous can also be used to express conjectures: *no me habrás estado esperando, ya te dije que no te preocuparas* (CMG, Sp., dialogue) 'I hope you haven't been waiting for me, I told you not to worry'.

(2) The conditional continuous is used like its English counterpart 'would be . . . -ing': *yo sabía que a esa hora estarían comiendo* 'I knew that at that time they would be eating'. It can also express conjectures or suppositions about events that may have been going on: —*¿Por qué no contestaba al*

*teléfono? —Estaría durmiendo* “‘Why wasn’t (s)he answering the phone?’” “(S)he must have been sleeping.”

## 19.3 Restrictions on the use of the continuous

(a) Continuous forms are not commonly used with certain verbs that refer to inner mental activities, e.g. *aborrecer* ‘to loathe’, *amar* ‘to love’, *odiar* ‘to hate’, *saber* ‘to know’: *odio tener que quedarme en casa* ‘I hate having to stay at home’. In this respect Spanish and English more or less coincide, but some verbs which denote inner states or ‘invisible’ actions may appear in the continuous in Spanish but not in English, e.g.

*No estaba creyendo nada de lo que ella decía* (AG, Sp., dialogue)

She didn’t believe a word she said

*Estoy viendo que vamos a acabar mal*

I can see we’re going to end badly

*Asegura que está deseando conocerte*

He insists that he wants to meet you

(ABV, Sp. dialogue)

*Aún así, todo el dolor y todo el esfuerzo está mereciendo la pena* (CORPES, Sp.)

Despite all this, all the suffering and all the effort is worthwhile

*Estoy temiendo que va a llegar tarde*

I’m afraid (s)he’s going to arrive late

The last two of these examples would be more usually expressed by simple tenses: *merece . . .*, *temo . . .*

(b) The continuous is not used to describe states rather than actions. English often allows the progressive form for states:

*Normalmente lleva corbata azul, pero hoy lleva una corbata roja*

Normally he wears a blue tie, but today he’s wearing a red tie

*Tres arañas de luces colgaban del techo*

Three chandeliers were hanging from the roof

*Lo que falta es . . .*

What’s lacking is . . .

*La luna brillaba alta, con reflejos plateados* (GZ, Mex.)

The moon was shining silver beams high in the sky

*Parece cansada* (see note 4)

She’s looking tired

*¡Qué bien huele la madreselva hoy!*

Isn’t the honeysuckle smelling good today!

(c) The continuous is not used with *estar* (\**estar estando* is not Spanish), *poder*, *haber* or, usually, at least in European and standard literary Spanish, with *ir*, *venir*, *regresar*, *volver*, *andar*, except in the frequentative sense discussed at 19.2.4. For more remarks on Latin-American usage see 19.5:

*¿Adónde vas?*

Where are you going?

*Viene ahora*

(S)he’s coming now

*Cuando volvíamos del cine (me) subí un momento a ver a la abuela*

When we were coming back from the cinema I went up to see grandmother for a moment

*Estás pesado hoy*

You’re being a pain today

(d) **Important:** verbs that describe physical posture or position, e.g. *se sienta* ‘(s)he sits down’, *se agachó* ‘(s)he crouched’, can refer only to an action, not to a state. English speakers constantly mistranslate sentences like ‘he’s sitting down’ by *está sentándose* when they almost always mean *está sentado* ‘he is seated’. See 23.4 for details.

(1) Use of the continuous with other 'mental' verbs is rare, but not impossible if the action is presented as changing or increasing, as in *te estoy queriendo cada vez más* 'I'm getting to love you more and more', *estoy sabiendo cada vez más cosas sobre ese amigo tuyo tan misterioso* 'I'm finding more and more out about that mysterious friend of yours' (from GDLE 46.3.2.1).

(2) *Doler* 'to hurt' may appear in either form, much as in English: *me duele/me está doliendo la barriga* 'my belly aches/is aching'. *La barriga* = 'belly' or 'intestines'. Prudish English speakers who call their intestines their 'stomach' (*el estómago*) cause great anatomical confusion. *Los intestinos, la tripa* or *la barriga* are not indelicate words.

(3) For the continuous of *tener* 'to have' see 19.2.4.

(4) *Parecer* 'to seem' occasionally appears in the continuous: *la situación me está pareciendo/me parece cada vez más fea* 'the situation's looking uglier and uglier to me'.

## 19.4 Continuous forms of *ser*

Some grammarians have claimed that forms like *está siendo* '(s)he/it is being' are borrowed from English, but they are not uncommon, especially in Latin America, and they occur in speech as well as in writing to judge by the dialogue of some novels. It seems unreasonable to deny to Spanish the nuance that distinguishes our 'he was good' from 'he was being good'. The Academy (NGLE 28.12m) does not object:

*Por un instante pensó que de algún modo él,  
Martín, estaba de verdad siendo necesario  
a aquel ser atormentado* (ES, Arg.)

*La convocatoria a las distintas  
manifestaciones está siendo variada*  
(*La Vanguardia*, Sp.)

*Yo no estoy siendo juzgado* (CF, Mex.,  
dialogue)

*Estás siendo muy bueno hoy*

For an instant he thought that he,  
Martin, was really being necessary  
to that tormented creature

The people attending the different  
demonstrations come from various  
sources (lit. 'the calling to the  
several demonstrations is varied')

I'm not being judged

You're being very good today

## 19.5 Latin-American uses of the continuous

Written – or at least printed – Latin-American Spanish seems to obey the same rules as European Spanish as far as the use of the continuous is concerned. However, there are numerous regional colloquial variants, and it seems, in general, that the continuous is used more extensively in Latin-American speech than in Spain.

(a) In many places, the continuous of *ir*, *venir* and other verbs of motion is heard:

—*Estamos yendo a Pato Huachana* —*dijo*  
*Lalita* (MVL1, Pe., dialogue)

*Estaba yendo a tomar un café con leche en*  
*Brosa* (ibid.)

*¿Cómo le va yendo?* (Chile, quoted Kany,  
282; Sp. *¿Cómo le va?*)

*Él está yendo a una de esas escuelas que*  
*mandé a construir cuando el oro abundaba*  
(ET, Mex., dialogue. Sp. *mandé construir*)

'We're going to Pato Huachana,' Lalita  
said

I was on my way to Brosa to have a  
white coffee

How are things with you?

He's going to one of those schools I had  
built when there was plenty of gold  
around

In Spain one would use *vamos, iba, le va, va* in these sentences, but forms like *están viniendo* ‘they’re coming’ seem to be spreading among younger people.

**(b)** In colloquial language in a number of places including Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia, the present continuous is used, as in English, to express a pre-scheduled future: *mañana estoy yendo a París* ‘tomorrow I’m going to Paris’ (= *mañana voy a París*), *nos estamos viendo* ‘see you later’/‘I’ll be seeing you’ This is not found in European or literary Latin-American Spanish.

**(1)** Kany, 282ff., reports that in the Andean region, including Chile, verbs like *poder, tener, haber* also appear in the continuous form, especially in popular styles: *estás pudiendo* = *puedes* ‘you can’, *¿está habiendo?* ‘is there any?’ (Spain *¿hay?*). This usage is not heard in standard Spanish. However, the Peninsular colloquial form *irse yendo* is worth noting: *me voy a ir yendo* (CMG, Sp., dialogue), ‘I’m on my way/I’m off/I’m out of here’.

**(2)** In colloquial Mexican, *andar* is much used instead of *estar* to form the continuous: *ando trabajando* ‘I’m working’, *¿qué andas haciendo?* ‘what are you doing?’, *no andará tomando tan temprano, ¿verdad?* (EM, Mex., dialogue, Sp. *tomando* = *bebiendo* [alcohol]) ‘surely he isn’t drinking this early, is he?’ Similar forms with *andar* are sometimes heard in popular speech in Spain, e.g. *¿qué andas haciendo?* for *¿qué estás haciendo?*, but *andar* + gerund normally means ‘to go around doing something’; see 24.8.1 for discussion and examples.

# 20 The subjunctive

This chapter discusses the following topics:

- General remarks on the Spanish subjunctive (Section 20.1)
- Words that may trigger the subjunctive in all types of clause, including words meaning ‘perhaps’ (Section 20.2)
- The subjunctive in subordinate clauses introduced by the conjunction *que* (Section 20.3)
- The subjunctive in clauses introduced by other subordinators (Section 20.4)
- Translating ‘whether . . . or’, ‘however’, ‘whatever’, ‘whoever’, ‘whichever’, ‘the more . . . the more . . .’, ‘wherever’ (Section 20.5)
- The subjunctive in relative clauses see Chapter 39
- Use of the subjunctive to make imperatives see Chapter 21
- Tense agreement: subjunctive (Section 20.8)
- The future subjunctive (Section 20.9)
- Appendix to chapter

Some topics likely to interest advanced students are treated in the Appendix to this chapter:

- The subjunctive and ‘uncertainty’, advantages of the Spanish subjunctive, regional variations in the use of the subjunctive, Subjunctive ‘contamination’ (Sections 20.10–13)

## 20.1 General remarks on the Spanish subjunctive

### 20.1.1 The difficulties posed by the Spanish subjunctive

The subjunctive is constantly used in Spanish in all styles and countries, but it is a notorious problem for English-speaking learners. The main reasons for this are:

- English speakers often see no point to the subjunctive now that it is almost obsolete in their own language. Section 20.11 lists some examples of what English loses by lacking an equivalent of the Spanish subjunctive.
- Manuals of Spanish repeatedly claim that the subjunctive has a ‘meaning’ associated with ‘doubt’ or ‘uncertainty’. This is so misleading that it is confusing to say so. Section 20.10 discusses this problem further.
- There is no single underlying rule that explains the use of the Spanish subjunctive – or if there is it is too complicated to be useful. The best approach is simply to learn when to use the subjunctive without asking ‘why?’ or ‘what does it mean?’
- The rules for the use of the Spanish subjunctive have arbitrary and disconcerting exceptions. Why, for example, do we say *quizás lleguen mañana* (subjunctive) but *a lo mejor llegan mañana* (indicative) when both mean ‘perhaps they/you will arrive tomorrow’?

### 20.1.2 Forms of the subjunctive

There are three simple, i.e. non-compound, tenses of the Spanish subjunctive: present, imperfect and future. Only the first two are in everyday use: the present, formed as explained at 16.7.5, and the imperfect, of which there are two forms, one in *-ra* and one in *-se*. The latter two forms are explained at 16.7.6 and all the forms are shown at 16.3. The relationship between the *-ra* and

*-se* forms is discussed in the next section. The future subjunctive, discussed at 20.9, is virtually obsolete.

Compound tenses of the subjunctive, e.g. *haya hablado*, *hubiera/hubiese hablado* (also mentioned at 18.2.9 and 18.5), and continuous forms of the subjunctive, e.g. *esté hablando*, *estuviera/estuviese hablando*, are also common.

### 20.1.3 The *-ra* and *-se* imperfect subjunctive forms compared

The *-ra* and *-se* forms are interchangeable when they are used as subjunctives, and the two forms are shown side by side in the unattributed examples in this book. The *-ra* form is much more frequent everywhere, is gaining ground, and in some parts of Latin America has all but replaced the *-se* form in speech, if not in writing. The *-ra* form also has a few uses with an indicative meaning that it does not share with the *-se* form. These are discussed at 18.3.2 and 18.3.3.

The *-ra* form is also used in a few set phrases: see 20.2.7.

### 20.1.4 Regional variations in the use of the subjunctive

There are a few variations, most of them colloquial or popular, in the use of the subjunctive that students may encounter on both continents. These are discussed in the Appendix to this chapter, 20.12.

## 20.2 Words that may trigger the subjunctive in all types of clause

This section deals with words that often or always trigger the subjunctive whether they appear in main clauses or subordinate clauses.

### 20.2.1 *Tal vez*, and *quizá(s)* 'perhaps', *posiblemente*, *probablemente*

With all these words, when the event referred to is happening in the present or happened in the past, use of the subjunctive is optional. The subjunctive makes the possibility of the event rather weaker:

*Tal vez fuese una discusión auténtica. Tal vez representaban una comedia en mi honor* (interview, Madrid press; both moods used)

Maybe it was a real dispute. Maybe they were putting on an act for my benefit

*Tal vez debió irse* (El País, Sp., or *debiera/debiese haberse ido*)

Perhaps he should have gone/resigned

*Tal vez tengamos algo de culpa nosotros mismos* (SV, Ch., dialogue)

Perhaps we're partly to blame ourselves

*Quizá ni siquiera entabláramos conversación* (JM, Sp.)

Perhaps we didn't even start up a conversation

*Quizá hubo momentos en los que pude ser más estricto* (La Jornada, Mex., interview)

Maybe there were moments when I could have been more strict

*Quizá algunos de los encargados de allí fueran protestantes* (ibid.)

Perhaps some of the people in charge there were Protestants

*Posiblemente quedara algo de alcohol etílico en nuestras venas humorísticas* (GGM, Col.)

Possibly there was still some ethyl alcohol left in the veins of our humour



*Probablemente en ningún momento te  
fuiste del cuarto . . .* (JC, Arg., dialogue)  
*Probablemente el mérito sea de Ada*  
(CRG, Sp., dialogue)

Probably you never left the room for a  
moment  
You can probably thank Ada for that

If the event is still in the future, the present subjunctive or the future indicative or the conditional can be used, but **not** a present or past indicative tense. English-speakers constantly say *\*quizás viene mañana* for the correct *quizás venga mañana*.

*Tal vez me lo expliques cuando te llegue la  
hora* (LS, Ch., dialogue)  
*Quizá España podrá desempeñar un papel  
particularmente activo . . .* (El País, Sp.)  
*Quizá sería la mejor solución . . .*  
*Posiblemente esta/ésta sea la camioneta más  
lujosa que hayas visto en tu vida*  
(Excélsior, Mex.)

Perhaps you'll explain it to me when  
the time's right for you  
Perhaps Spain will be able to play a  
particularly active role . . .  
Maybe it would be the best solution  
Possibly this is/may be the most luxurious  
minibus you've seen in your life

If the event *was* still in the future, only the imperfect subjunctive, pluperfect subjunctive or the conditional can be used: *quizá/tal vez vinieran/viniesen/vendrían al día siguiente* (not *\*venían*) 'perhaps they would come the following day', *tal vez habría sido un buen padre* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'maybe he'd have been a good father'.

(1) Both *quizá* and *quizás* are acceptable, but the former is more common in formal writing in Spain according to Manuel Seco. *Quizás* seems to be preferred before words beginning with a vowel, a practice recommended by *El País*. *Tal vez* (written *talvez* in Latin America) and *quizá(s)* are equally common in both continents.

(2) The conditional is common after these words to make the statement more tentative: *quizá habría que revisar asimismo estos conceptos* (AG, Sp.) 'it may also be necessary to modify these ideas', *tal vez el presidente prolongaría su periodo y tomaría medidas extremas contra los izquierdistas* (JA, Mex.) 'perhaps the president would prolong his stay in office and take extreme measures against the left-wingers'.

(3) **Important:** the subjunctive can only be used if the word meaning 'perhaps' precedes the verb it modifies: one can only say *era, tal vez, un efecto de esta política . . .* 'it was, perhaps, an effect of this policy . . .', but *tal vez era/fuera/fuese un efecto . . .*

## 20.2.2 *Acaso*

*Acaso* can mean 'perhaps' and it obeys the same rules as *quizá(s)*, but it is rather literary in this meaning: *acaso comprendía ahora el error de haberse confiado en la capacidad del mito de Perón para gobernar a una sociedad compleja* (MSQ, Arg.) 'perhaps she now understood the mistake of having relied on the ability of the Perón myth to govern a complex society', . . . *una generación que acaso no volviera a ser feliz fuera de sus retratos* (GGM, Col.) ' . . . a generation that would perhaps never again be happy outside its portraits'. It is more often found with the indicative in all styles in rhetorical, often sarcastic, questions, i.e. ones to which the speaker already knows the answer:

*¿Acaso has visto alguna vez que no  
llueva en verano?* (implies 'of  
course you haven't . . .')  
*¿Acaso no tiene quien le lave la ropa en casa?*  
(GZ, Mex., dialogue)

Have you ever known it not to  
rain in summer? (lit. 'have you  
ever seen that it didn't rain in summer?')  
Don't you have someone at home to wash  
your clothes?

<i>¿Acaso todos los paganos no odian a los huambisas? (MVLI, Pe., dialogue)</i>	Don't all the Indians (lit. 'pagans') hate the Huambisa tribe?
---	---

(1) In colloquial Mexican *a poco* . . . can mean more or less the same: *¿a poco crees que no se iban a dar cuenta?* (MC, Mex., dialogue) 'do you really think they wouldn't realize?'

### 20.2.3 *A lo mejor and de repente*

These also mean 'perhaps' but they do not take the subjunctive.

(a) *A lo mejor* is very common on both continents and is more typical of spoken language or informal writing:

<i>A lo mejor se ha quedado en casa</i>	Perhaps/Maybe (s)he's stayed at home
<i>Ni siquiera la nombró. A lo mejor se ha olvidado de ella (MVLI, Pe., dialogue)</i>	He didn't even mention her. Maybe he's forgotten her
<i>A lo mejor el loco era él (EP, Mex.)</i>	Maybe he was the lunatic

(b) *De repente* is widely used in informal Latin-American speech to mean 'perhaps' but it can also mean 'suddenly', this being its only meaning in Spain. It does not take the subjunctive: *o porque, de repente, nosotros somos los autores de esos anónimos . . . ¿Se le ha ocurrido, no?* (MVLI, Pe., dialogue) 'or because, perhaps, we're the authors of those anonymous letters . . . That thought's occurred to you, hasn't it?'

### 20.2.4 *Igual, lo mismo*

These are used to mean 'perhaps' in familiar speech in Spain, but not in writing, and they are followed by the indicative: *yo no sé lo que me espera hoy. Igual llego tarde* (CRG, Sp., dialogue) 'I don't know what's in store for me today. Maybe I'll get back late'; *llama a la puerta. Lo mismo te da una propina* 'knock on the door. Maybe he'll give you a tip'.

These words are not used in Latin America to mean 'perhaps', although the variant *igual y . . .* occurs colloquially in Mexico: *a veces cuando un lazo se estrecha de más* (Sp. *demasiado*), *en lugar de unir corta lo que amarraba. Igual y eso fue* (AM, Mex., dialogue) 'sometimes when a bond (i.e. between two people) grows too tight, instead of joining it cuts what it was holding together. Maybe that was it'.

Latin Americans may interpret *igual* as 'anyway'/'all the same' as in *también mi estómago se mueve pero igual estoy contento* (MB, Ur., dialogue) 'my stomach's churning too, but I'm happy all the same'.

### 20.2.5 Words that express a wish

These are such words as *ojalá, ya, así, quién* – the latter is a special use of the word which more usually means 'who?' They require the subjunctive.

<i>¡Ojalá nos toque la lotería!</i>	Let's hope we win the lottery!
<i>Ojalá se le queme el arroz (AA, Cu. dialogue)</i>	I hope her rice burns
<i>. . . y pensé quién fuera escritor . . . (ABE, Pe.)</i>	. . . and I thought: if only I were a writer
<i>Ya/Así fueran/fuesen como tú todas las mujeres</i>	If only all women were like you . . .
<i>Así se te pegue mi catarro! (parodies a gypsy curse)</i>	I hope you get my cold!

(1) *Que* followed by the subjunctive is a very common way of expressing a wish: *que te vaya bien* 'let's hope things go well for you', *que no vuelva a suceder* 'let's hope it doesn't happen again', *¡Que no se vaya!* —pensaba— *¡que no eche a volar!* (AM, Mex., dialogue) "'Please don't let him leave!'" I thought, "don't let him fly away!"". These are really sentences in which some main clause like *espero que* 'I hope that' or *quiero que* 'want . . .' has been omitted.

(2) *Quién* when used thus can only refer to the speaker him/herself, *quién fuera millonario* can only mean 'if only I were a millionaire'. It is followed by the imperfect or pluperfect subjunctive.

(3) In some set phrases a subjunctive on its own can express a wish: *¡viva el rey!* 'long live the King!', *¡mueran los tiranos!* 'death to tyrants!', *Dios te bendiga* 'God bless you'. For more on this see third-person imperatives, 21.6.

(4) The form *ojalá y . . .* is heard in colloquial Mexican: *ojalá y se te haga* (JGRI, Mex., dialogue, Sp. *ojalá se te haga a ti/ojalá te lo hagan a ti*) 'I hope they do it/the same to you!'

### 20.2.6 *De ahí que*

This means 'hence the fact that . . .' and it usually takes the subjunctive, although the reason for this is not obvious:

*De ahí que el Papa haya incluso presionado al nuevo Gobierno (El País, Sp.)*

*De ahí que en cada nuevo atentado sintieran que recuperaban su primitiva fuerza (MSQ, Arg.)*

This is why the Pope has even put pressure on the new Government

Hence the fact that with every new terrorist attack they felt they were regaining their original strength

But the indicative is possible: *de ahí que el costo de la que iba a ser vivienda presidencial, su aparatosa opulencia, resultaban difícilmente compatibles con la austeridad que debía evidenciar el jefe de una administración (La Jornada, Mex.)* 'hence the fact that the cost of what was to be the presidential residence and its spectacular opulence were incompatible with the austerity expected of the head of a government'.

(1) It is not clear why phrases meaning 'the fact that . . .' usually take the subjunctive when they clearly point to a concrete fact; this point is discussed further at 20.3.19.

### 20.2.7 Subjunctive in some common set phrases

(a) *O sea que* 'in other words':

*Ha dicho que tiene que trabajar, o sea que no quiere venir*

(S)he said (s)he had to work, in other words  
(s)he doesn't want to come

(b) *Que . . . sepa/que . . . recuerde:*

*Que yo recuerde es la primera vez que lo/le veo*  
*Nada que yo sepa (JMa, Sp., dialogue)*  
*Que se sepa nadie lo ha hecho antes*

As far as I remember it's the first time I've seen him  
Nothing, as far as I know  
As far as is known, no one has done it before

(c) **In a few other set phrases:**

*¡Acabáramos!*  
*Otro gallo nos cantara*

So that's what it's all about!/Now I get it!  
That would have been another story . . .

... *ni que fueras millonario*  
*¡Vaya tontería!*  
*¡Venga!* (constantly heard in Spain)

... anyone would think you're a millionaire  
 What nonsense!  
 OK/fine/right

## 20.3 The subjunctive in subordinate clauses introduced by the conjunction *que*

### 20.3.1 General

This lengthy section deals with sentences like '**it is a pity** that it rained', '**I hope** that you're feeling better', '**it's possible** that we'll get paid tomorrow', '**I told** them to do it', '**they didn't say** that they saw a UFO', where the bold type indicates the main clause and the rest is a subordinate clause.

Use of the subjunctive in the subordinate clause depends on the meaning of the main clause, as the translations show (subjunctives in bold): *es una pena que **haya** llovido, espero que te **sientas** mejor, es posible que nos **paguen** mañana, les dije que lo **hicieran/hiciesen**, no dijeron que **hubieran/hubiesen** visto un ovni.*

Note that this section does not deal with relative clauses, e.g. *este/éste es el cuadro que pintó Picasso* 'this is the picture that Picasso painted' or *buscamos un hotel que tenga piscina* 'we're looking for a hotel that has a swimming pool'. These also require the subjunctive in certain circumstances and are discussed at 39.15.

### 20.3.2 Tense agreement and the subjunctive

This is discussed in detail at 20.8. In the majority of cases the following scheme applies:

Tense of verb in main clause	Tense of subjunctive verb
Present, Perfect, Future, Imperative	Present
Conditional or any past tense	Imperfect

*Le digo/he dicho/diré que se **vaya***

I tell/have told/will tell him to go away

*Le diría/decía/dije/había dicho que se **fuera/fuese***

I would tell/was telling/told/had told him to go away

(1) The present subjunctive may refer to the present or to the future. *Espero que trabajes* can mean either 'I hope you're working' (more likely ... *que estés trabajando*) or 'I hope you'll work', *confío en que hagas un esfuerzo* means 'I trust you're making an effort' or '... will make an effort'.

(2) Note that for the purposes of agreement the perfect tense – *he hablado, han hecho* – is usually treated as a present tense: *te he dicho que te largues* (JM, Sp., dialogue) 'I told you to beat it/clear off'. See 20.8d for details.

### 20.3.3 Main clauses that state a fact or a belief, or consist of a question

The subjunctive is **not** used in the subordinate clause when:

(a) the main clause says that an event or fact is, was or will be true: *es cierto que hubo una conspiración* 'it's true that there was a conspiracy', *era obvio que lo había hecho* 'it was obvious that (s)he'd

done it', *se prevé que habrá déficit* 'a deficit is forecasted', *se queja de que está cansada* 'she complains that she's tired' (*quejarse de* is usually treated as stating a fact: see 20.3.10 note 1);

(b) when the main clause declares the subject's *belief* or *opinion* that something happened, is happening or will happen: *creo que hubo una conspiración* 'I think there was a conspiracy', *yo pensaba que él era más alto* 'I thought he was taller', *dicen que nos llamarán* 'they say they'll call us', *parece que su mujer está mejor* 'it seems that his wife is feeling better'. There are occasional exceptions to (b) discussed at 20.3.21.

(c) When the main clause is a direct or indirect question: *¿cree que es verdad?* 'do you think it's true?', *¿sabía usted que Marco es cubano?* 'did you now that Marco is Cuban?', *¿usted cree que mi vida se vendería?* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'do you think my life story would sell?'. For colloquial Latin-American exceptions to this rule see 20.12.1.

(1) **Important:** if the main clause is negative, the subordinate clause usually requires the subjunctive. See the next section.

(2) The phrase *el hecho de que* 'the fact that . . .' and others meaning the same thing usually require the subjunctive. See 20.3.19.

(3) As far as (b) is concerned, Spanish differs from Italian and resembles French. Compare *creo que es verdad* / *je crois que c'est vrai* 'I think it is true' – both verbs indicative – and Italian *credo che sia vero*, second verb subjunctive.

### 20.3.4 Negative main clauses + *que* generally require a subjunctive in the subordinate clause

**Important:** if the main clause is negated, the verb in the subordinate clause is almost always in the subjunctive: *esto no significa que ya sepan todo el uno del otro* (*La Reforma*, Mex.) 'this does not mean that they already know everything about one another'. See 20.3.15.

### 20.3.5 If the main clause means 'it is possible'/'probable that . . .', the subjunctive is required

This includes main clauses meaning 'it could happen that . . .', 'it is possible that . . .', 'the risk that . . .', 'the danger that . . .', 'it is inevitable that . . .', 'the possibility/probability/likelihood that' . . ., etc.:

*Es posible que/Puede que haya tormenta*  
*Era probable/previsible que sucediera/*  
*sucediese así*

*La sola posibilidad de que aquella muchacha*  
*no lo viese más lo desesperaba* (ES, Arg.)

*Existe el riesgo de que quienes reciben el dinero*  
*no sean capaces de resarcirlo* (JV, Mex.)

*Es inevitable que los autores . . . pierdan su*  
*capacidad creadora* (JM, Sp.)

*También puede ocurrir que Santiago prefiera*  
*tener a Graciela en una relación deteriorada*  
 (MB, Ur., dialogue)

*Está previsto que la tormenta . . . dure al*  
*menos 36 horas* (*El Periódico*, Sp.)

There may be a storm

It was probable/foreseeable that it  
 would happen that way

The mere possibility that that girl wouldn't  
 see him again filled him with despair

There is the risk that those who receive the  
 money won't be able to pay it back

It is inevitable that authors will lose  
 their creative ability

It may also be the case that Santiago  
 prefers being with (lit. 'having')  
 Graciela in a shaky relationship

The storm is predicted to last at least  
 36 hours

(1) *Pueda (ser) que* is a common Latin-American colloquial alternative for *puede que/puede ser que* 'maybe'/'it may be that': *pueda que algo te den y te mejores* (MP, Arg., dialogue) 'maybe they'll give you something and you'll get better'. The NGLE 24.11 prefers *puede (ser) que*.

(2) See 20.12.4 for the colloquial Latin-American use of the indicative in the subordinate clause in the above sentences. See also 20.12.4 for the colloquial Latin-American *capaz que* 'it is possible that . . .', not used in Spain.

### 20.3.6 Main clause contains a verb or phrase meaning 'depends on'/'relies on'

Main clauses + *que* that mean 'to depend on . . .' require the subjunctive

*Yo dependo de que me devuelvan  
el dinero a tiempo*

I'm depending on them giving me the  
money back in time

*De las mujeres depende que se coma  
en el mundo* (AM, Mex., dialogue)

It's women who ensure that people eat  
in this world (lit. 'that one eats in  
this world depends on women')

*Miguel contaba con que lo/le  
llamaran/llamasen aquella noche*

Miguel was counting on them calling  
him that night

### 20.3.7 Main clause means 'want', 'permit', 'forbid', 'allow', 'order', etc. + *que*

This covers a vast range of sentences. If the basic meaning of the main clause is some phrase that means wanting, ordering, needing, causing, allowing, advising, persuading, encouraging, ensuring that . . . followed by *que*, the subjunctive is required in the subordinate clause: *yo quiero que Simón lo haga* 'I want Simón to do it', *aconsejaban que el comité lo rechazara/rechazase* 'they advised the committee to reject it'. Examples:

*Organicé que todas nos vistiéramos como ellas*  
(AM, Mex., dialogue)

I arranged it so that all of us women  
dressed like them

*Me salvé de puro milagro de que los ladrones  
me mataran/matasen*

By a sheer miracle I avoided being  
killed by the thieves

*No puedes pretender que cambien las cosas*  
(JA, Sp., dialogue)

You can't expect things to change

*El primer paso, le dijo, era lograr que  
ella se diera cuenta de su interés*  
(GGM, Col., dialogue)

The first thing to do, she said to him,  
was to get her to notice his interest

*Hay que evitar que ellos se enteren*  
*Es necesario/im prescindible que lo reciban*  
*para mañana*

We have to avoid them finding out  
It is necessary/essential that they  
receive it by tomorrow

*Asegúrate de que antes de verme haya  
ido a misa* (EM, Mex., dialogue)

Make sure that he's been to Mass before he  
sees me

The following are more examples of verbs that require the subjunctive (except in the circumstances described in note 1):

*causar que* to cause  
*conseguir que* to succeed in  
*contribuir a que* to contribute to

*cuidar de que* to take care that  
*dar lugar a que* to give rise to  
*decir que* to tell someone to (see note 3)

*desear que* to want  
*dificultar que* to hinder  
*esforzarse porque* to make an effort to  
*evitar / impedir que* to avoid  
*exigir que* to require that  
*hacer que* to make/cause to  
*hacer falta que* to be necessary that  
*insistir / empeñarse en que* to insist on  
*necesitar que* to need to  
*ocasionar que* to cause/give rise to  
*oponerse a que* to be against  
*pedir que* to ask/request that (but see 20.3.9)

*preferir que* to prefer that  
*pretender que* to aim for/to aspire to  
*procurar que* to try to  
*querer que* to want  
*rogar que* to request that  
*salvar de que* to rescue/save from  
*ser necesario que* to be necessary that  
*suplicar que* to implore to  
*tratar de que* to try to ensure that  
*vigilar que* to make sure that  
*luchar por que* to struggle to

(1) **Important:** when the subjects in the main and the subordinate clause refer to the same person or thing, the infinitive is used: *Teresa quiere hacerlo* 'Teresa wants to do it', *pretendía hablar chino* '(s)he claimed (s)he spoke Chinese'. However, some verbs, especially verbs of permitting and prohibiting, can optionally be used with an infinitive even when the subjects are different. This possibility is discussed in 20.3.8c.

(2) There are many alternative ways of expressing the ideas associated with these verbs, e.g. by using adjectives, as in *es necesario / deseable que . . .* 'it's necessary / desirable that . . .' or nouns, as in *la petición / obligación de que . . .* 'the request / obligation that . . .', *la causa / el origen de que* 'the cause of . . .'. These also require the subjunctive when they are followed by the conjunction *que*, e.g. *su insistencia en que contestaran / contestasen en seguida* 'his/her insistence on them replying immediately', *soy partidario de que lo publiquen* 'I support them publishing it', *el anhelo de que Dios exista* 'the longing for God to exist', *la necesidad de que las fuerzas armadas se profesionalizaran* (JA, Mex.) 'the need for the armed forces to be professionalized'. See 37.4.2 for the use of *de que* after most of these noun phrases.

(3) Some verbs may or may not require the subjunctive according to their meaning. They take the subjunctive only when an order or wish is implied: *decidió que lo firmaran / firmasen* '(s)he decided that they should sign it', *decidió que lo habían firmado* '(s)he decided (i.e. 'came to the conclusion') that they had signed it', *dijo que se terminara / terminase* '(s)he said (ordered) that it should be finished', *dijo que se había terminado* '(s)he said (i.e. 'announced') that it was finished', *establecer que* 'to stipulate that' (subjunctive) / 'to establish the truth that' (indicative), *pretender que* 'to try to' / 'to aim at' / 'wish that' (subjunctive) / 'to claim that' (indicative), *escribir* 'to write that' (indicative) / 'to write instructing that' (subjunctive), *insistir en que* 'to insist that', as in *insisto en que es la verdad* (indicative) 'I insist that it is the truth', but *insisto en que usted me diga la verdad* 'I insist on you telling me the truth', *se me ocurrió que era él* 'it occurred to me that it was him', *se me ocurrió que me pagaran / pagasen por ello* 'it occurred to me that they should pay me for it' (wish).

(4) The remarks in the preceding note also apply to noun phrases that mean 'want', 'allow', etc. Compare *la idea de que la tierra giraba alrededor del sol* 'the idea that the Earth revolved round the Sun' (statement of fact: indicative) and *la idea era que las chicas ayudasen / ayudaran a los chicos* 'the idea was that the girls **should** help the boys' (intention or wish: subjunctive. Compare *la idea era que las chicas ayudaban . . .* 'the idea was that the girls **were** helping . . .'; statement of fact).

(5) Statements of 'hope' are discussed at 20.3.23.

(6) For the subjunctive with *pedir* 'to ask for' see 20.3.9.

(7) *Decir de* + infinitive is not standard Spanish: *\*le dije de hacerlo* should be *le dije que lo hiciera / hiciese* 'I told him/her/you to do it', a fact that students of French should bear in mind (cf. *je lui ai dit de le faire*). However, *decir de* + infinitive with the meaning 'to tell someone to . . .' occurs in

popular speech on both continents and is apparently spreading although it is not yet accepted in careful styles.

### 20.3.8 Use of the infinitive with phrases meaning 'want', 'permit', 'forbid', 'oblige', etc.

Some of the verbs listed under 20.3.7, and certain other verbs not mentioned so far, may appear with the infinitive, thus avoiding the subjunctive (for *pedir* and similar verbs of requesting, see 20.3.9). This occurs:

(a) As we stated in 20.3.7 note 1, when the subject of the main clause and the subject of the subordinate clause refer to the same person or thing: *quiero hacerlo* 'I want to do it' but *quiero que tú lo hagas* 'I want you to do it'. *Sólo así evitarían aumentar impuestos* (JA, Mex.) 'only in this way would they avoid raising taxes' (the subject of *evitarían* and *aumentar* is 'they')

(b) In impersonal constructions (i.e. when there is no identifiable subject):

*Hacía falta conseguir más gasolina*  
*Se exigía presentar los documentos*

It was necessary to get more petrol/US gas  
The documents were required to be  
presented

*Eso evita pensar en lo que dejaste afuera*  
(APR, Sp., dialogue)

That avoids one having to think about  
what you left out

(c) With certain verbs, even when they are not impersonal and have different subjects. These are verbs that can be constructed with an indirect object, as in *te ayudaré a conseguir / a que consigas lo que quieres* 'I'll help you to get what you want'. The most common of these verbs are:

*acostumbrar a* to accustom to  
*animar a* to encourage to  
*autorizar a* to authorize to  
*ayudar a* to help to  
*condenar a* to condemn to  
*conducir a* to lead to  
*conseguir a* to manage to  
*contribuir a* to contribute to  
*convidar a* to invite to  
*dejar a* to let/allow

*desafiar a* to challenge to  
*enseñar a* to teach to  
*forzar a* to force to  
*hacer a* to make (i.e. cause to)  
*impedir a* to prevent  
*impulsar a* to impel to  
*incitar a* to encourage to  
*inducir a* to persuade to  
*instar a* to urge to  
*invitar a* to invite to

*llevar a* to lead to  
*mandar a* to send to do  
*mandar a* to order  
*obligar a* to oblige to  
*ordenar a* to order  
*permitir a* to allow/to permit  
*prohibir a* to forbid  
*retar a* to challenge to  
*tentar a* to tempt to

#### Examples

*Le acostumbré/animé/autorice/ayudé a hacerlo/a que lo hiciera/hiciese*  
*Le condené/desafíe/enseñé/forcé/impulsé/incité a hacerlo/a que lo hiciese/hiciera*  
*Le induje/invité/mandé/obligué/reté/tenté a hacerlo/a que lo hiciera/hiciese*  
*Le dejó/hizo hacerlo/que lo hiciera/hiciese*  
*Le impidió hacerlo/que lo hiciese/hiciera*  
*Le mandó/permitió/prohibió hacerlo/que lo hiciera/hiciese*  
Cf. *le mandé a hacerlo/a que lo hiciera/hiciese*  
*Déjanos a los hombres conversar en paz*  
(MVLL, Pe., dialogue)

I accustomed/encouraged/allowed/helped him/her to do it  
I condemned/challenged/taught/forced/impelled/incited him/her to do it  
I induced/invited/sent/obliged/challenged/tempted him/her to do it  
(S)he let/made him/her do it  
(S)he prevented him/her from doing it  
(S)he ordered/allowed/prohibited him/her from doing it  
I sent him/her to do it  
Leave us men to talk in peace



*La dosis de vanidad que todos tenemos dentro hizo que me sintiera el hombre más orgulloso de la Tierra* (Che Guevara, in *Granma*, Cu.)

The dose of vanity that we all have within us made me feel the proudest man on Earth

*Hagámosle creer que nos costó un gran esfuerzo* (ES, Mex., dialogue)

Let's make him believe it cost us a big effort

*Irala me convidó a acompañarla* (JLB, Arg., dialogue; or *a que la acompañara*)

Irala invited me to accompany her

*Había ordenado retirarse a todas sus sirvientas* (AG, Sp., or . . . *a todas sus sirvientas que se retirasen/retiraran*)

She had ordered all her ladies-in-waiting to withdraw

(1) Some verbs are in a transitional state. The older construction with the subjunctive is probably safer for foreigners, but the infinitive construction is often heard and is seen in written language:

*aconsejar* to advise  
*obstaculizar* to hinder

*pedir* to ask (but see 20.3.9)  
*proponer* to propose

*recomendar* to recommend  
*sugerir* to suggest

*Te propuse hacerlo/que lo hiciéramos/hiciésemos*

I suggested to you that we should do it

*Te confieso que te propuse fugarnos* (ABE, Pe., dialogue)

I admit that I suggested to you that we should elope

*Octavia, a quien una vez le sugerí pasar a la otra parte* (ibid.)

Octavia, to whom I once suggested that she should go over to the other side

*Incluso las radioemisoras aconsejaron con insistencia a los capitalinos abstenerse de salir* (La Jornada, Mex.)

Even the radio stations strongly advised residents of the capital to avoid going out

(2) Some of the verbs listed in this section can appear without a direct object in their main clause whereas English requires a dummy object like 'one' or 'people': *un delgado vestido que impedía llevar nada bajo él/. . . que se llevara/llevase nada debajo de él* 'a thin dress that prevented **one** from wearing anything underneath it', *esto permite pensar que . . .* 'this allows **one** to think that'.

(3) When the object is non-living and the subject is human the subjunctive should be used. One can say *la hiciste reír* 'you made her laugh', but not *\*se puede hacer un ordenador solucionar ese problema* for . . . *hacer que un ordenador solucione ese problema* 'one can get a computer to solve that problem' (impersonal *se* counts as a human subject); *el experto técnico puede hacer que el acompañamiento se oiga menos* 'the technical expert can make the backing sound less loud' but not *\*. . . puede hacer al acompañamiento oírse menos*.

(4) When both subject and object are non-living it seems that either construction is possible, although the safe option is the subjunctive: *el embalse permite que las aguas del río alcancen unos niveles adecuados* (possibly . . . *permite a las aguas alcanzar . . .*) 'the dam allows the water of the river to reach suitable levels', . . . *vientos flojos que harán bajar las temperaturas* (Radio Nacional de España) ' . . . light winds that will cause temperatures to fall'.

### 20.3.9 Use of the infinitive or subjunctive with *pedir* and verbs of similar meaning

*Pedir* and other verbs of similar meaning, e.g. *rogar* 'to request', seem to be in a transitional state with respect to the use of the infinitive.

They are used with an infinitive when the subjects are identical: *pidió hablar con el director* '(s)he asked to speak to the director', *pidió verme a las seis* '(s)he asked to see me at six o'clock'.

They normally require *que* and the subjunctive when the subjects are different, as do other verbs of requesting: *pidió/suplicó/rogó que contestaran/contestasen cuanto antes* '(s)he asked/implored/requested them to answer as soon as possible', *pidió al reportero que tuviera la gentileza de llamar a un colega mexicano* (ES, Mex.) 'she asked the reporter [Sp. *periodista*] if he would kindly call a Mexican colleague'.

However, when the subject of the main verb is impersonal *se*, the infinitive is found in public notices of the type *se ruega a los residentes no llevar las toallas a la piscina* 'residents are requested not to take the towels to the swimming pool'.

In other cases, use of the infinitive when the subjects are different is not usually accepted in standard language in Spain, but it is found in Latin America: *yo sé que pidió a los muchachos no abrir la boca* (DT, Mex., dialogue) 'I know he asked the boys not to open their mouths', *le pidió dejarlo solo con los varones* (GGM, Col.) 'he asked her to leave him alone with the men' (normally *le pidió que lo dejara/dejase solo*); *pidió a la sociedad denunciar a quienes hagan dichas peticiones* (La Jornada, Mex.) 'he asked society to report anyone making such requests [for money]'.

Nevertheless, the infinitive construction is increasingly common in Spain in journalistic styles, especially headlines, e.g. *Amnistía Internacional pide al gobierno español presionar* (for *que presione*) *a Chile* (El País, Sp.) 'Amnesty International asks Spanish government to pressure Chile'. Moreover, sentences like *me pidió salir con él* 'he asked me to go out with him' (for *que saliera/saliese*), *nos pidieron ir con ellos al cine* 'they asked us to go with them to the cinema' (for *que fuéramos/fuéssemos*) are nowadays common in the speech of young Spaniards and seem to be spreading.

### 20.3.10 Main clauses that express emotional reactions or value judgements require the subjunctive in the subordinate clause

In standard Spanish, the subjunctive is used in sentences of the pattern emotional reaction or value judgement + *que* + subordinate verb. 'Emotional reaction' and 'value judgement' cover a vast range of possibilities including regret, pleasure, displeasure, blaming, praise, criticism, surprise, understanding, toleration, agreement, excuse, rejection, justification, statements of sufficiency, insufficiency and importance, etc. Examples:

*Es natural que esté alterada*  
*Que te protejan no está mal*  
(ABV, Sp., dialogue)

It's natural for her to be upset  
It's not a bad thing that they protect you

*No aguanto que me hablen de esa manera*  
*Basta que te ofrezcan mucho dinero para que*  
*de repente no sepas ni para qué sirve*

I can't stand them talking to me like that  
You only need to be offered a lot of  
money to suddenly realize that you  
don't even know what use it is

*Estoy hasta el moño de que tengamos que ser*  
*siempre nosotras las que debemos recoger*  
*la mesa* (CRG, Sp.)

I'm sick to death that it's always us  
women who have to clear the table

*Andrés era el culpable de que me pasaran*  
*todas esas cosas* (AM, Mex., dialogue)  
*Que la locomotora arrancara emocionó a*  
*Lorenzo* (EP, Mex.)

It was Andrés's fault that all these  
things were happening to me  
Lorenzo was excited by the locomotive  
starting up

*Yo sentía mucho que pensaras/pensases eso*  
*Están de acuerdo en que los militares*  
*entreguen sus armas*

I was really sorry you thought that  
They agree that the troops should hand in  
their weapons

**(1) Important:** one must differentiate between value judgements and statements of fact like *es verdad* *que* 'it's true that', *es obvio/evidente que* 'it's obvious that', *es indiscutible que* 'it is beyond

dispute that', *afirma/pretende que* . . . '(s)he claims that . . .'. The latter require the indicative when they are not negated, even though the distinction may not always be obvious to English speakers, especially when they notice that *ser natural que* 'to be natural that' takes the subjunctive whereas *quejarse de que* 'to complain that' usually takes the indicative. For negative statements like 'it is *not* true that . . .', which require the subjunctive, see 20.3.15.

(2) Some impersonal forms of verbs denoting value judgements or emotional reactions require the infinitive when their *indirect* object and the subject of the following verb are the same, as in *¿te importa hacer menos ruido?* 'do you mind making less noise' or *nos gusta comer mejillones* 'we like eating mussels'. Similar verbs are: *afligir* 'to afflict', *agobiar* 'to oppress/overwhelm', *agradecer* 'to thank for', *alarmar* 'to alarm', *alegrar* 'to cheer up', *apetecer* as in *me apetece hacerlo* 'I feel like doing it', *bastar* as in *te basta con decir gracias* 'all you have to do is say thanks', *conmover* 'to move' (emotionally), *convenir* as in *me conviene hacerlo mañana* 'it suits me to do it tomorrow', *costar* 'to be hard work', *disgustar* 'to displease', *doler* 'to hurt', *fastidiar* 'to annoy', *interesar* 'to be of interest' / 'to be advantageous', *preocupar* 'to worry', *sorprender* 'to surprise', etc.

(3) Most other verbs take the infinitive when the subjects refer to the same person or thing, as in (yo) *odio hablar en público* 'I hate speaking in public'. Similar are: *aceptar* 'to accept', *avenirse a* 'to agree to', *conformarse con* 'to agree with/accept', *consentir en* 'to consent to', *contentarse con* 'to be content to', *deplorar* 'to deplore', *lamentar* 'to lament', *resignarse a* 'to be resigned to', *soportar/aguantar* 'to put up with', etc. (based on GDLE 36.3.2.3).

A fuller list of infinitive constructions appears at 22.2.2.

(4) Note the different meanings of *sentir*: *siento que se me ha dormido el brazo* 'I feel that my arm has gone to sleep' (physical sensation), *siento que se te haya dormido el brazo* 'I'm sorry your arm's gone to sleep' (emotional reaction).

(5) *Menos mal que* 'it's a good thing that', takes the indicative even though it is obviously a value judgement: *menos mal que estaba presente la mujer de Maximino* (RC, Sp., dialogue) 'it's a good thing Maximino's wife was there', *menos mal que tú y yo estábamos acostumbradas a la niebla* (SG, Mex., dialogue) 'it's a good thing the two of us were used to the fog'.

*Qué bien que* and *qué bueno que* take the subjunctive in Spain: *qué bien que haya venido Tito* 'it's great/good news that Tito's come'. In Latin America, they may appear with the indicative: *qué bueno que está bien* (EM., Mex., dialogue) 'it's great that he's okay'.

(6) The form *mejor* . . . 'it would be best that . . .' is also followed by the indicative. This abbreviation of *sería mejor que* is very common in Latin America but it is also heard in colloquial language in Spain: *mejor lo dejamos para más tarde* 'we'd better leave it until later', *¿le cuento lo de los otros tres novios o mejor lo dejamos ahí?* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'should I tell you about the other three boyfriends or would it be better to leave it there?' Compare *sería mejor que lo dejáramos/dejásemos para más tarde* 'it would be better if we left it until later', (es) *mejor que lo dejemos* 'best we leave it until later'.

(7) English speakers should beware of over-using *si* 'if' in sentences involving a value judgement: *sería maravilloso que/si no hubiera/hubiese hambre en el mundo* 'it would be wonderful if there were no hunger in the world'.

(8) **Important:** the subjunctive is still required when the main clause is deleted: . . . *pero que él diga eso* . . . (some phrase like *es increíble que* . . . having been deleted from the sentence) ' . . . that he should say *that!*' / ' . . . that he should have the nerve to say *that!*'

### 20.3.11 Some unexpected exceptions to the rule stated in the previous section

In spontaneous language in Latin America, and to a lesser extent in Spain, an emotional reaction or value judgement referring to a past, present or habitual event may take the indicative in the subordinate clause. Some speakers accept *me alegra/molesta que estás aquí* 'I'm glad/annoyed you're here', other speakers require . . . *estés aquí*. This tendency to use the indicative is rather stronger with verbs followed by *de que*: see 20.3.12.

The indicative is sometimes seen in writing in Latin America, especially in Argentina. Examples:

*El innegable genio de Joyce era puramente verbal; lástima que lo **gastó** en la novela* (JLB, Arg.)

Joyce's undeniable genius was purely verbal; a pity that he wasted it on the novel

*Es curioso que uno no **puede** estar sin encariñarse con algo* (MP, Arg., dialogue)

It's strange that one can't manage (lit. 'can't be') without getting fond of something

*Me da lástima que **terminó*** (ibid., dialogue)

I'm sorry it's ended

*Me parece raro que este hombre **baja y dice** "Mire . . ."* (Ven., quoted DeMello, 1996, (2), 367)

It seems strange to me that this man gets out and says 'Look . . .'

(1) DeMello's (1996, 2) study of recordings from Hispanic capital cities suggests that colloquial Spanish tends to distinguish between value judgements accompanied by emotional reactions (subjunctive) and value judgements that simply inform the speaker of a fact (indicative). But he notes that whereas the indicative was found in 57 per cent of Latin-American sentences involving value judgements, it occurred in only 36 per cent in Spain. Literary language strongly prefers the subjunctive after all value judgements + *que*.

### 20.3.12 Emotions and value judgements followed by *de que*

We said at 20.3.10 that the subjunctive is used with expressions of emotion and value judgements + *que*. But when the verb is followed by *de que* the indicative mood is sometimes heard in relaxed speech when the verb is in the present or past. This tendency should probably not be imitated by foreign students:

*Me alegré de que (pensaban)/pensaran pensasen hacerlo*

I was glad that they intended to do it

*Se indignaba de que sus suegros (creían)/creyeran/creyesen en la pena de muerte*

(S)he was outraged that his/her in-laws believed in the death penalty

*Se asombra de que todo el mundo tiene un ticket* (quoted DeMello, 1996 (2), 367. Madrid speech)

(S)he's surprised everyone's got a ticket

(1) As mentioned earlier, *quejarse de que* 'to complain that . . .' seems to foreign learners to be an emotional reaction, but it is followed by the indicative: *se queja de que Berta la hace quedarse a dormir la siesta* (MP, Arg., dialogue) 'she complains about Berta making her stay in to sleep in the afternoon', *siempre se quejaba de que debía ir a misa y confesarse* (EM, Mex., dialogue) 'he was always complaining that he had to go to Mass and confess'.

### 20.3.13 *Lamentar que, protestar de que, sentir que* and other verbs whose meaning changes when a following verb is in the subjunctive

*Lamentar que* 'to regret the fact that' takes the subjunctive. *Lamentarse de que* 'to lament/regret the fact that . . .' takes the subjunctive when it expresses an emotional reaction and the indicative when it merely makes a statement: compare *lamento que se haya tomado molestias* (JM, Sp., dialogue) 'I'm sorry that you've been bothered' and *renunció el 5 de enero de 1853, lamentándose de que entre nosotros los males sociales son orgánicos* (*Historia general de México*, Mex.) 'he resigned on 5 January 1853, regretting (the fact that) that social evils are deep-rooted among us'.

*Protestar de que* 'to protest that' takes either mood: *protestaba de que el gobierno había/hubiera/hubiese subido los impuestos* '(s)he was protesting at/lamenting the fact that the Government had raised taxes'. For *sentir que* see 20.3.10 note 4.

(1) Other verbs of variable meaning are:

	with indicative	with subjunctive
<i>comprobar que</i>	to note that	to make sure that
<i>denunciar que</i>	to report (e.g. to police) that	to denounce the fact that
<i>garantizar que</i>	to guarantee that	to ensure that
<i>soñar que</i>	to dream (while asleep) that	to dream (i.e. yearn) that
<i>ver que</i>	to see/observe that	to see to it that
<i>verificar que</i>	to note/confirm that	to check/make sure that

See 20.3.22 for *comprender que, entender que, explicar que, aceptar que*

### 20.3.14 *Lo + emotional reactions + que*

If a value judgement is expressed by a phrase involving the 'neuter article' *lo*, the rule for the use of the subjunctive is as follows:

(a) *Lo lógico es que . . ./lo normal es que . . ./lo habitual/corriente es que . . .* are followed by a subjunctive:

<i>Lo lógico/lo normal/lo habitual es que no venga</i>	The logical thing/the normal thing is that he doesn't come
<i>En nuestro país, lo habitual es que en todo asunto en que una persona pobre reclama de algún abuso . . . termine con problemas mayores que aquellos por los cuales reclama</i> (La Época, Ch.)	In our country, it's usual that in any matter in which a poor person complains about some abuse, they end up with worse problems than the ones they are complaining about

(b) *Lo peor es que/lo mejor es que . . ./lo malo es que . . ./lo terrible es que . . ./lo molesto es que . . .*, etc., can be problematic for English speakers. They are followed by the subjunctive when they clearly express an emotional reaction or value judgement, especially about some future event:

<i>Lo peor será/es que no venga nadie</i>	The worst thing will be if no one comes
<i>Lo malo sería que no terminaran/terminasen el trabajo a tiempo</i>	The problem would be if they didn't finish the work on time
<i>Lo más provocante de la ley es que provoque una reacción violenta del gobierno cubano</i> (La Jornada, Mex.)	The most provocative thing about the law is that it may produce a violent reaction from the Cuban government

But they take the indicative when they refer to some present or past fact:

*Lo peor fue que no vino nadie*  
*Lo que me indigna es que la sociedad todavía*  
*condena los amores o amoríos entre una*  
*señora madura y un jovencito (CRG, Sp.)*

The worst thing was that no one came  
 What makes me mad is that society  
 still condemns romances or love  
 affairs between a mature woman  
 and a young man

*Lo que más me sorprendió . . . fue que . . . se*  
*habían detenido y vuelto (JM, Sp.)*

What surprised me most was that they  
 had stopped and turned round

*Lo malo es que soñé nuevamente con Emilio*  
 (MB, Ur., dialogue)

The worst is that I dreamt of Emilio  
 again

*Lo que me extraña es que no me di cuenta*  
 (GZ, Mex., dialogue)

What puzzles me is that I didn't realize

(1) English speakers usually fail to see the difference between the indicative and the subjunctive in the examples listed above under (b). Compare *lo malo es que tenemos el examen a las cuatro* 'the worst thing is that we've got the exam at four o'clock' (statement of fact) and *lo malo es que tengamos el examen a las cuatro* (expresses an emotional reaction and means something like 'unfortunately we've got the exam at four o'clock', or 'we've got the exam at four, worst luck').

(2) Spanish-speakers who will not accept sentences like *?es curioso que dices eso* 'it's odd that you should say that' (for *digas*) will often accept *lo curioso es que dices eso*.

### 20.3.15 When the main clause denies something the subordinate verb is in the subjunctive

Examples:

*No creo que sea posible*  
*Mayta negó que hubiera intervenido en el*  
*rapto (MVLL, Pe., dialogue); or hubiese*  
*Yo no he dicho que seas una histérica*  
 (CRG, Sp., dialogue)

I don't think it's possible  
 Mayta denied he was involved in the  
 kidnapping  
 I didn't say you were a hysteric

*Esto no significa que haya que esperar un*  
*cambio radical de actitud (JC, Arg.)*

This doesn't mean that one must  
 expect a radical change of attitude

*No ocurre/sucede que haya eclipse todos*  
*los días*

It doesn't happen that there's an  
 eclipse every day

*No se trata de que tengas que quedarte todos*  
*los días hasta las nueve de la noche*

It's not a question of your having to  
 stay till nine p.m. every day

*Pero eso no indica que se vaya a dar una crisis*  
 (Excelsior, Mex.)

But that doesn't show that there is going to  
 be a crisis

*No es verdad que existan las hadas*

It isn't true that fairies exist

(1) Statements containing imperatives like 'don't think that', 'don't believe that' usually take the indicative: *no digas que es verdad* 'don't say that it's true', *no creas que esto es lo único que hacemos* 'don't think that this is the only thing we do' (AM, Mex., dialogue).

(2) The subjunctive is sometimes optional after negated verbs of knowing or believing, depending on the degree of uncertainty involved. If one knows for a fact that X is a thief, one says *no confesaba que había robado el dinero* '(s)he didn't confess to stealing the money'. If X may be innocent one says *no confesaba que hubiese/hubiera robado el dinero*. For this reason, negated statements of observable truths, e.g. *yo no sabía que la puerta estaba abierta* 'I didn't know the door was open'

(it was) are more likely to take the indicative although *estuviera/estuviese* is also correct. Negated opinions, e.g. *no creo que sea muy útil* 'I don't think it's very useful', are almost certain to take the subjunctive.

As the NGLE 25.7g points out, this distinction is not applied rigidly. It quotes *si sujetas con la mano un vaso con agua fresca, al cabo de cierto tiempo no notas que el agua esté fresca* 'if you hold a glass of cool water in your hand, after a while you don't notice that the water is cool'. In this case the water obviously *is* cool. This example is a reminder of how difficult it is to formulate binding rules about the Spanish subjunctive.

(3) The indicative is occasionally found after *negar que* and verbs of similar meaning, although this construction is unusual, especially in Spain: *niego que hubo bronca* (*Proceso*, Mex., usually *hubiera, hubiese* or *haya habido bronca*) 'I deny there was a row', *pero negaban tozudamente que transportaban marihuana en esta ocasión* (*Granma*, Cu.) 'but they stubbornly denied that they were carrying marihuana on this occasion', *rechaza que Dios existe* (from Navas Ruiz (1986), 69, usually *exista*) '(s)he denies that God exists'. The negative of *negar* amounts to an assertion of the truth so it often takes the indicative: *nadie podía negar que él siempre cumplía con su palabra* (GM, Sp.) 'no one could deny that he always kept his word'. But the subjunctive is also common: *no negaban que unas Cortes pudieran ser benéficas para la monarquía, siempre y cuando se limitaran a representar los intereses de los súbditos* (*Historia general de México*, Mex.) 'they did not deny that a Parliament could be beneficial for the monarchy provided it limited itself to representing the citizens' interests'.

(4) *No ser que* and *no que* . . . are denials and are normally followed by the subjunctive: *no es que yo diga que es mentira* 'it's not that I'm saying that it's a lie', *no es que se dijeran grandes cosas* (JM, Sp.) 'it isn't that important (lit. 'great') things were said', *no era que no hubiese pobres por toda la ciudad* (AM, Mex.) 'it wasn't that there were no poor people all over the city'.

Exceptionally *no ser que* is followed by the indicative, in which case the denial is more confident and assertive: *no era que tomaba posesión del mundo* (M. de Unamuno, Sp.) 'it wasn't that he was taking possession of the world'. *No ser que* takes the indicative in questions: see next section.

(5) For the formula *no sea que* 'lest' / 'so that not . . .' see 20.4.3b.

(6) *Poco* . . . may also take the subjunctive in sentences like *pocas personas creen que existan/existen los fantasmas* 'few people believe ghosts exist', *poca gente acepta que sea/es inocente* 'few people accept that (s)he's innocent'. There is little difference between the subjunctive and the indicative in these cases.

### 20.3.16 Main clause consists of a negative question or order

Negative questions and negative orders are not denials, so the indicative is used:

¿No es verdad que ha dicho eso?

Isn't it true that he said that?

¿No sientes que el corazón se te ensancha al ver esto? (JI, Mex., dialogue)

Don't you feel your heart getting bigger when you see this?

(1) For the Latin-American, especially Mexican, use of the subjunctive in positive questions, e.g. *¿crees que sea verdad?*, Spain *¿crees que es verdad?* see 20.12.1.

### 20.3.17 Main clause contains a statement of doubt

*Dudar que* 'to doubt that . . .' takes the subjunctive, but after *no dudar que* 'not to doubt that . . .' the indicative is normally used when the meaning is 'to be sure that . . .':

<i>Dudo que sea verdad</i>	I doubt whether it's true
<i>No dudo que sea verdad lo que dices</i>	I don't doubt whether what you say is true (tentative remark)
<i>No dudo que es verdad lo que dices</i>	I don't doubt (i.e. 'I'm convinced') that what you say is true
<i>No dudo que irá/vaya</i>	I don't doubt he'll go
<i>No hay duda que ella puede ser discutida</i> (MVLI, Pe., Sp. <i>no hay duda de que . . .</i> )	There's no doubt that it [the claim: <i>la afirmación</i> ] can be debated
<i>No dudé que el adjetivo "perfecta" era el único que le convenía</i> (JV, Mex., dialogue)	I didn't doubt that the adjective 'perfect' was the only one appropriate for her

(1) For *dudar de que* see 37.4.3 note 2.

### 20.3.18 Statements of fear + *que*

*Temer, tener miedo de que* 'to fear/be afraid of' and other statements of similar meaning may take a subjunctive or an indicative tense, in the latter case most often a future form, or, if they refer to the past, a future in the past:

<i>Temo que le moleste/Temo que le va a molestar/molestará/le vaya a molestar</i>	I'm afraid it may bother him/her
<i>Temíamos que le molestara/molestase/molestaría/Temíamos que le iba/fuera a molestar</i>	We were afraid it would bother him/her
<i>Yo tenía miedo de que te hubieras ido</i> (GCI, Cu., dialogue)	I was scared that you'd gone
<i>. . . para no ver el mar por la escotilla porque nos da miedo de que entre</i> (EP, Mex.)	. . . so as not to see the sea through the hatch because we're afraid it'll come in

The subjunctive is always used if the main verb is negated: *no temía que me fuera/fuese a atacar* 'I wasn't afraid he/she/it was going to attack me'.

(1) *Temer que* may also be found with the indicative when it refers to timeless or habitual actions: *temo que la verdadera frontera la trae cada uno dentro* (CF, Mex., dialogue) 'I fear that each one of us carries the real frontier inside ourselves', *empezaba a temer que las imágenes de los dos mundos . . . pertenecían a dos caras de la misma moneda* (JA, Sp.) 'I was beginning to fear that the images of the two worlds . . . belonged to two sides of the same coin'.

(2) *Temerse que* usually means little more than 'I'm sorry to say that . . .' and it then takes the indicative: *me temo que no he sido muy delicado* 'I fear I haven't been very discreet', *de eso me temo que no puedo hablarte* (LS, Ch., dialogue) 'I'm afraid I can't talk to you about that'. But the subjunctive is also possible, in which case it tends to mean 'to fear that' rather than 'to suspect that': *mucho nos tememos que se trate de los primeros* (Terra, Ur.) 'we are very much afraid that the former are involved'.

### 20.3.19 Main clause means 'the fact that . . .'

There are several common ways of translating 'the fact that': *el hecho de que*, *el que*, and *que*; the latter two items have various other meanings, for which see the Index.

(a) With all of these the subjunctive is generally used whenever the phrase meaning 'the fact that . . .' appears at the head of a sentence:



*El hecho de que seas protegido de los Valdés me tiene sin cuidado* (EM, Mex., dialogue)

(El) *que no digan nada no debería afectar tu decisión*

*El que yo escriba un diario se debe también a Virginia* (JJA, Mex., dialogue.)

The fact that you're someone protected by the Valdéses leaves me cold

The fact that they say nothing shouldn't affect your decision

The fact that I keep a diary is also due to Virginia

(b) The indicative is often used when the main verb is a verb of knowing or perceiving (e.g. *enterarse de* 'to find out', *darse cuenta de* 'to realize'). When *el hecho de que* is preceded by a preposition it almost always takes the indicative:

*Se ha dado cuenta (del hecho) de que tiene que trabajar para vivir*

*... parten del hecho de que muchos mayores tienen dificultades para usar correctamente los aparatos* (El Mundo, Sp.)

*No sé si influiría el hecho de que era medio danesa y que al parecer hizo allí parte de sus estudios* (LS, Sp., dialogue)

*... como corrobora el hecho de que sus principales discos seguían reeditándose* (JA, Mex.)

(S)he has realized (s)he has to work in order to live

... are based on the fact that many elderly persons find it difficult to use the devices [computers] correctly

I don't know whether the fact she was half Danish and apparently did part of her studies there would have any influence

... as is confirmed by the fact that his main records/disks continued to be published

(1) *El que* 'the fact that' must be distinguished from *el que* 'the person that' (discussed at 40.1.4). Sometimes only context makes the sense clear: *el que haya dicho eso no sabe lo que dice* 'the person who/whoever said that doesn't know what (s)he's talking about', *el que haya dicho eso no tiene importancia* 'the fact that (s)he said that has no importance'.

(2) English speakers tend to overdo *el hecho de que* for 'the fact that'. *El que* ... or *que* ... alone are as common, if not more so.

(3) For *de ahí que* 'hence the fact that ...' see 20.2.6.

### 20.3.20 Subjunctive after noun phrases + *de que*

When a noun phrase replaces a verb phrase it is usually connected to a following subordinate clause by *de que*: compare *esperamos que llueva* 'we hope it will rain' and *la esperanza de que llueva* 'the hope that it will rain': see 37.4.2 for a more detailed discussion of the use of *de que* after nouns.

(1) For the tendency to drop the *de* in this construction, see 37.4.2 note 1.

### 20.3.21 Subjunctive after *creer, parecer, suponer* and *sospechar* + *que*

We said at 20.3.3b that expressions of belief + *que* take the indicative – *creo que Dios existe* 'I believe that God exists', *dice que sospechó que todo iba a terminar muy mal* (MS, Mex.) 'he says he suspected that everything was going to end really badly' – unless they are negated: *no creo que Dios exista* 'I don't believe God exists', *no me parece que haya nada malo en eso* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'it doesn't seem to me that there's anything bad about that'.

However, the subjunctive occasionally appears after *parecer que* ... and – very rarely – after *sospechar que* ... 'to suspect that ...' even when they are not negative. The meaning is then more hesitant or implies that what follows is not true; but the difference can barely be translated into English:

<i>Sospecho que es/sea mentira</i>	I suspect it's a lie
<i>Como si la Historia fuera una especie de saltamontes; y parece que lo sea (AS, Sp.)</i>	As if History were a sort of grasshopper and it seems that it is
<i>¿Por qué estás así? Parece que te estuvieras ahogando (ABE, Pe., dialogue)</i>	Why are you like that? It looks as though you were drowning
<i>... una de esas veces ... en que parece que hubiera explotado una bomba en alguna parte muy, muy remota (MS, Mex.)</i>	... one of those times when it seems that a bomb had exploded somewhere far, far away

In other words, *parece que es así* tends to mean 'it seems that' implying 'and it is', and *parece que sea así* suggests 'it looks that way' but it may not be.

(1) Use of the subjunctive to make a question ironic (i.e. when the speaker already knows the answer, as *¿crees realmente que esto ayude?* 'do you *really* think this helps?') is much more common in Latin America than in Spain. See 20.12.1 in the Appendix to this chapter.

(2) *No saber si* ... often takes the subjunctive from Colombia northwards, including Mexico. See 20.12.1 note 1.

(3) *Parecer* + subjunctive can sometimes mean 'to seem OK' in questions in Spain, but less often in Latin America: *¿te parece que vayamos a un restaurante chino?* 'how about we go/what if we go to a Chinese restaurant?', more usually *¿qué te parece si vamos ...?*

### 20.3.22 Subjunctive after *comprender/entender que, explicar que, aceptar que*

All of these verbs take the subjunctive when they are negated, e.g. *no entiendo que ahora me pregunten sobre la ponencia* (interview in *El País*, Sp.) 'I don't understand why people are asking me now about the written statement'.

*Comprender que, entender que* and *aceptar que* usually take the subjunctive when they mean 'to sympathize with':

<i>Comprendo que mucha gente en la comunidad afroestadounidense pudiera no entender eso (interview, La Jornada, Mex.)</i>	I understand that a lot of people in the US Afro-American community may not understand that
<i>También aceptó que el Parlamento francés examine el pacto (El País, Sp.)</i>	He also accepted that the French parliament should examine the agreement
<i>Acepto que no quieras ir con nosotros</i>	I accept that you don't want to go with us

But *comprendo/entiendo/acepto que la situación es así* 'I realize/accept that this is the situation' take the indicative: *comprendo que esta noticia carece totalmente de importancia* (interview, *La Jornada*, Mex.) 'I understand/accept that this news is totally lacking in importance'.

(1) *Explicar* usually takes the indicative when it really means 'to state' or 'to say': *Javier explicó que había estado enfermo* 'Javier explained that he had been ill'. But the subjunctive is used when the verb means 'gives the reason why': *esto explica que las mutaciones de la literatura estén estrechamente ligadas a las innovaciones técnicas* 'this explains that changes in literature are intimately linked to technical innovations', *eso explica que estemos de buen humor* 'that explains why we're in a good mood'.

### 20.3.23 Subjunctive after *esperar que*

*Esperar* ‘to hope’, and the noun *la esperanza de que* . . . ‘the hope that’, may be followed by the subjunctive, by the future indicative, by the conditional tense or by the indicative of *ir a*. The subjunctive is by far the commonest form when the verb means ‘to hope’. Use of the indicative of these tenses suggests the meaning ‘to expect’:

<i>Espero que lo/le convenzas /convencerás</i> ... con la esperanza de que ella haría lo mismo (CF, Mex., dialogue)	I hope/expect you'll convince him ... with the hope that she'd do the same
<i>Por un momento la invadió la esperanza de que su marido no habitara ya el reino de los vivos</i> (SP, Mex.)	For a moment she was filled with the hope that her husband no longer inhabited the realm of the living
<i>Espero que no se le ocurra meterse por mitad del caño que hay entre las piedras</i> (APR, Sp., dialogue)	I hope he doesn't get the idea of sailing through the channel between the rocks
<i>Espero que me vas a pagar</i>	I'm expecting that you're going to pay me

(1) *Esperar a que* and *aguardar a que* ‘to wait for . . .’ take the subjunctive: *yo estaba esperando/aguardando a que lo hiciera/hiciese otra persona* ‘I was waiting for someone else to do it’.

(2) *Esperar* must be used with an infinitive when the two subjects are the same: *yo esperaba hacerlo* ‘I was hoping to do it’, but *yo esperaba que él lo hiciera/hiciese* ‘I was hoping he'd do it’.

(3) *No esperar(se) que* takes the subjunctive: *yo no (me) esperaba que me fuera a escribir* ‘I didn't expect (s)he was going to write to me’. The form *esperarse* emphasizes surprise.

## 20.4 The subjunctive in subordinate clauses introduced by subordinators other than *que*

### 20.4.1 Introductory

The subordinators discussed in Section 20.4 are words like ‘when’, ‘after’, ‘because’, ‘unless’, which introduce subordinate clauses. The general rule governing the use of the subjunctive after such subordinators is: if the event referred to in the subordinate clause has or had already occurred, the subordinate verb is in the indicative. If the event has or had not yet occurred, the verb is in the subjunctive. Example:

<i>Te lo di cuando llegaste</i>	I gave it to you when you arrived
<i>Te lo daré cuando llegues</i>	I'll give it to you when you arrive
<i>Yo iba a dártelo cuando llegaras/llegases</i>	I was going to give it to you when you arrived

Timeless or habitual actions also take the indicative: *oscurece cuando se pone el sol* ‘it gets dark when the sun sets’, *mi nieta siempre me da un beso en cuanto llega* ‘my granddaughter always gives me a kiss as soon as she arrives’.

It follows from this that some subordinators, e.g. *antes de que* ‘before’, *para que/a que* ‘in order that’, *a condición de que* ‘on condition that’ always take the subjunctive because they must refer to something that has or had not yet happened at the time of the main clause. But in most cases use of the subjunctive depends on the rule given in the first paragraph of this section.

As in English, the subordinate clause may precede or follow the main clause: *después de que llegaron, empezamos a hablar/empezamos a hablar después de que llegaron* ‘after they arrived we started talking’/‘we started talking after they arrived’.

**(1) Important:** the rules given here do not refer to question words like *cuándo, dónde, cómo, quién, cuál*, which are not subordinating conjunctions and are best thought of as separate words. They are followed by the indicative: *¿sabes cuándo llega?* ‘do you know when (s)he’s coming?’, *¿te acordarás de dónde lo has dejado?* ‘will you remember where you’ve left it?’, *dudo que sepa cómo se dice* ‘I doubt (s)he knows how to say it’. Compare also *¿y cuándo te casas?* ‘and when are you getting married?’ and *¿y cuando te cases qué va a ser de tus hijos?* ‘and when you get married what’s going to happen to your children?’

## 20.4.2 Use of the infinitive after subordinators

The infinitive is used after certain subordinators when both verbs have the same subject. Compare *entré sin verla* ‘I came in without seeing her’ (same subject: ‘I’) and *entré sin que ella me viera / viese* ‘I came in without her seeing me’ (different subjects). This occurs with the following subordinators:

**(a)** Those that include the word *de*, e.g. *con tal de que* ‘provided that’, *antes de que*, ‘before’, *después de que* ‘after’, *bajo la condición de que* ‘on condition that’, *con el objeto de que / a fin de que* ‘with the intention of’, *a cambio de que* ‘in return for’, *en vez de que* ‘instead of’, *a pesar de que* ‘despite’, *en caso de que* ‘in the event of’, *el hecho de que* ‘the fact that’, etc. The *que* is dropped before the infinitive:

<i>Lo haré antes/después de salir</i>	I’ll do it before/after I go out
<i>Muchos lo consultaban antes de tomar decisiones políticas (JA, Mex.)</i>	Many people consulted him before taking political decisions
<i>Lo escribió con el objeto de alabar a sus compañeros de trabajo</i>	(S)he wrote it with the intention of praising his/her work colleagues
<i>El hecho de saber cuatro lenguas me ayuda</i>	The fact of knowing four languages helps me

**(b)** *Sin que* ‘without’, *para que/a que* ‘in order to’, *nada más* ‘as soon as’, *hasta que* ‘until’

The *que* is dropped before an infinitive. Compare: *entré sin hacer ruido* ‘I came in without making any noise’, *entré sin que me viera / viese* ‘I came in without him/her seeing me’; *fue al dentista a que le sacara / sacase una muela* ‘(s)he went to the dentist for him to take one of her/his teeth out’ and *fui al supermercado a comprar pan* ‘I went to the supermarket to buy bread’. In the case of the other subordinators, e.g. *cuando, mientras* ‘while’, *en cuanto/una vez que* ‘as soon as’, a subordinate finite verb cannot be replaced by an infinitive: *te lo diré cuando te vea* ‘I’ll tell you when I see you’, never *\*te lo diré cuando verte*, which is not Spanish.

**(1)** Some of these subordinators that allow the infinitive construction are found with an infinitive in very informal speech even when the subjects are not the same, as in *¿cómprame unas postales para mandárselas (yo) a mi madre* for *cómprame unas postales para que yo se las mande a mi madre* ‘buy me some postcards for me to send to my mother’, *te voy a ver antes de irte ¿no?* (for . . . *antes de que te vayas*) ‘I’m going to see you before you go, aren’t I?’ This kind of construction is quite common in spontaneous informal speech but it is avoided in careful language.

**(2)** For *porque* when it means ‘in order to’ (it usually means ‘because’) see 20.4.3 note 1.

## 20.4.3 Subjunctive with subordinators of purpose: ‘in order to’, ‘so that’, etc.

**(a)** Phrases meaning ‘in order to’ such as *a fin de que, para que / porque, con el objeto de que, con el propósito de que, con la intención de que* and *a que* (which also has other meanings, e.g. *a que sí* ‘I bet it’s true’), are always followed by a subjunctive because they obviously point to an event that has

or had not yet happened at the time of the main clause. When the subjects of the verbs are identical the infinitive is used, e.g. *lo hice para fastidiarte* 'I did it to annoy you'; see 20.4.2:

*Afuera, para que la solidaridad se sienta,  
hay que reunir un millar de personas  
(MB, Ur., dialogue. Sp. Fuera . . .)  
La enorme fuerza que cobraba la derecha  
fue determinante para que el presidente  
eligiera sucesor (JA, Mex.)  
He escrito una circular a fin de que se  
enteren todos  
Debemos esforzarnos porque/para que los  
demás tengan menos trabajo  
Estoy un tanto apurado y como  
impaciente porque pase el trago*

Outside, so that people should sense  
the (level of) solidarity, we need to  
assemble about a thousand people  
The enormous strength the political Right  
was acquiring was what decided the  
President to choose a successor  
I've written a circular so that everyone  
knows about it  
We should make an effort so that the others  
have less work  
I'm a bit worried and rather impatient  
for this unpleasantness to pass.

(b) A number of phrases express negative intention or avoidance, i.e. 'so that not', and they always take the subjunctive. They are awkward to translate now that our word 'lest' is confined to formal styles. These phrases do not allow replacement of the subjunctive by an infinitive:

*Trabaja más, no sea que te despidan  
Me subí al coche en tres minutos no se  
me fuera a arrepentir de la invitación  
(AM, Mex., dialogue)  
No corras tanto, no vaya a darte un infarto  
  
No vaya a ser que los secuestradores se  
den cuenta (EM, Mex., dialogue)  
Devuélveles el dinero, no ocurra que nos  
demanden*

Work harder so they don't fire you  
I got into the car within three minutes lest  
he regretted /so that he wouldn't regret  
the invitation  
Don't rush (lit. 'run') so much – you don't  
want to give yourself a heart attack  
We don't want the kidnappers to  
find out  
Give them back the money. We don't  
want them to sue us

(1) *Porque* in the meaning 'in order that' is less common than *para que*, but is quite often found after certain verbs, especially *esforzarse porque/para que* + subjunctive 'to make an effort in order to . . .'. For the difference between *por* and *para* when both mean 'in order to', see 38.17.16.

#### 20.4.4 Subjunctive with subordinators meaning 'because', 'seeing that', etc.

These do not allow replacement of the finite verb by an infinitive.

(a) The following are followed by the indicative when they mean 'since' or 'because':

<i>pues</i> because (see 37.5.3) <i>ya que</i> since/ seeing that	<i>debido a que</i> due to the fact that
<i>comoquiera que</i> since <i>puesto que</i> since	<i>en vista de que</i> seeing that

(b) *Como*, when it means 'because' or 'since' (i.e. 'in view of the fact that . . .') is also usually followed by the indicative; it is discussed at 37.5.2. When followed by the subjunctive *como* may mean 'if' and is discussed at 29.8.2. For the use of *como* in sentences like *hazlo como quieras* 'do it as/how you like', see 20.5.2. *Cómo* means 'how' in direct and indirect questions, and is best thought of as a different word: see 28.7.

*Invítame ya que / puesto que tienes tanto dinero /* Since you have so much money  
*Como tienes tanto dinero me puedes invitar* you can pay for me  
 (in this meaning *como* must appear at  
 the head of the clause; see 37.5.2)

*Comoquiera que los perros no leen* Since dogs can't read, the notice must have  
*debía de estar ahí el letrado para* been there for people to read  
*que lo leyera la gente (comoquiera*  
 for 'since' is literary)

(c) **Porque** is usually followed by an indicative, but it requires the subjunctive when it means 'just because' / 'only because', and after *no porque* 'not because'. Sometimes it can be preceded by *solo/sólo*.

*No lo hago porque tú lo digas* I'm not doing it just because *you* say so  
*Que nadie venga a nosotros porque piense* Let no one come to us (just) because  
*que va a obtener enchufes* they think that they'll get special favours  
*... no tanto porque fuera imprescindible* ... not so much because his approval  
*su aval (JA, Mex.)* was absolutely necessary  
*Me perdí y llegué tarde. No porque yo me* I lost my way and was late. Not  
*oriente mal, sino porque iba un poco* because I have a poor sense of direction  
*sonada (CMG, Sp., dialogue)* but because I was a bit stoned,

But:

*No lo hago porque tú lo dices* I'm not doing it because you say I should  
*No lo hago solo/sólo porque tú lo dices* I'm doing it, but not simply because  
 you're telling me to  
*No salgo contigo solo/sólo porque tienes* The fact that you have a Ferrari isn't  
*un Ferrari* the only reason I go out with you

Spanish can thus avoid an important ambiguity that affects English sentences like 'he didn't react because he was tired'. See 20.11.

(d) The subjunctive is used after *bien porque ... o, ya ... ya ... / ya porque ... o, fuera porque ... fuera porque* meaning 'whether ... or':

*Bien / Ya porque tuviera algo que hacer o* Whether he had something to do or  
*porque estuviera cansado, el caso es que* whether he was tired, the fact is that  
*no estuvo muy amable con nosotros* he wasn't very kind to us  
*... ya fuese para apuntalar al Gobierno, ya* ... whether in order to support the  
*para atacarlo (Abc Color, Par.)* government, or to attack it  
*Fuera porque no sea costumbre de los* Whether because it wasn't usual in the  
*arrabales estadounidenses, fuera porque a* suburbs in the USA, or because her  
*nadie le interesara demasiado su vida ...* life didn't interest anyone too much ...  
 (SP, Sp. ... *bien porque ... o porque* could  
 have been used)  
*Me gusta, ya sea idea de Pedro, ya sea de otro* I like it, whether it's Pedro's idea  
 or someone else's

(e) **Dado que** usually takes the indicative: ... *dado que los resultados del peritaje ponían en riesgo la veracidad del caso* (AH, Mex.) '... since the results of the experts' report threatened [to undermine] the truth of the case'. But it may imply 'assuming it is the case that ...' and take the subjunctive: *dado que sea verdad lo que dices, cuenta con mi aprobación y ayuda* (DRAE) 'assuming what you say is true, count on my approval and help'.

(1) For *porque* in the meaning of 'in order that ...' see 20.4.3.

### 20.4.5 Subjunctive with subordinators of result, aim and manner, e.g. 'as a result'

These are words meaning 'so'/'as a result' in sentences like 'it was snowing, so we stayed at home'. They do not allow replacement of the finite verb by an infinitive.

(a) When they indicate the result of an action the following take the indicative:

*así que* so (= 'as a result')

*conque* so (esp. in questions, e.g.

*¿conque lo has hecho tú?* 'so it was you that did it?')

*de manera que* in such a way that/so

*de suerte que* in such a way that/so

*de forma/modo que* in such a way

*Tú tienes la culpa, de modo que/así que/conque no te puedes quejar*

You're to blame, so you can't complain

*El río Niágara sigue fluyendo debajo de la capa de hielo, de modo que las cataratas no están totalmente congeladas (Excélsior, Mex.)*

The Niagara river is still flowing underneath the ice layer, so the falls are not completely frozen

If they indicate aim or purpose they take the subjunctive: *iban disfrazados de manera que nadie los/les reconociera/reconociese* 'they were in disguise so (i.e. 'with the intention that . . .') no one would recognize them'; . . . *de manera que nadie los/les reconoció* implies result, i.e. that no one *did* recognize them. This avoids another ambiguity of English – see 20.11. Further examples implying aim or intention:

*Compórtate de modo/manera que no sospechen —Está sobreactuando —me dijo a mí en el pasillo, de forma que nuestra madre no le pudiera oír (SP, Sp.)*

Behave so as to avoid them suspecting

'She's overacting,' he said to me in the corridor so that our mother wouldn't hear him

*. . . procurando colocar la cámara de tal manera que mi rostro . . . no estropeará la foto (ES, Mex., dialogue)*

. . . trying to position the camera so that my face wouldn't spoil the photo

(b) **Como** when it means 'as'/'however' requires the subjunctive when it refers to an action which is or was still in the future:

*Hazlo como quieras*

Do it however you like

*Te dije que podías venir como quisieras/quisieses*

I told you that you could come any way you liked

When it refers to a present or past action, the indicative is used: *lo hacen como siempre lo han hecho sus madres* 'they do it as their mothers have always done', *lo hice como quise* 'I did it the way I wanted to'.

For *como* + subjunctive meaning 'if' see 29.8.2; for *como* meaning 'as' (i.e. 'seeing that') see 37.5.2.

(c) **Cual si** (literary: see 28.3.1 note 3) and **como si** 'as if' always take a past subjunctive, but never a present subjunctive. For *como si* = 'just as if'/'it's just the same as when', see note 2:

*Me miró como si no me viera/viese*

(S)he looked at me as if (s)he couldn't/didn't see me

*Las trató con gran familiaridad, como si las viera todos los días (CF, Mex.)*

He treated them very familiarly, as though he saw them every day

(1) *Comme si* takes the indicative in French: *comme si elle avait quinze ans* = *como si tuviera/tuviese quince años* ‘as if she was fifteen years old’.

(2) *Hacer que* ‘to pretend that’, *hacer como si/que* ‘to act as if’ and *ser como si* ‘to be as if . . .’ take the indicative when they mean the same as *como cuando* . . . ‘. . . the same as when . . .’: *Marta hace que no escucha* ‘Marta pretends not to be listening’, *hicieron como si no se enteraban* (SP, Sp.) ‘they acted as if they didn’t realize’, *hizo como que no entendía* ‘(s)he pretended not to understand’, *es como si/ como cuando no puedes respirar y te asustas* ‘it’s the same as when you can’t breathe and you get scared’, *el niño pasa de todo, como si le llevo a una manifestación en favor del divorcio o contra los bocadillos de calamares* (MVM, Sp., dialogue) ‘my little boy doesn’t worry about a thing: it’s the same to him whether I take him on a demonstration in support of divorce or against squid sandwiches’.

(3) *Como si* . . . is found colloquially in Spain with the indicative to mean ‘even if’: —*No iré hasta las ocho*—. *Como si no vienes, a mí me da igual* (Spain, colloquial) “‘I won’t come until eight o’clock.” “Even if you don’t come it’s the same to me”.

(4) *Tan . . . como que . . .* ‘such . . . as that . . .’ takes the subjunctive: *dos héroes como nosotros no pueden retroceder por cosas tan sin importancia como que le coma a uno un gigante* (children’s story book, Sp.) ‘two heroes like us can’t turn back because of such unimportant things as being eaten by a giant’ (lit. ‘as that a giant eats one’).

(5) *Como que*, which can also mean ‘as if’, takes the indicative: *últimamente lo he venido notando preocupado, como que desea comunicarme algo* (JJA, Mex., dialogue) ‘lately I’ve been noticing that he’s preoccupied, as if he wants to tell me something’.

### 20.4.6 Subjunctive with words meaning ‘in case’, ‘supposing that’

*En caso de que* and *en el caso de que* call for the subjunctive:

<i>En caso de que no esté, llámame</i>	If (s)he’s not in call me
<i>Esperaremos dos minutos para darle tiempo de ponerse cómodo, en el caso de que se esté usted duchando</i> (ABE, Pe., dialogue)	We’ll wait two minutes for you to make yourself comfortable if you happen to be taking a shower
<i>No les voy a soltar esa información, es sólo en caso de que me pregunten</i>	I’m not going to let them have that information; it’s only in case they ask me
(GZ, Mex., dialogue)	

But *por si* usually, but not invariably, takes the indicative, although *por si acaso* may take either mood, the subjunctive making the possibility less likely. *Por si* is not followed by the present subjunctive:

<i>Llévate el paraguas por si (acaso) llueve/lloviera/lloviese</i> but ( <b>not</b> * <i>por si llueva</i> )	Take the umbrella in case it rains
<i>Siempre estaba haciendo favores a la gente por si acaso a alguien se le ocurría devolvérselos</i> (SP, Sp.)	She was always doing people favours in case someone thought of repaying them
<i>Está apuntando hacia la otra acera, por si hay un ataque por retaguardia</i> (JI, Mex., dialogue)	He’s aiming at the other pavement/ sidewalk in case there’s an attack from the rear
<i>Por si fuera poco . . .</i> (set phrase)	As if that wasn’t enough . . .
<i>Conviene que vayas enterado por si alguien te pidiera una aclaración</i> (EM, Sp.)	It would be best if you were informed (lit ‘went informed’) in case someone asks you for an explanation



(1) *Suponiendo que* when it means ‘supposing that’ requires the subjunctive: *suponiendo que él venga, ¿lo/le vas a dejar entrar?* ‘supposing he comes, are you going to let him in?’ But when it means ‘to assume’ it takes the indicative: *traicionaste a quien se suponía que era tu socio y tu mejor amigo* (GZ, Mex., dialogue) ‘you betrayed the person who was supposed to be your partner and best friend’.

## 20.4.7 Subjunctive with subordinators of time

These include such words and phrases as the following:

<i>a medida que/según/ conforme as</i>	<i>después (de) que after</i>	<i>mientras (que) as</i>
<i>antes (de) que before</i>	<i>en cuanto/nada más/apenas/tan pronto</i>	long as, while (see 20.4.9)
<i>cuando when</i>	<i>como/una vez que/nomás que (Lat. Am.)</i>	<i>siempre que every time</i>
<i>desde que since</i>	<i>as soon as</i>	
	<i>hasta que until</i>	

After subordinators of time, the subordinate verb is in the subjunctive when its action is or was still in the future, as in the following examples:

<i>Llegamos antes de que empezara/empezase a nevar (for antes de que see note 2)</i>	We arrived before it started snowing
<i>No sea muy dura con su empleada, después que se haya tranquilizado (SV, Ch., dialogue)</i>	Don’t be very hard on your maid after you’ve calmed down
<i>In Spain usually después de que . . .)</i>	
<i>Tú conoces a mi prima. Cuando venga le diré que te lo cuente (AA, Cu., dialogue)</i>	You know my cousin. When she comes I’ll tell her to tell you about it
<i>Íbamos a cenar cuando llegaran/llegasen los demás</i>	We were going to have supper when the rest arrived (i.e. they hadn’t arrived yet)
<i>Reparte los folletos conforme los diputados vayan entrando</i>	Hand out the pamphlets as the members of parliament come in
<i>tan pronto como acabe la huelga . . .</i>	as soon as the strike is over . . .
<i>En cuanto pueda me compraré un reloj (MB, Ur., dialogue)</i>	As soon as I can, I’ll buy a watch
<i>Nomás que oscurezca te vas por la carretera (JL, Mex., dialogue; Sp. en cuanto oscurezca. For nomás see 27.6)</i>	As soon as it gets dark you go down the road
<i>Apenas pueda, te llamo (JA, Arg. Apenas is discussed more fully at 27.5.7. See also note 2)</i>	As soon as I can, I’ll ring you
<i>Hasta que no llegue a ser ministro no se quedará contento (see 27.2.4 for the use of no here)</i>	He won’t be satisfied until he becomes a Minister
<i>Siempre que la vea se lo recordaré</i>	I’ll remind her whenever/if I see her

When the event is in the past or present, or is a habitual event, the indicative is used

<i>Me saludan cuando llegan (habitual)</i>	They greet me when they arrive
<i>tan pronto como acabó la huelga . . .</i>	as soon as the strike was over . . .
<i>Me doy cuenta, a medida que Rosita pasa mis notas a máquina, de que he reunido cerca de doscientas páginas (CF, Mex.)</i>	I realize, as Rosita types out my notes, that I’ve assembled nearly 200 pages
<i>Hasta que no llegó a ser ministro no se quedó contento (see 27.2.4 for no here)</i>	He wasn’t satisfied until he became a Minister

*Ya es de noche cuando . . . oye los débiles golpes en la puerta* (DT, Mex. Historic present)      It is already night when he hears the feeble tapping on the door

(1) **Important:** students of French and Italian must not use the future tense after these subordinators: compare *je lui donnerai son livre quand il arrivera*, *gli darò il suo libro quando arriverà* and *le daré su libro cuando llegue* 'I'll give him his book when he arrives'.

(2) Of these subordinators of time, only *antes de*, *después de*, *hasta* and *nada más* (and in Latin America *nomás*) can take an infinitive construction when the subjects of both verbs are identical: *me fui después de comer* 'I went after I had eaten', *hazlo antes de acostarte* 'do it before you go to bed', *trabajó hasta no poder más* '(s)he worked until (s)he could work no longer', *la llamaré nada más llegar a casa* 'I'll call her as soon as I get home'. In the case of *nada más*, the subjects do not need to be identical: *salí nada más entrar ella* 'I left as soon as she came in'. *Apenas* is heard with the infinitive in very informal speech when the subjects are identical, although this is stigmatized: *?lo hice apenas llegar a casa* (good Spanish *lo hice apenas llegué a casa*) 'I did it as soon as I got home'. The rest allow only a finite verb, indicative or subjunctive according to the rule given.

(3) As we have said, *antes de que* is always followed by the subjunctive because it must refer to a still future event. Both *antes de que* and *antes que* are correct, the former being more common in Spain. *Antes que* also means 'rather than' and must not be confused with *antes (de) que* 'before': *cualquier cosa antes que casarse* 'anything rather than get married'.

(4) *Después (de) que* 'after' and similar phrases, e.g. *a los pocos días de que*, 'a few days after', *luego de que* 'after', take the subjunctive when they refer to an action still in the future. If they refer to a past action, they should logically take the indicative – and in Latin America they frequently do. But in Spain the *-ra* and *-se* forms are common after these words and after *desde que*: see 18.3.3. *Después que* for *después de que* is quite common in Latin America and is spreading in Spain. *Desde que* 'from the moment that . . .' rarely refers to the future, but cf. *la vigilaré desde que llegue hasta que se vaya* 'I'll keep an eye on her from the moment she arrives until she leaves'.

(5) *Nada más* is followed by an indicative when it means *solo*: *solo/sólo/nada más voy un momento a comprar un periódico* 'I'm just going out for a moment to buy a newspaper'.

## 20.4.8 Subjunctive with subordinators of condition and exception

These are words meaning 'provided that', 'unless', 'except', etc. They all take the subjunctive (for *si* and *como* when they mean 'if' see 29.8.1 and 2) Those that include the word *de*, e.g. *con tal de . . .*, are used with the infinitive when the subject of both verbs is identical, as explained at 20.4.2, e.g. *me llevaré el libro a condición de no tener que leerlo* 'I'll take the book on condition that I don't have to read it'.

(a) **Condition:** the following mean 'provided that', 'on condition that':

<i>con tal (de) que</i>	<i>a condición de que</i>	<i>a cambio de que</i>
<i>siempre que</i> (also	<i>con la condición de que</i>	(also 'in return for')
'whenever'. See 20.4.7)	<i>bajo (la) condición de que</i>	
<i>siempre y cuando</i> (emphatic)	<i>mientras</i> as long as. See 20.4.9	

<i>El Gobierno está dispuesto a negociar siempre que/siempre y cuando/con tal (de) que/a condición de que sean razonables</i>	The Government is ready to negotiate provided they are reasonable
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... *con tal de que mi hijo se eduque en otro ambiente soy capaz de todo* (ES, Mex., dialogue)  
 ... *siempre que su muerte se debiera a causas naturales* (LS, Ch., dialogue)  
*Firmaremos a cambio de que no se haga público hasta la semana que viene*

... provided that my child is educated in a different environment I'm capable of anything  
 ... provided his death was due to natural causes  
 We'll sign in return for it not being made public until next week

**(b) Exception** (occasionally followed by the indicative in the cases discussed in note 1):

*a no ser que* unless  
*salvo que* unless/save that  
*excepto que* unless/except that

*a menos que* unless  
*fuera de que* (less common)  
 unless  
*en vez de que* instead of

*como no (sea que)* unless  
 (in suggestions: see 29.8.2b)  
*como no fuera que* unless

*Me casaré contigo a no ser que/salvo que/como no sea que/a menos que hayas cambiado de idea*

I'll marry you unless you've changed your mind

*No se debe usar esta puerta, excepto que sea en caso de emergencia*

This door shouldn't be used unless it's an emergency

*Íbamos de vacaciones en agosto salvo/a no ser que/como no fuera que yo estuviera/estuviese muy ocupado*

We took our holidays/vacation in August unless I was very busy

*No tenemos nada que decir, como no sea que sentimos mucho lo de mi ahijada* (MS, Mex., dialogue)

We've nothing to say except that we're very sorry about what happened to my goddaughter

*¿En vez de que te quedes solo aquí, por qué no vamos todos al cine?*

Instead of staying alone here, why don't we all go to the cinema?

**(1)** *Excepto/salvo que* and *con la salvedad de que* are followed by the indicative when they mean 'except for the fact that': *en realidad no sé gran cosa de él, excepto que parece que le gusta poner su nombre a cosas* (interview, *La Jornada*, Mex.) 'in fact I don't know much about him except that he likes putting his name to things', *es difícil hacer previsiones sobre esta cumbre, salvo que no van a reducir sus cuotas* (*El Economista*, Mex.) 'it's difficult to make forecasts about this summit meeting, except that they aren't going to lower their quotas'.

### 20.4.9 *Mientras (que)*

*Mientras* can mean 'while', 'whereas' or 'provided that'.

**(a)** In the first meaning it often simply refers to something happening at the same time, in which case the indicative is used: *siempre tengo la televisión apagada mientras comemos* 'I always keep the television switched off while we're eating', *sonreía mientras atravesaba el estacionamiento frente a la Facultad de Ciencias* (EP, Mex.) 'he was smiling while he crossed the parking lot opposite the Science Faculty'. But if it refers to the future the subjunctive is possible, although the indicative is more usual: *mañana puedes hacer la comida mientras yo arreglo/arregle la casa* 'tomorrow you can do the cooking while I tidy the house'.

**(b)** If a contrast is implied – i.e. if it means 'on the other hand' or 'whereas' – *mientras que* is preferred: *mi padre nunca se movería de la capital mientras que mi madre conocería en Tetuán a un militar sosegado y viudo* (MDu, Sp.) 'my father was never to move from the capital whereas my mother was to meet a quiet military widower in Tetuán'.

(c) If it means ‘provided that’ or ‘as long as’ it requires the subjunctive: *mientras el Gobierno no tome sus medidas, no habrá paz para la gente honrada* (EM, dialogue, Sp.) ‘as long as the government doesn’t take measures, there will be no peace for honest folk’, *mientras no hagan ruido me da igual quiénes sean mis vecinos* ‘as long as they don’t make a noise, I don’t care who my neighbours are’, *mientras nosotros no nos hiciéramos visibles no teníamos problema contigo* (MS, Mex., dialogue) ‘as long as we didn’t make ourselves visible we had no problem with you’.

### 20.4.10 Subjunctive with subordinators of concession (words meaning ‘although’)

There are several ways of saying ‘although’ of which *aunque* is the most common:

<i>aunque</i>	<i>siquiera</i>	<i>si bien</i>
<i>así</i>	<i>aun cuando</i>	<i>y eso que</i>

Words meaning ‘despite the fact that’ have a similar meaning:

<i>a pesar de que</i>	<i>pese a que</i> (literary)	<i>a despecho de que</i> (literary)
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With the exception of *si bien que* and *y eso que*, which are always used with the indicative (see 37.6.2), these require the subjunctive if they point to an event which is or was still in the future: compare *aunque llueve* ‘although it is raining’ and *aunque llueva* ‘even if it rains’; also *aunque llovía* ‘although it was raining’ and *aunque lloviera/lloviese* ‘even if it rained’ (it hadn’t started raining yet). *Así* always requires the subjunctive when it means ‘although’. Those that contain the word *de* may be constructed with an infinitive in the circumstances described at 20.4.2:

<i>Es un valiente, no hablará así/aunque lo/le amenacen</i>	He’s a brave man, he won’t talk even if they threaten him
<i>No lo confesó aunque le ofrecieron dinero</i>	(S)he didn’t confess although they offered him/her money
<i>No lo confesaría aunque lo/le mataran/matasen</i>	(S)he wouldn’t confess it even if they killed him/her
<i>... tienen que cumplir, así caminen bajo la lluvia (La Jornada, Mex.)</i>	They have to fulfil their mission, even if they walk in the rain
<i>Vendieron la finca, a pesar de que el abuelo se oponía</i>	They sold the estate, despite the fact that grandfather opposed it
<i>¿A pesar de que tus padres se opongan? (ABV, Sp., dialogue)</i>	Even though your parents will/may be against it?
<i>A pesar de que no posee el aura de misterio de los primeros años (JV, Mex.)</i>	Despite him not having the aura of mystery of the early years

(1) The subjunctive may be optionally used with *aunque* to refer to past or habitual events. In this case it strengthens the concession, making it an equivalent to ‘even though’: *jamás culparé a Octavia, aunque lo haya intentado alguna vez* (ABE, Pe., dialogue) ‘I’ll never blame Octavia, even though I may have tried to sometimes’, *él era un importante hombre de negocios, aunque su padre lo hubiera menospreciado a veces* (GZ, Mex., dialogue) ‘he was an important businessman, even though his father had despised him at times’.

(2) When *siquiera* is used to mean ‘although’ (literary style) it requires the subjunctive: *... dos fuentes independientes ... a las que se aludirá, siquiera sea vagamente (Libro de estilo de El País, Sp.)* ‘... two independent sources, which will be mentioned, even if in vague terms’.

## 20.5 Translating 'whether . . . or', 'however', 'whatever', 'whoever', 'whichever' and 'the more . . . the more . . .'

The phrases discussed in this section are often translated by the *forma reduplicativa*, i.e. constructions in which a subjunctive verb is repeated, as in *pase lo que pase* 'whatever happens', *no hay salida para ti, hagas lo que hagas, vayas a donde vayas* (CF, Mex., dialogue) 'there's no way out for you, whatever you do, wherever you go'.

### 20.5.1 'Whether . . . or'

The *forma reduplicativa* is used, as in:

*Escuchaba las conversaciones con sus  
amigas, repararan o no repararan en mí  
(SP, Sp.)*

I listened to the conversations  
with her female friends, whether  
they noticed me or not

The second verb is sometimes replaced by *hacer* or, in negative phrases, omitted altogether:

*. . . trabaje en una red, o lo haga desde un PC  
en casa . . .  
Estuviese/Estuviera o no enfermo, lo cierto  
es que no vino al trabajo  
México está cambiando, les guste o no  
(El Economista, Mex.)*

*. . . whether you work on a network or  
from a PC at home . . .  
Whether he was ill/sick or not, the  
fact is he didn't come to work  
Mexico is changing whether you/they like  
it or not*

### 20.5.2 'However much/little . . .', etc.

With *por muy* + adjective or noun the subjunctive is obligatory: *¿cómo consentía que ese hombre horrible, por muy amigo suyo que hubiera sido hacía unos años, pasara tanto tiempo con mi madre?* (SP, Sp.) 'how could he let that awful man – despite having been such a friend of his some years before – spend so much time with my mother?', *por poco convincente que hubiera sido su explicación* 'however unconvincing his/her explanation may have been . . . '.

*Por mucho que/por más que* + verb, *por mucho* + noun + verb, *por (muy)* + adjective + verb. Use of the subjunctive follows the usual rule: if the event referred to is or was a reality, the indicative may be used: *por mucho que/por más que se lo dijo, no lo hizo* '(s)he didn't do it however much (s)he asked him/her'; but the subjunctive is required if the event is or was still in the future, and also for purposes of emphasis (see note 1):

*Por mucho calor que haga, no abrirán la  
ventana  
A una por más liberada que esté siempre le  
gustará que el hombre le abra la puerta  
del coche (ES, Mex., dialogue)  
Por más que llueva no se le van a resucitar  
los novillos muertos (MP, Arg., dialogue)  
Por mucho que corriera y que se escondiera,  
él acabaría por encontrarla (RM, Sp.)*

However hot it gets/is, they won't open  
the window  
However liberated one is one will always  
like the man to open the car door for one  
However much it rains, his dead  
steers won't come back to life  
However much she ran and hid, he'd  
eventually find her

(1) Using the subjunctive for events or states that are realities strengthens the force of the concession: *por mucho que/más que se lo dijera/dijese, no lo hacía* 'however often (s)he told him/her, (s)he didn't do it', *por más brillante que fuera en la física teórica, no tenía adiestramiento astronómico* (EP, Mex.) 'however brilliant he was in theoretical physics he had no training in astronomy'.

(2) To translate 'however it is', 'however it was', etc., either the *forma reduplicativa* is used or *como quiera que* + subjunctive, e.g. . . . *pero como quiera que sea, yo he comprado . . . una media docena por lo menos* (J JA, Mex., dialogue) 'but however it is/but all the same, I've bought at least a half a dozen', or . . . *sea como sea* . . .

### 20.5.3 'The more . . . the more', 'the less . . . the less'

*Cuanto/a/os/as más . . . más* and *cuanto/a/os/as menos . . . menos* are the standard formulas. The general rule is applied: if the event is a reality (i.e. has occurred or is occurring) the indicative is used, otherwise the subjunctive is required:

*Cuanto más comas más querrás*  
*Cuanto más comías, más querías*  
*Yo sabía que cuanto más bebiera/bebiese*  
*más me emborracharía*  
*Cuanta más sal pongas, peor sabrá*  
*Cuanto menos digas menos se inquietarán*

The more you eat the more you'll want  
 The more you ate the more you wanted  
 I knew that the more I drank the  
 drunker I'd get  
 The more salt you put in the worse it'll taste  
 The less you say the less they'll worry

For the use of *mientras* instead of *cuanto* in this construction, and, in parts of Latin America, of *entre*, instead of *cuanto*, see 6.11.

### 20.5.4 'Whatever'

The *forma reduplicativa* is normally used:

*digan lo que digan/hagan lo que hagan*  
*Den lo que den, siempre vamos al*  
*Metropolitan (EP, Mex., dialogue. Sp.*  
*pongan lo que pongan . . .)*  
*Hablara de lo que hablara, se estaba*  
*dirigiendo a mí (SP, Sp.)*  
*Cómpralo sea como sea*  
  
*Dijo que lo compraría fuera/fuese como*  
*fuera/fuese*

whatever they say/whatever they do  
 Whatever's on (lit. 'whatever they give')  
 we always go to the Metropolitan cinema  
  
 Whatever she was talking about,  
 she was addressing herself to me  
 'Buy it whatever it looks like' or 'buy it  
 whatever the cost'  
 (S)he said she'd buy it whatever happened/  
 anyway

*Comoquiera que sea* and *comoquiera que fuera/fuese* could be used in the last two examples, but they are less usual. *Como quiera* is an alternative spelling, not recommended by the Academy (NGLE 25.13q).

*Lo que* + the subjunctive may also be used in some contexts:

*Aquella novela o lo que quiera que fuese era*  
*muy difícilmente publicable (JM, Sp.)*  
*. . . por temor, por pereza o por lo que sea . . .*  
*(SP, Sp.)*  
*Le pago lo que quiera, pero vaya de una vez*  
*(MS, Mex., dialogue)*

That novel, or whatever it was, was  
 very unlikely to be publishable  
 . . . out of fear, laziness, or whatever  
  
 I'll pay you whatever you want, but get  
 going now!

(1) The English 'whatever' may mean 'whichever', in which case it is best translated by an appropriate tense of *sea cual sea* . . . This *forma reduplicativa* is preferred in written and spoken language to the rather stilted *cualquiera que* and *comoquiera que*: *las camelias, cualquiera que/sea cual*

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*sea su color, son bonitas* ‘camellias are pretty whatever their colour’ (for a general discussion of *cualquiera*, see 10.8), *fuera/fuese cual fuera/fuese la razón . . .* ‘whatever the reason was . . .’.

(2) When ‘whatever’ means ‘everything’ it will usually be translated by *todo lo que* or *cuanto*: *trae todo lo que puedas* ‘bring whatever/everything you can’, *aprenderé todo lo que/cuanto pueda* ‘I’ll learn whatever/everything I can’.

### 20.5.5 ‘Whichever’

When this word means ‘which’, ‘whichever one’ or ‘the one that’ it is usually translated by *que* or *el que* + subjunctive, e.g.

*Escoge la maceta que más te guste*  
—¿Qué sombrero me llevo? —*El que*  
*usted quiera*

Choose whichever flowerpot you like most  
‘Which hat should I take?’ ‘Whichever (one)  
you want’

For details see the subjunctive in relative clauses, 39.15.

### 20.5.6 ‘Whenever’

This is translated by *cuando* with the subjunctive when the event referred to is or was still in the future, and by the indicative in all other cases:

*Vienen cuando quieren* (habitual)  
*Vendrán cuando quieran*  
*Dijeron que vendrían cuando*  
*quisieran/quisiesen*  
*La banca mexicana debe facilitar una*  
*relación con sus clientes “donde*  
*quiera y cuando quiera y como quiera.”*  
(*El Economista*, Mex.)

They come whenever they like  
They’ll come whenever they like  
They said they’d come when they  
wanted to  
Mexican banking should provide  
its customers with a [digital] link  
“where, when they want it and however  
they want it”

(1) *Siempre que*, as well as meaning ‘provided that’ (see 20.4.8), may also mean ‘whenever’; *cada vez que* can mean the same thing: *yo la saludaba siempre que/cada vez que la veía* ‘I said hello to her whenever I saw her’. When used with the subjunctive *siempre que* usually means ‘provided that’. The issue may be clarified by using an alternative for ‘whenever’, e.g. *no se te olvide saludarla cada vez que la veas* (future reference) ‘don’t forget to say hello to her whenever you see her’.

(2) *Cuando quiera que* is old-fashioned for *cuando*, but it is used as an occasional literary variant for *siempre que*: . . . *cuando quiera que en la vida española se ponen tensos los ánimos* (R. Pérez de Ayala, Sp., quoted by Seco) ‘whenever passions are stirred in Spanish life’.

### 20.5.7 ‘Anyone who . . .’, ‘whoever . . .’

For *cualquiera que*, *quienquiera que*, see 39.15.2.

### 20.5.8 ‘Wherever’

*Dondequiera que* or the *forma reduplicativa*. They take the subjunctive if they refer to an as yet unidentified place:

<i>Dondequiera que vaya / Vaya donde vaya me lo encontraré</i>	Wherever I go I'll meet him
<i>Dondequiera que fuese / Fuese donde fuese, me lo encontraba (or fuera . . .)</i>	Wherever I went I met him
<i>Estés donde estés, busca un teléfono público (LS, Ch., dialogue)</i>	Wherever you are, look for a public phone
<i>Sean de donde sean, lo que importa es saber dónde tienen a tu padre (EM, Mex. dialogue)</i>	Wherever they're from, the important thing is to find where they're keeping your father

(1) The *que* is sometimes omitted, e.g. *dondequiera se encuentren* 'wherever they're found', but Seco (1998), 170, disapproves.

(2) *Adondequiera* can be used when the meaning is 'wherever . . . to': *adondequiera que vayan* 'wherever they go (to)' or *vayan a donde vayan*. But *dondequiera que vayan* is also common.

## 20.6 Subjunctive in subordinate relative clauses

E.g. *busco una persona que sepa sueco* 'I'm looking for a person who knows Swedish' compared with *conozco a una persona que sabe sueco* 'I know a person who knows Swedish'. This important topic is discussed at 39.15.

## 20.7 Use of the subjunctive to make imperatives

All matters connected with the imperative are treated in Chapter 21. As a reminder, it should be noted that

(a) The subjunctive is used to form all negative imperatives: *no me hables* 'don't talk to me', *no se vayan ustedes* 'don't go away'.

(b) The subjunctive is used for all imperatives with the pronouns *usted* and *ustedes*: *guarden (ustedes) silencio* 'keep quiet', *váyase (usted)* 'go away'.

(c) The subjunctive is used to form first-person plural and all third-person imperatives, e.g. *sentémonos* 'let's sit down', *que entren* 'let them come in' / 'tell them to come in'.

## 20.8 Tense agreement with the subjunctive in all subordinate clauses

Despite the claims of some traditional grammars, there are no rigid rules of tense agreement between main and subordinate clauses, but the following are the most usual combinations:

### (a) Main clause in present indicative tense

- Present subjunctive: *me gusta que hable* 'I like her/him to talk', *lo más probable es que la deje ir* (EM, Mex., dialogue) 'the most likely thing is that he'll let her go'.
- Perfect subjunctive: *me encanta que hayas venido* 'I'm really glad you've come'.
- Imperfect subjunctive (see note 1): *es muy extraño que no me vieras llegar* (MS, Mex., dialogue) 'it's very strange that you didn't see me arrive', *no creo que fuera/fuese detective* 'I don't believe (s)he was a detective'.



**(b) Main clause in future tense**

- Present subjunctive: *nos contentaremos con que terminen para finales del mes* 'we'll be content with them finishing by the end of the month', *¡jamás soportaré que mi sobrina se case con un tipo que va por el mundo vestido de profesor en vacaciones!* (ABE, Pe., dialogue) 'I'll never tolerate my niece marrying a guy who goes around dressed like a teacher on vacation!' or, possibly '... a guy who goes around on vacation dressed like a teacher!'

**(c) Main clause in conditional or conditional perfect tense**

- Imperfect subjunctive: *nos contentaríamos con que terminaran / terminasen para finales del mes* 'we'd be content with them finishing by the end of the month', *yo habría preferido que se pintara / pintase de negro* 'I'd have preferred it to be painted black'.

**(d) Main clause in perfect tense (see note 2)**

- Present subjunctive: *le he dicho que se siente* (AG, Sp., dialogue; European Spanish perfect of recency) 'I told you to sit down'.
- Perfect subjunctive: *ha sido un milagro que no te hayan reconocido* 'it was a miracle they didn't recognize you'.
- Imperfect subjunctive: *ha sido un milagro que no te reconocieran / reconociesen* 'it was a miracle that they didn't recognize you'.

**(e) Main clause in imperfect, preterite or pluperfect tense (see notes 3 and 4)**

- Imperfect subjunctive: *la idea era que cobrarais / cobraseis los viernes* 'The idea was that you'd get paid on Fridays', *me dio miedo que me quitaran al niño* (CF, Mex., dialogue) 'I felt afraid they might take my child away from me', *yo te había pedido que me prestaras / prestases cien dólares* 'I'd asked you to lend me 100 dollars'.
- Pluperfect subjunctive: *me sorprendía que hubiera / hubiese protestado* 'I was surprised that (s)he had protested'.
- Present subjunctive. This is common, especially in the media, when the main clause refers to the past and mentions an action that has still not taken place: *el secretario de Naciones Unidas pidió ayer a Estados Unidos que no actúe unilateralmente contra Irak* (El País, Sp.) 'The UN secretary asked the US yesterday not to act unilaterally against Iraq'. It is also common in popular Latin-American speech where standard language requires the past subjunctive. See note 4.

(1) The combination present + imperfect or perfect subjunctive occurs when a comment is being made about a past event. There seems to be little difference between the perfect and imperfect subjunctive in this case, and occasionally the present subjunctive can also be used: *algunos niegan que Cristóbal Colón fuera / fuese / haya sido / sea el primer descubridor de América* 'some deny that Christopher Columbus was the first discoverer of America'.

(2) The perfect (*ha dicho, ha ordenado*, etc.) is strictly speaking classified as a present tense for the purposes of agreement, but the imperfect subjunctive is occasionally used with it when the event in the subordinate clause is also in the past. Compare *ha dado órdenes de que nos rindamos* '(s)he's given orders for us to surrender' and *el clima que se está creando ha llevado a que se hablara / hablase de intervención del Ejército* (or *hable*) 'the climate that is being created has led to talk of Army intervention'.

(3) The combination past indicative + present subjunctive is optionally possible when the subordinate clause refers to a timeless or perpetual event: *Dios decretó que las serpientes no tengan / tuvieran / tuviesen patas* 'God decreed that snakes should have no legs' (*las piernas* is used for human legs).

(4) Use of the present when both verbs refer to the past is common in popular Latin-American speech and informal writing but is unacceptable to many Peninsular speakers: *el inspector aduanero*

*le pidió a la muchacha que le muestre su casaca* (La Prensa, Pe., Spain *mostrara/mostrase*. In Spain *la casaca* = 'dress coat') 'the Customs inspector asked the girl to show him her coat', *Maduro pidió el martes pasado a la Asamblea Nacional que apruebe el decreto* (El Economista, Mex.) 'Maduro asked the National Assembly last Tuesday to approve the decree'. This construction seems to be spreading to the media in Spain and it is not unknown there in spontaneous speech.

(5) After *como si* 'as if', *igual que si/lo mismo que si* 'the same as if', the verb is always in the imperfect or pluperfect subjunctive: *le hablaré como si yo no supiese/supiera hablar bien el castellano* 'I'll talk to him as if I didn't know how to speak Spanish well', *como si no me hubiera visto* 'as if (s)he hadn't seen me'. See also 20.4.5c for *como si*.

## 20.9 The future subjunctive

The future subjunctive (see 16.7.7 for its forms) is nowadays obsolete in everyday Spanish, except in a few literary set phrases such as *sea lo que fuere* (more usually *sea lo que sea*) 'whatever it may be', *venga lo que viniere* (usually *venga lo que venga*) 'come what may'; the present or imperfect subjunctive is used instead. But it is still used in legal jargon and official documents, e.g. in the Penal Code and other collections of laws:

APUESTA: Contrato bilateral en el que se acuerda que el que **acertare** un pronóstico o **tuviere** razón en una disputa recibirá del perdedor lo pactado (legal dictionary)

'BET': A bilateral contract in which it is agreed that a person who makes an accurate forecast or wins an argument shall receive an agreed sum from the loser

It occasionally appears in flowery language to indicate a very remote possibility:

... lo cual ofrece amplísimas ventajas en la extracción del motor o en reparaciones, caso de que las **hubiere** (advert., Sp., *hubiera/hubiese* more normal).

... which offers very wide advantages when removing the engine or in repair work – should such a thing ever arise

It is also found in solemn language in Latin-American newspapers:

Sólo la aplicación de un plan de estrictas medidas, aun cuando estas/éstas resultaren antipopulares, **permitirá** salir de la actual situación (La Nación, Arg.)  
... **facilitándoles, si fuere necesario, intérpretes** u otros medios eficaces (La Jornada, Mex.)

Only the application of a plan of strict measures, even if these turn out to be unpopular, would allow us to get out of the present situation  
... providing them, if necessary, with interpreters or other effective means

## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 20

This Appendix contains some miscellaneous points connected with the subjunctive which may interest advanced students.

### 20.10 The subjunctive and 'uncertainty'

Many grammars claim that the subjunctive has a meaning associated with 'uncertainty' or 'doubt'. This is true in some cases – *es posible que llueva* 'it's possible that it will rain' – but there are many cases where the subjunctive expresses a certainty:

*Me acostaré cuando se ponga el sol*  
*No es verdad que la tierra sea plana*  
*Es una tragedia que exista la pobreza*  
*Me alegro mucho de que hayas aprobado*  
*el examen*  
*El hecho de que exista la luna explica*  
*muchas cosas . . .*  
*Perdieron aunque jugaran/jugasen bien*

I'll go to bed when the sun sets  
 It's not true that the Earth is flat  
 It's a tragedy that poverty exists  
 I'm really glad you passed the exam  
 The fact that the Moon exists  
 explains many things  
 They lost even though they played well

Moreover, the subjunctive is not always obligatory after some common words that express uncertainty, e.g. *a lo mejor llueve esta noche* 'maybe it'll rain tonight', *quizás Manuel se ha quedado en casa* 'perhaps Manuel has stayed at home'.

A subtler argument is put forward by some linguists, e.g. that the subjunctive is an *irrealis* mood, i.e. it does not refer directly to what is necessarily real. This does indeed explain sentences like *me acostaré cuando se ponga el sol* 'I'll go to bed when the sun sets' which, although a certainty, is still in the future and not yet 'real', or *quiero comprar un coche que tenga cuatro puertas* 'I want to buy a car that has four doors' where the four-door car is still unidentified and is therefore 'unreal'. But it does not explain sentences like *es una pena que Marte apenas tenga atmósfera* 'it's a pity that Mars barely has an atmosphere' or *siento mucho que te hayas roto el tobillo* 'I'm really sorry you've broken your ankle', both of which refer to something real.

Probably the best approach is to abandon the idea that the subjunctive has a definable 'meaning' or that there is a single underlying rule that generates it. Instead one should simply learn when to use it without enquiring too closely why.

The NGLE 25.1j agrees with the objection that the subjunctive does not necessarily express 'uncertainty'.

## 20.11 In praise of the Spanish subjunctive

English has almost completely lost the subjunctive. Apart from set phrases like 'if I were you' (for 'if I was you') it appears only in formal literary styles in sentences like 'if this **be** true', 'it is important that this problem **receive** (for 'should receive' or 'receives') immediate attention', or 'lest he **try** to escape again' for 'lest he tries to escape again'.

The price that English pays for this loss is a series of ambiguities which Spanish makes clear and English speakers are usually unaware of. The following examples reflect British English; American English seems to make slightly more use of subjunctive forms:

- 'We insist that the children are treated well'. Are they treated well or not? If they *are*, then indicative in Spanish: *insistimos en que se trata bien a los niños*. If they *should* be, then subjunctive: *se trate bien a . . .*). American English seems to require 'should be . . .' for the second meaning.
- 'We decided to eat when they arrived'. Does this mean 'when they arrived we decided to eat' (indicative: *decidimos cenar cuando llegaron*) or 'we decided to delay eating until they arrived' (subjunctive: . . . *cuando llegaran/llegasen*)?
- 'I'm going to move to a country where it never snows'. Does this mean 'I've discovered a country where it never snows and I'm going there' (indicative: *me voy a mudar a un país donde nunca nieva*) or are you still looking for one (subjunctive: . . . *donde nunca nieve*)?

- ‘He didn’t leave because he was angry’. If this means ‘he left, but not because he was angry’ then subjunctive: *no se fue porque estuviese/estuviera enfadado*. If it means ‘he stayed because he was angry’ then indicative: *no se fue porque estaba enfadado*.
- ‘When we get the signal we return to base’. Is this ‘whenever we receive the signal we return to base’, standing orders, so indicative: *cuando recibimos la señal volvemos a la base*, or are we waiting for the signal . . . *cuando recibamos la señal volveremos a la base*?
- ‘He was wearing a mask so no one identified him’. Does this mean ‘his intention or hope was that no one would identify him’ . . . *llevaba una máscara de manera que nadie lo/le identificara/identificase* or did no one identify him – . . . *de manera que nadie lo/le identificó*? North Americans apparently insist on ‘would’ for the intentional form, so they should know when to use the Spanish subjunctive.
- ‘I didn’t know she was so intelligent’. Does this mean ‘she is intelligent, but I didn’t know it?’ – *no sabía que era tan inteligente* – or ‘I didn’t know she was so intelligent and I’m not saying she is’ – *no sabía que fuese tan inteligente*?

## 20.12 Regional variations in the use of the subjunctive

There is generally little variation in the use of the subjunctive in educated usage throughout the Spanish-speaking world. However, students may come across some of the following variations.

### 20.12.1 Use of the subjunctive in questions.

In Latin America, and especially in Mexico, but not in Spain, the subjunctive may be used in direct and indirect questions, as in *¿tú crees que uno **sepa** cuándo se va a morir?* (JRG, Mex., dialogue, Spain . . . *uno sabe*) ‘do you believe that one knows when one’s going to die?’, *pero con los retrasos de los aviones y luego con este clima no sé a qué horas **llegue*** (ES, Mex., dialogue; Sp. . . . *a qué hora llega/llegará*) ‘but with the planes being late and then this weather I don’t know what time she’ll arrive’, *¿usted cree que esto **ayude**?* (MP, Arg. Dialogue, Sp. . . . *esto ayuda*) ‘do you really think that this helps?’

(1) *No saber si* . . . often takes the subjunctive in Mexico, Central America, Chile and the Andes: *no sé si quieras venir* ‘I don’t know whether you want to come’, . . . *si quieres venir* in Spain and the River Plate region. The same is true of *no saber cuándo*: *no sé cuándo sea el mejor momento* ‘I don’t know when the best moment will be’, Sp. *cuándo será* . . . (NGLE 25.5p), . . . *porque quién sabe cuándo vayas a regresar* (ES, Mex., dialogue; Sp. *vas a regresar*) ‘because who knows when you’ll be back’.

### 20.12.2 Use of the conditional for the subjunctive

In some regions, especially in northern Spain and in the Southern Cone, the Andes and Colombia, there is a tendency in popular speech to use the conditional instead of the imperfect subjunctive, e.g. *¿si tendría dinero, lo compraría* for *si tuviera/tuviese dinero lo compraría* ‘If I had money, I’d buy it’. NGLE 23.15d and 23.15g says that this is avoided in educated speech and in writing.

### 20.12.3 Use of indicative after subordinators of time

There is a tendency in parts of Latin America to use the indicative after subordinators of time that point to the future, e.g. *¿se lo diré cuando vienen* or *cuando vendrán* for *se lo diré cuando vengan* ‘I’ll tell her/him/you/them when they come’. This is avoided in careful speech and in writing.

### 20.12.4 Use of the future indicative or conditional after phrases meaning 'it is possible that . . .'

Popular Latin-American speech sometimes uses indicative tenses after phrases like *es/era posible que* 'it is/was possible that': *la posibilidad de que no podrán* (Spain *puedan*) *moler fábricas que no cuenten con caña suficiente* (Granma, Cu.) '... the possibility that mills that do not have enough sugar-cane will not be able to do any crushing'. This is avoided in careful styles. Such sentences require the subjunctive in standard Spanish, and use of the subjunctive is the norm everywhere: see 20.3.5.

Use of *capaz que* for 'possibly', often, but not always, with the indicative, is typical of familiar Latin-American speech: *capaz que la conoció cuando fue a Los Ángeles* (EM, Mex., dialogue) 'maybe he met her when he went to Los Angeles', *capaz está enferma* 'maybe she's ill'. *Capaz* means only 'capable' in standard European Spanish.

### 20.12.5 The subjunctive in Argentina

In Argentina, where *voseo* is normal (see 12.3.1), careful speakers use the standard Spanish subjunctive forms with *vos* because the expected *vos* forms with a stressed final vowel are a shade too popular for many people. The NGL 4.7e notes that this prejudice applies more to positive forms than to negative forms like *no digás*, *no hagás* which are more widespread. In the following examples, the speakers address one another as *vos*: *tengo miedo que no vengas . . . que aflojes* (JA, Arg. dialogue; Spain . . . *miedo de que*) 'I'm scared you won't come . . . that you'll go off the idea', *no digas nada pero papá fue a matar un pollo . . .* (MP, Arg., dialogue) 'don't say anything, but father went to kill a chicken . . .'. But the following example is of very familiar language: *me extraña que defendás la hipocresía* (Mafalda cartoon, Arg., 'standard' style . . . *que defiendas*) 'I'm surprised at you defending hypocrisy'. In Uruguay the popular *vos* forms of the subjunctive are more stigmatized.

## 20.13 Subjunctive 'contamination'

Students will encounter examples of the subjunctive that seem to contradict the explanations given in this chapter. One common case is what could be called 'subjunctive contamination', i.e. the tendency to use the subjunctive unnecessarily later in a sentence that starts with a subjunctive. An example is *no es posible suponer que esta/ésta sea la razón por la que el acusado se llevara/llevase el coche* 'it is not possible to conclude that this is the reason why the accused took the car away'. *Llevó* would have been correct, but the combined effect of *posible* and *suponer que . . .*, which here invite the subjunctive, has 'contaminated' the phrase *la razón por la que . . .* which does not in fact require a subjunctive.

# 21 The imperative

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- Forms of *tú, vos, vosotros/as* and *usted(es)* imperatives (Section 21.2)
- The imperative of *estar* (Section 21.2.6)
- How to form negative imperatives (*no lo hagas*, etc.) (Section 21.3)
- The position of object pronouns with the imperative (Section 21.4)
- First-person plural imperative (*vámonos* 'let's go', *sentémonos* 'let's sit down', etc.) (Section 21.5)
- Third-person imperatives (*que entre* 'let her/him come in', *que hablen* 'let them speak', etc.) (Section 21.6)
- Impersonal imperatives (*véase, escríbase*, etc.) (Section 21.8)
- Use of the infinitive as an imperative (*empujar, tirar*, etc.) (Section 21.9)
- Present tense used as an imperative (Section 21.10)
- Making imperatives mellower (Section 21.11)

## 21.1 General remarks

The imperative is used to give orders or to make requests. As in English, a simple imperative, e.g. *hazlo* 'do it', can sound abrupt, so intonation and attitude are important. In Spanish, a friendly manner counts for much more than constant repetition of *por favor* or *haga el favor* 'please', which, like *gracias*, English-speakers constantly over-use. In Spain, *por favor* is strictly speaking required when asking a favour, and since baristas, waiters or salespersons are simply doing their job, *por favor* is not really necessary. However, *por favor* is nowadays heard more often than before, especially in Mexico, where everyday language is very polite.

Other points to watch are: (a) all negative imperatives (e.g. 'don't do', 'don't say') are formed with the subjunctive: *vete* 'go away', *no te vayas* 'don't go away' – for which reason knowledge of the subjunctive forms of verbs is essential; (b) for Latin Americans there is no *vosotros/vosotras* imperative: *usted* and *ustedes* + the present subjunctive are used for both strangers and friends, and even for children and animals.

**(1) Important:** English allows passive imperatives, normally only in the negative: 'don't be fooled by him', 'don't get stung by a bee'. A different solution must be found in Spanish: *no te dejes engañar por lo que dice* 'don't be deceived by what he says', *que no te pique una abeja* 'don't let a bee sting you'/'don't get stung . . .', *no dejes que te hagan cantar a la fuerza* 'don't be bullied into singing', *no dejes que te mangoneen/no te dejes mangonear* 'don't let yourself be pushed around'.

## 21.2 Positive forms of the imperative

For negative imperatives ('don't do', 'don't say', etc.) see 21.3.

### 21.2.1 Pronouns and the imperative

As in English, addition of a subject pronoun to an imperative can make an order emphatic and brusque:

<i>¡Tú bájate de ahí!/Usted bájese</i>	You get down from there!
<i>¡Vosotros callaos! (Lat. Am. ustedes cállense)</i>	You shut up!

However, *usted* may be added after an imperative to reinforce the politeness: *venga usted a las ocho* ‘come at eight o’clock’.

(1) Spoken Mexican Spanish often makes imperatives emphatic by adding *-le*: *aváncenle* ‘move on!’, *pásenle* ‘come in!’, *ádale* ‘wow!’/‘get moving!’, *¡córrele!* ‘hurry!’.

### 21.2.2 The *tú* imperative

The familiar singular imperative (*tú* form) is, with eight exceptions, formed by removing the *-s* of the second-person singular of the present indicative: *llamas* > *llama*, *lees* > *lee*. The exceptions are:

<i>decir</i> to say: <i>dí</i>	<i>poner</i> to put: <i>pon</i>	<i>tener</i> to have: <i>ten</i>
<i>hacer</i> to do/make: <i>haz</i>	<i>salir</i> to leave/go out: <i>sal</i>	<i>venir</i> to come: <i>ven</i>
<i>ir</i> to go: <i>ve</i> ( <i>vete</i> = ‘go away’)	<i>ser</i> to be: <i>sé</i>	

<i>Anda, sé bueno y márchate</i> (JMa, Sp., dialogue)	Come on, be good and go away
<i>Ven a tomar el café cuando quieras</i>	Come and have coffee whenever you want
<i>Ten cuidado</i>	Be careful
— <i>Vete</i> — <i>le dijo</i> —. <i>Vete, antes de que</i> <i>te cobre el dinero que me debes</i> (AM, Mex., dialogue)	‘Go away,’ she told him. ‘Go away before I collect the money you owe me’
<i>Haz clic en/Pincha en el icono</i>	Click on the icon

(1) The *tú* imperative of *haber* is theoretically *he*, but it is never used. As Seco (1998, 243), points out, the nowadays rather stilted literary expression *he aquí*, ‘here is . . .’/‘what follows is . . .’ (French *voici* . . .) is not the imperative of *haber*: *he aquí un resultado cuidadosamente escondido* (El País, Ur.) ‘this is a carefully concealed result’.

(2) The *tú* imperatives of compound verbs formed from *poner* and *tener* have an accent: *propón* ‘suggest’, *detén* ‘arrest’. The accent is not required when one pronoun is suffixed: *proponlo* ‘suggest it’, *detenlos* ‘arrest them’; but *propónselo* ‘suggest it to her/him/them’.

### 21.2.3 The *vos* imperative

The imperative form corresponding to *vos* (Argentina, Uruguay and also most of Central America, see 12.3.1) can usually be found by removing the *-r* from the infinitive; the final vowel is therefore stressed: *tener* > *tené*, *contar* > *contá*, *decir* > *decí*, *defender* > *defendé*. Pronominal verbs take the pronoun *te*, so the imperative of *lavarse* is *lavate* (the standard form is *lávate*). Further examples, all from Argentina (where *vos* for *tú* is normal in all styles); the *tú* form is included in brackets. Stressed vowels are shown in bold:

<i>Decíle que pase (dile que pase)</i>	Tell him to come in
<i>Suscribite y defendé tus derechos</i> ( <i>suscríbete, defiende</i> )	Sign up/Register and defend your rights
<i>Vení cuando puedas (ven cuando puedas)</i> See 20.12.5 for <i>vení cuando podás</i> )	Come when you can
<i>Levantate (levántate)</i>	Get up
<i>Oíme, Pozzi (MP, Arg., óyeme)</i>	Listen to me, Pozzi
<i>Mostrame (muéstrame)</i>	Show me

(1) The *vos* imperative of *ir* is *andá* or *andate*, the form *ve* being avoided in speech in regions of *voseo*. The predicted form *i* is avoided but it is apparently heard in some rural areas of Argentina.

### 21.2.4 The **vosotros** imperative

The European Spanish *vosotros/vosotras* imperative (used to address friends, relatives, children, animals) is formed by replacing the *-r* of the infinitive by *-d*. There are no exceptions:

*ser* to be: *sed*  
*ir* to go: *id*

*tener* to have: *tened*  
*venir* to come: *venid*

*cantar* to sing: *cantad*

The *-d* is dropped in the pronominal ('reflexive') form: *dad* + *os* = *daos* as in *daos la mano* 'shake hands', *lavad* + *os* = *lavaos*: *lavaos el pelo* 'wash your hair'. There is one exception: *id* + *os* = *idos* 'go away!' from *irse*, although in relaxed everyday speech *iros* is nowadays common: see note 2.

(1) Latin-American Spanish uses *ustedes* where European Spanish uses *vosotros/as*, so these forms are virtually unknown in the Americas.

(2) In informal speech in Spain, this imperative is often expressed by the infinitive: *venid* = *venir*, *id* = *ir*, *daos* = *daros*, *veníos* = *veníros*, *lavaos las manos* 'wash your hands' = *lavaros las manos*, etc. Although it apparently has a long history, this construction is considered slovenly by some people. Example: *tener* (for *tened*) *cuidado con Socorro que ya se ha cargado tres matrimonios* (EA, Sp., dialogue) 'watch out for Socorro – she's already messed up three marriages'.

Students should use the forms in *-d* or, in the case of pronominal verbs, *-aos*, *-eos*, *-íos*. For further remarks on the use of the infinitive as an imperative, see 21.9.

### 21.2.5 The **usted/ustedes** imperative

The pronouns *usted* and *ustedes* have no independent imperative forms: they use the third-person singular or plural present subjunctive endings respectively: *dígame* 'tell me', *tenga* 'take'/'have', *empiecen* 'begin', *ayúdenme* (*ustedes*), 'help (plural) me', etc. *Ustedes* forms are used for both polite and informal address in Latin America:

*Vaya a descansar. Preséntese aquí a las 11*  
(MVM, Sp., dialogue)

Go and rest. Be here at 11 o'clock

*¡Ayúdeme, doctora!* (MVLI, Pe.)

Help me, doctor!

*Perdone si parezco impertinente* (LO, Sp.)

Excuse me if I seem impertinent

*No me vengán con que es poético ladrarle a la luna* (EM, Mex., dialogue)

Don't try telling me that it's poetic to bark at the moon

For the position of the pronouns and the popular Latin-American form *?síente(n)sen*, see 21.4.

See 12.3.2 for more on the use of *usted/ustedes*.

### 21.2.6 The imperative of **estar**

For the affirmative imperative of *estar* 'to be' the pronominal (i.e. 'reflexive') form is normally, but not exclusively, used: *estate quieto* 'be still'/'stop fidgeting', *estense listos para las ocho* 'be ready by eight'. This is more common with the *tú* imperative because the non-pronominal form is easily confused with the third-person present singular *está*:



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*Las habrá amenazado con algo. Estate seguro*  
(JM, Sp., dialogue)  
—*No se mueva. Por favor estese tranquilo*  
(CF, Mex. dialogue)  
—*Esté tranquila —le dijo . . . si se mueve le va mal, así que estese tranquila*  
(GGM, Col., dialogue)

He must have threatened them with something. You can be sure (lit. 'be sure')  
Don't move. Please remain calm  
'Keep calm,' he told her . . . 'if you move it'll go badly for you, so keep calm'

(1) The NGLE 42.5b does not approve of the non-pronominal *tú* form of the imperative and the following example would have been expressed *estate lista* in Spain: *paso a cambiarme como a las ocho. Por favor, está lista* (CF, Mex., dialogue) 'I'll be home around eight to get changed. Please be ready'. The unambiguous forms *esté, estén* are however considered correct.

(2) One should write *estate* not *estáte*, and *estese/estense*, not *estése/esténse*. Accented forms are often seen in print but the accent is unnecessary: one does not write \**deténlo* for *detenlo* 'arrest him' even though the form without a pronoun is *detén*.

(3) There is a very colloquial form of *estate* – *tate* – heard in several Latin-American countries and occasionally in Spain.

## 21.3 Negative forms of the imperative

To express a negative imperative, the present subjunctive form must be used:

### Affirmative imperative

<i>canta</i>	sing
<i>vete</i>	go away
<i>(usted) levántese</i>	stand up
<i>(vosotros) sentaos</i>	sit down
<i>(ustedes) dénselo</i>	give it to him/ her/them

### Negative imperative

<i>no cantes</i>	don't sing
<i>no te vayas</i>	don't go away
<i>no se levante</i>	don't stand up
<i>no os sentéis</i>	don't sit down
<i>no se lo den</i>	don't give it to him/ her/them

(1) The Argentine *vos* forms obey the same rules, and foreign students should use the standard subjunctive forms with them for the reasons explained at 20.12.5: *levantate* > *no te levantes*. *No te levántés* is a shade too popular for many Argentines and is said to be 'lower class' in Uruguay.

## 21.4 Position of object pronouns with the imperative

When an imperative form is used with an object pronoun, the following rules apply:

(a) If the imperative is affirmative, the pronouns are attached to the verb in the order shown at 14.2.4):

<i>(Tú) dame la mano</i>	Hold my hand
<i>(Tú) ponte la chaqueta</i> (Arg., <i>vos ponete el saco</i> )	Put your jacket on
<i>(Usted) dómelo</i>	Give it to me
<i>(Vosotros/as) dádmelo</i>	Give it to me
<i>(Vosotros) despertaos</i> (colloquial <i>despertaros</i> ; see 21.2.4 note 2)	Wake up
<i>(Ustedes) dénnoslo</i>	Give it to us
<i>Déjame lo ver, déjame lo ver</i> (AM, Mex., dialogue; or <i>déjame verlo</i> )	Let me see it, let me see it

(b) If the imperative is negative, the pronouns precede it in the order shown at 14.2.4:

<i>No me des la lata (tú)</i>	Stop pestering me
<i>No te pongas la chaqueta (tú)</i>	Don't put your jacket on
<i>No me lo dé (usted)</i>	Don't give it to me
<i>No os quejéis (vosotros)</i>	Don't complain
<i>No se lo enseñen (ustedes)</i>	Don't show it to him/her/them
<i>Es una chica que trabaja conmigo no te vayas a creer (CMG, Sp., dialogue)</i>	She's a girl who works with me – don't get the wrong idea

(1) When a pronoun ending in a vowel is attached to an affirmative *ustedes* imperative, there is a widespread tendency in very popular Latin-American speech either to repeat the plural *-n* at the end of the word or to shift it to the end of the word: *?levántensen* or *?levántesen* (for *levántense*) 'get up', *?desen cuenta que está por pasar lo más terrible aquí en nuestro país* (reader's letter, *Foros Latinos*, Ven., Sp. *dense cuenta de que*) 'be aware that the most terrible thing is about to happen here in our country', etc. In some places, these forms are heard even in spontaneous educated speech, but only in sub-standard or dialect speech in Spain, and they are not used in Latin-American written styles or careful speech.

(2) In popular language in Spain, pronouns are sometimes put before an affirmative imperative verb and a redundant pronoun is used even for a direct object (this construction should not be confused with imperatives preceded by *que*, discussed at 21.6): *?¡le dé el juguete al niño!* (for *dele el juguete al niño!*) 'give the toy to the child!', *?las riegue las plantas* (for *riegue las plantas*) 'water the plants'. This construction is strongly stigmatized and should not be imitated.

(3) Uncertainty surrounds the correct spelling of the *usted* imperative of *dar* (*dé*) when one pronoun is attached: *dele* or *déle* for 'give him/her'? Since the accent merely distinguishes *dé* 'give' from *de* 'of', it is not needed on a form like *dele*, *deles*, *denos*. The Academy does not use it and *El País*, Sp. has dropped it.

## 21.5 First-person plural imperatives

The present subjunctive can be used to make a first-person plural imperative, e.g. 'let's go!', 'let's begin'. If the verb is pronominal – *lavarse*, *volverse*, etc. –, the final *-s* is dropped before adding *-nos*. If the imperative is negative the pronouns precede the verb:

<i>Empecemos</i>	Let's get started
<i>Asegurémonos primero de la verdad de los hechos (not *asegurémosnos)</i>	Let us first assure ourselves of the truth of the facts
<i>Generemos un ambiente en donde todas estas luchas hay que continuarlas</i> (interview, Mex.)	Let us generate an environment in which all these struggles must be continued
<i>No nos enfademos</i> (Lat. Am. <i>no nos enojemos</i> )	Let's not get angry

(1) **Important:** *ir/irse* often forms its first-person plural imperative irregularly: *vamos*, *vámonos* 'let's go'. The expected forms, *vayamos*, *vayámonos*, are also used – *vayamos a rescatar a la sargento y cenemos como personas, o intentémoslo* (LS, Sp., dialogue) 'let's go and rescue the sergeant (fem.) and have a proper dinner, or try to' ('lit. 'dine like persons/human beings'). *Vayamos* is found in set phrases, e.g. *vayamos al grano* 'let's get to the point'.

(2) With the exception of *vámonos* 'let's go', informal spoken language may avoid first-person plural imperatives, usually by using *ir a*, or sometimes simply *a* and an infinitive, e.g. *vamos a sentarnos* 'let's sit down', *bueno, a comer* 'OK, let's eat', *vamos a verlo/a ver* 'let's have a look'/'let's see'. Thus *no nos enfademos* 'let's not get angry' may be expressed by *no nos vamos a enfadar*, *no vamos a enfadarnos*. However, *no nos enfademos* is perfectly acceptable in spoken language.

(3) **Important:** as we said earlier, the final *s* of a first-person plural imperative is dropped if *-nos* is added: *vamos* – *vámonos*, *sentémonos* 'let's sit down', *quedémonos aquí* 'let's stay here'. The *s* is not dropped before other pronouns (but see the next note): *digámosles* 'let's tell them', *celebrémoslo* 'let's celebrate it'.

(4) **Important:** double *s* is not found in Spanish, so one *s* is dropped in cases like the following: *digámoselo* 'let's tell it to him/her/them' (not \**digámosselo*), *démoselos* 'let's give them to him/her/them'.

(5) **Important:** double *n* must be retained and pronounced as a double sound: *denos* = 'give us' (singular *usted* form), *dennos* = 'give us' (plural *ustedes* form), (*ustedes*) *dígnannos* 'tell us'.

## 21.6 Third-person imperatives

Third-person imperative forms consisting of *que* + a subjunctive are common. They are usually translatable by some formula like 'let him/her/them . . .', 'tell him/her/them to . . .':

—*Que llaman preguntando por su marido*—

*Pues que lo/le llamen a la oficina*

*¡Que trabaje tu PC!* (Computer Hoy, Sp.)

*Que ella los bañara, los vistiera, oyera sus preguntas, los enseñara a rezar y a creer en algo* (AM, Mex., dialogue)

*Que te sea leve*

'There's a phone call for your husband.'

'Then tell them to call him at his office'

Get your PC working!

Let her bathe them, clothe them, listen to their questions, teach them to pray and believe in something

I hope it won't be too tough/Take it easy

Pronouns always precede the verb in this construction. See 37.4 for further remarks on the use of the conjunction *que*.

(1) Third-person imperatives without *que* are found in set phrases: *¡Dios nos coja confesados!* (archaic or humorous) 'Good God!'/ 'Heavens above!' (lit. 'may God take us after we've confessed!'), *¡no lo permita Dios!* 'God forbid!', *¡sálvese quien pueda!* 'every man for himself!' (or woman: the Spanish version is not sexist), *¡viva/muera el presidente!* 'long live/death to the President!', *¡vivan los novios!* 'here's to the bride and groom!'

(2) This construction must not be confused with *que* + subjunctive meaning 'that' or 'the fact that': *¡que me diga usted eso a estas alturas!* 'that you should tell me that at this stage of the business/now we've got this far!'; see 20.3.19.

## 21.7 Second-person imperatives preceded by *que*

An imperative can be formed from a second-person subjunctive preceded by *que*. This makes the order more emphatic or presents it as a reminder:

*¡Que pases un buen fin de semana!*

*¡Que no pierdas el dinero!*

*¡Que se diviertan!*

Have a good weekend

Don't lose the money!

Have a good time! (*ustedes*)

## 21.8 Impersonal imperatives (passive *se* imperatives)

It is possible to form an imperative with passive *se* or the *pasiva refleja*, the resulting construction having no exact equivalent in English. It is used in formal written Spanish to give instructions without directly addressing the reader:

<i>Rellénese en mayúsculas</i>	Fill out in capital letters (lit. 'let it be filled out . . .')
<i>Tradúzcanse al castellano las siguientes frases</i>	Translate the following phrases into Spanish
<i>No obstante, permítansenos aquí algunas palabras</i> (C. Sánchez López in GDLE)	However, may we be allowed to say a few words here
<i>Cuézanse las patatas durante 15 minutos, córtense en rodajitas, déjense enfriar y cúbranse con mayonesa</i>	Boil the potatoes for 15 minutes, cut them into slices, leave them to cool and cover them with mayonnaise

**(1) Important:** as the last three examples show, the verb agrees in number with the subject of the verb (in these cases with *frases*, *palabras* and *patatas*). There is a modern tendency to prefer the infinitive to this impersonal imperative. See the next section.

## 21.9 The infinitive used as an imperative

The infinitive may be used as an imperative:

**(a)** In spoken European Spanish as a familiar alternative to the standard affirmative *vosotros* imperative ending in *-d*: *decirme la verdad = decídmela la verdad* 'tell me the truth'. This is not accepted by all speakers but it is constantly heard. See 21.2.4 note 2 for discussion.

**(b)** Everywhere, as a brief, impersonal alternative to the *usted/ustedes* imperative, useful for public notices or instructions, e.g. in technical manuals or cookery books

<i>Empujar</i> (notice on doors, sometimes <i>empujen</i> or, in Spain, <i>empujad</i> )	Push
<i>Poner los medallones en un plato, salsearlos, y acompañarlos con las bolitas de papa, zanahorias y un ramito de brócoli</i> (La Reforma, Mex. <i>Papas</i> = <i>patatas</i> in Spain; <i>salsear</i> = <i>sazonar</i> , <i>brócoli</i> = <i>brécol</i> )	Put the medallions (of beef) on a plate, season them and serve them with the potato balls, carrots and a floret of broccoli
<i>Descolgar y esperar. Percibirá una señal acústica continua y uniforme. No demorar el marcar</i> (phone book, Sp., <i>marcar</i> = <i>discar</i> in many parts of Lat. Am.)	Lift receiver and wait. You will hear a continuous even tone. Do not delay dialling

**(1)** This use of the infinitive instead of the *usted(es)* form is controversial. Some grammarians reject it for affirmative commands and admit only negative forms like *no fumar* 'no smoking', *no tocar* 'don't touch', *no fijar carteles* 'no bill-sticking', *no asomarse a la ventanilla* 'do not lean out of the window'; but affirmative forms are nowadays seen everywhere.

In speech, use of the infinitive for an imperative when speaking directly to someone may sound sub-standard. María Moliner says that *callarse todos* for *cállense todos* 'everybody be quiet' is not acceptable, but it is nevertheless very common in informal speech everywhere.

(2) *Haber* plus the past participle is often used to make a sarcastic, wise-after-the-event suggestion: —*Me arrepiento de haberla llamado*—. *Bueno, no haberlo hecho . . .* “I regret calling her.” “Well, you shouldn’t have done it, should you?” —*¡Vaya mojadura!*— *Haber traído el paraguas* “What a soaking!” “You should have brought your umbrella, shouldn’t you?” This construction is called the *imperativo retrospectivo* in Spanish.

(3) With the preposition *a*, the infinitive may be used to give orders in informal styles:

— <i>Todavía está sucio</i> —. <i>Bueno, a lavarlo otra vez</i> (sounds colloquial without the <i>a</i> )	‘It’s still dirty’ ‘Well wash it again.’
— <i>¡No tengo novio todavía!</i> — <i>Las ganas no te faltan. ¡A buscarlo!</i> (AA, Cu., dialogue)	‘I haven’t got a boyfriend yet!’ ‘You’re keen enough. Look for one!’
<i>¡Todos a callar!</i>	Be quiet everybody!
<i>¡A dormir inmediatamente!</i>	Go to sleep right now!

This type of imperative can include the speaker: *bueno, ahora a trabajar* ‘OK, now let’s get to work’.

(4) In Spain, an infinitive is nowadays often used to introduce the last point in radio or TV news items. This is surely not an imperative but an abbreviation of some phrase like *solo/sólo nos queda . . .* or *solo/sólo falta . . .* ‘all that remains is to . . .’: *y finalmente, añadir* (for *añadamos* ‘let us add’) *que esta/ésta no es la primera vez que el autor recibe un importante premio literario* ‘and finally we should add that this isn’t the first time that the author has received an important literary prize’. The Academy disapproves of this construction.

## 21.10 The present indicative used as an imperative

The present indicative is often used as an imperative in spoken Spanish, just as in English; cf. ‘you’re getting up right now and going to school’. In both languages this tends to be a no-nonsense imperative and, depending on intonation, it can be brusque to the point of rudeness:

<i>Si tienes dinero, me lo das</i>	If you’ve got money, give it to me
<i>De acuerdo. No te guardo el sitio para mañana, pero pasado me haces dos páginas</i> (CRG, Sp., dialogue; editor to journalist)	OK. I won’t keep the space for you tomorrow, but the day after you do two pages for me
<i>Nomás que oscurezca te vas por la carretera y tiras en una barranca el cuerpo de una muchacha que se murió</i> (JI, Mex., dialogue. In Spain <i>nomás que</i> = <i>en cuanto</i> or <i>nada más</i> and <i>barranca</i> is <i>el barranco</i> )	As soon as it gets dark, you go down the road and you throw the body of a girl who died into a ravine

## 21.11 Ways of mellowing the imperative

There are numerous ways of making a request sound friendly, although in any language a politely-worded request can sound rude if the intonation is abrupt or irritable. Some ways of making a request sound more friendly are:

(a) Use the conditional or imperfect of *poder*:

<i>¿Podrían/Podían hacer menos ruido (por favor)?</i>	Would you mind making less noise? / Could you make less noise?
<i>¿Podrías hacerme el favor de no fumar?</i>	Would you mind not smoking?

(b) Use *querer*. The conditional makes the imperative even milder:

<i>¿Quieres decirme la verdad?</i>	Would you mind telling me the truth?
<i>¿Querías (hacerme el favor de) darle un recado a Pedro?</i>	Would you mind giving a message to Pedro?

(c) Use the phrase *a ver* 'let's see . . .':

<i>A ver si vienes a verme más a menudo</i>	Try to come and see me more often
<i>A ver si me devuelves el dinero que te presté</i>	Perhaps you could give me back the money I lent you

(d) Turn the request into a question:

<i>¿Me pasas el agua (por favor)?</i>	Pass the water please
<i>¿Me pone con el 261-84-50 (por favor)?</i> (See 11.17 for how to say telephone numbers)	Can you connect me to 261 8450 please?

(e) In Spain, use *tú* instead of *usted*, even to strangers: *ponme un tinto de verano* 'I'll have a "summer red wine"' (red wine diluted with soda water or lemonade). This is very widespread in Spain and appropriate between young people (say under forty) even when they are strangers, but it may sound over-familiar when said to older strangers and must not be used to people in authority. In Latin America *tú* is generally used less frequently between strangers.

(f) Add a diminutive suffix to the direct object noun:

This is a common way of making a request sound friendly. Compare *deme una barra de pan* 'give me a loaf of bread' and *deme una barrita de pan* 'I'll just take a loaf of bread, please'. The diminutive does not necessarily imply smallness in this construction; it simply makes the tone friendlier, as in *fuimos a tomar unas copitas* 'we went and had a couple of drinks' (see 43.2.2 for more details).

(g) Add some tag like *¿eh?*, *¿puedes?*:

<i>Vamos al cine, ¿quieres?/¿vale?</i>	Let's go the cinema, okay?
<i>Abre la puerta, ¿puedes?</i>	Open the door would you
<i>No chilles, ¿eh?</i>	Stop screaming

## 21.12 Miscellaneous imperative constructions

<i>Oye/Oiga (usted) (por favor)</i> (lit. 'hear!')	Excuse me! (to call someone's attention)
<i>No lo vuelvas a hacer/No vuelvas a hacerlo</i>	Don't do it again
<i>Mira lo que he comprado</i>	Look what I bought
<i>Fíjate en lo que me ha pasado</i>	Look what happened to me
<i>Imagínate qué disgusto</i>	Imagine how upset I was (lit. 'imagine what displeasure')
<i>Ténmelo/Téngamelo preparado</i>	Have it ready for me
<i>Trae que te lleve la bolsa</i> (colloquial, Sp. only?)	Let me carry your bag
<i>Trae aquí</i> (colloquial, Sp. only?)	Give it here/Let me take it
<i>No se te ocurra hacer eso</i>	Don't even think of doing that
<i>No dejes de llamarme/No se te olvide llamarme</i>	Don't forget to call me
<i>Vete a saber</i>	Goodness knows/Heaven knows why

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*No me digas* (incredulous tone)  
*Vayan entrando*

You don't say!  
Start coming in

(1) In Spain the word *venga* has become a constantly used catch-phrase roughly meaning 'OK', 'fine': *venga, dáselo a papá* 'come on, give it to daddy', *venga, vámonos* 'OK, let's go', *venga, te llamo mañana* 'OK, I'll call you tomorrow'. Constant use of *vale* for 'fine'/'OK', is noted by Latin Americans as being typical of the Spanish of Spain, where the word *OK* is not much used.

# 22 The infinitive

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- Verb + infinitive, e.g. *quiero ir, dice saber, trató de pasar*, etc. (Section 22.2)
- *La vi entrar, los oí decir*, etc. (Section 22.2.4)
- Infinitive after prepositions and subordinators (Section 22.3)
- *Antes de hacerlo* compared with *antes de que lo haga* (Section 22.3.2)
- *Comimos al llegar, al darnos cuenta . . .*, etc. (Section 22.3.3)
- Infinitive used in place of finite forms (e.g. —¿Qué hacemos? —*Esperar; cualquier cosa menos casarse*, etc.) (Section 22.4)
- Possible passive meaning of the Spanish infinitive (Section 22.5)
- The infinitive as a noun and the definite article with the infinitive (Sections 22.6–7)
- *Es difícil de hacer* compared with *es difícil hacerlo* (Section 22.10)
- *Total a pagar, un punto a tener en cuenta* (Section 22.13)

## 22.1 Summary

Spanish infinitives end in *-ar, -er* or *-ir*, e.g. *hablar, comer, vivir*. A few infinitives, e.g. *freír, reír, sonreír*, have an accent on the *i*. These are listed at 16.6.6.

The infinitive may act as a verb or noun. In the latter case it is masculine and usually singular: *fumar es malo para la salud* ‘smoking is bad for the health’. One must not use the gerund to translate this kind of English sentence: *\*fumando es malo para la salud* is not Spanish.

The Spanish infinitive can sometimes have a passive meaning as in *tres cartas sin terminar* ‘three unfinished letters’. See 22.5.

The Spanish infinitive often takes suffixed personal pronouns, e.g. *antes de hacerlo* ‘before doing it’, *sin habérmoslo dado* ‘without having given it to us’. When the infinitive is governed by a finite verb, position of the pronouns is often optional, as in *quiero verlo* and *lo quiero ver* ‘I want to see it/him’: see 14.3.4–5 and below at 22.2.2.

For the use of the infinitive as an imperative see 21.9. For *de* + infinitive to mean ‘if . . .’ as in *de haberlos visto los habríamos saludado* ‘if we’d seen them we’d have said hello to them’ see 29.8.3.

## 22.2 Infinitive governed by a verb

This section refers to constructions like *sabe nadar* ‘(s)he can swim’, *te desafío a hacerlo* ‘I challenge you to do it’, *te oí decirlo* ‘I heard you say it’, etc. These have many parallels in English, but there are some surprises.

### 22.2.1 Replacement of finite subordinate verbs by an infinitive

Some verbs, particularly verbs meaning ‘to say’, ‘to affirm’, allow either an infinitive or *que* + a finite verb when the subjects are the same, e.g. *Juan dice conocerla* or *Juan dice que la conoce* ‘Juan says that he knows her’ (where Juan and ‘he’ are the same person). In such cases, use of the infinitive makes the sentence unambiguous in the third person, whereas *Juan dice que la conoce*



is ambiguous, i.e. it could also mean 'Juan says that he (someone else)/she/you know(s) her'. Compare these pairs:

<i>Desmintieron que hubieran/hubiesen lanzado el misil</i>	They denied that they'd launched the missile (i.e. themselves or someone else)
<i>Desmintieron haber lanzado el misil</i>	They denied launching the missile
<i>Afirmaba que era francés</i>	He claimed he was French (himself or someone else)
<i>Afirmaba ser francés</i>	He claimed to be French

Further examples:

<i>Dijo llamarse Simón . . . tener 42 años, ser casado, mexicano y estar radicado en el Salto de la Tuxpana</i> (JL, Mex. Imitates police report language)	He said he was called Simón, was 42, married, Mexican and lived in Salto de la Tuxpana
<i>Había creído volverse loco, pensado en matarse</i> (MVLl, Pe.)	He had imagined he was going mad, thought about killing himself
<i>La información . . . revela ser falsa</i> (CF, Mex., dialogue)	The information turns out to be false
<i>Reconoció/Confesó haberlo hecho</i>	(S)he confessed to having done it

and similarly with *admitir* 'to admit', *recordar/acordarse de* 'to remember', *ocultar* 'to hide' *olvidar* 'to forget'.

(1) Some verbs always take an infinitive because they can only have one subject: *se obstinaba en hacerlo* '(s)he insisted on doing it', *tienden a abstenerse* 'they tend to abstain'.

(2) In written language, an infinitive may appear in relative clauses when the subjects refer to different things and the clause includes a verb of saying or believing. This avoids the use of two *ques*: *las tres muchachas, que él creía ser hijas de don Mateo* (rather than *que él creía que eran . . .*) 'the three girls, whom he believed to be the daughters of Don Mateo'.

(3) The past equivalent of the infinitive is made with *haber* + past participle: *dice haberlo comprado hace meses* '(s)he says that (s)he bought it months ago'.

(4) Despite the clarity of the infinitive construction, it tends to be confined to formal styles and the ambiguous construction with *que* is more usual in everyday language. One is more likely to say *dicen que lo saben* than *dicen saberlo* for 'they say they know it'.

### 22.2.2 Verbs followed by the infinitive

The following list shows some common verbs that are followed by an infinitive. French equivalents are supplied in some cases to remind students of that language to avoid all-too-frequent blunders like *\*intentar de hacer algo* for *intentar hacer algo* (French *essayer de faire quelquechose*) 'to try to do something'. Where no preposition is shown the verb is followed by an infinitive alone, as in *anhelaban hacerlo* 'they longed/yearned to do it'. Some verbs may be used either with the infinitive or with *que* plus a subjunctive as explained at 20.3.8.

#### Selection of verbs followed by infinitive

Verbs preceded by § may be followed by an infinitive even when the subject of the infinitive is not the subject of the finite verb, as in *yo le aconsejé a Roberto no hacerlo* 'I advised Roberto not to do it'. See 20.3.8c for details.

Verbs marked with an asterisk allow pronoun shifting; see note 1. This list has caused us many headaches, the problem being that some shifted forms are widely heard but may be popular or colloquial and unacceptable to careful speakers. For example, *hay que hacerlo* is normal but the shifted form, *??lo hay que hacer* is popular though widespread. We have not marked all of these doubtful cases with an asterisk.

*abstenerse de* to refrain from  
*acabar de\**: i.e. *acabo de verla* or  
*la acabo de ver* 'I've just seen  
 her/it/you'  
*acabar por\** to end by  
*acercarse a/para* to approach  
 (Fr. *s'approcher de*)  
*aceptar* to accept  
*acertar a\** to manage to/to  
 succeed  
*§aconsejar\** to advise (Fr.  
*conseiller de*)  
*acordar* to agree to  
*acordarse de* to remember  
 (cf. *recordar*. See note 4)  
*acostumbrar a\** to be  
 accustomed to  
*§acusar de* to accuse of  
*afanarse por* to do one's best to  
*afirmar* to claim/to state  
*alcanzar a \** to manage to: *lo*  
*alcancé a ver* 'I managed  
 to see it'  
*amenazar (con)* to threaten to  
 (Fr. *menacer de*): *amenazó*  
*matarlo/le* or *con matarlo/le*  
*anhelar* to long to  
*§animar a* to encourage to  
*ansiar* to long to  
*aparentar* to seem to  
*aprender a\** to learn to: the  
 shifted form is colloquial  
*apresurarse a* to hasten to  
*arrepentirse de* to regret/to  
 repent  
*arriesgarse a* to risk  
*asegurar* to assure  
*atreverse a* to dare to (cf. Fr.  
*oser faire*)  
*§autorizar a/para* to authorize  
 to  
*avergonzarse de* to be ashamed  
 of  
*ayudar a* to help to  
*bajar a* to go down to: *bajé a*  
*verla* 'I went down to see her'

*brindarse a* to offer to  
*buscar* to seek to (Fr. *chercher à*)  
*cansarse de* to tire of  
*ceñirse a* to limit oneself to  
*cesar de* to cease  
*comenzar a\** to begin to  
*comenzar por* to start by  
*comprometerse a* to undertake to  
*conceder* to concede to  
*§condenar a* to condemn to  
*§conducir a* to lead to  
*confesar* to confess  
*conseguir\** to succeed in  
*consentir en* to agree to (Fr.  
*consentir à*)  
*consistir en* to consist of  
*contribuir a* to contribute to  
*convenir* to be appropriate  
*convenir en* to agree to  
*§convidar a* to invite to  
*creer* to believe  
*cuidar de* to take care to  
*§culpar de* to blame someone  
 for  
*deber\** must. See 25.3  
*decidir* to decide to (Fr. *décider*  
*de*)  
*decidirse a* to make up one's  
 mind to  
*decir* tell (i.e. order; Fr. *dire de*)  
 also 'say'. See 20.3.7  
*declarar* to declare  
*dedicarse a* to dedicate oneself  
 to  
*§dejar\** to let/to allow: *le dejó*  
*hacerlo* or *se lo dejó hacer*  
 '(s)he let him/her do it';  
*dejar de\** to leave off/to give  
 up  
*demonstrar* to demonstrate  
 (more usually with *que* +  
 finite verb)  
*§desafiar a* to challenge to (Fr.  
*défier de*)  
*desear\** to desire/to wish to.  
*Lo deseo ver* is colloquial.

*desesperar de* to despair of  
*desvivirse por* to do one's  
 utmost to  
*dignarse (a)* to deign to  
*disponerse a* to get ready to  
*§disuadir de* to dissuade from  
*divertirse en* to amuse oneself  
 by (usually with gerund; Fr.  
*s'amuser à*)  
*dudar en* to hesitate over (Fr.  
*hésiter à*)  
*elegir* to choose to  
*empeñarse en* to insist on  
*empecinarse en* to insist on  
*empezar a\** to begin to  
*empezar por* to start by  
*encargarse de* to take charge of  
*enseñar a* to show how to/  
 teach  
*§enviar a* to send to  
*esforzarse por/en* to strive to  
 (Fr. *s'efforcer de*)  
*esperar* to hope/expect/wait to  
*evitar* to avoid (Fr. *éviter de*)  
*fingir* to pretend to  
*§forzar a* to force to  
*guardarse de* to take care not to  
*gustar de* to like to (but  
 usually *le gusta fumar*, etc.)  
*haber que* 'to be necessary to'.  
 See 25.4.2 note 1  
*habituarse a* to get used to  
*§hacer* to make (*la hizo callar*,  
 etc.)  
*hartarse de* to tire of  
*imaginar* to imagine  
*§impedir\** to prevent from  
 ... (Fr. *défendre de*)  
*imponer* to oblige to  
*§impulsar a* to urge to  
*§incitar a* to incite to  
*§inclinarse a* to incline to  
*§inducir a* to induce/  
 persuade to  
*insistir en* to insist on  
 (Fr. *insister pour*)

<i>Şinstar a</i> to urge to	<i>ofrecer</i> to offer (usually with <i>que</i> . . .)	<i>reconocer</i> to acknowledge (more usually with <i>que</i> )
<i>intentar*</i> to try to (Fr. <i>essayer de</i> ): <i>lo intentaron hacer</i> is more colloquial than <i>intentaron hacerlo</i>	<i>oír*</i> to hear. See 22.2.4	<i>recordar</i> to remember to (see note 4)
<i>interesarse en</i> (or <i>por</i> ) to take interest in (Fr. <i>s'intéresser à</i> )	<i>olvidar</i> to forget;	<i>rehuir</i> to shun/to avoid
<i>Şinviar a</i> to invite to	<i>olvidarse de, olvidársele</i> ; to forget. See 30.7.26	<i>rehusar</i> to refuse to (Fr. <i>refuser de</i> )
<i>ir a*</i> to go to ( <i>esto va a hacerse pronto</i> 'this will be done soon')	<i>optar</i> (usually <i>optar por</i> ) to opt to	<i>renunciar a</i> to renounce
<i>jactarse de</i> to boast of	<i>Şordenar</i> to order to (Fr. <i>ordonner de</i> )	<i>Şreprochar</i> to reproach for
<i>jurar</i> to swear to	<i>parar de</i> to stop	<i>resignarse a</i> to resign oneself to
<i>lamentar</i> to regret to	<i>parecer</i> to seem to	<i>resistirse a</i> to resist
<i>limitarse a</i> to limit oneself to	<i>pasar a</i> to go on to	<i>resultar</i> to turn out to be
<i>llegar a*</i> to go so far as to . . . (the unshifted form is much more usual)	<i>pasar de</i> to be uninterested in	<i>resolver</i> to resolve to (Fr. <i>résoudre de</i> )
<i>llevar a</i> to lead to	<i>Şpedir</i> to ask to (Fr. <i>demandar à, demander de</i> ). See 20.3.9	<i>saber*</i> to know how to
<i>lograr*</i> to succeed in	<i>pensar*</i> <i>pienso hacerlo</i> 'I plan to do it'	<i>sentir</i> to regret/to be sorry for
<i>luchar por</i> struggle to	<i>pensar en</i> to think of (Fr. <i>penser à</i> )	<i>soler*</i> : <i>solía hacerlo</i> '(s)he habitually did it' (see 25.6)
<i>Şmandar*</i> to order to (Fr. <i>ordonner de</i> )	<i>Şpermitir*</i> to allow to (Fr. <i>permettre de</i> )	<i>solicitar</i> to apply to
<i>Şmandar a</i> to order (to do something)	<i>persistir en</i> to persist in (Fr. <i>persister à</i> )	<i>soñar con</i> to dream of (Fr. <i>rêver de</i> )
<i>manifestar</i> to state/to declare (usually with <i>que</i> . . .)	<i>poder*</i> to be able to	<i>tardar en</i> to be late in/to be a long time in (Fr. <i>tarder à</i> )
<i>maravillarse de</i> to marvel at	<i>ponerse a</i> to start to	<i>temer</i> to fear to
<i>merecer</i> to deserve to	<i>precipitarse a</i> to rush to	<i>tender a*</i> to tend to: sometimes shifted colloquially
<i>meterse a</i> to start to	<i>preferir</i> to prefer to	<i>tener que*</i> to have to
<i>molestarse en</i> to bother to	<i>prepararse a</i> to get ready to	<i>Ştentar a</i> to tempt to
<i>necesitar*</i> to need to: <i>lo necesitamos hacer</i> is colloquial	<i>presumir de</i> to boast about	<i>terminar de</i> to finish
<i>negar</i> to deny ( <i>negarse a</i> refuse to)	<i>pretender</i> to claim to/to try to	<i>tratar de*</i> try to; but <i>lo trató de hacer</i> is colloquial
<i>Şobligar a</i> to oblige to (Fr. <i>obliger de</i> )	<i>proceder a</i> to proceed to	<i>vacilar en</i> to hesitate over
<i>obstinarse en</i> to insist obstinately on (Fr. <i>s'obstiner à</i> )	<i>procurar</i> to try hard to	<i>venir de</i> to come from . . .
	<i>Şprohibir</i> to prohibit from (Fr. <i>défendre de</i> )	<i>ver*</i> to see. See 22.2.4
	<i>prometer</i> to promise to (Fr. <i>promettre de</i> )	<i>ver de</i> to try to
	<i>quedar en</i> to agree to	<i>volver a (hacer)*</i> to (do) again. See 36.6
	<i>querer*</i> to want to	<i>votar por</i> to vote for
	<i>Şrecomendar</i> to recommend that	

(1) An asterisk marks verbs that allow pronoun shifting: one can say *acabo de hacerlo* or *lo acabo de hacer* 'I've just done it', *pienso mudarme mañana* or *me pienso mudar mañana* 'I'm thinking of moving tomorrow'. Pronoun shifting is discussed in detail at 14.3.4–5.

(2) Verbs of motion, e.g. *salir, bajar, ir, volver, entrar, acercar(se)*, always take *a* before an infinitive: *bajó a verla* '(s)he went down to see her', *entraron a saludar al profesor* 'they went in to say hello to the teacher', etc. When the subjects are not identical, *a que* or *para que* + subjunctive is required: *bajó a/para que la vieran/viesen* 'she went down so they could see her'.

(3) For the use of the infinitive as a noun, e.g. *es bueno jugar al tenis* 'it's good to play tennis' / 'playing tennis is good', see 22.6–7.

(4) The construction is *me acuerdo de haberlo visto* or *recuerdo haberlo visto* 'I remember seeing him/it'. *Recordarse* can only mean 'to remember oneself', as in *me recuerdo como un niño muy tímido* 'I remember myself as a very timid child'. *Recordarse* for 'to remember' is heard in familiar Latin-American speech but it is avoided in careful styles and is considered incorrect in Spain.

### 22.2.3 Verbs of permitting and forbidding, and other verbs constructed with an indirect object

Most, but not all, verbs that can be constructed with an indirect object, e.g. *les permití hacerlo/les permití que lo hicieran* 'I let them do it', allow either a subjunctive or an infinitive construction. They are discussed at 20.3.8c.

(1) It is worth repeating here that when used with the infinitive, verbs of obliging, prohibiting and permitting can appear without an object pronoun in Spanish but not in English: *esto prohíbe pensar que . . .* 'this prohibits **one** from thinking that . . .'. See 20.3.8 note 2.

### 22.2.4 Infinitive after verbs of perception like 'to see', 'to hear', 'to remember'

The infinitive is used after verbs like *ver*, *oír*, *recordar* to denote a completed action; an incomplete action is indicated by the gerund. English makes the same distinction: compare *lo/le vi fumar un puro* 'I saw him smoke a cigar' (and finish it) and *lo/le vi fumando un puro* 'I saw him smoking a cigar'. See 24.6–7 for more examples.

The word order with an intransitive infinitive is as follows: *vi entrar a Marta* 'I saw Marta come in', where Marta is the direct object of *ver* and the subject of *entrar*. *Vi a Marta entrar* is also found but more often in literary styles. But with transitive infinitives the order is Subject-Infinitive-Noun, i.e. *vimos a Roberto comprar unas flores* 'we saw Robert buy some flowers':

<i>Te vi entrar</i>	I saw you come in
<i>Te lo vi firmar</i>	I saw you sign it
<i>Notábamos entrar a varias personas de aspecto sospechoso</i>	We noticed several suspicious-looking people entering
<i>Millones vieron una manzana caer, pero solo Newton se preguntó por qué (El Economista, Mex.)</i>	Millions saw/had seen an apple fall, but only Newton asked why
<i>Vi a Beatriz Noguera suplicar ante la puerta de Muriel (JM, Sp.)</i>	I saw Beatriz Noguera pleading at Muriel's door
<i>No he oído nunca aullar a un lobo, pero sé que era un lobo (JLB, Arg., dialogue)</i>	I've never heard a wolf howl, but I know it was a wolf
<i>Marés sentía desintegrarse día a día su personalidad (JMs, Sp.)</i>	Marés felt his personality disintegrating day by day
<i>Se lo oí decir</i>	I heard her/him/you ( <i>usted/es</i> )/them say it
<i>Quiero escuchárselo decir (RB, Ch., dialogue)</i>	I want to hear you ( <i>usted</i> ) say it

(1) **Important:** the crucial 'rule of two l's' explained at 14.9 means that if a third-person pronoun is optionally shifted leftwards in this construction, the first pronoun, if it begins with *l*, becomes *se*: *la vi firmarlo* 'I saw her sign it' > *se lo vi firmar*, *lo/le oí confesarlo* > 'I heard him confess it' > *se lo oí confesar*, *los vi hacerlo* > *se lo vi hacer*.

(2) **Important:** the Spanish infinitive can be active or passive in meaning, so a passive may be required in the English translation: *nunca la oí nombrar* 'I've never heard her mentioned', *vio*

*detener a varios manifestantes* '(s)he saw several demonstrators arrested'. See 22.5. This occasionally causes ambiguity. *Vi matar a dos leones* could out of context mean either 'I saw two lions killed' or 'I saw two lions kill', the first meaning being more likely.

## 22.3 Infinitive after prepositions and subordinators

### 22.3.1 Infinitive after prepositions

**Important:** the infinitive is used after prepositions and prepositional phrases: *fue la primera en enterarse* 'she was the first to find out', *estoy harto de decírtelo* 'I'm tired of telling you', *reprende a la banca por arriesgarse* (*El País*, Sp.) 'he reproaches the banks for taking risks', *un líquido para quitar las manchas* 'a liquid to remove stains', *un abrigo sin estrenar* 'an unworn coat', etc. Prepositions are **never** used before a Spanish gerund: *\*\*estoy harto de diciéndotelo* is not Spanish (for an archaic exception to this rule see 24.5).

### 22.3.2 Choice between the infinitive and *que* + finite verb

An infinitive construction is possible after the subordinators listed in section 20.4.2 e.g. *hasta* 'until', *para* 'in order to', *sin* 'without', *nada más* 'as soon as', and those consisting of phrases that require the word *de que* before a finite verb, e.g. *antes de (que)* 'before', *después de (que)* 'after', *el hecho de (que)* 'the fact that', etc.

Foreign students should apply the following rule: use the infinitive with these subordinators only if the subject of the following verb is the same as the main verb's, as in *lo hice antes de salir* 'I did it before I went out/before going out'.

If the subjects are different, the subjunctive or indicative must be used (although the rule is applied loosely with *antes de* and *después de*), the choice being determined by the rules laid out at 20.4.1. Compare *lo haré nada más acabar esto* 'I'll do it as soon as I've finished this' and *lo haré nada más que acabe esto* 'I'll do it as soon as *this* finishes'. The latter sentence could also, however, mean 'as soon as I finish this' or 'as soon as (s)he finishes/you finish . . .'. Further examples:

<i>Lo haré después de comer</i>	I'll do it after I've had lunch
<i>Lo haré después de que hayas comido</i>	I'll do it after you've had lunch
<i>Entré sin verte</i>	I entered without seeing you
<i>Entré sin que tú me vieras/vieses</i>	I entered without you seeing me
<i>Se fue antes de contestar</i>	(S)he left before answering
<i>Se fue antes de que yo contestase/contestara</i>	(S)he left before I answered
<i>Enfermó (Lat. Am. se enfermó) por no comer</i>	(S)he fell sick from not eating

(1) Spontaneous language quite often uses an infinitive construction with these subordinators even when the subjects are not identical. Thus. *vino a los tres días de que te fueras tú* '(s)he arrived three days after you left' is correct, but *vino a los tres días de irte tú* (ABV, Sp., dialogue) is constantly heard. The GDLE 27.2.1 describes *no es conveniente marcharte sin despedirte* as 'careless' for *no es conveniente que te marches sin despedirte* 'it's not right for you to leave without saying goodbye'. Further examples:

? <i>Le miraba sin él darse cuenta</i> (JMs, Sp., dialogue: <i>sin que él se diese/diera cuenta</i> )	He watched him without him realizing
? <i>¿Te voy a ver antes de irte?</i> (Spanish informant, i.e. . . . <i>antes de que te vayas</i> )	Am I going to see you before you go?
<i>¿Me podés comprar postales para mandar yo?</i> (Argentine informant, i.e. <i>para que yo las mande</i> ; Sp. <i>puedes</i> for <i>podés</i> )	Could you buy me some postcards for me to send?

(2) If the infinitive construction is used, the best order is preposition + infinitive + subject, as in *me fui antes de llegar tú* 'I left before you arrived'. One hears the order preposition + subject + infinitive in very informal speech, as in *?para él hablar así, tenía que estar borracho* 'he must have been drunk for him to talk like that' (from GDLE 36.3.4), *?es decir que había comprado marfil para usted vender* (VdC, Cu. for . . . *para que usted lo vendiera/vendiese*) 'in other words he had bought ivory for you to sell'. The NGLE 26.7i says that this latter order is frequent in Caribbean Spanish, but it is also heard frequently elsewhere, cf. Spain *¡para él decir eso!* 'fancy him saying that!'.

(3) Note, that when looking back in time, one can use either the present or perfect infinitive after a preposition: *después de haber sido/de ser declarado inocente* 'after having been/being declared innocent', *luego de haber instalado/de instalar el programa, mi PC se me colgó* 'after installing the programme my PC crashed'.

### 22.3.3 *Al* + infinitive

This means the same as the English 'on' + the -ing form of a verb: *noté el perfume al entrar* 'I noticed the perfume on entering', i.e. 'when I entered'. The Spanish construction is very common on both continents:

*Se alegró al enterarse*

*Al fumarlo los indios experimentaban una especie de éxtasis* (El País, Sp.)

*Al terminar el bachillerato Gladys pasó a un organismo estatal* (MP, Arg.)

*Se detuvo un instante sorprendido, al ver de nuevo los rasgos olvidados del conserje* (CF, Mex.)

(S)he was happy when (s)he found out

When they smoked it the Indians experienced a sort of ecstasy

After finishing her baccalaureate Gladys moved to a government organization

He stopped for a moment, surprised to see again the forgotten features of the janitor

(1) This construction can also mean 'because': *al no ser morales, los animales no deben actuar de acuerdo con ciertos valores* (La Nación, Arg.) 'since they are not moral beings, animals do not have to act according to certain values', *una tecnología que no representa ningún riesgo para la población y el entorno, al no producir residuos* (Granma, Cu.) 'technology that presents no risk to the population or environment since it produces no waste'.

(2) In theory, *al* + infinitive ought to be used only when the subjects are the same, as in *al despedirme le dije a uno de los dos . . .* 'as I said goodbye I said to one of the two of them . . .', but sentences like *al despedirme uno de los dos me dijo* (JLB, Arg., dialogue, different subjects) 'as I left one of the two said to me', *al llegar a la puerta principal ya lo esperaba la madre superiora*. (MS, Mex.) 'when he got to the main door the Mother Superior was already waiting for him', are very common in relaxed styles.

(3) The conditional meaning of this construction is, according to NGLE 26.13j, confined to Mexico, Central America and the Andes region: *al ganar la lotería me mudaría a la capital* 'if I won the lottery I'd move to the capital' (for *si ganara/ganase . . .*). This conditional use is avoided in Spain.

## 22.4 Replacement of finite forms of a verb by an infinitive

The infinitive rather than a finite verb may be used in the following circumstances:

(a) To give an abrupt response to a question, as one does when the answer is obvious:

—¿Qué hacemos ahora? —Esperar

—¿Pero se puede saber que está usted

'What do we do now?' 'Wait'

'But do you mind saying what you're

*haciendo?* —¿Sacar a mi mujer!  
(EA, Sp., dialogue)

doing?’ ‘Getting my wife out!’

(b) After *más que*, *menos*, *excepto*:

*Yo siempre sospeché que había algo después  
de la muerte. Más que sospecharlo,  
lo sabía, casi con seguridad* (JJM, Pan.,  
dialogue)

I always suspected that there was  
something after death. More than  
suspect it, I knew it, almost as a certainty

*... ojos que más que mirar, retan* (EA, Sp.)  
*Más que proteger a la naturaleza, los  
zapatistas manifiestan su identidad con ella*  
(JV, Mex.)

... eyes that rather than look, challenge  
The Zapatistas identify with nature rather  
than protect it

*... todo, menos/excepto volver a escribirlo*

... anything, except write it again

(c) For naming or listing actions, as in:

*... y esto es lo que hacen los campesinos:  
arar, plantar, podar, regar*  
*¿Sabéis/Saben lo que yo hago después de que  
vosotros os habéis ido/ustedes se han ido  
a casa? Trabajar*

... and this is what peasants do: ploughing  
/US plowing, planting, pruning, watering  
Do you know what I do after you’ve gone  
home? Work

(d) In indignant or sarcastic statements and questions like *¿para qué servirle carne a un vegetariano?* ‘what’s the point of serving meat to a vegetarian?’ See 22.9.

## 22.5 Infinitive: passive or active?

The Spanish infinitive may have a passive meaning, especially after *sin*, *por*, *a* and *para*. This has no counterpart in English:

*Esto aún está por ver  
una cerveza sin abrir*  
*Pasaba el tiempo sin sentir* (CMG, Sp.)  
*En su recámara había cuatro maletas a  
medio hacer* (AM, Mex., dialogue;  
*recámara* = *habitación* in Spain)

This is still to be seen  
an unopened beer  
Time passed unnoticed  
In her room there were four half-  
packed suitcases

*Transcurrieron años sin tener noticias de  
lo ocurrido*

Years passed without (lit. ‘without having’)  
news of what had happened being  
received

*... trabajos para hacer por el estudiante*

... work to be done (lit. ‘to do’) by the student

(1) After adjectival phrases like *digno de* ‘worthy of’, *imposible de*, *difícil de*, *fácil de* the infinitive may appear with or without ‘passive *se*’: *el diseño del panel frontal es digno de tener(se) en cuenta* ‘the design of the front panel is worth noting’, *este tipo de tumor es difícil de observar(se) microscópicamente* ‘this type of tumour is difficult to observe under the microscope’, *es algo imposible de imaginar(se)* ‘it’s something that’s impossible to imagine’. One could also use the passive with *ser*: ... *digno de ser tenido en cuenta*, ... *difícil de ser observado*.

## 22.6 Infinitive as a noun

The infinitive may function as a noun, in which case it is sometimes translated by an English -ing form. Used as a noun, an infinitive is always masculine and usually singular:

*Mañana me toca lavar el coche*  
*aquel fluir movedizo de los colores* (CMG, Sp.)  
*mejor no hacerlo*  
*Odio ordenar*  
*un atolondrado ir y venir*  
*Sólo cuesta 20,000 pesos construir este auto*  
 (Excélsior, Mex. *Este coche* in Spain.  
 In most Spanish-speaking countries  
 20,000 is written 20.000)

It's my turn to wash the car tomorrow  
 that shifting flow of the colours . . .  
 Best not do it  
 I hate sorting/tidying  
 a mad coming and going  
 This car costs only 20,000 pesos to build

## 22.7 Definite article before the infinitive

The definite article is used before the infinitive:

(a) in the common construction *al* + infinitive: *tómese una pastilla al acostarse* 'take a pill on going to bed'. See 22.3.3 for discussion.

(b) When the infinitive is qualified by an adjective or by a noun phrase joined to the infinitive, often by the preposition *de*:

*Oyó el agitado girar de una cucharilla contra*  
*un vaso* (LG, Sp.)  
*Cristina escuchó el percutir de las gotas de la*  
*ducha sobre los azulejos* (LO, Cu.)  
*con el andar de los años*  
*. . . por el solo haberse enamorado de Josefa*  
*con mirarla* (AM, Mex.)

He heard the agitated grating of a  
 teaspoon against a glass  
 Cristina listened to the patter of  
 drops from the shower on the tiles  
 as the years passed by  
 . . . just because of having fallen in love  
 with Josefa from looking at her

(c) In other cases when the infinitive is used as a noun, the definite article seems to be optional, although it is less common in informal styles, e.g. *comer es como tomar*. *En exceso hace daño* (EP Mex., dialogue. *Tomar* here = *beber alcohol* in Spain) 'eating is like drinking. In excess it causes harm', *vivir con un hombre equivale a trabajar 7 horas extras* (Excélsior, Mex.) 'living with a man is the equivalent of working seven extra hours'. The article is, however, quite often retained when the infinitive is the subject of a verb. In all the following examples the *el* before the infinitive could be omitted, although in the examples it was used. Omission of the article *el* would make the style slightly less literary:

*Paula no pudo evitar (el) reírse* (JJP, Sp.)  
*(El) estar sin móvil, para mí, va a suponer*  
*algo horrible* (interview, *La Sexta*, Sp.)  
*Como si . . . estimaran prudente (el) estar*  
*preparados para salir a la calle afrontando*  
*el frío* (RB, Ch.)  
*G. nunca pudo perdonar a Heisenberg (el) no*  
*haber hecho lo suficiente para salvarlos*  
*(JV, Mex.)*

Paula couldn't help laughing  
 Being without a mobile/cell phone will  
 mean something horrible for me  
 As if they thought it prudent to be ready  
 to go out into the street and face the cold  
 G. was never able to forgive Heisenberg  
 for not having done enough to save them

The article is obligatory when an infinitive is followed by *de* when the phrase is the subject of a verb: *el crujir de los dientes es un síntoma . . .* 'grinding of teeth is a symptom . . .', *el trinar de los pájaros le confortaba* 'the warbling of the birds comforted him'. In other cases, the use of *de* shows that the infinitive is used as a noun rather than as a verb. Compare *oía crujir las ramas* '(s)he heard the branches creaking' (verb) and *oía el crujir de las ramas* '(s)he heard the creak(ing) of the branches' (noun). In both cases a noun could have been used, e.g. *el trino* and *el crujido*.



(d) The article is required in some constructions involving *en*:

<i>La moda en el vestir influye en la moda del maquillaje</i>	Fashion in dressing influences fashion in make-up
<i>Algunos españoles son un poco enfáticos en el hablar</i>	Some Spaniards are rather ponderous in their manner of speaking
<i>Lo/le conocí en el andar</i>	I recognized him from his way of walking

(e) The indefinite article *un* is also found before infinitives:

<i>en un abrir y cerrar de ojos</i>	in the wink of an eye
<i>Después de dos años de un agitado avanzar por el camino de la libertad . . .</i>	after two years of agitated progress along the road to liberty . . .
<i>. . . siluetas, grupos, en un ir y venir sin prisas (MVL, Pe.)</i>	. . . silhouettes, groups, unhurriedly coming and going

## 22.8 Infinitive as an imperative

The use of the infinitive as an imperative form, as in *calentar el aceite en una cazuela, freír las habas, luego las patatas* ‘heat the oil in a casserole dish, fry the beans and then the potatoes’, is discussed at 21.9.

## 22.9 ‘Rhetorical’ infinitive

The infinitive may be used in rhetorical questions or to express disbelief, indignation or sarcasm:

<i>¡Pagar yo cien mil por eso!</i>	Me pay 100,000 for that!
<i>¡Enamorarme yo a mis años!</i>	Me fall in love at my age!
<i>Pero, ¿cómo abrirlo sin llave?</i>	But how do you open it without a key?
<i>Pero no tiene sentido, si es en hebreo ¿por qué usar caracteres griegos? (MC, Mex., dialogue)</i>	But it doesn’t make sense. If it’s in Hebrew why use Greek letters?
<i>¿Por qué condenar el proyecto estrella de toda una gestión presidencial? (Vértice, ES)</i>	Why condemn the star project of a whole presidential initiative?

and also after words like *¿dónde?* and *¿para qué?*: *¿(a)dónde ir?* ‘where on earth shall we go?’, *¿para qué insistir?* ‘why insist?’

(1) The NGLE 26.14j notes the Mexican expression *ni modo de: ni modo de pedirle plata* (i.e. *dinero*) ‘no point asking him for money’. Elsewhere *ni hablar de . . .* means the same thing.

(2) In Spain *venga a* + infinitive expresses the idea of tiresome repetition: *y él venga a pedirme que me case con él* ‘and he keeps on and on asking me to marry him’.

## 22.10 Adjective + *de* + infinitive

*Es difícil aprender español* ‘it is difficult to learn Spanish’ differs from *el español es difícil de aprender* ‘Spanish is difficult to learn’. In the first sentence the subject of *es* is *aprender* and *de* is not used when the infinitive is the subject’: *no es fácil creerlo* ‘it isn’t easy to believe it’, *parece difícil solucionar tal problema* ‘it seems difficult to solve such a problem’, *resulta imposible comprobar que . . .* ‘it is impossible to prove that . . .’.

But when the infinitive is not the subject, *de* must be used (subject in bold, but it may be implicit in the Spanish verb): (*eso*) *es difícil de averiguar* ‘that is difficult to check/confirm’, *para este Día del Padre sorprenda a papá con un delicioso menú fácil y rápido de elaborar* (La Reforma, Mex.) ‘for today, Father’s Day, surprise father with a delicious menu that’s easy and quick to prepare’, *resulta difícil de definir* ‘it is difficult to define’, *ciertos movimientos difíciles de imitar* ‘certain movements (that were/are) difficult to imitate’.

## 22.11 Infinitive preceded by *que*

The following constructions must be noted, particularly by students of French: cf. *j’ai beaucoup à faire, il n’y a rien à manger*, etc.:

<i>Tengo muchas cosas que hacer/decir</i>	I’ve got a lot of things to do/say
<i>Voy a comprar algo que/para leer</i>	I’m going to buy something to read
<i>Dame algo que/para hacer</i>	Give me something to do
<i>Eso nos ha dado bastante que hacer</i>	This has given us enough to do
<i>Te queda mucho que ver en este mundo</i>	You’ve a lot left to see in this world
<i>No tiene mucho que ver con este problema</i>	It hasn’t got a lot to do with this problem

But this construction with *que* cannot be used with verbs of needing, requesting, searching:

<i>Necesito algo para comer</i>	I need something to eat
<i>Quiero algo para beber</i>	I want something to drink
<i>Pidió algo para (or con que) calmar su dolor de muelas</i>	(S)he asked for something to soothe his/her toothache
<i>Busco algo para . . .</i>	I’m looking for something to . . .

## 22.12 No tengo qué comer, no sabía dónde ir, etc.

This construction is similar to English:

<i>No tenían qué comer</i>	They had nothing to eat
<i>Había sitios a donde ir a bailar</i> (JA, Mex.)	There were places to go dancing
<i>No encontró dónde cambiar dólares</i> (ibid.)	He didn’t find anywhere to change dollars

(1) In the first example the accent on *qué* is crucial: cf. *no tenían que comer* ‘they didn’t have to/need to eat’. In the third example, it can be omitted from *dónde*. But *yo no sabía dónde pasar la noche* ‘I didn’t know where to spend the night’ is clearly an indirect question, so *dónde* requires an accent. See Chapter 28 for more details.

## 22.13 El problema a resolver, un argumento a tener en cuenta, etc.

This combination of a noun + *a* + an infinitive in phrases like *el problema a resolver* ‘the problem to be solved’ is controversial. *El País, Libro de estilo* 2014, 13.8, condemns it, but Seco (1998), 5, welcomes its brevity and points out that it is not identical to *por* + infinitive: *cosas por hacer* = ‘things still to be done’, *cosas a hacer* = ‘things to do’. The Academy’s *Esbozo . . .*, 3.11.5, tolerates certain set expressions used in commerce and finance, e.g. *total a pagar* ‘total payable’, *cantidades a deducir* ‘amounts deductible’, *asuntos a tratar* ‘business pending’/‘agenda’, but notes that the Academies

of all Spanish-speaking countries condemn such sentences as *tengo terrenos a vender* 'I've got land to sell' (for *que/para vender*), *personas a convocar* 'people to call/summon' (for *que convocar*), etc. The *NGLE* 26.6l, says of this construction that 'a pesar de su extensión, posee escaso prestigio en el español actual'. However, *es un dato a tener en cuenta* 'it is a point to be borne in mind' appears in the Academy's own *GDLE*, p.1785.

The construction with *a* is more widely accepted in Latin America; cf. *los uniformados presentaron hace poco un nuevo texto a ser considerado* (*Abc Color*, Par.) 'the military recently presented a new text for consideration'.

# 23 Participles

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- Main uses of the past participle – *hablado, vivido, hecho*, etc. (Section 23.1)
- Forms of regular and irregular past participles (Section 23.2)
- Past participles as adjectives (Section 23.3)
- Translating '(s)he was sitting', 'they were crouching' etc. (Section 23.4)
- Participle clauses (e.g. 'the meeting **having ended**, they left') (Section 23.5)
- Adjectival or present participles ending in *-ante*, – (*i*)*ente*, e.g. *inquietante* 'worrying', *convvincente*, 'convincing', *perteneciente* 'belonging' (Section 23.6)

## 23.1 Past participles: general

Past participles – *hablado, vivido, dicho, hecho*, etc.– have several uses:

- (a) they are used with *haber* to form the compound tenses of verbs: *ha hablado* '(s)he has spoken', *yo la había visto* 'I had seen her'. See Chapter 18.
- (b) They are occasionally used with *tener* or *llevar* to emphasize the idea of acquiring or accumulating things or actions, as in *tengo compradas las entradas* 'I've bought the entrance tickets', *llevo tomados tres somníferos* 'I've taken three sleeping tablets'. See 18.1.3 for discussion.
- (c) They are used to form the passive: *fue impreso/a* 'it was printed', *fueron observados/observadas* 'they were observed'. The passive is discussed in Chapter 32.
- (d) They can function as adjectives: see 23.3.

## 23.2 Past participles: forms

### 23.2.1 Regular and irregular past participles

The past participle is formed in most cases by replacing the *-ar* of an infinitive by *-ado*, and *-er* and *-ir* by *-ido*: *hablar/hablado, tener/tenido, construir/construido* (no accent!), *ir/ido, ser/sido*, etc. There are a few common irregular forms:

*abrir: abierto* (and *entreabrir*)  
*absolver* (and all verbs ending in *-solver*): *absuelto*  
*cubrir* (and all verbs ending in *-cubrir*):  
*cubierto*  
*\*decir* (and all verbs ending in *-decir\**): *dicho*  
*escribir* (and all verbs ending in *-scribir*):  
*escrito*  
*satisfacer* and other verbs ending in *-facer*:  
*satisfecho*

*freír: frito* (see note 2)  
*hacer: hecho* (also *deshacer, contrahacer*, etc.)  
*imprimir: impreso* (see note 2)  
*morir: muerto* (see note 1)  
*poner* (and all verbs ending in *-poner*): *puesto*  
*romper: roto*  
*ver* (and compounds like *prever*): *visto*  
*volver* (and all verbs ending in *-volver*): *vuelto*

\*See the next list for *maldecir*.

A few verbs have separate adjectival and verbal participles, cf. *está despierto* porque lo/le he despertado 'he's awake because I've woken him', *ahora que han soltado* a los animales andan sueltos 'now they've released the animals they're wandering around free', *el agua que ha bendecido* un cura se llama agua bendita 'the water that a priest has blessed is called Holy Water'. In the following list the verbal participle is shown first:

*absorber*: absorbido/absorto absorbed  
*bendecir*: bendecido/bendito blessed  
*confesar*: confesado/confeso confessed  
*confundir*: confundido/confuso confused  
*despertar*: despertado/desperto woken up  
*elegir*: elegido/electo elected

*maldecir*: maldecido/maldito cursed  
*prender*: prendido/preso. See note 3  
*proveer*: proveído/provisto equipped with  
*soltar*: soltado/suelto released  
*suspender*: suspendido/suspenso failed (e.g. exams)/hanging

(1) Muerto is often used in literary styles as the passive past participle of *matar* 'to kill' when applied to human beings: *con el tiempo sería muerto por la Gestapo* (ES, Arg., interview; ordinary language *sería matado/lo mataría*) 'he was later to be killed by the Gestapo', but *unos bandidos habían matado a su padre* 'some bandits had killed his father'.

(2) *Freído* and *imprimido* are still heard as verbal participles of *freír* 'to fry' and *imprimir* 'to print'. *Frito*, *impreso* are usual nowadays and the Academy accepts both.

(3) *Prender* has numerous meanings, e.g. 'to capture/detain', 'to pin on', 'catch fire' and, in Latin America, 'to switch on' lights, etc., Spain *encender*.

### 23.2.2 Irregular past participles in Latin America

A number of irregular adjectival participles are widely used in Latin America. These forms are either obsolete in Spain or are used only in set phrases, e.g. *el presidente electo* 'the president elect', but they are used in Latin America – especially in Argentina – not only as adjectives but also to form passives, e.g. *resultó electo candidato a la presidencia* (AM, Mex.) 'he was elected as presidential candidate', Spain *salió elegido*. In the following list the standard form appears first:

*convencer*: convencido/convicto convinced  
*corromper*: corrompido/corrupto corrupt  
*describir*: descrito/descripto described

*dividir*: dividido/diviso divided  
*inscribir/inscrito/inscripto* registered/enrolled  
*prescribir: prescrito/prescripto* prescribed

*Ocurre en las regiones antárticas descriptas con extraordinaria vividez . . .* (JLB, Arg., Sp. *descritas*)

It happens in the Antarctic regions described with extraordinary vividness . . .

*Incluye todos los shampoos prescriptos por médicos* (Gente, Arg., Sp. *recetados/prescritos*, *champús*)

It includes all the shampoos prescribed by doctors

*El autor de los disparos estaba inscripto al curso* (La Jornada, Mex. Sp. *inscrito en . . .*)

The person who fired the shots was enrolled on the course

*. . . escritores que fueron conservadores convictos* (MVLI, Pe., Sp. *Convencidos*. *Convicto* = 'convicted' in Spain)

. . . writers who were convinced conservatives

(1) Latin Americans may reject the use of the regular participles in such sentences, but the usual forms are quite common everywhere, especially in finite past tenses: *ella no había elegido al jefe del Ejército* (MSQ, Arg.) 'she hadn't chosen the head of the Army', *los políticos no están convencidos de esta "verdad profunda"* (ibid.) 'the politicians are not convinced of this "profound truth"'.

(2) Both *una sociedad corrompida* and *una sociedad corrupta* 'a corrupt society' are heard in Spain. *Corrupto* is usual in Latin America.

### 23.2.3 Object pronouns and participles

For the now obsolete construction *había comprado la casa y pintádola* for *había comprado la casa y la había pintado* 'he had bought the house and painted it', see 14.3.7 note 2.

## 23.3 Past participles as adjectives

### 23.3.1 Adjectival participles

When they are used as adjectives, past participles agree in number and gender like any adjective: *una exagerada reacción* 'an exaggerated reaction', *la gestación subrogada* 'surrogate pregnancy', *huevos revueltos* 'scrambled eggs', etc. These adjectival past participles can sometimes be converted into nouns by the use of a determiner (see Glossary): *un muerto* 'a dead person', *ese herido* 'that wounded person', *¿qué dirán por su parte los censurados?* 'what will those who have been censured have to say for themselves?', *varios condenados* 'several condemned persons'. Such forms provide neat translations of English relative clauses: *nunca olvidaremos a los desaparecidos* 'we'll never forget those who disappeared', *¿dónde están los recién llegados?* 'where are the ones who've just arrived?'

### 23.3.2 Unexpected meaning of some past participles and some adjectives ending in -do

Some adjective and participles ending in *-do* confuse foreign learners since they seem to have two meanings, the first adjectival and the second as a verbal participle. *Reducido* is notorious: *una cantidad reducida* is 'a small quantity', not a 'reduced' quantity, but *la cantidad ha sido reducida* is 'the quantity has been reduced'.

Other examples are *acusado* 'clearly visible' or 'accused', *ajustado* 'tight' or 'adjusted', *alargado* 'long' or 'lengthened', *alejado* 'remote' or 'distanced', *aprovechado* 'opportunistic' or 'made use of', *cuidado* 'careful'/'painstaking' or 'looked after', *elevado* 'high' (e.g. number/quantity) or 'raised', *honrado* 'honest' or 'honoured', *recogido* 'timid' or 'picked up', *retirado* 'remote' or 'withdrawn'/'retired'.

(1) The NGLE 27.10g notes regional survivals on both continents of older participle forms, e.g. *pago* 'paid', *calmo* 'calm(ed)', *canso* 'tired', *nublo* 'cloudy', *pinto* 'painted', *quito* 'removed', nowadays replaced by *pagado*, *calmado*, *cansado*, *nublado*, *pintado*, *quitado*. These forms are found in pre-eighteenth-century literature.

## 23.4 'She was sitting on the couch', etc.

**Important:** English-speakers constantly wrongly translate such sentences by using a Spanish gerund when a participle is needed: *estaba sentada en el sofá* 'she was sitting (i.e. 'seated') on the couch', *los jóvenes sentados en posición de flor loto* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'the young folk sitting in the lotus position', *estoy levantado, no arrodillado* 'I'm standing, not kneeling', *estaba apoyado contra la pared* 'he/I was leaning against the wall', *el gato estaba escondido debajo de la mesa* 'the cat was hiding under the table', *la abuela está acostada porque le duele la cabeza* 'grandma is lying down because she's got a headache', *estábamos agachados* 'we were crouching'.

Use of the gerund in such sentences creates a wholly different meaning: *la abuela se está acostando* means 'grandma is going to bed', i.e. is preparing herself for bed. In other words, the participle describes the position or posture someone or something is in, and the gerund describes an action in progress.

## 23.5 Participle clauses

Participle clauses (see Glossary) are common. They often have exact English counterparts, but there are slight differences between the two languages (see also 35.3.4 for sentences like *aceptó irritada* ‘she accepted irritably’):

*Me fui, convencido de que él no sabía nada*  
*José González, nacido el 23 de marzo*  
*su padre, muerto en 1956 . . .*  
*. . . preguntado qué le había gustado de ella,*  
*contesta con un gruñido (GGM, Col.)*

I left, convinced he knew nothing  
 José González, born on 23 March  
 his father, who died in 1956 . . .  
 . . . asked what he had liked about her, he  
 replies with a grunt

Spanish allows certain participle clauses, more often in written language, that have no exact equivalents in English:

*. . . refugiados y migrantes llegados a Europa*  
*desde el año pasado (La Jornada, Mex.)*  
*Concluidas las primeras investigaciones,*  
*la policía abandonó el lugar de autos*  
*. . . por fin, transcurridos siete años desde*  
*la publicación de su primera novela . . .*  
*Terminada la conferencia nos fuimos*  
*Después de vendida la casa, nos*  
*arrepentimos (from Seco, 1998, 334)*  
*Arrasado el jardín, profanados los cálices y*  
*las aras, entraron a caballo los hunos en*  
*la biblioteca monástica (JLB, Arg. Very*  
*literary)*

. . . refugees and immigrants having arrived  
 in Europe since last year  
 The initial investigations having been  
 concluded, the police left the crime scene  
 . . . at last, seven years having passed since  
 the publication of his/her first novel . . .  
 When the lecture was over, we left  
 Once the house was sold, we regretted it  
 Having demolished the garden and  
 profaned chalices and altars, the  
 Huns rode into the monastery library

(1) *Llegar* seems to be the only unmodified verb of motion that allows this construction. One cannot say *\*entrada en el agua se puso a nadar* ‘having entered the water she began to swim’: *cuando entró en el agua se puso a nadar*, or *\*bajados del tren for cuando bajaron del tren* ‘when they got out of the train’. But a few other verbs allow it if they are modified by an adverb: *recién bajados del tren* ‘having just got out of the train’, *ya entrado el día . . .* ‘once the day had begun’, *bien entrada la noche . . .* ‘well after nightfall . . .’.

## 23.6 Participles ending in *-ante*, *-iente* or *-ente*

These are adjectival present participles. They may be formed from many verbs but by no means from all and they function like the English adjectival forms ending in -ing: ‘Sleeping Beauty’ = *La Bella Durmiente*. New coinages appear constantly, many of them inspired by English adjectives ending in -ing. They are formed as follows:

- -ar conjugation: replace the -ar of the infinitive by -ante: *alarmar* > *alarmante* ‘alarming’ *inquietar* > *inquietante* ‘worrying’;
- -er and -ir conjugations: replace the -er or -ir of the infinitive by -iente or by -ente, the choice being unpredictable.

Examples:

*alucinar*: *alucinante* astounding/amazing  
*concernir*: *concerniente* concerning  
*conducir*: *conducente* leading to  
*convenir*: *conveniente* suitable  
*crecer*: *creciente* growing  
*deprimir*: *deprimiente* depressing  
*entrar*: *entrante* incoming  
*existir*: *existente* existing  
*fluir*: *fluyente* flowing  
*ocurrir*: *ocurrente* witty

*pertenecer*: *perteneciente* belonging to  
*proceder*: *procedente* proceeding  
*producir*: *producente* producing  
 (also *contraproducente* counter-productive)  
*provenir*: *proveniente de* coming from  
*restar*: *restante*: remaining  
*salir*: *saliente* outgoing  
*sorprender*: *sorprendente* surprising  
*tender*: *tendente (a)* tending (to)  
*vincular*: *vinculante* binding

There are a few slightly irregular forms:

*convencer*: *convincente* convincing  
*dormir*: *durmiente* sleeping  
*herir*: *hiriente* wounding

*reír*: *riente* laughing  
*seguir*: *siguiente* following  
*sonreír*: *sonriente* smiling

These participle forms should be learned separately from the dictionary, especially in view of the remark in note 2. They are quite often used, especially in the media:

*una situación cambiante/estresante*  
*el ministro saliente/entrante*  
*condiciones vinculantes*  
*resultados sobresalientes*  
*el millón y medio restante*  
*157.000 personas, pertenecientes a diferentes*  
*clases sociales y procedentes de lugares*  
*muy distintos de nacimiento . . . (El País, Sp.)*  
*El gran impacto que tuvieron en un escenario*  
*internacional resulta desconcertante,*  
*alentador y excitante (La Jornada, Mex.)*

a changing/stressful situation  
 the outgoing/incoming minister  
 binding conditions  
 outstanding results  
 the remaining 1.5 million  
 157,000 people, belonging to various  
 social classes and originating from  
 widely different places of birth  
 The great impact they had on an  
 international stage is disconcerting,  
 encouraging and exciting

**(1) Important:** the gerund in *-ando* or *-iendo* could not be used instead of the *-nte* form in any of these examples. See 24.3 for discussion.

**(2) Important:** one cannot predict which verbs have this kind of participle and foreign learners often invent non-existent words like *\*moviente* for 'moving': *piezas movibles* = 'moving parts', *espectáculo conmovedor* = 'moving spectacle'. Note also *mesa plegable* 'folding table', *agua potable* 'drinking water', *confiado/crédulo* = 'trusting', *planta trepadora* = 'climbing plant', *resultados satisfactorios* 'satisfying results', *hechos reveladores* 'revealing facts', *un libro aburrido* 'a boring book', *es cansado* 'it's/he's tiring', and many others.

**(3)** Many forms in *-nte* are not strictly speaking participles but ordinary adjectives, e.g. *brillante* 'shining', *corriente* 'current'/'ordinary', *aparente* 'apparent', *reciente* 'recent', etc.

**(4)** These participles do not normally have a separate feminine form: *la presidenta saliente* 'the outgoing (female) president'. There are a few colloquial or popular exceptions, e.g. *dominanta* 'bossy' (a woman, more usually *dominante*), *currante-curranta* familiar European Spanish for 'hard-working'; *currante* can also be used for females. *Atorrante-atorranta* (Lat. Am.) 'slacker'/'layabout' is also heard. However, a few nouns in *-nte* make their feminine with *-nta*. See 1.2.5.



# 24 The gerund

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- Forms of the gerund (Section 24.2)
- Translating ‘a box containing books’, ‘a girl speaking French’ (Section 24.3)
- Main uses of the gerund (Section 24.4)
- ‘I imagined her dancing’, ‘I heard them talking’, etc. (Sections 24.6–7)
- Gerund with *andar*, *ir*, *llevar*, *quedarse*, *salir*, *venir*, *acabar*, *terminar* (Section 24.8)
- Translating the English –ing form (Section 24.9)

The gerund is the verb form that ends in *-ando* or *-(i)endo*: *andando*, *respondiendo*, *diciendo*, *riñendo*, etc.

For the use of the gerund to form the continuous aspect of verbs, e.g. *estoy hablando* ‘I’m talking’, *estaba escribiendo* ‘(s)he was writing’, etc. See Chapter 19.

## 24.1 General

The gerund is invariable in form but pronouns are sometimes attached to it. This may be obligatory, as in *contestó riéndose* ‘(s)he replied (by) laughing’, or optional as in *estaban esperándolos* or *los estaban esperando* ‘they were waiting for them’. Object pronouns never appear directly before a gerund: *\*los esperando* is not possible for *esperándolos* ‘waiting for them’. See 14.3.6 for details on the use and position of pronouns with gerunds.

The Spanish gerund is quite unlike the English -ing form (‘walking’, ‘replying’, ‘saying’, etc.), which can function as a gerund, a present participle, a noun or an adjective. It is also unlike the French form ending in *-ant*, which covers the functions of both the Spanish gerund and the adjectival form ending in *-ante*, *-(i)ente* discussed at 23.6.

The Spanish gerund is a kind of adverb and it therefore should theoretically not modify nouns. See 24.3 for discussion.

The NGLE 27.7q notes the increasing use of the gerund on both continents, especially in book and film titles, e.g. *Bailando con lobos* ‘Dances with Wolves’, *Cantando bajo la lluvia* ‘Singin’ in the Rain’. See 19.1.1 for more on this subject.

**Important:** except in one archaic construction described at 24.5, the Spanish gerund is never preceded by a preposition, so *\*estoy harto de diciéndolo* is not Spanish for *estoy harto de decirlo* ‘I’m tired of saying it’. Nor can the gerund ever be used as a noun: *\*fumando daña los pulmones* is absolutely wrong for *(el) fumar daña los pulmones* ‘smoking damages the lungs’.

## 24.2 Forms of the gerund

(a) All verbs of the *-ar* conjugation, including radical-changing verbs: replace the *-ar* of the infinitive by *-ando*: *hablar* ‘to speak’ *hablando*, *dar* ‘to give’ *dando*.

(b) Verbs of the *-er* and *-ir* conjugations: replace the infinitive ending with *-iendo*: *temer* ‘to fear’ *temiendo*, *vivir* ‘to live’ *viviendo*, *producir* ‘to produce’ *produciendo*.

Irregular verbs form the gerund in the same way: *ser* – *siendo*, *tener* – *teniendo*.

Exceptions – not all of them truly 'irregular':

*decir* and its compounds: *diciedo*  
*dormir*, *morir*: *durmiendo*, *muriendo*  
*ir*: *yendo* (regular, despite appearances)  
*oír* and its compounds: *oyendo* (regular)  
 verbs like *pedir*, *elegir*: *pidiendo*, *eligiendo*,  
*riñendo*, *hiriendo*, *irguiéndose*

*poder*: *puviendo*  
 verbs like *reír*: *riendo*, *sonriendo*  
 verbs like *sentir*: *sintiendo*, *hirviendo*,  
*mintiendo*  
*venir* and its compounds: *viniedo*

(1) Verbs whose infinitive ends in *-uir*, *-eer*, *-aer* or *-oer* obey the spelling rule shown at 16.11.13, e.g. *construir* – *construyendo*, *huir* – *huyendo*, *poseer* – *poseyendo*, *creer* – *creyendo*, *traer* – *trayendo*, *caer* – *cayendo*, *roer* – *royendo*, etc.

(2) Verbs whose infinitive ends in *-ñir*, *-ñir* or *-llir* obey the spelling rule shown at 16.4.10, e.g. *tañer* – *tañendo*, *ceñir* – *ciñendo* (conjugated like *pedir*), *bullir* – *bullendo*, etc.

## 24.3 'A box containing books' 'a girl speaking French', etc.

English and French can avoid relative clauses by using the *-ing* or the *-ant* form of the verb:

We need a girl who speaks French  
 He had a box that contained several books  
*Vous cherchez un médecin qui parle votre*  
*langue?* ('Are you looking for a doctor  
 who speaks your language?')

We need a girl **speaking** French  
 He had a box **containing** several books  
*Vous cherchez un médecin parlant votre*  
*langue?*

Since the Spanish gerund can, strictly speaking, modify only verbs and not nouns, such sentences must usually be translated by a relative clause:

*Necesitamos una chica que hable francés*  
 (not \**hablando francés*)  
*Tenían una caja que contenía varios libros*  
 (not \**conteniendo varios libros*)  
*¿Busca usted un médico que hable su lengua?*

We need a girl who speaks French  
 They had a box containing several books  
 Are you looking for a doctor who speaks  
 your language?

In careful Spanish, the gerund is usually possible only when there is a verb in the main clause to which it can refer, e.g. *me escribí pidiéndome que fuera/fuese a verla* '(s)he wrote a letter asking me to go and see her'. But this rule is broken:

(a) In captions to pictures:

*Dos cazas siendo preparados para el despegue*  
*El Avante publicó mi foto quitándome los*  
*aretes* (AM, Mex., dialogue. *Aretes* =  
*los pendientes* in Spain)

Two fighter aircraft being readied for take-off  
*Avante* published a photo of me taking  
 off my earrings

(b) After nouns that are the objects of verbs meaning 'hear', 'imagine', 'see', 'find', usually to show that the action is actually in progress. See 24.6–7 for more details;

(c) in the exceptional cases of the adjectives *ardiendo* 'burning' and *hirviendo* 'boiling'. See 5.3 for discussion;

(d) with the preposition *con*: *volvió en sí con el brazo sangrando* '(s)he came round with his/her arm bleeding', *salimos del bar con la cabeza dando vueltas* 'we left the bar with our heads spinning';

(e) in official and administrative documents: *una ley decretando . . .* (= *una ley por la que se decreta* 'a law decreeing . . .'). This construction, sometimes called the *gerundio curialense* or 'lawyers' gerund', is entrenched in certain documents, e.g. the *Boletín Oficial del Estado* (where Spanish laws are published), but Seco (1998, 228) condemns it, as does the NGLE 27.7a and the stylebook of *El País*;

(f) occasionally by writers whose style is presumably above reproach, as in *el propósito de Probo, el hombre solo afrontando a la multitud, no se pudo realizar* (Seco, 1998, xvii) 'it was not possible to realize the goal of Probus, the man alone confronting the multitude', despite his condemnation of this very construction (ibid., p. 228);

(g) constantly in spontaneous speech and informal writing:

. . . luego ya en mi habitación, recién limpia y oliendo a ambientador de flores (CMG, Sp.)

Tenía mi edad y un hijo viviendo con su mamá (AM, Mex., dialogue)

el tenue ruido de un cuerpo moviéndose con sigilo (LS, Ch.)

. . . con la luna ahí colgando para nosotros (ABE, Pe.)

Se aseguraron mil 803 paquetes conteniendo un vegetal verde y seco al parecer marihuana (La Jornada, Mex. Marihuana in other countries)

Hombres trabajando a 400m (Mexican road sign)

. . . then back in my room, (which was) recently cleaned and smelling of flower-scented air-freshener

She was my age and had a son living with his mother

the faint sound of a body moving stealthily

. . . with the moon hanging there for us

1803 packages containing a green, dry vegetable substance, apparently marihuana, were recovered

Men working at 400 metres

(1) Foreign learners should probably imitate only the possibilities listed at (a), (b), (c) and (d). However, the grammarians' complaints about (e), (f) and (g) seem excessive since these constructions are clearly sometimes acceptable to careful native speakers.

(2) The NGLE 27.7i notes that misuse of *conteniendo* in phrases like *una caja conteniendo libros* is spreading, but does not approve of it.

(3) The participle form ending in *-nte* may sometimes be used like the English *-ing* form: *una tumba más amplia perteneciente a Nefertiti* (La Jornada, Mex.) 'a larger tomb belonging to Nefertiti'. This construction, typical of newspapers, is possible only with a limited number of verbs. It is discussed at 23.6.

(4) For the use of the gerund after *hay* see 24.6d.

(5) French allows the *-ant* form to refer to a subject different from that of the main clause: *la pluie tombant à verse, le voyageur s'arrêta sous un hangar*. The gerund cannot be used here: *ya que llovía a cántaros, el viajero se detuvo bajo un granero*, 'since it was pouring with rain, the traveller stopped under a barn' (not \**lloviendo a cántaros . . .*).

## 24.4 Main uses of the gerund to modify the main verb in the sentence

### 24.4.1 Gerund used to indicate simultaneous actions

The gerund is used to indicate an action happening at the same time – or almost the same time – as the action of the main verb:

<i>Se fue gritando</i>	(S)he went off shouting
<i>Nos recibió bañándose</i>	She received us while having a bath
<i>Me bajé del caballo queriendo un zumo de naranja (AM, Mex.)</i>	I got down from my horse as I wanted (lit. 'wanting') an orange juice
<i>Un día, caminando por la playa, tuvo una idea</i>	One day, while walking along the beach, (s)he had an idea
<i>—Aquí tiene mi tarjeta, dijo Félix entregándosela al chofer (CF, Mex., in Spain chofer = chófer)</i>	'Here's my card,' Felix said, handing it to the driver'

(1) **Important:** the actions of the gerund and of the main verb should be simultaneous or almost simultaneous. ?*El ladrón huyó volviendo horas más tarde* 'the thief fled, returning hours later' should be *el ladrón huyó y volvió horas más tarde*. ?*Abriendo la puerta, entró en la casa* (for *abrió la puerta y entró en la casa*) is less acceptable in Spanish than 'opening the door, (s)he entered the house': the Academy's NGLE 27.4g considers it is incorrect. However – and rather arbitrarily – *salió de casa dando un portazo* '(s)he left the house slamming the door' is acceptable since it is considered to be almost simultaneous.

(2) **Important:** the Spanish gerund should also not be used to describe an action that is the result of a previous action: one says *el edificio se hundió y mató a varias personas* not ? . . . *se hundió matando a varias personas* 'the building collapsed killing several people', although this rule is constantly broken in the media.

(3) With the verbs *ser* and *estar* the gerund can translate 'when' or 'while', a construction strange to English-speakers: *estando en París, me enteré de que Rafael se había casado* 'while I was in Paris, I found out that Rafael had got married', *lo/le conocí siendo yo bombero* 'I met him while I was a fireman', *te lo diré, pero no estando aquí esta señora* 'I'll tell you, but not while this lady is here', *y menos todavía estando los dos a solas* (ES, Mex.) 'and even less when the two of them were/are on their own'.

Note the position of a personal pronoun with the gerund: *estoy dispuesto a hablar de ello, pero no estando ustedes presentes* 'I'm prepared to talk about it, but not with you (plural) present'.

### 24.4.2 Gerund used to indicate method

The gerund may indicate the method by which an action is performed. English usually requires the preposition 'by':

<i>Hicieron su fortuna comprando acciones a tiempo</i>	They made their fortune (by) buying shares at the right time
<i>Hacéis divinamente no teniendo niños (AG, Sp., dialogue)</i>	You're doing just the absolutely right thing by not having children
<i>Estás obligado a escribir otra novela. No publicando esta/ésta te he hecho un favor (MVM, Sp., dialogue)</i>	You're obliged to write another novel. I've done you a favour by not publishing this one
<i>... como si supiera la verdad y no quisiera ofenderlo diciéndosela (CF, Mex.)</i>	... as if he knew the truth and didn't want to offend him by telling it to him

(1) This construction often expresses a condition: *apretándolo/si lo aprietas de ese modo lo vas a romper* 'you'll break it if you squeeze it/by squeezing it like that', *poniéndose/si se pone así conmigo usted no conseguirá nada* 'you'll get nowhere if you get like that with me'.

(2) The NGLE 27.1i notes that the gerund can alternate with the infinitive after *manera, forma, modo* and similar words: it quotes *la única manera de abrirlo es cambiando/cambiar este taladro por otro* 'the only way of opening it is by swapping this drill for another'.

### 24.4.3 Gerund used to express purpose (= *para* + infinitive)

This construction occurs with verbs of communication:

<i>Me escribió diciéndome/para decirme que fuera/ fuese a verle</i>	(S)he wrote telling me to come and see him
<i>Nos llamó pidiendo/para pedir ayuda</i>	(S)he rang us asking/to ask for help
<i>Recibí una llamada . . . diciéndome que estaba en la caseta de cobro de la autopista (AH, Mex.)</i>	I got a call telling me he was in the toll booth on the motorway/ turnpike

### 24.4.4 Gerund used to indicate cause (= *ya que . . . , puesto que . . . + finite verb*)

<i>Siendo estudiante, tendrá usted derecho a una beca</i>	Since you're a student, you'll be entitled to a grant
<i>Siendo gobernador del Estado de México, fue uno de los dos principales clientes del Centro Fox (AH, Mex.)</i>	Since/While he was governor of the state of Mexico he was one of the main clients of the Fox Centre
<i>Tratándose de usted, no faltaba más</i>	Since it's you, there's no need to mention it
<i>No queriendo molestar me fui</i>	Not wanting to be a nuisance, I left
<i>Un día, no teniendo nada que hacer, fue a verla</i>	One day, not having anything to do, (s)he went to see her

### 24.4.5 Gerund used to express concession (= *aunque* + finite verb)

The Spanish gerund occasionally signifies 'although', often in combination with *aun* 'even':

<i>Siendo inteligente como es, a veces parece tonto</i>	Although intelligent, he sometimes seems stupid
<i>Llegando tarde y todo, nos ayudó mucho</i>	Although (s)he arrived late, (s)he helped us a lot
<i>Es probable que este servicio no se ofrezca en su provincia o que, aun existiendo, no se haya anunciado (Yellow Pages, Sp.)</i>	It is probable that this service is not available in your province or, even if it exists ('even existing') it has not been advertised
<i>. . . incluidos aquellos que, siendo soldados, se entreguen sin combatir a nuestras fuerzas (JV, Mex.)</i>	. . . including those who, even though they are enemy soldiers, surrender to our forces without fighting

### 24.4.6 Gerund preceded by *como* as an equivalent of *como si*

<i>Me miró como calculando mi edad (SP, Sp., = como si estuviera calculando)</i>	She looked at me as though calculating my age
<i>Si un perro tiene un problema que no puede resolver, voltea a ver al humano como pidiendo cooperación o ayuda (Excélsior, Mex. Voltear = volverse in Spain)</i>	If a dog has a problem it can't solve it turns to look at the human as if asking for cooperation or help

## 24.5 *En* + gerund

In older language and in some dialects, especially in Latin America, this is an equivalent of *al* + infinitive: *en llegando al bosque* = *al llegar al bosque* 'on arriving at the woods' (cf. French *en*

*arriant à*). This construction is extinct in standard modern Spanish. *Al* + infinitive is discussed at 22.3.3.

The use of *en* + the gerund to indicate conditions, as in *en sabiendo que están bien y contentos, ya tengo bastante* 'as long as I know they're well and happy, that's enough for me' is mentioned in GDLE 10.8.5, but it also seems to be virtually extinct in modern Spanish.

## 24.6 Gerund used to qualify the object of a verb

Like the English -ing form, the Spanish gerund can also indicate an action performed by the direct object of certain kinds of verb:

(a) With verbs of perception like 'see', 'hear', 'observe': see 24.7 for details.

(b) With verbs like *coger*, *pillar* 'to catch', *arrestar* 'to arrest', *dejar* 'to leave', *descubrir* 'to discover', *encontrar/hallar* 'to find', *sorprender* 'to surprise', *pescar* 'to catch by surprise':

<i>Lo/Le cogí/pillé robando</i>	I caught him stealing
<i>Me sorprendí repitiendo entre dientes. . .</i> (CMG, Sp.)	I caught myself repeating between my teeth . . . (i.e. 'muttering')
<i>Dejamos a Andrés durmiendo</i> (AM, Mex., dialogue)	We left Andrés sleeping

(c) With verbs of representation like 'paint', 'draw', 'photograph', 'show', 'describe', 'imagine', 'represent', etc.:

<i>La pinté tocando el clavicémbalo</i>	I painted her playing the harpsichord
<i>Esta fotografía muestra al rey bajando del avión</i>	This photo shows the King getting out of the plane
<i>Los imaginaba caminando por la playa</i> <i>cargados de armas (EM, Mex.)</i>	He pictured them walking along the beach loaded with guns

Captions under photos or other pictures fall into this category. See 24.3a above.

(d) With *haber*: *había más de cien personas haciendo cola* 'there were more than a hundred people queuing/standing in line', *no hay nadie esperando* 'there's no one waiting'. Note that, unlike English, this construction does not allow the definite article. One can say *mira, hay un niño jugando* 'look, there's a child playing', but not \**mira, hay el niño jugando* 'look, there's the child, playing': *mira, ahí está el niño jugando*.

## 24.7 Gerund after verbs of perception ('see', 'hear', etc.)

Commonly after the verb *ver* 'to see', and occasionally after *oír* 'to hear', *recordar* 'to remember', *olvidar* 'to forget' and *sentir* 'to feel'/'to hear', the gerund may be used to qualify the object of the main verb, as in *abrimos el periódico y vemos a niños muriéndose de hambre (El País, Sp.)* 'we open newspapers and see children dying of hunger'. Usually the infinitive is also possible in this construction, the difference being that the infinitive indicates a completed action and the gerund an action that is or was still in progress. Compare *la vi fumando un cigarrillo* 'I saw her (while she was) smoking a cigarette' and *la vi fumar un cigarrillo* 'I saw her smoke a cigarette' (see 22.2.4 for the infinitive). There is usually a colloquial alternative to the gerund using *que* + a finite verb: *la vi que fumaba un cigarrillo* 'I saw that she was smoking a cigarette'. Further examples:

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*No se me olvida mi hijo bailando con ella*  
*Me gustaba sentir la lluvia azotando los*  
*avellanos de la huerta (CMG, Sp.)*  
*Cuando Félix divisó al doctor leyendo una*  
*revista política . . . (CF, Mex.)*  
*Por eso los recuerdo siempre bebiendo*  
*(ABE, Pe., dialogue)*

I can't forget my son dancing with her  
I liked to hear the rain lashing the  
hazelnut trees in the garden  
When Felix caught sight of the doctor  
reading a political magazine . . .  
That's why I remember them always  
drinking

(1) With *ir* and *venir* the gerund is not usual: 'I saw him coming towards me' is *lo/le vi venir hacia mí* or *lo/le vi que venía hacia mí* but not \**lo/le vi viniendo hacia mí*.

(2) *Oír* 'hear' may take a gerund, as in *desde allí oíamos al niño jugando en su cuarto* 'from there we could hear the child playing in his/her room', but it appears more often with either the infinitive or with *que* and a finite verb: *oí entrar a alguien/oí que alguien entraba* 'I heard someone come in'; see 22.2.4 for examples. The infinitive is safest for foreigners, since a gerund could be taken to refer to the subject of the main verb, e.g. *?la vi entrando* could mean 'I saw her while I was entering'.

However, the gerund is common when its subject is non-living: *cuando el sargento oye la corneta tocando la retirada* (MVLI, Pe.) 'when the sergeant hears the trumpet sounding the retreat', . . . *la voz del propio comandante saludando por la megafonía* (MT, Sp.) ' . . . the voice of the commandant himself greeting us over the public-address system'.

(3) Nouns that mean the same thing as this sort of verb can also be followed by a gerund, e.g. *un ruido de lluvia cayendo sobre hojas secas* 'a sound of rain falling on dry leaves', *el eco de una voz gritando* 'the echo of a voice shouting', *una descripción de una jirafa sentándose* 'a description of a giraffe sitting down'.

## 24.8 Other uses of the gerund

### 24.8.1 Gerund with *andar*

This translates the English 'to go around doing something' often with the same implication of pointless activity, or it suggests frequent activity, e.g. 'keeps on doing . . .'. *Ir* can often replace *andar* in this construction, but *andar* tends to imply intermittent activity:

*Siempre anda/va buscando camorra*  
*Era profesor de geografía, y siempre*  
*anduvo solicitando traslados*  
*(CMG, Sp.)*  
*Anduve maldiciendo todo el jueves*  
*(AM, Mex., dialogue)*  
*Anda escribiendo una novela*  
*(from NGLE 28.14a)*

(S)he always goes round looking for trouble  
He was a geography teacher, and was always  
applying for transfers (to other schools)  
All day Thursday I went around swearing  
(S)he's writing a novel on and off

(1) Spoken, but not formal Mexican, often uses *andar* for *estar* to form the continuous: *¿andas trabajando?* (for *¿estás trabajando?*) 'are you working?', *a lo mejor se andaba despidiendo* (EM, Mex., dialogue) 'maybe he was saying goodbye' (*despedirse* 'to say goodbye'), see 19.5.

(2) The idea of repetitive activity is sometimes expressed colloquially by *vivir* + gerund in colloquial Latin American Spanish: *mi esposa me vive repitiendo que no me ama* (forum, Mex.) 'my wife keeps on telling me she doesn't love me', *me vivía diciendo 'te amo' y ahora no la voy a escuchar nunca más* (interview, *Diario La Provincia*, Arg. Sp. *vivía diciendo*) 'she kept telling me "I love you" and now I'm not going to listen to her ever again'.

### 24.8.2 Gerund with *ir*

(a) Expresses slow, painstaking or gradual action:

*Nos vamos haciendo más sabios*  
*Ella se fue doblando hasta caer al suelo*

*Así ha ido perdiendo todos los clientes,*  
*por estar pensando en otra cosa (MP, Arg.)*  
*... los libros que fui leyendo después (SG, Mex.)*  
*Gano lo necesario para ir tirando*

We're (gradually) getting wiser  
 She gradually doubled up until she fell  
 to the ground  
 That's how he's been losing all his clients,  
 through thinking about other things  
 ... the books I went on to read later  
 I earn enough to get by

(1) Spoken Mexican Spanish also uses this construction to express an action that is just finishing (examples from J.M. Lope Blanch, 1991, 16): *espera un momento; voy acabando ya* (Sp. *estoy acabando ya/estoy a punto de acabar*) 'wait a moment, I'm just finishing', *voy llegando ahorita* (Sp. *acabo de llegar*) 'I've only just arrived'. See also 24.8.6 note 1 for a similar construction with *venir*. The NGLE 28.13f notes that in Mexico and Central America this construction can also be a near equivalent of *casi/por poco: me iba dejando el avión = casi me deja el avión* 'the plane nearly left me behind'. This is not heard in Spain.

(b) To express the idea of 'getting on with' something:

*Ya es hora de ir terminando esto*  
*Ya puedes ir preparando todo para*  
*cuando lleguen*  
*Ve escribiendo todo lo que te dicte*

It's time we got on with finishing this  
 You can start getting things ready for when  
 they arrive  
 Write down everything as I dictate it to you

### 24.8.3 Gerund with *llevar*

This provides a neat translation of 'for' a specific time period as in *llevo dos meses pintando esta casa* 'I've been painting this house for two months'. In Latin America *llevar* in this construction may be optionally replaced by *tener*. For details see 36.3.1.

### 24.8.4 Gerund with *quedarse*

This translates the idea of 'to continue to do something':

*Me quedé ayudándolos un rato*  
*Me quedé meditando durante algunos*  
*momentos (JV, Mex., dialogue)*  
*Yo me le quedé mirando ... (JH, Mex., dialogue)*

I stayed on for a while to help them  
 I spent a few minutes thinking it over  
 I remained/went on looking at him

### 24.8.5 Gerund with *seguir* and *continuar*

*Seguir* and *continuar* with the gerund translate 'to go on ... -ing', 'to continue to ...', as in *Ruso 'revive' en la morgue y corre a continuar bebiendo vodka* (*Excélsior*, Mex.) 'Russian "comes back to life" in morgue and runs off to carry on drinking vodka'. See 36.8 for further remarks.

### 24.8.6 Gerund with *venir*

To express an action that accumulates or increases with time. It sometimes conveys mounting exasperation:



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*Hace años que viene diciendo lo mismo los programas que se vienen ejecutando en el campo de la cardiología infantil (Granma, Cu.)*

*El plan de invasión venía siendo desarrollado desde 1967*

*Hay muchísimo interés en lo que en este momento viene siendo algo que sin duda tiene alta rentabilidad (El Universal, Mex.)*

(S)he's been saying the same thing for years the program(me)s that have been carried out (up to now) in the field of child cardiology

The invasion plan had been in preparation since 1967

There is a great deal of interest in what at this moment is becoming something that is without doubt highly profitable

(1) The following construction is heard in Mexico and Central America: *¿Qué, no lo viste? Ah, claro: tú vienes llegando apenas* (Sp. *apenas acabas de llegar*) 'What? Didn't you see it? Oh, of course, you've only just arrived' (from J.M. Lope Blanch, 1991, 17), *venía llegando, escuché y entré corriendo para ver a mi hija que estaba dormida* (interview, *El Universal*, Mex.) 'I'd just arrived, I listened and ran in to see my daughter who was asleep'.

(2) *Venir siendo* has the colloquial meaning 'it happened that', as in *venía siendo amiga del obispo* 'she happened to be a friend of the bishop'. This is also used in Spain.

### 24.8.7 Gerund with *acabar, terminar*

These verbs with the gerund mean 'end by':

*Siempre acaba riéndose*

*A este paso lo vas a acabar destruyendo (ES, Mex., dialogue)*

*Acabarás haciendo lo que ella diga*

*... porque con el tiempo terminaríamos no viéndonos nunca (ABE, Pe., dialogue)*

(S)he always ends by laughing

At this rate you'll eventually destroy it

You'll end by/up doing what she says

... because with time we were to end by/up seeing one another at all

(1) *Acabar por* + infinitive is an equivalent and is more common in negative statements: *acabarás por no salir nunca de casa* 'you'll end by/up never going out of the house'.

## 24.9 Translating the English -ing form

The following examples consist mainly of cases where the English -ing form cannot be translated by the Spanish gerund.

### 24.9.1 When the -ing form is the subject of a verb

This is normally translated by an infinitive or by a suitable noun:

Eating too much butter is bad for the heart

No smoking

Skiing is expensive

Salmon fishing is an art

*Comer demasiada mantequilla es malo para el corazón*

*Prohibido fumar*

*Esquiar/El esquí cuesta mucho*

*La pesca del salmón es un arte*

### 24.9.2 When the -ing form is the object of a verb

In this case there are two possibilities:

(a) When the same subject performs both actions, use an infinitive or a noun:

(S)he dreads having to start	<i>Teme tener que empezar</i>
I like swimming	<i>Me gusta nadar/Me gusta la natación</i>
(S)he gave up gambling	<i>Dejó de jugar/Dejó el juego</i>
Try calling him	<i>Intenta llamarlo/le</i>
There's nothing I like better than working in the garden	<i>No hay nada que me guste más que trabajar en el jardín</i>

(b) When the actions are performed by different subjects, use a clause or noun. The subjunctive must be used when required by the rules given in Chapter 20:

I can't stand Pedro singing	<i>No aguanto que Pedro cante</i>
I didn't mind him/her living here	<i>No me importaba que viviera/viviese aquí</i>
I recommended promoting her	<i>Recomendé su ascenso/que la ascendiesen/ascendieran</i>
I approve of your getting up early	<i>Me parece bien que te levantes temprano</i>

Some verbs allow the gerund. See 24.6–7.

### 24.9.3 The -ing form used in a passive sense

Care is needed when the English -ing form replaces a passive infinitive, cf. 'your hair needs cutting' (= 'your hair needs to be cut'). In the Spanish translation an infinitive or a clause must be used:

Your hair needs cutting	<i>Tienes que cortarte el pelo</i>
This needs attending to	<i>Hace falta cuidar esto/Hay que atender a esto</i>
You're not worth listening to	<i>No vale la pena escucharte</i>
It wants/needs polishing	<i>Hace falta/Hay que sacarle brillo</i>

### 24.9.4 The -ing form preceded by prepositions

Unless the preposition is 'by' (see 24.4.2) an infinitive or clause must be used:

I'm looking forward to seeing you	<i>Tengo ganas de verte</i>
I prefer swimming to running	<i>Prefiero nadar a correr</i>
He was punished for being late	<i>Lo/Le castigaron por llegar tarde</i>
This is a good opportunity for showing what you mean	<i>Esta/Ésta es una buena oportunidad para demostrar lo que quieres decir</i>
You get nothing in life without working	<i>No se consigue nada en esta vida sin trabajo/sin trabajar</i>
He was furious at being mistaken for his/her brother	<i>Le enfurecía que lo/le confundieran/confundiesen con su hermano</i>

### 24.9.5 The -ing form before nouns

(a) If the -ing form is itself a noun, translation is usually by an infinitive or a noun:

driving licence/US driving permit	<i>el carnet/el permiso de conducir</i>
dancing shoes	<i>los zapatos de baile</i>
fishing rod	<i>la caña de pescar</i>

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(b) If the -ing form is a participle (adjective) then a relative clause may be used, unless a participle in *-ante* or *-(i)ente* exists (see 23.6):

the chiming bells	<i>las campanas que tañen/tañían</i> (* <i>tañente</i> does not exist)
a worrying problem	<i>un problema inquietante</i>
a flying object	<i>un objeto volante/volador</i>
a convincing reply	<i>una respuesta convincente</i>

But often an idiomatic solution must be sought in either case:

boiling point	<i>el punto de ebullición</i>
changing room	<i>el vestuario</i>
conditioning cream	<i>la crema suavizante</i>
dining room	<i>el comedor</i>
drinking water	<i>el agua potable</i>
flying planes	<i>aviones en vuelo</i>
flying saucer	<i>el platillo volante</i>
riding boots	<i>las botas de montar</i>
sleeping bag	<i>el saco de dormir</i>
steering wheel	<i>el volante</i>
turning point	<i>el punto decisivo/la vuelta de la marea</i>
walking boots	<i>las botas de senderismo</i>

For the exceptional use of *hirviendo* 'boiling' and *ardiendo* 'burning' as adjectives, see 5.3.

# 25 Auxiliary verbs

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- *Poder* and *saber* (Section 25.2)
- *Deber*, *deber de* and *tener que* (Section 25.3)
- *Ha debido/podido hacerlo* or *lo ha debido/podido hacer?* (Section 25.3.5)
- *Haber*, *haber de*, *haber que* (Section 25.4)
- *Querer* (Section 25.5)
- *Soler* and *acostumbrar* (Section 25.6)
- Translating 'would', 'shall', 'will' 'ought to', and 'got to' (Section 25.7)

## 25.1 General

Auxiliary verbs are verbs like *poder*, *saber*, *deber*, *haber que*, *tener que*, *soler* or 'would', 'may', 'might', 'can', 'could', 'should', 'ought to', 'to have to', that express various shades of meaning, usually when combined with an infinitive, as in *podría llover* 'it may/might rain', *deberían hacerlo* 'they ought to do it', *tengo que trabajar* 'I've got to work'.

## 25.2 *Poder* and *saber* 'to be able to'/'to know how to'

### 25.2.1 *Poder* and *saber* contrasted

Both verbs often translate 'can' or 'could', but their meanings are slightly different: *saber*, as well as 'to know', means 'to know how to do something', and *poder* means 'to be able to do something'/'to be allowed to do something'. Sometimes the meanings overlap:

*¿Sabes nadar?*

*¿Puedes nadar hoy?*

*Nunca podía salir con sus amigas*

*Soy libre. Puedo hacer lo que quiero*

*La importancia de saber comer es mucha*  
(La Jornada, Mex.)

*Julia se sabe ganar/sabe ganarse*  
*las simpatías de todo el mundo*

*Lo único que sabía hacer era trabajar*  
*honradamente (CORPES, CR)*

*Nunca había podido descifrarlo/nunca podrá*  
*descifrarlo*

Can you swim? (do you know how to?)

Can you swim today? (are you able to/are you allowed to?)

She could never/was never allowed to go out with her girlfriends

I'm free. I can do whatever I want

Knowing how to eat is highly important

Julia knows how to win everyone's affection

The only thing he could do was honest work

(S)he had never been able to decipher

it/(S)he'll never be able to decipher it

(1) *No poder (por) menos de* means the same as *no poder evitar* + infinitive: *no podré (por) menos de decirselo* 'I won't be able to stop myself from telling him/her'. The Latin-American equivalent is *no poder menos que*.

(2) Idioms with *poder*: *no puedo más, estoy harto* 'I can't go on, I'm fed up', *al menos en ese terreno la vida no ha podido conmigo* (CMG, Sp.) 'in that area at least, life hasn't got the better of me', *con esa estatura no hay quien pueda con él* (MS, Mex., dialogue) 'with height like that (i.e. with him being that tall . . .) no one can get the better of him'.

(4) *Saber* means to know a fact or skill: *sé la respuesta* 'I know the answer', *sabías dónde estaban* 'you knew where they were', *sé ruso* 'I know Russian', *sé cocinar* 'I know how to cook'. *Conocer* means 'to be acquainted with', e.g. *conozco a tu primo* 'I know your cousin', *yo no conocía Buenos Aires* 'I didn't know Buenos Aires'; its other meanings should be sought in a good dictionary.

### 25.2.2 Preterite and imperfect of *poder* and *saber*

The preterite of *poder* often means 'to manage to' (but see note 2), and the preterite of *saber* usually means 'to find out' as opposed to 'know', although it can mean 'was able to'. The imperfect of *poder* means 'was able to' but does not give us further information. The imperfect of *saber* means 'knew':

*No pudo escaparse*

*No podía escaparse*

*No me pudo ver porque yo estaba ocupada*

*No podía verme porque estaba siempre ocupada*

*Yo ya sabía la verdad*

*Cuando supe la noticia de tu éxito . . .*

*Esa noche también traía mis copas*

*y nunca supe bien qué pasó* (ES, Mex.,

dialogue. Sp. . . . *llevaba unas copas*

*encima y. . .*)

*Me miró con una expresión sobria y grave*

*que no supe descifrar* (JM, Sp.)

(S)he couldn't escape (. . . didn't manage to)

(S)he couldn't escape (no information about whether (s)he eventually did)

(S)he didn't get to see me because I was busy

(S)he couldn't see me because she/I was always busy

I already knew the truth

When I heard the news of your success . . .

I was pretty drunk as well that night and

I never really found out what happened

He looked at me with a sober, serious expression that I was unable to decipher

(1) In those areas where the perfect of recency is used, e.g. Spain, Bolivia, Peru, *haber sabido* can also mean 'to realize', 'to find out': *no he sabido que era campeón hasta la última vuelta* (racing driver in *El Periódico*, Sp.) 'I didn't realize I was the champion until the last lap'.

(2) Strangely, the affirmative preterite form of *poder* can also mean the opposite of 'manage to', i.e. 'could have done but didn't'. See 25.2.3c.

(3) "'Can you see the stars?'"', "'I can see them'"', etc., are usually expressed —*¿ves las estrellas?* —*Las veo*. *No lo/le puedo ver* may mean 'I can't stand him' as well as 'can't see . . .'.

### 25.2.3 *Poder* to express possibility and suggestions

*Poder* is usually translated by 'could' or 'may'. Either the imperfect or the conditional can be used:

#### (a) Possibility/suggestions

*Lo que podíamos/podríamos hacer es tirar este tabique*

*Creo que esta/ésta podría ser una salida digna para todos* (JV, Mex., dialogue)

*Puede/Podría/Podía haberle ocurrido algo*

What we could do is to knock down this partition wall

I think this could be a dignified way out [of the problem] for everyone

Something could have happened to him/her

*Pudiera* could also be used for *podría*, but it is less usual in spoken language.

**(b) Polite requests**

The conditional is more usual than the imperfect in polite requests, but both are heard:

<i>¿Podría/Podía usted abrir la ventana?</i>	Could you open the window?
— <i>¿Podríamos hablar con ella?</i> — <i>le pregunté</i> (JV, Mex., dialogue)	'Could we talk to her?' I asked him
<i>¿Podrías/Podías decirle al jefe que estoy enfermo?</i>	Could you tell the boss I'm ill/sick?

**(c) The affirmative preterite indicative form may often express something that could have happened but didn't:**

<i>El día que pudo haber estallado la Tercera Guerra Mundial</i>	The day World War III could have broken out
<i>... pensando en lo que pudo haber sido y no fue</i> (JM, Sp.)	... thinking of what might have been and wasn't
<i>El hombre que pudo ser Presidente</i> (Excélsior, Mex.)	The man who could have been President

But it can, paradoxically, also mean 'could and *did*', as in *pudo abrir la puerta* '(s)he managed to open the door', *Félix lo saludó y solo/sólo pudo retener una impresión* (CF, Mex.) 'Félix greeted him and only managed to retain a (fleeting) impression'.

The negative preterite means 'couldn't and didn't': *no pudimos conseguirlo* 'we didn't manage to get it'.

**(d) The imperfect indicative (not the conditional) can also be used to reproach somebody for something not done in the past. The preterite can also be used:**

<i>Me lo podías/pudiste haber dicho</i>	You could have told me
<i>Podías haber puesto algún adornito de Navidad</i> (CRG, Sp., dialogue)	You could have put up some Christmas decorations

**(2) *Puede ser, podría/pudiera ser, podría/pudiera haber sido* are equivalent to 'it could be', 'it could have been'; *pudiera* is less common in the spoken language: *aun en el caso de que nuestro viejo profesor se hubiera muerto, que bien pudiera ser* ... (CMG, Sp.) 'even if our old teacher had died, which could well have happened'.**

In answers, *puede ser* can be abbreviated to *puede*: —*¿Vas a pescar mañana?* —*Puede/puede que sí* "'Are you going fishing tomorrow?" "'Perhaps/Maybe ...".

**(2) For the use of *poder que* with the subjunctive, see 20.3.5.**

## 25.2.4 *Poder* used in speculations

As in English, *poder* can be used to speculate about something: *ha llamado alguien. ¿Quién puede/podrá haber sido/ha podido/habrá podido ser?* 'Somebody called. Who could it have been?', *podría ser/podría haber sido/puede haber sido tu tía* 'it could be/could have been your aunt'.

## 25.3 *Deber* and *deber de*

### 25.3.1 *Deber* to express obligation

*Deber* + infinitive translates 'must' in the sense of 'obliged to', 'ought to':

*Su hijo debe trabajar más si quiere aprobar el examen* (in Latin America *pasar un examen* is common and is heard in Spain)

Your/His/Her son must work harder if he wants to pass the examination

*Hubo un verano en el que el marido debió ausentarse de más por razones profesionales* (JM, Sp.)

There was a summer when her husband had to be away more often than usual for professional reasons

*¿Quién debe manejar las finanzas hogareñas, el hombre o la mujer?* (La Jornada, Mex.)

Who should manage the home finances the man or the woman?

(1) **Important:** *deber de* should not be used to express obligation. *¿Debes de hacerlo ahora* sounds bad for *debes hacerlo ahora* 'you've got to do it now'. This mistake is not uncommon in popular speech on both continents and even in writing, cf. *si desea hacer alguna rectificación en la libreta electoral, debe de acreditarlo con documentación* (Peruvian official document) 'if you wish to make any change in the Electoral Register, you must provide documentary support'. This use of *deber de* is common in colloquial speech everywhere. See the next section for the standard use of *deber de*.

(2) *Tener que* can be used instead to strengthen the obligation, i.e. *tienes que trabajar* 'you have to work', *tuvieron que intervenir* 'they had to intervene'. See 25.3.4.

(3) The degree of obligation is reduced by using the conditional or, less often, the *-ra* form of *deber*. Since the imperfect is often colloquially used as a conditional (see 17.5.4b), *deberías hacerlo*, *debías hacerlo* and *debieras hacerlo* can therefore all mean 'you ought to do it', although *debieras* is more literary.

### 25.3.2 *Deber (de)* to express probability or supposition

*Deber de* can only express probability or supposition, although *deber* alone is nowadays also constantly and increasingly used with this meaning:

*Debiste (de) llegar tarde*

You must have arrived late

*Debe (de) haber sido muy bella*

She must have been very beautiful

*Deben (de) ser las cinco*

It must be five o'clock

*Se te ha roto el vestido por detrás, sí, sí, has debido de engancharte en un clavo* (RC, Sp.)

Your dress has got torn at the back, yes, yes, you must have got caught on a nail

*En verano debía de ser una bella alameda* (LS, Ch.)

In summer it must have been a fine tree-lined avenue

*Debieron de haber abandonado su base antes de que comenzara el ataque* (AH, Mex.)

They must have left their base before the attack began

(1) As stated above, the modern tendency is to use *deber* both for obligation and supposition as in *debió ser vergüenza* (JMa, Sp.) 'it must have been shame', *tiene arañazos en el brazo izquierdo, que debió hacerse al caer* (MS, Mex., dialogue) 'he's got scratches on his left arm that he must have got when he fell'. This use of *deber* without *de* for suppositions is now so widespread that the NGLÉ 28.6k accepts it but prefers *deber de* for suppositions.

- (2) Mexican Spanish constantly uses *haber de* to express suppositions. See 25.4.1b.
- (3) Like ‘got to’ in English, *tener que* can also indicate a strong supposition. See 25.3.4.

### 25.3.3 Preterite, conditional and imperfect of *deber*

The preterite expresses something that should have been done; the negative something that should not have been done. The conditional and the imperfect express something that should be done.

<i>Debió decírtelo antes</i>	(S)he ought to/should have told you before
<i>Debía/debería decírtelo antes</i>	(S)he ought to/should tell you before
<i>No debiste hacerlo</i>	You shouldn’t have done it
<i>En ese momento debí desconfiarme,</i> <i>pero no lo hice</i> (JI, Mex., dialogue. Sp. <i>debí desconfiar</i> )	At that moment I ought to/should have been suspicious, but I wasn’t
<i>Volvió al sitio del que nunca debió salir</i> (EA, Sp., dialogue)	He went back to the place he should never have left
<i>Debieron llamarla PDUSA, no PDVSA</i> (Rebelión, Ven.)	They should have called it [i.e. Venezuela Oil Inc.] PDUSA, not PDVSA

- (1) But when it is used to express suppositions, the preterite of *deber* may also indicate an assumption or guess so strong as to be a virtual certainty: *lo que ella les dijo debió (de) convencerlos, ya que al día siguiente le dieron cien mil dólares* ‘what she told them must have convinced them since they gave her 100,000 dollars the following day’.

### 25.3.4 *Tener que*

*Tener que* expresses a stronger obligation or supposition than *deber*. It is very common on both continents:

<i>Tienes que formatear el disco duro</i>	You have to format the hard disc/disk
<i>Te guste o no tienes que arreglar ese</i> <i>coche</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue)	Like it or not, you’ve got to fix that car
<i>¿Por qué tuviste que contarles todo?</i>	Why did you have to tell them everything?
<i>Tiene que haberlo hecho Marta</i>	Marta must have done it (supposition)
<i>Tienes que estar loco</i>	You’ve got to be crazy (supposition)

- (1) The preterite indicates an obligation actually carried out: *tuvieron que comprar un televisor nuevo* ‘they had to buy a new TV set’ tells us that they bought it; *tenían que* does not tell us whether they did or not.

- (2) *No tener más remedio que* is a variation of *tener que* often used in everyday language to express very strong obligation: *no tengo más remedio que despedirlo/le* ‘I’ve got no choice but to fire him’.

### 25.3.5 *Deber, poder* and *tener que*: alternative construction with compound tenses

*Deber* and *poder* allow a variety of constructions in compound tenses, i.e. tenses based on *haber* and a participle. The option of pronoun shifting (discussed at 14.3.4–5) multiplies the number of possibilities:



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*Ha debido hacerlo/Lo ha debido hacer* (S)he must/should have done it  
*Debe haberlo hecho/Lo debe haber hecho*

*Ha podido hacerlo/Lo ha podido hacer* (S)he could have done it  
*Puede haberlo hecho/Lo puede haber hecho*

*Habían podido hacerlo/Lo habían podido hacer* They could have done it (before)  
*Podían haberlo hecho/Lo podían haber hecho/*

*Habría debido hacerlo/Lo habría debido* (S)he ought to have done it  
*hacer/Debería haberlo hecho/Lo debería*  
*haber hecho (debiera can be used for*  
*debería here)*

*Ha tenido que hacerlo/tiene que haberlo* (S)he must have done it  
*hecho/lo tiene que haber hecho*

and also *habría podido hacerlo, podría haberlo hecho*, etc. '(s)he might/could have done it'.

## 25.4 **Haber**

*Haber* is for forming compound tenses, e.g. *he visto* 'I have seen', *habían vuelto* 'they had returned'. This is discussed at 18.1.

(1) *Haber* with the special present-tense form *hay*, is not an auxiliary verb. It is used to translate 'there is', 'there are', 'there were', etc., as in *hay cincuenta* 'there are fifty', *hubo una explosión* 'there was an explosion'. This is discussed at 34.2.

### 25.4.1 **Haber de**

In Spain *haber de* is nowadays faintly archaic, at least outside Catalonia. It has the following uses:

(a) It expresses obligation or future certainty:

<i>He de hacerlo cuanto antes</i>	I have to do it as soon as possible
<i>Si su compañía tiene bancos de datos que</i>	If your company has data banks that
<i>han de ser accesibles desde varias</i>	are to be accessed from several sites
<i>sedes . . . (computer magazine, Sp.)</i>	
<i>Hubo de repetir el experimento (JM, Sp.)</i>	(S)he had to repeat the experiment
<i>las dos tendencias, centralista y federalista,</i>	the two tendencies, centralist and
<i>que habían de marcar la historia de</i>	federalist, that were to leave their
<i>Colombia (Promocomercio, Col.)</i>	imprint on Colombian history

(b) It may express probability or suppositions:

<i>Ha de haberle dicho todo (usually debe (de)</i>	(S)he must have told her/him everything
<i>haberle dicho . . .)</i>	

This construction is rather literary in Spain but it is very common in Mexico and Central America, e.g. *para terminar, el capitán ha de haberse quejado de su soledad. Serafina ha de haberlo compadecido* (JL, Mex.) 'eventually, the Captain must have complained about his solitude. Serafina must have taken pity on him'; Spain *debió (de) haberse quejado, debió (de) haberse compadecido de él*.

(c) In the conditional or imperfect forms it translates an indignant or mystified ‘should . . .’. This usage is normal in spoken and written styles:

<i>¿Por qué habría/había de ofenderse si yo no dije nada?</i> (or, more colloquially, <i>iba a ofenderse</i> )	Why should (s)he get offended if I didn’t say anything?
<i>¿Por qué habría de acusar a Samuel?</i>	Why would I accuse Samuel?

(1) Catalans sometimes use *haber de* in Castilian to express obligation since their own language uses *haver de* to mean ‘must’, or ‘should’.

### 25.4.2 *Haber que (hay que)*

*Haber que* means ‘to be necessary to . . .’. In this construction, the verb is used only in the third-person singular. The present-tense form is *hay que*:

<i>Hay que darles tiempo</i>	One has to give them time/It’s necessary to give them time
<i>No había que hacer autopsia</i> (GGM, Col.)	There was no need to do an autopsy
<i>Hubo que llamar a los bomberos</i>	It was necessary to call the firemen (implying ‘and we did’)
<i>Hay que estar loco para viajar de noche en camión</i> (MS, Mex., dialogue. In Spain ‘bus’ is <i>el autobús</i> and <i>el camión</i> means ‘lorry’/‘truck’)	You’ve got to be crazy to travel by bus at night

(1) One should not put an object pronoun before *haber que*, i.e. one says *hay que hacerlo* but not *?lo hay que hacer*. The latter construction, criticized in NGL 28.6s, is heard in popular speech in certain areas.

(2) *Haber que* is used only in the third person, for which reason a following reflexive pronoun should also be third-person: *hay que levantarse* ‘we’ve got to get up’, *hay que lavarse las manos* ‘one has to wash one’s hands’. Person-mixing, e.g. *?hay que levantarnos* ‘we’ve got to get up’, *?había que decidirnos* ‘we had to make up our minds’ should be avoided, though it occurs in popular Mexican Spanish (NGL 16.4j).

## 25.5 Querer

### 25.5.1 *Querer* means ‘to want’ and ‘to love’

*Querer* means two things, ‘to want to’ and ‘to love’. In the latter meaning it can only refer to humans or pets. One can only say *me encanta nadar* ‘I love swimming’, *me encanta/adoro el helado de vainilla* ‘I love vanilla ice-cream’. Cf. *quiero a mis hijas* ‘I love my daughters’.

*Amar* indicates very deep love, e.g. love for God or between persons in love: *hay que amar a Dios* ‘one must love God’, *te amo* ‘I adore you’, *yo amaba todo* (Espronceda, nineteenth-century poet) ‘I loved everything’.

### 25.5.2 *Querer* in the meaning of ‘to want’

In the present tense, this verb should cause English-speakers little trouble: *quiero ir a Paraguay*, ‘I want to go to Paraguay’, *no quiero que vayan solos* ‘I don’t want them/you to go alone’. *Querer que* requires the subjunctive whatever its tense.

(a) The imperfect of *querer* simply means ‘wanted’ and does not tell us about the outcome: *quería hablar con José* ‘I wanted to talk to José’ (and may or may not have done).

(b) The preterite of *querer* is peculiar in that out of context it is ambiguous. It may mean ‘wanted to and failed’: *quise hablar con José* ‘I wanted/ tried to talk to José (but didn’t)’. But in other contexts, and less commonly, it may mean ‘wanted to and did’, especially when the speaker is being very assertive: *lo hice porque quise* ‘I did it because I wanted to (and that’s that!)’, *me casé con Federico porque quise* (JRIG, Mex., dialogue) ‘I married Federico because I wanted to’.

(c) The negative preterite form usually means ‘to refuse to’. Compare *no quiso hacerlo* ‘(s)he didn’t want to do it’ and didn’t, and *no quería hacerlo* ‘(s)he didn’t want to do it’ – ((s)he may or may not have done it). It can also imply ‘didn’t mean to’ when something unintended happened: *no quise ofenderte* ‘I didn’t mean to offend you’.

(d) The *-ra* imperfect subjunctive form can be used for the conditional: *no querría/quisiera volver a nacer* ‘I wouldn’t like to be born again’. The imperfect indicative can also be used instead of these two tenses in polite enquiries or requests: *querría/quisiera/quería hablar con el director* ‘I would like to speak to the manager’.

## 25.6 *Soler* and *acostumbrar*

*Soler* translates the idea of ‘usually’, ‘to be used to’. It is used only in the present and imperfect tenses.

<i>Los zapatos de tacón alto suelen ser incómodos</i>	High-heeled shoes are usually uncomfortable
<i>Solía hablar solo</i>	He used to talk to himself
<i>Suelen disparar uno o varios tiros al aire</i> (MS, Mex., dialogue)	They usually fire one or several shots into the air

(1) *Acostumbrar a* may be used for *soler* when habits or customs are involved, so not *\*acostumbra a llover en abril* for *suele llover* ‘it usually rains in April’, which is not a custom or habit. Cf. *no acostumbro a/no suelo salir por la noche* ‘I don’t usually go out at night-time’. *Acostumbrar* (no *a*) used to be usual in Spain and is still used in Latin America: *se dirige al rancho de un morador, donde acostumbra pernoctar* (MVLL, Pe., Sp. *rancho* = *choza, casucha*) ‘he makes for the hut of a local inhabitant, where he usually spends the night’, *las recepciones que acostumbraba organizar* (JV, Mex.) ‘the receptions he used to organize’.

(2) In some spoken varieties of Latin-American Spanish, notably in the Southern Cone, *saber* is used for *soler*: *sabe levantarse a las ocho* for *suele levantarse a las ocho* ‘(s)he usually gets up at eight’. This usage is popular or provincial and it is not found in Spain.

## 25.7 Translation of miscellaneous English modal verbs: ‘would’, ‘shall’, ‘will’, ‘got to’

(a) ‘Would’. This may form a conditional: ‘it would be better’ *sería mejor*.

**Important:** in English narrative or story-telling, ‘would’ often means ‘used to’ and it must then be translated by the imperfect: ‘every morning he would leave/he left/he used to leave at seven’ *todas las mañanas salía a las siete*. This use of English ‘would’ must not be translated by the Spanish conditional tense.

(b) **'Should'**. This usually means 'ought to', in which case the conditional of *deber* is the translation: 'this should work now' *debería funcionar ahora*. In older English, it may mean the same as the conditional 'would' 'I should/would be very angry if you did it' *me enfadaría mucho si lo hicieras*.

(c) **'Ought to'**. The conditional or imperfect of *deber* is the likely equivalent: 'you ought to eat less fat' *deberías/debieras/debías comer menos grasa*. When it refers to the past, the preterite of *deber* is a common translation: *debiste hacerlo antes* 'you ought to have done it sooner'.

(d) **'Got to'**. This may imply a strong obligation: 'you've got to work harder' *ienes que trabajar más*. In both American and colloquial British English it may also express a strong supposition: 'it's got to/must be a lie' *debe (de) ser mentira/tiene que ser mentira*.

# 26 Personal *a*

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- Use of personal *a* before direct objects referring to living things (Section 26.2)
- *Me trató como a una reina*, etc. (Section 26.3)
- Personal *a* before pronouns (Section 26.4)
- Personal *a* before personified nouns (Section 26.5)
- Personal *a* with *tener* and *querer* (Section 26.6)
- Personal *a* before collective nouns (Section 26.9)
- Personal *a* before non-living direct objects (Section 26.10)
- Use of the preposition *a* with miscellaneous verbs (Section 26.11)

## 26.1 Personal *a*: general

The use of the preposition *a* before certain kinds of direct object is so important in Spanish that it deserves a special chapter.

The basic rule is that *identified* or *particularized* human and most other animal direct objects are preceded by *a*, e.g. *vi a tu hermana* 'I saw your sister', *conozco al secretario* 'I know the secretary'. Compare *vi tu coche* 'I saw your car', *comiste una naranja* 'you ate an orange' (non-human). However, 'personal' *a* is an inaccurate term since the same *a* also sometimes appears with non-living direct objects, especially, but not only, whenever there might be doubt about which is the subject and which is the direct object in the sentence.

## 26.2 Personal *a* before direct objects denoting human beings or animals

Personal *a* is required before a direct object which denotes a known or identified human being or an animal such as a pet or some other familiar creature.

Before a direct object which is a personal name or title—*Alberto, el jefe, mamá*—personal *a* is never omitted: *conozco a tu madre* 'I know your mother', *vi a Mario y a Elena* 'I saw Mario and Elena', *no aguantan al nuevo jefe* 'they can't stand the new boss'. \**Vi Mario y Elena* is not Spanish.

With animals, use of personal *a* depends on the extent to which the creature is humanized. A named animal such as a pet is likely to take personal *a*, but in other cases use of *a* depends on factors of emotion or context: the more familiar the language, the more likely the use of *a*. At the zoo, one could optionally say *vamos a ver a los monos* 'let's go and see the monkeys' but, probably, *vamos a ver los insectos* 'let's go and see the insects', monkeys being more loveable than cockroaches. Clinical or scientific language would naturally use personal *a* much more sparingly.

In the following examples personal *a* is obligatory except where indicated:

*No conozco a Feliciano*

I don't know Feliciano

*Llevó a las niñas al zoo*

(S)he took the girls to the zoo

*Jamás volvieron a ver a Amado ni Trini*

They never saw Amado or Trini again

(DES, Mex. Sp. . . *ni a Trini*)

*No me importa que encuentre al o a los asesinos* (LS, Ch., dialogue)  
*Admiran mucho al cámara* (cf. *admiran la cámara* ‘they admire the camera’)  
*¿Quieres pasear al/el perro?*  
*Dejad/Dejen de atormentar al/el gato*

I don’t care whether you find the murderer or murderers  
 They admire the cameraman a great deal  
 Do you want to take the dog for a walk?  
 Stop tormenting the cat

Compare the following sentences in which the object of the verb is not individually particularized:

*Busco un marido que me ayude en la casa*  
*No conozco un solo farmacéutico en todo Bruselas* (ABE, Pe., dialogue)  
*Veía un chico que jugaba en silencio* (ES, Arg.)  
*Los universitarios eligieron una reina de belleza* (IA, Ch.)  
*Matar periodistas no mata la verdad* (Excelsior, Mex.)  
*Utilizaron un pastor alemán para el experimento*

I’m looking for a husband who will help me in the house  
 I don’t know a single pharmacist in the whole of Brussels  
 I saw a child playing in silence  
 The university students elected a beauty queen  
 Killing journalists does not kill the truth  
 They used an Alsatian/German shepherd dog for the experiment

(1) **Important:** for the sake of brevity, in this chapter ‘human direct object’ includes pets and other familiar animals.

(2) Students will come across much inconsistency affecting the rule that unidentified direct objects do not take personal *a*, e.g. *utilizaron a un perro lobo* . . . , *matar a periodistas* . . . , *veía a un chico* . . . Such variations seem to depend on the extent to which the speaker identifies the objects. The GDLE, Chapter 28, notes that with some verbs personal *a* is used quite systematically with unidentified persons: *encarcelaron a un narcotraficante* ‘they jailed a drug-pusher’, not \**encarcelaron un* . . . Likewise *insultar* ‘to insult’, *curar* ‘to cure’, *emborrachar* ‘to make drunk’, *sobornar* ‘to bribe’, *golpear* ‘to hit’, *odiar* ‘to hate’, *hacer* + infinitive ‘to make . . .’.

(3) A proper name can denote the person’s work, in which case use of *a* is usual: *estoy relejendo a Shakespeare* ‘I’m re-reading Shakespeare’, *esta noche interpretan a Beethoven* ‘tonight they’re performing Beethoven’. However, a name may denote a non-living thing, in which case personal *a* is not used: *van a subastar un Turner* ‘they’re going to auction a Turner (painting)’, *procura capturar la reina* ‘try to take the queen’ (in chess), *¿quién se comió el caballo?* (APR, Sp., dialogue) ‘who took the knight?’ (in chess: literally ‘who ate the horse?’).

(4) *Matar* is a special case: *mataron (a) un transeúnte* ‘they killed a passer-by’ implies accidentally without the *a*, deliberately with it (based on GDLE 28.2.1, though not all speakers recognize this difference).

## 26.3 Personal *a* with nouns linked by *como*

When a noun is linked by *como* to a previous noun which has personal *a*, or to a pronoun standing for such a noun, it usually also takes personal *a*, although it is sometimes omitted colloquially if there is no ambiguity:

*Tuve que recoger a mi hermana como a un fardo*  
*Usted no me considera como a un igual*

I had to pick my sister up as though she were a bundle  
 You don’t consider me to be your/an equal

*Su reacción fue una de las primeras cosas  
que delató a Adriano Gómez como a  
un ser peligroso (JD, Ch.)*

*Me trataba como a una reina (AM, Mex., dialogue)*

His reaction was one of the first things  
to expose Adriano Gómez as a  
dangerous person

He used to treat me like a queen

(1) ?*Tuve que recoger a mi hermana como un fardo* sounds like ? 'I had to pick up my sister as though I were a bundle'. But the rule is not always respected in everyday language: *que te trate como una reina* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'let him treat you like a queen'/'get him to treat you like a queen'.

## 26.4 Personal *a* before pronouns

### 26.4.1 Before pronouns other than relative pronouns

When a pronoun refers to a human being or familiar animal it takes personal *a*. These pronouns include *alguien*, *alguno*, *uno*, *ambos*, *cualquiera*, *nadie*, *otro*, *ninguno*, *este*, *ese*, *aquel*, *quien/quién*, *todo*, *él*, *ella*, *usted* and other personal pronouns except *me*, *te*, *se*, *nos*, *os*, *le*, *la*, *lo*, *les*, *los*, and *las*. See next section for discussion of the use of personal *a* in relative clauses:

*Le quedaban unas horas para buscar a alguien  
que pudiese ayudarlo a entrar (JV, Mex.)*

*La conozco a ella pero no a él*

*Aunque yo no conozco a nadie de la gente  
que viene aquí . . . (CMG, Sp.)*

*Era capaz de insultar a cualquiera*

*¿A quién has visto?*

*¿A ese/ése es al que mencionó, no a ti*

He had a few hours left to find someone  
who could help him to get in

I know her but not him

Although I don't know anyone among  
the people who come here . . .

(S)he was capable of insulting anybody

Who(m) did you see?

He's the one (s)he mentioned, not you

(1) Pronouns like *alguien*, *nadie*, *cualquiera* are therefore unusual in that they take personal *a* even though they do not refer to specific individuals.

(2) When *quien* means 'anyone' or 'no one' it does not take personal *a*: *¿a quién llamaste?* 'who(m) did you call/phone?' but *no tenía quien le ayudara/ayudase* '(s)he had no one to help him/her'.

### 26.4.2 Personal *a* before relative pronouns

Personal *a* may appear before a direct object relative pronoun that refers to a human being, in which case the form of the relative pronoun will be *a quien*, *al que* or *al cual* (see 39.4 for discussion).

The relative pronoun *que* is used when the clause is clearly restrictive (as defined at 39.1.2), cf. *vi a varios alumnos que yo no conocía* 'I saw several students who(m) I didn't know' (restrictive); *que* does not take personal *a* when it is not preceded by *el/la/los/las*. But if it is non-restrictive, personal *a* is used though the difference is occasionally elusive. Informants from Spain generally insisted on *a* in the following examples:

*Tengo un profesor al que/a quien han  
nombrado miembro de la Academia*

*La persona a quien yo más echaba de menos*

*Me dijiste que yo era la primera persona  
a la que habías querido (ES, Arg. dialogue)*

*Plutón, esposo de Proserpina, a la que/a  
quien/a la cual robó*

*la lista de personas a las que hemos molestado  
(CREA, Sp.)*

I have a teacher whom they've  
appointed as a member of the Academy

The person I missed most

You told me I was the first person  
you had loved

Pluto, the husband of Proserpine,  
whom (i.e. Proserpine) he abducted

the list of people we have bothered

(1) **Important:** *el que* or *quien* are obligatory in all types of clause if *que* alone creates ambiguities, as it quite often does when it refers to a human being: *esos/éso son los autores que siempre critican* ‘those are the authors whom they always criticize’ or ‘those are the authors who always criticize’. *A los que* or *a quienes* would clearly mean ‘whom they always criticize’.

(2) Personal *a* is rare before relative pronouns referring to non-human objects, but it is occasionally found: *sabe que nosotros no somos como esos árboles a los que se sacude para hacer caer los frutos* (SL, Sp., CREA) ‘you know that we aren’t like those trees that one shakes to get the fruit to drop’.

## 26.5 Personal *a* before personified nouns

A personified noun usually requires personal *a*. The decision whether a noun is personified or not is, however, dependent on complex factors of context:

*A lo que yo temo es a la maldita casualidad*  
(ABV, Sp., dialogue)

*Se iba feliz a su casa para no seguir*  
*desafiando al azar* (GGM, Col.),

*Los cazas llevan bengalas para confundir a*  
*un misil dirigido*

*Bien sabes cuánto temo a los huracanes*  
(PJG, Cu., dialogue)

What I’m scared of is damned random  
chance

He went off happily to his home so as  
not to go on tempting fate

The fighters carry flares to confuse a  
guided missile

You well know how scared I am of  
hurricanes

(1) The last three examples show how certain verbs, e.g. *admirar* ‘to admire’, *confundir* ‘to confuse’, *criticar* ‘to criticize’, *insultar* ‘to insult’, *odiar* ‘to hate’, *satirizar* ‘to satirize’, *sobrevivir a* ‘to survive’, *temer* ‘to fear’, etc., tend by their meaning to personify their object because they suggest a human-like reaction. They therefore sometimes appear with personal *a* even before non-living things, which explains – but does not excuse – sentences like *?criticaba a las novelas de fulano* ‘(s)he criticized so-and-so’s novels’ (correct without the *a*).

## 26.6 Personal *a* after *tener, querer*

These verbs may change their meaning when used with personal *a*:

*Tengo un hijo y una hija*  
*Tenemos una asistente griega*

I’ve got a son and a daughter  
We have a Greek maid

but

*Así tiene al marido y a los hijos, a base de*  
*bocadillos, latas y congelados*

That’s how she keeps her husband  
and children – on sandwiches,  
tins/cans and frozen food

*Tengo a mi tío como fiador*  
*querer un hijo*  
*querer a un hijo*

I’ve got my uncle to act as guarantor  
to want a child/son  
to love a child/son

(1) *Tengo un hijo/novio* ‘I have a son/boyfriend’ does not make the direct object specific or identified, whereas *Gracias a Dios tenía a mi hermana mayor, a la que sigo queriendo mucho* (ES, Mex., dialogue) ‘thank God I had my elder sister who I love a lot’ refers to an identified individual.

If possession is not implied, *tener* usually takes *a* before human objects *el fenómeno tiene boquiabiertos a los astrónomos* ‘the phenomenon has astronomers astounded’, *tiene a su novia*



*medio loca de celos* 'he's got his girlfriend half crazy with jealousy', *no tenía a nadie . . . con quien hablar en español* (DES, Mex.) 'he had no one to talk with in Spanish', *vamos fuera. Tengo a la chica esperando con el coche* (LS, Sp., dialogue) 'Let's go outside. I've got the girl waiting with the car'.

## 26.7 Omission of personal *a* before numerals

Nouns preceded by a number may be unspecified or unidentified and personal *a* is sometimes omitted before them:

*Reclutaron (a) doscientos jóvenes*  
*Bayardo San Román . . . vio las dos mujeres*  
*vestidas de negro* (GGM, Col.)  
*Solo/sólo conozco un hombre capaz de*  
*componer esta emboscada maestra* (. . . *a*  
*un hombre also possible)*

They recruited 200 young people  
 Bayardo San Román saw the two  
 women dressed in black  
 I only know one man capable of  
 organizing this brilliant ambush

(1) A clearly particularized or identified personal noun will, however, take personal *a*: *yo conocía personalmente a sus tres hijas* 'I knew his three daughters personally', *en realidad aborrece a los dos* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'actually he loathes both of them'.

## 26.8 Personal *a* combined with dative *a*

Ambiguity may arise when two *as* occur in the same sentence, e.g. *?presenté a mi marido a mi jefe* 'I introduced my husband to my boss' or '. . . my boss to my husband'. The usual solution used to be to omit personal *a* and place the direct object before the indirect object:

*Presenté mi marido a mi jefe*  
*Denuncié el ladrón al guardia*  
*Mande el paciente al especialista*  
*Yo prefiero Dickens a Balzac*

I introduced my husband to my boss  
 I reported the thief to the policeman  
 Send the patient to the specialist  
 I prefer Dickens to Balzac

But the NGLE 34.10r notes that the tendency nowadays is to use both *as* and say *presenté a mi marido a mi jefe, mande al paciente al especialista, prefiero a Dickens a Balzac. Ignacio le presentó a Adriana a Luis* (JV, Mex. Personal *a* is obligatory before the personal name *Luis*) 'Ignacio introduced Luis to Adriana', *pero antes de entrar en detalles . . . quisiera presentarles a ustedes a nuestros invitados* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'But before going into detail . . . I'd like to introduce our guests to you' (the *les* shows that *ustedes* is the indirect object).

## 26.9 Personal *a* before collective nouns

Personal *a* is usual before collective nouns when these refer to human beings:

*Yo no conocía al resto del grupo*  
*. . . un paso que podría poner a Estados*  
*Unidos en una posición delicada*  
*(La Prensa, Arg.)*  
*Eso pondría en peligro a la compañía*  
*Admiro al pueblo cubano*  
*La explosión aterró a la ciudad*  
*Sacudió a la sociedad mexicana* (EP, Mex.)

I didn't know the rest of the group  
 . . . a step which could put the United  
 States in a delicate position  
 That would put the company in danger  
 I admire the Cuban people  
 The explosion terrified the city  
 It shook Mexican society

(1) *A* is normal in all the above examples, but in the following sentences *Irán* does not refer to people but to a place: *en septiembre del año siguiente, Irak invadió Irán* (CREA, Mex.) ‘in September of the following year Iraq invaded Iran’. But as so often with personal *a*, usage is fickle: *la comunista Corea del Norte invadió a Corea del Sur en junio de 1950* (CREA, Pan.) ‘communist North Korea invaded South Korea in June 1950’.

(2) Before words like *país, nación, partido, movimiento*, when these words refer to people, *a* seems to be optional: *criticó duramente al/el movimiento anarquista* ‘(s)he criticized the anarchist movement severely’, *Luis García Meza, quien gobernó el país entre julio de 1980 y agosto de 1981* (El País, Sp., *al* possible) ‘Luis García Meza, who governed the country between July 1980 and August 1981’.

(3) Seeing, visiting, leaving, picturing or painting a place do not call for personal *a*: *estamos deseando ver Lima* ‘we’re longing to see Lima’, *esta/ésta es la segunda ocasión que visito Alemania* (JH, Mex., dialogue) ‘this is the second time I’ve visited Germany’, *quería pintar Toledo* ‘(s)he wanted to paint Toledo’, *abandonaron Madrid* ‘they left Madrid’. The Academy used to maintain that *a* was necessary in such sentences but it now considers the omission of *a* to be correct.

## 26.10 Personal *a* before non-living direct objects

Personal *a* cannot appear before a noun denoting a non-living direct object in straightforward sentences of the following kind:

*Mándales un texto*

Send them a text message

*Escribe poesía*

(S)he writes poetry

*Tus palabras delataban tu derrotismo*

Your words betrayed your defeatism

But, despite its name, personal *a* is sometimes used before non-living objects. This may happen:

(a) when there is likely to be uncertainty about which is the subject and which the direct object of a verb. This often – but not only – happens in relative clauses, where the verb often precedes the subject. *Una organización que protege a su coche* can only mean ‘an organization that protects your car’, but *una organización que protege su coche* might mean ‘... that your car protects’:

*Este producto es el que mejor impermeabiliza  
al algodón*

This product is the one that best  
waterproofs cotton

*Es difícil saber en qué medida afectó esto a la  
economía cubana* (MVLL, Pe.)

It is difficult to know to what extent  
this affected the Cuban economy

*¿Cómo afecta a tu salud el problema  
de Volkswagen?* (Excélsior, Mex.)

How does the Volkswagen [emissions]  
problem affect your health?

*A tres Autos y un Comercio quemaron*  
(Latin-American headline, strange to  
speakers of European Spanish)

Three Cars and Store Burnt (lit. ‘they burnt’  
three cars and a store’)

(b) sometimes before non-living direct objects when both subject and object are non-living, even though there is apparently no danger of ambiguity.

It seems that this occurs only in those sentences in which the subject is also the real agent of the action. In a sentence like *la piedra rompió un cristal*, ‘the stone broke a pane of glass’ or *la novela causó una sensación* ‘the novel caused a sensation’, it can be argued that the real agents of the action are the person who threw the stone or wrote the novel: *piedra* and *novela* are simply instruments and for this reason personal *a* is not used. However, if the non-living subject really performs the action, personal *a* may optionally appear before the direct object:

*Ambos creían que los astros regían a las pasiones* (OP, Mex.)  
*... soluciones mixtas de un litro embozadas en bolsas negras para proteger a la ponzoña de la luz* (JH, Mex.)  
*El suicidio de la muchacha ... excitó a la opinión pública* (MVLI, Pe.)  
*Este fenómeno caracteriza al norte de Escocia*

Both believed the stars ruled the passions  
 ... one-litre/liter mixed solutions wrapped in black bags to protect the poison from the light  
 The girl's suicide ... stirred public opinion  
 This phenomenon is characteristic of northern Scotland

A could be omitted in all the examples under (b).

(c) Often after impersonal *se* in order to show that the *se* really is impersonal *se* and not some other kind of *se* such as reflexive *se* or passive *se* (see Chapter 32 for the uses of *se*).

*... la plataforma, como se llama a los andenes en Inglaterra* (JM, Sp.)  
*En España se llamaba a la plata* (Sp. dinero) *de los cohechos y sobornos "unto de México"* (OP, Mex., cf. *la plata se llamaba* 'money was called ...')  
*La inversión es indispensable si se quiere convertir al sistema ferroviario en un sector atractivo para los inversionistas* (La Hora, Ec.)

... the 'platform', as they call the *andén* (of a railway station) in England  
 In Spain they used to call the money from bribery and graft 'Mexican grease'  
 Investment is essential if one wishes to turn the railroad system into an attractive sector for investors

(1) Omitting *a* in such sentences could cause ambiguities or an awkward sentence. ... *si se quiere convertir el sistema ferroviario* could be read as 'if the railway system wants to be converted into ...'

## 26.11 A obligatory or preferred with certain verbs

Some verbs always take the preposition *a*, e.g. *agarrarse a* 'to hold on to', *asociarse a* 'to associate oneself with', *seguir a* 'to follow', *suceder a* 'to follow', *sustituir a* 'to substitute', *renunciar a* 'to renounce', *ayudar a* 'to help', *gustar/agradar a* 'to please', etc. However, this *a* is usually not personal *a* but some other use of the preposition *a*:

*Considera que la opción más sabia es renunciar gradualmente a la energía nuclear* (El País, Sp.)  
*Los dirigentes nacionales renunciaron a sus puestos en el sindicato* (JA, Mex.)  
*Esto obedece a unas normas de comportamiento*  
*Le gustaba todo lo que le gustara a su mujer, pero no que su mujer les gustara tanto a los hombres* (MVM, Sp.)  
*Este nuevo producto ayuda al cabello a recuperar su brillo natural*

He considers that the wisest option is to gradually give up nuclear energy  
 The national leaders gave up their positions in the union  
 This obeys certain norms of behaviour  
 He liked everything his wife liked but not the fact that men liked his wife so much  
 This new product helps the hair recover its natural shine

Other similar verbs are: *acompañar a* 'accompany', *afectar a* 'to affect', *atender a* 'to pay attention to', *asentir a* 'to agree with', *asistir a* 'to be present at', *contestar a* 'to reply to', *contribuir a* 'to contribute to', *corresponder a* 'to correspond to'/'to reciprocate', *equivaler a* 'to be equivalent to', *sucumbir a* 'to succumb to', *superar a* 'to out-perform', *sustituir a* 'to replace'.

# 27 Negation

The Spanish negative words and phrases discussed in this chapter are:

- *no* (Section 27.2)
- ‘Redundant *no*’ (Section 27.2.4)
- Single and double negatives (Section 27.3)
- ‘anyone’, ‘anything’, ‘ever’, etc. (Section 27.4)\*
- *nada* and *nadie* (Section 27.5.1–3)
- *ni* (Section 27.5.4)
- *ninguno* (Section 27.5.5)
- *nunca* and *jamás* (Section 27.5.6)
- *apenas* (Section 27.5.7)
- *en mi vida*, etc. (Section 27.5.8)
- *en absoluto* (Section 27.5.9)
- *tampoco* (Section 27.5.10)
- *nomás* (Section 27.6)

\*i.e. in sentences like ‘bigger than **ever**’, ‘it’s impossible to see **anything**’, ‘why blame **anyone**?’, where the words in bold are translated by *nunca*, *nada* and *nadie*.

## 27.1 General

Matters that cause problems for English speakers are: the use or non-use of the double negative, e.g. *no lo he visto nunca/nunca lo he visto* ‘I’ve never seen it/him’ (see 27.3), sentences like *¿quién ha dicho nunca eso?* ‘who **ever** said that?’ (see 27.4), and the use of ‘redundant’ *no*, e.g. *¿cuántas veces no te habré dicho!* ‘how many times have I told you?!’ (see 27.2.4).

## 27.2 No

### 27.2.1 Use and position

*No* means both ‘no’ and ‘not’: this chapter is concerned with the latter meaning. *No* usually precedes the word that it negates, but object pronouns (*me*, *te*, *se*, *lo*, *la*, *nos*, *os*, *les*, *los*, *las*) are never separated from a verb: *no dije eso* ‘I didn’t say that’, but *no lo dije nunca* ‘I never said it’, never *\*\*no lo nunca dije*:

*Mario no estaba*  
*No perdamos tiempo*  
*No todos son capaces de tocar el piano*  
*Arguyen—y no sin razón—que . . .*  
*No intentabas verla*  
*Intentabas no verla*

Mario wasn’t there  
Let’s not waste time  
Not everyone is capable of playing the piano  
They argue – and not without reason – that . . .  
You weren’t trying to see her  
You were trying not to see her

(1) If a verb has been deleted, *no* retains its position: *bebe cerveza pero no bebe vino—bebe cerveza, pero no vino* ‘(s)he drinks beer but not wine’, —*¿Sabéis nadar?* —*Yo sí, pero él no* ‘“Can you swim?” “I can, but he can’t”’. But in emphatic denials it may follow a noun or pronoun: *¡bases nucleares no!* ‘no nuclear bases!’, *ah no, eso no . . .* ‘oh no, not that . . .’, *aquí puede entrar todo el que*

*quiera, pero borrachos no* (or *pero no borrachos*) ‘anyone who wants to can come in here, but not drunkards’.

(2) **Important:** compound tenses do not allow participle deletion in Spanish. In other words, the answer to *¿lo has visto?* ‘have you seen him/it?’ is *sí* or *sí, lo he visto*, or *no* or *no, no lo he visto*, but not \**no, no lo he . . .* (compare English ‘no, I haven’t . . .’). —*¿Has sido tú?* —*No, no he sido yo* “‘Was it you?’ “No, it wasn’t”, —*¿Se lo has dado?* —*No, no se lo he dado* “‘Did you give it to him/her/ them?’ “No, I didn’t”. This rule is occasionally broken with the pluperfect: see 18.1.2 note 1 for an example.

(3) Deletion of a gerund or infinitive is, however, possible: —*¿Estabas comiendo?* —*No, no estaba* “‘Were you eating?’ “No I wasn’t”, —*¿Quieres venir?* —*No, no quiero* “‘Do you want to come?’ “No I don’t”.

(4) If it means ‘non-’ or ‘un-’, *no* precedes the noun or adjective: *yo estoy por la no violencia* ‘I support non-violence’, *la política de la no intervención* ‘the non-intervention policy’, *es la única imagen no real en todo el libro* (JM, Sp.) ‘it’s the only non-real/unreal image in the whole book’.

### 27.2.2 ‘No’ and *no* contrasted

The English word ‘no’ may require translation in various different ways:

Look, no hands!

‘What’s the problem?’ ‘No money’.

no petrol/US no gas

no smoking

no way!

no kidding?!

There’s no need for arguments

*Mira, ¡sin manos!*

—*¿Cuál es el problema?* —*No tengo/ tiene/tenemos/tienen* (etc.) *dinero*

*No hay gasolina/Se nos acabó la gasolina*

*prohibido fumar/no fumar*

*¡ni hablar!/¡de eso nada!*

*¿en serio?*

*No hay por qué discutir*

### 27.2.3 *No* as a question tag

*¿No?* at the end of a statement implies that the asker already knows or guesses the answer:

*Usted habla inglés, ¿no?*

*Mejor tarde que nunca, ¿no?*

*Usted sabe que a veces es bueno decir mentiras,*

*por algo es periodista ¿no?*

(ES, Mex., dialogue)

You speak English, don’t you?

Better late than never, don’t you think?

You know that it’s sometimes good to tell lies.

You’re not a journalist for nothing are you?

### 27.2.4 ‘Redundant’ *no*

An apparently superfluous *no* is inserted in certain types of sentence, more often it seems in Spain than in Latin America:

(a) In informal language redundant *no* is sometimes used in comparisons, especially before an infinitive or to avoid two *ques* side-by-side:

*Más vale que vengas conmigo que (no) que te quedes solo aquí* (or . . . *a que te quedes solo*)

*Mejor gastar cinco mil ahora que (no) tener que comprar un coche nuevo para el verano*

Better come with me than stay here alone

Better spend five thousand now than have to buy a new car by summer

<p><i>La obra de R. vale más para un conocimiento de la derecha que no para conocer la República . . . con los ojos más luminosos, más tristes y más agradecidos que ella no le vio nunca . . .</i> (GM, Col.)</p>	<p>R.'s work is more useful for learning about the Right than knowing about the Republic . . . with the most luminous, saddest and most grateful eyes she had ever seen in him . . .</p>
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(b) Optionally in interjections involving *cuánto* or *qué de* 'how much', 'how many' and also after *cuál* in exclamations.

<p><i>¡Cuántas veces no lo había soñado en los últimos tiempos!</i> (LG, Sp.)  <i>¡Cuántas veces no me la habré jugado por él!</i>        (ES, Mex., dialogue)  <i>¡Qué de angustias (no) habrán pasado!</i></p>	<p>How often he had dreamt of it lately!        How many times have I risked my life for him!        What tough times they must have gone through!</p>
<p><i>Cuál no sería mi sorpresa cuando a los dos meses . . . me lo encuentro a la salida del Sarape</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue)</p>	<p>Imagine my surprise when two months later I run [historic present] into him on the way out of the Sarape Club</p>

The *no* makes it clear that the sentence is an exclamation, not a question: cf. *¿cuántas veces te lo he dicho?* 'how many times have I told you?'

(c) Optionally, but very often, after *hasta que* 'until' when pointing to a future event or a future in the past, and also in negative sentences:

<p><i>. . . su prohibición de salir del país hasta que no se haya hecho firme el auto</i>        (La Jornada, Mex.)  <i>Y todo el mundo tiene derecho a que se le trate como inocente hasta que no se pruebe lo contrario</i> (LS, Sp., dialogue)  <i>Adolfito, hasta que no te tomes el bocadillo no te vas a jugar</i> (EA, Sp., dialogue)  <i>Quítale la cámara a este muchacho . . . y no se la devuelvas hasta que no aprenda a hacer buen uso de ella</i> (LR, Col., dialogue)</p>	<p>. . . his being banned from leaving the country until the judicial order is confirmed        And everyone has a right to be treated as innocent until the opposite is proved        Adolfo, you're not going out to play until you finish your sandwich        Take this boy's camera away from him and don't give it back to him until he learns how to use it properly</p>
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(d) Occasionally in literary language after expressions of fear. The *no* does not alter the sense. Note that *que* is used if the *no* is removed:

<p><i>Temo no le haya sucedido/Temo que le haya sucedido alguna desgracia</i>  <i>Tenía miedo no (or tenía miedo de que) lo/le vieran/viesen desde arriba</i></p>	<p>I'm worried (s)he might have suffered some misfortune        He was afraid that they would see him from above</p>
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(1) *No* is not used if the clause after *hasta* refers to a certainty or to something that has happened: *insistió en quedarse en el aeropuerto hasta que la avioneta se perdió de vista* (EM, Mex.) 'he insisted on staying at the airport until the (light) plane disappeared from view', *me quedaré aquí hasta que se ponga el sol* 'I'll stay here until the sun sets'.

(2) *Hasta* can also have a negative meaning in the Spanish of Mexico, Central America, Colombia and a few other places: *perdona que te llame hasta ahora* means *perdona que no te haya llamado hasta ahora*. 'sorry I haven't called you until now'. See 38.14 note 1.

## 27.3 Double negatives

One may say *nadie vino* or *no vino nadie* ‘no one came’. As the second example shows, if a negative follows a verb a negative must also precede the verb. Moreover, if a word is negated, all the following words in the sentence must be negated if possible: *pero una no debe esperar nunca nada de un hombre sino malas noticias* (CRG, Sp.) ‘but one (fem.) should never expect anything from a man except bad news’, *nunca hay nada nuevo en ninguna parte* (CS, Mex., dialogue) ‘there’s never anything new anywhere’.

The difference between a double and a single negative, e.g. between *nunca viene* and *no viene nunca*, is sometimes merely stylistic. References under the individual items (27.5.1–10) give guidance on this subject, but it may be said in general that (a) the single negative is more typical of written language when the negated word is the object of a verb, as in *nada prometen que después traicionen* (L. Cernuda, poetry, Sp.) ‘they [i.e. violets] promise nothing that they then betray’ (*nada* is the direct object), spoken Spanish *no prometen nada que . . .*; (b) the single negative is not used to reply to questions (NGLE 48.3k): —¿Qué dijo? —No dijo nada (not *nada dijo*) “‘What did (s)he say?” “(S)he didn’t say anything?”:

### Double negatives

<i>No dice nada</i>	(S)he says nothing
<i>Nadie dijo nada</i>	No one said anything
<i>Nadie había visto nada; nadie sabía nada</i> (HR, Mex.)	No one had seen anything, no one knew anything
<i>Apenas come nada</i>	(S)he scarcely eats anything
<i>Tampoco vino nadie</i>	Nor did anyone come
<i>Nunca trae ninguno</i>	(S)he never brings a single one
<i>Pero no había ningún otro síntoma</i> (EL, Arg.)	But there was no other symptom
<i>No sabe ni latín ni francés</i>	(S)he knows neither Latin nor French
<i>No la he visto nunca con nadie</i>	I’ve never seen her with anyone

### Single negatives

<i>Tampoco vino</i>	(S)he didn’t come either
<i>Apenas habla</i>	(S)he scarcely talks
<i>Nadie sabe cuánto se lava</i> (Excélsior, Mex.)	No one knows how much [money] is being laundered
<i>Ninguna era más bella que ella</i>	No woman was more beautiful than her
<i>Jamás/Nunca la volvería a ver</i>	(S)he was never to see her again

(1) The double negative can be ambiguous, although intonation or context usually make the meaning clear: *lo que dice no es nada* ‘what (s)he says is nothing’ (i.e. worthless) or ‘what (s)he says isn’t nothing’ (i.e. it is something); *no llora por nada* ‘(s)he doesn’t cry over nothing’ / ‘(s)he doesn’t cry over anything’; cf. *llora por nada* ‘(s)he cries over nothing’. *No llora sin motivo* expresses the first idea unambiguously.

(2) **Important:** only one preceding negative word is allowed in Spanish: compare French *personne ne savait la vérité* and *nadie sabía la verdad* ‘no one knew the truth’, never \**nadie no sabía la verdad*; *de ninguna manera pensaban hacerlo* ‘in no way were they thinking of doing it’, never \**de ninguna manera no pensaban*, *no lo dije nunca* ‘I never said it’, never \**nunca no lo dije*.

**Exception:** the double preceding negative *nunca nadie/nadie nunca* can be used: *nunca nadie ha dicho eso* ‘no one has ever said that’, *nunca nadie supo decirle el porqué de ese Ynés con i griega* (JMs, Sp.) ‘no one was ever able to tell him the reason for that “Ynés” with a “Y”’, *nadie nunca ha visto a*

*Abraham* (MC, Mex., dialogue) 'No one has ever seen Abraham'. The same idea can be expressed by *nadie ha dicho eso nunca*, or *nunca ha dicho eso nadie*, or *no ha dicho eso nunca nadie*. The combination *nunca jamás* is also possible. See 27.5.6.

(3) A compound preceding negative linked with *y* is also possible, at least in literary styles, as in *en ningún momento y en ninguna parte había visto que volara/volase un elefante* 'never and nowhere had (s)he seen an elephant fly' / '(s)he had never seen anywhere an elephant fly'.

## 27.4 *Nada, nadie, nunca, jamás, ninguno* in sentences that are affirmative in form or meaning

Even though they are listed as negative words, these words can have the meaning of 'anything', 'ever', 'anyone', 'anything' in the following contexts. In some cases, either they or their affirmative equivalent can be used without a significant change of meaning:

(a) After comparisons:

*Más que nada, es taimado*  
*Me irrité más por eso que por nada*

More than **anything**, he's cunning  
I got irritated more because of that than  
because of anything else

*Podría ser la mayor esfera tallada nunca por*  
*manos humanas* (El Periódico, Sp.)

It could be the largest sphere **ever** carved by  
human hands

*Salió más temprano que nunca*  
(AM, Mex., dialogue; not *jamás*)

She went out earlier than ever before

*... y allí un capataz, el mejor que jamás*  
*hubiera* (MP, Arg., dialogue)

... and a foreman there – the best that  
ever was

*Este libro es más complicado que ninguno*  
*de los que yo he leído*

This book is more complicated than  
any I've read

*Es más lista que ninguno de los otros*  
*la mayor tontería que haya dicho nadie*

She's cleverer than any of the others  
the most stupid thing anyone has said

(b) In sentences which involve expressions of doubt, denial, abstention, impossibility, etc.:

*Es dudoso que nadie/alguien pueda pasar*  
*por nativo en más de tres idiomas*

It's doubtful whether anyone can pass  
as a native in more than three languages

*Hace mucho que nadie me traía flores*  
(MC, Mex., dialogue)

It's been a long time since anyone brought  
me flowers

*... sin nada ni nadie en el mundo*

... without anything or anybody in the  
world

*Se negó siquiera a hablar a nadie de la emisora*  
(GCI, Cu.)

He even refused to talk to anyone from the  
radio station

*Es demasiado difícil para que nadie/alguien*  
*entienda esto*

It's too difficult for anyone to understand it

*Es imposible ver nada de lo que está sucediendo*

It's impossible to see anything of  
what's going on

*Pocos libros dirían nada semejante*

Few books would say anything similar

*No tolera que nadie lo contradiga* (EM, Mex.)

He can't stand anyone contradicting him

*Es horrible contar todo esto a nadie/alguien*

It's horrible to tell all this to anyone/  
someone

*Yo no sé dónde está nada en esta casa*

I don't know where anything is in this  
house



(c) In questions or exclamations that expect a negative answer:

<i>¿A usted cuándo le han preguntado nada/algo?</i>	When did anyone ask you anything?
<i>¿Quién ha visto a nadie/alguien que trabaje más que él?</i>	Who has ever seen anyone who works more than he does?
<i>¿Para qué despedirme de nada ni de nadie?</i> (AG, Sp.)	Why should I say goodbye to anyone or anything?
<i>¿Quién puede pensar en nada cuándo se está rodeado de idiotas?</i> (CS, Mex., dialogue)	Who can think of anything when one's surrounded by idiots?
<i>¿Quién hubiera pensado nunca/jamás/alguna vez que se casaría con Julia?</i>	Who would ever have thought he'd have married Julia?

(d) After *antes de*, *antes que*, and *sin*

<i>He venido sin nada</i>	I've come without anything
<i>sin nadie que lo/le cuidara/cuidase</i>	without anyone to look after him
<i>Él tenía la culpa por llegar antes que nadie</i> (CF, Mex.)	It was his fault for arriving before anyone else
<i>Esto hay que hacerlo antes de empezar nada</i>	This must be done before starting anything else

(1) Statements of emotion involve a subtlety: *me sorprendería que nadie me llamara/que no me llamara nadie* 'I'd be surprised if nobody rang me', *me sorprendería que me llamara/llamase nadie* 'I'd be surprised if anyone rang me'; *sentiría que nadie me viera así/que me viera/viese así nadie* 'I'd be sorry if anyone sees me (looking) like this', *sentiría que nadie me viera/viese así/sentiría que no me viera/viese así nadie* 'I'd be sorry if no one sees me (looking) like this'.

(2) In sentences in which English allows 'something' after 'without' Spanish allows *algo*: . . . *sin que nadie pudiera hacer algo para impedirlo* (LS, Mex., *hacer nada* also possible) ' . . . without anyone being able to do anything/something to stop it', but *no podía dormir sin que algo* (not *nada*) *la despertara/despertase* 'she couldn't sleep without something waking her up'.

## 27.5 Further remarks on individual negative words

### 27.5.1 *Nada, nadie*

(a) When *nada* or *nadie* are a direct object or a predicate or follow a preposition, they usually appear in the double negative construction in ordinary language:

<i>No sé nada</i>	I know nothing/I don't know anything
<i>No sé nada de nada</i>	I don't know anything about anything
<i>Contestó que no conocía a nadie</i> (NC, Mex.)	She replied that she knew no one
<i>No hay nada/nadie</i>	There's nothing/nobody
<i>No lo haría por nada/nadie</i>	I wouldn't do it for anything/anyone

But in literary or emotive styles they may precede the verb:

<i>Desde hace tiempo para nadie es desconocido que el Sol emite rayos ultravioletas</i> (Granma, Cu.)	For some time now no one has been unaware of the fact that the sun gives off ultraviolet rays
<i>A nadie conozco más apto para esta labor literaria</i>	I know no one more suited for this literary task
<i>Por nada del mundo quisiera perderme eso</i> (set phrase in everyday use)	I wouldn't miss that for anything in the world

*A nadie podía pedirle cuentas sino a Félix  
Maldonado (CF, Mex.)*

He couldn't demand an explanation  
from anyone except Félix Maldonado

In all these cases the double negative would have been plainer style, e.g. *no es desconocido para nadie, no conozco a nadie . . . , no quisiera perderme eso por nada . . .*, etc.

(b) When *nada* or *nadie* are the subject of a verb they usually precede it (single negative):

*Nada parece cierto en todo esto  
Dentro de la pensión reinaba el silencio,  
como si nadie la habitara (JMs, Sp.)  
Nada en el mundo nos podrá separar  
(AA, Cu., dialogue)  
Nada en la pieza es histórico (MVLL,  
Pe. Sp. nada en la obra . . .)  
En caso de que lo atacaran nadie saldría a  
defenderlo (MS, Mex.)  
Nadie cree eso ya*

Nothing seems certain in all this  
Inside the boarding-house silence  
reigned, as if no one were living in it  
Nothing in the world will be able to  
separate us  
Nothing in the play is historical  
In the event of anyone attacking him no one  
would come forward to defend him  
No one believes that any more

(1) A double negative construction is frequent in questions: *¿no ha venido nadie?* 'hasn't anyone come?', *¿no llueve nunca aquí?* 'doesn't it ever rain here?'/'does it never rain here?', *¿cuando te fuiste no viste a nadie?* (EN, Sp., dialogue) 'when you left didn't you see anyone?' But a single negative is also possible: *¿por qué nadie les hizo caso a los científicos de Nuevo México?* (MC, Mex., dialogue) 'why did no one listen to the scientists in New Mexico?'

### 27.5.2 *Nada* as intensifier

*Nada* may be used as an adverb meaning 'not at all':

*Manuel no trabaja nada  
No hemos dormido nada  
La separación de su marido no había sido  
nada dramática (SP, Sp.)  
No me gusta nada lo que acabas de decir  
(ABE, Pe., dialogue)  
La junta no empezó nada bien (MS, Mex.,  
Sp. la reunión no empezó . . .)*

Manuel does absolutely no work  
We haven't slept a wink  
The break from her husband had not  
been at all dramatic  
I really don't like what you just said  
The meeting didn't start too well

(1) In the spoken language of many Latin-American countries, *nada* is used extensively as an adverb: *acá en Chihuahua no llueve nada, nos morimos de calor* 'there's not a drop of rain here in Chihuahua, we're dying from heat', *ayuda no me dieron nada* 'they didn't help me at all',

### 27.5.3 *Nadie*: further remarks

*Nadie* takes personal *a* if it is the object of a verb:

*Apenas conozco a nadie  
No se veía a nadie en la playa  
Dí que hoy no quiero ver a nadie  
(DT, Mex., dialogue)*

I hardly know anybody  
There was no one to be seen on the beach  
Say that I don't want to see anybody today

(1) *Nadie* *de* should not be followed by a plural noun or pronoun: *nadie de mi familia* 'no one in my family' but *ninguna de las alumnas* 'none of the female students'; *ninguno de nosotros salimos* 'none

of us went out', *ninguno de los pasajeros hizo comentario alguno* (MVLI, Pe.) 'none of the passengers made any comment', *ninguno de sus agentes iba al aeropuerto tal como él les había solicitado* (MS, Mex., dialogue) 'none of his agents/officers was going to the airport as he had asked them to'.

### 27.5.4 *Ni*

'Nor', 'neither'. As with other negative words, if *ni* follows the verb, the verb must itself be negated: compare *ni tú ni yo lo sabemos* 'neither you nor I know (it)' and *no lo sabemos ni tú ni yo*. Constructions like *\*ni tú ni yo no lo sabemos* are considered archaic or incorrect.

Unlike 'nor', *ni* is usually repeated before each member of a list: *no han llegado (ni) Antonio, ni Pilar, ni Ana, ni Marta* 'neither Antonio, Pilar, Ana nor Marta has arrived' (first *ni* optional). Examples of the use of *ni*:

<i>Vives en el siglo pasado . . . no tienes computadora, ni celular, ni fax, ni auto, ni tarjetas de crédito y ni siquiera una contestadora telefónica</i> (GZ, Mex., dialogue)	You live in the past century . . . you don't have a computer or a mobile/cell phone or fax, or a car, or credit cards or even an answering machine
In Spain <i>computadora=ordenador, celular = móvil, auto=coche, contestadora = contestador</i>	
<i>No hay nada que me ligue ni con él ni contigo</i> (CF, Mex., dialogue)	There's nothing linking me to him or to you
<i>Ni fumo ni bebo/No fumo ni bebo</i>	I neither smoke nor drink
<i>No hubo tiempo ni de llamar a una ambulancia</i> (CMG, Sp.)	There wasn't even time to call an ambulance
<i>Ni con ella, ni con nadie, me puedo comunicar</i> (MP, Arg., dialogue)	I can't communicate with her or with anybody

(1) *Ni* commonly translates 'not even': *y ni la conoces. ¿O sí?* '... and you don't even know her. Or do you?' (WL, Mex., dialogue). It is very often reinforced by *siquiera*: *ni siquiera podía recordar si había sido verano u otoño* (JV, Mex.) 'he couldn't even remember whether it had been summer or autumn', *eres un inútil, ni siquiera sabes freírte un huevo* 'you're useless, you can't even fry yourself an egg'.

(2) Before a noun *ni* may make a strong denial: —*¿Sabes quién es? —Ni idea* "'Do you know who it is?" "No idea"', —*¿Cuánto ganabas? —Ni (siquiera) un céntimo* "'What were you earning?" "Not a cent"'.

(3) *Ni* is required after *sin*: *vivía sin dinero ni ganas de tenerlo* '(s)he lived without money or the urge to have it', *sin mujer ni hijos* 'without wife or children', *las rarezas climáticas se sucedieron sin ton ni son* (Excélsior, Mex.) 'strange climatic events occurred chaotically one after another'.

(4) The following Latin-American sentence, *si no te gusta lárgate que ni haces falta* (AM, Mex., dialogue) 'if you don't like it go away, because you're not even needed' would be expressed in Spain by . . . *que no haces falta*.

### 27.5.5 *Ninguno*

'No', 'none', 'nobody' (cf. French *aucun*, German *kein*). The double negative rule applies: if *ninguno* follows the verb, the verb must be negated: *ninguno de ellos lo sabe/no lo sabe ninguno de ellos* 'none of them knows it', *nunca compra ninguno* '(s)he never buys a single one'. In certain types of sentences it may be an equivalent of 'any': see 27.4 for examples.

*Ninguno* may be either an adjective or a pronoun. As an adjective it loses its final *-o* before masculine nouns or noun phrases: *en ningún momento pensé que . . .* ‘at no point did I think that . . .’, *la gente piensa que los matemáticos no tenemos ningún contacto con el mundo, pero no es cierto . . .* (JV, Mex., dialogue) ‘people think that we mathematicians have no contact with the world, but it isn’t true’; but *no aceptaremos ninguna solución parcial* ‘we will accept no partial (or ‘biased’) solution’.

(a) Pronominal forms

<i>Ninguno de los que hablan un idioma está libre de dudas</i> (Manuel Seco, Sp.)	None of those who speak a language is free of doubts
<i>O se lleva todos, o ninguno</i>	Either you take/(s)he takes them all, or none
<i>Llamo a mis hermanas pero ninguna responde</i> (EM, Mex., dialogue. Sp. <i>ninguna contesta</i> )	I call/phone my sisters but none of them is answering
<i>Si he sido insincero con ninguno/alguno de vosotros, decídmelo</i> ( <i>ninguno</i> is literary)	If I have been insincere with any of you, tell me so

(b) Adjectival forms

<i>Otra vez el Oscar no incluye a ningún actor negro</i> (Excélsior, Mex.)	Once again the Oscar list features no black actor
<i>Tampoco recibimos ninguna contestación/—Si es molestia, puedo esperar—.</i>	Neither did we receive any reply ‘If it’s a nuisance I can wait.’ ‘No nuisance at all’
<i>Molestia ninguna/Ninguna molestia</i>	
<i>Había llegado al climaterio con tres hijas y ningún varón</i> (GGM, Col.),	She had reached the menopause with three daughters and no males

(1) **Important:** *ningún* is usual in speech before feminine nouns beginning with stressed *a-* or *ha-*, but it should be written in full, e.g. *ninguna arma nuclear*. Seco (1998, 307), rejects written forms like *?ningún arma*.

(2) **Important:** *alguno*, placed after the noun, may be used as an emphatic alternative to *ninguno*: *no hay motivo alguno* = *no hay motivo ninguno*. See 10.4.1 note 1 for details.

(3) The plural *ningunos/ningunas* is rare since one usually does not need to mention more than one of something that does not exist. But it occurs with nouns that are always plural: *ningunas vacaciones en Cataluña son completas sin una excursión al Pirineo* ‘no holiday/vacation in Catalonia is complete without a trip to the Pyrenees’, *total, tenía 18 años y ningunas ganas de volver al pueblo* (AM, Mex., dialogue) ‘in a word, he was eighteen and had no desire to go back to the village’.

(4) When *ninguno* is the subject of a verb, person and number agreement seems to be optional when a pronoun appears: *ninguna de nosotras tiene/tenemos marido* ‘none of us women has a husband’, *ninguno de vosotros habéis/ha traído el libro* ‘none of you has brought the book’.

If the pronoun is omitted, the verb ending must make the meaning clear: *ninguno hemos dicho eso* ‘none of us said that’, *¿no salisteis* (Lat. Am. *salieron*) *ninguna anoche?* ‘didn’t any of you girls/women go out last night?’. Compare *¿no salió ninguna anoche?* ‘didn’t any of the girls/women go out last night?’.

(5) If *ninguno* is a direct or indirect object and is placed before the verb, the redundant pronoun (explained at 14.10) agrees with the accompanying noun or pronoun: *a ninguno de ellos los conozco* ‘I don’t know any of them’, *y si te soy franca a ninguno de nosotros nos pareció bien que fueras mujer* (SG, Mex., dialogue) ‘and if I’m honest with you, none of us approved of the fact that you were a woman’.

### 27.5.6 *Nunca* and *jamás*

Both mean 'never' or, in certain sentences, 'ever'. *Jamás* is somewhat stronger and less common than *nunca*. It is usually identical in meaning to *nunca*, but see note 1. The combination *nunca jamás* is strongly emphatic: *nunca jamás le vi escuchar "La Internacional"* (DES Mex., dialogue) 'Never once did I see him listening to The Internationale'.

Both require a double negative construction when they follow the verb phrase to which they refer: *nunca viene* = *no viene nunca* '(s)he never comes', *jamás viene nadie* 'no one ever comes'. When placed before the verb, they are stronger in meaning: *nunca he oído cosa/nada semejante* 'I never heard anything like that', *nunca se sabe muy bien por qué ni para qué pasan las cosas* (LS, Sp.) 'one never really knows why things happen and to what purpose':

<i>Yo nunca/jamás conocí a un extranjero que hablase/hablara tan bien (el) español</i>	I've never met a foreigner who spoke Spanish so well
<i>Jamás imaginó que su hijo pudiera caer preso</i> (EP, Mex.)	She never imagined her son might be arrested
<i>No sale nunca/jamás de casa</i>	(S)he never goes out of the house

(1) *Jamás* cannot appear after comparisons, i.e. after *más que* or *menos que*: *ahora más que nunca* 'now more than ever', *trabaja menos que nunca* '(s)he's working less than ever'.

*Jamás* usually appears before the verb: *y así jamás tuvo problema para ser aceptado en Madrid* (JM, Sp.) 'so he never had any trouble in being accepted in Madrid'.

(2) In rhetorical questions inviting the answer 'no' *jamás/nunca* means 'ever': *¿se vio jamás/nunca tal cosa?* 'was such a thing ever seen?', *¿se ha oído jamás/nunca que un hombre mordiera/mordiese a un perro?* 'who ever heard (lit. 'was it ever heard') that a man bit a dog?' Compare the non-rhetorical question: *¿has estado alguna vez en Madrid?* 'have you ever been in Madrid?'

### 27.5.7 *Apenas* and other words meaning 'scarcely', 'hardly', 'as soon as'

*Apenas* may be a subordinator of time or an adverb. In the following examples it is a subordinator:

<i>Apenas llegamos/habíamos llegado/hubimos llegado/cuando empezó a llover</i>	We had scarcely arrived when it started raining
<i>Apenas den con algún posible testigo, si es que dan, que nos avisen</i> (LS, Sp., dialogue)	As soon as they find some possible witness, assuming they do, tell them to let us know
<i>Apenas había dado treinta pasos la invadió el terror</i> (ES, Mex.).	She had scarcely walked thirty paces when she was overcome by terror

In the following examples it is an adverb:

<i>No te conozco apenas/Apenas (si) te conozco</i>	I hardly know you
<i>Hace apenas seis años</i>	barely six years ago
<i>Tu pensión apenas llega para cubrir gastos</i> (APR, Sp., dialogue)	Your pension's barely enough to cover expenses
<i>el entusiasmo apenas contenido de los profesores universitarios</i> (RB, Ch.)	the barely repressed enthusiasm of the university teachers

(1) For the subjunctive with *apenas*, as in *tengo que estar alerta para abrirles la puerta apenas lleguen* (EP, Mex., dialogue) 'I've got to be alert so as to open the door for them as soon as they arrive'; see 20.4.7.

(2) When used as an adverb before a verb the variant *apenas si* is much used for the meanings ‘only’ and ‘scarcely’: Seco (1998, 51), says it is especially common in literary styles. *En una semana apenas si cambió dos palabras con su tío* (JMs, Sp.) ‘In the course of a week she barely exchanged two words with her uncle’, *yo apenas si gasto mis zapatos* (EP, Mex., dialogue) ‘I scarcely/hardly/barely wear out my shoes’. *Apenas si* is not used when *apenas* is a subordinator as in *apenas llegué* ‘I had scarcely arrived’ or when *apenas* follows the verb, i.e. *hace apenas seis años* ‘barely six years ago’, not *\*hace apenas si seis años*.

(3) When *apenas* is a subordinator of time, *no bien* (or often *ni bien* in Latin America, especially the Southern Cone) is an alternative: *no bien algo me produce una tristeza infinita, me convierto en un hombre de izquierda* (ABE, Pe.) ‘as soon as something produces an infinite sadness in me, I turn into a man of the Left’ (i.e. politically), *se mostró encantado de ayudarme no bien llegara a su país* (JN, Sp.) ‘he declared he would be delighted to help me as soon as he returned to his country’, *ni bien terminó de envolver los regalos* (CP, Arg.) ‘she had barely finished wrapping the presents . . .’

(4) *Nada más* is a colloquial alternative as a subordinator of time used in time statements in Spain but less so in Latin America, where *nomás* is often used: *nada más llegar, pasé por su despacho* ‘as soon as I arrived, I dropped in at his office’, *lo haré nada más llegues* ‘I’ll do it as soon as you arrive’, *de no haber logrado salir del país nada más producirse el golpe* (JM, Sp.) ‘had he not managed to leave the country as soon as the coup happened’, but *el Coronel va a venir a despedirse nomás termine de cenar* (MS, Mex., dialogue) ‘the Colonel is going to come and say goodbye as soon as he’s finished having dinner’. See 27.6 for *nomás*.

### 27.5.8 *En mi vida, en toda la noche*

The phrases *en mi vida/en la vida*, ‘in my life’, *en toda la noche* ‘in the whole night’ can be used as negatives: *en mi vida lo/le he visto* (or *no lo/le he visto en mi vida*) ‘I’ve never seen him in my life’, *en toda la noche he podido dormir* ‘I’ve not been able to sleep the whole night’, *¿para qué quería identificación allá en la sierra?* *En su vida había tenido una* (EM, Mex.) ‘what did he need and identity document for up there in the sierra? He’d never had one in his life’ (it does not mean ‘he had had one in his life’).

Insertion of *no* does not change the meaning: *en mi vida no he visto nada tan peculiar* ‘I’ve never seen anything so peculiar in my life’.

(1) *En toda la noche* without an accompanying negative word is rather old-fashioned: *no he podido dormir en toda la noche* is more normal.

### 27.5.9 *En absoluto*

**Important:** the negative meaning of *en absoluto* should be noted: —*¿Te molesta?* — *En absoluto* “‘Does it bother you?’ “Absolutely **not**/not at all”, *el acercamiento resultaba más difícil aún que si no nos conociésemos en absoluto* (JV, Mex.) ‘getting close to one another was even more difficult than if we hadn’t known one another at all’.

### 27.5.10 *Tampoco*

‘Not . . . either’, ‘nor’, ‘neither’ (cf. French *non plus*): it is the opposite of *también* ‘also’. As with other negative particles, it requires a double negative construction if it follows a verb phrase: *tampoco creo en los ovnis* = *no creo en los ovnis tampoco* ‘nor do I believe in UFOs’/‘I don’t believe in UFOs either’. *Tampoco* is common on both continents:

—¿Tienes la llave? —No—. *Yo tampoco . . .*  
*Tampoco pienso decir a qué me dedico*  
 (LS, Sp., dialogue)  
*Tampoco dice nada a nadie*  
*Tampoco el cine mexicano lo entusiasmaba*  
*mucho* (ES, Mex.)

'Do you have the key?' 'No.' 'Nor do I'  
 Nor am I planning to say what I do  
 for a living  
 Nor does (s)he say anything to anyone  
 He wasn't very keen on Mexican cinema  
 either

(1) *Ni* or *y* can precede *tampoco*: *yo no soy un rebelde sin causa, ni tampoco un desenfrenado* (JA, Mex., dialogue) 'I'm not rebel without a cause, nor am I crazy/out of control'. As this example shows, *ni* can only be combined with *tampoco* if a negative statement precedes.

(2) *Tampoco* is much used colloquially, especially in Spain, to reduce the importance of a preceding remark, usually a negative one: —*Estoy furioso*—. *Hombre, tampoco es para que te pongas así/ tampoco es para tanto* "'I'm furious." "Come on, there's no need to get like that/it's not such a big deal"', —*Me han dicho que no pagaban sus impuestos*—. *Sí, tampoco es gran cosa* "'They told me that they didn't pay their taxes." "Yes, but that's no big deal"'.

## 27.6 *Nomás* (occasionally written *no más*)

Throughout Latin America this word has a variety of meanings in colloquial language. It is not used in Spain:

—¿Dónde está el hospital? —*En la esquina*  
*nomás* (Spain *justo en la esquina*)  
*La vi ayer nomás* (Spain *lo/le vi ayer mismo*)  
*Pase nomás* (Spain *pase, pase*, etc.)  
*nomás que venga . . .* (Sp. *en cuanto venga*)  
*El gringo viejo se murió en México. Nomás*  
*porque cruzó la frontera* (CF, Mex.,  
 Sp. *solo/sólo porque . . .*)  
*Una invitación del señor Presidente nomás*  
*no se rechaza* (idem, dialogue)

'Where's the hospital?' 'Right on  
 the corner'  
 I saw her only yesterday  
 Do come in, please  
 as soon as s(h)e arrives . . .  
 The old gringo died in Mexico.  
 Just because he crossed  
 the border  
 You don't turn down an invitation  
 from the President himself

(1) On both continents, *no . . . más que* means 'only' and must be distinguished from *no . . . más de* 'not more than'; see 6.5.

# 28 Questions and exclamations

The following words are discussed in this chapter:

- ¿cuál? which?/what? (Section 28.3)
- ¿qué? what? (Section 28.4)
- ¿quién? who? (Section 28.5)
- ¿cuánto and cuán? how many/much? (Section 28.6)
- ¿cómo? how? (Section 28.7)
- ¿cuándo? when? (Section 28.8)
- ¿dónde? where? (Section 28.9)
- ¿para qué? and ¿por qué? why?/what for? (Section 28.10)

Mistakes often made by foreigners when asking questions or making exclamations are: confusion between *qué* and *cuál*, failure to write accents on question words, omission or wrong position of the upside-down question and exclamation marks, mistakes in the choice between *qué* and *lo que* in indirect questions (see Glossary for 'indirect question'). For the use of the Spanish signs ¿ and ¡ see 44.4.5.

**(1) Important:** foreign students sometimes wonder why the subjunctive is not used after question words like *qué*, *cómo*, *cuándo*, e.g. why does one not say *\*me preguntaron cuándo 'llegues'* 'they asked me when you're arriving', correctly . . . *cuándo llegas*? These accented forms are not subordinating conjunctions, so the subjunctive is not used after them: one says *no sé cuándo lloverá* 'I don't know when it'll rain', not *\*llueva*. For the subjunctive after the unaccented words *que*, *cuando*, *como*, etc. see 20.3 and 20.4.7. The exception to this is colloquial Spanish from Colombia northwards which tends to use subjunctives in indirect questions, e.g. *no sé cuándo lleguen* (standard Spanish . . . *cuándo llegan*) 'I don't know when they arrive', *¿quién sabe qué opinen otros lectores?* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'who knows what other readers think?' See 20.12.1.

**(2) ¿Cúyo?** for *¿de quién?* 'whose?' is obsolete in modern Spanish but the form *cuyo* is used in relative clauses like *los alumnos cuyo apellido empieza con "B"* 'students whose family name begins with "B"'. See 39.7.

## 28.1 Spelling

Spanish question words are written with an accent: *ahora hay más muertos y ni siquiera hay acuerdo en torno a cuántos son y cómo murieron* (La Reforma, Mex.) 'now there are more dead and there is even no agreement about how many there are and how they died', *no sabemos ni quién es usted ni cuál es su juego* (LS, Ch., dialogue) 'we don't know who you are or what your game is'.

The accent shows that these words are stressed in speech, and this can radically alter the meaning of a sentence. Compare *yo sé que piensan* 'I know that they think' and *yo sé qué piensan* 'I know what they think', or *quien sabe francés* . . . 'the person who knows French . . .' and *¿quién sabe francés?* 'who knows French?'

The accented words should be thought of as different words from the unstressed ones *que*, *como*, *cual*, *cuanto*, *cuando*, *quien*, which should be sought in the Index.



(1) **Important:** the accent is also used in exclamations: *¡qué inteligente eres!* 'aren't you intelligent!', *¡cuánta nieve!* 'what a lot of snow!', *¡cómo trabajan!* 'the way they work!'

## 28.2 Word order in questions and exclamations

When a sentence or clause begins with one of the words listed above, the order Verb-Subject is used (subject in bold):

<i>¿Qué hizo <b>usted</b>?</i>	What did you do?
<i>¿Cómo se llama <b>tu hermana</b>?</i>	What's your sister called?
<i>¿Cómo cena <b>la gente decente</b>?</i> (EM, Mex., dialogue)	How do decent people have dinner?
<i>¿A qué viene <b>la pregunta</b>?</i> (GGM, Col. dialogue)	What's the question for?
<i>¿Desde cuándo no fuma <b>tu marido</b>?</i>	Since when has your husband not smoked?
<i>¿Qué inteligentes son <b>las ardillas</b>!</i>	Aren't squirrels intelligent!

Word order in interrogative sentences is discussed more fully at 42.3.

(1) In Caribbean, especially Cuban, Spanish constructions like *¿qué usted hizo?* for *¿qué hizo usted?* are common. See 42.3.4.

## 28.3 Cuál and cual

### 28.3.1 Basic uses of cuál

This word is a pronoun whose basic meaning is 'which one?' of a set of things:

<i>¿Cuál prefieres?</i>	Which one do you prefer?
<i>¿A cuál prefieres?</i>	Which of the (people) do you prefer?
<i>¿A cuál de los tres se refiere usted?</i>	To which of the three are you referring?
<i>Dime cuál debo elegir</i>	Tell me which (one) I should choose
<i>Cayó ahora en la cuenta de cuál era el verdadero sesgo de mi indiscreción posible</i> (JM, Sp.)	He now realized what was the real intention of my possible indiscretion
<i>Sería difícil decir cuál era la más arreglada de las tres mujeres allí presentes</i> (MS, Mex.)	It would be hard to say which of the three women present there was the best dressed

(1) When persons are referred to, *quién* is preferred: *han venido algunos de tercero, pero no sé quiénes* (rather than *cuáles*) 'some of the third year (students) have come, but I don't know which/who'.

(2) *Cual* (no accent) is an archaic alternative for *como* 'like', sporadically revived on both continents for literary effect: *se mantiene a su lado cual guardaespaldas* (EP, Mex.) 'he stays at her side like a bodyguard', *me miraba cual testigo de Jehová llamando al timbre* (APR, Sp.) 'he was looking at me like a Jehovah's Witness ringing the doorbell'.

(3) *Cual si* is archaic for *como si*: *arrimada a las paredes cual si la atosigara el miedo* (ET, Sp.) 'clinging to the walls, as if fear were harrying her', *uno espera ese vistazo cual si fuera una maravilla* (MB, Ur.) 'one awaits that spectacle as though it were a miracle'. *Como si* could have been used in these examples. Both expressions require a subjunctive.

(4) *Cual* without an accent appears most often in the relative pronoun *el cual*, discussed at 39.3–5. It is also found in the phrase *tal o cual* ‘this or that’ or ‘such and such’, as in *e insistía en que tal o cual problema tenía otra solución* (EP, Mex.) ‘and he insisted that this or that problem had another solution’.

### 28.3.2 Translating ‘what is/are/were?’, etc.

The usual translations of the phrase ‘what is?’ is *¿cuál es?: ¿cuál es/era el motivo/la diferencia?* ‘what is/was the motive/difference’ (cf. *¿qué motivo/diferencia hay/había?* ‘what motive/difference is/was there?’). *¿Qué es?* literally means ‘what thing?’ or ‘what kind of thing?’, and it is used to ask the definition of something’s nature, as in *¿qué es la democracia/un agujero negro?* ‘what (kind of thing) is democracy/a black hole?’ Compare:

*¿Qué es la vida?*  
*¿Qué hora es?*  
*¿Qué es su hermana?*

What is life?  
 What’s the time?  
 What is his/her sister? (i.e. what does she do?)

and

*¿Cuál es el problema?*  
*¿Cuál es su impresión de los acontecimientos?*  
*Ya sabemos cuál es la respuesta que cualquier*  
*escritor hubiera dado a la carta de la*  
*señora (JC, Sp.)*  
*¿Cuál no sería mi sorpresa?*  
*Pero ya que usted me pregunta cuáles son mis*  
*planes para el futuro (ES, Mex., dialogue)*

What’s the problem?  
 What is your impression of the events?  
 We already know what answer any writer  
 would have given to the lady’s letter  
 Imagine my surprise . . .  
 But since you’re asking me what my plans  
 for the future are . . .

(1) One says *¿a qué fecha estamos?* / *¿a cuántos estamos?* for ‘what’s the date today?’ or *¿qué fecha es hoy?* Compare *¿cuál es la fecha de la Batalla de Waterloo?* ‘what’s the date of the Battle of Waterloo?’

### 28.3.3 *Cuál*: dialect differences

In Spain and in some parts of Latin America, *cuál* is almost never used adjectivally (i.e. directly before a noun): one says *¿qué chicas vienen esta noche?* ‘which girls are coming tonight?’, not *¿cuáles chicas vienen esta noche?* However, sentences like the latter are common in many parts of Latin America from Colombia northwards, and the *NGLE* 22.14a says that this may be spreading in the Americas:

<i>¿Gatos? ¿Cuáles gatos?</i> (CF, Mex., dialogue. Sp. <i>¿qué gatos?</i> )	Cats? What cats?
— <i>¿Recibiste mi carta?</i> — <i>¿Cuál carta?</i> (JP, Mex., dialogue. Sp. <i>¿qué carta?</i> )	‘Did you get my letter?’ ‘What letter?’
— <i>Me dijo que eran las mentiras las que la</i> <i>volvían loca—, ¿Cuáles mentiras?</i> (LR, Col., Sp. <i>¿qué mentiras?</i> )	‘She told me it was the lies that were driving her crazy.’ ‘What lies?’

(1) Sentences like *¿cuál sombrero prefieres?* may occasionally be heard in Spain, but learners of European Spanish should say *¿qué sombrero prefieres?*, *¿cuál de los sombreros prefieres?*, or simply *¿cuál prefieres?*

## 28.4 Qué

For the conjunction *que* as in *dice que viene* '(s)he says (s)he's coming' see 37.4. For the relative pronoun *que* (as in *el libro que estoy leyendo* 'the book I'm reading', see Chapter 39.

### 28.4.1 Basic uses of *qué*

*¿Qué?* means 'what?', 'what sort of?', but not in sentences like *¿cuál es el problema?* 'what's the problem?', for which see 28.3.2. It is also used in exclamations like *¡qué inteligente es!* 'isn't (s)he intelligent!' See 28.4.4.

#### (a) *Qué* as a pronoun

*No sé qué decirte*  
*Discutían sobre qué iban a decirles*  
*No recuerdo ya qué fue de Antonio*  
*¿Quién ha dicho qué?*  
*¿Y qué...?*  
*Nunca voy a tener con qué pagarte*  
 (AM, Mex., dialogue)

I don't know what to say to you  
 They were arguing about what to tell them  
 I can't remember what became of Antonio  
 Who said what?  
 So what?  
 I'll never have enough to pay you with

#### (b) *Qué* as an adjective (see 28.3.3 for the Latin-American use of *cuál* in this context):

*¿A qué párrafo te referies?*  
*¿Qué animales prefieren fotografiar?*  
*Entender qué casa quiere comprar un cliente*  
*ahorra tiempo y malos entendidos (CP, Arg.)*  
*No sabía qué sentido tenía esa*  
*supervivencia (SP, Sp.)*

Which paragraph are you referring to?  
 What animals do they / you prefer to photograph?  
 Understanding what house a client wants to buy saves time and misunderstandings  
 I didn't know what meaning that survival could have

#### (c) Adverbially to reinforce adjectives or adverbs:

*¡Qué generoso es!*  
*¡Qué tarde se ha hecho!*  
*¡Qué bien cantan!*  
*Boston, ¡qué bella ciudad de tabiques rojos!*  
 (EP, Mex., dialogue. *Tabiques* = *ladrillos* in Spain)

Isn't he generous!  
 Look how late it is! / Gosh, it's late!  
 They really sing well!  
 Boston, what a beautiful red brick city!

(1) Before a verb phrase *qué* may optionally be followed by *que* in colloquial language: *¡qué guapa (que) es tu hermana!* 'isn't your sister good-looking!'; *¡qué bien (que) lo han hecho!* 'they've really done it well!'

(2) Use of *cómo* before adjectives is found in Latin America but is archaic in Spain: *¡cómo somos desgraciadas las mujeres!* (Sp. *¡qué desgraciadas somos las mujeres!*) 'how unhappy we women are!'; *¡cómo es difícil vivir!* (= *¡qué difícil es vivir!*) 'how difficult living is!'; (Argentine and Uruguayan examples from Kany, 342–3), *cómo es discola alguna gente* 'how unruly some people are' (AM, Mex., dialogue). J.M. Lope Blanch (1991), 13, notes that *cómo* is used thus by all social classes in Mexico. Alternative constructions, found on both continents, are *qué discola es...* and *cómo es de discola...*

(3) *¿Qué?* is a familiar alternative for the more courteous *¿cómo?*/*¿cómo dices?* when a repetition is requested: —*María es muy respondona*—. *¿Qué?* (polite *¿cómo?*, Mex. *mande*) “‘María answers back a lot.” “What?/Pardon?” (i.e. ‘what did you say?’).

(4) **Important:** *qué* ‘what?’ must not be confused with the conjunction *que* found in sentences like *¡que me llamen a las cinco!* ‘let them call me at five o’clock!’/‘tell them to call me at five!’, *dijiste que te ibas* ‘you said you were leaving’, *¡pero que no nos hayas dicho nada!* ‘but the fact that you didn’t tell us anything!’ See 20.3.19.

## 28.4.2 Qué and lo que in indirect questions

Either *qué* or *lo que* are possible in indirect questions (see Glossary), except immediately before an infinitive, when *qué* is required and *lo que* may sound uneducated:

<i>Sé de lo que te hablo</i> (CF, Mex., dialogue; or <i>de qué te hablo</i> )	I know what I’m talking to you about
<i>Ni sé qué piensa y tampoco sé lo que pienso yo</i> (ES, Arg., dialogue)	I don’t know what he thinks, and I don’t know what I think either
<i>¡Sabe Dios en qué nos metemos!</i>	God knows what we’re getting into!
<i>No sé lo que/qué voy a hacer</i>	I don’t know what I’m going to do
<i>No sé qué hacer</i> (not * <i>no sé lo que hacer</i> )	I don’t know what to do

## 28.4.3 Qué: some idiomatic uses

<i>¿Qué tal estás?</i> (= <i>¿cómo estás?</i> )	How are you? How are things?
<i>¿Qué tal es como profesor?</i>	What’s he like as a teacher?
<i>¿Qué te parece?</i>	What do you think of it?
<i>¿A santo de qué haces eso?</i>	What on earth are you doing that for?
<i>¿A mí qué?/¿Y qué?</i>	What do I care?/So what?
<i>¿A qué viene esta compra?</i> (JA, Sp., dialogue)	What’s the point of this purchase?/ What’s the point of buying this?
<i>¿De qué va la cosa?</i>	What’s it all about?
<i>¿Y qué de las familias sin hogar?</i>	And what about the homeless families?

(1) *Que* has no accent in the following construction: —*¡A que llueve esta tarde!* —*¡A que no!* “‘I bet you it rains this afternoon!” “I bet it doesn’t!”

## 28.4.4 Translating ‘What a . . .!’

*Qué* is used before noun phrases without *un/una* to translate ‘what a . . .!’ in exclamations:

<i>¡Qué vida!</i>	What a life!
<i>¡Qué día más/tan hermoso!</i>	What a lovely day!
<i>¡Qué cara!</i> (Spain, familiarly, <i>¡qué morro!</i> )	What a nerve/cheek!
<i>¡Los grandes tazones de café con leche, ¡qué maravilla!</i> (EP, Mex.)	The big cups of white coffee: wonderful!
<i>¡Qué libro más/tan interesante!</i>	What an interesting book!
<i>¡Qué nevera más/tan estúpida esta/ésta!</i>	Wow, is this is refrigerator stupid!!
<i>Ronie fue directo al bar. “Qué raro tan temprano”</i> (CP, Arg., dialogue)	Ronie went straight to the bar. ‘That’s strange, [drinking] so early’

(1) The colloquial *cómo . . . de* is common with *estar* on both continents: *¡cómo estás de guapa!* ‘aren’t you looking attractive!’, *pero ¡cómo está de gordo!* ‘wow, isn’t he fat!’

(2) *Qué de . . .* is a rather old-fashioned alternative for *cuánto* in exclamations: *¡qué de cosas/cuántas cosas tengo que contarte!* (familiarily *¡la de cosas que tengo que contarte!*) ‘what a lot of things I’ve got to tell you!’

(3) For the Latin-American phrase *qué tan . . .* see 10.16 note 6.

## 28.5 Quién

*Quién/quienes* translates ‘who?’/‘whom?’ in direct and indirect questions:

*¿Quién ha sido?*

Who was it?

*¿Quién iba a pensar que era médico?*

Who would have thought he was a doctor?

*¿Sabes en quién estoy pensando ahora?*

Do you know who(m) I’m thinking of now?

*¿A quién invitaste?*

Whom did you invite?

*No sabe a quién querer más, si al papá o a la mamá* (ES, Mex., dialogue)

He doesn’t know who to love more, father or mother

(1) For *quien* as a relative pronoun as in *los amigos con quienes había salido* ‘the friends (s)he had gone out with’ see Chapter 39. For *quien* as a nominalizer (as in *quien dice eso . . .* ‘people who say that . . .’/‘the person who says that . . .’) see Chapter 40.

(2) *Quién* plus the imperfect subjunctive translates ‘if only . . .’: *quién fuera millonario . . .* ‘if only I were a millionaire’. See 20.2.5.

(3) The following construction is common: *yo no soy quién para aconsejar* (ABV, Sp., dialogue), ‘I’m not the right person to give advice’, *tú no eres quién para criticar* ‘you’re no one to criticize’/‘you’ve got no right to criticize’, *yo no soy quién para emitir juicios de valor* (interview in *El Independiente*, Mex.) ‘I’m not the person to make value judgements’. There is some uncertainty about whether *quién* in this construction should have an accent: it usually does.

(4) The NGL 22.13b notes the use of *quién* in the meaning of ‘no one’ in Mexico and Central America: *la muerte de su marido la había dejado sin quién en el mundo* ‘the death of her husband has left her with no one in the world’, in Spain *sin nadie en el mundo . . .*

## 28.6 Cuánto and cuán

### 28.6.1 Cuánto

*Cuánto* may function as a pronoun, adjective or as an adverb. In the former two cases it agrees in number and gender with the noun; in the latter case it is invariable.

(a) ‘How much?’, ‘how many?’

*¿Cuánto es?*

How much is it?

*¿Cuánta mantequilla queda?*

How much butter is left?

*No sé cuántos vendieron*

I don’t know how many they sold

—*¿Cuánto tarda en llegar?, pregunta—.*

‘How long will it take you to get there?’ he asks. ‘Fifteen days at most.’

—*Quince días a lo más* (DT, Mex., dialogue. Sp. . . *días como máximo*)

**(b) In exclamations, ‘how much!’, ‘what a lot!’**

¡Cuántas veces (no) te lo habré dicho!  
 ¡Mira cuánta nieve!  
 ¡Cuántas medidas drásticas e innecesarias,  
 suspiró el Director General! (CF, Mex.)  
 ¡Cuánto más trágico!  
 ¡Cuánto mejor estarías así!

How many times have I told you!  
 Look at all that snow!  
 ‘What a lot of drastic and unnecessary  
 measures!’ the Director General sighed  
 How much more tragic!  
 How much better you’d look like that!

(1) In the comparative phrases *cuanto más/menos . . . más/menos* ‘the more . . . the more’ ‘the less . . . the less’, *cuanto* is not used exclamatorily, is not stressed, and does not take an accent. See 6.11 for further discussion of this construction.

(2) *Cuanto* (no accent) may be used as a relative pronoun equivalent to *todo lo que*: *tengo cuanto necesito* (ABV, Sp., dialogue) = *tengo todo lo que necesito* ‘I have all I need’, [*la recámara*] *fue sin duda la más suntuosa de cuantas ocupó* (ES, Mex. *Recámara* = *la habitación* in Spain) ‘without a doubt, the room was the most luxurious of all those she had occupied’.

(3) Exclamatory *cuánto* may optionally be followed by *que* before verbs: ¡cuánto (que) te he extrañado! ‘I’ve missed you so much!’ (example from GDLE 31.3.12).

**28.6.2 *Cuán***

In exclamations and indirect questions *cuánto* is shortened to *cuán* and *cuanto* to *cuan* before adverbs or adjectives other than *más*, *menos*, *mayor*, *menor*, *mejor*, *peor*. However, although it is not yet completely extinct in educated speech, *cuán* is nowadays usually found only in flowery styles, and *qué*, or *lo* + adjective or adverb (the latter discussed at 8.2.2) are more usual. *Cuán* is apparently more common in Latin America than in Spain:

Ella misma se sorprendió de cuán lejos  
 estaba de su vida (GGM, Col. or  
 . . . de lo lejos que estaba de su vida)  
 Sólo han conseguido exponer cuán soeces,  
 cuán ineptos y cuán interesados son  
 nuestros dirigentes políticos  
 (La Jornada, Mex.)  
 Luego se echó en el suelo con naturalidad  
 cuan largo era (JM, Sp.)  
 No aguanta el sueño y el cansancio. Se tira en  
 el suelo cuan largo es (CREA, Mex.)

She herself was surprised at how  
 distant he was from her life  
 They have merely managed to expose how  
 coarse, inept and self-interested our  
 political leaders are  
 Then he casually lay down full length on  
 the floor  
 He can’t stand the sleepiness and tiredness.  
 He lies/US lays down full length on the  
 floor

(1) *Cuán* in questions like *¿cuán apoyado te sientes por tu familia?* ‘how supported do you feel/to what extent do you feel supported by your family?’ is heard in Latin America outside the River Plate region, but it is archaic elsewhere. Usually one says *¿hasta qué punto te sientes apoyado?*

(2) In Spain and the Southern Cone sentences like ‘how’ + adjective + ‘is/was it?’ are translated *¿cómo es de . . .?* *¿cómo es de grande el hotel?* ‘how big is the hotel?’, *¿cómo es de profunda el agua?* ‘how deep is the water?’, *¿cómo era de alto?* ‘how tall is he?’ For the Latin-American *qué tan* as in *¿qué tan grande es?* ‘how big is it?’ see 28.7 note 4.

## 28.7 *Cómo*

‘How’ in direct and indirect questions and in exclamations. Sometimes it means ‘why?’, and in this case it is more formal than the English ‘how come?’ (for *como* = ‘as’, ‘since’, see 37.5.2; for *como* + subjunctive = ‘if’ see 29.8.2):

¿Cómo te llamas?

¿Cómo quieres que me peine?

No sé cómo hacerlo

¡Cómo llueve!

¿Cómo/Por qué no me llamaste ayer?

Pero ¿cómo vas a vender dulces en un cine? (EP, Mex., dialogue, Sp. caramelos)

¿Cómo es de inteligente tu cuñado?

(Mex., Col. ¿Qué tan inteligente es . . .?)

What’s your name?

How do you want me to do my hair?

I don’t know how to do it

Look how it’s raining!

Why didn’t you call me yesterday?

But how are you going to sell sweets/candy in a cinema?

How intelligent is your brother-in-law?

(1) ¿Cómo? or ¿cómo dice (usted)? (Mexicans say *mande*) are polite ways of requesting a repetition of something misheard or misunderstood (politer than ¿qué? ‘what?’).

(2) ¿Qué tal? is common on both continents as a way of saying ‘how?’ or ‘what’s sort of?’: ¿qué tal estás? ‘how are you?’, ¿qué tal es como médico? ‘what’s he like as a doctor?’

(3) *Cómo no* is much used in Latin America and occasionally in Spain to mean ‘of course (not)’ in reply to questions, as in —¿Le importa si me voy temprano? —¿Cómo no! ‘Do you mind if I leave early?’ ‘Of course not’.

(4) *Qué tan* is much used in Latin America outside the Southern Cone, and especially in Mexico, in writing and in speech, in sentences like the following: *le preguntó . . . qué tan bueno era para disparar un arma* (MBD, Col.) ‘he asked him how good he was at firing a gun’, *¿qué tan rápido se pueden multiplicar las ratas?* (Excelsior, Mex.) ‘how fast can rats breed?’, *vaya a saber qué tan bueno fue en realidad* (LR, Col., dialogue) ‘who knows how good (i.e. ‘saintly’) he really was’.

## 28.8 *Cuándo* ‘when’

Little need be said about this word in direct questions, e.g. ¿cuándo fue eso? ‘when was that?’, ¿desde cuándo te gusta el tequila? ‘since when did you like tequila?’, and in indirect questions: *no sé cuándo llegarán* ‘I don’t know when they’ll arrive’.

When it is not a question word, *cuando* (no accent) may introduce relative clauses (see 39.12); or it may be a subordinator, often requiring the subjunctive (see 20.4.7). For ‘whenever’ see 20.5.6. For the use of *cuando* in cleft sentences, e.g. *fue entonces cuando . . .* ‘it was then that . . .’ see 41.3.

(1) It may also occasionally be used as a preposition meaning ‘at the time of’: *nos casamos cuando el terremoto* ‘we got married at the time of the earthquake’.

## 28.9 *Dónde* ‘where’

This word behaves predictably in direct questions, e.g. ¿dónde viven? ‘where do they live?’ and in indirect questions: *no sé dónde viven* ‘I don’t know where they live’, *no sabe por dónde empezar* (AC, Mex.) ‘she doesn’t know where to start’.

*Dónde* should be differentiated from *¿adónde?*, which means ‘where to?’ and is optionally used with verbs of motion: *¿adónde/dónde van ustedes?* ‘where are you going?’ Only *¿dónde?* can be used when no motion is involved: *¿dónde estamos?*, not \**¿adónde estamos?*

(1) When it is not a question word, *donde* (no accent) may introduce relative clauses (see 39.10), where the difference between *donde*, *adonde* and *a donde* is discussed. For ‘wherever’ see 20.5.8. For *donde* in cleft sentences, e.g. *fue allí donde . . .* ‘it was there that . . .’ see 41.3.

(2) *Donde* may also mean ‘at the house of’ in some countries, especially Chile, Peru, Ecuador and Central America: *voy donde Olga = voy a casa de Olga*—this construction is also heard in colloquial speech in Spain. *Lo de* can also mean ‘the house of’ in the River Plate area: *Isabel estuvo unos días en lo de Farías* (MSQ, Arg.) ‘Isabel spent a few days at Farías’s house’.

## 28.10 ***Por qué, para qué***

*Por qué* ‘why’ (stressed *qué*) must be distinguished in spelling and pronunciation from *porque* ‘because’. *¿Para qué?* ‘what . . . for?’ must be distinguished from *para que* ‘in order to’.

In questions *para qué* emphasizes intention, *por qué* emphasizes cause, and the difference is the same as between ‘what for?’ and ‘why?’: *¿para qué* (or *¿por qué*) *vamos a cambiarlo si todo está bien?* ‘what are we changing it for if everything’s OK?’, *una de tantas comisiones creadas entonces sin que nadie sepa muy bien para qué sirven* (JV, Mex., dialogue; not *por qué*) ‘one of so many official committees created at that time without anyone knowing very well what they are for’.

Statistically *por qué* is much more frequent and can often be used instead of *para qué*, but obviously not in sentences like *¿por qué se incendió la casa?* ‘why did the house catch fire?’ (not *para qué* ‘what for?’).



# 29 Conditional sentences

This chapter discusses

- Different types of conditional sentences (Sections 29.1–7)
- The use of the imperfect indicative for the conditional tense (Section 29.5)
- The uses of *si* (= 'if') (Section 29.8)
- *Como* + subjunctive instead of *si* (Section 29.8.2)
- *De* + infinitive instead of *si* (Section 29.8.3)
- Other ways of expressing conditions (Section 29.9)
- Translating 'if I were you . . .' (Section 29.10)

## 29.1 Conditional sentences with *si* 'if'

For more on the word *si* 'if' see 29.8.1.

The commonest types of conditional sentences that use *si* are:

### (a) Open conditions (Section 29.2)

<i>Si viene me quedo/quedaré</i>	If (s)he comes I'll stay
<i>Si han llegado, me quedaré</i>	If they have arrived, I'll stay
<i>Lleva cinco semanas en cama. Si</i> <i>eso no es grave, ya me dirás</i>	(S)He's been in bed for five weeks. If that's not serious, tell me what is
<i>Si el televisor funcionaba, lo comprarían</i> (see 29.2 note 1)	If the television set worked, they'd buy it

### (b) Remote conditions (Section 29.3)

<i>Si yo tuviera/tuviese cien dólares, lo compraría</i>	If I had \$100 I'd buy it
<i>Si yo fuera/fuese millonario te compraría un yate</i>	If I were a millionaire I'd buy you a yacht

### (c) Unfulfilled conditions (Section 29.4)

<i>Si yo hubiera/hubiese tenido cien mil</i> <i>dólares, lo habría comprado</i>	If I'd had \$100,000 I would have bought it
--	---

### (d) Fulfilled conditions (Section 29.7)

<i>Si no salía, era porque prefería quedarse en casa</i>	If (s)he didn't go out, it was because (s)he preferred staying at home
<i>Si llegaba temprano comíamos a las doce</i>	If (s)he arrived early we had lunch at twelve

(1) **Important:** *si*, in the meaning of 'if', is not followed by the present subjunctive. See 29.8.1 for details and exceptions.

(2) **Important:** the *-ra* form and *-se* form of the imperfect subjunctive are interchangeable in conditional sentences, the *-ra* form being more common. See 20.1.3.

## 29.2 Open conditions

So called because fulfilment (US 'fulfillment') or non-fulfilment of the condition is equally possible. The subjunctive is not used in open conditions and the tense patterns are the same as in English:

### (a) *Si* + present + present

*Si tenemos que pagar tanto no vale la pena  
Si (el elitismo) significa que selecciona a sus  
miembros en razón de su aptitud, todas  
las universidades del mundo son elitistas  
(MVLI, Pe.)*

If we have to pay so much it isn't worth it  
If elitism means they select their members  
according to their ability, every  
university in the world is elitist

### (b) *Si* + present + future, or present with future meaning

*Si el contrato no está mañana en Londres,  
no hay/habrá trato*

If the contract isn't in London by  
tomorrow, there will be no deal

*Si llueve me quedo/quedaré en casa*

If it rains I'll stay at home

*Si lo veo por la calle, lo voy a reconocer  
(RC, Sp., dialogue)*

If I see him in the street, I'll recognize him

*Si te oye tu papi se muere (AM, Mex. dialogue)*

If your dad hears you he'll die

### (c) *Si* + past tense + present, future or conditional, normally only possible when the subject of the verb in the main clause is not yet sure about the facts described in the if-clause.

*Si han contestado ya, no les escribiré*

If they've already answered, I won't write  
to them

*Avisó que la huelga sería legal, pero si  
encontraban obstáculos entonces "sería  
revolucionaria" (JA, Mex.)*

He warned that the strike would be legal,  
but if they ran into obstacles 'it would be  
revolutionary'

*Si no lo hicieron estamos salvados*

If they didn't do it, we're saved

### (d) *Si* + present + imperative

*Si queréis ver el desfile salid al balcón  
(Lat. Am. si quieren . . . salgan . . .)*

If you want to see the parade go out on to  
the balcony

*Si lo compras en DVD, que sea en Blu-ray  
(DVD pronounced [dew-βe-ðé])*

If you buy it on DVD, make sure it's Blu-Ray

### (e) A past tense + the conditional or an indicative past tense (see note 1)

*La operarían si tenía algún hueso roto*

They would operate on her if she had any  
broken bones

*(Dije que) me quedaba en casa si llovía*

(I said) I'd stay at home if it rained

**(1) Important:** open conditions in the past are typical of reported speech: *me dijo que me pagaría/pagaba si había terminado* '(s)he told me he'd pay me if I'd finished'. This reports the actual words *te pago si has terminado* 'I'll pay you if you've finished'. Likewise *le respondió que no se acabaría nunca si se ponían a leer todas las actas de las casillas* (JA, Mex). In this context in Spain *actas* = *papeletas* and *casillas* = *urnas* 'he replied that they'd never finish if they decided to read every voting paper in the ballot boxes'. This construction is very common when the text reports someone's spoken or unspoken thoughts:

*Si la policía la detenía, ya escarmentaría  
(MVM, Sp., unspoken thoughts)*

If the police arrested her, that would  
teach her a lesson

*Si no actuaba pronto, Gianni terminaría  
por resquebrajarse* (SP, Mex.)  
*¿En qué se convertiría su vida si estallaba  
el escándalo?* (MVLL, Pe.)  
*Me pareció que si me mostraba disponible  
te ibas a cansar* (MP, Arg., dialogue)

If she didn't act promptly Gianni would  
eventually break down  
What would become of his life if the  
scandal got out?  
I thought that if I showed I was available  
you'd get tired (of me)

This construction often encourages students to think that the pattern *si* + imperfect indicative + conditional is the usual way of making *remote* conditions in Spanish, as it is in French and English, e.g. 'if I **had** money I'd buy a car' / *si j'avais de l'argent j'achèterais une voiture*. The next section should correct this assumption.

## 29.3 Remote conditions

There are two types, which correspond to the English sentences 'if you left now you'd get there early' and 'if I were rich I'd buy you a house'.

The first type is theoretically fulfillable and is merely a less confident variant of an open condition: there is little difference between *si pagaras/pagases ahora costaría menos* 'if you **paid** now it would cost less' and *si pagas ahora costará menos* 'if you **pay** now it will cost less'. In the second type, the condition is contrary to fact and the subjunctive construction is the only possible one: *si yo fuera/fuese rico, te compraría una casa*, 'if I were/was rich, I'd buy you a house (but I'm not)'. In 'remote' conditions, the verb in the if-clause is in the imperfect subjunctive (*-ra* or *-se* form). The verb in the other clause is usually in the conditional.

*Me he pasado la vida burlándome de los  
psicoanalistas y sus fantasmagorías  
pseudocientíficas, pero mentiría si dijera  
que aquellas sesiones no sirvieron para  
nada* (JC, Sp.)  
*Si supieras hacer el nudo como todos los  
chicos de tu edad, no te tendrías que quejar*  
(IA, Sp., dialogue)  
*Si no fuera por los embotellamientos de  
tránsito sería la más feliz de las mujeres*  
(ES, Mex., dialogue)  
*Quería saber qué haría si fuese el  
presidente de la atribulada red  
social Twitter* (La Jornada, Mex.)

I've spent my life mocking psychoanalysts  
and their pseudo-scientific fantasies, but  
I'd be lying if I said that those sessions  
were no use at all

If you knew how to make a knot like all  
the boys of your age, you wouldn't  
have to complain  
If it weren't for the traffic jams I'd be the  
happiest of women

She wanted to know what he would do were  
he the president of the troubled Twitter  
social network

- (1) In these four examples the *-se* or *-ra* subjunctive form could have been used in the if-clause.
- (2) As was mentioned at 29.2 note 1, English and French-speaking students must avoid using the imperfect indicative in the if-clause of remote conditions (cf. *si j'étais riche . . .*).
- (3) Use of the conditional in the if-clause is regional or sub-standard, but it is common in Navarre, the Basque Provinces, near-by parts of Spain, and in popular Argentine speech, e.g. *¿si no estaría preso, no lo habrían soltado* 'if he wasn't arrested they wouldn't have let him go' (MP, Arg., dialogue; for *estuviera/estuviese*). This should not be imitated.

## 29.4 Unfulfilled conditions

These indicate a condition in the past that was not fulfilled as in *si me hubieran/hubiesen invitado habría ido* 'if they had invited me I'd have gone' (but they didn't). The verb in the if-clause is in the pluperfect subjunctive (*hubiera/hubiese hablado*, etc.) and the verb in the main clause is usually in the perfect conditional (*habría/hubiera hecho*, etc.):

*Si él hubiera/hubiese tenido dinero,  
habría/hubiera saldado la cuenta*

If (s)he'd had money (s)he'd have  
settled the bill

*Si no hubiera sido por las contracciones del  
estómago, se habría sentido muy bien  
(JC, Arg., dialogue)*

If it hadn't been for the stomach  
cramps, he'd have felt fine

*Mi mamá trajo luto un año y lo habría  
llevado más tiempo si no le hubiéramos  
dicho que a papá no debía gustarle  
(ES, Mex., dialogue)*

My mother wore widow's black for a year  
and would have worn it longer if we  
hadn't told her that father surely didn't  
like it

(1) A number of simpler ways of making unfulfilled conditions are heard in spontaneous speech but they are rare in writing and are probably a shade too informal for most foreign learners: *si me hubieran/hubiesen pagado más claro que trabajaba más* 'if they'd paid me more of course I'd have worked harder', *si lo llego a saber, te habría llamado* 'If I'd known I'd have called you', *si llegas a estar más rato, te juro que entro a cobrarles algo . . .* (CMG, Sp., dialogue) 'if you'd stayed there any longer, I swear I'd have gone in and charged them some money . . .', *si sé que estás enfermo, no vengo* 'if I'd known you were ill/sick, I wouldn't have come', *di un tropezón y si me descuido, me caigo* 'I slipped and I nearly fell over', *si me largo en ese momento, hubiera sido una malagradecida* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'if I'd left at that moment I'd have been ungrateful', *si no te hubieras casado conmigo, me meto de monja* (present indicative for *me hubiera metido de . . .*) 'if you hadn't married me I'd have become a nun'.

(2) *Si* + imperfect + imperfect is widespread but defined as 'sub-standard' by the GDLE 57.2.3.3: *si me tocabas, te mataba con mi cuchillo* (ES, Arg., dialogue) 'if you'd touched me, I'd have killed you with my knife'. One also hears *si* + imperfect + conditional in Argentina: *si hace unos años yo veía* (for *hubiera/hubiese visto*) *en la playa a alguien con esto, hubiera pensado: ese tipo es loco* (Mafalda cartoon, Arg., Sp. *está loco*) 'if I'd seen someone wearing that on the beach a few years ago, I'd have thought the guy's crazy'.

(3) The following two types of unfulfilled condition should be noted: *si hubieras/hubieses trabajado más durante el año no tendrías que ir a clase ahora* 'if you had worked harder during the year you wouldn't have to go to classes now' (refers to the present) and *si hubieras/hubieses trabajado más durante el año no habrías tenido que ir a clase este verano* 'if you'd worked harder during the year, you wouldn't have had to go to classes this summer' (refers to the past).

## 29.5 Imperfect indicative for the conditional tense

The imperfect indicative is frequently used in conditional sentences instead of the conditional tense in spontaneous speech on both sides of the Atlantic (the subject is further discussed at 17.5.4). This is acceptable in relaxed Spanish but it is avoided in formal styles:

*Desde luego, si yo fuera hombre, no me casaba  
(LG, Sp., dialogue)*

Of course, if I were a man I wouldn't  
get married . . .

*Si no fuera por vosotros iba yo a aguantar a  
vuestro padre . . . (CRG, Sp.)*

If it weren't for you, would I put up  
with your father?

*Ni loca me casaba con un español*  
(ES, Mex., dialogue)

I wouldn't marry a Spanish man even if I  
were crazy

## 29.6 -ra forms instead of the conditional

See 17.5.7 for the use of the -ra pluperfect subjunctive form of *haber* (but not, at least in careful language, the -se form) as an alternative for the past conditional *habría*, e.g. *con él o sin él, habría/hubiera sido igual* 'with him or without him, it would have been the same'.

## 29.7 Fulfilled conditions

These are not really conditions at all but merely an elegant way of saying 'the reason why'/'just because'/'whenever'/'whereas'. The main verbs in the if-clause and the apodosis (the clause indicating the consequence of the condition) are in the indicative form:

*Si me estaba contando todos aquellos  
proyectos era porque inexorablemente  
pensaba realizarlos (FU, Sp.)*  
*Si he tenido suerte, la culpa no es mía*  
*Si teníamos dinero, íbamos al teatro*

If he was telling me about all those plans  
it was because he was inevitably  
intending to carry them out  
It's not my fault if I've been lucky  
If (i.e. 'whenever') we had any money  
we used to go to the theatre

*Si te traje a la playa es para que vigilaras a  
Alvarito y no para que te pusieras a leer*  
(SV, Ch., dialogue: i.e. 'the reason  
why I brought you . . .')  
*Si en el siglo XX la guerra fue por el  
petróleo, en el actual será por el  
agua (La Jornada, Mex.)*

If I brought you to the beach it's so you  
could keep an eye on little Alvaro, not so you  
could start reading  
If (i.e. 'whereas') war in the 20th century was  
about oil, in the present century it will be  
about water

## 29.8 Si 'if'

### 29.8.1 Si: general

*Si* is not followed by the present subjunctive, except occasionally after *saber*: *no sé si sea cierto* 'I do not know whether it be true' for *no sé si es cierto*. The latter construction is very common in many Latin-American republics, especially Mexico: *no sé si en este estado pueda continuar* (LRS, PR, dialogue) 'I don't know if I can go on in this condition', *a estas alturas ya no sé si eso sea posible* (DT, Mex., dialogue) 'having got this far I don't know any more if that's possible'. See 20.12.1 note 1 for details.

(1) **Important:** *ser* cannot be deleted after *si*: *si es urgente* 'if urgent', *ven antes si es posible* 'come earlier if possible'. Cf. also French *si nécessaire* 'if necessary', *si es/fuera/fuese necesario*.

(2) **Important:** *si* cannot be followed by the future indicative except in the contexts described in note 3: *\*si vendrás mañana* is incorrect for *si vienes mañana* 'if you come tomorrow'.

(3) *Si* often means 'whether': *no sé si vienen/vendrán o no* 'I don't know whether/if they're coming or not'. In this case use of a future tense after *si* is possible.

(4) *Si* sometimes merely has an emphatic meaning: *pero ¡si tiene más de setenta años!* 'but (s)he's more than seventy years old!': see 35.4.8.

(5) In the phrase *apenas si* it has no function: *apenas (si) la conocía* 'I/he/she/you barely knew her'. See 27.5.7 note 2.

(6) The construction *que si . . .* indicates tedious repetition: *no sé por qué no vino Andrés. Que si no sabía a qué hora era, que si no lo/le habían invitado, que si su mujer estaba enferma . . .* 'I don't know why Andrés didn't come. He "didn't know" what time it was, they "didn't invite him", his wife was "sick . . ."' (i.e. you don't believe his various excuses).

### 29.8.2 Como = si 'if'

In informal language in type 1 (open) conditions, *como* with the present or imperfect subjunctive may be used instead of *si*. This tends to be confined to threats and warnings and is found on both continents as the Cuban example shows; but Lope Blanch (1991, 146), says that the construction is unknown in Mexican Spanish:

<i>¡Como se me vuelva a colgar la tableta la tiro por la ventana!</i>	If my tablet crashes again I'll throw it out of the window!
<i>Me dijo que como no se lo pagara/pagase, se lo llevaba/llevaría</i>	(S)he told me that if I didn't pay her/him, for it, (s)he would take it away
<i>—¿Está enfermo su hijo? —Enferma me pondrá a mí como lo deje (AA, Cu., dialogue)</i>	'Is your son sick?' 'He'll make me sick if I let him'

(1) *Como* with the indicative means 'since' (i.e. 'because') and is discussed at 37.5.2, e.g. *como no me lo has pagado, me lo llevo* 'since you've not paid me for it, I'm taking it away'.

(2) *Como* with the subjunctive can also mean 'except' or 'unless': *no tenemos nada que decir, como no sea que sentimos mucho lo de mi ahijada* (MS, Mex., dialogue) 'we have nothing to say except that we're very sorry for what happened to my goddaughter', *nunca he sabido para qué sirve tener dos como no sea para lavarse simultáneamente una mano en cada uno* (LR, Col., dialogue) 'I've never known what's the point of having two [washbasins] unless it's for simultaneously washing one hand in each of them'.

### 29.8.3 De + infinitive = si + finite verb

*De* plus an infinitive may be used for *si* and a finite verb in an if-clause. This construction is best restricted to sentences in which the verb in the if-clause and the verb in the subordinate clause are in the same person. One can say *de llover, lloverá mucho* 'if it rains it'll rain a lot' (both third-person), but not *\*de llover, me quedo en casa* 'if it rains I'm staying at home' (*si llueve me quedo/quedaré en casa*). This rule is not always applied, but foreigners should probably observe it:

<i>Se me ocurrió que, de estar viva, la mujer me habría parecido más vieja y más digna (AM, Sp., dialogue)</i>	It occurred to me that, had she been alive, the woman would have seemed older and more dignified to me
<i>Un experimento . . . que, de confirmarse, supondría el hallazgo de la fuente de energía más buscada por los científicos (Granma, Cu.)</i>	An experiment which, if confirmed, would mean the discovery of the energy source most sought after by scientists
<i>De haber sido hija única a lo mejor sí me hubiera vuelto una niña mimada (ES, Mex., dialogue)</i>	If I'd been an only child maybe I really would have become a spoilt girl

(1) When used thus *de* must have an unfulfilled or future meaning. One can say *de llover, lloverá mucho* 'if it rains it'll rain a lot', or *de haberlo sabido, habríamos . . .* 'had we known, we would

have . . .’ (unfulfilled), but not *\*de ser guapa, es mi novia* ‘if she’s beautiful, she’s my girlfriend’ (timeless statement: *si es guapa . . .*). *De* cannot therefore be used in type 4 (fulfilled) conditional sentences (29.7).

## 29.9 Other ways of expressing conditions

(a) The gerund may sometimes have a conditional meaning: *hablando de esa manera no consigues nada* ‘you’ll get nowhere by talking like that’ is the same as *si hablas de esa manera . . .* ‘if you talk like that’. See 24.4.2 for more examples.

(b) A negative if-clause may be introduced by some phrase meaning ‘unless’, e.g. *a menos que, a no ser que* (see 20.4.8b), *como no sea que* (see 29.8.2 note 2): *debe (de) estar en casa, a no ser que/a menos/ como no sea que haya ido al bar con sus amigos* ‘(s)he must be at home, unless (s)he’s gone to the bar with his/her friends’. The subjunctive is required after these expressions.

(c) ‘If’ may be expressed by some phrase meaning ‘on condition that’, e.g. *con tal (de) que, a condición de que* (see 20.4.8a): *compraré los aguacates, con tal (de) que estén frescos* ‘I’ll buy the avocados provided/if they’re fresh’. (*Aguacate* is used in Spain and from Ecuador northwards; *la palta* is used south of Ecuador) These expressions require the subjunctive.

(d) *Al* + infinitive properly means ‘on . . .-ing’, but is sometimes seen with a conditional meaning: *?al ser verdad esta afirmación se tendrá que repensar todo* ‘if this claim is true, everything will have to be re-thought’. See 22.3.3. This should not be imitated.

(e) *A* + infinitive can have a conditional meaning in a few cases:

*También estaba nervioso, a juzgar por  
la manera como relamía su bigotito  
(ES, Mex., dialogue)*

He was nervous too to judge by how  
he was licking his moustache

*A decir verdad, no me cae bien  
(= si digo la verdad)*

To tell the truth, I don’t like him/her/you

(f) *Por si . . .* forms conditionals of the sort translated by ‘in case . . .’ or some similar phrase:

*Me asomé a la ventana por si venía*

I looked out of the window in case  
he was coming

*Compramos otra botella por si acaso  
Por si esto fuera poco, también me han  
puesto una multa*

We’ll buy another bottle just in case  
As if that weren’t enough, they’ve  
given me a fine too!

*Prefiero que envíe protección a mi esposa,  
y que asegure el entierro de mi hijo por si  
llega algún indeseable (MS, Mex., dialogue)*

I prefer you to send protection for my wife  
and also for you to put a guard on my  
son’s funeral in case some undesirable  
turns up

(g) *Donde* can sometimes mean a nervous ‘what if . . .?’ in Mexico, and possibly elsewhere in northern Latin America. In this context, European Spanish uses *anda que si* + indicative or *anda que como* + subjunctive: *no digas, estoy muy espantada, donde a la pobre criatura le salga la nariz de este hombre* (AM, Mex., dialogue; Sp. *anda que como le salga . . .*) ‘don’t even mention it, I’m really terrified. What if the poor little thing gets this man’s nose?!’, *donde me vea mi madre en cueros se muere del disgusto* (ES, Mex., dialogue) ‘if my mother sees me in the nude [i.e. on television] she’ll die from the shock’, *no sé cómo se van a casar. Donde estén igual de ignorantes en lo demás* (ibid. Sp. *anda que como estén . . ., anda que si están . . .*) ‘I don’t know how they’re going to get married. What if they’re just as ignorant about all the other things?!’

## 29.10 Translating 'if I were you . . .'

*Yo que usted/Si yo fuera usted, me callaría*

*Si yo fuera usted, ya estaría buscando*

*un abogado* (MS, Mex., dialogue)

*Yo que usted compraba una nueva*

(ES, Mex., dialogue)

If I were you, I'd keep quiet

If I were you I'd already be looking for  
lawyer

If I were you I'd buy a new one (refers to  
*una máquina de escribir* – typewriter)

(1) *Yo que tú/usted* is used on both continents. *Yo de ti/usted* is a Catalanism which is now quite widespread in Spain and is heard in some parts of Central America and the Caribbean, but is censured by manuals of good usage (e.g. Santamaría et al. 1989, 309): *yo de ti lo dejaba* 'if I were you I would leave it', *yo de Ana no lo haría* 'if I were Ana I wouldn't do it'.



# 30 Pronominal verbs

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- The terms 'reflexive' and 'pronominal' verb (Section 30.1.1)
- The reflexive meaning of pronominal verbs (e.g. *lavarse, matarse*) (Section 30.2)
- The reciprocal meaning of pronominal verbs ('they love one another', etc.) (Section 30.3)
- The intransitive meaning of pronominal verbs (e.g. the difference between *enamorar* and *enamorarse*) (Section 30.4)
- *Se de matización* (i.e. *se* used to add a shade of meaning) (Section 30.5–8)
- *Se comió una pizza, me bebí un litro de vino* (Section 30.9)
- Possible meanings of sentences like *se abrió la puerta* (Section 30.10)
- The obligatory use of *uno* where two *se*'s would occur side by side (Section 30.11)

## 30.1 Pronominal verbs: general

### 30.1.1 'Pronominal' verbs or 'reflexive' verbs?

**Important:** 'pronominal' refers to the *form* of these verbs, not to their meaning. A very large number of Spanish verbs can be made 'pronominal', even intransitive verbs like 'to be' (*estarse*) and 'to fall' (*caerse*). It is very misleading to call such verbs 'reflexive'. 'Reflexive' refers only to one of the *meanings* that a pronominal verb can have, i.e. that the subject performs an action on or for him/herself, as in *me afeito* 'I shave (myself)', *se lavan* 'they're washing (themselves)', etc.

Pronominal verbs are those which are accompanied by an object pronoun (i.e. *me, te, se, nos, os* or *se*) which is of the same person and number as the verb's subject: *yo me voy* 'I'm going away', *nos acostamos* 'we're going to bed', *te cansarás* 'you'll get tired', *me lavo* 'I'm washing myself', *se quieren mucho* 'they love one another a lot', (*él*) *se ha dormido* 'he's gone to sleep'. The usual object pronouns are used with these verbs except in the third person (*usted, ustedes* included), which uses the pronoun *se* for both singular and plural. Common forms of a typical pronominal verb are:

**Infinitive** *sentarse* 'to sit down'

**Gerund** *sentándose*

**Imperative** *tú siéntate, vosotros/as sentaos, usted siéntese, ustedes siéntense*. The *voseo* form is *sentate*. See 21.2 for details about these imperative forms.

**Present indicative**

*yo me siento*

*tú te sientas*

*vos te sentás*

*él/ella/usted se sienta*

*nosotros/nosotras nos sentamos*

*vosotros/vosotras os sentáis*

*ellos/ellas/ustedes se sientan*

### 30.1.2 Possible uses of Spanish pronominal verbs

The several possible uses of Spanish pronominal verbs are shown here:

Name	Example	Singular or plural verb?	Person of verb	Living or non-living subject?	Section
1. Reflexive	<i>me lavo</i>	either	any	living	30.2
2. Reciprocal	<i>nos queremos, os habláis</i>	plural	any	living	30.3
3. Intransitive	<i>me alegro, se rompió la taza</i>	either	any, if living, otherwise 3 <sup>rd</sup>	either	30.4
4. <i>Se de matización</i>	<i>se fue, se murió, te bajaste, me lo esperaba, se lo cree, etc.</i>	either	any, if living, otherwise 3 <sup>rd</sup>	either	30.5–8
5. 'Unusual consumption'	<i>se bebió un litro de vino</i>	either	any	living	30.9
6. Passive <i>se</i>	<i>se construyó el puente</i>	either	third only	non-living (usually)	Chapter 32
7. 'Special construction'	<i>se arrestó a dos personas</i>	singular	third only	human, with some exceptions	Chapter 32
8. Impersonal <i>se</i>	<i>en España se vive bien</i>	singular	third only	human	Chapter 32

(1) **Important:** it must be remembered that pronominal verbs often have several possible meanings. *Se critican* could mean 'they criticize themselves', 'they criticize one another', or 'they are criticized' (passive *se*: Chapter 32). Context or the meaning of the verb usually makes the meaning clear.

(2) The term 'pronominal' verb can be criticized, but it is now adopted by the Academy: NGLE 41.13a. Avoiding the name 'reflexive' for this type of verb may stop students from imagining that sentences like *se construyó el puente* mean 'the bridge built itself' instead of 'the bridge was built'.

## 30.2 Reflexive meaning of pronominal verbs

### 30.2.1 Basic reflexive meaning of pronominal verbs

The reflexive meaning of a pronominal verb almost always shows that an action is done by the subject to or for him/herself: *se está duchando* '(s)he's taking a shower', *ustedes se alaban mucho* 'you praise yourselves a lot' (or 'you praise one another a lot'; see 30.3), *me voy a comprar otro traje* 'I'm going to buy (myself) another suit'.

This meaning is quite common, but it is not the most frequently encountered even though it is usually the first one studied, probably because it was the basic meaning of pronominal verbs in Classical Latin. Four important features of this reflexive meaning are:

(a) The subject must be living or have some sort of artificial intelligence, since doors or stones don't usually do things to themselves.

(b) The pronoun may stand for the direct or the indirect object: *se está afeitando* 'he's shaving' (*se* = direct object), *me estoy quitando la camisa* 'I'm taking my shirt off' (*me* is the indirect object; *la camisa* is the direct object), *ponte la gorra* 'put your cap on', etc.

(c) The action can be deliberate or accidental: *me estoy pintando las uñas* 'I'm painting my nails', *me he roto una uña* 'I've broken a nail'. In a few cases it may actually be done by someone else: see 30.2.3, especially note 3.

(d) The original verb is always transitive – i.e. it must be capable of having a direct object. If the original verb is intransitive then the pronominal form cannot have a reflexive meaning, cf. *ir* 'to go' (intransitive), *se va* '(s)he's going away' (*se de matización*, not 'reflexive').

Examples of the reflexive meaning of pronominal verbs:

<i>Se está maquillando</i>	(S)he's putting on make-up
<i>Me corté con una lata</i>	I cut myself on a tin
<i>¡Qué bien se peina!</i>	Doesn't (s)he do his/her (own) hair well!/ ... get his/her hair done well!
<i>¡Cuidado, que te vas a salpicar!</i>	Careful, you're going to get splashed!
<i>Ex presidente hondureño se declara culpable (La Jornada, Mex.)</i>	Honduran ex-president admits guilt (lit. 'declares himself guilty')
<i>Lávate las manos</i>	Wash your hands
<i>Esto me lo pido, esto me lo pido...</i> (children overheard in a toy shop before Epiphany. See note 4)	I'm asking for this... and this...
<i>Se mató en un accidente (see note 2)</i>	(S)he got killed in an accident
<i>Se daban crema para el sol</i>	They were putting sun-cream on (or reciprocal 'they were putting sun-cream on each other')

(1) Spanish reflexive pronouns must be of the same person and number as the subject of the verb. Unlike informal English, Spanish rejects *\*nos compré un coche nuevo* for *compré un coche nuevo para nosotros* 'I bought us a new car' / 'I bought a new car for us'. Likewise, one must say *hay que levantarse* 'time to get up', not *\*hay que levantarnos* (because *hay* is third-person). The latter construction is heard but is condemned by the NGL 16.4j.

(2) *Se mató* can imply accidental death or suicide. If the death was accidental, it means that the subject was performing the action that killed him/her. *Se mató en un accidente de coche* '(s)he was killed in a car accident' implies that (s)he was driving. But one cannot say *\*se mató en una pelea* '(s)he killed him/herself in a fight': *lo/le/la mataron en una pelea* since someone else is responsible.

(3) In colloquial language in Spain the reflexive meaning of a few verbs may imply that the action concerns or is meaningful for the subject and no one else: *tú sabrás lo que te dices* 'I guess you know what you're talking about (i.e. I don't)', *se lo digo yo, y yo sé lo que me digo* (RM, Sp., dialogue) 'I'm telling you and I know what I'm saying', *yo me entiendo* 'I know what I'm referring to' / 'I know what I'm talking about', *yo sé lo que me hago* 'I know what I'm doing' (even if you don't). As far as we can tell, this construction is rare, in Latin America, but cf. —¿Cuál ensalmo? —preguntó Corzas—. *Uno que yo me sé* —contestó Isabel (AM, Mex., dialogue. Spain and Southern Cone ¿Qué ensalmo?) ' "What magic spell?" Corzas asked. "One I know," Isabel replied'.

(4) In Spanish-speaking countries presents are traditionally given on *Reyes* or Three Kings' Day, i.e. Epiphany, 6 January. To the dismay of parents of young children, the news has spread in recent years that Santa Claus (*Papá Noel*) also hands out presents on 24 or 25 December.

### 30.2.2 Emphasis of the subject and the reflexive meaning

The subject can be emphasized by using subject pronouns, sometimes reinforced by the appropriate form of *solo* 'alone' or *mismo*. This construction also makes it clear that the meaning is

reflexive: *primero vistió a la niña y luego se vistió ella* 'first she dressed the child, then she dressed herself', *ya no te aguantas ni a ti mismo* (EP, Mex.) 'you can't even stand/put up with yourself', *te has perjudicado tú solo/mismo* 'you've harmed yourself'.

(1) If a preposition is used (including personal *a*), emphasis is made by using the appropriate prepositional form of the personal pronoun (*mí/ti/sí/nosotros/vosotros/sí*) plus the correct number and gender of *mismo*: *se decía a sí misma que tenía que hacerlo* 'she told herself she had to do it', *nos mentimos a nosotros mismos con frecuencia* 'we lie to ourselves frequently', *se lo había prometido a sí misma desde mucho antes del casamiento* (SG, Mex.) 'she'd promised it to herself long before the wedding'.

(2) Verbs expressing hurt take either the prepositional or non-prepositional form: *se hace daño él mismo/a sí mismo* 'he's hurting himself', *te perjudicas tú mismo/a ti mismo* 'you (masc.) are damaging yourself'.

### 30.2.3 Use of the reflexive meaning to mean 'to get something done for oneself'

With a few common verbs, and especially in Spain, the reflexive meaning may also include 'to get or have something done for oneself': *Ana se va a hacer un abrigo rojo* 'Ana's going to make herself a red coat' / 'Ana is going to get a red coat made', *se han construido un chalet* 'they have built themselves a house (either themselves or to their specifications)', *me voy a cortar el pelo* 'I'm going to get my hair cut', *me peino en una peluquería famosa* 'I get my hair done at a famous hairdressers'. Ambiguity can be removed by the appropriate use of the personal pronoun followed by *mismo* or *solo*, e.g. *me voy a cortar yo mismo el pelo* 'I'm going to cut my hair' (myself).

(1) This construction is not used everywhere in Latin America, especially in northern regions, in which case *mandar* or *hacer* are used, e.g. *mandó construir un palacio* or *hizo construir un palacio* '(s)he had a palace built'. Both of these constructions are also used in Spain.

(2) In a few cases, it is very unlikely that the subject will actually perform the action her or himself: *inyectarse contra el cólera* 'to get injected against cholera', *me voy a operar de cataratas* 'I'm going to be operated on for cataracts', *es evidente que se ha operado, no sólo una sino varias veces* (BE, Mex.) 'it's obvious she's been operated on not once but several times', *nunca me voy a operar la cara* (interview, *Capital*, Pe.) 'I'm never going to have my face operated on', *si te duele esa muela, debías sacártela* 'if that tooth's aching you ought to have it out' (less likely, 'you ought to pull it out'), *no me gusta nada ese corte que tienes en la mano. Debes ir a vértelo* (colloquial, Spain) 'I really don't like that cut on your hand. You ought to go and get it looked at'.

## 30.3 Reciprocal meaning of pronominal verbs

Plural pronominal verbs with human or animal subjects can have a reciprocal meaning, i.e. they may show that an action is done to or for one another. *El uno al otro/los unos a los otros* can be added to make clear that this is the meaning:

*Nos escribimos periódicamente*  
*Hace años que no se hablan*

We write to one another regularly  
They haven't been talking to one another for years

*Pasó mucho tiempo sin que nos viésemos/viéramos*

We didn't see one another for a long time

*Los novios hacían como que se odiaban, pero en el fondo se querían* (ES, Mex., dialogue)

The bride and groom pretended to hate one another, but deep down they loved one another

*Los guardianes parecían vigilarse los unos a los otros* (GGM, Col.)

*Se hacen la compra los unos a los otros*

*Siempre se ponen pegas (el uno al otro)*

The guards seemed to be watching one another

They do one another's shopping

They're always finding fault with one another

**(1) Important:** if both female and male subjects are involved, masculine pronouns are used: *los muchachos y las muchachas se ayudan los unos a los otros* 'the boys and girls help one another', *Pablo y Marta se quieren mucho el uno al otro* 'Pablo and Marta love one another a lot'. *El uno a la otra* might eliminate the idea of reciprocity, i.e. suggest that he loved her but not vice versa. However, reciprocal forms like *el uno a la otra* are occasionally seen in literary styles; see NGLE 16.5i.

## 30.4 Pronominal verbs and intransitivity

### 30.4.1 Common intransitive pronominal verbs

One important and constantly encountered use of the pronominal form is to show that a verb is intransitive – i.e. it cannot have a direct object. English does not always differentiate transitive from intransitive verbs: cf. 'I've finished the dinner'/'the dinner has finished', 'I boiled it'/'it boiled', 'we grow carrots here'/'carrots grow here'. But with some important exceptions, Spanish marks the intransitive meaning of an otherwise transitive verb by making it pronominal: Compare:

Transitive	Intransitive
<i>abrir</i> to open (but see 30.7.1)	<i>abrirse</i> to open (intransitive)
<i>acabar</i> to finish (transitive and intransitive)	<i>acabarse</i> to end (intransitive)
<i>acostar</i> to put someone to bed	<i>acostarse</i> to go to bed
<i>aprovechar</i> to make the most of	<i>aprovecharse (de)</i> to take advantage of
<i>beneficiar</i> to benefit	<i>beneficiarse (de)</i> to benefit from
<i>casar</i> to marry someone off (also intransitive in archaic or regional styles)	<i>casarse</i> to get married
<i>cerrar</i> to close	<i>cerrarse</i> to close (intransitive)
<i>colgar</i> to hang something	<i>colgarse</i> to 'hang' (computers)
<i>despertar</i> to wake someone up (also intransitive)	<i>despertarse</i> to wake up (intransitive)
<i>desplazar</i> to shift/scroll	<i>desplazarse</i> to move about
<i>divorciar</i> to divorce (someone)	<i>divorciarse</i> to get divorced
<i>dormir</i> to put somebody to sleep (also 'to sleep')	<i>dormirse</i> to go to sleep
<i>enamorar</i> to make someone fall in love	<i>enamorarse de</i> to fall in love with
<i>estropear</i> to spoil something	<i>estropearse</i> to get spoilt/break down
<i>involucrar</i> to implicate	<i>involucrarse</i> to be/get involved
<i>meter</i> to put in	<i>meterse</i> to get in/to interfere
<i>perder</i> to lose	<i>perderse</i> to get lost (but see 30.7.31)
<i>preocupar</i> to worry somebody	<i>preocuparse</i> to worry
<i>presentar</i> to introduce people	<i>presentarse</i> to appear unexpectedly
<i>terminar</i> (see <i>acabar</i> )	<i>terminarse</i> (see <i>acabarse</i> )
<i>tirar</i> to throw/pull	<i>tirarse</i> to jump/to dive

### 30.4.2 Pronominalization can radically change the meaning of a verb

Sometimes the pronominal form of the verb is radically different in meaning:

<i>cambiar</i> to change	<i>cambiarse de</i> to change clothes/house
<i>correr</i> to run	<i>correrse</i> to be ashamed/'to move over', 'to come' (Sp., sexually: vulgar)
<i>desenvolver</i> to unwrap	<i>desenvolverse</i> to be good at/skilful in something
<i>despedir</i> to see someone off/to fire/sack someone	<i>despedirse de</i> to take one's leave/say goodbye
<i>empeñar</i> to pawn/pledge	<i>empeñarse en</i> to insist on doing something
<i>gastar</i> to spend	<i>gastarse</i> to wear out
<i>llevar</i> to take/to wear	<i>llevarse</i> to take with one/to steal
<i>negar</i> to deny	<i>negarse a</i> to refuse to do something
<i>oponer</i> to contrast two views	<i>oponerse</i> to oppose
<i>valer</i> to be worth	<i>valerse de</i> to make use of

(1) Some pronominal verbs are being replaced by the non-pronominal form, e.g. *entrenar* for *entrenarse* 'to train', which is now widespread (*entrenó mañana en el gimnasio* 'I'm training tomorrow at the gym'), or *encarar* for *encararse con* 'to face up to (a problem)': *Arco 93 trata de encarar la crisis del mercado de arte* (*El País*, Spain) 'Arco 93 is trying to face up to the economic crisis in the art market', *el medio idóneo para encarar nuestros problemas* (interview, *La Jornada*, Mex.) 'the ideal method of tackling our problems'.

(2) *Estrenar* 'to perform or to show for the first time' is transitive: *niña estrena prótesis de mano hecha con impresión 3D* (*La Jornada*, Mex.) 'girl shows off for first time artificial hand made by 3D printer', *estrenar zapatos nuevos* 'to wear new shoes for the first time'. But in the Southern Cone the non-pronominal form may be intransitive: "*El Marginal*" premiada antes de estrenar 'El Marginal [a film] wins award before it is released' (*La Nación*, Arg.), Sp. *estrenarse*.

### 30.4.3 Pronominal verbs that have no transitive counterpart

Some pronominal intransitive verbs have no non-pronominal counterparts, at least in normal language. These are some of the more common:

<i>abstenerse</i> to abstain	<i>ensimismarse</i> to become introspective	<i>quejarse</i> to complain
<i>acurrucarse</i> to crouch	<i>fugarse</i> to flee	<i>rebelarse</i> to rebel
<i>arrepentirse</i> to repent	<i>inmiscuirse</i> to interfere	<i>regodearse</i> to delight in
<i>atenerse a</i> to limit oneself to	<i>jactarse</i> to boast	<i>resentirse</i> to feel the effects of
<i>atreverse a</i> to dare	<i>mofarse</i> to mock	<i>sincerarse</i> to be sincere
<i>comportarse</i> to behave	<i>obstinarse en</i> to insist on	<i>suicidarse</i> to commit suicide
<i>dignarse</i> to deign to		<i>vanagloriarse</i> to boast

### 30.4.4 Some non-pronominal verbs may be intransitive or transitive

There are so many intransitive pronominal verbs in Spanish that beginners sometimes assume that all intransitive counterparts of transitive verbs must be pronominal. But a number of non-pronominal verbs have both a transitive and an intransitive meaning. We can say *lo/le suspendieron en francés* 'they failed him in French' and *suspendió en francés* '(s)he failed in French', *su cabeza asomaba por la ventana* (or *se asomaba*) 'his/her head was sticking out of the window' and *asomaba la cabeza por la ventana* '(s)he was sticking his/her head out of the window', *desconectó la*

*radio* '(s)he disconnected the radio' and *en clase siempre desconecta* 'in class (s)he always switches off' (i.e. 'day-dreams'), *lo empezó* '(s)he/you began it' and *empezó* '(s)he/it/you began', *tenemos que hablar* (intransitive) 'we need to talk', *lo tenemos que hablar* 'we need to talk about it' (transitive).

The following are common examples of verbs that can be either transitive or intransitive without changing their form (verbs marked with an asterisk may optionally be made pronominal when used intransitively. A good dictionary should provide further details):

<i>acabar</i> * to end (see 30.7.2)	<i>conectar</i> * to connect	<i>hervir</i> to boil
<i>aclamar</i> * to brighten/lighten/ e.g. after a storm	<i>crecer</i> to grow (for <i>crecerse</i> ) see 30.7.10)	* <i>iniciar</i> (can be intransitive in Mexico) 'to start'
<i>adelgazar</i> * to slim/lose weight	<i>despertar</i> * to wake up (see 30.7.15)	<i>mejorar</i> * to improve (see 30.7.23)
<i>aflojar</i> * to loosen	<i>disminuir</i> * to diminish/ reduce	<i>oscurecer</i> * to darken
<i>aprobar</i> to approve/to pass (an examination)	<i>empeorar</i> * to worsen	<i>quebrar</i> * to snap/break
<i>augmentar</i> * to grow bigger/to make bigger	<i>encoger</i> * to shrink	<i>resucitar</i> to come back to life, to resuscitate
<i>avanzar</i> * to advance/move forward	<i>enfermar</i> to make/get sick ( <i>enfermarse</i> in Lat. Am.)	<i>sangrar</i> * to bleed/to indent (a text)
<i>bajar</i> * to go down/to lift down (see 30.6.1)	<i>enflaquecer</i> * to lose weight	<i>secar</i> * to dry
<i>comenzar</i> to begin	<i>enfriar</i> * to grow cold	<i>subir</i> * to go up/to lift up
	<i>engordar</i> * to fatten/get fat	<i>terminar</i> * to end
	<i>enloquecer</i> * to go mad	<i>vestir</i> * to wear (see 30.7.37)

### 30.5. *Se de matización: general*

The term *se de matización* is taken from Moreira and Butt (1996). It is, however, inaccurate in the sense that such verbs appear with other pronouns besides *se*, e.g. *me voy*, *te duermes*, *nos trajimos*, *os creéis*, etc.

*Se de matización* (lit. 'se that adds a shade of meaning') refers to the use of the pronominal form to modify the meaning of the original verb in some way. Compare *bajó del árbol* and *se bajó del árbol* '(s)he came down from the tree' (the difference between the two is barely translatable), or *salió del cine* '(s)he left the cinema' and *se salió del cine* '(s)he walked out of the cinema'. Several points must be made about this construction:

(a) It is confined to a limited and apparently closed series of common transitive and intransitive verbs. The fact, for example, that *volver* 'to return' has a pronominal counterpart *volverse* 'to return before time'/'to turn back' (not to be confused with *volverse* 'to become' or 'to turn round') does not mean that *regresar* 'to return' also has a pronominal counterpart *regresarse* (but the latter form is used in Latin America); nor does *descender* 'to descend' have a form \**descenderse*, despite the fact that *bajar* has the form *bajarse*. For this reason these verbs must be learned separately. The most common verbs that take *se de matización* are:

<i>abrir</i>	<i>coger</i>	<i>devolver</i> *	<i>figurar</i>	<i>merecer</i>	<i>pensar</i>	<i>salir</i>	<i>ver</i>
<i>acabar</i>	<i>conocer</i>	<i>empeorar</i>	<i>guardar</i>	<i>montar</i>	<i>perder</i>	<i>saltar</i>	<i>vestir</i>
<i>aguantar</i>	<i>correr</i>	<i>encontrar</i>	<i>imaginar</i>	<i>morir</i>	<i>probar</i>	<i>sentir</i>	<i>volver</i>
<i>aparecer</i>	<i>crecer</i>	<i>enfermar</i> *	<i>ir</i>	<i>olvidar</i>	<i>quedar</i>	<i>sonreír</i>	
<i>bajar</i>	<i>creer</i>	<i>entrar</i>	<i>leer</i>	<i>oscurecer</i>	<i>regresar</i> *	<i>subir</i>	
<i>caer</i>	<i>decidir</i>	<i>envejecer</i> *	<i>llegar</i>	<i>parar</i>	<i>reír</i>	<i>suponer</i>	
<i>callar</i>	<i>dejar</i>	<i>escapar</i>	<i>llevar</i>	<i>parecer</i>	<i>resbalar</i>	<i>temer</i>	
<i>cambiar</i>	<i>desayunar</i>	<i>esperar</i>	<i>marchar</i>	<i>pasar</i>	<i>resistir</i>	<i>traer</i>	
<i>cerrar</i>	<i>despertar</i>	<i>estar</i>	<i>mejorar</i>	<i>pasear</i>	<i>robar</i> *	<i>venir</i>	

\*The pronominal form of asterisked verbs is used in Latin America but not Spain.

Only a selection of these is discussed in detail below. The rest should be sought in a good dictionary.

(b) Some of the pronominal forms described below are more characteristic of spoken language, and the non-pronominal form is used in formal styles. Thus, only *morir* 'to die' is used in formal Spanish, whereas both *morir* and *morirse* are heard in everyday speech, often with a slight difference of meaning.

(c) For specifically Latin-American examples of *se de matización* see 30.8.

(d) The nuance added by pronominalization is sometimes very subtle. The ability to distinguish correctly between forms like *llegar/llegarse* 'to arrive'/'to approach' or *traer/traerse* 'to bring' is the mark of the true master of idiomatic Spanish.

(e) The possibility of *se de matización* does not mean that the same verb is not pronominalized for one of the reasons discussed elsewhere in this chapter. Out of context, a form like *se encontraron* can mean 'they found by chance', 'they met by chance', (*se de matización*), 'they found themselves' (reflexive), 'they found one another' (reciprocal) or 'they were found' (passive *se*). Context usually clarifies the meaning. Pronominalized verbs of motion tend to share common features of meaning, so they are discussed separately at 30.6. Other examples of *se de matización* are discussed at 30.7.

## 30.6 Verbs of motion and *se de matización*

Many common verbs of motion acquire an extra nuance in the pronominal form. The pronominal form may:

(a) Draw attention to the point of departure as opposed to, or as well as, the destination, cf. *ir* 'to go somewhere', *irse* 'to go away from somewhere': *voy a España* 'I'm going to Spain', *me voy* 'I'm leaving'/'going', *me voy a España* 'I'm leaving for/going away to Spain'.

(b) Suggest that an action is untimely, accidental or unplanned, e.g. *caer* 'to fall', *caerse* 'to fall over/down'; *salir* 'to leave'/'to come out', *salirse* 'to walk out'/'to leak' (liquids, gases). Sometimes both nuances are combined.

### 30.6.1 *Bajar/bajarse* 'to go down'; *subir/subirse* 'to go up'

As far as 'getting off/out of' and 'getting in/onto' some kind of vehicle is concerned, the forms are usually interchangeable, although informal language prefers the pronominal form. Compare *en Cuajimalpa se bajaron a comer quesadillas* 'they got out [of the bus] in Cuajimalpa to eat some quesadillas' and *cuando el taxista bajó del auto para calcular la longitud del majestuoso embotellamiento* 'when the taxi driver got out to calculate the length of the stupendous traffic jam' (both examples from ES, Mex.). More examples:

*Vino hacia ellos sonriente tan pronto se bajaron del coche* (MD, Sp.)  
*Después de 10 minutos, bajó del carro con cara sonriente*, (GR, Mex. *carro* = *coche* in Spain)  
*Recibí órdenes de subirme a un camión militar* (EP, Mex., dialogue. *Camión* = 'lorry'/'truck' in Spain)  
*Isabel subió al tren* (AM, Mex.)

He came towards them, smiling, as soon as they got out of the car  
 Ten minutes later he got out of the car smiling  
 I was given orders to get on a military truck/bus  
 Isabel got on the train



(1) Ordinary going up and down (e.g. stairs, lifts) usually requires the non-pronominal form unless reference is made to a whole set of stairs. See 30.9 for a more detailed discussion of the latter construction:

<i>Espérame abajo/arriba que bajo/subo enseguida</i>	Wait for me downstairs/upstairs – I'll be down/up right away
<i>Subía siempre las escaleras lentamente</i>	(S)he always used to go upstairs slowly
<i>(Se) subió las escaleras de un tirón</i> (the whole flight of stairs; see 30.9)	(S)he rushed upstairs without stopping

(2) When the urgency or figurative nature of the action is stressed, the pronominal form is usual:

<i>Se subieron a la tapia de un salto</i>	They jumped on top of the garden wall
<i>Súbbase por los andenes, como sea, pero arranque</i> (GGM, Col., dialogue. Sp. <i>los andenes</i> = <i>las aceras</i> )	Drive up onto the pavements/sidewalks, anything you like, but get moving!
<i>Se subía por las paredes</i>	(S)he was climbing up the wall (with rage, not literally)

(3) *Bajar(se)/subir(se)* can also be used colloquially as transitive verbs meaning 'to take up', and 'to take down': *bájate/baja estos tiestos al jardín* 'take these flowerpots down to the garden'.

(4) The non-pronominal form is used for 'to increase', 'to diminish': *los precios suben/bajan* 'prices go up/down'.

(5) *Bajar* (or *descargar*) translates 'to download' in computer jargon.

### 30.6.2 *Caer/caerse*

The non-pronominal form can emphasize either the point of departure or arrival: *el meteoro cayó del cielo* 'the meteor fell from the sky', *el tigre cayó sobre su presa* 'the tiger fell on its prey', *el avión cayó aquí* 'the plane fell here'. It is also used when the point of departure is taken for granted: *caía una lluvia fuerte* 'heavy rain was falling'. The non-pronominal form is also reserved for the following figurative meanings:

<i>Cayó en la guerra</i>	(S)he fell (was killed) in the war
<i>El Gobierno ha caído</i>	The government has fallen/has been toppled
<i>Esa calle cae lejos de aquí</i>	That street lies far from here
<i>caer en la tentación</i>	to fall into temptation
<i>Ya caigo</i>	I get it/I understand

*Caerse* suggests accidental falling ('falling over', 'falling down'), although *caer* alone can be used for the same meaning:

<i>(Se) cayó de la mesa</i>	It fell off the table (accidentally)
<i>¡Que no se te caiga el paquete!</i>	Don't drop the parcel!
<i>No sé si corrió a pesar de la herida, no sé si se cayó, no sé qué fue de él</i>	I don't know whether he ran despite the wound, I don't know whether he fell over,
<i>(EP, Mex., dialogue)</i>	I don't know what happened to him

### 30.6.3 *Entrar/entrarse*

*Entrar* 'to enter' is by far the more common form. The status of *entrarse* is problematic: it was once quite common but most speakers now reject it although it is sometimes heard in popular speech

to emphasize point of departure or furtive entry, as in *la familia de osos que se entró a una piscina* (headline Col.) ‘the family of bears that got into a swimming pool’. Foreign learners should stick to *entrar*.

(1) In the sentence *se entra por aquí* ‘one goes in through here’ / ‘the entrance is this way’ the construction is *se impersonal*, not *se de matización*.

### 30.6.4 *Escapar/escaparse*

When it is intransitive the pronominal form is common but optional: *los prisioneros (se) escaparon* ‘the prisoners escaped’, *no me digas que otra vez se escaparon las pupilas* (MVLL, Pe., dialogue) ‘don’t tell me the girls at the convent have escaped again’, *tendría que haber visto cómo intentaba escaparse* (AC, Mex., dialogue) ‘you (usted) should have seen how he was trying to escape’, but *era presa de Stalin. No podía escapar de él* (RM, Sp.) ‘she was Stalin’s prey. She couldn’t escape from him’. If an indirect object pronoun is included, *escaparse* is required: *se le escapó un rugido bastante masculino* (GR, Mex.) ‘he let out a pretty masculine roar’, *por su sordera algo se le escapaba* (EP, Mex.) ‘because of his deafness he was missing something’. The non-pronominal form is used for figurative and transitive meanings: *escapar con vida* ‘to escape with one’s life’, *escapar del peligro* ‘to escape danger’, *escapar a la calle* ‘to take to the streets’, *escapar a la justicia* ‘to escape justice’, *la inseguridad no escapó a la atención del Director General* (CF, Mex.) ‘the uncertainty did not escape the Director General’s attention’.

### 30.6.5 *Ir/irse*

The difference between the two is more or less the same as between ‘to go’ and ‘to go away’, French *aller/s’en aller*. The pronominal form stresses departure although this does not exclude the possibility of mentioning destination as well:

<i>Vamos a casa de Pepe</i> (destination stressed)	We’re going to Pepe’s house
<i>Me voy a casa de Pepe</i> (departure stressed)	I’m off to/leaving for Pepe’s house
<i>Se casaron en el tren y se fueron de luna de miel a Bariloche</i> (Río Negro, Arg.)	They got married on the train and left on their honeymoon for Bariloche
<i>... un beso como el que recibía Jim antes de irse a la escuela</i> (JP, Mex.)	... a kiss like the one Jim used to get before he left for school
<i>Vete</i> (point of departure stressed)	Go away
<i>Este avión va a Caracas</i> (destination stressed)	This plane’s going to Caracas
<i>¡Voy!; ¡Ya voy!</i> (destination stressed)	I’m coming!/I’ll be right there!

### 30.6.6 *Llegar/llegarse*

*Llegar* means ‘to arrive’ and is by far the more common form. *Llegarse* is colloquial and means ‘to approach’ ‘to pop over to’, ‘to get as far as’:

<i>Llegamos a Madrid</i>	We arrived in Madrid
<i>LLégate/Acércate a la tienda de enfrente</i>	Go over to the shop/store opposite
<i>Me hice paso entre la gente y me llegué a la Reina</i>	I made my way through the crowd and got as far as the Queen
<i>El iPhone se llegó a México</i> (Excélsior, Mex.)	The iPhone has reached Mexico!
In Spain <i>el iPhone llegó</i> is more likely)	

*Se tomaron un colectivo y se llegaron hasta la casa de unos parientes de Pablo (Lugcos, Arg. Colectivo is Latin-American for a bus or for a shared taxi)*

They took a bus and went as far as the house of some of Pablo's relatives

### 30.6.7 *Marchar/marcharse*

*Marchar* means 'to march' and *marcharse* means 'to leave a place', but *marchar* may also have the same meaning as *marcharse*:

*¡Mira cómo marchan los soldados!*  
*Me marcho/Me voy*  
*El tren ya se marchó/ya se fue/ya salió*  
*Era una lástima que las circunstancias la obligaran a marcharse tan pronto*  
 (ES, Mex.)

Look at the soldiers marching!  
 I'm leaving  
 The train's already left  
 It was a pity that circumstances obliged her to leave so soon

### 30.6.8 *Pasar/pasarse*

As a verb of motion, both forms mean 'to pass'/'to pass by'/'to pass over'. (For *pasar* as a transitive verb meaning 'to pass time', see 30.7.30.) *Pasar* suggests normal motion (it is also used in card games: *paso* 'I pass'):

*Cuando pasó la frontera*  
*La carretera pasa por el pueblo*  
*Pasamos a hablar de la situación actual*

When (s)he crossed the frontier  
 The road goes through the village  
 We went on to talk of the current situation

*Pasarse* suggests unwanted or illegal passage or over-stepping the mark:

*Se pasó de la raya*  
*No te pases*  
*¡No te pases de sol! (Mujer a Mujer, Col.)*  
*Se pasó el semáforo en rojo (MS, Mex., dialogue)*  
*Si estuviera Valeria aquí no te pasarías de listo*  
 (EM, Mex., dialogue)

(S)he went beyond the mark/overdid it  
 Don't go too far/Don't overdo it  
 Don't overdo (exposure to) the sun!  
 He jumped the red traffic light  
 If Valeria was here you wouldn't be so smart/clever

(1) *Pasárselo bien/mal* – more frequently *pasarlo bien* - is 'to have a good/bad time', e.g. *pásatelo bien/pásalo bien* 'have a good time' (sometimes *pasársela* in Latin America). Note also *no les pasa ni una* '(s)he doesn't let them get away with a thing', *pasa de todo* '(s)he doesn't care about anything'.

(2) *Pasarse* a can mean 'to switch over', as in *me pasé del prepago a un contrato* 'I switched from pay-as-you-go to a contract'; also *se pasó al bando enemigo* '(s)he went over to the enemy' (i.e. changed sides).

(3) The pronominal form with an indirect object may mean everywhere 'to get over': *ya se le pasará* (MC, Mex., dialogue) 'he'll soon get over it'.

### 30.6.9 *Salir/salirse*

*Salir* means 'to go out'/'to leave' without further implications. *Salirse* implies untimely or unexpected departure or, applied to liquids or gases, accidental leakages or escapes:

*Salimos del cine cuando terminó la película*  
(as expected)

*Nos salimos del cine porque la película*  
*era muy violenta* (unexpected)

*Salí del convento a las cinco* (intended)

*Me salí del convento a los treinta años*  
(unexpected)

*El agua sale por aquí* (intended)

*El agua se salía de la bañera* (accidental)

*El FMI se salió de las normas* (Clarín, Arg.)

*Se salió de la carretera* (ES, Mex., dialogue)

We left the cinema when the film ended

We left the cinema (before the end)  
because the film was very violent

I left the convent at 5 o'clock

I left the convent at the age of thirty

The water comes out here

The water was overflowing from the bath

The IMF (International Monetary

Fund) has exceeded its powers

He went off the road (i.e. crashed)

### 30.6.10 ***Saltar/saltarse***

*Saltar* is the normal word for 'to jump'. It can also mean 'to jump over', but *saltarse* is replacing it in informal language in the latter meaning. *Saltarse* is used for illegal jumps, e.g. traffic lights or starting signals:

*Saltaban de alegría*

*No saltas a conclusiones*

*Nunca se había saltado un semáforo en*  
*rojo en toda su vida* (LS, Ch., dialogue)

*Te saltaste la pistola de salida*

*... ese extraño personaje que se saltaba*  
*las fórmulas de cortesía* (MS, Mex.)

*Mi corazón se saltó un latido*

*Se saltó la hoguera*

They were jumping for joy

Don't jump to conclusions

He had never jumped a red light in his life

You jumped the starting pistol

... that strange character who skipped all the  
formulas of politeness

My heart skipped a beat

(S)he jumped over the bonfire

### 30.6.11 ***Subir/subirse*** (see *bajar/bajarse*)

### 30.6.12 ***Venir/venirse***

*Venirse* suggests 'to come away from somewhere' either permanently or for a long time. Applied to non-living things, it implies accidental or unexpected arrivals. *Venir* simply means 'to come to a place':

*Ha venido de París a pasar unos días*  
(point of departure not stressed)

*Se ha venido de Madrid porque no aguanta*  
*la contaminación* (point of departure  
stressed)

*¿Por qué no vienes conmigo?* (destination  
stressed)

*¿Por qué no te vienes conmigo?* (point of  
departure stressed)

*Le ofreció más por venirse con él* (MS, Mex.)

*Véngase para acá y conversamos* (GGM,  
Col., dialogue)

*cuando las Torres Gemelas se vinieron abajo* ...  
(idem)

(S)he's come from Paris to spend a few days

(S)he's come here from Madrid because  
(s)he can't stand the pollution

Why don't you come with me?

Why don't you leave (him/her/this  
place and) come with me?

He offered him more to come and  
work for him

Come over here and let's talk

when the Twin Towers collapsed ...

*Mira la tormenta que se nos viene encima*  
(accidental)  
*Toda la sangre se le vino a los pies* (ES, Mex.)

Look at the storm that's going to hit us  
(lit. 'that's coming down on us')  
All his blood rushed to his feet

(1) *Venirse* also has the obvious sexual meaning in Latin America and should be used with caution.

### 30.6.13 *Volver/volverse*; Latin-American *regresar/regresarse*, *devolver/devolverse*

*Volver* as a verb of motion means 'to return'. Its subject can be living or non-living, e.g. summer, happiness, fine weather. *Volver a* + infinitive is the most common way of translating 'to do something again': see 36.6a.

*Nunca volveré a aquella casa*  
*Has vuelto muy moreno*  
*Yo volví al espectáculo cuando me*  
*divorcí* (ES, Mex., dialogue)  
*Vuelve la primavera*

I'll never return to that house  
You've come back very suntanned  
I went back into show business when I got  
divorced  
Spring returns/is returning

*Volverse* as a verb of motion may mean 'to turn back half-way', 'to return before time' (unplanned return), though the non-pronominal form can have the same meaning:

*Selene se volvió a su asiento* (ES, Mex.)  
(Me) *volví antes de llegar*  
*Había pensado muy seriamente en*  
*divorciarse y volverse a Dinamarca* (LS, Sp.)  
*Vuélvanse a Montevideo que yo en quince días*  
*estoy allá* (Tenfield Digital, interview, Ch.)

Selene went back to her seat  
I turned back before arriving  
He'd thought very seriously about getting  
divorced and going back to Denmark  
Go back to Montevideo. I'll be there in  
15 days

(1) In Latin America, as well as *volver(se)*, *regresar(se)* is much used for 'to return' with the same difference between the pronominal and non-pronominal forms (*regresarse* is not used in Spain): *Helen se había regresado a Puebla* (AM, Mex., dialogue; Sp. *se había vuelto* or *había regresado*) 'Helen had gone back to Puebla'.

(2) Many countries north of the Southern Cone also use *devolverse* for 'to return': *pero se había devuelto del Camino Real* (GGM, Col.) 'but he'd turned back on the highway', *abandonó la oficina . . . sin embargo se devolvió* (EM, Mex.) 'he left the office; nevertheless he returned'. *Devolver* (transitive – not a verb of motion) is standard Spanish everywhere for 'to give back' (money, borrowed items, etc.). It can also mean 'to throw up', i.e. 'to vomit'.

(3) *Volverse* has other meanings everywhere, e.g. 'to become' (see 31.3.2) or 'to turn round' as in *se volvió hacia ella* '(s)he turned towards her'. 'To make a U-turn' in a vehicle is *dar la vuelta*.

## 30.7 *Se de matización* with miscellaneous verbs

Pronominalization adds nuances of meaning to a number of other verbs, of which the following are frequently encountered:

### 30.7.1 *Abrir/abrirse* and *cerrar/cerrarse*

*Abrir* 'to open' is used when the verb is transitive: *abrimos la puerta/un programa* 'we opened the door/a program(me)'. *Abrirse* is used when the verb is intransitive: *la puerta se abrió* 'the door

opened'. However, *abrir* is also used intransitively for the scheduled opening of establishments: *¿cuándo abre el restaurante?* 'when is the restaurant opening?', *el museo abre de martes a domingo en el horario de 8:00 am–6:00pm* (website, Cu.) 'the museum opens from Tuesday to Sundays, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.' *Cerrar* 'to close' behaves in the same way: *la puerta se cerró* 'the door closed' (on its own) but *el único cine del pueblo ha cerrado* 'the only cinema in the village/town has closed down', *los bancos ya habían cerrado y no abrirían hasta cuatro días después* (JA, Mex.) 'the banks were already closed and wouldn't open for the next four days', *lo que ha logrado es que cierren más de 40 empresas* (Expreso, Ec.) 'what it has achieved is that more than forty firms are closing down'. *Se abrió/cerró la ventana* may also be an example of passive *se*, 'the window was opened/closed'.

### 30.7.2 *Acabar/acabarse*

*Acabar* can be used transitively and intransitively, like its English translation 'to finish': *han acabado el proyecto* 'they've finished the project', *el proyecto ha acabado* 'the project's finished'. *Acabarse* is also common for the intransitive meaning. It is much used to mean 'to run out': *se ha acabado la cerveza* 'the beer's run out', *¡bueno, esto se ha acabado!* 'this is the last straw!'/'this is the end!', *cuando cayó Lehman supe que mi tiempo se había acabado* (JV, Mex., dialogue) 'when Lehman Brothers collapsed I knew my time was up'.

### 30.7.3 *Aguantar/aguantarse*

The basic meaning of *aguantar* is 'to tolerate'/'to bear': *este puente aguanta pesos muy fuertes* 'this bridge supports very heavy weights', *no puedo aguantarlos* 'I can't stand them'. *Aguantarse* is intransitive and means 'to stand upright' – *la abuela ya no se aguanta sola* 'grandmother can't stand on her own any more' – or 'to put up with something': *si te duele esa muela tendrás que aguantarte hasta el lunes* (or *aguantar hasta el lunes*) 'if that tooth is aching, you'll have to hold out until Monday', *bueno, a aguantarse* 'oh well, we'll just have to put up with it', *le disgustaban algunos comentarios de F.S. pero se aguantaba* (La Jornada, Mex.) 'he disliked some of F.S.'s remarks but he put up with it'.

### 30.7.4 *Aparecer/aparecerse*

*Aparecer* means 'to appear' without further nuances. *Aparecerse* is used for apparitions:

*Manuel apareció en la iglesia*  
*La Virgen de Guadalupe se apareció al*  
*indio Juan Diego*

Manuel appeared/turned up at the church  
 The Virgin of Guadalupe appeared before  
 the Indian Juan Diego

(1) In Latin America, and sometimes in Spain, *aparecerse* is used of people appearing, especially unexpectedly: *en vez de despedirla, como Flora temía, se apareció, contrito, en la covacha de la rue du Foarre* (MVLI, Pe.) 'instead of firing her, which is what Flora feared, he turned up, full of remorse, at the hovel on the rue du Foarre', *un día el hombre y las tres mujeres dejan de aparecerse por el edificio* (AC, Mex.) 'one day the man and the three women stop showing up at the building'.

### 30.7.5 *Callar/callarse*

*Callar* must be used when it is transitive: *no me van a callar* 'they are not going to silence me'. Used intransitively, *callar* and *callarse* are more or less interchangeable, except when the subject is non-living, in which case the pronominal form is less usual: *la música calló de repente* 'the music suddenly stopped'. When the subject is human or animal the pronominal form is more informal:

*el niño (se) calló en cuanto le dieron el biberón* ‘the little boy stopped crying as soon as he was given a bottle’, *y luego nos callábamos y oíamos la radio* (CSG, Mex., dialogue) ‘then we used to stop talking and we listened to the radio’, *calló y corrió a otro lugar de la tienda* (CF, Mex.) ‘he fell silent and ran to another place in the shop/store’.

(1) *Quieto* is a false friend. It means ‘still/not moving’ and not ‘quiet’: *¡estate quieto!* ‘sit still!/stop moving around!’

### 30.7.6 *Cambiar/cambiarse*

*Cambiar* means ‘to change’ in the sense of ‘to alter’, and is used transitively or intransitively: *hay que cambiar el aceite* ‘we have to change the oil’, *la situación ha cambiado* ‘the situation has changed’, *Ángela ha cambiado desde que va a la universidad* ‘Angela has changed since she’s been going to university’.

The most usual meaning of *cambiarse* is ‘to get changed’ or ‘to move on’: *me trajo ropa, quién sabe de dónde, para que me cambiara* (AC, Mex.) ‘he brought me some clothes, who knows where from, so I could change’, *me cambié de trabajo* (Prensa Gráfica, ES) ‘I changed jobs’.

### 30.7.7 *Coger/cogerse*

*Coger* is used for physical catching or grasping hold of: *coger un tren/autobús/una pelota/un ladrón/una flor* ‘to catch a train/bus/ball/thief’/‘to pick a flower’, etc. The pronominal form is rare, at least in standard European Spanish, but it is found in colloquial phrases referring to drunkenness: contrast *coger un catarro* ‘to catch a cold’ and *cogerse* (or *coger*) *una borrachera* ‘to get drunk’.

*Coger* can also mean ‘to take’, ‘to pick up’ in Latin America: *tardé en decidirme a coger el teléfono* (ES, Mex., dialogue) ‘I took my time before picking up the phone’. However, since in the Americas *coger* is a vulgar or very familiar word for the sex act, many speakers there prefer to use *agarrar* (Sp. ‘to clutch’, ‘to seize’): *esa noche, de tanto gritar y tomar con hielo agarró una bronquitis y ya nunca se volvió a poner bueno* (ES, Mex., dialogue) ‘that night he caught bronchitis from so much shouting and drinking liquor on the rocks and he never got better again’.

### 30.7.8 *Conocer/conocerse*

*Conocer* covers all meanings of the French *connaître* ‘to know a person/place’ (cf. *saber* ‘to know a fact/the truth/a language’, etc.). It can also mean ‘to meet for the first time’: *la conocí en Madrid* ‘I met her in Madrid’. The pronominal form, as well as meaning ‘to know oneself’, may imply total knowledge and can add a sarcastic note: *se conoce todo Madrid* ‘(s)he knows the whole of Madrid’ (but not just \**se conoce Madrid*), *me lo conozco . . .* ‘I know him (and his little tricks . . .)’, *me los conozco de arriba a abajo* (Río Negro, Arg.) ‘I know them from top to bottom’, *me conozco esa carretera de día y de noche* (La Jornada, Mex., dialogue) ‘I really know that road by day and by night’.

(1) The American English ‘to meet with’, British ‘to meet (but not for the first time)’ is *reunirse con*, *verse con*, *quedar con*.

### 30.7.9 *Correr/correrse*

*Correr* is overwhelmingly the more frequent form and is used for meanings including ‘to run’, ‘to flow’, ‘to hurry’, even for vehicles: *no corras tanto* ‘don’t go/drive so fast’. The only use of the pronominal form in respectable language is to mean ‘to shift over’, ‘to move over’ (intransitive): *córrete hacia acá para que el señor pueda sentarse* ‘move over this way so the gentleman can sit down’, *le pidió a Félix que se corriera. Él le contestó que no, se iba a bajar pronto* (CF, Mex.) ‘she asked Felix to move over. He answered no, he was getting out soon’. Foreigners should be careful since in Spain it also has the sexual meaning of ‘to come’ (Latin-American *venirse*).

**30.7.10 Crecer/crecerse**

*Crecer* means to grow in size. *Crecerse* means to grow in worth or value:

*La hierba crece mucho con tanta lluvia*

The grass grows quickly with so much rain

*¡Ya crezcan idiotas!* (graffiti in Mexico

Grow up you idiots!

City. In Spain *crecer* means physical growth)

*Hay personas que se crecen con el peligro*

There are people who grow stronger  
when they are in danger

*Éste, por su parte, se crecía ante el castigo  
y, en vez de ceder . . .*

The latter, for his part, grew stronger  
under attack and instead of yielding . . .

(1) In parts of Latin America *crecerse* means ‘to be brought up’: *yo me crecí* (Sp. *me crié*) *en Bolivia* ‘I was raised in Bolivia’.

**30.7.11 Creer/creerse**

The non-pronominal form translates most meanings of ‘to believe’/‘to think that . . .’. *Creer en* ‘to believe in’ appears only in the non-pronominal form. The pronominal form usually implies unfounded belief, although its use is often optional:

*Creo que han llegado*

I think they’ve arrived

*Creo en ella*

I believe in her

*Ese/Ése (se) cree que habla francés*

He thinks he speaks French

*(Se) cree todo lo que le dicen*

(S)he believes everything they tell her/him

*No se crea que era un irresponsable*

Don’t get the idea that he was irresponsible

(ES, Mex., dialogue)

*Pero no crea que soy tan parlanchina* (ibid.)

But don’t get the idea that I’m such a gossip

(1) *Creerse* can also emphasize unbelief: *no me creo todavía que haya vuelto* ‘I still can’t believe that (s)he’s come back’.

(2) Idiom: *se lo tiene creído* ‘(s)he has a high opinion of himself/herself’, (British) ‘(s)he fancies him/herself’.

(3) *Pensar/pensarse* ‘to think’ is used colloquially like *creer/creerse*, although good style respects the difference between *creer* ‘to believe’/‘to have an opinion’ and *pensar* ‘to think’, i.e. indulge in thinking activity, as in *es un escritor que piensa mucho* ‘he’s a writer who thinks a lot’. *Pensarse algo* means ‘to think something through carefully’: *¡piénsatelo mucho!* ‘think it through carefully!’

**30.7.12 Decidir/decidirse**

With a living subject, the verb means ‘to decide’: *ha decidido dejar el trabajo* ‘(s)he’s decided to give up work/give up his/her job’. It can also be used transitively in the sense of ‘to make up someone’s mind’/‘to decide the outcome’: *lo que me decidió fue el estado del presupuesto* ‘what made up my mind was the state of the budget’, . . . *lo que decidió el resultado del partido . . .* ‘. . . what decided the outcome of the game . . .’. The pronominal form implies a decision taken after hesitation and effort, cf. ‘to make up one’s mind’: *¡decídet!* ‘make up your mind!’, *lo que más le costaba era decidirse a involucrarme en algo sucio* (JM, Sp.) ‘what he found hardest was to make up his mind to involve me in something dirty’, *y sabiendo cuánto arriesgaba, se decidió a pedir ayuda a Adrián Melgoza* (MS, Mex.) ‘and knowing how much he was risking, he made up his mind to ask AM for help’.



### 30.7.13 *Dejar/dejarse*

*Dejar* translates 'to let/allow', 'to leave' (in the sense of 'abandon') and also 'to lend'. *Dejarse* emphasizes accidental leaving behind:

*Deja tu maleta aquí*  
*Déjame tu móvil*  
*cuando dejó el ejército . . .*  
*Me he dejado la llave en casa*

Leave your suitcase here  
 Lend me your mobile/cell phone  
 when (s)he left the army . . .  
 I've left the key at home

(1) This use of *dejarse* for accidental leaving seems to be confined to Spain. Latin-American informants said *dejé la plata . . .* 'I left my money . . .' (in Spain *la plata* = 'silver' and *el dinero* = 'money'), which in European Spanish might imply deliberate leaving. *Dejarse* is used on both continents in sentences like *¡déjense de tonterías!* (headline, *El Mañana*, Mex.) 'cut/stop the nonsense!'

(2) A reflexive meaning is found in *me dejé besar* 'I allowed myself to be kissed', *se han dejado* 'they've let themselves go' (i.e. physically, morally), or 'to let oneself': *ella no se deja tratar mal* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'she doesn't let herself be mistreated', *se dejaba engañar* '(s)he let herself/himself be fooled'. This is not *se de matización* and is common everywhere.

### 30.7.14 *Desayunar/desayunarse*

*Desayunar* is nowadays overwhelmingly the more common form in Spain and may be intransitive or transitive: *desayuno fruta y cereales* 'I have fruit and cereals for breakfast', *¿a qué hora desayunaste?* 'what time did you have breakfast?' The older form *desayunarse con* does, however, occur in Spain, *me desayuno con fruta* 'I have fruit for breakfast'. *Desayunarse* is widespread – but not universal – in Latin America: *desayúnese con nosotros* (advertisement, Ur.) 'have breakfast with us', *quienes tengan la fortuna de desayunarse hoy lunes un par de huevitos con jamón* (*La Jornada*, Mex.) 'those who are lucky enough to breakfast today, Monday, on a couple of eggs with ham' (but *desayunar* alone is common in Mexico).

### 30.7.15 *Despertar/despertarse*

*Despertar* is used transitively: *me despertó la tormenta* 'the storm woke me up', *desperté al vecino* 'I woke up the neighbour'. Either form can be used intransitively, the non-pronominal form being much more common: (me) *desperté a las cinco* 'I woke up at five o'clock', *lo metieron en la cama sin que él se despertara* (AC, Mex.), 'they put him to bed without him waking up', *has tenido pesadillas y has despertado llorando* (EP, Mex., dialogue) 'you've had nightmares and you've woken up crying', . . . *donde se había instalado Anita con el niño, que todavía se despertaba cada tres horas* (AGr, Sp.) ' . . . where Anita had installed herself with the child, who was still waking up every three hours'.

### 30.7.16 *Encontrar/encontrarse*

The transitive form means 'to find', the pronominal transitive form can be used optionally (but frequently) for 'to find or meet by chance':

*Encontré el libro que yo buscaba*  
*(Me) encontré una moneda de oro*  
*(Me) encontré a Pepe en la calle*  
*Me encontré con que no me quedaba nada*  
*de sal*

I found the book I was searching for  
 I found a gold coin  
 I met Pepe (by chance) in the street  
 I found that I didn't have any salt left

*Todo el dinero es igual. Yo lo agarro de donde me lo encuentro* (AM, Mex., dialogue) Sp. *yo lo cojo/agarro donde lo encuentro*)

All money's the same. I grab it where I find it

The reflexive meaning of *encontrarse*, 'to be found'/'to be located', as in *María se encuentra en España*, 'María's in Spain', is also very common on both continents.

### 30.7.17 *Enfermar/enfermarse*

*Enfermar* is used in Spain: *enfermó de bronquitis* '(s)he fell ill with bronchitis'. The pronominal form *enfermarse* is considered popular although it is spreading in informal speech. In Latin America the pronominal form is universal: *el pirulo animal se enfermó de la guatita* (*La Cuarta*, Ch.) 'the super-elegant animal went down with a stomach bug' (refers to a famous model's poodle. In Spain *pirulo* = *pijo*, *guatita* = *barriga* or *tripas*). *Camila Naranjo se enfermó con el interrogatorio* (EM, Mex., dialogue) 'Camila Naranjo fell ill because of the interrogation'.

### 30.7.18 *Esperar/esperarse*

*Esperar* translates 'to wait for'. Both *esperar* and *esperarse* are used for 'to expect' and 'to wait' although the non-pronominal form is more frequently seen:

*¿(A) qué estás esperando?*

*Te estamos esperando*

*No me esperaba este 5–0* (Terra, Col.)

*Hay que esperar(se) a que te atiendan*

*No es lo que uno se espera, perdone*

(JM, Sp., dialogue)

*Buscan vida en otros planetas esperando*

*encontrar seres como nosotros*

(MC, Mex., dialogue)

What are you waiting for?

We're waiting for you

I wasn't expecting this 5–0 win (in soccer)

One has to wait to be served

Sorry, but it isn't what one expects . . .

They're searching for life on other planets

hoping to find beings like us

(1) *Espera/espere* and *espérate/espérese* seem to be interchangeable in the imperative and the pronominal imperative is common everywhere.

### 30.7.19 *Estar/estarse*

*Estar* means 'to be', and its use is discussed in Chapter 33. The pronominal form *estarse* is used:

(a) Optionally, but usually, to form the imperative of *estar*: *¡estate quieto!* 'sit still!', *¡estese tranquilo!* 'stay calm!/don't worry!' See 21.2.6 for details.

(b) To express obligatory or deliberate being in a place. The translation is usually 'to stay':

*Antes se estaba usted en la finca, y nosotras aquí tranquilitas* (ABV, Sp., dialogue)

*Me estuve estudiando toda la noche* (from María Moliner. Not 'studying myself!')

*He tenido que estar(me) a la cola todo el día*

*Y aquí que se esté para lo que se ofrezca* (AM, Mex., dialogue. In Spain *y que se esté aquí para lo que sea*)

You used to stay on the estate, and we women were so peaceful here

I stayed up all night studying

I had to queue/US stand in line all day

And let him remain here in case anything turns up

*Quedarse* would have been possible for *estarse* in all these examples.

### 30.7.20 **Ganar/ganarse**

*Ganar* is used in the phrase *ganar mucho/poco dinero* 'to earn a lot'/'very little money', *¿cuánto ganas?* 'how much do you earn?' It also means 'to win'. *Ganarse* can sometimes add more emphasis to the amount earned. It is also used for metaphorical meanings or when the way of earning one's living is mentioned:

(Se) *gana diez mil euros al mes*  
*Ellos saben que yo me gano la vida*  
*trabajando por ahí con los campesinos*  
 (Río Negro, Arg.) *Ganarse la vida* is a  
 set phrase)

*Se gana el cariño de todos*  
*Nos ganó cien mil pesos al póker*  
*Muy pronto se ganó la confianza del*  
*secretario del Tesoro (JV, Mex.)*

(S)he earns 10,000 euros every month  
 They know I earn my living working  
 out there with the country folk

(S)he gains/wins everybody's affection  
 (S)he won 100,000 pesos off us at poker  
 He very soon won the trust of the secretary  
 of the Treasury

### 30.7.21 **Imaginar/imaginarse**

*Imaginar* is a transitive verb meaning 'to conceive of'/'invent a new idea'. *Imaginarse* means 'imagine' in the sense of 'suppose', 'guess' or 'picture':

*Imaginó un nuevo modo de hacerlo*  
*Te puedes imaginar lo que yo estaba pensando*  
*Me los imagino divirtiéndose*  
*En contra de lo que yo me imaginaba,*  
*no cuenta siquiera con banda ancha*  
 (JV, Mex., dialogue)

(S)he thought of a new way of doing it  
 You can imagine what I was thinking  
 I imagine them amusing themselves  
 Contrary to what I imagined,  
 it doesn't even have broadband

(1) *Figurarse* means the same as *imaginarse*: *me figuro que ya se ha marchado* 'I guess he must have gone already'. The non-pronominal form means 'to figure as an item': *no figura en el índice* 'it doesn't appear in the index'.

### 30.7.22 **Llevar/llevarse**

*Llevar* means 'to wear', 'to take' or 'to carry'. *Llevarse* means 'to take away':

*Voy a llevar el traje a la tintorería*  
*No se te olvide llevarte los libros*  
*Llevaba un abrigo negro*  
*Trae que te lleve ese paquete* (*trae* is here a  
 colloquial interjection in Spain)  
*La crisis se llevó lo poco que quedaba*  
 (Río Negro, Arg.)  
*No se lleva mi basura si no le doy una*  
*lana semanal* (GZ, Mex. dialogue. *Lana*  
 = *dinero* in familiar Mexican Spanish)

I'm going to take my suit to the cleaner  
 Don't forget to take the books with you  
 She was wearing a black coat  
 Here, let me carry that parcel for you

The crisis took away the little that was left

He won't take my rubbish/trash away if I  
 don't give him some money every week

(1) For *llevar* in time phrases, as in *llevo horas aquí* 'I've been here for hours', see 36.3.1. *Llevar* has many uses which should be sought in a good dictionary.

### 30.7.23 *Mejorar/mejorarse*

*Mejorar* as a transitive verb means ‘to make better’, as an intransitive verb it means ‘to get better’. *Mejorarse* optionally means ‘to get better’ from an illness, but *mejorar* alone is usual in written language for other kinds of improvement. *Mejorarse* is much used for best wishes about health and is common everywhere to judge by the texts of electronic greeting-cards:

<i>La situación ha mejorado</i>	The situation has improved
<i>Se encuentra bien y mejora cada día</i>	He feels fine and is improving every day
( <i>La Jornada</i> , Mex.)	
<i>¡Mejórate pronto!/¡Que te mejores pronto!</i>	Get well soon!

(1) In the following sentence *mejorarse* is not *se de matización* but passive *se*: *piden que se mejore el servicio de recogida de animales abandonados* ‘they are requesting that the service for collecting abandoned animals should be improved’.

### 30.7.24 *Morir/morirse*

Both translate ‘to die’, but the pronominal form normally denotes natural death, especially, but not exclusively, a gradual death and is less formal: *mi madre se murió de cáncer* ‘my mother died of cancer’. *Morir* is generally used for accidental or deliberate death: *murió en un accidente de avión* ‘(s)he died in a plane accident’. In formal written Spanish, *morir* is used for all kinds of death. In colloquial Spanish *morirse* is especially used for the death of relatives and friends:

<i>Ha muerto el primer ministro</i> (formal style)	The Prime Minister has died
<i>La propia Tránsito Arias se murió</i>	Tránsito Arias herself died convinced that . . .
<i>convencida de que . . .</i> (GGM, Col.)	
<i>Los iban a abandonar en el desierto, para que</i>	They were going to abandon them in the
<i>se murieran de sol y de hambre</i>	desert so they died from sun and hunger
(MS, Mex. dialogue)	
<i>Se moría Franco, surgía, por fin, un</i>	Franco was dying, at last a moment of
<i>momento de prometedora incertidumbre</i>	promising uncertainty was dawning in the
<i>en el país</i> (RC, Sp.)	country (refers to General Franco)

(1) *Morirse* is used figuratively: *me muero de ganas de ver a mi familia* ‘I’m dying to see my family’, *me muero de nervios* (EM, Mex., dialogue) ‘I’m so nervous I could die’.

(2) *Fallecer* is much used in formal styles for ‘to die’: *se fingió enfermo de muerte y pidió que antes de fallecer le permitieran casarse con la muchacha* (JA, Mex.) ‘he pretended to be fatally sick and he asked them to let him marry the girl before he died’.

### 30.7.25 *Ocurrir/ocurrirse*

*Ocurrir* means ‘to happen’. *Ocurrírsele a alguien algo* means ‘to occur to one’, ‘to have a sudden idea’:

<i>Esto lleva ocurriendo desde hace algún tiempo</i>	This has been happening for some time
<i>Que me cuente cualquier idea que se le</i>	Get him to tell me about any idea that he
<i>ocurra</i> (LS, Sp., dialogue)	may have
<i>Se les ocurrió tocar la puerta de las habitaciones</i>	They had the idea of knocking on the
<i>del hotel a las tres de la mañana</i>	hotel-room doors at 3 a.m.
( <i>La Reforma</i> , Mex.)	

### 30.7.26 *Olvidar/olvidarse(de)/olvidársele algo a uno*

The verb means ‘to forget’ and there are four possibilities: *olvidar algo*, *olvidarse algo*, *olvidarse de algo* and *olvidársele algo a alguien*.

(a) *Olvidar* and *olvidarse de*. When deliberate trying to forget is implied, the first form is rather formal and is usually replaced in colloquial styles by *olvidarse de*: *no puedo olvidarla/no puedo olvidarme de ella* ‘I can’t forget her’, . . . *tratando de olvidarse del dolor, casi desmayado* (GZ, Mex.) ‘trying to forget the pain, almost fainting’.

(b) *Olvidar* and *olvidársele a uno*. For absent-minded or accidental forgetting *olvidar* and *olvidársele* can be used, the former again being rather formal: *he olvidado mi agenda/se me olvidó la agenda* ‘I’ve forgotten my diary’, *se le olvidaban los otros compromisos, se le olvidaba todo menos ella* (GGM, Col.) ‘he forgot his other commitments, he forgot about everything except her’, *no se te olvide que me debes respeto* (EM, Mex., dialogue) ‘don’t forget you owe me respect’. In the latter construction, which is very common, *olvidarse* is not *se de matización* but a passive *se* and the verb agrees in number with the thing forgotten: *se me olvidaron las flores* ‘I forgot the flowers’ (lit. ‘the flowers forgot themselves “on” me’).

(c) *Olvidarse algo* (without the *de*) is colloquial and is censured by some grammarians, including Manuel Seco. The DPD recommends avoiding it, but notes that it has a long history and it is in fact very common in everyday speech, *me olvidé la contraseña*, i.e. *se me olvidó la contraseña* or *olvidé la contraseña* for ‘I forgot the password’.

### 30.7.27 *Oscurecer/oscorecerse*

The pronominal form means ‘to get darker’ (e.g. colours, light). *este amarillo se ha oscurecido* ‘this yellow has got darker’, *el cielo se oscureció* ‘the sky darkened’, *los mayas se sentían atemorizados cuando el sol se oscurecía parcialmente* (www.yucatan.com, Mex.) ‘the Mayas felt terrified when the Sun was partially darkened’. The non-pronominal form may have the special meaning of ‘to grow dark’ (i.e. at dusk): *está oscureciendo* ‘night is falling’/‘it’s growing dark’, *al oscurecer, los viejos sacaban sillas a las banquetas para ver pasar la vida* (ES, Mex.) ‘at nightfall the old men brought chairs out onto the sidewalks/pavements to watch life passing by’ (*banqueta* = *acera* in Spain, *vereda* in Argentina, *andén* in Colombia). *Oscurecer* may also be used transitively for ‘to make dark’: . . . *el terror que oscureció la mirada de la florista cuando se despidió de mí* (AGr, Sp.) ‘. . . the terror that darkened the florist’s face (lit ‘gaze’) when she said goodbye to me’.

### 30.7.28 *Parar/pararse*

*Parar* is used transitively: *para el motor* ‘turn off the engine’. Used intransitively, both *parar* and *pararse* translate ‘to stop’ on both continents but they are not usually interchangeable. The non-pronominal form indicates scheduled or planned halts, e.g. buses at bus-stops, trains in stations: *el tren expreso para en Monterá* ‘the express train stops at Monterá’. The pronominal form suggests unexpected stops, i.e. at traffic lights or because of breakdown: *el motor se ha parado* ‘the motor’s stopped’, *me tuve que parar en un semáforo* ‘I had to stop at the lights’. When the subject is human, the pronominal form often suggests that the subject is personally moving, i.e. walking or running, while the non-pronominal form suggests that (s)he is driving a car: *me paré delante de la tienda* ‘I paused/stopped in front of the shop/store’, *paré delante de la tienda* ‘I stopped (the car) outside the shop/store’.

(1) In Latin America but not in Spain, *pararse*, as well as meaning ‘to stop’, is much used to mean ‘to stand up’ (*levantarse* in Spain): *párate derecho* = Sp. *ponte derecho* ‘stand up straight’, *se acuclilló, luego se paró y se fue; tenía un carro estacionado atrás del almacén* (EM, Mex.) ‘he crouched down,

then he stood up and left; he had a car parked behind the store' (in Spain *carro* = *coche*, *se paró* = *se levantó*, *atrás de* = *detrás de*).

### 30.7.29 **Parecer/parecerse**

*Parecer* means 'to seem', *parecerse a* means 'to look like': *parece cansada*, 'she seems/looks tired'; *se parecen a su madre* 'they look like their mother', *la película no se parece a ninguna otra* (¿Qué Pasa?, Ch.) 'the movie is like no other', *es algo que ni siquiera se parece al sueño* (JV, Mex.) 'it's something that doesn't even seem like sleep', *se parecían bastante, con la misma piel blanca y los mismos ojos de color azul oscuro* (RM, Sp.) 'they were quite like one another, with the same white skin and the same dark blue eyes'.

### 30.7.30 **Pasar/pasarse**

For the use of these two as verbs of motion, see 30.6.8. *Pasar* also means 'to spend time somewhere' or 'to pass' time:

*Miguel pasó la noche en un hotel*  
*Pasaron tres horas*

Miguel spent the night in a hotel  
Three hours passed

*Pasarse* means 'to spend time doing something' and also to 'go over the limit':

*Los niños se pasan entre mujeres los primeros*  
*años de su vida* (JM, Sp.)  
*Podíamos pasarnos la vida sin verlos*  
(AM, Mex., dialogue)  
*No te pases (de la raya)*

Children spend the first years of their  
lives among women  
We could spend our lives without  
seeing them  
Don't overdo it/Don't step over the mark

(1) *Pasar un examen* 'to pass an exam' is heard in Latin America and colloquially in Spain, but *aprobar un examen* is more usual in Spain in formal language.

### 30.7.31 **Perder/perderse**

The non-pronominal form means 'to lose': *en alguna ocasión llegó a perder diez millones de dólares en una sola partida* (JV, Mex.) 'on one occasion he even lost ten million dollars in a single game', *he perdido peso* 'I've lost weight', etc. The pronominal form is used for 'to miss' opportunities, program(me)s, etc. *Bar de Nueva Delhi invita a no perderse lo que podría ser su "última danza"* (*La Jornada*, Mex. refers to rumours of end of world in 2012) 'Delhi bar invites people not to miss what may be their "last dance"', *no se perdía un domingo de carreras, cuando no estaba de viaje* (JM, Sp.) 'he didn't miss a Sunday's racing when he wasn't away travelling'.

However, the non-pronominal form is used for missing transport: *no pierdas el tren/el búho* 'don't miss the train/night bus' (young people in Spain call night buses *búhos* or 'owls'), *vamos para La Gomera. Ya casi perdemos el barco* (LS, Sp., dialogue) 'we're going to La Gomera. At this rate we'll miss the boat'.

The reflexive form *perderse* means 'to get lost'.

### 30.7.32 *Probar/probarse*

*Probar* means 'to prove', 'to test', 'to sample': *prueba este vino* 'try this wine', *eso no prueba nada* 'that proves nothing', *hacía tiempo que apenas probaba el café* (RC, Sp.) 'he had barely tasted coffee for ages'. The pronominal form is used for the special meaning 'to try on': *se pasa horas en las tiendas probándose todo* '(s)he spends hours in the stores trying on everything', *la mejor hora para probarse zapatos es por la tarde o durante la noche* (Impulso, Mex.) 'the best time to try on shoes is in the evening or at night'.

### 30.7.33 *Quedar and quedarse*

This constantly used verb has numerous meanings and there are regional variations.

- ***Quedar only*** In the following cases only the non-pronominal form is used:

#### (a) 'To agree' on some plan of action

<i>Quedamos en ir al cine</i>	We agreed to go to the cinema
<i>Habían quedado de verse</i> (EM, Mex.)	They had agreed to meet
<i>Conseguí su teléfono, le llamé, quedamos</i> (JC, Sp.)	I got his phone number, called him, we agreed to meet
<i>Quedamos en que no íbamos a</i> <i>mencionar el pacto</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue)	We agreed we weren't going to mention the agreement
<i>Habían quedado en que sólo trabajaría</i> <i>hasta esa hora.</i> (CP, Arg.)	They'd agreed that she would only work until that time ('hour')

#### (b) 'To be left' as in 'there are only three sandwiches left'

<i>La cabeza me la he tenido que lavar con el</i> <i>poco champú que quedaba en la botella</i> (CRG, Sp.)	I had to wash my hair (lit. 'head') with the few drops of shampoo left in the bottle
<i>Y luego sólo él quedó vivo</i> (EM, Mex.)	And he was the only one left alive
<i>Queda por ver . . .</i>	It remains to be seen
<i>Soy un viejo y no me queda mucho tiempo</i> (EP, Mex., dialogue)	I'm an old man and I haven't got much time left
<i>No me queda otra alternativa</i>	I have no other alternative

#### (c) As an equivalent of *estar* when referring to location

<i>¿Dónde quedaba México exactamente? ¿Junto</i> <i>a Perú?</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue)	Where <i>was</i> Mexico exactly? Next to Peru?
<i>Pudimos llegar al lugar del crimen antes de</i> <i>que expirase el ultimátum de la juez. No</i> <i>quedaba lejos de la carretera.</i> (LS, Sp.)	We managed to get to the crime scene before the judge's ultimatum expired. It wasn't far from the road
<i>¿La Plaza del Rey dónde queda?</i>	Where is the Plaza del Rey?
<i>Queda bastante lejos</i>	It's quite a long way away

- ***Quedarse only***. In the following cases (d–f) only the pronominal form is used

#### (d) To mean 'to stay' or 'to remain' or 'to go on doing' something'

<i>Se quedaron en el Hotel Continental</i>	They stayed in the Hotel Continental
<i>Yo me quedé de pie ante él</i> (CMG, Sp.)	I remained standing in front of him

<i>Se quedó quieto, escuchando las voces de la calle</i> (EM, Mex.)	He remained motionless, listening to the voices in the street
<i>Por no salir a tiempo hombre se quedó encerrado en un banco</i> (headline, Terra, Col., Sp. <b>un</b> hombre se quedó . . .)	Man locked in bank after failing to leave in time
<i>Los últimos tiempos él se quedaba toda la semana, solo, con las persianas bajas</i> (CP, Arg.)	Lately he was staying alone for the whole week with the blinds drawn
<i>quedarse dormido/quedarse mirando</i> (both very common phrases)	to go to sleep /to stare at
<i>Mi retrato se quedó a medio esbozar</i>	My portrait remained half sketched

**(e) To mean ‘to keep’, as in ‘keep the book, I don’t need it’**

<i>Quédese la vuelta</i>	Keep the change
<i>Te lo puedes quedar si lo necesitas</i>	You can keep it if you need it
<i>El carro se lo quedaron los federales</i> (EM, Mex., dialogue. <i>El carro</i> = <i>el coche</i> )	The ‘feds’ ( <i>Policía Federal</i> ) kept the car
<i>Pero no podía tomarse el atrevimiento de quedársela</i> (CP, Arg.).	But she couldn’t dare to keep it

**(f) Colloquially, probably only in Spain, to mean ‘to tease’/‘to wind up’**

<i>Menos mal que sé que te estás quedando conmigo</i> (LS, Sp., dialogue)	It’s a good thing that I know you’re winding me up
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The noun associated with this use of the verb is *una quedada*, as in *yo no me daba cuenta de que era una quedada suya* ‘I didn’t realize it was one of his/her wind-ups’.

**• Overlap between *quedar* and *quedarse***

Very often either *quedar* or *quedarse* can be used to indicate a change of state.

**(g) With living subjects, to indicate a change of state** often involving some sort of loss, injury or inconvenience, but often simply some new state. In these examples, *quedarse* or *quedar* could be used, *quedar* probably being more usual – at least outside the Madrid area. The Academy thinks that in this context *quedar* is slightly more formal than *quedarse*.

<i>(Se) quedó cojo/sordo/calvo</i>	He became lame/blind/deaf/bald
<i>Una mañana se despertó en la habitación de su hotel y no vio nada. Se había quedado ciego</i> (RB, Ch.)	One morning he woke in his hotel room and could see nothing. He had gone blind.
<i>(Se) quedó descolocada</i>	She was ‘thrown’/disconcerted
<i>Sí. Y me quedé embarazada, si eso es a lo que se refiere</i> (LS, Sp., dialogue)	Yes. And I got pregnant, if that’s what you’re referring to
<i>Todo el mundo quedaría admirado</i> (LR, Col)	Everyone would be surprised
<i>Los hombres la veían y quedaban hipnotizados</i> (EM, Mex.)	Men saw her and were hypnotized
<i>Los hombres que carezcan de un acceso completo e instantáneo al Internet quedarán rezagados</i> (EP, Mex., dialogue; presumably refers to women as well)	Men who don’t have total and instantaneous access to the Internet will be left behind

If the state arising is temporary, the form *quedarse* is more likely: *se quedó cubierto de pintura* ‘he was covered in paint’, *se quedó boquiabierta* ‘she was flabbergasted’, but *quedó viuda* ‘she was



widowed', *la primera ministra quedó debilitada por el resultado de las elecciones* 'the prime minister was weakened by the election result'. *La gente se quedó paralizada* 'people remained paralyzed' suggests with shock, amazement or fear; . . . *quedó paralizada* suggests a physical handicap. *Don Joaquín se estaba quedando calvo* (EP, Mex.) 'don Joaquín was going bald' is not the same as *Don Joaquín ha quedado calvo* ' . . . has gone bald'. Nevertheless, *se quedó viuda, se quedó debilitada, quedó boquiabierta* are also acceptable.

**(h) Changes of state with non-living subjects.** *Quedar* tends to indicate a result or a long-lasting condition and *quedarse* an event which does not necessarily have a lasting result:

The following sentence refers to a short-term state: *el coche se quedó averiado en medio de la calle pero pudimos arreglarlo en seguida* 'the car broke down in the middle of the road but we were able to fix it immediately'. The non-pronominal form suggests an on-going state and since *en seguida* suggests it was not on-going, the following sentence is contradictory: *?el coche quedó averiado en medio de la calle pero pudimos arreglarlo en seguida*. Likewise *\*se queda prohibido* for *queda prohibido* is incorrect. The following examples refer to states, usually long-lasting ones:

<i>El pueblo quedó destruido a causa de la inundación</i>	The town/village was destroyed because of the flood
<i>Quiero que este punto quede claro</i>	I want this point to be clear
<i>Ahora que lo hemos pintado, el dormitorio queda realmente bien</i>	Now we've painted it, the bedroom looks really good
<i>Queda feo que duermas hasta que te ponga el plato en la mesa, te lo zampes y luego te largues</i> (LS, Sp., dialogue)	It really doesn't look nice if you sleep until she puts your plate on the table, then you gobble it down and then leave
<i>. . . por no exponerme a que mi carrera quedase truncada por un bobo delito contra la seguridad vial</i> (ibid.)	. . . so as not to expose myself to my career being cut short because of a stupid road safety offence
<i>Tenía una personalidad de insecto que había quedado fielmente plasmada en su foto de bodas</i> (ES, Mex.)	He had an insect-like personality that was faithfully reflected in his wedding photo
<i>Ahora que lo he corregido queda mucho mejor</i>	Now I've corrected it it's much better

The following sentences suggest short-lived events, but examples like these are not very common:

<i>Mi pelo se quedó azul</i> (temporary, we assume)	My hair turned/went blue
<i>Hasta que su revólver se quedó sin balas</i> (MVLI, Pe.)	Until his revolver ran out of bullets
<i>Primero el líquido se queda verde, luego se queda negro</i>	First the liquid turns green, then it turns black

This pronominal use is easily confused with the examples at **(d)** as in *se me quedó grabado cómo trataban a mi madre* (EP, Mex., dialogue) 'I couldn't forget (lit. 'it remained engraved on me') how they were treating my mother', *el salón se quedó medio vacío* (ES, Mex.) 'the room was left half empty', *el perfume de Mariana se quedó impregnado en las vestiduras como un recordatorio de mi cobardía* (ibid.) 'Mariana's perfume remained clinging to my clothes as a reminder of my cowardice'. *Quedarse* in these contexts suggests the start of a condition, *quedar* the subsequent result.

**(1)** There is some overlap with *quedar* and *resultar* in sentences like *ahora que han restaurado la catedral resulta/queda impresionante* 'now they've restored the cathedral it looks impressive'. See 32.2.6.

**30.7.34 Reír/reírse**

Both mean 'to laugh'. *Reírse* is the more common form in speech, *reír* is much used in writing. However *reírse* implies spontaneous laughter, so it is not used when the cause of merriment comes from outside, as in *el gas me hizo reír* 'the gas made me laugh', *me estoy ahogando, cállate, no me hagas reír más* (RC, Sp., dialogue) 'I'm choking, shut up, don't make me laugh any more':

<i>Se rio de su propia risa</i> (GGM, Col. See note 1)	She laughed at her own laughter
<i>Todos se rieron de él</i>	They all laughed at him
<i>Consiguió dejar de reírse y retomar la conversación</i> (MS, Mex.)	He managed to stop laughing and pick up the conversation again
<i>Reí y me senté en un banco de madera frente a su escritorio</i> (JV, Mex.)	I laughed and sat down on a wooden bench in front of his desk

(1) The spelling *rio* for *rió* is now recommended by the Academy. See 44.2.4.

**30.7.35 Temer/temerse**

*Temer* usually means 'to be afraid' in the literal sense of 'to fear', especially with a direct object; *temerse* can mean the same, but often simply means 'to suspect', 'to be worried that'. See 20.3.18.

**30.7.36 Traer/traerse**

*Traer* is the normal and overwhelmingly the most common word for 'to bring', but it seems to us that in modern colloquial speech *traerse* is increasingly used with the same meaning as *traer*, cf. *trae a tu marido/tráete a tu marido* 'bring your husband with you', *y tráete a los otros a mi casa* (MVLL, Pe., dialogue) 'and bring the others to my house', *llevas años retirada, y de repente matas a un vigilante y te traes a casa a un fugitivo* 'you've been retired for years, and you suddenly kill a security guard and bring home someone who's on the run' (JN, Sp., dialogue), *si quiere usted traerse su bloque de taquígrafía* (CF, Mex. dialogue. Spain *bloc de taquígrafía*) 'would you mind bringing your shorthand pad?'

(1) *Traer* can also mean 'to wear' *traía/llevaba un traje precioso* 'she was wearing a lovely suit/dress', *toda la ropa que traía* (JV, Mex.) 'all the clothes he was wearing'. In Spain *llevar* is more frequent in this meaning.

(2) *Traerse* is used in phrases implying shady or strange business: *yo creo que no es por ella, sino por su tío y los asuntos que os traéis entre manos* (JM, Sp., dialogue) 'I think it isn't because of her but her uncle and the things you're getting up to between you', *¿qué se traen entre manos las grandes de la tecnología de la información?* (El Universal, Ven.) 'what are the big IT companies up to?', *¿quién sabe qué se trae?* *Yo creo que no anda bien de la cabeza* (JP, Mex., dialogue) 'who knows what he's up to? I think he isn't right in the head'.

**30.7.37 Vestir/vestirse**

*Vestir* is used for the transitive meaning: *la madre vistió al niño* 'the mother put the child's clothes on', *vestía a las modelos con ropa absurda* '(s)he dressed the models in absurd clothes', *vestía una camisa estampada y jeans azules* (EM, Mex. In Spain *jeans* = *vaqueros*) 'he was wearing a printed shirt and blue jeans'. Used intransitively, *vestir* means 'to wear' or 'to dress' (intransitive) and *vestirse* means 'to get dressed':

<i>Vestía como lo haría una ejecutiva un viernes de ropa informal</i> (LS, Sp.)	She dressed like a female executive at a casual-dress Friday party
<i>¿Vestía de rosa con frecuencia?</i> (MS, Mex., dialogue)	Did she often wear pink?

*Tampoco ese día se vestirá ni saldrá a buscar  
trabajo* (LR, Col.)

*No se vestía para los hombres ni se ponía  
joyas ni perfumes* (RM, Sp.)

That day too he won't get dressed or  
go out to look for work

She didn't get dressed up for men or put  
on jewellery / US jewelry or perfumes

### 30.8 *Se de matización* in Latin America

Most of the uses of *se de matización* heard in Spain are also found in Latin America, but a few constructions accepted there sound strange to Spaniards. The following selection, not exhaustive, includes verbs discussed elsewhere, and not all the forms are current in educated speech in every republic. European equivalents are shown in brackets:

*crecerse* to be brought up (*criarse*)  
*desayunarse* to have breakfast (*desayunar*)  
*desconfiarse* not to trust (*desconfiar*)  
*devolverse* to return (not in River Plate area,  
*volverse*)  
*enfermarse* to get ill / US sick (*enfermar*)  
*heredarse* to inherit (*heredar*); see note 1  
*lloverse* to leak (of roofs: rural Argentina)  
*prestarse* to borrow; see note 2

*recordarse* remember (*recordar, acordarse*: see  
22.2.2, note 4)  
*regresarse* to return (*volverse*)  
*robarse* to steal (*robar*)  
*soñarse con* to dream of (*soñar con*)  
*tardarse* to be late (*tardar*)  
*verse* to look (*parecer*) / to seem: see note 3  
*vomitarse* to vomit (*vomitarse, devolver*)

(1) In some parts of Latin America, e.g. Mexico, *heredar* can mean 'to leave to someone in a will' (Spain *dejar*): *estaba seguro de su alcurnia y pudo heredársela entera a su hija* (AM, Mex., Sp. *pudo dejársela entera*) 'he was sure of his pedigree and managed to bequeath it intact to his daughter'.

(2) In Argentina the popular word for 'to borrow' is *emprestar*. This verb is heard in Spain and elsewhere, but it is considered sub-standard. The standard form is *pedir prestado*. *Prestar* is 'to lend' or, colloquially, *dejar*.

(3) In Latin America *verse* is used to refer to personal appearance: *te ves muy guapa* (AM, Mex., dialogue; Sp. *estás muy guapa, se te ve muy guapa*) 'you look very pretty', *y tú no te ves nada mal con esa tenuta* (SV, Ch., dialogue; Sp. *no estás nada mal; la tenuta = el traje*) 'and you don't look at all bad in that outfit', *Véase y siéntase bien alimentándose correctamente* (Latin-American book title) 'Look and feel good by eating properly'. *Yo me veo bien con esta ropa* 'I look okay in these clothes' is possible in Spain.

### 30.9 Pronominal verbs of consumption, perception, knowledge

One function of the pronominal form of some transitive verbs in colloquial language is to emphasize the unusual or surprising nature of some act of consuming, perceiving or knowing. Thus one says *como pizza* 'I eat pizza' (no quantity specified), but optionally – though usually – *me comí una pizza* 'I ate a whole pizza'. The verb must have a direct object which must refer to a specific item or quantity:

*Se bebió de un trago su tequila* (GZ, Mex.)  
*Nos liquidamos las dos un par de Viña  
Tondonias y nos comimos un par de  
bolsas King size de patatas fritas* (CRG, Sp.)

He downed his tequila in one gulp  
The two of us women finished off a  
couple of bottles of Viña Tondonia  
and ate a couple of king-size bags  
of crisps / US chips

(Se) *fuma tres paquetes al día*  
 (Me) *anduve cincuenta kilómetros*  
 (Me) *aprendí todo el capítulo en una hora*  
 ¿(Te) *sabes los verbos irregulares?*  
 (Me) *conozco Valencia de cabo a rabo*  
*Tómate/toma un somnífero*  
 (Se) *lo ha tragado*  
 (Se) *vio todo el museo en diez minutos*  
*Vas a tener que releerte las obras completas*  
*[de Shakespeare] CF, Mex., dialogue)*  
*Piénsatelo*  
*Se gasta todo lo que gana*

(S)he smokes three packs a day  
 I walked 50 km  
 I learned the whole chapter in an hour  
 Do you know the irregular verbs?  
 I know Valencia inside out  
 Take a sleeping pill  
 (S)he's swallowed it  
 (S)he saw the whole museum in ten minutes  
 You're going to have to re-read the  
 complete works [of Shakespeare]  
 Think it through (completely/thoroughly)  
 (S)he spends everything (s)he earns

## 30.10 Interpretation of pronominal verbs with inanimate subjects

As we have remarked before, a third-person pronominal verb may also be interpreted as passive in meaning: *se construyó en España* means the same as *fue construido en España* 'it was built in Spain' (see 32.4 for more details).

A difficulty therefore sometimes arises with sentences containing pronominal verbs, for example *se abrió la puerta*. Is this to be understood as intransitive, i.e. 'the door opened', or passive, 'the door **was** opened'? Likewise, does *se hundió el barco* mean 'the boat sank' or 'the boat was sunk'? This problem only arises with certain verbs which have well-established pronominal intransitive forms, e.g. *abrir/abrirse* 'to open', *cerrar/cerrarse* 'to close', *encontrar/encontrarse* 'to find'/'to be located' and others which will be found in good dictionaries. Most transitive verbs, e.g. *construir* 'to build', *derribar* 'to fell', do not have intransitive counterparts so confusion is hardly possible.

One way of clarifying which sense is intended is as follows: if a pronominal verb has an established intransitive meaning, e.g. *abrirse* 'to open', *encenderse* 'to light up'/'to switch on', it will usually precede the subject if the passive meaning is intended, although this position does not preclude a pronominal interpretation. Thus *la puerta se abrió* usually means 'the door opened', but *se abrió la puerta* may mean either 'the door opened' or 'the door was opened'. Similarly:

*La luz se enciende a las nueve*  
*Se enciende la luz a las nueve*  
*Tres ventanas se rompieron durante la tormenta*  
*Se rompieron tres ventanas durante la*  
*manifestación*

The light comes on at nine  
 The light is lit/comes on at nine  
 Three windows broke in the storm  
 Three windows were broken in the  
 demonstration

## 30.11 Obligatory use of *uno* as an impersonal pronoun with pronominal verbs

**Important:** *uno/una* must be used to give an impersonal meaning to a third-person pronominal verb since two *ses* can never appear side by side. One can never say *\*se se enfada/enoja mucho* for *uno/una se enfada/enoja mucho* 'one gets very angry' (*enojarse* is more typical of Latin America):

*Se moría de frío en esa casa (morirse)*  
*Se moría uno de frío en esa casa*

(S)he/It was/You were dying of cold  
 in that house  
 One died from the cold in that house

*Cuando está así, se irrita fácilmente por cualquier cosa*

*Cuando se/uno está así, **uno** se irrita fácilmente por cualquier cosa*

*Con estas cosas se cansa mucho*

*Con estas cosas **uno** se cansa mucho*

*A veces una se equivoca de método*

*(ES, Mex. dialogue)*

*A esa edad uno se siente más vulnerable y desprotegido que nunca. (JV, Mex.)*

*Cuando una se lava las manos en los aeropuertos quedan bastante más limpias pero arrugaditas (MB, Ur., little girl speaking)*

When (s)he's like that, (s)he easily gets irritated over anything

When one is like that, one gets easily irritated over anything

(S)he gets very tired with these things

One gets very tired with these things

Sometimes one gets the method wrong

At that age one feels more vulnerable and unprotected than ever

When one washes one's hands at airports they come out quite a lot cleaner but all wrinkly

For more details about the pronoun *uno* see 32.7.1.

# 31 Verbs of becoming

Matters discussed in this chapter are:

- Verbs like *cansarse*, *indignarse*, *augmentar*, etc. (Section 31.2)
- *Ponerse* (Section 31.3.1)
- *Volverse* (Section 31.3.2)
- *Hacerse* (Section 31.3.3)
- *Llegar/pasar a ser* (Section 31.3.4)
- *Convertirse en* (Section 31.3.5)
- *Quedar(se)* (Section 31.3.6)
- *Resultar* (Section 31.3.7)
- *Devenir* (Section 31.3.8)

## 31.1 General

There are two main ways in Spanish of expressing the idea of 'to become': either use one of the many verbs derived from adjectives to indicate a change of state, e.g. *enfermó* (Lat. Am. *se enfermó*) '(s)he became ill/sick', *se entusiasmaron* 'they became enthusiastic', *nos alegramos* 'we became happy', *quiero adelgazar* 'I want to lose weight'/'become slimmer'; or use one of the several verbs that mean 'to become', e.g. *ponerse*, *volverse*, *hacerse*, *llegar a ser*, *convertirse en*, *quedarse*. One can therefore also say *se puso enfermo* 'he became ill/sick', *se puso/se quedó contento* 'he became contented/happy', *se volvió loco* 'he went mad', etc.

## 31.2 Verbs denoting change of state

These are numerous in Spanish. Many of them are pronominal verbs (the term is explained in Chapter 30). The following is a small selection:

<i>aburrirse (de)</i> to get bored	<i>extrañarse (de)</i> to be puzzled
<i>alegrarse (de)</i> to become happy	<i>envejecer</i> to grow old
<i>asustarse (de)</i> to get frightened	<i>fastidiarse</i> to get annoyed
<i>cansarse (de)</i> to get tired	<i>indignarse</i> to get indignant
<i>deprimirse</i> to get depressed	<i>irritarse (por)</i> to get irritated
<i>divertirse</i> to enjoy oneself	<i>marearse</i> to feel sick
<i>endurecerse</i> to become hard	<i>molestarse (por)</i> to be bothered
<i>enfadarse</i> (Lat. Am. <i>enojarse</i> ) to get angry	<i>vaciar</i> to become empty
<i>enloquecer(se)</i> to go mad	
<i>enrojecer</i> to go red/to blush	

(1) As *enrojecer* shows, not all verbs that express changes of state are pronominal: *enloquecer* is more common for 'to go mad' than *enloquecerse*. Some other common cases of non-pronominal verbs denoting 'to become ...'/'to get ...' are shown at 30.4.1.

(2) *Amanecer* 'to dawn', can be used with living subjects: *amanecí detestando mi color de pelo, mis ojeras, mi estatura* (AM, Mex., dialogue) 'I woke up (lit. 'I dawned') hating the colour of my hair, the bags under my eyes, my height', *amaneció sin ánimos para levantarse* (LR, Col.) 'he woke (lit. 'dawned') not feeling like getting up', *nunca amanecí en su casa* (JM, Sp., dialogue) 'I never spent the night (lit. 'dawned') in her house'.

### 31.3 Verbs meaning 'to become'

Apart from the use of the pronominal forms discussed in the previous section, Spanish resembles English in having several words meaning 'to become': cf. 'to grow old', 'to get warm', 'to go mad', 'to turn nasty', 'to become happy', etc. French and Italian make much use of one word, *devenir* and *diventare* respectively, but the Spanish verb *devenir* 'to become' is very limited in use. See 31.3.8.

#### 31.3.1 *Ponerse* 'to become', 'to get'

*Ponerse* is used to indicate changes of mood, physical condition and appearance, voluntary or involuntary, which are usually short-lived, e.g. *ponerse enfermo/frenético/cabizbajo* 'to get ill/frantic/preoccupied', *ponerse contento* 'to become pleased'. It is not used with adjectives that do not allow *estar*: \**se puso budista/ateo* 'he became a Buddhist/atheist' is not possible for *se hizo budista/ateo*.

There is a contrast between *se ha puesto muy pesado* 'he's become very annoying' (temporarily) and *se ha vuelto muy pesado* 'he's become a real pain'. There is sometimes overlap with *quedarse*; see 31.3.6, and with *volverse*.

*Ponerse* can have living subjects and also certain kinds of non-living subjects, e.g. prices, foods, situations and weather conditions.

*Cuando se enteró se puso muy contenta/triste/de mal humor/enfadada (se entristeció, se enfadó could also be used)*  
*Se puso/Se quedó ronco/Enronqueció de tanto hablar*

When she heard about it she became very happy/sad/bad-tempered/cross

*El FMI se puso duro (Clarín, Arg. Sp. se ha puesto)*

(S)he got hoarse from talking so much

*Se puso/Está mejor/Mejoró de su enfermedad (but not \*la enfermedad se puso mejor)*

The IMF (International Monetary Fund) has got tough

*¡No te pongas difícil/tonto!*

(S)he got better from his/her illness

*En estos últimos años se me ha puesto el pelo rizado*

Don't get difficult/silly!

My hair has got curly in recent years

*El tiempo se está poniendo/volviendo frío*

The weather is getting cold

*... una costumbre que se está poniendo de moda entre estos clientes ... (AC, Mex.)*

... a custom that's becoming fashionable among these clients

(1) *Ponerse* is often used with children to indicate that they are looking bigger or handsomer than ever: *¡pero qué guapo/grande se ha puesto este niño!* 'hasn't this child got handsome/big!' It may also imply deliberate effort: *mi madre se ha puesto guapa* 'my mother's made herself look attractive'.

(2) *Ponerse a* + infinitive means to begin: *le contaba de mi papá que se puso a bailar conmigo* (ES, Mex., dialogue; Spain *le contaba que mi padre se puso a ...*) 'I was telling her about my father, who started dancing with me', *nos pusimos a hablar de la muerte* (CRG, Sp.) 'we started talking about death'.

#### 31.3.2 *Volverse*

This usually translates 'to become'/'to go', as in 'to go mad', and often implies changes of belief or commitment when applied to living subjects; these changes may be involuntary and long-lived: *cuán grosero se había vuelto el gringo* (MS, Mex., dialogue) 'how ill-mannered the gringo had become'. It can also be used with non-living subjects: *los arreglos musicales de Pérez Prado se volvieron legendarios* (JA, Mex.) 'Pérez Prado's musical arrangements became legendary'.

The change is felt to be more permanent than with *ponerse*: compare *se puso malhumorada* 'she got into a bad mood' and *se volvió malhumorada* 'she became a grumpy person'.

<i>Con la edad nos vamos volviendo más de derechas</i>	We get more right-wing with age
<i>Me he vuelto alérgico a la lana</i>	I've become allergic to wool
<i>Últimamente todo se vuelven sorpresas</i> (see 2.3.3 for the plural agreement of <i>vuelven</i> )	Recently everything has become surprises
<i>¿Dónde se volvió asesino ese chico?</i> (MP, Arg., dialogue)	Where did that boy learn to be a murderer?
<i>La peor pesadilla para una madre en esta época es que sus hijos anuncien que se han vuelto vegetarianos</i> (Terra, Ven.)	The worst nightmare for a mother these days is for her children to announce they've become vegetarians
<i>Durante un rato el cielo se volvió anaranjado</i> (AM, Mex., or <i>se puso</i> )	The sky turned orange for a while

See 30.6.13 for other meanings of *volver(se)*.

### 31.3.3 *Hacerse* 'to become'

When used of people, this often implies voluntary or deliberate changes and it is usual for religious, professional or political conversions, i.e. changes that are more or less lasting. It can also occasionally be used of circumstances:

<i>Se hizo católico/Se convirtió al catolicismo</i>	He became a Catholic
<i>Para hacerte arquitecto necesitas saber dibujo</i>	You need to know how to draw to become an architect
<i>Me hice amigo de mucha gente rica</i>	I made friends with a lot of rich people
<i>¿Qué se hicieron los ídolos?</i> (La Prensa, Pan., Sp. . . . <i>se hizo de los ídolos</i> . . .)	What became of (our) idols/heroes?
<i>Emigró a México, se hizo inmensamente rico</i> (AGa, Sp.)	He emigrated to Mexico and became immensely rich
<i>. . . cuando Isabel se hizo novia de Esteban</i> (JP, Mex., dialogue)	. . . when Isabel became Esteban's girlfriend
<i>. . . como volutas de humo que se hace progresivamente más espeso</i> (CMG, Sp.)	. . . like spirals of smoke growing progressively thicker
<i>Las noches se hacen más largas</i>	The nights are getting longer
<i>Se me hace cuesta arriba tener que levantarme temprano</i>	It's turning into a chore (lit 'uphill') for me to have to get up early

(1) The NGLE 38.2c notes that if an adjective can be used with *estar* but not with *ser*, it cannot take *hacerse*: *se deprimió* '(s)he became depressed', not \**se hizo* . . .; likewise with *contento*, *descontento*, *irritado*, *enfadado*/*enojado*, *desnudo*, etc.

(2) There is no difference between sentences like *se está haciendo cada vez más vago* and *se está volviendo cada vez más vago/perezoso* 'he's getting lazier and lazier' even though they do not necessarily suggest voluntary choices. But *se hizo socialista* 'he became a socialist' implies a deliberate commitment, unlike *se volvió socialista* 'he became socialist (in outlook/attitude)'.

(3) Idioms: *hacerse tarde* 'to get late', *hacerse de miel* 'to become so soft that people can take advantage of one', *hacerse humo* 'to vanish' (lit. 'to become smoke'); *no te hagas el tonto* 'stop pretending you don't understand', *hacerse viral* 'to go viral'.



(4) 'To become' with the meaning of 'to be appointed' is translated into Spanish as *nombrar* or *hacer*: *lo/le han nombrado/hecho ministro* 'he's become a Minister'.

### 31.3.4 *Llegar a (ser), pasar a (ser)*

*Llegar a (ser)* is used to indicate the result of a slow and sometimes difficult change, i.e. 'to manage to become'/'to become eventually'. It is only occasionally used with non-living subjects, as in *la situación llegó a ser imposible* 'the situation (eventually) became impossible':

*Trabajó mucho y con el tiempo llegó a ser  
alguien/director general/una persona  
importante*

He worked hard and in due time he  
became someone/general manager/  
an important person

*Pretendía, con el tiempo, llegar a Jefe  
de la Interpol (ES, Mex., dialogue)*

He aimed eventually to become head of  
Interpol

*Pasar a (ser)* means 'to go on to be' but it does not imply difficulty or lapse of time:

*De secretario pasó a (ser) jefe*

From being a secretary he went on to  
become the boss

*Pasó a ser uno de los partidos políticos del  
mundo con el porcentaje más alto de  
afiliados (La República, Ur.)*

It became one of the world's political  
parties with the highest percentage  
of members

*De hija pasé a ser esposa (CRG, Sp.)*

From being a daughter I went on to  
become a wife

*... el momento en que Baviera pasó a formar  
parte del Reich alemán (JV, Mex., dialogue)*

... the moment when Bavaria became part of  
the German Reich

### 31.3.5 *Convertirse en 'to become/change/turn into'*

This verb precedes noun phrases and usually suggests total changes or transformations:

*Nada más tocarlo/le el hada con la varita el  
príncipe se convirtió en rana*

As soon as the fairy touched him with  
her wand, the prince turned into a frog

*Tu socarronería ha dejado de ser irónica para  
convertirse en vitriólica (CMG, Sp.,  
dialogue)*

Your sarcasm has stopped being ironic;  
it's become vitriolic

*El golf se convirtió en pasión de multitudes  
(Río Negro, Arg.)*

Golf has become a mass craze

*La silla se convierte fácilmente en una escalera  
Había descendido socialmente hasta convertirse  
en lo que ahora era (CF, Mex.)*

The chair turns easily into a step-ladder  
It [an apartment block] had gone downhill  
socially to become what it was now

(1) 'To convert to' a new belief is *convertirse a* (see also *hacerse*; see 31.3.3): *no todos los que se convierten a una religión se vuelven buenos* 'not everyone who is converted to a religion becomes good'.

### 31.3.6 *Quedarse and quedar*

This verb is discussed in detail at 30.7.33. Its use in passive sentences, e.g. *quedaron detenidos* 'they were arrested' is also discussed at 32.2.6.

### 31.3.7 *Resultar*

This verb is also discussed at 14.6.3–5. Although it is not really a verb of 'becoming', *resultar* with adjectives and participles expresses a nuance that is related to the idea of change of state, namely that a result or impression is unpredicted or unexpected. This often involves misfortunes, but it can also indicate pleasant surprises:

*Pero la rutina del cisne que despierta oyendo  
el Danubio azul resultó un desastre por culpa  
del tocadiscos* (ES, Mex., dialogue)

*Pero entre tanto disparate hubo uno que resultó  
mortal: las medias blancas* (LR, Col.

In Spain *medias* = 'stockings' and  
'socks' = *calcetines*)

*Se notaba que se llevaban muy bien y me  
resultaban ustedes muy simpáticos*  
(JM, Sp., dialogue)

*También resultaba mágico lanzar pompas  
de jabón* (EP, Mex.)

But the routine of the swan waking up  
when it hears the Blue Danube was  
a disaster because of the record-player

But among all these stupid blunders there  
was one that was fatal: white socks

One could see you got on very well together  
and I found you very nice

It was also magical to blow (lit. 'launch')  
soap bubbles

(1) For *resultar* in passive sentences, as in *tres personas resultaron heridas* 'three people were injured', see 32.2.6b.

### 31.3.8 *Devenir*

The verb *devenir* 'to become' is virtually never used in Spain except in philosophical texts. In Latin America it is found in the media: *se hizo conocida como modelo; luego devino actriz popular* (*La Nación*, Arg.), 'she became known as a model; then she became a popular actress', *el caso que empezó como novela televisiva deviene circo mediático* (*La Jornada*, Mex.) 'the case that began like a TV soap opera is turning into a media circus'. The construction *devenir en* 'to turn into' is also found in formal Latin-American Spanish: *la ominosa conspiración militar que devino en el golpe de Estado* (*La República*, Ur.) 'the deplorable/ominous military conspiracy that turned into the Coup d'État [of 1973]'.

# 32 Passive and impersonal sentences

This chapter covers:

- General remarks on passive and impersonal sentences (Section 32.1)
- The passive with *ser* (Section 32.2)
- *La ciudad fue destruida* and *la ciudad estaba destruida* compared (Section 32.2.5)
- *La pasiva refleja* ('passive *se*') and the passive with *ser*: general (Section 32.3)
- Passive *se* (*pasiva refleja*) (Section 32.4)
- *Se vio a tres personas/Se les vio* (Section 32.5)
- Impersonal *se* (Section 32.6)
- Other impersonal pronouns (*uno/una, tú, ellos*) (Section 32.7)
- Appendix to Chapter 32: further remarks on *se* + transitive verb + non-living direct objects (Section 32.8)

## 32.1 General

In **passive sentences** the object of a verb in an active sentence becomes the subject: 'they signed the deal' (active) > 'the deal was signed' (passive). The latter is a type of impersonal sentence, but the agent of the action could be included – 'the deal was signed **by** the manager' – in which case it is passive but no longer impersonal.

In **impersonal sentences** the agent of the action is either unknown or irrelevant, as in 'the fire was started accidentally' (we don't know by whom) or 'they drink vodka in Russia' (the identity of 'they' is irrelevant).

Spanish is rich in passive and impersonal constructions and it is not always easy to distinguish between them. Students who know French may find the comparisons helpful:

### Spanish passive and impersonal constructions

Construction	Example	English	French	Section
Passive with <i>ser</i>	<b><i>el libro fue publicado</i></b>	the book was published	<i>le livre a été publié</i>	<b>32.2</b>
Passive <i>se</i>	<b><i>se publicó el libro</i></b>	the book was published	<i>le livre s'est publié</i>	<b>32.4</b>
	<b><i>se bebe vino</i></b>	wine is drunk	<i>on boit du vin</i>	
	<b><i>se bebe mucho</i></b>	a lot <b>of it</b> is drunk	<i>on en boit beaucoup</i>	
'Special construction'	<b><i>se recibió a los embajadores</i></b>	the ambassadors were received	<i>les ambassadeurs ont été reçus/on a reçu les ambassadeurs</i>	<b>32.5</b>
	<b><i>se les recibió</i></b>	they were received	<i>on les a reçus/ils ont été reçus</i>	
Impersonal <i>se</i>	<b><i>se entra por aquí/se bebe mucho</i></b>	one goes in here/people drink a lot	<i>on entre par ici/on boit beaucoup</i>	<b>32.6</b>

<i>uno/una</i>	<b><i>uno/una se cansa</i> <i>uno/una duerme</i></b>	one gets tired/one sleeps	<i>on se fatigue/on dort</i>	<b>32.7</b>
Impersonal <i>tú</i> (informal)	<b><i>es fácil si sabes</i> <i>inglés</i></b>	it's easy if you know English	<i>c'est facile si on sait</i> <i>anglais</i>	<b>32.7.2</b>
Impersonal 3rd person	<b><i>dicen que es verdad</i></b>	they say it's true	<i>on dit que c'est vrai</i>	<b>32.7.3</b>

(1) As the table above shows, Spanish lacks an exact equivalent of the French *on*, German *man*, English 'one'. Medieval Spanish once used *hombre* as an impersonal pronoun, cf. *como hombre es mujer y vieja, no hacen caso de hombre* 'since one's a woman and old, they don't pay one any attention' (from G. Correas, *Vocabulario de refranes y frases populares*, quoted Kany, 1970, 179). When this useful construction died out, some of its functions were transferred to the already overworked pronoun *se*.

## 32.2 Passive with *ser*

### 32.2.1 General

The passive with *ser* is formed from the appropriate tense and person of *ser* 'to be' and the past participle, which agrees in number and gender with the subject of *ser*:

#### Active

*Solucionaron los problemas*

They solved the problems

*Manuel escribió la respuesta*

Manuel wrote the reply

#### Passive

*Los problemas fueron solucionados*

The problems were solved

*La respuesta fue escrita por Manuel*

The reply was written by Manuel

There are several points to be made about this construction.

(a) The passive with *ser* is common in written Spanish everywhere and it is more common than 100 years ago although it is not a modern invention; but it is much less common in spoken language.

English uses the passive constantly in all styles – 'he was congratulated by the boss', 'my car was damaged by a falling tree', 'you've been conned' – with the result that English-speaking students constantly over-use it in spoken Spanish. The result may not always be ungrammatical, but it may sound pedantic or awkward. Some grammarians go so far as to claim that it is not heard in everyday language, but this is not entirely true, assuming that the following extracts really reflect spontaneous speech:

... la mujer "esposa de" que llevas dentro de ti  
y para lo que **fui**ste educada (RM, Sp.,  
dialogue)

Los derechos de filmación del fin del mundo  
ya **fue**ron vendidos a la televisión  
norteamericana (LRS, PR, dialogue)

Uno viene a estos desayunos para **ser** visto  
por los demás (CF, Mex., dialogue)

Tuve la suerte de **ser** elegida (ES, Mex.,  
dialogue)

El hijo de Pilar Ternera fue llevado a casa de  
sus abuelos (GGM, Col., llevar cannot  
form a passive with *ser* if it means  
'to wear' or 'to hold')

... the 'wife-woman' that you carry  
inside you and you were brought up to be

Film rights for the end of the world  
have already been sold to US television

One comes to these breakfasts to be seen by  
other people

I was lucky enough to be chosen

Pilar Ternera's son was carried to his  
grandparents' house

Such examples seem more common in the dialogue of Latin-American novels than in Spain. In informal language impersonal 'they' (32.7.3) is more common than the passive, e.g. . . . *y para lo que te educaron, . . . para que te vean los demás . . .*

(b) In English an indirect object can become the subject of the verb in a passive sentence: 'she was sent a letter' = 'a letter was sent to her', 'I was given a prize' = 'a prize was given to me'. This is a peculiarity of English and it is impossible in Spanish. See 32.2.2a.

(c) If no agent is mentioned, the passive with *ser* is often identical in meaning with passive *se* (explained at 32.4): *encontraron dos cargas explosivas que fueron desactivadas* and *encontraron dos cargas explosivas que se desactivaron* both mean 'they found two explosive charges which were defused', although the first is unambiguous whereas the second might conceivably be read as ' . . . which defused themselves'. But there is sometimes a difference of nuance which may become crucial. See 32.2.7.

(d) The passive with *ser* is more common with the preterite, future, perfect, pluperfect tenses and with the infinitive than with the imperfect, present and continuous tenses: *fue entrevistado ayer* is normal written style for 'he was interviewed yesterday', but *Mario es entrevistado con frecuencia por periodistas de la prensa amarilla* 'Mario is frequently interviewed by journalists from the tabloid press/US yellow press' is less usual although increasingly common in the media:

*Basta saber que un hombre es buscado para  
que todos lo vean de manera distinta*  
(CF, Mex., dialogue)  
*El exministro de Hacienda es investigado  
por la Fiscalía (La Razón, Bol.)*  
*El parlamento gibraltareño tiene 17  
miembros, de los que dos son puestos por el  
Gobierno inglés (El País, Sp. See note 3)*

It's enough to know a man's being  
sought for everyone to look at him in  
a different way  
The ex-minister of finance is investigated by  
the State Prosecutor  
The Gibraltarian parliament has 17  
members, two of which are appointed  
by the English [sic] Government

Most European informants found these sentences very formal and preferred a *se* construction or an active sentence, e.g. *basta saber que a un hombre se le busca . . . , la fiscalía investiga a . . . , . . . de los que el Gobierno inglés pone dos*.

(1) Unlike the passive with *ser*, or should not be used with passive *se*. \*? *El puente se construyó por los romanos* is generally considered to be bad Spanish for *el puente fue construido por los romanos* 'the bridge was built by the Romans'. See 32.4.1, note 1 for more on this point.

(2) The difference between the passive with *ser*, *la ciudad fue destruida* 'the city was destroyed' (an event), and *la ciudad estaba destruida* 'the city was in a state of destruction' (result or outcome of an event) is discussed at 32.2.5.

(3) The example shows that the difference between 'British' and 'English' is not always respected outside the UK.

### 32.2.2 Constraints on the passive with *ser*

Students, particularly native speakers of English, should observe the following rules about the use of the Spanish passive with *ser*:

(a) **Important:** as mentioned earlier, the passive must not be used when the subject of the passive sentence would be an indirect object: '(s)he was sent a letter' is best translated *se le envió una carta* or *le enviaron una carta*. \*(Él) *fue enviado una carta* or \**ella fue enviada una carta* are not Spanish and

*fue enviada una carta* can only mean ‘a letter was sent’. This is a common mistake among English-speaking beginners.

A possible literary translation of ‘(s)he was sent a letter’ is *le fue enviada una carta*. This construction is rare in spontaneous speech and very unusual with other than third-person pronouns: *me fue enviada una carta, te fue enviada una carta*, etc., are not impossible but are uncommon.

**(b) Important:** the passive with *ser* should not be used with verbs like *pegar* ‘to beat’ which take the pronouns *le/les* as their third-person direct object even when this object is female: Section 15.6.4 includes a list of verbs similar to *pegar*. One can transform *su marido la adoraba* into *era adorada por su marido* ‘she was adored by her husband’, but *su marido le pegó/pegaba* ‘her husband beat her’ should not be transformed into *\*fue/era pegada por su marido*: NGLE 41.2e.

However, the verbs *pagar*, *preguntar* and *obedecer* always take *le/les* as a third-person object pronoun but can, exceptionally, be used with passive with *ser*:

<i>Los ministros fueron preguntados . . .</i> ( <i>El País</i> , Sp.)	The minsters were asked . . .
<i>. . . fue preguntado en relación con la falta de sanciones . . .</i> ( <i>La Jornada</i> , Mex.)	He was questioned about the lack of measures against . . .
<i>Serás pagado por la Secretaría del Trabajo</i>	You’ll be paid by the Labour Ministry
<i>Por la contundencia de su voz deduje que estaba acostumbrada a ser obedecida</i> (AG, Sp., dialogue)	From her no-nonsense voice I inferred that she was used to being obeyed

Such sentences cannot include a direct object: one cannot say *\*fui preguntado una pregunta* for ‘I was asked a question’ (*se me hizo una pregunta/me hicieron una pregunta*) or *\*fui pagado el dinero* for ‘I was paid the money’ (*el dinero me fue pagado* (rare)/*se me pagó el dinero/me pagaron el dinero*).

**(c) Important:** in English a phrase consisting of a preposition + a noun or pronoun can make a passive sentence. This is absolutely impossible in Spanish. One can translate ‘this bed has been slept in’ only by *alguien ha dormido en esta cama* ‘someone has slept in this bed’, never by the incomprehensible *\*\*esta cama ha sido dormido en*. Likewise ‘she was talked about a lot’ is *se hablaba mucho de ella* (impersonal *se* = ‘people talked about her a lot’), never *\*\*era hablada mucho de*, which is also unintelligible. Spanish sentences and clauses cannot end with prepositions.

**(d)** The passive with *ser* is not usual when the subject of *ser* has no article: *se venden naranjas aquí* ‘oranges for sale’ but not *\*naranjas son vendidas aquí* ‘oranges are sold here’. However, sentences like *en el mercado antiguo eran vendidas manzanas y otras frutas* ‘in the old market apples and other fruits were sold’ may be found, especially in literary and in journalistic Latin-American Spanish; *dan en adopción a mascotas que eran vendidas por catálogo* (*El Comercio*, Pe.) ‘pets sold by catalogue are given up for adoption’ ( . . . *se vendían por catálogo* would be more usual in Spain).

**(e)** The passive with *ser* is rarely used with a present or imperfect tense to denote a single action. The Academy (*Esbozo*, 3.12.9c) says that *la puerta es/era abierta por el portero* ‘the door is/was opened by the doorman’ can only refer to a habitual or timeless event. This rule does not apply to all styles. Journalists sometimes use the imperfect for single events (usually for calamities) – *momentos después era asesinado por un terrorista* ‘seconds later he was murdered by a terrorist’ (see 17.5.8 for discussion), and the historic present may denote a single past action, as in *el 22 de junio de 1941 la Unión Soviética es invadida por ejércitos alemanes* ‘on 22 June 1941 the Soviet Union was (lit. ‘is’) invaded by German armies’.

**(f)** The passive with *ser* is not used in reciprocal constructions. One can say *se vieron el uno al otro* ‘they saw one another’, but never *\*fueron vistos el uno por el otro* *\*‘they were seen by one another’*.

(g) The Spanish passive with *ser* cannot be used in constructions that involve verbs of seeing, hearing, etc., followed by an infinitive: *vieron aterrizar el avión* 'they saw the plane land' can be made passive in English 'the plane was seen by them to land', but *\*el avión fue visto aterrizar* is not Spanish. A *se* construction must be used: *se vio cómo aterrizaba el avión* or *se vio aterrizar el avión*. *Vieron aterrizar el avión* is the most natural translation.

(h) Unattributed beliefs or opinions of the sort 'it is said that . . .', 'it is believed that', 'people thought that' are translated by a *se* construction: *se dice que, se cree que, se pensaba que*.

(i) The passive is not used with a number of verbs and for no obvious reason. This topic is discussed further in the Appendix to this chapter at 32.9.

### 32.2.3 Ways of avoiding the passive

English-speaking students constantly over-use the Spanish passive. It can be avoided in the following ways:

(a) **Make the sentence active** – the simplest solution, but tedious if overdone in written Spanish:

<i>Los críticos lo/le alabaron (=fue alabado por los críticos)</i>	He was praised by the critics
<i>Suspendieron la sesión (= la sesión fue suspendida)</i>	The session was suspended

(b) **Use passive *se*** (further discussed at 32.4).

The following typical piece of journalese . . . *su bufete privado es utilizado con frecuencia para asuntos propios del Gobierno* (*El País*, Sp.) 'his private office is often used for government business' could be neatly rephrased as . . . *su bufete privado se utiliza con frecuencia* . . . But passive *se* should only be used if the agent of the action is not included in the sentence; in other words one should avoid constructions like \* . . . *se utiliza por los secretarios* . . . See 32.4.1 note 1 for details.

(c) **Put the direct object before the verb**. Since one function of the passive is to focus the object of a sentence – compare 'he preferred Jane' and '**Jane** was preferred by him' – the effect of an English passive can often be reproduced in Spanish by putting the direct object before the verb, e.g. *la sentencia la había dictado un juzgado de Madrid* 'the sentence had been delivered by a Madrid court'. A redundant object pronoun (in this case *la*) then usually becomes necessary: see 14.10.1 and 42.9.1, especially note 2, for details.

### 32.2.4 Passive meaning of the infinitive

In Spanish, the distinction between active and passive is often blurred in infinitive constructions as in *una botella sin abrir* 'an unopened bottle'. See 22.5.

### 32.2.5 Comparison between *ser convencido* and *estar convencido*

**Important:** the passive with *ser* denotes an action or an event while the participle with *estar* describes the result arising from an action or event. English rarely makes this distinction and English-speaking students may not grasp the difference between events and resulting states: 'it was (i.e. 'got') burnt in the fire yesterday' is an event, 'the toast was cold and black and it was

obviously burnt’ describes a condition resulting from an event. Compare also *la puerta fue abierta* ‘the door was opened’ (event) and *la puerta estaba abierta* ‘the door was open’ (resulting state).

The possibility of making this contrast is normally limited to verbs with a dynamic meaning, i.e. ones that describe events, not states. The participle of a non-dynamic verb (see Glossary) will probably denote only a state and therefore may only allow *estar*, cf. *estoy acatarrado* ‘I’ve got a cold’, *estás equivocado* ‘you’re mistaken’, *está oxidado* ‘it’s rusty’ (*ser* impossible).

In some cases, a special participle is used with *estar*: cf. *estaba despierto porque había sido despertado por una voz de hombre* ‘he was awake because he had been woken by a man’s voice’. See 23.2.1 for a list of these participles.

Examples of the contrast between passives with *ser* and *estar* (the latter is called the *pasiva resultativa* or *pasiva de resultado* in Spanish):

<i>La ciudad fue destruida</i> *(event)	The city was destroyed
<i>La ciudad estaba destruida</i> (state)	The city was in ruins
<i>Fui detenido/Yo estaba detenido</i>	I was arrested/I was under arrest
<i>El manuscrito fue escrito en alemán</i> (event)	The manuscript was written in German
<i>El manuscrito estaba escrito en alemán</i> (state)	The manuscript was in German
<i>[El libro] estaba muy leído, subrayado en algunos pasajes, e incluso con notas al margen</i>	[The book] had been read a lot, underlined in some places, and even had marginal notes
<i>Los hechos históricos no están gobernados por leyes</i> (OP, Mex.)	Historical facts are not governed by laws
<i>En los días finales Berlín estuvo defendido por niños y ancianos</i> (RM., Sp.)	During the final days Berlin was defended by children and old people

### 32.2.6 Alternatives to *ser* to express passive meaning

Several other verbs may be used instead of *ser* in the passive construction. They usually add nuances which can barely be translated into normal English:

#### (a) *Quedar(se)*

Unlike English, Spanish often differentiates between states that are not necessarily the outcome of some process, and states that arise from some preceding process or activity. Consider the following sentences:

<i>This is our new car. It’s fantastic.</i>
<i>Este/Éste es nuestro coche nuevo. Es fantástico</i> (not a ‘result’, so not <i>quedar(se)</i> )
<i>They’re going to auction a painting by Velázquez. It’s magnificent</i> (not a result, so not <i>quedar(se)</i> )
<i>Van a subastar un cuadro de Velázquez. Es magnífico</i>
<i>We’ve washed the car and it looks/is fantastic</i>
<i>Hemos lavado el coche y ha quedado fantástico</i> (as a result)
<i>They’ve restored this painting by Velázquez. It looks magnificent</i>
<i>Han restaurado este cuadro de Velázquez. Ha quedado magnífico</i> (as a result)

This use of *quedar(se)* to indicate the result of some process or activity is common in passive sentences:

<i>Con este aguacero va a quedar hecho una sopa</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue)	With this downpour you’ll end up soaked to the skin (lit. ‘turned into a soup’)
<i>Las casas (se) quedaron desprovistas de luz</i>	The houses were left without light



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<i>Nos hemos quedado hechos un lío</i>	We've got into a real mess
<i>Queda dicho al principio de este párrafo que . . .</i>	It was stated at the beginning of this
(Academy, Esbozo . . .)	paragraph that . . .

The use of *quedar(se)* with adjectives and participles is further discussed at 30.7.33.

### (b) *Resultar*

This verb is commonly used in Spanish to add a nuance that English tends to ignore. It roughly means 'to turn out to be', i.e. it suggests that the result is surprising or not predicted. Compare these sentences:

<i>Las pelotas de golf son redondas (expected)</i>	Golf balls are round
<i>Me esperaba lo peor, pero la fiesta resultó ser un éxito (unexpected)</i>	I was expecting the worst, but the party was/turned out to be a success

*Resultar* would sound strange in the first sentence but is normal in the second. *Resultar* is therefore much used to form passive sentences involving unforeseen outcomes. For more on *resultar* compared with *ser* see 14.6.3 and 31.3.7.

### (c) *Verse*

*Verse* is quite often used with a participle in formal styles, even with non-living subjects, and especially in the phrases *verse afectado* 'to be affected' and *verse obligado* 'to be obliged':

<i>Mis ingresos eran reducidos, ya que se veían afectados por la piratería informática</i> (letter, <i>El País</i> , Sp.)	My earnings were low because they were affected by software piracy
<i>Se veía arrinconada en medio de una familia hostil</i> (ES, Mex.)	She was trapped in the middle of an unfriendly family
<i>Me veo obligado a denunciarte</i>	I am obliged to report you

### (d) *Venir*

Use of *venir* also emphasizes that a condition has arisen from some previous event. It is confined to formal styles:

<i>. . . como viene dicho en el párrafo anterior . . .</i>	. . . as was stated in the previous paragraph
<i>En el caso de producirse omisiones y errores en la guía, la Compañía Telefónica vendrá obligada a corregirlos</i> (Spanish phone book)	If omissions or error should appear in the directory, the Telephone Company will be obliged to correct them
<i>Todas estas condiciones han complicado su estado de salud, que ya venía afectado desde su traslado</i> (Monumental, Col.)	All these conditions have caused complications for the state of its [the lion's] health, which was already affected since its transfer [to the zoo]

## 32.2.7 Passive with *ser* or a *se* construction?

Learners often have to choose between the passive with *ser* and one of the *se* constructions described at 32.4–6, a choice that arises more often in speech since the passive with *ser* is generally more typical of written Spanish.

The passive with *ser* seems to be used in news reports or other impersonal styles more than the 'special' construction *se + a + human direct object* described at 32.5: *varias personas fueron*

*rescatadas* is probably more usual in newspapers than *se rescató a varias personas* ‘several people were rescued’. It seems that this is due to the fact that the passive with *ser* tends to be less impersonal than passive *se*, i.e. it ascribes an action to some named or unnamed agent whereas constructions with *se* may suggest that anyone might do the same; in other words, the passive with *se* tends to be generalizing in meaning. Compare *las patatas se fríen en aceite de oliva* ‘(the) potatoes are fried in oil’ (a typical action: the sentence could appear in a cookery book) and *las patas habían sido fritas en margarina* ‘the potatoes had been fried in margarine (by someone or other)’, which is not usual. Compare also *se aplaudió mucho a las niñas* ‘the girls were applauded warmly’ but *las niñas fueron asesinadas* ‘the girls were murdered’, a repugnant action that we want to ascribe to some specific though unnamed individual. *En Suecia se habla sueco* ‘Swedish is spoken in Sweden’ is normal since the identity of the speakers is too obvious to deserve mention; *el sueco es hablado en Suecia* sounds odd because it focuses on the action of speaking rather than on *what* is spoken and therefore suggests that one can do other things with Swedish as well as speak it.

The fact that, in the view of most grammarians, *por* should not be used with passive *se* may account for the frequent use in written language of the passive with *ser*: *varias investigaciones fueron realizadas por la policía* is the passive version of *la policía realizó varias investigaciones* ‘the police carried out several investigations’, not *\*se realizaron varias investigaciones por la policía*, which is generally considered incorrect. See 32.4.1 note 1.

## 32.3 General remarks about passive and impersonal *se*

There are three types of passive and impersonal construction that use *se*:

(a) **The *pasiva refleja* or ‘passive *se*’** (32.4). This is found only with transitive verbs in the third person, singular or plural: *se vendió la casa* ‘the house was sold’, *se debatieron varios problemas* ‘several problems were discussed’.

(b) **The ‘mixed’ or ‘special’ construction** *se* + a transitive verb + *a* + direct object: see 32.5. The verb is always singular and third-person: *se detuvo a tres narcotraficantes* ‘three drug-dealers were arrested’, *se llama a los perros con un silbido* ‘dogs are called by whistling’.

(c) ***Se impersonal* or ‘impersonal *se*’** (32.6). This is found with intransitive verbs, e.g. *se vive mejor aquí* ‘one lives better here’, and also with ‘objectless’ transitive verbs, as in *en este país se come mucho* ‘people eat a lot in this country’ (no mention of what they eat).

## 32.4 Passive *se* (*pasiva refleja*)

### 32.4.1 Basic rules

Passive *se/la pasiva refleja* can only be used with third-person transitive verbs, and usually only with non-living nouns and pronouns so as to avoid clashes of meaning with other uses of *se* (see 32.5 for discussion). It is normally equivalent in meaning to the passive with *ser*, but it is much more common in ordinary speech, more ‘impersonal’ than the passive with *ser* (32.2.7) and it should not be used when the agent of the action is mentioned: see note 1:

*Los cangrejos se cuecen en vino blanco*  
(recipe, Sp.)

*Se me contó un cuento chino*

*El vino se le sirvió en copas de cristal*  
(MVM, Sp.)

The crabs are boiled in white wine

I was told a tall story (lit. ‘Chinese story’)

The wine was served to him in crystal  
glasses

*Nunca se oyeron y leyeron en el Perú tantas definiciones de la libertad de información* (MVLL, Pe.)

*Ayer hasta se veían los volcanes* (ES, Mex., dialogue)

*Se reparan relojes*

*Estos errores podrían deberse a . . .*

*Se acababan de promulgar varias leyes*

*Que se sepa*

*Eso no se hace*

*Se dice que va a dimitir* (see note 8)

Never were there heard and read in Peru so many definitions of freedom of information

Yesterday you could even see the volcanoes

Watches mended

These errors could be due to . . .

Several laws had just been published

As far as is known

That sort of thing isn't done

They say / It's said that (s)he's going to resign

**(1) Important:** as was mentioned earlier, passive *se* should not be followed by *por* and the agent of the action: *\*la decisión se tomó por el presidente* is usually considered bad Spanish (outside legal language) for *la decisión fue tomada por el presidente* 'the decision was taken by the President'. However, it is seen and heard, e.g. *?la decisión de irnos se tomó conjuntamente y por personas de la misma línea política* 'the decision to leave was taken jointly and by persons sharing the same political line', *?el terrorismo no debe atacarse aisladamente por las naciones que lo padecen* (Felipe González in *El País*, Sp.) 'terrorism must not be combated individually by those nations that suffer from it'.

One hesitates to declare the construction to be always 'incorrect'. It was common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the *GDLE* notes contexts in which it is more acceptable than in others, although it says that the phenomenon is uncommon (*GDLE* 26.3.3). The *GDLE* 26.1.1.2, notes that *\*se pasaron los trabajos a ordenador por Sandra* 'the work was typed into the computer by Sandra' is ungrammatical. The *NGLE* 41.11h considers such a sentence to be 'very awkward' (*muy forzado*)

**(2) Important:** as far as form is concerned there is no difference between a third-person passive *se* construction and reflexive or reciprocal *se*. Common sense tells us that *los cangrejos se cuecen en vino blanco* does not mean 'the crabs cook themselves (or 'one another') in white wine'.

**(3) Important:** passive *se* must not be confused with intransitive *se*, described at 30.4.1. The *GDLE*, 26.2.1.1, gives two examples in which context alone differentiates the meaning of *se*: *en verano los bosques se queman fácilmente* 'in summer the forests burn easily' (intransitive) and *se quemaron los bosques para acabar con la plaga* 'the forests were burnt to get rid of the infestation' (passive *se*). The latter implies an intentional action.

**(4)** For a comparison of passive *se* construction with the passive with *ser* – *el problema se solucionó/ el problema fue solucionado* 'the problem was solved' – see 32.2.7.

**(5)** *Vendieron los libros* 'they sold the books' can be transformed into the sentence *se vendieron* 'they were sold' or *fueron vendidos*, but not (at least in Spain nor, generally, in careful language) into *se los vendió*. See 32.4.2 and 32.5.2 for discussion.

**(6)** Passive *se* may be used to form a passive imperative useful for impersonal footnotes and written instructions: *no se crea que* 'let it not be believed that . . . / do not think that . . .', *téngase presente que* 'let it be borne in mind that . . . / bear in mind that . . .', *véanse las páginas 10 y 11* 'see pages 10 and 11'. See 21.8.

**(7)** French passive *se*, as in *cela ne se dit pas* (= *eso no se dice* 'that isn't said' / 'one doesn't say that') is more restricted in use and tends to be reserved for timeless statements.

**(8)** The old-fashioned form *dícese que* 'it is said that' is no doubt the origin of a colloquial form, very widespread in Latin America in various guises, e.g. *isque, dizque*. It is often sarcastic: *a los*

*seis años de andar dizque* (Sp. *según dicen*) *gobernando se puso enfermo* (AM, Mex.) ‘after six years of so-called “governing” he fell ill’, *Berenice, la dizque estrella del espectáculo* (ES, Mex., dialogue) ‘Berenice, the so-called star of the show’.

### 32.4.2 Agreement of the verb with passive *se*

In theory, any verb used with *se* must agree with the logical subject. This applies to all constructions involving reflexive, reciprocal and passive *se*. Compare *los niños se están lavando* (reflexive) ‘the children are washing’ or ‘... are washing one another’ and *las tuercas se quitan con llave, no con martillo* (passive *se*) ‘bolts are removed with a spanner/US wrench, not with a hammer’. Further examples of the agreement of the verb with passive *se*:

<i>Se mezclan en la batidora los tomates sin pepitas y sin piel</i>	The tomatoes, without skin and pips, are mixed in the liquidizer
<i>Se enviaron los hombres y las armas necesarios para concluirlo (i.e. la lucha: FC, Cu.)</i>	The men and weapons necessary to finish it [the fight] were sent
<i>Son maravillas que se ven una sola vez en la vida</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue)	They’re marvels that are only seen once in a lifetime

In constructions involving passive *se*, the rules of agreement are always respected when a plural noun comes before the verb: *los libros se vendían a diez dólares* ‘the books were being sold for ten dollars’, never \**los libros se vendía a diez dólares*.

However, when the verb comes before a plural noun, familiar and popular language sometimes breaks the rules of agreement: ?*se compra objetos usados* ‘used articles bought’ for *se compran objetos usados*. This phenomenon raises problems for an impartial grammarian, since many speakers consider ?*se compra objetos* ... to be incorrect and others, including a few grammarians, accept it on the grounds that this is really an impersonal *se* construction. Plural agreement seems overwhelmingly to be the norm on both continents (see DeMello 1995, 1, for a survey) and foreigners should observe it.

The NGLE 41.12d notes that whereas a singular verb in such cases is generally avoided in Spain, it is accepted in the Andes, Chile and the River Plate region, and it is not uncommon elsewhere in Latin America outside Mexico. Furthermore, the NGLE 41.12l concedes that if the implied subject of a sentence is human and the object non-living, both constructions can be possible. It quotes *se firmó/se firmaron los acuerdos* ‘the agreements were signed’. However, ‘in cases of doubt’, the Academy recommends the plural form (NGLE 41.12o), as we do.

Rather arbitrarily, singular agreement is common and allowed in classified advertisements of the sort *se busca dependientes* ‘shop-assistants’/US ‘sales clerks’ sought’, *se necesita camareros* ‘waiters required’.

The following forms may be unacceptable to many speakers:

?Y nunca más se <b>ha</b> tenido noticias de su paradero (Abc, Sp., for <i>se han tenido</i> ...)	And no more news has been received of his whereabouts
?Se necesita agallas para hacer eso (Spanish informant overheard: <i>se necesitan agallas</i> )	You need guts to do that
?Se les <b>dio</b> varios premios (for <i>se les dieron</i> ...)	Several prizes were given to them
?Se vende máquinas de coser usadas (notice in Mexico City)	Used sewing machines for sale

(1) The last example must be exceptional in view of the claim of J.M. Lope Blanch (1991, 12), that Mexican Spanish preserves, 'casi con exclusividad, la construcción pasiva refleja del tipo "se rentan departamentos" (Sp. *se alquilan pisos*) sin dar entrada a la construcción activa impersonal del tipo "se vende botellas", relativamente frecuente en el habla española'.

(2) When passive *se* is followed by the interrogative words *cuánto*, *qué*, *cuál* or *quién* the verb is singular: *se calculó cuántos kilos había* 'it was calculated how many kilos there were', *se averiguó qué existencias quedaban* 'a check was made on what stocks remained', *no se sabe quiénes son* 'it is not known who they are'.

(3) With verbs of perception followed by an infinitive, both singular and plural agreement seem equally acceptable: *se veía(n) caer gotas de agua* 'drops of water could be seen falling'.

(4) The verb *tardar* is a special case. It is always singular in this construction: *se tardó varias horas en llegar a un acuerdo* 'it took several hours to reach an agreement' (lit. 'several hours were taken to reach . . .'). This must not be confused with the Latin-American verb *tardarse* (*tardar* in Spain), mentioned at 30.8.

### 32.4.3 Agreement of passive *se* with auxiliary verbs

Agreement with plural nouns is required with auxiliary verbs (*poder*, *saber*, *tener que*, *haber de*, *querer*, *soler*) when they precede the infinitive of a transitive verb. In this case *se* can be suffixed to the infinitive or it can precede the modal verb:

<i>Se tienen que resolver varios problemas/</i> <i>Tienen que resolverse varios problemas</i>	Several problems must be solved
<i>Se deben limpiar bien antes de cocerlas</i> <i>(or deben limpiarse)</i>	They should be washed well before cooking
<i>. . . cosas que no se quieren hacer / cosas que no</i> <i>quieren hacerse</i>	. . . things one doesn't want to do
<i>¿Se pueden prevenir las várices? (El Comercio,</i> <i>Pe., Sp. usually las varices)</i>	Can varicose veins be prevented?
<i>En Londres por la calle se pueden observar los</i> <i>tipos de personas más extrañas</i> <i>(Cosmopolitan, Sp.)</i>	In London the oddest types of people can be seen in the streets

See 14.3.3–7 for further discussion of the position of pronouns with the infinitive.

(1) Singular agreement with auxiliary verbs followed by an infinitive and a plural object is generally considered to be incorrect, but it is commonly seen and heard, cf. *¿se puede imprimir textos con más rapidez con un procesador de textos (Ordenador Personal, Sp., for se pueden)* 'texts can be printed more rapidly with a word processor', *¿la Ley prohíbe que se pueda transferir fondos de un programa a otro (La Prensa, Pan.)* 'the Law prohibits the transfer of funds from one programme to another' (for *se puedan transferir*).

(2) There is, however, an increasing contrary tendency, criticized by the NGLC 41.11n and other grammars, to pluralize non-modal verbs (e.g. *desear*, *intentar*, *esperar*, *tratar de*, etc.) before an infinitive whose object is plural, cf. *¿se necesitan resolver muchos problemas* 'many problems have to be resolved', *¿cuando se tratan de estudiar los hallazgos de tiempos pasados (Abc, Sp.)* 'when an attempt is made to study the discoveries of the past', *¿y en el Ministerio de Obras Públicas (MOP) también se esperan firmar otros contratos (El Comercio, Ec.)* 'and in the Ministry of Public Works it is also hoped that other contracts will be signed'. These verbs should be singular and foreigners should observe this rule, but use of the plural in this construction is spreading.

## 32.5 *Se* + transitive verb (the 'special' construction)

### 32.5.1 General

Passive *se* as described at 32.4 is usually perfectly clear in meaning if there is no noun in the sentence that could be understood to be the subject, as is usually the case when talking about non-living things: *los platos se lavan* 'the plates are washed' is unlikely to mean 'the plates wash themselves' or 'one another'. However, a problem arises with nouns that refer to creatures – especially people – that can do things to themselves: *se consideraban muy inteligentes* could easily mean 'they considered themselves very intelligent' or '... considered one another very intelligent' as well as 'they were considered very intelligent'.

Spanish has developed a way round this problem by inserting an object pronoun: *se les /los/las consideraba muy inteligentes* 'they were considered to be very intelligent', *se nos criticó* 'we were criticized', etc. If a noun is included in the sentence, the preposition *a* is placed in front of it: *se consideraba muy inteligentes a los alumnos* 'the students were considered to be very intelligent'.

We call this *se* construction the 'special' construction, and three points must be remembered about it:

(a) In the 'special' construction the verb is always singular: \**se les consideraban muy inteligentes* for *se les consideraba* ... is a bad mistake.

(b) In the 'special' construction the word *se* implies an unidentified and usually human agent, in which respect it resembles English 'one', French *on*, German *man*. In other words, one could not say *se mató a dos turistas* for 'two tourists were killed' if they were killed by a falling tree or a bolt of lightning, in which case one would say *murieron dos turistas* or *dos turistas resultaron muertos*.

(c) As stated earlier, the noun can be replaced by an object pronoun: *se me había reconocido* 'I had been recognized', *se les/los/las reconoció* 'they were recognized'.

Examples of the 'special' construction:

*Se persiguió y encarceló a millares de creyentes* (El País, Sp.)  
*Se incitaba a las muchachas a trabajar más que los muchachos*  
*¿Se puede destrozar a una persona de esa manera porque se la ama de esa manera ...?* (ABE, Pe.)  
*No se te paga tan mal, entonces, si puedes comprarte tus revistas* (SV, Ch., dialogue)  
*A pesar de su pobre estado físico, se le convocó al servicio activo* (JV, Mex.)

Thousands of believers were persecuted and jailed  
 The girls were encouraged to work harder than the boys  
 Can one destroy a person that way because one loves them that way?  
 You're not that badly paid if you can afford to buy your magazines  
 Despite his poor physical condition, he was drafted for active military service

(1) **Important:** when a third-person pronoun replaces the noun in this type of sentence, many speakers, including Latin Americans, prefer *le/les* to *lo/la/los/las* despite the fact that the pronouns are the direct object of the verb and may also be feminine: *se le veía nerviosa* 'one could see she was nervous' instead of *se la veía*; but the latter is not incorrect. This is discussed in more detail at 15.6.3.

(2) As was mentioned, the verb must be singular in this construction. \**Se les notaban cansados* is incorrect for *se les notaba cansados* 'one could see they were tired'. See 32.4.3 for sentences like *se pueden ver los árboles desde aquí* 'the trees are visible from here' which is passive *se* and not the 'special' construction.

(3) Before the eighteenth century, *Juan y Antonio se vieron* could also mean 'Juan and Antonio were seen'. Nowadays it is taken to mean 'saw one another' or 'saw themselves', and *se vio a Antonio y a Juan*, or, in written styles, *Antonio y Juan fueron vistos*, would be used for the passive. In modern journalism, passive with *ser* is in fact increasingly preferred to the 'special' construction. See 32.2.7.

### 32.5.2 Difference between the 'special' construction and passive *se*

Foreign students, and, it must be admitted, quite a few native speakers, have difficulty distinguishing between the 'special' construction just described and passive *se*, especially when pronouns replace nouns, as in *se le/la nota feliz* 'one can see she's happy'.

In theory, and also in practice as far as most careful speakers and writers are concerned, passive *se* is used only when the direct object of the equivalent active sentence refers to something non-living, and the 'special' construction is reserved for cases in which passive *se* might be ambiguous because the direct object is an identified human being or an animal. This should be clear from the difference between the following sentences:

<i>A Eugenio d'Ors se lo/le lee poco</i> ('special' construction)	Eugenio d'Ors isn't read much
<i>Los libros de Eugenio d'Ors se leen poco</i> ( <i>se pasivo</i> )	Eugenio d'Ors's books aren't read much
<i>Se lo/le lee poco</i> (refers to a male author: 'special' construction)	He isn't read much/people don't read him much
<i>Se lee poco</i> (refers to a book: passive <i>se</i> )	It isn't read much
<i>Se le/la admira mucho</i> (i.e. a woman: 'special' construction)	She's admired a lot
<i>Se admira mucho</i> (e.g. some non-living thing: passive <i>se</i> )	It's admired a lot
<i>Se las/les criticó duramente</i> (i.e. some women: 'special' construction)	They were strongly criticized
<i>Se criticaron duramente</i> (i.e. some non-living things: passive <i>se</i> )	They were strongly criticized

These examples show that passive *se* constructions cannot contain a direct object pronoun (apart from *se*, which is not always a direct object pronoun). In *se los envió*, *se* cannot be the direct object, which is *los*, so it cannot be passive *se*. So, the sentence must mean one of two things:

- (a) '(S)he sent them to her/him/you (*usted/ustedes*)/them', active sentence in which *se* stands for *le* or *les* by the 'rule of two l's' discussed at 14.9. This is the likely reading.
- (b) or it is an example of the 'special' construction, so it means 'they (human beings) were sent': *se los/les envió*.

But it cannot usually mean 'they were sent' (passive meaning) if 'they' refers to something non-living like 'books': the latter can only be *se enviaron* (or *fueron enviados*). See 32.8 for exceptions.

(1) **Important:** the passive *se* construction is, however, allowed with human beings when the latter are unidentified, as in *se necesitan secretarias* 'secretaries needed', *se ven muchos turistas en la playa* 'a lot of tourists are seen on the beach'. Compare *se ve a los dos alemanes tumbados en la playa* 'you can see the two Germans lying on the beach' (identified or specified persons).

## 32.6 Impersonal *se*

### 32.6.1 General

Spanish also uses *se* with third-person verbs as an equivalent of the English 'one'/'people', French *on*, German *man*. Impersonal *se*, like English 'one' and French *on*, refers to an unidentified human agent. This is demonstrated by the absurdity of *\*es difícil dormir por las noches porque se ladra mucho?* 'it's difficult to sleep at night because one barks a lot' which in both languages could only refer to people, not to dogs.

Impersonal *se* most commonly occurs with intransitive verbs: *se está mejor aquí* 'one's better off here' (French *on est mieux ici*), *se entra por aquí* (French *on entre par ici*) 'one goes in this way', etc. But impersonal *se* can also be used with transitive verbs, as in *en este país se lee poco* 'in this country people don't read much' – a construction easily confused with passive *se*. See 32.6.3 for more on this point.

### 32.6.2 Impersonal *se* with intransitive verbs

The following examples show impersonal *se* used with intransitive verbs. The verb is always singular. In some cases, explained in note 3, *uno* could be used instead of *se*:

<i>No se puede entrar</i>	It is impossible to enter/No entry
<i>Siempre se vuelve a los sitios a los que se pertenece</i> (AG, Sp., dialogue; or <i>uno vuelve . . . uno pertenece</i> )	One always returns to the places one belongs to
<i>O se va a referéndum, o habrá guerra civil</i>	Either a referendum is held, or there will be a civil war
<i>¿Quién puede pensar en nada cuando se está rodeado de idiotas?</i> (CS, Mex., dialogue)	Who can think of anything when one's surrounded by idiots?
<i>. . . que en vez de ser pobre, se es rico; que en vez de ser nadie, se es alguien . . .</i> (SV, Ch., dialogue; or <i>uno es rico, . . . uno es alguien</i> )	. . . that instead of being poor, one's rich, that instead of being nobody, one's somebody
<i>Pareció llegarse a un acuerdo tácito para descansar</i> (JC, Arg.)	It appeared that a tacit agreement was reached to get some rest
<i>Se cruza si el semáforo está en verde y se espera si está en rojo</i> (El País, Sp.)	One crosses if the lights are green and one waits if they are red

(1) **Important:** impersonal *se* cannot be used with a verb that already has *se* attached to it. One cannot say *\*se se esfuerza mucho* for 'people make a great effort': *la gente se esfuerza mucho* or *uno/una se esfuerza mucho*. See 30.11.

(2) As with most sentences involving *se*, common sense and context usually clarify the meaning. Thus *se iba al teatro* may mean '(s)he was going to the theatre' (*irse* is also a pronominal verb meaning 'to go away') or 'people used to go to the theatre' (impersonal *se*).

(3) As was mentioned, in some cases *uno* can be used instead of impersonal *se*. This is possible when *se* includes the speaker, as in *nunca escuchaba cuando se le hablaba/cuando uno le hablaba* '(s)he never listened when one spoke to him/her/when (s)he was spoken to'. But when the speaker excludes him/herself, *uno* is not possible, as in *este/éste es un país donde se fuma y se bebe* (or *donde fuman y beben*) *mucho* 'this is a country where people smoke and drink a lot'.



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(4) Impersonal *se* may even appear in combination with the passive with *ser*, although this is rare: *no se debe hablar más que con personas a las que se ha sido ya presentado* ‘one should only talk to people one has been introduced to’ (CRG, Sp., dialogue).

(5) The *se* in this construction can refer to males or females: *si se está embarazada hay que dejar de fumar* ‘if one is pregnant one must stop smoking’. This gender agreement with *se* suggests that the latter in such sentences in fact functions as a subject pronoun and not as a direct or indirect object.

(6) The use of *se* with intransitive verbs has no counterpart in French, which uses *on*.

### 32.6.3 Impersonal *se* with transitive verbs

Impersonal *se* can also be used with transitive verbs, in which case the verb is always singular and no direct object appears:

*En España se come mucho*

People eat a lot in Spain (in general;  
does not refer to any specific food)

*Sí, se habla, se habla . . .*

Yes, people talk and talk . . .

*Es difícil vender periódicos en un país donde  
se lee poco (cf. se leen poco, passive se:  
‘they aren’t read much’)*

It’s difficult to sell newspapers in a  
country where people don’t read much

*Se hablaba de todo menos de asuntos laborales  
(ES, Mex.)*

Everything was talked about except  
work matters

*Se critica mucho pero se alaba poco*

People criticize a lot but don’t praise much

(1) **Important:** students – and quite a few native speakers – find it difficult to distinguish between this construction and passive *se*. The difference depends on whether a noun underlies the sentence. If it does, then the construction is passive *se*; if not, it is impersonal *se*. Thus, if we are talking about garlic, the sentence *en España se come mucho* is taken to mean ‘a lot of it is eaten in Spain’ (passive *se*, French *on en mange beaucoup*). If the conversation is simply about quantities eaten in general, the same sentence means ‘people eat a lot in Spain’ (no underlying noun, French *on mange beaucoup*) and the *se* is impersonal *se*.

(2) If a direct object pronoun appears in an impersonal *se* construction, it can usually refer only to a human being: *se le considera útil* ‘(s)he is considered useful/you’re considered useful’, but not ‘it is considered useful’, which is *se considera útil* (passive *se*): see 32.5.2 for more on this controversial point.

## 32.7 Other impersonal constructions

### 32.7.1 *Uno/una* as a pronoun

This is similar to the English ‘one’ and it can be a modest way of saying ‘I’ or ‘we’. A woman referring to herself and/or other females uses *una*, but *uno* if humankind in general is intended. Its object forms are *lo/la/le*. For many Latin Americans *uno* is the only form used, even by women, but the following examples show that this is not universal. *Uno/una* is often interchangeable with impersonal *se*:

*Bueno, si no le dicen a una cómo hay que  
hacerlo . . . (woman speaking)*

Well, if they don’t tell one how to do it

*¿Era eso el socialismo, hacer por obligación  
moral todo lo que uno no quiere hacer?  
(EP, Mex.)*

Was that socialism – doing out of moral  
obligation everything one doesn’t want  
to do?

*En ese tiempo una no hablaba de eso con las amigas* (MVL, Pe., dialogue, woman speaking; or *no se hablaba de eso*)  
*Con tal de salirse con la suya, la llevan a una a la tumba* (AA, Cu., dialogue; mother complaining about her children)

In those days one didn't talk about those things with one's female friends

As long as they get their own way, they'll put one in one's grave

(1) Colloquially *uno/una* may also mean 'someone'. See 10.3 note 4.

### 32.7.2 Impersonal *tú*

The second-person singular is often used impersonally, much the same as English 'you'. *Uno* or *se* may be preferred when one is on formal terms with the hearer:

*Yo nunca voy allí porque te cobran más que en otra parte* (le cobran a uno más)  
*Es increíble, si lo piensas* (si uno lo piensa)  
*Si eres niño no tienes derecho a que te gusten las mujeres* (JP, Mex., dialogue)  
*Es que no se tiene conciencia de que pasa el tiempo cuando eres joven* (Queen Sofía in *El País*, Sp. Mixed pronouns, common in informal styles)

I never go there because they charge you more than elsewhere  
 It's incredible if you think of it  
 If you're (i.e. 'one is') a child you've got no right to like women  
 It's that one isn't conscious of time passing when you're young

### 32.7.3 Impersonal third-person plural

As in English, the third-person plural is constantly used impersonally when the speaker does not include him/herself or the hearer in the reference:

*Dicen que las zanahorias son buenas para los ojos* (= *se dice que* . . .)  
*Parece que hablan más despacio en Estados Unidos que en Inglaterra* (= *que se habla*)  
*¿Le parece normal que hablen de usted así . . .?* (AC, Mex., dialogue)

They say carrots are good for the eyes  
 It seems that they speak more slowly in the United States than in England  
 Do you think it's normal for people to talk about you like that?

## Appendix to Chapter 32

### 32.8 The 'special' construction with non-living direct objects: further remarks

It was stated at 32.5.2 that the 'special' construction *se* + transitive verb – *se admiraba al autor/se le admiraba* 'the author was admired/he was admired' – is generally reserved for cases in which the direct object refers to an identified human being or, less commonly, to an animal: normally *se admiraba* can refer only to lifeless things 'it was admired' – unless we read it as a reflexive: '(s)he admired himself/herself'.

But the 'special construction' may appear with a non-living direct object to remove any possibility of understanding a pronominal verb form as a passive *se* or some other type of *se* construction. Thus *los metales blandos se derriten con facilidad* means 'soft metals melt easily', but *se derrite los*

*metales blandos con facilidad* means ‘soft metals are easily melted’ – impersonal *se* (‘special’ construction), because *se derriten* is ambiguous. Likewise one might say *se quemó los libros* ‘the books were burnt’ (intentional) to avoid the ambiguity of *se quemaron los libros* ‘the books burnt’. The example with *derretirse*, but not the explanation, is inspired by GDLE 23.3.2.3.

Further examples: *hay que cruzar el río Tajo, y se le cruza por el puente llamado del Cardenal* (Miguel de Unamuno, Sp.) ‘one has to cross the river Tagus, and one crosses it over the bridge called the Cardinal’s Bridge’; *en la obra de la santa de Avila se ve esas dulces huertas interiores de esta tierra* (ibid.) ‘in the work of the saint of Avila [Teresa] one can see those gentle interior gardens typical of this land’; *su extensión [i.e. de esta pauta] es muy reducida, pues se la ha señalado para el oeste de Panamá* (GDLE, p. 1411) ‘its scope [i.e. of this grammatical tendency] is very limited, since it has been noted in the west of Panama’; *el ascensor subía por dentro de las barandillas y se le oía chirriar desde todas las habitaciones de la casa* (CMG, Sp.) ‘the lift went up on the inside of the banisters, and one could hear it squeaking from every room in the house’. Presumably the nature of the verbs in the preceding paragraph persuaded the writers against *se cruza*, which could mean ‘crosses over itself’, *se ven*, which in a writer like Unamuno addicted to personification could mean ‘see themselves’, *se ha señalado* which can mean ‘has stood out’; and *se oía chirriar* might be read as ‘one could hear squeaking’ rather than ‘one could hear it squeak’. However, when there is no possibility of ambiguity, the ‘special’ construction with lifeless direct objects may sound incorrect: ?*se publicó tres novelas suyas en 2016* for *se publicaron tres novelas suyas en 2016* ‘three of his/her novels were published in 2016’ and ?*se las publicó en 2016* for *se publicaron en 2016* ‘they were published in 2016’ are unacceptable for many Spanish-speakers.

## 32.9 Verbs that do not allow the passive with *ser*

These are more numerous than in English, which also has constraints on the use of the passive with ‘to be’, e.g. ‘the window was broken by Jill’ but not \*‘the stairs were descended by Jill’ and not \*‘his watch was lost by Tom’ as the passive of ‘Tom lost his [own] watch’. Only familiarity with the language will eliminate such malformations as \**fueron esperados por sus padres* ‘they were expected by their parents’, \**fue permitido hacerlo* ‘he was allowed to do it’, both of them sentences which should be expressed in the active form or, in the second example, by impersonal *se*: *se le permitió hacerlo* (but *le fue permitido hacerlo* is possible).

Likewise, one can say *la casa fue destruida por una bomba* ‘the house was destroyed by a bomb’, but not \**la ventana fue rota por una piedra* ‘the window was broken by a stone’, which, curiously, is difficult to translate into Spanish: *esta ventana la han roto de una pedrada*. Similarly one does not normally say ?\**el cable fue cortado por un cuchillo* ‘the cable was cut by a knife’ for . . . *fue cortado con un cuchillo*.

The GDLE’s explanation, 26.3.12, is that bombing is ‘intentional’ and a stone has no ‘intention’. But where is the ‘intention’ in *el cráter fue producido por un meteoro* ‘the crater was produced by a meteor’? The correct explanation seems to be that when the noun clearly refers to the instrument with which some person performed an action (in these cases ‘stone’, ‘knife’) the passive construction is avoided.

Sometimes the passive is wrong with a personal pronoun, but acceptable with other types of agent: *él era admirado por todos* ‘he was admired by everybody’, but not ?*él era admirado por mí* ‘he was admired by me’ (*yo lo/le admiraba*).

It would be beyond the scope of this grammar to establish a comprehensive list of verbs which do not allow the passive with *ser*. As a general rule it seems that verbs commonly used in everyday conversation are less likely to appear in the passive form than verbs usually associated with formal or written language.

# 33 *Ser* and *estar*

The main topics discussed here are:

- The uses of *ser* (Section 33.2)
- The uses of *estar* (Section 33.3)
- When *ser* and *estar* are more or less interchangeable (Section 33.4)
- *Estar* used to mean 'seem', 'taste', etc. (Section 33.4.3)
- *Ser* or *estar* used to change the meaning of adjectives (Section 33.4.4)

For the conjugation of *ser* see 16.11.45 and of *estar* see 16.11.21.

## 33.1 General

*Ser* and *estar* both translate the English 'to be', but the difference between the two Spanish verbs is fundamental and sometimes subtle.

Basically *ser* is used to answer questions about *who* or *what* something or someone is, whereas *estar* answers questions about *where*, *how* or in *what condition* someone or something is: *soy español*, *pero estoy en Londres* 'I'm Spanish, but I'm in London'; *es callado* 'he's the quiet type'; *está callado* 'he's keeping silent (at the moment)'; *el hierro es un elemento* 'iron is an element', *el hierro está oxidado* 'the iron is rusty'.

It is misleading to say that *ser* indicates permanent features and *estar* temporary conditions: thus *está muerto* 'he/it is dead' is a condition or state, however permanent. A woman can change her hair colour and still say *antes era morena pero ahora soy rubia* 'I was a brunette before, but now I'm a blonde' because each colour is considered to be a typical feature, not a 'state' that she is in.

*Ser* is also sometimes used with a few adjectives that indicate what can be thought of as states or conditions: see 33.2.3.

Some adjectives may be used with either *ser* or *estar* with hardly any significant change of meaning. See 33.4.1.

*Estar* before a noun phrase can normally only denote location: compare *¿es el jefe?* 'is (s)he/are you the boss?' with *¿está el jefe?* 'is the boss in?'

Learners constantly forget that *ser* must be used for the location of events as opposed to people or things: *¿dónde es la fiesta?* 'where's the party?', but *¿dónde está el sacacorchos?* 'where's the corkscrew?'. See 33.2.5.

*Ser* is used to form the 'dynamic' passive *la puerta fue abierta* 'the door was opened' (an action). *Estar* can form what the grammarians call the *pasiva resultativa* or *pasiva de resultado*: *la puerta estaba abierta* 'the door was open' (a state or result, not an action); see 32.2.5.

*Estar* is used for the continuous aspect of verbs: *está hablando* 'he's talking'; see Chapter 19.

Both *ser* and *estar* are often echoed or 'resumed' by *lo*, as in —*Ana parece sueca*—. *Lo es* "'Ana looks Swedish." "She is"". See 8.4.2.

The relationship between *ser* and *estar* has evolved over the centuries, so readers may find exceptions to the following rules in pre-eighteenth-century texts.

## 33.2 Uses of *ser*

### 33.2.1 In sentences of the type A = B

The most common use of *ser* is to link elements in statements of the type 'A = B', where A and B are nouns or pronouns:

<i>París es la capital de Francia</i>	Paris is the capital of France
<i>Era médico/abogado/bibliotecario</i>	He was a doctor/lawyer/librarian
<i>Es la una/Son las doce</i>	It's one o'clock/twelve o'clock
<i>Ha sido un año/verano frío</i>	It's been a cold year/summer
<i>Otro gran problema fue la cuestión de los braceros (JA, Mex.).</i>	Another major problem was the issue of the seasonal farm labourers
<i>Una conexión de banda ancha es la solución</i>	A broadband connection is the solution
<i>Son ellos/ellas</i>	It's them

**(1) Important:** *estar* cannot appear before nouns or pronouns unless the latter are its subject: *\*yo estoy maestro* is emphatically not Spanish for 'I'm a schoolteacher': *soy maestro*. *Está Miguel* means 'Miguel is in/at home/there' (location); it *never* means 'he is Miguel': *es Miguel*.

Exceptions to this rule are rare and include *estar pez*, e.g. *estoy pez en historia* 'I'm a complete duncie in history' and *estar mosca* 'to be needled/irritated' (both perhaps used colloquially in Spain only?), *está un día que da gusto salir a la calle* 'it's one of those days when you like going out into the streets'.

The NGLE 37.9a notes that in Mexico one hears sentences like *estaba jefe* '(s)he was temporarily acting as boss', but this seems to be unknown or rare elsewhere and it is not heard in Spain.

**(2) Important:** English changes verb forms between sentences like 'you **are** the only person I love' and 'the only person I love **is** you'. Spanish does not: *tú eres la única persona a la que quiero* > *la única persona a la que quiero eres tú*. Similarly one says *el jefe soy yo* 'I'm the boss'; also *soy yo* 'it's me', *eres tú* 'it's you', never *\*es yo*, *\*es tú*.

### 33.2.2 *Ser* with adjectives

*Ser* is used with adjectives or adjectival phrases which indicate identity or nature, i.e. physical, moral and mental characteristics, as opposed to conditions or states:

<i>—¿Cómo eres? —Soy alto, moreno y delgado</i>	'What are you like?' 'I'm tall, dark and slim'
<i>Esa chaqueta es bien bonita</i>	That jacket is very nice
<i>Así soy de testarudo (GCI, Cu., dialogue)</i>	That's how stubborn I am
<i>Uno de ellos será bueno y el otro malvado</i>	One of them will be nice and the other one
<i>(JV, Mex., dialogue)</i>	nasty

**(1) Hacer** is used in statements about the weather that involve certain nouns. One uses *tener frío/calor* for sensations: compare *tiene frío* '(s)he feels cold' and *es muy frío* 'he is very cold' (i.e. emotionless).

### 33.2.3 *Ser* with certain adjectives apparently denoting states

*Ser* is normally used with *pobre* 'poor', *feliz* 'happy', *desgraciado* 'unhappy', *inocente* 'innocent', *culpable* 'guilty', *consciente* 'aware', despite the fact that they may be thought of as conditions or states, and sometimes temporary ones as well:

<i>Ahora que el precio del petróleo ha bajado, este país es pobre</i>	Now that the price of (crude) oil has dropped, this country is poor
<i>El acusado dijo que era inocente/culpable</i>	The accused said he was innocent/guilty
<i>Soy consciente de mis limitaciones</i>	I'm conscious/aware of my limitations
<i>Pocas veces fue tan feliz como en las horas que precedieron a la entrevista (ES, Arg.)</i>	He was seldom so happy as during the hours before the interview
<i>Ella decía ser más o menos feliz (JV, Mex., dialogue)</i>	She said she was more or less happy
<i>—Soy tan desgraciada— me dijo (GCI, Cu., dialogue)</i>	'I'm so unhappy,' she told me

(1) *Ser feliz/infeliz* 'to be happy/unhappy' is the traditional form except in the phrase *estoy feliz y contento* 'I'm happy and satisfied'. However, Latin Americans frequently use *estar* with *feliz*: *estaban tan felices que me dieron envidia* (AM, Mex., dialogue) 'they were so happy that they filled me with envy', *acaban de ganar las elecciones y están felices* (ABE, Pe., dialogue) 'they've just won the elections and they're happy'. This use of *estar* with *feliz* is spreading in Spain, cf. *en la academia militar este niño de mamá no estaba muy feliz* (RM, Sp.) 'in the Military Academy this mother's boy was not very happy'. *Contento* always takes *estar*.

(2) *Estar rico* generally means 'to be tasty'/'to taste nice' in Spain (see 33.4.4), but not necessarily in Latin America: *Andrés acompañó al padre José que estaba riquísimo y lo oyó jurar por la Virgen de Covadonga que no tenía un centavo* (AM, Mex.) 'Andrés accompanied Father José, who was extremely rich, and he heard him swear by the Virgin of Covadonga that he didn't have a centavo'.

(3) European Spanish differentiates *ser consciente (de)* 'to be aware/conscious of' and *estar consciente* 'to be conscious' (i.e. awake). In Latin America, the distinction is not always made: *quienes no están conscientes de su libertad no son libres* 'those who are not aware of their freedom are not free' (EP, Mex., dialogue; but in the same novel *tú eres muy consciente . . .* 'you're clearly aware . . .').

(4) *Está claro* 'it's clear/obvious' is usual in Spain, but *es claro* is common in Latin America: *es claro que, cuando eso acaba, debe quedarle a uno un sentimiento de dignidad* (MB, Ur., dialogue) 'it's obvious that when that ends one must be left with a feeling of dignity'.

### 33.2.4 *Ser de*

*Ser* can be followed by *de* + noun or by *de* + *un* + adjective to denote identity, nature, origin or the material something is made of: *soy de La Paz* 'I come from La Paz', *es de mármol* 'it's made of marble'. See 38.8.3–4.

(1) *Estar de . . .* has other uses: see 33.3.3.

### 33.2.5 *Ser* of events

If 'to be' means 'to take place' or 'to happen' it must be translated by *ser*:

<i>La fiesta es/se celebra en su casa</i>	The party is at his/her place
<i>Hay un incendio en el edificio pero no sé en qué piso es</i>	There's a fire in the building but I don't know which floor it's on

*¿Dónde es la manifestación?*  
*El encuentro fue en el Hotel Washington*  
 (MSQ, Arg.)  
*El entierro sería a las cinco* (GGM, Col.)  
 —*¿Dónde fue?* —*En su casa.* (GZ, Mex.,  
 dialogue)

Where is the demonstration?  
 The meeting was in the Washington Hotel  
  
 The funeral was to be at five o'clock  
 'Where did it happen? 'In his house'

(1) Use of *estar* would imply an object or person. Compare *¿dónde es la conferencia?* 'where's the lecture (being held)?' and *¿dónde está la conferencia?* 'where's the lecture?' (i.e. the lecture notes or typescript). Note also *el reloj es/va encima del aparador* 'the clock belongs on top of the sideboard', as opposed to ... *está* ... 'is on ...'.

### 33.3 Uses of *estar*

#### 33.3.1 *Estar* used to describe states as opposed to identity or nature

*Estar* is used with adjectives and adjectival phrases that indicate mood, physical condition, temporary physical appearance or other non-characteristic features. Note the difference between *es guapa* 'she's good-looking' and *está guapa* 'she's looking good/attractive', *eres moreno* 'you have dark skin' and *estás moreno* 'you're sun-tanned/you've got brown'. *Estar* is much used to indicate a change of state, e.g. when someone's appearance or condition has changed since last meeting them:

*Está más bien triste/contenta*  
*Hoy no estoy muy católico*  
  
*El destino no está predeterminado por*  
*nada* (CSG, Mex., dialogue)  
*El agua que se añade tiene que estar caliente*  
*Está parado desde febrero*  
*Estuvo callado todo el tiempo*  
*Pero ¡qué alto estás!*  
 —*Estás muy española hoy*—. *Claro, es*  
*que soy española*

(S)he's rather sad/pleased  
 I don't feel too great today (lit. 'I'm  
 not feeling too Catholic')  
 Fate isn't predetermined by anything  
  
 The water to be added has to be hot  
 He's been out of work since February  
 He was silent all the time  
 Wow, you've grown tall!  
 'You're looking very Spanish today'.  
 'Obviously. I *am* Spanish'.

(1) *Ser hecho de* for *estar hecho de* sounds poetic or archaic: *¡y cuán frágil el barro de que somos hechos!* (R. del Valle-Inclán, Sp., 1890s) 'and how frail the clay of which we are made!'

(2) *Estar caliente* means 'to be hot' when applied to lifeless things like coffee, metals, but 'to be sexually excited' when applied to humans. 'I feel hot/cold' is *tengo calor/frío*.

#### 33.3.2 *Estar* to indicate location

*Estar* is used to say *where* something is, but *ser* must be used for the location of events, as explained at 33.2.5.

*Sitges está en Cataluña*  
*Si buscan a mi hijo no está* (EM, Mex.  
 dialogue)  
*Está encima de todo*  
*Yo soy el que está ahí* (LS, Sp., dialogue)

Sitges is in Catalonia  
 If you're looking for my son, he's not at home  
  
 It's on top of everything  
 I'm the one who's on the spot (i.e.  
 'there'/'available')

(1) With nouns that are permanent fixtures or features there is a colloquial tendency to use *ser*:

<i>¿Dónde es la casa de tu amigo?</i>	Where's your friend's house?
<i>Aquí era la plaza de las Carretas</i> (JLB, Arg., dialogue)	This is where Carretas Square used to be
— <i>¿Dónde es Puebla?</i> — <i>preguntó Eusebio</i> (SG, Mex., dialogue)	'Where is Puebla?' Eusebio asked

*Estar* would also be correct in the previous three examples. *Ser* would be impossible for a portable or moveable item, as in *tu portátil/laptop está en el armario* 'your laptop is in the cupboard/closet'.

### 33.3.3 *Estar de*

*Estar de* + adjective or noun can be used to indicate mood, temporary employment or situation:

<i>Está de buen/mal humor</i>	(S)he's in a good/bad mood
<i>Cuenta la razón por la que estuvo de mesero y auxiliar de cocina</i> (El Heraldo, Col.)	He tells why he worked as a waiter and kitchen help
( <i>mesero</i> = <i>camarero</i> in Spain)	
<i>Están de veraneo</i>	They're taking their summer vacation
<i>A las tres necesitamos estar de regreso en la oficina</i> (EP, Mex., dialogue)	We need to be back at the office by three
<i>Estás de un guapo subido/de un antipático/de broma/de buen humor . . .</i>	You're looking really good /You're in a really bad mood/joking/in a good mood

### 33.3.4 *Estar con*

*Estar* followed by *con* + noun:

<i>Estoy en cama con gripe</i> (Revista Uno, Arg.)	I'm in bed with the flu
<i>¿Puedo tomar helados cuando estoy con tos o resfriado?</i> (AméricaTV, Pe.)	Can I eat ice cream when I've got a cough or cold?
<i>Estaba con un traje de chaqueta muy bonito</i>	She was wearing a very attractive suit
<i>Estoy contigo</i>	I support you/I'm with you
<i>Mi simpatía está con los conservadores</i>	I support/back the conservatives

### 33.3.5 *Estar* + adverb

*Estar* followed by an adverb or an adjective used as an adverb:

— <i>¿Cómo estás?</i> — <i>Estoy bien/mal</i>	How are you? 'I'm well/not well'
<i>El nombre está mal. Se llamaba Luis José</i>	The name is wrong. His name was Luis José
<i>Ese día los técnicos llegaron, revisaron las conexiones y estaban fatal</i> (LaMula, Pe.)	The technical experts arrived that day, checked the connections and they were awful.

(1) Adverbs are invariable in form, e.g. *estamos mal* 'we're in trouble'/'we're in a bad way', *están mejor/peor* 'they're feeling /looking better/worse' (*mejor* and *peor* are here the comparative forms of the adverbs *bien* and *mal*).



### 33.3.6 *Estar que*

*Está que muerde*  
*Hoy estás que no hay quien te aguante*  
*Aquí el aire está que congela* (MS, Mex.,  
 dialogue)

(S)he's in a lousy mood (lit. 'ready to bite')  
 You're unbearable today  
 The air's freezing here today

### 33.3.7 *Estar meaning 'to suit', or 'to fit'*

*Este vestido me está muy bien*  
*El abrigo te está corto*  
*El puesto de ministro le está grande*

This dress suits me/fits well  
 The coat is too short for you  
 The ministerial job is too big for him/her

For *estar* with *por* and *para* see 38.16.8.

### 33.3.8 Idiomatic use of *andar*, *ir*, *encontrarse* and *hallarse* for *estar*

*Andar* 'to walk' is sometimes used in colloquial language instead of *estar* when the subject is human. This is only possible when the phrase refers to some kind of activity, usually temporary, or to the way one dresses or behaves. One could not say \**ando calvo* for *estoy calvo* 'I'm bald':

*Miguel dice que andan recelosos y no le falta razón* (MD, Sp., dialogue)  
*Andan muy atareados estos días*  
*No se da cuenta de que todos los hombres andan locos por ella . . .* (ES, Mex., dialogue)  
*¿Cómo andas? (= ¿cómo estás?)*  
*No le ponía atención por andar todo el tiempo en reuniones feministas* (DES, Mex., dialogue. Sp. *no le prestaba atención*)

Miguel says they're suspicious, and he's right  
 They've got a lot of work these days  
 She doesn't realize that all the men are crazy about her  
 How are things?/How are you doing?  
 She neglected him because she was in feminist meetings all the time

*Ir* 'to go' is also often used instead of *estar* with certain adjectives and participles, especially when movement is involved:

*Ella era joven, iba bien vestida, muy abrigada, llevaba el pelo suelto y ningún maquillaje* (AGr, Sp.)  
*Era evidente que no iba armado* (MS, Mex.)  
*El que iba de negro viajaba de copiloto* (ibid., dialogue)  
*Telefoné desde el coche que iba conduciendo Arnau* (LS, Sp.)

She was young, well-dressed, warmly clad, with her hair loose and no make-up  
 It was obvious that he wasn't armed  
 The one in black was travelling as the co-driver [of a truck]  
 I called from the car that Arnau was driving

(1) *Andar* is also sometimes used colloquially (at least in Spain) to refer to non-living things that can easily be moved about, e.g. *no sé dónde andarán mis gafas* 'I don't know where my glasses have got to', *¿dónde anda el coche, tú?* (MD, Sp., dialogue) 'Hey, whereabouts is the car?'

(2) *Encontrarse* can mean the same as *estar*: *¿dónde se encuentra el museo?* 'where's the museum?', *¿qué tal te encuentras?* 'how are you/how do you feel?', *nuestros servidores se encuentran conectados a seis proveedores de backbone* (advert., Arg.) 'our servers are linked to six backbone service providers', . . . *que no hicieron el viaje por encontrarse lesionados* (La Jornada, Mex.) ' . . . who didn't make the journey because they were injured'. *Hallarse* is the same as *encontrarse* but less common in spoken language: *su mesa se hallaba ocupada, de manera que se instaló donde pudo* (EM, Mex.) 'his [usual] table was occupied so he sat where he could'.

## 33.4 *Ser* or *estar*?

### 33.4.1 *Ser* and *estar* more or less interchangeable

(a) With words indicating marital status either verb can be used, though *estar* is more usual. The difference between *estoy casado* and *soy casado* is about the same as between 'I'm married' and 'I'm a married man':

<i>Sale con una chica que es/está divorciada</i>	(S)he's going out with a girl who's divorced
<i>Tiene que mantener a su madre que es/está viuda</i>	(S)he has to keep/look after his/her mother who's a widow
—¿Y tú eres casada? —Fui, hace muchos años (EM, Mex., dialogue)	'And are you married?' 'I was, many years ago'
<i>Pero si es casado debe estar cenando en casa a estas horas</i> (MP, Arg., dialogue; or <i>está casado</i> )	But if he's married (i.e. 'a married man') he must be at home having his dinner at this time of day

One could ask a stranger *¿es* (or *está*) *usted casado?* 'are you married?', but two friends meeting again after some time would say *¿estás casado?* or *¿todavía estás soltero?* 'are you married?' or 'are you still single?' because the enquiry is about a change since the last meeting.

In this example, which refers to a temporary marriage, only *estar* is possible: *estuve casado con una feminista que me obligó a respetar su independencia* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'I was married (for a time) to a feminist who made me respect her independence'.

(b) With *calvo*, *gordo*, *delgado* and *alto*, *estar* is always used when there has been a change of state. Elsewhere the two verbs are practically interchangeable except in generalizations, when *ser* is required:

<i>¡Mujer, pero qué delgada estás!</i>	Good heavens, haven't you got thin!
<i>Siempre ha sido calvo/gordo, pero ahora está más calvo/gordo que nunca</i>	He's always been bald/fat but now he's balder/fatter than ever
<i>Dentro de cien años todos seremos calvos</i> (LRS, PR)	We'll all be bald in a hundred years
<i>¿Te has fijado que está gordo . . . y además calvo?</i> (GZ, Mex., dialogue)	Did you notice that he's fat . . . and bald as well?
<i>Un periodista güero que antes era gordo me daba buenas propinas</i> (EM, Mex., dialogue)	A blond journalist who was previously fat gave me good tips (money, not information)
<i>In Spain güero = rubio</i>	
<i>Las mujeres de esa tribu son muy delgadas</i> (generalization)	The women of that tribe are very slim

(c) With adjectives applied to events and *vida* and *situación*:

<i>La conferencia fue/estuvo muy interesante</i>	The lecture was very interesting
<i>La situación es/está caótica</i>	The situation is chaotic
<i>La fiesta fue/estuvo muy animada</i>	The party was very lively
<i>La vida es/está cara hoy día</i>	Life is expensive nowadays

But *la vida es difícil/maravillosa/amarga* 'life is difficult/wonderful/bitter' can only be general comments on life. *La vida está difícil* means 'life is difficult at the moment'.

(d) With adjectives describing social manner when 'to be' = 'to behave':

<i>Estuvo/Fue muy cortés conmigo</i>	(S)he was very courteous towards me
<i>Siempre está/es cariñosa</i>	She's always affectionate
<i>Tienes que estar/ser más amable con él</i> (usually <i>ser</i> )	You must be kinder to him
<i>Si soy amable con él luego no me lo quito de encima</i> (MS, Mex., dialogue)	If I'm nice to him I can't get rid of him later

(1) But *hoy has sido bueno* 'you've behaved well today' because *estar bueno* means 'tasty' / 'appetizing' or 'sexually desirable'.

(2) *Estar* is not used for general statements about behaviour: *antes los ingleses eran muy corteses* 'formerly the English were very courteous'.

(3) *Ser* can be used to make it clear that a situation is being talked about rather than someone's behaviour: *ahora era mucho más serio y ella estaba más seria* (SP, Sp.) 'now it (the situation) was more serious and she was more serious'.

### 33.4.2 ***Ser* and *estar* with prices and quantities**

*Ser* is obligatory when the price or quantity is fixed:

<i>¿Cuánto (es lo que) le debo?</i>	How much do I owe you?
<i>¿Cuántos somos hoy para comer?</i>	How many are we for lunch today?
<i>Somos doce en mi familia pero hoy solo/sólo estamos tres en casa</i>	There are twelve of us in my family but there are only three of us at home today
<i>Los sobrevivientes fueron pocos</i>	There were few survivors

But either can be used for fluctuating prices:

<i>¿A cuánto/A cómo son/están las uvas?</i>	How much are the grapes?
<i>Son/Están a tres euros (con) veinte el kilo</i>	They're 3 euros 20 cents a kilo
<i>¿A cuánto/A cómo están/son esas acciones?</i>	What are those shares at?

### 33.4.3 ***Estar* implying impression or change of condition**

When *estar* denotes impression, sensation or appearance, it often calls for translation by a special verb in English, e.g. 'to look', 'to taste', 'to feel' or 'to get'. Use of *estar* rather than *ser* often shows there has been a change of condition. Compare:

<i>Es muy guapa/Está muy guapa</i>	She's very good-looking/She's looking very attractive
<i>Este niño es muy alto/Está muy alto</i>	This child is very tall/He's grown very tall
<i>Este sillón es ya viejo/Está ya viejo</i>	This armchair is old/It's getting old
<i>El pollo es riquísimo*/Está riquísimo</i>	[The] chicken is very good/It tastes delicious
<i>El café es horrible*/Está horrible</i>	(The) coffee is horrible/It tastes awful
<i>Tráelo como sea/Tráelo como esté</i>	Bring it any way you can/Bring it as it is

(1) The examples marked with an asterisk are ambiguous: *el pollo es riquísimo* is either a general statement about chicken or it could mean 'the chicken is very good quality'. *Estar* could only mean 'to taste'.

(2) Note *tú eres/tú estás viejo para estas cosas* 'you're old/getting old for these things' (there is a slight difference of meaning in both languages). But one says *tú eres demasiado joven para estas cosas*.

### 33.4.4 Ser and estar involving change of meaning

There are some words whose meaning is radically affected by choice of *ser* or *estar*. The following list is not exhaustive:

<i>ser aburrido</i>	boring	<i>estar aburrido</i>	to be bored
<i>ser atento</i>	courteous	<i>estar atento</i>	attentive
<i>ser bueno</i>	good	<i>estar bueno</i>	(see 33.4.1, note 1)
<i>ser cansado</i>	tiresome	<i>estar cansado</i>	tired
<i>ser católico</i>	Catholic	<i>no estar católico</i>	unwell/furious
<i>ser decidido</i>	resolute	<i>estar decidido</i>	decided
<i>ser consciente</i>	aware	<i>estar consciente</i>	(see 33.2.3 note 3)
<i>ser despierto</i>	sharp/alert	<i>estar despierto</i>	awake
<i>ser (un) enfermo</i>	to be an invalid	<i>estar enfermo</i>	be ill/sick
<i>ser fatal</i>	be fatal	<i>estar fatal</i>	be/feel awful
<i>ser fresco</i>	be cheeky	<i>estar fresco</i>	be cool/fresh (see note 1)
<i>ser interesado</i>	self-seeking	<i>estar interesado</i>	interested
<i>ser listo</i>	clever	<i>estar listo</i>	to be ready
<i>ser (un) loco</i>	scatter-brained	<i>estar loco</i>	to be mad/crazy
<i>ser malo</i>	bad	<i>estar malo</i>	ill/sick/gone bad
<i>ser rico</i>	wealthy	<i>estar rico</i>	(see 33.2.3 note 2)
<i>ser verde</i>	green/smotty	<i>estar verde</i>	unripe
<i>ser violento</i>	violent/embarrassing	<i>estar violento</i>	embarrassed
<i>ser vivo</i>	sharp/alert	<i>estar vivo</i>	alive

(1) Note the colloquialism *estás fresco si piensas que las cosas van a cambiar* 'you're dreaming if you think things are going to change'.

# 34 'There is', 'there are', 'there was', 'there were', etc.

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- The forms and uses of *haber/hay* (Section 34.2.1)
- *Lo hay, la hay*, etc. (Section 34.2.2)
- *Hay* and *estar* compared (Section 34.3)

## 34.1 General

This chapter covers 'existential sentences', i.e. those that refer to the existence or non-existence of things: 'there's bread', 'there are several possibilities', 'God exists'/'there is a God', *no ha habido ningún accidente* 'there wasn't an accident', etc. In Spanish such sentences usually involve the special third-person singular of the verb *haber* (present indicative *hay*), which means 'there is/there are/were, etc.'. However, the picture is complicated by the existence of another verb, *estar*, which often means 'to be located'/'to be present'. For the much more specific spatial words *allí*/*allá* 'there', see 35.6.

## 34.2 *Haber* (*hay*)

For the conjugation of *haber* see 16.11.22.

### 34.2.1 Basic uses

*Haber* has two uses:

- (a) as an auxiliary verb in compound tenses, e.g. *han dicho* 'they've said', *he visto* 'I've seen'. See Chapter 18;
- (b) as a verb meaning 'there is'/'there are', 'there was/were', etc., French *il y a*, German *es gibt*.

This chapter covers the latter use of the verb, which we call *hay* to avoid confusion with the use of *haber* as an auxiliary verb. It is conjugated exactly like the latter except for the present indicative tense, which is *hay*, not *ha*. It is used only in the third person (see note 3). *Hay* can occur in any third-person singular non-continuous tense form.

It does not mean '... is/are/were *there*' as in 'the remote control is there' *el mando a distancia está ahí/allí*. The relationship between *hay* and *estar* is discussed further at 34.3. Examples of *hay*:

*Había muchas chicas de mi edad y más jóvenes* (JM, Sp.)

*Hay casos peores, hay quienes no pueden volver del exilio* (AM, Mex.)

There were many girls of my age and younger

There are worse cases, there are people who can't return from exile

En Madrid . . . no tenían delincuencia. Bueno, seguro habría una poca pero no era nada comparada con la de México (ES, Mex., dialogue. Una poca is familiar for un poco)

¿Qué hay? (¿Qué hubo?/¿Quiubo? in familiar language from Colombia northwards, including Mexico)

Hubo muchas noches que salíamos a recorrer su barrio (GCI, Cu. dialogue)

Había una vez . . . /érase una vez . . . (érase is here a grammatically unusual set formula)

In Madrid they had no crime. Well, sure, there would be a bit, but it was nothing compared with Mexico

What's happening? /How're things?

There were many nights when we went out for a walk round her part of town

Once upon a time there was . . .

(1) **Important:** *hay* has no plural in European Spanish and in formal Spanish everywhere: *había tres chicas* 'there were three girls', not *\*habían* . . .; *hubo clases de italiano el año pasado* 'there were Italian classes last year', not *\*hubieron* . . . But the plural construction is common in and near Catalonia and in the Americas, where it is deep-rooted and probably spreading in spontaneous, even educated, speech. It is avoided in formal language: *pero nadie llamaba para pedir el rescate y no había novedades ni pistas* (MS, Mex.) 'but no one was calling to ask for a ransom and there was no news and no clues'. The Academy recommends the singular. The form *hubieron* for *hubo* is less common than *habían* for *había*.

(2) *Hay* is used only in the third person, whatever its tense: *hay cinco* 'there are five', but *somos cinco* 'there are five of us', *ustedes eran cinco* 'there were five of you', *son cinco* 'there are five of them', —*No hay nadie* —*Bueno, estamos yo y el gato* "'there's no one here." "Well, there's me and the cat"' (never *\*hay yo/hay tú/hay nosotros*, etc.).

A first-person plural construction, e.g. *\*habemos cinco* = *somos cinco* 'there are five of us' (n.b. not the usual form *hemos*) occurs in popular speech in Spain and more often in popular Latin-American speech, cf. *en el patio habíamos dos parejas bailando* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'there were two of us couples dancing in the patio'. This construction is rejected by careful speakers. See also 34.3.3.

(3) **Important:** *hay* is not followed by the definite article, except when it means 'to exist', in which case *existir* is more commonly used: *ha venido el médico* (not *\*hay el médico*) 'there's the doctor!' (i.e. he's arrived), but *también hay/existe la posibilidad de . . .* 'the possibility also exists of . . .'. *\*Hay el cartero* for *ha venido el cartero* 'the postman's there' / 'the postman's come' is a typical Catalanism.

(4) **Important:** *hay* is also not followed by the nominalizer *el que/la que/los que/las que*, for which see Chapter 40. One can say *hay quienes prefieren las lentejas con salsa caldosa* 'some prefer lentils in a watery/thin sauce', but not *\*hay los que prefieren . . .* Compare *hay quien juega lento y no cede el paso* (CP, Arg.) 'there are some people who play slowly and don't let others get past' (in golf), *eres un niño que vive en las nubes y que de allá no hay quien te baje* (LR, Col.) 'you're a child who lives in the clouds and there's no one who can bring you down from there', *pero por la gente de fuera no hay quien responda* (MS, Mex., dialogue) 'but there's no one can answer for the people who are not from here'.

(5) For *hay que* 'it is necessary to' see 25.4.2.

### 34.2.2 Direct object pronouns and *hay*

*Hay* functions like a transitive verb, and since transitive verbs in Spanish must usually have a direct object, a direct object pronoun is normally used before *hay* to indicate the presence of a deleted noun:

**426** 'There is', 'there are', 'there was', 'there were', etc.

*No hubo presiones, ni las hay, ni las  
habrá* (interview in *El País*, Sp.)

*El cochero quiso asegurarse de que no había  
ningún error. No lo había* (GGM, Col.  
Refers to a horse-drawn carriage)

—¿Existe una fórmula para obtener éxito  
en la vida? —Sí, la hay (JV, Mex., dialogue)

There wasn't any pressure, there isn't  
any and there won't be

The coach driver sought reassurance  
that there was no mistake. There wasn't

'Is there a formula for being successful in  
life?' 'Yes, there is'.

(1) The direct object pronoun is not used when answering questions about the existence of non-countable things (bread, water, justice, etc.): —¿Hay azúcar? —Sí, hay "Is there any sugar?" "Yes, there is", —¿Hay mucho que hacer? —Sí, hay. "Is there a lot to do?" "Yes, there is." Compare this reference to countable items: —¿Hay problemas? —Los hay y muchos "Are there any problems?" "There are. Plenty". Omission of the pronoun in the latter context, e.g. —Hay y muchos is considered typical of familiar or popular speech. See 8.4.2 for resumptive pronouns with *ser*, *estar*, *parecer*.

## 34.3 Hay and estar in existential sentences

*Estar* has many other uses, discussed in detail in Chapter 33.

As far as its relationship with *hay* is concerned, *está* basically means '... is somewhere' and *hay* means 'there is/are ...' (i.e. 'there exists'). In certain cases, the meanings overlap, as in —¿El Sr. Ramírez? —No está—. ¿Y su mujer? —No está nadie/No hay nadie "Mr Ramírez?" "He's not in." "What about his wife?" "There's no one in." On entering an apparently empty building one shouts ¿hay alguien? 'is there any one around?'/ 'is anyone there?'

### 34.3.1 Uses of *estar* and *hay* with defined nouns

Nouns accompanied by the definite article, by a possessive adjective or by a demonstrative (*este*, *ese*, *aquel*) normally require *estar*. *Hay* used with such noun phrases is restricted in its meaning to 'exists', as explained at 34.2.1 note 3. *Estar* takes for granted that the subject exists and tells us about its location or availability:

*Hay un gerente en la compañía*

*Está el gerente*

*No hay dinero*

*No está el dinero/El dinero no está*

*¿Hay tortilla española?*

*¿Está la tortilla española?*

*Predominaban las tiendas pequeñas, aunque  
por supuesto había ya las grandes* (JA, Mex.)

*No se pueden subir ni perros ni cosas ...*

*para eso está el montacargas* (EA, Sp.,  
dialogue)

*Las mujeres no estaban para hablar de temas  
que no fueran domésticos* (AM, Mex.)

There's a manager in the company (i.e.  
'a manager exists')

The manager's there/here/in

There's no money (anywhere)

The money isn't here/there

Do you have Spanish omelette/US omelet?

Is the Spanish omelette on the  
list?/Is the Spanish omelette ready?

There were mainly small shops/stores,  
although there were the big ones

You can't take up dogs and things ...

The service lift is there for that

Women weren't there to discuss  
non-domestic subjects

In this last example, *no había mujeres para hablar ...* would have meant 'there were no women there to talk about ...'.

(1) In relative clauses, *hay* and *estar* seem to be interchangeable when material objects are involved: *tropecé con la silla que estaba/había en el dormitorio* 'I tripped over the chair that was in the bedroom', . . . *del espejo que había sobre la chimenea* (CMG, Sp., or *estaba*) ' . . . from the mirror hanging over the fireplace', *el sitio estratégico es la mesa que hay al lado de la cristalera que da a la calle* (EA, Sp., dialogue; or *está*) 'the strategic place is the table next to the window looking out onto the street'. But with nouns referring to abstract things only *hay* is possible: *las posibilidades de inversión que hay en (la) Argentina* 'the investment opportunities that there are in Argentina'. See the next section.

(2) In this exchange, —¿Qué hay en este pueblo? —Hay/Está la iglesia . . . "What is there in this village?" "There's the church . . .", *hay* is possible with the definite article because it answers the question 'what things exist?' However, Latin Americans may insist on *está* in this sentence.

### 34.3.2 *Estar* for mobile things

As we have said, *estar* implies that a thing is present in a certain place, *hay* merely that it exists. For this reason, words like 'problem', 'question', 'atmosphere', 'accident' can only appear with *hay* since they do not refer to locatable or moveable things:

<i>Ha habido un accidente</i>	There's been an accident
<i>Ha habido aquí tres presidentes</i> (i.e. 'have existed')	There have been three presidents here/ We've had three presidents (in this country)
<i>¿Es que en España no hay problemas de empleo?</i> (interview, <i>La Jornada</i> , Mex.)	Are there no employment problems in Spain?

but –

<i>Han estado aquí tres presidentes</i>	Three presidents have been here
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### 34.3.3 *Hay* used before partitive nouns and numbers

Before partitive nouns (quantities, parts of a whole), only *hay* can be used:

<i>Hay leche</i>	There's (some) milk
<i>Sólo hay agua vieja, agua de salitre</i> (CF, Mex., CREA)	There's only old water, water full of saltpetre (or 'salts')
<i>Había gente</i>	There were (some) people
<i>No hay champú</i>	There's no shampoo

Since *hay* can be used only in the third person (see 34.2.1, note 2), *ser* or *estar* must be used for other persons:

<i>Éramos cuarenta en la fiesta</i> (GZ, Mex., dialogue)	There were forty of us at the party
<i>Los que estábamos ahí nos quedamos callados</i>	Those of us who were there kept quiet
<i>Estábamos más de cinco personas encerradas en el ascensor</i>	There were more than five of us shut in the lift



### 34.4 Miscellaneous English sentences whose translation requires *hay* or *estar*

If there hadn't been a doctor (available),  
he'd have died

*Si no hubiera habido (un) médico, habría  
muerto / De no haber habido (un)  
médico, habría muerto*

If the doctor hadn't been **there**, he'd  
have died

*Si no hubiera **estado** el médico, habría muerto*

There's no such thing as fairies

*Las hadas no existen / No hay hadas / No  
existen las hadas*

There have always been economic crises  
*Horchata* available / *Horchata* sold here

*Siempre ha habido crisis económicas  
Hay horchata (a refreshing drink made  
from crushed tiger nuts or chufas)*

There's a book on the table  
The book isn't there any more

*Hay un libro encima de la mesa  
El libro ya no está ahí*

# 35 Adverbs

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- Adverbs ending in *-mente* (Section 35.2)
- Adverbs not ending in *-mente* (Section 35.3)
- Adverbial use of adjectives and nouns (Section 35.3.3–7)
- Intensifiers and moderators (*muy, algo, increíblemente, sí, si*, etc.) (Section 35.4)
- *Aquí, acá, ahí, allí, allá* (Section 35.6.1–4)
- *Dentro/adentro, fuera/afuera* (Section 35.6.5)
- Adverbs of place (*abajo, debajo de, arriba, encima, detrás, delante, adelante*) (Section 35.6.6–8)
- Adverbs of time (*ya, recién, todavía, aún, luego, entonces*, etc.) (Section 35.7)
- Words meaning ‘even’ (*incluso, aun, hasta*, etc.) (Section 35.8)

## 35.1 General

Spanish adverbs and adverbial phrases can be divided into two large classes:

- (a) adverbs formed from adjectives by adding the suffix *-mente* to an adjective, e.g. *tranquilamente* ‘tranquilly’, *violentamente* ‘violently’, *naturalmente* ‘naturally’;
- (b) invariable words and phrases like *mal* ‘badly’, *bien* ‘well’, *ayer* ‘yesterday’, *adrede* (familiar language *aposta*) ‘on purpose’, *en serio* ‘seriously’ (i.e. not jokingly), *aquí* ‘here’, etc.

A few adjectives can also function as adverbs: *hablaban fuerte* ‘they were talking loudly’; see 35.3.3. Much more common in Spanish than in English is the use of an adjective where English uses an adverb: *el rey los recibió agradecido* ‘the King received them gratefully’, *vivían felices* ‘they lived happily’. See 35.3.4.

## 35.2 Adverbs in *-mente*

Adverbs formed by adding *-mente* to an adjective are very numerous:

*Lo del médico había sido sencillamente horrible* (AG, Sp.)

*Siguió hasta el final para desahogarse totalmente* (ES, Mex.)

*Desgraciadamente no han vuelto a llamar*

*Pero en el futuro no estamos solamente vos y yo* (MB, Ur., dialogue; Sp. *tú y yo*)

... *muy inteligente, buen abogado, pero sumamente peligroso* (GGM, Col., dialogue)

The business with the doctor had been simply dreadful

He carried on [talking] right to the end so as to get it off his chest completely

Unfortunately they haven’t called back

But there won’t be only you and me in the future

... very intelligent, a good lawyer, but extremely dangerous

### 35.2.1 Formation of adverbs ending in *-mente*

If the adjective has a separate feminine form, *-mente* is added to it. Otherwise it is added to the invariable singular form:

Masc. singular	Fem. singular	Adverbial form	
<i>absoluto</i>	<i>absoluta</i>	<i>absolutamente</i>	absolutely
<i>extremo</i>	<i>extrema</i>	<i>extremamente</i>	extremely
<i>evidente</i>	<i>(evidente)</i>	<i>evidentemente</i>	evidently
<i>cortés</i>	<i>(cortés)</i>	<i>cortésmente</i>	courteously
<i>tenaz</i>	<i>(tenaz)</i>	<i>tenazmente</i>	tenaciously

### 35.2.2 Accent rules for adverbs in *-mente*

Adjectives that make adverbs in *-mente* are pronounced with two stress accents, one on the vowel that was originally stressed (any written accent is retained), another on the first *e* of *-ente* (audible, but not shown in writing): *inevitable/inevitavelmente* 'inevitable'/'inevitably', *crítico/críticamente* 'critical'/'critically', *electrónico/electrónicamente* 'electronic'/'electronically', *hábil/hábilmente* 'skilful'/'skilfully', etc.

### 35.2.3 Consecutive adverbs in *-mente*

**Important:** if more than one adverb in *-mente* is joined by a conjunction (e.g. *y*, *ni*, *o*, *pero*, etc.), *-mente* is dropped from all but the last:

<i>ni intelectual, ni política, ni económicamente se puede mantener tal postura (El País, Sp.)</i>	and neither intellectually, nor politically, nor economically can such a position be maintained
<i>La inflación se encuentra total y absolutamente controlada (El Economista, Mex.)</i>	Inflation is totally and absolutely under control
<i>Significa mucho personalmente, pero también cultural e intelectualmente (Granma, Cu.)</i>	It means a lot personally, but also culturally and intellectually

(1) This rule is also applied in comparative phrases like *más ampulosa que profundamente* 'more pompously than profoundly', *lo explicó tan clara como sinceramente* '(s)he explained it as clearly as (s)he did sincerely'.

(2) This is an important rule of written Spanish but it is often ignored in spontaneous speech. It is not applied when there is no joining conjunction: *y así, separados por el muro de vidrio, habíamos vivido ansiosamente, melancólicamente* (ES, Arg.) 'and thus, separated by the wall of glass, we had lived anxiously, melancholically'.

### 35.2.4 Limits on the use of the suffix *-mente*

*-mente* cannot be added to all adjectives, although there is no accounting for experiments like Julio Cortázar's invention *pelirrojamente* 'red-hairedly' in his novel *Rayuela*.

With a few exceptions (cf. *difícil/difícilmente* 'difficult'/'with difficulty', *lleno* 'full', but 'fully' = *plenamente*), the set of Spanish adjectives that take *-mente* corresponds to the set of English adjectives that end in *-ly*. These are chiefly adverbs of manner or behaviour, so the following do not take *-mente*, at least in normal styles:

(a) Adjectives denoting physical appearance: *rojo* 'red', *negro* 'black', *calvo* 'bald', *gordo* 'fat', *cojo* 'lame', *viejo* 'old'/'aged', etc.

(b) Adjectives denoting origin, nationality, religion: *cordobés* 'Cordoban', *argentino* 'Argentinian', *protestante* 'Protestant', *musulmán* 'Muslim', etc. Two exceptions are *católicamente* and *cristianamente*:

*tienes que educar a tus hijos católicamente* ‘you must bring up your children in the Catholic way’,  
 *murió cristianamente a los noventa años* ‘(s)he died a Christian death at the age of ninety’.

(c) Ordinal numbers, e.g. *segundo* ‘second’, *quinto* ‘fifth’, *vigésimo* ‘twentieth’. Exceptions: *primeramente* ‘chiefly’/‘firstly’ and *últimamente* ‘lately’/‘lastly’. *En segundo lugar* = ‘secondly’.

(d) Some adjectives, for no obvious reason, e.g. *vacío* ‘empty’, *importante* ‘important’, and most adjectives in *-ón*, cf. *mandón* ‘bossy’, *peleón* ‘aggressive’/‘prone to start fights’, *pidón* ‘always asking favours’.

(e) Many verbal participles which cannot, because of their meaning, function as adverbs, e.g. *roto* ‘broken’, which has no adverbial form *\*\*rotamente* ‘brokenly’. However, some Spanish participles take *-mente*: the following are some of the many examples. They all refer to behaviour or manner:

*abatido*: *abatidamente* downcast  
*abierto*: *abiertamente* open(ly)  
*acentuado*: *acentuadamente* marked(ly)  
*atrevido*: *atrevidamente* daring(ly)  
*debido*: *debidamente* due/duly  
*decidido*: *decididamente* decided(ly)  
*deliberado*: *deliberadamente* deliberate(ly)

*equivocado*: *equivocadamente* mistaken(ly)  
*exagerado*: *exageradamente* exaggerated(ly)  
*irritado*: *irritadamente* irritated(ly)  
*perdido*: (‘lost’) *perdidamente* hopeless(ly)  
 (e.g. in love)  
*reiterado*: *reiteradamente* repeated(ly)  
*resuelto*: *resueltamente* resolute(ly)

### 35.2.5 Colloquial forms

Colloquial forms like *buenamente* and *malamente* are occasionally heard in familiar speech with specialized meanings:

*Lo terminamos, pero malamente*  
*Hazlo buenamente cuando puedas*

We finished it, but it was rushed  
 Do it in your own time when you can

(1) *Otramente* ‘otherwise’ (virtually obsolete and replaced by *de otra manera*) and *?mismamente*, cf. *?mismamente el cura* ‘the priest himself’, are considered substandard or humorous. The forms *mayormente* ‘especially’/‘mainly’ is more acceptable in Latin America: *las mujeres mayormente hacen trabajo doméstico no remunerado* (*La Jornada*, Mex., i.e. *principalmente*) ‘the women mainly do unpaid domestic work’.

(2) *Buenamente* can also mean ‘willingly’, ‘as well as possible’ or ‘easily’: *cada cual sobrelleva la derrota como buenamente puede* (*La Nación*, Arg.) ‘everyone copes with defeat as best they can’, *pasaba las noches donde buenamente podía* (*El País*, Spain) ‘he spent the night wherever he could’ (i.e. ‘slept rough’), *lo que buenamente se puede hacer es una versión del libro* (*La Jornada*, Mex.) ‘what one can easily make (i.e. without too much effort) is a version of the book’.

### 35.2.6 Equivalents of adverbs in *-mente*

The existence of an adverb ending in *-mente* does not mean that the adjective from which it is formed cannot also be used in an adverbial phrase with the same or a similar meaning. Constant reading and dictionary work are the only solutions to this problem, e.g.:

*en vano/vanamente*  
*de inmediato/inmediatamente*  
*directo/directamente*  
*Siempre obra locamente/a lo loco*

in vain  
 immediately  
 directly  
 (S)he always acts wildly/in a mad way

(1) One says *locamente/perdidamente enamorado/a* ‘madly in love’, not *\*enamorado a lo loco*.

### 35.2.7 Too many adverbs in *-mente*

It is bad style to include too many adverbs ending in *-mente* in a single paragraph: the final syllables set off ugly rhymes. The horrible sentence *evidentemente, todas las lenguas evolucionan constantemente, y sería totalmente absurdo pretender detener arbitrariamente su crecimiento* makes passable English in literal translation – ‘clearly, all languages evolve constantly, and it would be totally absurd to attempt to arrest their growth arbitrarily’ – but must be recast in Spanish along the lines of *es evidente que todas las lenguas están en constante evolución, y sería totalmente absurdo pretender detener de manera arbitraria su crecimiento*.

(1) **Important:** an adverb ending in *-mente* must not be used to modify another: *\*increíblemente rápidamente* for ‘incredibly quickly’ is not Spanish: *con una rapidez increíble*. See 35.4.3.

### 35.2.8 *-ísimamente*

The suffix *-ísimo* (see 5.8) may be added (judiciously) to adverbs of manner, and time. The result is very emphatic: *sobre todo a las mujeres nos trataban malísimamente* (*Revista de la Universidad de México*) ‘above all they treated us women really badly’. More examples:

<i>claramente</i>	<i>clarísimamente</i>	extremely clearly
<i>intensamente</i>	<i>intensísimamente</i>	extremely intensely
<i>recientemente</i>	<i>recientísimamente</i>	extremely recently
<i>urgentemente</i>	<i>urgentísimamente</i>	extremely urgently

(1) Common alternatives exist, e.g. *con gran claridad, con enorme intensidad, con gran urgencia*, etc.

(2) *Lejos* and *cerca* can also have *-ísimo* added to them: *lejísimos* ‘far, far away’ (note the final s) and *cerquísimas* ‘really close’.

### 35.2.9 Adverbs in *-mente* to mean ‘from a . . . point of view’

Adverbs in *-mente* are freely used to indicate point of view, a common construction in journalistic styles:

<i>Económicamente, este país va a la ruina</i>	Economically, this country is heading for ruin
<i>Políticamente, Planck nunca simpatizó con la democracia</i> (JV, Mex., dialogue)	Politically, Planck never sympathized with democracy
<i>Personalmente, lo dudo</i>	Personally, I doubt it
<i>Editorialmente, lo apruebo</i>	From a publishing point of view, I approve

## 35.3 Adverbs not ending in *-mente*

### 35.3.1 General

These include words like *bien* ‘well’, *mal* ‘badly’, *despacio* ‘slowly’, *pronto* ‘quickly’, *adrede/aposta* ‘on purpose’, *igual* ‘the same’, *bastante* ‘enough’ / ‘fairly’, *demasiado* ‘too’. There are regional differences of usage, e.g. *deprisa* ‘quickly’ in Spain and *aprisa* in Latin America: the latter is considered popular by some Spaniards, but *quiero ir muy aprisa* (AM, Mex., dialogue; Sp. *deprisa*) ‘I want to go very fast’.

Adverbs of place (*aquí, allí, dentro, fuera*, etc.) are discussed at 35.6 and adverbs of time (*ya, entonces, luego, recién*, etc.) at 35.7.

There are many adverbial phrases: *a propósito* ‘deliberately’, *en balde* ‘in vain’, *a contrapelo* ‘unwillingly’, *en serio* ‘seriously’. A selection appears at 35.3.2.

These adverbs, and also those ending in *-mente*, can modify verbs, participles or adjectives:

<i>Hable despacio por favor</i>	Speak slowly please
<i>Lo quieren así</i>	They want it that way
<i>Esto está mal hecho</i>	This is badly made/This is the wrong thing to do
<i>Está bien</i>	It/He/She’s OK/You’re OK
<i>Me da igual</i>	It’s all the same to me
<i>Aquí estamos mejor/peor</i>	We’re better/worse (off) here
<i>Infórmese gratis</i> (advert., Sp.)	Get information free
— <i>Era totalmente desequilibrada— volvió a comentar</i> (EP, Mex., dialogue)	‘She was completely unbalanced’, he remarked again

Intensifiers like *muy* ‘very’, *bastante* ‘fairly’, can modify other adverbs: *muy lejos/cerca* ‘very far/near’, *bastante lejos* ‘pretty far away’.

A few can even modify nouns:

<i>¿No te das cuenta que una mujer así no puede ser aristócrata?</i> (SV, Ch., dialogue; Sp. usually <i>cuenta de que</i> )	Don’t you realize that a woman like that can’t be an aristocrat?
<i>Visiones así no se olvidan</i> (MS, Mex., dialogue)	You don’t forget sights like that
<i>una niña bien</i> (pejorative)	a ‘nice’ girl/a girl from a ‘respectable’ or ‘posh’ family
<i>dos coñacs con hielo, y dos cafés igual</i>	two cognacs with ice, and two coffees the same way

(1) *Bien* and *así de* can modify adjectives when they are used as intensifiers. See 35.4.9.

(2) *Deprisa* can be spelled *de prisa*. but the Academy, DPD 214, prefers *deprisa*.

### 35.3.2 Adverbial phrases of manner

**Important:** these are numerous, and they often provide an elegant alternative to an unwieldy adverb in *-mente*. The following is a small sample:

<i>a buen paso</i> at a smart pace	<i>a la carrera</i> at full speed
<i>a caballo</i> on horseback	<i>a la fuerza</i> by force
<i>a ciegas</i> blindly	<i>a la ligera</i> hastily/without proper thought
<i>a conciencia</i> conscientiously	<i>a las claras</i> without beating about the bush
<i>(el agua sale) a chorros</i> The water’s pouring out	<i>(llorar) a lágrima viva</i> to shed floods of tears
<i>a destiempo</i> inopportunistly	<i>a mano</i> by hand
<i>(entrar) a empujones</i> to push one’s way in	<i>a máquina</i> machine-made/by machine
<i>a escondidas</i> secretly/clandestinely	<i>a matacaballo</i> at breakneck speed
<i>a fuego lento</i> on a low flame	<i>a medias</i> by halves
<i>a hurtadillas</i> by stealth	<i>a oscuras</i> in the dark
<i>al alimón</i> together by turns/jointly	<i>a quemarropa</i> point-blank
	<i>a regañadientes</i> reluctantly/unwillingly

*a sabiendas de que...* fully aware that ...  
*a tiempo* in time (e.g. for the train)  
*a tientas* by touch/by feel  
*a traición* treacherously  
*al raso* in the open/out of doors  
*al sereno* in the open/'under the stars'  
*al tuntún* without thinking/at random  
*bajo cuerda* on the sly/in an underhand way  
*con delirio/locura* madly/passionately  
*con frecuencia/a menudo* frequently  
*de balde* free (= without paying)  
*de buenas a primeras* suddenly/without thinking it through  
*de camino* on the way  
*de continuo* continuously  
*de corrido* at one go/straight off  
*de costumbre* usually  
*de golpe* suddenly  
*de improviso* unexpectedly  
*de memoria* (learn) by heart

*de ordinario* normally/usually  
*de puntillas* on tiptoe  
*de rodillas* kneeling  
*de seguro* for certain/for sure  
*de sobra* in excess/more than enough  
*(leer algo) de un tirón* to read something in one sitting/straight through  
*de verdad* really/genuinely  
*en balde* in vain/pointlessly  
*en cambio* on the other hand  
*en confianza* confidentially  
*en cueros* stark naked  
*en el acto* on the spot  
*en lo sucesivo* from now on/hereafter  
*(hablar) por los codos* to talk nonsense  
*río abajo/río arriba* down/upstream  
*sin empacho* coolly/unconcernedly  
*sin reserva* unreservedly  
*sin ton ni son* willy-nilly/thoughtlessly

### 35.3.3 Adverbs derived from adjectives and participles

A few adverbs are identical in form to masculine singular adjectives. Like all adverbs, their form is invariable except for the occasional addition of a diminutive suffix as in *ahorita* 'right now' (Latin-American). They are used only with certain verbs, e.g. *hablar/pronunciar claro* 'to speak/pronounce clearly' but only *expresarse claramente/con claridad* 'to express oneself clearly':

*Hablan alto/bajo*  
*Lo hemos comprado barato/caro*  
*El tren va directo a Tuy*  
*A la niña no le gustaron y lloró más fuerte* (ES, Mex.)  
*Se me apiló firme* (JC, Arg., dialogue. Spain  
*se me arrimó)*  
*Anda rápido que vamos a llegar tarde*  
*(see 35.3.6 for rápido)*  
*Respiraba hondo*  
*Me sentó fatal*  
  
*Él no juega limpio*

They talk loudly/softly  
 We've bought it cheap/dear  
 The train goes direct to Tuy  
 The little girl didn't like them and she cried louder  
 He pushed himself tight up against me  
  
 Walk fast or we'll arrive late  
  
 (S)he was breathing deeply  
 It didn't agree with me at all/I didn't like it all  
 He doesn't play fair

The following are typical of familiar speech and are not to everyone's taste:

*Lo hemos pasado estupendo/fantástico/ bárbaro*  
*La chaqueta le sienta bárbaro a Mariluz*  
*Inicialmente pensé que podíamos haber conseguido unos dólares fácil, sin problemas para la revolución* (VdC, Cu.)

We had a tremendous/fantastic time  
 The jacket looks terrific on Mariluz  
 Initially I thought we could easily have got a few dollars without any problems for the Revolution

(1) Colloquial Latin-American Spanish provides numerous examples unacceptable in Spain: . . . *un gran número de mexicanos que piensan distinto que el PRI* (Excélsior, Mex., i.e. *de manera distinta*)

'... a large number of Mexicans who think differently from the PRI' (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*), *¡qué bonito baila!* (AM, Mex., Sp. *¡qué bien baila!*) 'how beautifully she dances!'.

(2) *Seguido* is much used for 'frequently'/'repeatedly' in Latin America: *dos muchachos del balé del Faraón que me vienen a visitar seguido o me invitan a su departamento* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'two boys from the "ballet Faraón" who keep coming to visit me or invite me to their apartment' (*departamento* = *piso* or *apartamento* in Spain). *Seguido* is also used in this way in familiar speech in Spain.

### 35.3.4 Adjectives used to modify both subject and verb

Spanish often uses adjectives in combination with verbs to produce an effect more easily expressed by an adverb in English: the adjective agrees with the number and gender of the subject. This construction makes the adjective act both as an adverb and an adjective, i.e. it modifies both the verb and the subject of the verb. Sometimes the construction is obligatory: *las niñas cansadas dormían* 'the tired girls were sleeping' is not the same as *las niñas dormían cansadas* which is most nearly translated as 'the girls were tired and asleep' or 'sleeping in their tiredness'. But one could hardly say *?las niñas dormían cansadamente* 'the girls were sleeping wearily', which modifies 'sleep' but not 'girls'.

This construction is obviously limited to adjectives that can equally well apply to a noun and an action, e.g. *inocente* 'innocent', *confuso* 'confused', *feliz* 'happy', *desconcertado* 'disconcerted', *aliviado* 'relieved'; but not to adjectives like *harapiento* 'ragged' or *azul* 'blue', which cannot describe an action:

*Sonrió tranquila* (JM, Sp.)

She smiled gently

... *preguntó el reportero, insistente* (JV, Mex., dialogue. *Reportero* = *periodista* in Spain)

... the reporter asked, insistently/eagerly

*Javier miraba atónito desde el vagón vacío* (MB, Ur.)

Javier gazed in surprise from the empty carriage

*Me extendió un papel que leí asombrado* (ABE, Pe., same as ... *leí con asombro*)

He handed me a paper that I read in amazement

*Viven felices* (normal style))

They live happily

### 35.3.5 Nouns used adverbially

For familiar constructions like *llover cantidad*, *divertirse horrores* see 35.4.7.

### 35.3.6 *Rápido*

*Rápido* is an adjective and it is correctly used in phrases like *tren rápido* 'fast train', *comidas rápidas* 'fast food'. As an adverb it is colloquial but spreading; *rápidamente*, *pronto* and *deprisa* are formal adverbial forms: *¡rápido (deprisa/pronto), que se va el tren!* 'quick, the train's going!', *¡fuera! ¡Rápido!* 'get out! Quick!'. *Rápido* sounds colloquial to Spanish ears in this headline from Mexico: *acelera tu metabolismo y pierde peso muy rápido* 'speed up your metabolism and lose weight really fast'. Spaniards would probably write *rápidamente* but adverbial *rápido* is spreading.

### 35.3.7 *A la* and *a lo*

Both may form adverbial phrases of manner, but *a lo*, tends to predominate in set phrases of a derogatory nature:

*tortilla a la francesa*  
*lenguado a la normanda*

plain omelette/US omelet  
sole à la normande



*El apagón a la Mexicana (Excélsior, Mex.)  
despedirse a la francesa*

*Viven todavía a la antigua*

*Ando un poco a la defensiva (CMG, Sp.,  
dialogue)*

*Yo soy la mejor preparada porque sé idiomas  
y ustedes tararean a lo bruto sin saberse las  
letras de las canciones (ES, Mex., dialogue)*

The Mexican-style power-cut/power outage  
to leave without saying goodbye

They still live in the old style

I'm feeling a bit on the defensive

I'm the best prepared because I know  
languages and you guys just sing la-la-la  
any old how without knowing the words

(1) And also *a lo grande* 'in a big way', *a lo bestia* 'crudely', *a lo tonto* 'stupidly', *a lo loco* 'madly', *a lo Drácula* 'Dracula-style', etc.

(2) *En plan* . . . is familiar, like '-style': *viajar en plan hippy* 'to travel rough/hippy-style', *hablar en plan Tarzan* 'to talk Tarzan-style'.

(3) Two common adverbial phrases are *a lo lejos* 'in the distance' and *a lo largo* 'throughout'/'all along' as in *a lo largo de 2019* 'throughout 2019', *a lo largo de la costa* 'all along the coast'.

### 35.3.8 Note on position of adverbs of manner (see also 42.8)

An adverb of manner usually follows an intransitive verb:

*Trabaja intensivamente en una segunda  
novela*

*El aeropuerto de Cancún . . . servía  
principalmente para repostar  
combustible (AH, Mex.)*

*Esa cara de asco que parece ser  
habitualmente la suya*

(S)he is working very hard on a  
second novel

Cancún airport was used mainly for  
refuelling

That look of disgust which seems  
habitually to be his/hers

But, less commonly, an adverb may precede the verb to add emphasis:

*Tu vida inevitablemente se dispone a  
recorrer el tramo final (JM, Sp., dialogue)*

Your life is inevitably getting itself  
ready for the last lap

(1) In a transitive sentence, an adverb may follow the object – *habla griego correctamente* – or the verb – *habla correctamente el griego* '(s)he speaks Greek perfectly/without making mistakes'; there is no noticeable change of meaning here, but note the definite article *el*. Strictly speaking an adverb that follows the object modifies the whole verb phrase, whereas an adverb that precedes the object modifies only the verb. Thus *comían riñones con fruición* 'they ate kidneys with relish/eagerly', but *comían con fruición riñones . . .* is the appropriate order if more items follow, e.g. *hígado/liver, salchichas/sausages*, etc.

## 35.4 Intensifiers and moderators

### 35.4.1 General

Intensifiers and moderators strengthen or weaken the force of a verb, adverb, adjective and, occasionally, noun. Typical intensifiers are *muy* 'very', *mucho/poco* 'much'/'little', *intensamente* 'intensely', *extremadamente* 'extremely', *algo/más bien* 'rather', *increíblemente* 'incredibly', *sobremadamente* 'exceedingly' (literary). Many intensifiers have other functions, and are dealt with elsewhere, e.g. *algo* and *más bien* at 10.2, *demasiado* at 10.9, *mucho* and *poco* at 10.12.

New colloquial intensifiers appear and vanish as fashion dictates. *Requete* used to be a popular prefix and has created permanent expressions like *requeteguapo/a* ‘really good-looking’ and *requetebién* ‘really well’: *les está yendo requetebién* (*La Jornada*, Mex.) ‘things are going really great for them [i.e. the super-rich]’. *Archi-* can still be found in *archiconocido/archisabido* ‘very well known’. Nowadays many adjectives can be reinforced in colloquial styles by *super-*: *supertonto/superinteligente* ‘really stupid’/‘really intelligent’.

### 35.4.2 *Muy*

*Muy* ‘very’ is originally an abbreviated form of *mucho*, and the full form should be used when it stands alone:

<i>Es muy inteligente</i>	(S)he’s very intelligent
—¿Es inteligente? —Sí, mucho	‘Is (s)he intelligent?’ ‘Yes, very’
—¿Es atrabancado desde joven? —Mucho, pero ahora no deja a sus escoltas (EM, Mex., dialogue. <i>Atrabancado</i> = <i>atrevido/imprudente</i> in Spain)	‘Has he been reckless since he was young?’ ‘Very. But now he doesn’t leave his bodyguards behind’

(1) *Muy* cannot be used with *más* ‘more’, *menos* ‘less’, *mejor* ‘better’ or *peor* ‘worse’: one says *mucho más/menos/mejor/peor*. For more about *mucho más/menos* see 10.12b. *Muy mucho* is humorous.

(2) The expression *muy de* should be noted: *no soy muy de ir a fiestas* ‘I’m not a great party-goer’, *esa calle es muy de cafeterías* ‘that street has loads of cafés’, *es muy de izquierdas/derechas* ‘(s)he’s very left-wing/right-wing’.

### 35.4.3 Intensifiers in *-mente*

There are numerous intensifiers ending in *-mente*, e.g. *sumamente* ‘exceedingly’, *increíblemente* ‘incredibly’, *tremendamente* ‘tremendously’, *fenomenalmente* ‘phenomenally’, etc. As was mentioned earlier, these cannot modify another adverb in *-mente*, i.e. ‘(s)he speaks English incredibly fluently’ cannot be translated *\*habla inglés increíblemente fluidamente* but must be recast, e.g. *habla inglés con una soltura/facilidad/fluidez increíble*.

### 35.4.4 *Más*

For the use of *más* and *menos* in comparisons, see Chapter 6. *Más* can be used – at least in Spain and possibly elsewhere – as an intensifier in familiar speech without any comparative meaning.

<i>Es que eres más tonto . . .</i>	Wow, are you stupid!
<i>Está más borracho . . .</i>	Is he drunk!

### 35.4.5 *Lo* as an intensifier

For *lo* in sentences like *cuéntale lo bien que canta* ‘tell her/him how well (s)he sings’, *camina lo más lentamente/despacio que puedas* ‘walk as slowly as you can’, see 8.2.2.

### 35.4.6 *Qué, cuánto* and *cuán* as intensifiers

Exclamatory *qué* as in *¡qué bien!* is discussed at 28.4.4, *cuán* and *cuán(to)* as in *¡cuánto tiempo sin verte!* at 28.6.

### 35.4.7 Nouns used as intensifiers

Familiar speech uses some nouns as intensifiers, not to everyone's taste as the translations show: *parecía divertirse horrores* (APR, Sp.) 'he seemed to be incredibly amused', *para los setenta y cinco años que traía a costas . . . ¡estaba fenómeno!* (SG, Mex., dialogue) 'for her seventy-five years (lit. 'for the seventy-five years she was carrying on her back'), she looked phenomenal!', *nos aburrimos cantidad/nos reímos cantidad* 'we were bored stiff'/'did we laugh!', *me gustas mogollón, María, ya lo notas* (JM, Sp., dialogue) 'I really like you, María, you can see that' (*un mogollón de* 'a heap/load of . . .').

### 35.4.8 *Sí* and *si* as intensifiers

*Sí*, which means 'yes', and *si* (no accent), which usually means 'if', can both also be used as intensifiers.

*Sí* (with an accent) is often used to assert a fact that the speaker thinks has been contradicted or doubted, or for purposes of contrast: —*María no vendrá*—. *Sí que vendrá. Me lo prometió* "'María won't come." "She will come. She promised me"', *la ciudad tiene muchísimas ventajas, oiga. Aquí sí puede una tener privacidad* (ES. Mex., dialogue) 'the city does have a lot of advantages, you know. One can get some privacy here' (woman speaking), *entonces me entró cierta impaciencia por conocer un país que sí pudo llevar a cabo su cambio* (MB, Ur., dialogue) 'then I felt a certain impatience to get to know a country that really did complete its process of change' (i.e. Cuba).

*Si* (no accent) is often used as an intensifier in spoken language, usually preceded by *pero*. It emphasizes the following statement, often with an indignant or insistent tone, ¡(pero) *si te oí la primera vez!* 'but I heard you the first time!', *pero si vivimos muy bien. No necesitamos nada* (SP, Sp., dialogue) 'but we really *do* live well. We don't need anything', *pero si mañana me voy al Perú y no vuelvo más* (ABE, Pe., dialogue; Sp. *a Perú*) 'but tomorrow I'm going to Peru and I'm not coming back', —*Párate como si nada te doliera*—. *Pero si todo me duele* —*dijo Isabel* (AM, Mex., dialogue. *Párate = ponte de pie* or *levántate* in Spain) "'But stand up as if nothing were hurting you". "But everything's hurting me," Isabel said'.

For *apenas si* 'scarcely' see 27.5.7 note 2.

### 35.4.9 *Bien* and *así de* as intensifiers

Both of these words are occasionally used colloquially before adjectives:

*Es bien lista*

She's pretty clever

*Bien bueno que está, ¿eh?*

Great, isn't it? (sarcastic)?

*¿Adónde vas así de guapa? or . . . vas tan guapa?*

Where are you off to looking so pretty?

(1) *Bien* with the meaning 'very' is more common in Latin America than in Spain: *es bien simpática* (Chilean informant) 'she's very pleasant', *¡si está bien viejo para ti!* (popular Mexican, from Arjona Iglesias, 1991, 78) 'he's really/pretty old for you!', . . . *todos dicen que estoy bien loco* (ET, Mex., dialogue) 'everyone says I'm pretty crazy!'

## 35.5 Adverbs of doubt

Words meaning 'perhaps', 'probably', 'possibly' usually – but not always – call for the subjunctive and are discussed at 20.2.

## 35.6 Adverbs of place

Only *acá*, *allá*, *adentro*, *afuera*, *abajo*, *arriba*, *atrás*, *delante* and *adelante* can be intensified or reduced: *más adentro* / *abajo/arriba/atrás* 'further inside/down/up/back', *más afuera* or *más hacia fuera* 'more to the outside', *más/menos hacia delante* 'further/less forwards'. *Más adelante* means 'later on', e.g. *ya hablaremos más adelante* 'we'll talk later on', *más allá de la realidad y el sueño* (LMD, Sp.) 'beyond reality and dreams', *un poco más acá del horizonte* (MB, Ur.) 'just on this side of the horizon', *¡un poquito más acá!* 'this way a bit!' / 'towards me a bit!'

### 35.6.1 *Aquí, ahí, allí*

These adverbs are closely linked in meaning to the demonstratives:

*este* this near me/us

*ese* that

*aquel* that further away

*aquí* here near me/us

*ahí* (just) there

*allí* there further away/over there

In other words, *aquí* indicates somewhere near the speaker, *ahí* points to space near the speaker and/or the hearer, and *allí* to something distant.

*Pero otras veces me siento aquí también un exiliado* (MB, Ur., dialogue)

*Aquí construiremos la casa, ahí el garaje, y allí al final del jardín, la piscina*

*Deja la linterna ahí a tu lado*

*La seguí hasta el interior de una iglesia.*

*Allí se encontró con un hombre y le*

*entregó un sobre* (JV, Mex., dialogue)

But sometimes I feel like an exile here too

We'll build the house here, the garage there, and the swimming pool there at the bottom of the garden/yard

Leave the torch/US flashlight there by you

I followed her into a church. She met a man there and handed him an envelope

If the place referred to is out of sight, *ahí* is often used if it is nearby or in the same town, *allí* for remoter places:

—*Lo he comprado en esa tienda—. Ah, sí, yo compro siempre ahí*

*Ya están ahí monsieur Fréjus y monsieur Bébé, y quieren cocktails* (JC, Arg., dialogue.

*Están ahí* = 'have arrived')

*Acuérdate que me corrieron, ya no trabajo ahí* (MS, Mex., dialogue. Spain  
*me despidieron* or *me echaron*)

*Mi hermana nació en Caracas, y yo también nací allí*

'I bought it in that shop/store.' 'Oh yes, I always shop there'

M. Fréjus and M. Bébé are here, and they want cocktails

Remember that they fired me. I don't work work there any more

My sister was born in Caracas, and I was born there too

(1) **Important:** one should distinguish carefully between *ahí* and *allí*: they tend to sound similar in some varieties of Spanish. One asks someone on the phone *¿qué tiempo hace ahí?* 'what's the weather like there?' because the weather of interest is close to the hearer. But use of *ahí* to refer to a place distant from the hearer and speaker may produce a strange effect. To ask persons from another country who are sitting next to you *¿qué tal se vive ahí?* 'what's it like living (just) there?', instead of *allí*, prompts them to look under their chairs . . .

(2) When there is more than one verb, it is important to place *allí* and *ahí* near the verb that they qualify:

*Allí/Ahí me dijo que nos casaríamos*

(S)he told me there that we would get married

*Me dijo que nos casaríamos allí/ahí*

She told me we would get married there

(3) Native speakers may use *ahí* for *allí* (but not vice versa) if they feel emotionally close to the place they are talking about: *¿conoces la iglesia a la entrada del pueblo? Pues ahí/allí se casaron mis padres* 'do you know the church on the way in to the village? Well, that's where my parents got married', *es una hermosa ciudad, Princeton quiero decir . . . He estado ahí un par de veces* (JV, Mex., dialogue) 'It's a beautiful city, Princeton, I mean. I've been there a couple of times', *ahí está, dijo, y ahí estaba porque él lo conocía . . .* (GGM, Col., dialogue, pointing to a comet in the sky; or *allí*) "'There it is," he said, "and there it was because he was familiar with it."'

### 35.6.2 *Acá, allá*

In Latin America *acá* and *allá* are more common than *aquí* and *allí* in all styles, especially in the Southern Cone: *acá en la Argentina si querés una taza de té, tenés que beber mate* = in European Spanish *aquí en Argentina, si quieres una taza de té, tienes que beber mate* 'here in Argentina if you want a cup of tea you have to drink *mate*'; *oye, hijo: hay por acá oportunidades de chamba* (MS, Mex., dialogue. *La chamba* is an everyday expression from Peru northwards and especially in Mexico for *el trabajo* 'work') 'listen son: there are work opportunities round here', *vive seis meses allá y seis acá* (EM, Mex., dialogue) 'she lives six months there and six months here', *una bomba debió estallar cerca de acá* (LR, Col., dialogue) 'a bomb must have gone off close to here'.

In Spain, *acá* and *allá* are less common and denote vague or non-specific location or, most commonly, movement, often with the preposition *para*:

*Ven acá/aquí, que te voy a contar una cosa*

Come here, I'm going to tell you something

*Íbamos allá/hacia allí cuando nos lo/le encontramos*

We were on the way there when we ran into him (i.e. 'met him')

*Que se venga para acá en cuanto pueda*

(S)he must come here as soon as (s)he can

(1) *Allá* is often used of large distances in Latin America and occasionally in Spain. It can also on both continents express vague yearnings. In time phrases, it emphasizes remoteness and may be obligatory: *allá/allí en (la) Argentina tenemos mucha familia* (*allí* in Spain, though *allá* is possible) 'we have a lot of family out there in Argentina', *el sur era y es acentuadamente indio; allá la cultura tradicional está todavía viva* (OP, Mex.) 'the south was and is markedly Amerindian; down there traditional culture is still alive'. In time phrases, *allá* cannot be replaced by *allí*: *había trabajado en sus dos primeros largometrajes, allá por 1950* (JM, Sp., dialogue, not \**allí por*) 'he'd worked on his first full-length films sometime around 1950'.

(2) On both continents *allá* with a pronoun translates 'let him/her get on with it' / 'it's your look-out/problem': *allá él si hace tonterías* 'if he's fooling around, that's his affair', —*Y eso es exactamente lo que niegan los protestantes*—. *Allá ellos* (GZ, Mex., dialogue) "'and that's precisely what the Protestants deny." "Good luck to them/Let them get on with it"'.

(3) *Acá* is sometimes used in time expressions in informal language, though it sounds a little old-fashioned, at least in Spain: *¿de cuándo acá no se dice hola a los amigos? (desde cuándo . . .)* 'since when have people not been saying "hello" to their friends?', *desde las elecciones (acá), este país ya no tiene remedio* 'since the elections this country's been beyond hope', *de un tiempo acá se le nota cansada (desde un tiempo a esta parte . . .)* 'she's been looking tired for some time now'.

### 35.6.3 Use of adverbs of place as pronouns

One hears speakers use *aquí/ahí/allí* familiarly for *este/ese/aquel*: *aquí me dice* 'this one here says to me' (itself very familiar) so as to avoid a personal reference. The same phenomenon occurs in Latin America, and also with *acá/allá*.

### 35.6.4 Adverbs of place with prepositions

All the adverbs of place can be preceded by *de, desde, hacia, hasta, por* and, less commonly, *para* (for which see *acá/allá*).

*Los duraznos de aquí son mejores que  
los de Estados Unidos (in Spain durazno  
= el melocotón)*

*Mira el sombrero que lleva la señora de allí*

*Desde aquí se ve el mar*

*Se sale por aquí*

The peaches (from) here are better  
than the ones from the United States

Look at the hat that lady over there is  
wearing

You can see the sea from here

This is the way out

### 35.6.5 *Dentro/adentro, fuera/afuera*

'Inside' and 'outside', respectively. In Spain *dentro* and *fuera* are preferred after prepositions (except perhaps *para*) and also to form prepositional phrases when followed by *de*. *Afuera* and *adentro* strictly speaking denote motion *towards* and should be used only in this sense in Spain although they are occasionally found in isolation with the meaning of *fuera, dentro*:

*Por dentro era negro, y por fuera blanco*

*Dentro de la caja había otra  
Ven (a)dentro y te lo explicaré  
Vamos a cenar fuera*

*El gas tiende a escaparse hacia fuera  
He estado fuera unos días  
un tren cuyos vagones quedaron volcados  
fuera de las vías (AM, Mex.).  
Tu ocurrencia ha estado fuera de lugar  
Afuera quedaba el domingo de verano,  
despoblado y soso (FU, Sp.  
Poetic: fuera is more usual)*

On the inside it was black, on the outside  
white

Inside the box was another  
Come inside and I'll explain it to you  
We're eating out (tonight)/We're  
having dinner outside

Gas tends to escape outwards  
I've been away for a couple of days  
a train whose wagons/carriages had ended  
up tipped over off the track  
Your witty remark was out of place  
Outside was the summer Sunday,  
empty (lit. 'depopulated') and  
lifeless

In Latin America *afuera* and *adentro* tend to be used much more often. *Adentro de* and *afuera de* are also used as prepositional phrases, this usage being considered normal in Argentina and colloquial in most other republics. Only *fuera de* and *dentro de* are used in Spain:

*Afuera hacía calor porque empezaba enero  
(JC, Arg., Sp. fuera)  
fuera en el parque, y adentro, por la casa  
entera seguían los disparos (JDC, Ch.,  
Spain fuera, dentro)*

Outside it was hot because January  
was beginning  
Outside in the park, and inside,  
throughout the house, the shooting  
continued

*Afuera de un banco nos encontramos a  
un hombre negro vestido con harapos  
(DES, Mex. Spain fuera de)  
nuestros treinta años adentro de Abc Color  
(Abc Color, Par. Sp. dentro de)*

Outside a bank we came across a black man  
dressed in rags

... our thirty years (working) at Abc Color

However, *dentro de* is used in Latin America, as in Spain, in time phrases of the sort *dentro de una semana* 'in a week's time' (very often *en una semana* on both continents).

(1) For the colloquial *adentro mío*, *adentro tuyo*, for *dentro de mí*, *dentro de ti*, see 9.7.

(2) *Fuera de* can mean *aparte de*, 'apart from' but is rather colloquial: *fuera de él no hay nadie en que yo pueda confiar* 'apart from him, there's no one I can trust' (some grammarians prefer *excepto él/aparte de él*).

### 35.6.6 **Abajo, debajo de, abajo de, arriba, encima**

For the prepositions *bajo*, *debajo de* see 38.4. For *encima de* see 38.20 and 38.11.

*Abajo* means 'down' or 'downstairs', and *arriba* means 'up' or 'upstairs':

*Te espero abajo/arriba  
Caminaba calle abajo/arriba*

I'll wait downstairs/upstairs  
(S)he walked down/up the street

*Abajo de* is constantly used in Latin America where Spaniards would use *debajo de*:

*¿Chofi guarda las quincenas abajo del  
colchón? (AM, Mex., Sp. debajo de.  
Quincenas = wages paid every two weeks)  
La nevera está abajo del bar (CF, Mex.,  
dialogue; Sp. debajo de)*

Does Chofi keep her wages under  
the mattress?

The refrigerator is under the bar

The difference between *arriba* and *encima* is basically the same as between 'up' and 'on top':

*Ponlo encima de la mesa  
Ponlo ahí encima  
Se le cayó encima un ladrillo  
Ponlo ahí arriba  
Unos pasos más adelante, miré por encima  
de mi hombro (BE, Mex.)  
El avión pasó por encima del pueblo*

Put it on (top of) the table  
Put it there on top  
A brick fell on top of him  
Put it up there  
A few paces further on I looked over my  
shoulder  
The plane flew over the village

(1) *Encima* can also be used figuratively: *les dije que se lo daría y encima se quejan* 'I told them I would give it to them and on top of that/even then they complain', *ya tenía bastante con su propio sentimiento de culpa ... como para soportar, encima, la inquisición de una hermana mojigata* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'she already had enough to put up with her own feeling of guilt ... without having to tolerate interrogation on top of that from a holier-than-thou sister', *la noche se nos vino encima* lit. 'night came down upon us', i.e. 'night fell around us'.

(2) *Arriba de* for *encima de* in the meaning of 'above'/'ahead of' in order or rank is accepted by the Academy: *NGLE 30.5e: iba en (Sp. a) la misma escuela, tres años arriba de mí* (ES, Mex. dialogue) 'he was at the same school, three years ahead of me'.

### 35.6.7 *Detrás, detrás de and atrás*

*Atrás* 'backwards/back' refers to motion backwards or things located to the rear or left behind, whereas *detrás* and the prepositional phrase *detrás de* indicate static position behind something:

<i>dar un paso atrás</i>	to move a step backwards
<i>Ella subió las escaleras sin siquiera mirar hacia atrás (GCI, Cu.)</i>	She went up the stairs without even looking back
<i>Ponte detrás de mí</i>	Stand behind me
<i>detrás del árbol/detrás de la mesa</i>	behind the tree/behind the table
<i>... dirigiéndose hacia la pequeña plaza que habían dejado dos calles atrás (AM, Mex.)</i>	... heading for the little square that they had left behind two streets back
<i>¡No te quedes atrás!</i>	Don't lag behind!

(1) In Latin America *atrás de* is frequently used for *detrás de*: *las demás me veían desde atrás de la mesa* (AM, Mex., Sp. *desde detrás de la mesa*) 'the other women were looking at me from behind the table'. For *detrás mío* (instead of *detrás de mí*) see Section 9.7.

(2) *Atrás* is also used in the time phrases *años/meses/días atrás* 'some years/months/days ago'. See 36.4 note 1.

(3) For *tras* = *detrás de* see 38.21.

### 35.6.8 *Delante, delante de and adelante*

In Spain *delante* 'in front' and the prepositional phrase *delante de* 'in front of' denote place, *adelante* 'forward(s)/onward(s)' denotes motion forward:

<i>Yo iba delante</i>	I was walking ahead/in front
<i>Delante de ti no hablará</i>	(S)he won't say anything in front of you
<i>¡Lo hemos tenido delante de nosotros todo el tiempo! (JV, Mex., dialogue)</i>	We've had it in front of us all the time!
<i>Sigue adelante que yo te alcanzaré</i>	Go on ahead. I'll catch you up
<i>¡Adelante!</i>	Come in!

(1) In colloquial Latin-American Spanish *adelante de* is often used for 'in front of', but this is not heard in Spain: *vio a Federico que, unos cuantos pasos adelante de él, se detenía y agachaba a tomar una piedra* (SG, Mexico; Sp. *delante de él*) 'he saw Federico, who was stopping and bending down to pick up a stone a few paces in front of him'.

(2) Omission of *de* in the prepositional phrase, common in Latin America, occasionally heard in Spain, is considered incorrect in careful language: *dentro de mi corazón, fuera de la casa*, not \**dentro mi corazón*, etc.

(3) For *ante* = *delante de* see 38.3.

(4) *De ... en adelante* is used in quantities and in time phrases: *para esto necesitas de un millón en adelante* 'for this you'll need a million or more', *de ahora en adelante no lo vuelvo a hacer* 'from now on I'm not doing it again'.

(5) For *delante mío* instead of *delante de mí* see 9.7.



## 35.7 Adverbs of time

### 35.7.1 *Ya, ya no*

*Ya* has a wide variety of uses. In many common constructions its meaning is determined by the tense of the verb that it modifies:

*Vienen ya* They're coming right now  
*Ya llegarán* They'll be here/Don't worry,  
 they'll come  
*Ya han llegado* They've already arrived  
*Ya llegaron* (Lat. Am.) They already arrived

*Ya no vienen* They're not coming any  
 more  
*Ya no llegarán* They won't be coming any  
 more

Further examples:

*Ya no soy el de antes*  
*¿Quién se acuerda ya del Charleston?*  
*Ya no tengo edad para trabajar*  
 (JMa, Sp., dialogue)  
*Desde que llegó dio a entender que se sentía*  
*fatigado; las cosas ya no marchaban como*  
*antes* (CF, Mex.)

I'm not the man I was  
 Who remembers the Charleston  
 anymore?  
 I'm no longer of an age to be  
 working/I'm too old to work  
 From the moment he arrived he let it  
 be known that he felt tired; things  
 weren't working anymore as they used to

But *ya* has many expressive uses which do not always appear in the dictionaries. Depending on context and intonation it can express impatience, frustration, fulfilled expectations, resignation, certainty about the future, disbelief or, in negative sentences, denial of something expected:

*Iros, iros a la playa, que ya me quedo yo*  
*aquí a lavar la ropa* (CRG, Sp., dialogue.  
*Iros* is familiar for *idos*; see 21.2.4 note 2)  
*Lleva seis meses en cama. Si eso no es*  
*grave, pues ya me dirás*  
*Sirve ya la cena* (impatient tone)  
*Ya siéntate y deja de interrumpir*  
 (AM, Mex., dialogue; Spain *siéntate ya*)  
*Por mí, que se vaya ya*  
*Ya le pasará la cuenta cuando gane el gallo*  
 (GGM, Col., dialogue)  
*Ya cuando uno los trata se da cuenta de que*  
*son magníficas personas* (ES, Mex., dialogue)  
*¡Basta ya! ¡Calla ya! ¡Ya está bien!*  
*Bueno, eso es el colmo ya*  
*Ya puedes tener buen olfato con la nariz que*  
*tú tienes*  
*Ya quisiera la Diana Ross para sus días*  
*festivos ser tan linda como tú* (RS, PR,  
 dialogue; Sp. *para sus días de fiesta*).  
*Por mí, ya puede llover, que tenemos tienda*  
*de campaña*

Go on, off you go to the beach while  
 I stay here washing the clothes  
 (martyred tone)  
 (S)he's been in bed six months. If that's  
 not serious, then you tell me what is  
 Serve supper *now*  
 Sit down and stop interrupting  
 (S)he can go right now, as far as I'm  
 concerned  
 I'll send you the bill when your cockerel/  
 rooster wins  
 As soon as you have anything to do with  
 them you straightaway realize they're  
 great people  
 That's enough! Not another word!  
 Well, that *is* the limit!  
 You can well have a good sense of smell  
 with the nose you've got!  
 Diana Ross on a good day (lit. 'on her  
 holidays') would like to be as pretty  
 as you  
 As far as I'm concerned, it can go  
 ahead and rain – we've got a tent

Hitler *habría sido todavía peor* – y *ya es*  
*decir* . . .  
*cuando ya acabemos de limpiar la casa* . . .  
*No, no, ya te digo que él no sabía nada de*  
*todo aquello*  
*¡Ya tuviste que contarme el final!*  
*Ya lo sé*  
*Ya empezamos* . . .  
*Ya era hora* . . .  
*Ya podías haberme dejado unos dólares*

—¿*No ves lo inteligente que soy?* —*Ya, ya* . . .

—*El jefe quiere hablar conmigo. Está muy*  
*enfadado*—. *Ya será menos*  
*Ya ves*  
*Ya hablaremos* (does not necessarily imply a  
 firm commitment)

Hitler would have been even worse –  
 and that's saying something . . .  
 when we finally finish cleaning the house . . .  
 No, no, I'm *telling* you he knew nothing  
 about all that  
 You *would* have to tell me the ending!  
 I already know / I *know*  
 (Oh dear) here we go again . . .  
 It's about time . . .  
 You could have lent me a couple of dollars  
 (wounded tone)  
 'Don't you see how intelligent I am?'  
 'Yeah, sure . . .' (sarcastic tone)  
 'The boss wants to talk to me. He's very  
 angry.' 'Come on, it won't be that bad.'  
 There you are / Didn't I say so?  
 We'll talk again sometime . . .

(1) *Ya* . . . *ya* is a literary alternative for *o* . . . *o* 'either . . . or': *ya porque la idea del matrimonio acabara/ acabó por asustarle, ya porque no pudiera/podía olvidar a María, no apareció en la iglesia* 'either because the idea of marriage eventually frightened him or because he couldn't forget María, he didn't appear at the church'. The indicative is more colloquial. *Bien* . . . *bien* . . . with the indicative can also be used.

(2) *Ya* may be an abbreviation of *ya lo sé* 'I know', or *ya entiendo* 'I understand': —*Cuando veas la luz verde pulsa el botón rojo*—. *Ya* "'When you see the green light, push the red button.'" "Right/OK"'.

(3) *Desde ya* 'straightaway' is an expression from the Southern Cone which seems to have spread to Spain, where *desde ahora ya* or *enseguida* are more usual.

### 35.7.2 *Recién*

In Spain *recién* appears before participles, a construction also found in Latin America: *recién pintado* 'newly painted', *recién casado* 'newly-wed', *recién divorciado* 'recently divorced', *un chico recién salido del colegio* 'a boy who has recently left school', *una amiga de mis padres, recién llegada de la Unión Soviética* (DES, Mex.) 'a female friend of my parents who had recently arrived from the Soviet Union'.

The use of *recién* as a free-standing adverb of time is one hallmark of Latin-American Spanish, particularly in the Southern Cone. It has two basic meanings, neither of which is used in Spain:

(a) 'Right now', 'just now', 'recently':

*Recién lo vi* (Spain *le acabo de ver*)  
 —¿*Cuándo lo dijo?* —*Recién* (Sp.  
*Ahora mismo*)  
*El nuevo Estadio de Delfines, que recién*  
*concluyó una serie de remodelaciones*  
*mayores* (La Jornada, Mex. Spain  
*recientemente/hace poco* . . .)

I've just seen him  
 'When did (s)he say it?' 'Just now'

The new Delfines Stadium, which  
 recently saw the end of a series of major  
 refurbishments

(b) 'Only', as in 'only now', 'only next week/this year/then' etc., or, with the future, 'not until'. This usage is particularly common in the Southern Cone even in written language, but it is considered colloquial further north:

*recién en los últimos siete años* (Sp. *sólo en*  
or *solamente en* . . .)

*Recién lo sabremos a último momento*  
(*La Nación*, Arg. Sp. *no lo sabremos*  
*hasta el* . . .)

*Y él recién entonces se da cuenta de que está*  
*herida* (MP, Arg., dialogue; Sp.  
. . . *sólo entonces se da cuenta* . . .)

*Pero las malas noticias recién empezaban*  
(MSQ, Arg. Sp. *solo acababan de empezar*)

only in the last seven years . . .

We won't find out until the last minute

And only then he realizes that she's  
injured

But the bad news was only just beginning

### 35.7.3 *Todavía, aún*

*Todavía* and *aún* both mean 'still'/'yet' and are synonymous. With words like *menos*, *más*, *menor* and *mayor* they are translated as 'even'. *Aún* with an accent must be distinguished from *aun* 'even', although its meaning sometimes overlaps with *aun*. The latter is discussed at 35.8:

*Todavía/Aún están aquí*

*No han venido aún/todavía*

*Su cara puede verse menos bonita aún, se lo*  
*aseguro* (CF, Mex., dialogue; or  
*todavía menos/menos bonita todavía*)

*Es todavía/aún/aun/incluso/hasta más*  
*difícil de lo que yo pensaba*

They are still here

They haven't come yet

I can assure you, your face can look  
even less pretty

It's even more difficult than I thought

### 35.7.4 *Luego and entonces*

Both words are translatable as 'then', but they usually mean different things.

(a) As time words, *entonces* means 'then'/'at that moment' whereas *luego* means 'afterwards'/'later on', although there is sometimes some overlap in meaning. *Luego* in this sense is stressed: *luego viene/viene luego* '(s)he's coming later'. If the *luego* is not stressed here, it means 'so'/'in that case'. *Entonces* may also mean 'at that time':

*Abrí la puerta, y entonces me di cuenta de*  
*lo que había pasado* (*luego* here would  
mean *después* 'afterwards')

*Entonces tuvo una crisis de arrepentimiento y*  
*se levantó decidida a romper la ventana*  
(ES, Mex., dialogue)

*Desde entonces soy feliz*

*Recuerdo que los cines de entonces siempre*  
*olían a agua de colonia*

*el entonces catedrático de griego*

*Hasta luego* (cf. *hasta ahora*, 'see you in  
a minute')

*Según dice mamá, que luego estuvo seis*  
*años liada con Tey* (JMs, Sp.)

*El detective lo escuchó, luego pidió una*  
*cerveza y un tequila* (EM, Mex.)

I opened the door, and realized then  
what had happened

Then she had a fit (lit. 'crisis') of remorse and  
stood up determined to break the window

From that time on I have been happy  
I remember that cinemas at that time  
always smelt of eau de Cologne  
the then professor of Greek  
See you later/goodbye

According to mother, who later on  
was involved with Tey for six years  
The detective listened to him and then  
asked for a beer and a tequila

(b) Both *entonces* and *luego* may mean 'in that case'. In this meaning *luego* is not stressed:

—En Madrid hace 40 grados, en Sevilla 38—.  
Entonces/Luego hace más calor en Madrid  
que en Sevilla

Es mi secreto. Entonces ya me lo contarás. Los  
secretos siempre se cuentan (ABV, Sp.,  
dialogue; luego not possible in in  
conjunction with *ya*)

Pienso luego existo (set phrase)

'In Madrid it's 40 degrees, in Seville  
38'. 'In that case it's hotter in  
Madrid than in Seville'

'It's my secret'. 'Then you'll soon tell  
me. Secrets always get told'

I think, therefore I am

(1) The following words also convey the idea of 'then': *después*, 'after', *acto seguido* 'next' / 'immediately after', *a continuación* 'next' / 'immediately after', *en seguida/enseguida* 'immediately' / 'straightaway'.

### 35.7.5 *Antes 'before'*

*Antes* must be distinguished from the entirely separate word *ante* 'in the presence of' / 'in front of', discussed at 38.3:

*Antes prefería hablar contigo*  
*Es que antes las parejas sí se tomaban en*  
*serio lo de hasta que la muerte los separe*  
(ES, Mex., dialogue)

*Lo antes que te puedo llamar es a las cinco*  
*Lola se levantó antes que nadie*  
*Si la ves antes que yo . . .*

First I'd prefer to talk to you  
The thing is that in the past couples really  
used to take the bit about 'till death do us  
part' seriously

The earliest I can call you is at five  
Lola got up before everyone else  
If you see her before I do . . .

(1) For the subordinators *antes (de) que* and *después (de) que* see 20.4.7 and 18.3.3.

(2) For *antes que* meaning 'rather than' see 37.4.2. note 3.

### 35.7.6 *Otrora*

This word, now archaic in Spain, is still alive in the Latin-American media, usually with an ironic tone: *la otrora pujante economía de Irlanda pone a temblar a la UE* (*El Tiempo*, Col.) 'the once thriving economy of Ireland is now making the European Union quake', *el otrora poderoso Partido Revolucionario Dominicano* (*La Jornada*, Mex.) 'the once powerful Dominican Revolutionary Party'. In Spain the words *antes* or *previamente* are used.

## 35.8 *Incluso (inclusive), hasta, aun, siquiera*

All these words may translate the English 'even' in such sentences as 'she even speaks Russian and Greek', 'even in Britain the sun shines sometimes'. *Incluso* and *aun* (no accent) are synonyms, but nowadays *incluso* is more often used (see note 1 for *inclusive*):

*Incluso/Aun hoy día algunas personas*  
*siguen creyendo en las hadas*  
*Incluso/Aun si le das dinero, no lo hará*  
*. . . e incluso en los años ochenta* (JA, Mex.)  
*Yo soy débil y extranjera y aun en mi*  
*condición de aristocracia, empobrecida*  
(CF, Mex. Dialogue)

Even today some people still believe  
in fairies  
Even if you give him money he won't do it  
. . . and even in the 1980s  
I'm feeble and foreign, and despite my  
aristocratic status (lit. 'even in my  
aristocratic status'), impoverished

**Important:** before or after comparative adjectives and adverbs (including *más* and *menos*), ‘even’ is translated by *todavía*, *aún* or *incluso*, but not by *aun*: *todavía/incluso/aún más inteligente* ‘even more intelligent’, *menos probable aún/todavía* ‘even less probable’.

**Hasta**, literally ‘until’, may also mean ‘even’:

*Ha llovido tanto que hasta/incluso/aun los patos están hartos*

It’s rained so much that even the ducks have had enough

*Y un día hasta me dijeron que usara el teléfono cuando quisiera* (ABE, Pe., dialogue)

And one day they even told me to use the phone whenever I liked

For other meanings of *hasta* see 38.14.

**Siquiera** means ‘at least’:

*Dame siquiera cien euros*

Give me a hundred euros at least

*Yo creo que si se mete uno a eso de las caridades, tiene que ser a lo grande, siquiera quedar como San Francisco* (AM, Mex., dialogue)

I think that if one’s going to go into charity work, one’s got to do it in a big way, at least be like St Francis

*Siquiera el General es generoso. Mira el coche que me regaló* (ibid.)

At least the General is generous. Look at the car he gave me

**Ni siquiera** translates ‘not even’:

*Bueno, los ingleses . . . los autos por la izquierda . . . ni siquiera han aceptado el sistema métrico* (C. Catania, Arg., interview; Sp. *los autos* = *los coches*)

Well, the English . . . cars on the left-hand side of the road . . . they haven’t even accepted the metric system

(1) **Inclusive** is much used in Latin America where European Spanish uses *incluso*, although the latter is also common on both continents: *la acción demasiado social . . . de muchos sacerdotes y religiosas, inclusive de obispos* (MSQ, Arg.) ‘the excessively social [i.e. left-wing] activity of many priests and nuns, even of bishops’, *el gran ventarrón . . . que inclusive en una casa arrancó el portón* (La Jornada, Mex.) ‘the violent wind that even ripped the front door off a house’.

In Spain *inclusive* is used thus: *te mando las revistas, el último número inclusive/incluido* (*inclusive* follows the noun) ‘I’m sending you the magazines, including the latest number’, *hasta el domingo inclusive/incluido* ‘up to and including Sunday’. *Inclusivamente* is hardly ever used.

# 36 Expressions of time

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- Tenses in sentences like ‘I’ve been here three days’, ‘it’s the first time that . . .’ (Section 36.2)
- Ways of saying ‘for six months’, ‘I’ve waited (for) two hours’, etc. (Section 36.3)
- Uses of the following words to express duration of time:

<i>llevar</i> (36.3.1)	<i>durante</i> (36.3.4)	<i>para</i> (36.3.6)
<i>hace . . . que</i> (36.3.2)	<i>por</i> (36.3.5)	<i>desde</i> (36.3.7)

- Translating ‘ago’ (Section 36.4)
- Translating ‘in three days’, etc. (Section 36.5)
- Translating ‘again’ (Section 36.6)
- *Tardar* (Section 36.7)
- Translating ‘still’ (Section 36.8)
- Translating dates (Section 36.9)
- Telling the time and miscellaneous time expressions (Section 36.10)
- Translating ‘next’ (Section 36.11)
- Expressions of age (Section 36.12)
- Omission of prepositions in certain expressions of time (Section 36.13)

## 36.1 General

This chapter is divided into two parts. Section 36.2–8 covers such matters as the expression of duration, e.g. ‘for *n* days’, ‘since . . .’, ‘during . . .’, ‘still’. Sections 36.9–36.10 contain translations of a number of expressions connected with the clock, dates and similar matters.

## 36.2 General remarks on tenses used in expressions of duration and other expressions of time

English-speakers tend to use the wrong tense in Spanish in sentences like ‘I have been learning Spanish for three years’, ‘it’s the first time I’ve seen her for months’. Unlike English, European Spanish often uses – and Latin-American Spanish normally uses – the present tense to indicate events that are still in progress or are likely to recur: *estudio español desde hace tres años* ‘I’ve been learning Spanish for three years’ (not *he estudiado . . .*), *desde que te conozco es la primera vez que te oigo decir algo que no debías* (GGM, Col., dialogue) ‘it’s the first time **since I’ve known you** that **I’ve heard** you say something that you shouldn’t have said’.

If the event *was* continuing in the past, European Spanish often uses – and Latin-American Spanish normally uses – the imperfect tense for events that were still in progress whereas English uses the pluperfect: *estudiaba español desde hacía tres años* ‘I/(s)he had been studying Spanish for three years’, *desde que disfrutaba la compañía de Iris encontraba terribles sus horas de soledad* (ES, Mex.) ‘since he had been enjoying Iris’s company he found the hours that he was alone terrible’.

## 36.3 Duration

There are various ways of expressing duration, not all of them interchangeable, e.g. *llevar . . .*, *hace . . .*, *desde hace . . .*, *desde*, *durante*, *en*, *por*, *para*.

### 36.3.1 *Llevar*

This verb provides the best translation of sentences like ‘I’ve been doing something for *n* hours/days/months/years’, but it indicates that the event is or was still in progress. One cannot say *llevo seis meses en España* ‘I’ve been in Spain for six months’ after one has left the country for good: one would then say *he estado/estuve seis meses en España*.

If the event is still in progress, a present tense of *llevar* is used:

<i>Llevamos cinco años viviendo juntos</i> (CRG, Sp.)	We’ve been living together for five years
<i>El ascensor lleva estropeado dos meses</i> (ibid.)	The lift/elevator has been broken for two months
<i>¿Cuánto (tiempo) llevas en este trabajo?</i>	How long have you been in this job?
<i>Llevo diez años sentada aquí esperando que me lo preguntes</i> (GGM, Col. dialogue)	I’ve been sitting here for ten years waiting for you to ask me that
<i>Llevas media hora hablando de lo mismo</i> (EP, Mex., dialogue)	You’ve been talking about the same thing for half an hour

If the event or state *was* still in progress at the time, an imperfect tense of *llevar* is used (other past tenses are not used in this construction):

<i>Llevabas años diciéndolo</i>	You had been saying it for years
<i>El chalet llevaba más de diez años cerrado</i> (RM, Sp.)	The house had been closed up for more than ten years
<i>Se comportaba como si llevara veinticinco años trabajando en la compañía</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue)	He behaved as if he’d been working in the company for twenty-five years

(1) This construction with *llevar* is very common in speech but less common in formal writing than the construction using *hace . . .* / *hacía . . .* described in the next section.

(2) *Llevar* often appears before gerunds but the latter cannot be negative: *\*llevo años no fumando* is not a possible translation of ‘I haven’t been smoking for years’: *hace años que no fumo/llevo años sin fumar/no fumo desde hace años*.

(3) In Latin America *tener* is also used: *tengo dos años aquí*, ‘I’ve been here for two years’, *tenía pocos meses de gobernar cuando logró el cambio* (AM, Mex., dialogue) ‘he’d only been Governor for a few months when he managed to bring about the change’; Kany, 273–4, quotes examples from all parts of the continent. This is also found in formal styles: *aunque tengan muchos años de vivir allí . . . nadie los confundiría con los norteamericanos auténticos* (OP, Mex.) ‘although they’ve been living there for many years, no one would take them for true North Americans’.

(4) The following third-person impersonal construction with *llevar* is noteworthy: *no debía de llevarnos mucho más de media hora plantarnos allí* (LS, Sp.) ‘it shouldn’t take us more than half an hour to get there’, *me llevó años aprender eso* ‘it took me years to learn that’. See 36.7 note 1.

(5) For *me lleva tres años* ‘(s)he’s three years older than me’ see 6.1 note 6.

### 36.3.2 *Hace/hacía/hará . . . que . . .*

**Hace + the present tense.** *Hace dos años que estoy en Madrid* means the same as *llevo dos años en Madrid* 'I've been in Madrid for two years' (and I'm still there). *Hace* in this construction is followed by a simple present tense when the following verb indicates something still in progress.

If the sentence is negative, the perfect tense is also often found in Spain: *¿cuántos años hace que no le has visto?* (JMs, Sp., dialogue) 'how long has it been since you last saw him?' This use of the perfect tense instead of the present is rejected by many Latin Americans and by some Spaniards and should probably be avoided by learners of Latin-American Spanish, although there is much regional variation in this matter. This sentence demonstrates the use of the present in negative sentences: *yo no puedo ver a mi marido desde hace quince días . . .* (EP, Mex., dialogue) 'I haven't been able to see my husband for a fortnight'.

**Hacía + que** translates 'for' in past time and is followed by the imperfect to denote an action that was still in progress: *hacía tiempo que nos veíamos* 'we had been seeing one another for some time'. In this case the pluperfect changes the meaning: *hacía tiempo que nos habíamos visto* 'it had been some time since we had seen one another'. If the sentence is negative, European Spanish sometimes uses the pluperfect in negative sentences in the same way as English: *hacía siete años que Juan de Dios no había visto a su hijo mayor* (MVM, Sp.) 'Juan de Dios hadn't seen his eldest son for seven years'. But the imperfect is far more usual everywhere . . . *que no veía a su hijo mayor*.

**Hará . . . que** + the present tense and **haría . . . que** + the imperfect are commonly used in suppositions or approximations: *hará dos años que no la veo* (Sp. also . . . *no la he visto*) 'it must be two years since I've seen her'. Further examples (affirmative sentences):

<i>Hace años que vienen pagando una especie de ahorro previo para asegurarse la plata</i> (CP, Arg., dialogue; <i>plata</i> = <i>dinero</i> in Spain)	For years they've been paying into a sort of savings fund to make sure of their money
<i>Me dijo que la señorita Brines hacía más de un mes que venía merodeando por el edificio</i> (ABE, Pe., dialogue)	She told me that Ms Brines had been lurking around the building for more than a month
<i>Hará siglos que no se lava</i> (JM, Sp., dialogue: suppositional future)	He can't have washed in centuries
<i>El disco era viejísimo. Hacía diez años que no lo escuchaba</i> (ES, Mex.)	The record was ancient. She hadn't listened to it for ten years

Negative sentences:

<i>Hace años que no la veo y también años que no me han hablado de ella</i> (MVM, Sp., dialogue) (both tenses used)	I haven't seen her for years and for years also they haven't spoken to me about her
<i>. . . como no bebo hace tiempo . . .</i> (MVLl Pe., dialogue. Sp. <i>desde hace tiempo</i> )	. . . since I haven't been drinking for some time
<i>Hacía años que no veía a David</i> (JA, Sp., dialogue)	I hadn't seen David for years
<i>¿Cuánto hacía que no desayunaba huevos con chorizo?</i> (EM, Mex. Redundant no. See 27.2.4)	How long had it been since he'd had eggs with chorizo for breakfast?

**(1) Important:** one cannot use the present tense if *hacer que* or *llevar* are not used. One can say *he estado tres horas aquí* 'I've been here three hours', but not *\*estoy tres horas aquí*. *Llevo tres horas aquí/hace tres horas que estoy aquí/estoy aquí desde hace tres horas* are the correct forms.



(2) **Important:** the verb *hacer* does not appear in the plural in this impersonal construction: *\*hacían años que no hablaban de otra cosa* ‘they hadn’t talked of anything else for years’ is bad Spanish for *hacía años que . . .*

(3) The imperfect tense may be used in negative sentences with a change of meaning. *Hace años que no tomábamos café juntos* ‘we haven’t had coffee together for years’ differs from *hace años que no tomamos café juntos*. The former is appropriate while one is actually drinking coffee with the friend; the latter suggests that it would be a good idea to meet some time in the future.

(4) *En* may be used in the same way as the English ‘in’ in negative sentences, e.g. ‘I hadn’t seen her in/for three days’; see 36.5.

### 36.3.3 Translating ‘for’ when the event is no longer in progress

Verb in a past tense and no preposition or *durante* in formal styles:

*Estuvimos (durante) cuatro días y al quinto  
nos trasladaron a la Cárcel de Mujeres  
(EP, Mex., dialogue)*

*Trabajé (durante) varios años en Madrid  
¿cuánto tiempo ha estado usted/estuvo en  
Madrid? (addressed to someone who has  
left Madrid)*

We were there for four days and on the  
fifth day they transferred us to the  
Women’s Prison

I worked in Madrid for several years  
How long were you in Madrid?

(1) Sentences like ‘I haven’t seen him for years’, ‘she hasn’t smoked for years’ can be thought of as ‘non-events’ that are still in progress. For this reason, they are discussed at 36.3.2. *Hace . . . que* with a preterite tense means ‘ago’ and is discussed at 36.4.

### 36.3.4 *Durante*

The basic meaning of *durante* is ‘during’: *durante el siglo XX* ‘during the twentieth century’, *durante los tres meses que estuvo aquí* ‘in the three months he was here’. Unlike ‘during’ it is regularly used before plural nouns to mean ‘for’ a specific period of time: *durante años* ‘for/in years’, *durante muchos siglos* ‘for/in many centuries’. When an event lasted throughout the period mentioned, the verb is in the preterite tense: *fue presidenta durante tres años* ‘she was president for three years’; see 17.4.2.

(1) Spanish uses the preterite continuous (*estuve hablando, estuvo leyendo*, etc.) to emphasize that an event continued throughout a period of time: *durante un cuarto de hora estuvo mirándote* (LS, Mex., dialogue) ‘he was staring at you for a quarter of an hour’. See 19.2.3.

(2) *En* may be used for *durante* in Latin America: *Olga no habló en varios minutos* (LS, Mex.) ‘Olga didn’t speak for several minutes’.

(3) Use of *en* may, on both continents, also correspond to English ‘in’ in negative sentences like ‘I haven’t smoked in/for years’; see 36.5 note 2.

(4) *En* may also be an alternative for *dentro de* in sentences like *te veo dentro de/en cinco minutos* ‘I’ll see you in five minutes’. See 36.5 for discussion.

### 36.3.5 *Por* meaning ‘for’ in time phrases

*Por* means ‘for’ when referring to periods of time, usually past time, when the speaker emphasizes the shortness of the period. The preposition may in some cases be omitted altogether:

*Entraré solo/sólo (por) un momento*  
*Me ha prestado el coche solo/sólo (por) tres días*  
*Por un momento, Bernardo estuvo a punto*  
*de ocultar los motivos de la visita*  
 (JMM, Sp.)  
*Por un instante, Félix sintió que una*  
*pantalla plateada los separaba a él y a Mary*  
 (CF, Mex.)

I'll come in just for a moment  
 (S)he's lent me the car for three days only  
 For a moment Bernardo was about to  
 conceal the reasons for his visit  
 For a moment Félix felt that a silver  
 screen was separating him and Mary

(1) *Por* and *para* are often interchangeable in time expressions fixing the duration of some short-lived future need (see also 36.3.6 for *para* in time phrases): *solo/sólo queremos la habitación por/para unos días* 'we only want the room for a few days'.

(2) When longer periods are involved, Latin Americans may use *por* where European speakers use *durante* or *para*: *por cuatro o cinco años nos tuvieron acorralados* (MVLL, Pe., dialogue; Sp. *durante* . . .) 'they had us cornered for four or five years', *mi viejo sombrero, que ha soportado soles y lluvias por más de tres años* (J JA, Mex., dialogue; Sp. *durante*) 'my old hat, that has put up with sun and rain for more than three years', *ahí permaneció por casi dos semanas* (LS, Ch., Sp. *durante* . . . or no preposition) 'there he stayed for nearly two weeks'.

### 36.3.6 *Para* in expressions of duration

*Para* is used to translate the idea of 'for' a specified period of time in the future, especially when the idea of 'enough for' is involved:

*Tenemos agua para tres días*  
*Las últimas lluvias alivian al campo*  
*alicantino solo para dos meses* (Abc, Sp.)  
*Han sido recuperados productos para dos*  
*meses de abastecimiento* (Panorama, Ven.)

We've enough water for three days  
 The recent rains will bring only two  
 months' relief to the fields of Alicante  
 Produce has been recovered [from  
 smugglers] sufficient for two months'  
 supplies

(1) *Ir para* is a colloquial translation of 'for nearly . . .': *va para cinco años que trabajo aquí* 'I've been working here for nearly five years' / 'it's getting on for five years that I've been working here'.

(2) *Para* can also mean 'by' in time phrases: *para entonces todos estaremos viejos* 'we'll all be old by then'.

### 36.3.7 *Desde*

*Desde* translates 'since' or, sometimes, 'for'. *Desde que* is used before verb phrases, *desde* before singular noun phrases and adverbials, and *desde hace/hacia* before plural or numbered nouns. *Desde* can be used in a way unfamiliar to English-speakers: *desde niña hablo francés* 'I've spoken French since I was a little girl'.

Correct choice of the tense is important. Events that are still in progress usually require the present tense, especially in Latin America. But in Spain, the perfect may optionally be used:

*desde ayer/desde hace un año*  
*Mi marido está parado desde hace dos años*  
 (ABV, Sp., dialogue)  
*Te he estado esperando desde antes de la*  
*una (or te estoy esperando)*

since yesterday / since a year ago  
 My husband's been out of work for  
 two years  
 I've been waiting for you since before  
 one o'clock

*Desde hace unos meses atrás alguien me  
había susurrado la verdad* (WU, Mex.,  
dialogue)

Some months ago/before someone had  
whispered the truth to me

*Desde entonces nada le ha durado mucho  
(JM, Sp., or . . . nada le dura)*

Since then nothing has lasted long for  
him

*Lo sé desde que te vi en el hospital  
(GGM, Col., dialogue; or Sp. lo he sabido)  
. . . lo que está pasando desde julio del  
pasado año* (Granma, Cu., or Sp. *ha  
estado pasando*)

I've known it since I saw you in the hospital  
. . . what has been happening since July  
last year

Events that *were* in progress are expressed by the imperfect tense: *desde la gran crisis dormían en habitaciones separadas* (SPI, Mex., Sp. also *habían dormido*) 'since the great crisis they had been sleeping in separate rooms'.

Events that are or were no longer in progress require a past tense, normally a compound tense (perfect, pluperfect) in Spain or the preterite in much of Latin America:

*He fumado tres veces desde octubre  
Yo había fumado tres veces desde entonces  
Claro que he vuelto a hacerlo/volví a  
hacerlo desde entonces* (preterite  
preferred in Latin America)

I've smoked three times since October  
I had smoked three times since then  
Obviously I've done it again since then

*Te estuve esperando desde antes de la una*

I was waiting for you from before one o'clock

*Desde hace/desde hacía* are required before plural nouns, before specified periods of time and before numbers. The compound tenses are possible in European Spanish:

*Todos los adolescentes se han comportado  
exactamente igual desde hace tres mil  
años* (C. Rico-Godoy, Sp., *se comportan*  
possible in Spain, normal in Latin  
America)

All adolescents have acted exactly the  
same way for three thousand years

*Desde hacía tiempo sospechaba que Tita  
deseaba que ella desapareciera de este  
mundo* (LE, Mex.)

She had been suspecting for some time  
that Tita wanted her to disappear  
from this world

*Estoy aquí desde hace cinco años  
(APR, Sp., dialogue)*

I've been here for five years

(1) Colloquial speech sometimes omits the *desde* from this phrase. This is considered careless by many speakers, but it may be more acceptable in Latin America, cf. *hace treinta años estoy sentado frente a una máquina de escribir* (Abc Color, Par.) 'for thirty years I've been sitting in front of a typewriter' (for *desde hace treinta años*), *somos República hace ocho años* (MVLI, Pe., dialogue) 'we've been a Republic for eight years' (*desde hace ocho años*), *no los veo hace mil años* (ABE, Pe., dialogue, Sp. *desde hace mil años*) 'I haven't seen them in a thousand years'.

(2) When the preterite is expected, literary styles, especially in Spain, often use a *-ra* or *-se* form of the verb after *desde*: *esta/ésta es la primera vez que menciona el asunto desde que ingresara/ingresase/ingresó en la cárcel* 'this is the first time he has mentioned the matter since he entered prison'. See 18.3.3 for discussion.

(3) 'Since' may sometimes need to be translated by *hace que . . . /hacía . . . que* with a past tense: *hace ya ocho años que nos casamos* 'it's eight years since we got married' / 'we got married eight years ago'.

(4) *Desde* is sometimes used in colloquial Latin-American speech to emphasize the moment at which something was done: *desde el martes llegó mi hermano* 'my brother already arrived – on Tuesday'.

(5) **Important:** *desde* never means 'because'. English-speakers make this mistake because 'since' has two meanings: 'I haven't seen him since Christmas' (i.e. from the time of . . .) *no lo/le he visto desde navidad*, but 'I'll do it since you're being nice' = *lo haré porque/ya que estás siendo simpático/a*, never . . . *desde que* . . .

## 36.4 Translating 'ago'

The usual formula is *hace/hacía* with a preterite or pluperfect tense, or, in Spain, with a perfect tense if the event is recent (see 18.2.3):

<i>Lo/Le vi hace años</i>	I saw him years ago
<i>Lo/Le habíamos visto hacía años</i>	We'd seen him years ago/before then
<i>Pero hace un mes quisiste robármelos</i> (MC, Mex., dialogue)	But you tried to steal them [my notes] from me a month ago
<i>La vi hace cosa de dos meses</i>	I saw her a couple of months ago
<i>La he visto</i> (Lat. Am. <i>la vi</i> ) <i>hace un momento</i> (Sp. perfect of recency)	I saw her a moment ago

(1) **Important:** *atrás* is often used to mean 'ago': *lo repararon tiempo atrás* 'they mended it/fixed it some time ago', *su última visita al museo, veinte años atrás* (APR, Sp.) 'his last visit to the museum, twenty years ago/previously', *ahí nació la gran civilización egipcia miles de años atrás* (DES, Mex., dialogue) 'the great Egyptian civilization was born there thousands of years ago'.

(2) Use of the verb *haber* for *hacer* in this construction (with the present-tense form *ha*) is now archaic in Spain, but survives in some colloquial varieties in Latin America: *ha mucho que él perdió a su madre* (MP, Arg., dialogue = *hace mucho*) 'he lost his mother a long time ago'.

## 36.5 'In n days/weeks', etc.

Foreign students often misuse *dentro de* when translating the English 'in' in time expressions. *Dentro de* can only refer to the future or the future in the past. One cannot say \**lo hice dentro de un mes* 'I did it in one month', correctly *lo hice en un mes*:

—¿Cuándo empieza? — <i>Dentro de tres días</i>	'When does it start?' 'In three days' time'
<i>Dentro de algunos años entrará en los libros de texto</i> (DT, Mex., dialogue)	In a few years' time it'll appear in the textbooks
<i>de hoy en ocho días</i>	in eight days' time
<i>Me faltan/quedan tres días para irme</i>	I'm going in three days' time.

(1) Use of *en* to mean *dentro de* is common in Latin America and is increasingly heard in Spain: *no te preocupes, vuelvo en un rato* (AM, Mex., dialogue) 'don't worry, I'll be back in a minute', *en cinco minutos estoy ahí* (LS, Sp., dialogue) 'I'll be there in five minutes'. Seco (1998, 186), complains that this is ambiguous since it can also mean 'in the space of': *lo haré en una hora* is more likely to mean 'it'll take me an hour to do it'.

(2) *En* can mean the same as the English 'in' in negative sentences like 'I've not been there in/for years': *sabe usted que no nos hemos visto en doce años* (CF, Mex., dialogue) 'you know that we haven't seen one another in/for twelve years'.

## 36.6 'Again'

There are numerous ways of translating 'again':

- (a) *Volver a . . .* plus an infinitive. This is probably the most usual construction before a verb:

<i>Han vuelto a hacerlo</i>	They've done it again
<i>Cuando cerró la puerta volví a llorar</i> (AM, Mex., dialogue)	When he shut the door, I started crying again
<i>Como me vuelvas a hablar de esa manera . . .</i> (this use of <i>como</i> is discussed at 29.8.2)	If you talk to me like that again . . .

- (b) *Otra vez*:

<i>No te lo digo otra vez/No te lo vuelvo a decir/No vuelvo a decírtelo</i>	I won't tell you again
<i>Otra vez más vuelve a subir la bencina</i> (Primera Línea, Ch., Sp. la gasolina)	Petrol/US Gas price up again
<i>Se habían revocado los acuerdos y Ahumada era otra vez presidente del Congreso</i> (JA, Mex.)	The agreements had been revoked and Ahumada was president of Congress again

- (c) *De nuevo* is more literary than *otra vez*:

<i>De nuevo volvieron las suspicacias y los celos</i>	Once again suspicion and distrust returned
<i>Esperemos que EE.UU. después no quiera meterse de nuevo en todo</i> (La Razón, Bol.)	Let us hope that the USA won't want to interfere in everything again

## 36.7 Tardar

*Tardar*, as well as meaning 'to be late' (*no tardes* 'don't be late'), may translate 'to take' in expressions of time:

<i>Tardó un año en escribirnos</i>	(S)he took a year to write to us/(S)he didn't write to us for a year
<i>Poco tardaron en vengarse</i> (Crónica, Arg.)	They soon got their own back
<i>Se tarda media hora andando</i>	It takes half an hour to walk it
<i>Cuánto tardaste, Mamá</i> (JP, Mex., dialogue)	You were such a long time Mother!

(1) *Llevar* may also be used in third-person expressions: *eso te llevará horas* 'that'll take you hours', *me llevó días* 'it took me days'; but *el viaje duró varias horas* 'the journey took several hours'. Note the difference between this third-person construction, i.e. *les llevó tres años construir el puente* and *tardaron tres años en construir el puente* 'they took three years to build the bridge'. English-speakers tend to forget the *en* in the second of these sentences.

This impersonal use of *llevar* must not be confused with *llevar* in phrases like *lleva años cerrado* 't's been closed for year', *llevo horas aquí* 'I've been here for hours'. See 36.3.1.

(2) *Tardarse* is heard in Mexico and no doubt elsewhere in Latin America: *Carvajal se tardó en responder, traspiraba* (EM, Mex.) 'Carvajal took time to answer; he was perspiring', Sp. . . . *tardó en contestar*.

## 36.8 'Still' (*Todavía* and *aún* are discussed at 35.7.3.)

A very frequent construction is *continuar* or, more commonly, *seguir* followed by the gerund (\**continuar a hacer algo*, 'to continue to do something', cf. French *continuer à faire quelque chose*, is not Spanish). *Seguir* is more often used before adjectives and participles, i.e. one says *sigue enfermo* 'he's still ill/sick' rather than *continúa enfermo*:

*Te has dado cuenta de que sigues  
llevando puesta la chaqueta del pijama  
(JMM, Sp., dialogue)*

You've realized that you're still wearing  
wearing your pyjama/US 'pajama' jacket

*Continuaban/Seguían viéndose  
Pero ella sigue soltera (CF, Mex., dialogue)*

They went on seeing one another  
But she's still unmarried

*Negó con firmeza su culpabilidad, como  
continuaría haciendo hasta el día del juicio  
(ES, Sp.)*

He firmly denied his guilt, as he was to go  
on doing until Judgement day

(1) In parts of Latin America *siempre* 'always' can, like the French *toujours*, mean 'still': *¿siempre vives en Quito?* 'Are you still living in Quito?', *¿siempre quiere una ducha?* 'do you still want a shower' (MVLl, Pe., dialogue, Sp. *¿todavía quiere...?*).

## 36.9 Dates

### 36.9.1 Saying and writing dates

Months are not written with a capital letter in Spanish: *el veintitrés de marzo* '23 March'. The usual way of saying dates is *quince de mayo de dos mil veinte* 'fifteenth of May 2020', *dos de abril de dos mil cuatro* 'April the second 2004'. The ordinal numbers ('first', 'third', etc.) are not used, the only exception being *primero de . . .* 'the first of'. The form *el uno de . . .* is common in Spain, and although some grammarians criticize it the Academy does not object. *Primero de* is preferred in Latin America.

The format used for dates in Spain is the same as in most of Europe: day-month-year, e.g. *17 de junio de 2015* or *17-06-2015*. In Latin America, the North-American format, month-day-year, is often used, especially in Mexico and Cuba, as in *junio 17 de 2015*, *06-17-2015*; but the European format is common in South America.

For the use and non-use of the definite article with years and in dates see 3.2.20b.

(1) **Important:** 'on the  $n^{\text{th}}$  of m' is translated without a preposition meaning 'on': *salimos de Montevideo el veinticinco de febrero* 'we left Montevideo on 25 February'.

### 36.9.2 Decades

Seco (1998, 150), says that *una década* is a decade, which can only start in a year that is a multiple of ten, e.g. 2020–29, whereas *el decenio* simply means any period of ten years. But *El País*, *Libro de estilo* (2014, item '*décadas*'), says *década* means any period of ten years and advocates *decenio* for 'decade'. *La Jornada* (Mex.) and *La Nación* (Arg.) seem to use the words interchangeably.

*Los años noventa* translates 'the nineties': *a principios de los años cuarenta Cantinflas era aún el de películas divertidísimas* (JA, Mex.) 'at the beginning of the forties Cantinflas was still making (lit. 'the one of') very amusing films'.

One can also say *la década de los cincuenta*, but Seco considers this long-winded. The formula *los cincuentas* 'the fifties', *los noventas* 'the nineties' is sometimes found, but is condemned by Seco as an Anglicism.

## 36.10 Miscellaneous time expressions

### 36.10.1 Telling the time

Except where specified, the following examples reflect European usage. Variants will be heard in the Latin-American republics.

#### (a) Asking the time (12-hour clock):

¿Qué hora es? What time is it?

¿Qué hora tiene? What time do you make it?

¿Qué hora será? I wonder what time it is

¿A qué hora viene/empieza? What time is (s)he coming/does it start?

¿Qué horas son? is often used in Latin America and occasionally in Spain.

#### (b) Telling the exact time:

*Es la una (en punto)* it's one o'clock (exactly)

*Son las dos, las tres*, etc. it's 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock

*Es la una de la mañana/de la tarde* it's one in the morning/afternoon

*Son las cuatro y cinco* it's five past/after four.

In Mexico also *son las cuatro con cinco minutos*

*Son las cinco y cuarto/y media* It's 5.15/5.30

*Son las siete y veinticinco* it's 7.25

*Son las ocho menos cuarto* it's 7.45

*Son las nueve menos diez* it's 8.50. (Also *diez minutos para las nueve* in parts of Latin America)

*A las ocho menos cuarto* at 7.45 (Mex. *al cuarto para las ocho*)

*Son y media/cuarto* it's thirty/fifteen minutes past

*Son menos diez/y cinco* it's ten to/five past

*Empezará a las diez de la noche* it'll begin at 10 p.m.

*Falta poco para las cuatro* it's nearly 4 o'clock

*Los autobuses salen a menos veinte* the buses leave at twenty to (the hour)

*Los autobuses salen a las horas (exactas) y a las medias* the buses leave at 30 minutes past and on the hour

*Son y media pasadas* it's gone half past

*Van a dar las doce* it's just coming up to twelve

*Acaba de dar la una* the clock's just struck one

*Acaban de dar las dos* the clock's just struck two

*Cuando daba la última campanada de las cuatro* on the last stroke of four

*La consulta es de/desde nueve a once* the doctor's surgery is from 9 to 11

*Al filo de la medianoche* (poetic) at exactly midnight

(1) The NGLE 41.6t advises against constructions, occasionally heard, like *¿es las siete* for *son las siete*.

#### (c) Approximate time

(Ya) *han dado las siete* it's already gone seven

*Son las ocho más o menos* it's about eight o'clock

*Son pasadas las ocho* (not *\*después de las ocho*)/*son las ocho pasadas/ya pasan de las ocho* 'it's gone eight/past eight'

*Son las tres y poco/algo* it's just after three

*Son las tres como mucho* it's three o'clock at the latest

*Son cerca de las nueve* it's nearly nine o'clock

*Deben de ser las/cerca de las nueve* it must be nine o'clock/nearly nine, or *serán las nueve*

*Llegaré a eso de/sobre las dos de la mañana*  
I'll be there around two a.m.  
*Serían las siete de la tarde* It must have been  
seven p.m.

*No acabaré hasta después de las tres/hasta pasadas  
las tres* I won't finish until after three

### 36.10.2 The 24-hour clock

*El tren sale a las quince horas* The train leaves  
at 15:00

*El avión llegó a las diecisiete (horas) y quince*  
The plane arrived at 17:15

### 36.10.3 Times of the day

*a primera hora de la mañana/por la  
mañana temprano* early in the morning  
*por la mañana* (Lat. Am. *a/en la mañana* in  
the morning)  
*a media mañana* in the middle of the  
morning  
*a mediodía* at noon  
*a la hora de comer/almorzar* at lunchtime  
(2–4 p.m. in Spain and several Lat.-Am.  
countries)  
*a la hora de la merienda* at teatime (i.e.  
around 4 p.m.)  
*a la hora de cenar* at dinner time (9–11 p.m.  
in Spain and several Lat.-Am. countries)  
*buenos días* good morning (greeting)  
*buenas tardes* (midday to 8 p.m.) good  
afternoon/evening (greeting)

*después de comer/cenar* 'after lunch/  
dinner'. 'Lunch' = *almorzar* in Latin  
America. The verb is not much used in  
Spain, but *el almuerzo* 'early lunch' is  
*por la tarde* in the afternoon (midday until  
about 8 p.m.)  
*al atardecer/anocheecer* in the evening  
*por la noche* at night  
*a (la) medianoche* at midnight  
*al amanecer/de madrugada* at dawn  
*Ven esta noche/de noche* Come tonight  
*Ven por la noche* Come at night-time  
  
*buenas noches* good evening/goodnight  
(greeting and goodbye)  
*¡buenas!* (familiar style)  
'morning!'/'afternoon!'

(1) *La tarde* does not coincide with either 'afternoon' or 'evening': it is the time between midday and sunset, but the precise boundaries are rather vague. *La madrugada* is between midnight and sunrise, although this period can also be called *la mañana*.

(2) The NGLÉ 21.9g reports that in much of Latin America *buenos días* is said until 12 in the morning, and *buenas tardes* thereafter until 1800 or 1900. In Spain *buenos días* tends to be used until around lunchtime (1400–1500) perhaps a little earlier, and *buenas tardes* after lunch until after sunset.

(3) *Buenos días* and *buenas tardes* can be used for goodbyes if preceded by some word or phrase of farewell like *adiós*, *hasta luego*: *adiós*, *buenos días/hasta luego*, *buenas tardes*.

### 36.10.4 Frequency

*dos veces a la semana/al día/por semana/día*  
twice a week/a day  
*cada media hora/dos o tres días* every half hour  
/every two or three days  
*todos los días* every day

*El sábado/Los sábados no trabajo* I don't work on  
Saturdays  
*todos los días entre semana* every day from  
Monday to Friday

For *cada día* and *todos los días* see 10.6 and 10.17.



### 36.10.5 Miscellaneous expressions

—¿Qué (día) es hoy? —Domingo	‘What day is it today?’ ‘Sunday’
Hoy es lunes, martes, etc.	Today’s Monday, Tuesday, etc.
Hoy es el/estamos a 28 de marzo	Today’s the 28 <sup>th</sup> of March
—¿A cuántos estamos? ¿Qué fecha es hoy?	‘What’s the date today?’ ‘The 17 <sup>th</sup>
—(Estamos) a 17 de enero de 2019	of January 2019’
Estamos a mediados/principios/finales/ últimos/de mes	We’re at the middle/beginning/end of the month
el 5 del corriente (business language)	the 5th of this month
Saldremos el viernes 28 (veintiocho)	We’ll leave on Friday the 28th at midday
al/a mediodía	
la semana pasada/el mes/el año pasado	last week, month, year
Se casaron el 20 de julio pasado	They got married on the 20th of last July
Nació en (el mes de) abril del año pasado	(S)he was born in April last year
al cabo de un año	a year later
a los cinco minutos quería irse	after 5 minutes (s)he wanted to leave
al día siguiente	the following/next day
de hoy en ocho días	a week today
ayer/anteayer	yesterday/the day before yesterday

### 36.11 Translating ‘next’

The word *próximo* means ‘coming’, so it can only refer to the future: *el año próximo/que viene* ‘next year’, *la próxima parada* ‘next stop’ (i.e. the one immediately coming). When ‘following’ could replace ‘next’ in English, *siguiente* must be used: *al día siguiente* (not *próximo*) *volvieron a casa* ‘the next/following day they returned home’, *me bajé en la parada siguiente* ‘I got out at the next/following stop’:

<i>al año siguiente, el/al mes/la semana que viene</i> (but <i>que viene</i> is not used with the months: <i>el próximo mes de julio</i> ‘next July’)	next year/month/week
<i>La próxima vez que nos veamos, te llevo tus mil quinientos dólares</i> (GZ, Mex. dialogue)	The next time we see one another I’ll bring you your 1,500 dollars

### 36.12 Age

The word *año(s)* cannot usually be omitted when talking about age, at least on the first mention of the topic: *al año andaba, a los cuatro hablaba dos idiomas, a los cinco leía* ‘(s)he was walking by the time (s)he was one, speaking two languages at four and reading at five’.

Spanish says ‘to have’ (*tener*) an age, English says ‘to be an age’.

<i>Mi hermano tiene quince años</i>	My brother is fifteen
<i>A los 15 años se mudó a La Habana (Latina, New York)</i>	At fifteen she moved to Havana
—¿Cuántos años tienes? —Veinte (the word <i>años</i> can be omitted only when answering this question)	‘How old are you?’ ‘I’m twenty’
<i>¿A qué edad andan los niños?</i>	At what age do children walk?
<i>Acaba de cumplir los cincuenta años</i>	(S)he has just turned fifty

<i>Andará por los cuarenta</i> (años can be omitted)	(S)he must be around forty
<i>Tiene sus sesenta años</i>	(S)he's a good sixty years old
<i>un joven de quince años</i>	a young man/youth of fifteen
<i>¿Qué tiempo tiene?/¿Qué edad tiene?</i>	How old's the baby? (when it could be less than one)

### 36.13 Omission of preposition before certain expressions of time

No preposition is used with some words and expressions. These are:

- (a) Days of the week, and weeks: *nos vemos el lunes/el viernes* 'we're meeting on Monday/Friday'.
- (b) Dates: *nos vemos el trece de abril* 'we're meeting on 13 April'.

(1) In informal Latin-American Spanish prepositions are omitted before some other words, as in *la ocasión que te vi* (Spain . . . *en que te vi*) 'the occasion I saw you', *cuando la mañana siguiente me anunció que . . .* (AM, Mex., Sp. *a la mañana siguiente*) 'when he announced to me the following morning that . . .', . . . *los funcionarios destituidos injustamente los últimos 18 meses* (*La Prensa*, Pan.) 'State employees unfairly dismissed during the last 18 months', more formally *durante los últimos 18 meses*, . . . *murieron la tarde de ayer en un accidente automovilístico* (*La Prensa*, Hon. = *murieron en la tarde de ayer*) ' . . . died yesterday afternoon/evening in a car accident', *en partido amistoso jugado la tarde del sábado* (*La Jornada*, Mex.) 'in a friendly match played on Saturday afternoon'.

# 37 Conjunctions and discourse markers

This chapter discusses the following words:

- *pero, sino, mas* ‘but’ (Section 37.1)
- *o/u* or (Section 37.2)
- *y/e* and (Section 37.3)
- *que, de que* that (Section 37.4)
- *porque/pues/como* and other words meaning ‘because’, ‘since . . .’ (Section 37.5.1)
- *ya que/puesto que/como* and other meaning ‘since’/‘seeing that’ (Section 37.5.2)
- *aunque, y eso que* and other words meaning ‘although’ (Section 37.6)
- *con tal de que, a menos que* and other expressions of condition and exception (Section 37.7)
- words indicating purpose (Section 37.8)
- *de modo/manera que* and other words expressing result (Section 37.9)
- Subordinating conjunctions of time words (Section 37.10)
- Discourse markers (Section 37.11)

‘Discourse markers’ are words and phrases like ‘however’, ‘nevertheless’, ‘anyway’, ‘well . . .’, ‘moreover’ that are used to link elements of a text or conversation.

Some Spanish subordinating conjunctions, e.g. *que, cuando, sin que, después de que, antes de que, para que*, etc., are sometimes or always followed by the subjunctive and these are also discussed in Chapter 20. They are merely noted in the appropriate section of this chapter.

## 37.1 *Pero, sino, mas*

All of these translate ‘but’. *Mas* (no accent) is virtually extinct, but it is occasionally found in flowery written language and the *NGLE* 31.10v notes that it is apparently coming back into fashion among the youth of Caracas.

The distinction between *pero* and *sino* is crucial.

(a) *Sino* corrects a preceding remark: compare *las manzanas no están maduras sino verdes* ‘the apples aren’t ripe but unripe’ (‘ripe’ is corrected) and *las manzanas no están maduras pero las peras sí* ‘the apples aren’t ripe but the pears are’ (*no están maduras* is not being corrected or withdrawn).

*Sino* therefore occurs most often after negations of the sort ‘not A but (instead) B’, and it is especially common in the formulas *no solo/sólo . . . sino (que) . . .* ‘not only . . . but . . .’, and *no porque . . . sino* ‘not because . . . but’ (*no porque* is followed by the subjunctive: 20.4.4c). Examples:

*No quiero vino sino agua*  
*no tú, sino él, no este/éste sino ese/ése*  
*No dormían en una pensión sino en un hotel*  
*de lujo*  
*No vino sola sino con su marido*

I don’t want wine but water  
not you, but him/not this one but that  
They weren’t sleeping in a  
*pensión*/guest-house but in a luxury hotel  
She didn’t come alone but with her husband

No porque sea algo incorrecto sino porque  
dificulta la lectura (El País, Sp.)  
Pero yo puedo ayudarte, no porque sepa  
más que tú . . . sino porque escucho muchas  
cosas (JV, Mex., dialogue)

Not because it is something that is incorrect  
but because it makes reading difficult  
But I can help you, not because I know more  
than you . . . but because I hear a lot of  
things

Before a verb *sino que* must be used:

No sólo le creo sino que estoy dispuesto  
a ayudarlo (GZ, Mex., dialogue)  
No ponía, sino que arrojaba las tazas  
sobre la bandeja (CRG, Sp.)

I don't only believe you but I'm prepared  
to help you  
She was not so much placing as flinging the  
cups onto the tray

*Pero* is not possible in any of the preceding examples, but in the following examples it is required because the initial statement is not being corrected or withdrawn:

Habla francés, pero mal  
No tiene dinero, pero es feliz  
Pero ¿es posible?  
Tenía un poco más de cuarenta años  
pero su peculiaridad consistía en fingir  
que era niña (CF, Mex.)

(S)he speaks French, but badly  
(S)he has no money, but (s)he's happy  
But can it (really) be possible?  
She was slightly over forty, but her  
peculiarity consisted in pretending to be a  
girl

**(1) Important:** words following *pero* can be emphasized with *sí* (with an accent): *no soy de humores fáciles, pero sí predecibles* (LR, Col., dialogue) 'I'm not given to passing moods but predictable ones', *pero sí lo soportó, porque los seres humanos somos capaces de aguantar lo inaguantable* (RM, Sp.) 'but she *did* bear it because we human beings are capable of bearing the unbearable'. This should not be confused with the construction *pero si* . . . (no accent) discussed at 35.4.8.

**(2)** *Sino* often means 'except', especially in questions and after negatives: *¿qué puedo decir sino que lo siento?* 'what can I say but/except that I'm sorry?', *¿por quién sino por ti habría subido las escaleras cantando a gritos 'aprendimos a quererte'?* (ABE, Pe.) 'for whom except for you would I have gone up the stairs singing "we learned to love you" at the top of my voice?', *ni él pudo entenderlo sino como un milagro del amor* (GGM, Col.) 'even he couldn't understand it except as a miracle of love', *nadie sino* (or *excepto*) *tú sabe hacerlo* 'no one knows how to do it except you', *el pueblo mexicano . . . no cree ya sino en la Virgen de Guadalupe y en la Lotería Nacional* (OP, Mex.) 'the Mexican people now believe in nothing but the Virgin of Guadalupe and the National Lottery', *pero esa sabiduría no te tranquiliza ni reconforta sino todo lo contrario* (EL, Arg.) 'but that wisdom doesn't calm you down or comfort you – just the opposite'.

**(4)** *Sino* must not be confused (as it sometimes is in older or badly written texts) with *si no* 'if not'.

## 37.2 O

'Or'. It is written and pronounced *u* before a word beginning with *o*- or *ho*-. *hombres o mujeres* 'men or women', but *mujeres u hombres*. Spoken language often neglects to use *u*, and *o* is also sometimes retained if it is the first word in a sentence. *O* is also sometimes retained in the construction 'either . . . or': *o organizaciones estatales o privadas* 'either state organizations or private ones'.

**(1)** *O . . . o* 'either . . . or' is a frequently used phrase: *o lo sabes o no lo sabes* 'either you know it or you don't', *os digo que u os apartáis, u os araño* (dialogue in a popular novel, Sp.) 'I'm telling you, either you get out of my way or I'll scratch you'.

(2) *O* was often written with an accent when it appears alongside a digit so as to avoid confusion with zero: 4 ó 5 '4 or 5'. However, *El País* and the Academy now rule that the accent should not be written: 4 o 5.

### 37.3 Y

'And', used much like its English equivalent. It is written and pronounced *e* before a word beginning with an *i* sound (i.e. 'ee'), e.g. *Miguel e Ignacio, padre e hijos*, but not before a *y* sound as in 'yacht': *carbón y hierro* 'coal and iron', *avionetas y yates* 'light planes and yachts'. *Y* is also sometimes used when it means 'what about?': *¿y Ignacio?* 'what about Ignacio?'. Substitution of *e* for *y* is not always made in spontaneous speech, but careful speakers observe the rule.

(1) 'English' constructions like *\*es para él y mí, \*es para ti o mí* 'it's for him or me', 'it's for you or me' must be avoided: *es para él y para mí, es para ti o para mí*.

(2) The Academy (NGLE 31.2ñ) recommends modestly placing the first-person pronoun last in phrases like *Miguel, Antonio y yo* 'Miguel, Antonio and I/me'.

(3) The NGLE 31.4s dislikes the 'English' form *y/o* as in *hombres y/o mujeres* 'men and/or women', but offers no clear alternative.

(4) As was mentioned earlier, it often means 'what about?': *¿y el perro?* 'what about the dog?', *¿y la democracia?* 'what about democracy?', *¿y qué?* 'so what?/who cares?', —*Yo ya terminé*—. *¿Y yo?* —*No. Tú no* (MC, Mex., dialogue) "'I've finished already." "What about me?" "No. You haven't".

### 37.4 Que

*Que* is an overworked word. It has at least four separate uses in Spanish:

(a) As the most common relative pronoun: *la mujer que vi* 'the woman that/whom I saw', *el año en que nací* 'the year I was born in'. This use is discussed in Chapter 39. For sentences like *llovía que daba miedo* see 39.2 note 2.

(b) *Qué* with an accent means 'what' and is best thought of as an entirely different word. It is discussed at 28.4.

(c) *Que* may mean 'than' in comparisons: *es más alto que su hermano* 'he's taller than his brother'. See Chapter 6.

(d) As a subordinating conjunction: see the next section.

#### 37.4.1 Que as a subordinating conjunction

*Que* introduces subordinate clauses in the same way as the English conjunction 'that' as in 'he said that it's true'. It differs from the latter in that it cannot be omitted (see 37.4.6 for rare exceptions):

*Dice que viene*  
*Cree que no ha pagado*  
*Parece que va a llover*

(S)he says (that) (s)he's coming  
 (S)he thinks (that) (s)he hasn't paid  
 It seems (that) it's going to rain

However, the limited use in Spanish of a personal infinitive construction found in the English 'he told **me to come**' makes this use of *que* much more common than the English 'that':

*Te aconsejo que no lo hagas*  
*Quiero que vengas*  
*Le pidió que no firmasen/firmaran*

I advise you not **to do** it  
 I want you **to come**  
 (S)he asked them not **to sign**

Statements followed by *que* that require the subjunctive, for example *quiero que . . .* 'I want . . .', *es necesario que . . .* 'it's necessary that . . .', are discussed in Chapter 20.

### 37.4.2 *De before que*

In certain circumstances a subordinate clause must be introduced by *de que*. This is necessary:

(a) After noun phrases when *que* is a conjunction and not a relative pronoun. English does not differentiate between 'that' as a relative pronoun and 'that' as a subordinating conjunction, so 'the idea that he liked . . .' is ambiguous out of context. If 'which' or 'who(m)' could replace 'that' in the English translation, *que* alone is possible in Spanish, otherwise *de que* should be used:

This is the idea that (= which) (s)he likes

*Esta/Ésta es la idea **que** le gusta* (relative pronoun; *de que* impossible)

The idea that (s)he likes bullfighting is absurd ('which' impossible)

*La idea **de que** le gustan las corridas es absurda* (subordinating conjunction)

More examples:

*Me desesperaba ante la idea de que mi madre debía morir un día* (ES, Arg.)  
*Tengo la certeza de que . . .*  
*Mis papás tuvieron miedo de que me fuera a enfermar de tristeza* (ES, Mex., dialogue.  
 Spain . . . *de que fuera a enfermar*)  
*el argumento/la creencia de que . . .*  
*la causa de que no llegara/llegase a tiempo*

I despaired at the idea that my mother would have to die one day  
 I'm certain that . . .  
 My parents felt afraid I was going to get sick with sadness  
 the argument/belief that . . .  
 the cause of his/her not arriving on time

(b) After a number of common verbs that require the preposition *de*

*me acuerdo de que . . .*  
*nos dimos cuenta de que*  
*me olvidaba de que . . .*  
*se convenció de que . . .*  
*se trata de que . . .*

I remember that . . .  
 we realized that . . .  
 I was forgetting that . . .  
 (s)he became convinced that . . .  
 it's about . . ./it's a question of . . .

For *informar de que*, *hablar de que*, *dudar de que*, *advertir de que* and *avisar de que*, see the notes to 37.4.3.

(c) After a number of verbs denoting emotional states, e.g.

*aburrirse de que*  
*alegrarse de que*  
*asustarse de que*  
*avergonzarse de que*  
*cansarse de que*  
*dolerse de que*  
*entristecerse de que*

to be bored by the fact that . . .  
 to be happy that . . .  
 to be frightened that . . .  
 to be ashamed that . . .  
 to get tired that . . .  
 to feel pity that . . .  
 to be saddened that . . .

*extrañarse de que*  
*lamentarse de que*  
*sorprenderse de que*

to be puzzled that . . .  
 to bewail the fact that . . .  
 to be surprised that . . .

#### Examples:

*Se aburre de que Gene Kelly baile siempre con Cyd Charisse (GCI, Cu., dialogue, i.e. in the film Singin' in the Rain)*  
*Al escuchar la lancha se extrañó de que regresaran tan pronto (EM, Mex.)*

He gets bored with the fact that Gene Kelly always dances with Cyd Charisse  
 When he heard the launch/boat he was surprised that they were back so soon

For further remarks about the use of the subjunctive with these verbs see 20.3.12–13.

Not all pronominal verbs of emotion allow this construction with *de que*. For example, one says *te deprimiste porque Ana no te llamaba* ‘you got depressed because Ana wasn’t phoning you’, but not *\*te deprimiste de que Ana no te llamara/llamara*; also *se emocionaron porque . . .* ‘they got excited because . . .’, not *\*se emocionaron de que..* Likewise *horrorizarse porque* ‘to be horrified because . . .’, *entusiasmarse porque* ‘to be enthusiastic because . . .’, *indignarse porque* ‘to be indignant because . . .’.

(d) After certain adjectives and adverbial phrases that are normally followed by *de*:

*estoy seguro/convencido de que . . .*  
*estamos contentos de que . . .*  
*estoy cansado/harto de que . . .*  
*soy consciente de que . . .*  
*estoy hasta la coronilla de que . . .*

I’m sure/convinced that . . .  
 we’re pleased that . . .  
 I’m tired/fed up with . . .  
 I’m aware that . . .  
 I’m sick to death with . . .

(e) After subordinators that include *de*:

*antes de que/después de que llegara/llegase a condición de que . . .*  
*a cambio de que . . .*  
*a pesar de que . . .*  
*con tal de que . . .*  
*en lugar de que . . .*  
*con el objeto de que . . .*

before/after (s)he arrived  
 on condition that . . .  
 in exchange for . . .  
 despite the fact that . . .  
 provided that . . .  
 instead of . . .  
 with the aim of . . .

(1) There is a colloquial tendency, strong in Latin America and spreading in Spain, to drop the *de* in these constructions: *pero estoy segura que es lo que haces . . .* (LG, Sp., dialogue) ‘but I’m sure that that is what you’re doing’, *para que te convenzas que la dignidad no se come* (GGM, Col., dialogue) ‘to convince you that (lit. ‘so you convince yourself’) that one can’t eat dignity’. This construction, called *queísmo* by grammarians, is found even in the Academy’s own publications, e.g. . . . *tenemos la impresión que . . .*, *GDLE*, 2188. It is fast becoming the norm among young Spaniards although older speakers may find it ‘careless’; but the battle against it is probably lost.

(2) *Antes que* ‘before’ may be used instead of *antes de que* in many regions, cf. *venda ese gallo antes que sea demasiado tarde* (GGM, Col., dialogue) ‘sell that cockerel before it’s too late’, *lo conozco desde antes que tú nacieras* (MVLl, Pe., dialogue) ‘I’ve known him since before you were born’, *antes que te cases, mira lo que haces* (Spanish proverb) ‘before you marry, look what you’re doing’. *Antes que . . .* is more common in Latin America, though *antes de que* is frequent there, especially in writing. *Antes que* is accepted by the Academy (DPD 52).

(3) *Antes que* . . . also means ‘rather than’ on both continents: *cualquier cosa antes que eso* ‘anything but/rather than that’, . . . *para evitar que resulte un nuevo problema antes que la solución deseada* (El Comercio, Ec.) ‘. . . so as to avoid it becoming another problem rather than the desired solution’, . . . *el aprecio por las cosas bellas antes que por las que tienen éxito* (AM, Mex.) ‘. . . the appreciation of beautiful things rather than successful ones’.

### 37.4.3 *Dequeísmo*

There is a tendency on both continents to insert *de* before *que* after verbs that do not require it, especially *decir* ‘say’, *afirmar* ‘claim’, *creer* ‘believe’, *sostener* ‘maintain’, *negar* ‘deny’, *pensar* ‘think’, *resultar* ‘to turn out to be’, *confesar* ‘confess’, *argüir* ‘argue’, etc. Examples (a question mark denotes sentences that are widely rejected as sub-standard): *?dice de que no viene* (for *dice que no viene*) ‘(s)he says (s)he’s not coming’, *?creo de que no es verdad* (for *creo que no es verdad*) ‘I think it isn’t true’.

This use of *de que* for *que* (called *dequeísmo*) is rejected by educated speakers and should be avoided by foreigners but it is not uncommon in popular language. It may prevail in the future, although its fate is probably still undecided.

(1) *Hablar de que* is correctly used for ‘to talk about . . .’ in sentences like *cuando hablábamos de que no sabemos cómo somos* (ABV, Sp., dialogue) ‘when we were talking about our not knowing what we are like’.

(2) *Dudar de que* is an accepted variant of *dudar que* ‘to doubt’: *nadie dudó (de) que dijera la verdad* ‘no one doubted that (s)he told the truth’, *ni a nosotros se nos ocurría dudar de que él abandonase su camino* (SP, Sp.) ‘it didn’t even occur to us to doubt that he would abandon his vocation (lit. ‘way’)’. Note also *dudo de tus intenciones* ‘I have my doubts about your intentions’.

(3) *Informar a alguien de algo* ‘to inform someone of something’ is correct, so *la OMS informa de que han sido registrados 2.270 casos de neumonía atípica* (El Mundo, Sp.) ‘WHO reports that 2,270 cases of “atypical pneumonia” (i.e. SARS) have been recorded’. *Informar que* is also used, especially in Latin America, but the style book of *El País* 2014, condemns it. The construction *te lo informaré* ‘I’ll let you know’, *nos lo informaron* ‘they let us know’ is heard in Latin America, but not in Spain.

(4) *Advertir que* means ‘to notice that’. *Advertir de* means ‘to inform/warn’, so *nos advirtieron de que había retrasos* ‘they informed/warned us there were delays’. However, for explicit threats one uses *advertir que*: *te advierto que, si no trabajas, no cobras* (not *de que* . . .) ‘I’m warning you that if you don’t work you don’t get paid’ (example from GDLE 34.1.5.2).

(5) The construction with *avisar* ‘to inform’ / ‘to warn’ is with *que* or *de que*. ‘To advise’ is *aconsejar*; *un aviso* is ‘a warning’, ‘a notice’ or, in Latin America, ‘an advertisement’ (Sp. *un anuncio*).

### 37.4.4 *Que* at the head of a phrase or sentence

*Que* may appear at the head of a sentence or clause, especially in speech. Its main functions are:

(a) To reinforce the idea that what follows is something expected, something repeated or something that is being insisted on. In this case some verb like *decir* or *preguntar* may have been omitted:

*¿Que cómo se llama mi película?*

(did you ask) What’s my film called?

*¿Que por qué no van obreros al teatro?*

(you’re asking me) Why don’t workers go to the theatre?

*Que no quiero verla*

(I said that) I don’t want to see her/it

*Oye, que aquí pone que no hay que abrirlo*

Listen, it says here that it mustn’t be opened



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*¡Que sí! ¡Que no!*

Yes!/No! (impatient repetition)

*¡Socorro! ¡Que me ahogo!*

Help! I'm drowning!

(b) As a colloquial subordinator of cause. It is often used to connect one idea to another where English uses a pause represented in writing by a dash:

*¡Rápido! ¡Rápido! ¡Que se va!*

Quick! Quick! It's going! (e.g. the train)

*No te cases con tu novio, que ese/ése*

Don't marry your boyfriend – he's after your money

*va a por tu dinero* (AGa, Sp., dialogue)

*No lo inclines tanto, que se caen los*

Don't tilt it so much – the papers will fall off

*papeles* (JJM, Pan., dialogue)

*No me apuntes con esa madre, que se*

Don't point that damned thing at me – you might let fly a bullet

*te puede salir un balazo* (MC, Mex.,

dialogue. *Madre* here is popular Mexican,

avoided in polite speech. *Balazo* = *tiro* in Spain)

(c) Colloquially, to show that the truth has dawned after some doubt:

*¡Ah! Que usted es el fontanero* (Lat. Am.  
*el plomero*)

Ah – so you're the plumber then . . .

*Que tú eres entonces el que lo hizo*

So you're the one who did it . . .

*¿Que no quieres ir conmigo?*

You mean you don't want to go with me?

(d) To translate 'that' in colloquial sentences meaning 'it was so . . . that . . .':

*Tengo un sueño que no veo*

I'm so sleepy I could drop (lit. 'I can't see')

*Estaba la habitación que no cabía un alfiler*

The room was so packed you couldn't get a pin in it

(e) With the subjunctive in commands, exhortations and wishes, e.g. *que venga en seguida* 'tell him/her to come/have him/her come immediately', *que te acuerdes de escribirnos* 'remember to write to us'. See 21.6 for details.

(f) To mean 'the fact that', in which case it is likely to take the subjunctive. See 20.3.18 for further discussion.

### 37.4.5 *Que* in indirect questions

*Decir que* may mean 'to ask' – at least in Spain. *Que* is also used optionally after *preguntar* 'to ask':

*Te dijo que si estaba la cena lista* (CRG, Sp.,  
dialogue)

He asked you if dinner was ready

*Yo me pregunto (que) dónde estará ella*  
*estudiando*

I wonder where she's studying

*Uno de los jugadores me preguntó que si*  
*quería ser porrista del equipo de fut*  
*americano* (ES, Mex., dialogue. *Porrista* =  
*animadora* and *fut* = *fútbol* in Spain)

One of the players asked me if I wanted to  
be a cheerleader for the American  
football team

*Le pregunté (que) qué hacía allí*

I asked him/her what (s)he was doing there

### 37.4.6 Omission of conjunction *que*

*Que* is occasionally omitted, but much less often than the English 'that':

(a) after certain verbs, e.g. *rogar que* 'to request', *esperar que* 'to hope that', *solicitar que* 'to ask/request that'. This construction is practically confined to business letters and other official or very formal language, but it is also found in sub-standard language. Foreigners should avoid it:

*Les ruego me envíen las facturas en papel*  
(advert. Sp.)

Please send me the bills/invoices in  
paper format

*No importa le tilden de bufón* (popular  
press, Sp., better *no importa que le tilden . . .*)

It doesn't matter if they call him a clown

*Solicitan se les solucione la deuda que*  
*mantiene el Estado con ellos* (*La Prensa,*  
*Pan.*), for *solicitan que . . .*

They are requesting settlement of the debt  
that the State has incurred towards them

(b) In subordinate and relative clauses introduced by *que* so as to avoid excessive use of *que*. This is probably also confined to formal written language (# marks the point of omission):

*desde este punto de vista, que pienso #*  
*comparten muchos españoles*

from this point of view, which I think  
many Spaniards share

*Me contestó con una serie de argumentos*  
*que supongo # están de moda hoy día*  
*. . . la turbia tempestad que sabía # se cernía*  
*sobre mi futuro* (EL, Sp.)

(S)he replied with a series of arguments  
which I suppose are fashionable nowadays  
. . . the murky storm that I knew was looming  
over my future

### 37.4.7 Replacement of subordinating *que* and finite verb by an infinitive

For a discussion of sentences like *dice estar enferma* 'she says she's ill/sick' (for *dice que está enferma*) see 22.2.1.

### 37.4.8 Miscellaneous examples of *que*

The bracket indicates that the *que* is optional:

*Qué bien (que) lo hemos pasado* (the  
redundant *que* is colloquial)  
*y él habla que habla* (colloquial)  
*Yo venga a pedirle el divorcio y él que no*  
(*venga a* is a colloquial form suggesting  
tedious repetition)  
*Lucho por conseguir comprensión, (que)*  
*no amor*  
*¡Tonto! Eran monos, (que) no alienígenas*  
*¡Cuidado que sois/(Lat. Am. son) pesados!*

What a nice time we've had  
and he kept talking on and on  
I kept on asking him for a divorce and  
he wouldn't have it/kept saying no  
I'm struggling to get understanding, not love  
Fool! They were monkeys, not aliens  
Heavens, are you pests!

## 37.5 Causal conjunctions

The most common are:

*porque* because  
*ya que* because/since

*en vista de que* seeing that  
*como* as/since

*puesto que* because  
*pues* see 37.5.3

### 37.5.1 *Porque*

*Porque* means ‘because’; *por qué*, spelt and pronounced differently (the *qué* is stressed), means ‘why’. The noun *el porqué* means ‘the reason why’. *Porque* may occasionally require the subjunctive: see 20.4.4c. The difference between *porque* ‘because’ and *por qué* ‘why’ is crucial:

*No saben porque llegaron tarde*  
*No saben por qué llegaron tarde*

They don’t know because they arrived late  
 They don’t know *why* they arrived late

(1) *Porque* may be used as an alternative to *para que* after those words which allow *por*, e.g. *esforzarse por* ‘to make an effort to . . .’, *tener prisa por* . . . ‘to be in a hurry to . . .’ (see the section on *por* and *para*, 38.17.6). For the difference between *por qué* and *para qué* ‘why’ see 28.10.

(2) *Por* is intimately associated with the idea of cause, e.g. *te lo mereces, por respondón* ‘serves you right for always answering back’, *se perdieron por no haber comprado un mapa* ‘they got lost as a result of not having bought a map’. See 38.17.1 for more examples.

(3) *Porque* and *por qué* can never be used to translate ‘that’s why’ or ‘that’s the reason why’ in sentences like ‘he’s sick, that’s why he hasn’t come to work’; see 41.4.

### 37.5.2 *Como, ya que, puesto que, que, en vista de que*

All of these may mean ‘since’ (i.e. ‘given that’, ‘in view of the fact that’) when it is a subordinator of cause, but in phrases like ‘since Tuesday’, ‘since I was young’ *desde* is used and is discussed at 36.3.7.

*Puesto que quieres que me quede, me quedo*  
*La reunión se aplazó en vista de que no vino*  
*casi nadie*  
*Ya que no tenía rivales . . . podía pasear a*  
*cualquier hora por cualquier lugar*  
 (EM, Mex.)

Since you want me to stay, I’m staying  
 The meeting was postponed since hardly  
 anyone turned up  
 Since he had no rivals/competition, he  
 could move around at any time anywhere

*Como*, when used thus, must appear at the head of the phrase it refers to. \**Yo no comía como no tenía apetito* is not Spanish, but *como no tenía apetito, yo no comía* ‘as/since/as I had no appetite, I didn’t eat’ is correct. Compare also *no lo hice como me dijiste* ‘I didn’t do it the way you told me to’, and *no lo hice, como me dijiste* ‘I didn’t do it, just as you told me’ (i.e. ‘because you told me not to’). Further examples:

*Es de peor educación todavía insinuar*  
*que, como soy una mujer, se supone*  
*que no soy nadie* (CRG, Sp., dialogue)  
*Como se sentía cansado y no quería que*  
*le molestaran, les ordenó que*  
*escribieran una composición* (SG, Mex.)

It’s even more ill-mannered to hint  
 that, since I’m a woman, it’s  
 assumed that I’m nobody  
 As he was feeling tired and didn’t  
 want them to bother him, he told them  
 [the schoolchildren] to write an essay

(1) The form *como que* for *ya que* ‘since’/‘as’, when placed before the main verb, should generally be avoided. Seco (1998, 118), censures it as a Catalanism and *como* alone should be used: *como no es posible no podemos hacerlo*, ‘since it is not possible, we cannot do it’, not ?*como que no es posible* . . .

Placed after the main verb it is, however, found on both continents to mean ‘as though’: *vivimos en un ambiente que nos asfixia. Hacemos como que no pasa nada* (RB, Ch., dialogue) ‘we live in an atmosphere that is stifling us. We act as though nothing were happening’.

When used emphatically it may, in colloquial Spanish and usually with an ironic tone, introduce an explanation of a fact: *claro que es verdad*. ¡*Como que lo he dicho yo!* ‘of course it’s true. I said it!’

(2) **Important:** *como* with the subjunctive may translate ‘if’ in conditional sentences; see 29.8.2.

(3) *Como* meaning ‘since’ / ‘as’ / ‘seeing that’ sometimes occurs with an *-ra* subjunctive verb form, as in —*Quizá —dijo Víctor. Y como Arturo no replicara, añadió—: Bueno, me subo* (M. Delibes, Sp.) ‘“Perhaps,” Victor said. And as Arturo didn’t reply, he added “OK, I’m getting in” (i.e. *ya que . . . / puesto que . . . + replicó*), *y como el Macetón se quedara en silencio, se puso de pie* (MS, Mex.) ‘and as Macetón remained silent, he stood up’.

(4) *Comoquiera* is occasionally used in literature to mean ‘since’ / ‘as’: *Lucrecia se detuvo para observar mi reacción. Comoquiera que yo permanecía impasible, prosiguió . . .* (LS, Sp.) ‘Lucrecia paused to watch my reaction. Since/Seeing that I remained impassive, she continued . . .’, *comoquiera que el viejo era el anfitrión, pidió a Sherard que se pusiese elegante para cenar* (La Jornada, Mex.) ‘since the old man was the host, he asked Sherard to make himself smart/elegant for dinner’.

### 37.5.3 **Pues**

*Pues* has numerous uses.

(a) *Pues* meaning ‘because’:

In Spain *pues* may be an elegant written variation on *porque* when used by a skilled writer, but it can sound affected. The grammarian Gili y Gaya says that most people give up using it when they grow out of adolescence.

However, *pues* meaning *porque* is frequent in Mexican speech and writing, e.g. *la mujer pide clemencia para el cazador, pues este/éste no conoce la ley que prohíbe abatir a los animales salvajes* (JV, Mex.) ‘the woman is asking for clemency for the hunter because the latter doesn’t know about the law that forbids killing wild animals’, *pero si lo único que hago es elegir mi destino libremente pues no me parece que haya nada malo en eso* (ES, Mex., dialogue) ‘but the only thing I’m doing is freely following my destiny because it doesn’t seem to me that there’s anything wrong in that’.

(b) ‘In that case . . .’, ‘then’. This use is very frequent in everyday speech:

— <i>No queremos comer ahora—</i> . <i>Pues,</i> <i>cuando ustedes quieran . . .</i> (or <i>entonces/en ese caso</i> )	‘We don’t want to eat now.’ ‘In that case, whenever you like . . .’
— <i>No lo sabía.</i> — <i>Pues ya lo sabes</i>	‘I didn’t know.’ ‘Well, you do now’
— <i>No voy a encontrar ninguna tienda</i> <i>abierta—</i> . <i>Pues rompe las puertas</i> (RM, Mex., dialogue)	‘I’m not going to find any shops/stores open.’ ‘Then smash the doors down.’

(c) Like the English ‘well’, it may tone down an answer to a question, adding a modest or tentative note or perhaps showing that the speaker has thought for a moment before answering:

— <i>¿En qué situación se encuentran las</i> <i>negociaciones entre los dos gobiernos?</i> — <i>Pues, el hecho es que no hay negociaciones</i>	‘What is the state of the negotiations between the two governments?’ ‘Well, the fact is, there are no negotiations’
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—¿Quiénes estaban? —Pues . . . Manuel,  
Antonio, Margarita . . .’

‘Who was there?’ ‘Er . . . Manuel, Antonio,  
Margarita . . .’

(d) It may add emphasis or a note of contradiction:

—Yo creía que estaba enfermo—. Pues no  
No, si ya me figuro dónde está ;Pues me  
va a oír! (ABV, Sp., dialogue)

‘I thought he was sick.’ ‘Well he isn’t’  
No, I can well imagine where she is. Well,  
she’s going to hear what I’ve got to say!

(1) In some parts of Latin America and Northern Spain, conversation is sprinkled with *pues*: *oye pues*, *vámonos pues*, etc.

(2) Students of French should not confuse *pues* with the French word *puis* which means *después*, *entonces* or *luego*.

## 37.6 Concession

### 37.6.1 Phrases that introduce concessions (‘although’, etc.)

The main ways of introducing a concession are as follows (forms marked with an asterisk are typical of literary language):

*aunque* although  
*bien que* although  
*y eso que* despite the fact that  
*así*

*aun cuando* even when  
*si bien* although  
*a pesar de que*  
*pese a que\** despite

*por más que* however much  
*a despecho de que\** despite  
*por mucho que* however  
much

All of these, except *y eso que* and *si bien*, may appear with the subjunctive and they are discussed at 20.4.10. *Por mucho que* is discussed at 20.5.2.

### 37.6.2 *Y eso que* and *si bien*

*Y eso que* ‘although’, does not take the subjunctive. It can only refer to events that are realities, i.e. it means ‘despite the fact that’: *no la reconocí, y eso que la había visto dos días antes* ‘I didn’t recognise her even though/despite the fact that I’d seen her two days before’:

. . . *y eso que no leo novelas eróticas* (ABE, Pe.)  
—Qué paz se respira aquí —dijo—.  
*Y eso que es el gran pueblo de la*  
*comarca— anoté* (LS, Sp., dialogue)  
*Y eso que unos días antes del golpe había*  
*invitado a cenar a algunos de sus*  
*dirigentes . . .* (JV, Mex.)

. . . despite the fact I don’t read erotic novels  
‘It’s so peaceful here,’ she said. ‘Despite it  
being the main town in the region,’ I added

Despite the fact that a few days before the  
*coup* he’d invited some of its leaders to  
dinner . . .

*Si bien* is used like *y eso que* to refer only to an established fact (i.e. it cannot refer to the future):

*Si bien la lluvia es frecuente, el verano*  
*inglés es a menudo agradable*  
*Si bien la guerra mundial había favorecido*  
*las exportaciones, una vez que esta/ésta*  
*concluyó todo se fue modificando* (JA, Mex.)

Despite the fact that rain is frequent,  
the English summer is often pleasant  
Although the World War had favoured  
exports, once the latter ended everything  
started changing

(1) The usual word for ‘although’ is *aunque*, discussed at 20.4.10.

(2) *Y eso que* cannot come before the main clause: \**y eso que es profesora, no sabe contar* 'despite the fact that she's a teacher, she can't count' is incorrect. *A pesar de ser profesora, no sabe contar . . .* or *no sabe contar, y eso que es profesora*.

## 37.7 Condition and exception

(a) The main conjunctions of condition are (all can be translated as 'provided that'/'as long as'):

<i>con tal (de) que</i> provided that	<i>siempre y cuando</i> provided that
<i>siempre que</i> provided that	<i>bajo (la) condición de que</i> on condition that
<i>a condición de que</i> on condition that	<i>mientras (no)</i> as long as

When these mean 'on condition that' they require the subjunctive and are discussed at 20.4.8a. *Siempre que* can also mean 'whenever', as in *siempre que voy a Madrid salgo a cenar con mis amigos* 'whenever I go to Madrid I go out to dinner with my friends'. *Mientras* may simply mean 'while', and is discussed at 20.4.9.

(b) The main conjunctions of exception are:

<i>a menos que</i> unless	<i>fuera de que</i> except	<i>salvo que</i> except
<i>a no ser que</i> unless	<i>excepto que</i> except	<i>como no</i> lest

All of these mean 'unless' and are discussed at 20.4.8b.

## 37.8 Subordinating conjunctions of purpose and aim

The most common are:

(a) 'in order that'/'so that'

<i>para que</i>	<i>de manera que*</i>	<i>porque</i>
<i>de modo que*</i>	<i>a que</i>	<i>de forma que*</i>
<i>a fin de que</i>	<i>con el objeto de que</i>	

(b) lest/in order that not . . .

<i>no sea que . . .</i>	<i>no fuera que . . ./no fuese que . . .</i>
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All conjunctions of purpose require the subjunctive and are discussed under 20.4.3. Those marked with an asterisk may also indicate result and are then followed by the indicative. See next section.

## 37.9 Subordinating conjunctions of result

These are phrases meaning 'so that':

<i>de modo que</i>	<i>de manera que</i>	<i>conque</i>
<i>de forma que</i>	<i>así que</i>	

*De manera/forma/modo que* can denote either a result or an intention: in the latter case they take the subjunctive. Compare *entraron silenciosamente de manera que nadie se dio cuenta* 'they entered quietly and as a result no one noticed' and *entraron silenciosamente de manera que nadie se diera/diese cuenta* 'they entered quietly so that no one would notice' (intention). See 20.4.5 for more details.

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It should be noted that the phrases *de tal modo que*, *de tal manera que*, *de tal forma que* can only express result, not purpose: *gritó de tal modo/manera/forma que todos los vecinos se asomaron a la ventana* '(s)he shouted in such a way that all the neighbours leaned out of their windows'.

*Conque* and *así que* indicate results: *conque ha sido ella* 'so it was her', *así que no he vuelto* 'so/as a result I haven't gone back'.

## 37.10 Subordinating conjunctions of time

These include such words and phrases as:

<i>a la vez que</i> at the same time as	<i>antes de que</i> before	<i>mientras</i> while
<i>a partir del momento en que</i> from the time that	<i>apenas</i> scarcely/as soon as	<i>nada más que</i> as soon as
<i>a poco de que</i> shortly after	<i>así que</i> as soon as	<i>no bien (que)</i> as soon as
<i>al mismo tiempo que</i> at the same time as	<i>cada vez que</i> every time that	<i>siempre que</i> whenever
<i>al poco rato de que</i> shortly after	<i>cuando</i> when	<i>tan pronto como</i> as soon as
	<i>después de que</i> after	<i>una vez que</i> once/as soon as
	<i>en cuanto</i> as soon as	
	<i>hasta que</i> until	

All subordinators of time require the subjunctive in certain circumstances (*antes de que* always takes the subjunctive). They are discussed at 20.4.7.

## 37.11 Discourse markers

Discourse markers are words like 'well', 'in that case', 'by the way', used to link what has been said to what is about to be said. The colloquial variants listed below reflect European usage and the list is not exhaustive.

### 37.11.1 Afterthoughts: 'by the way'

The standard ways of introducing an afterthought or some apparently digressive remark are *a propósito* and *por cierto*, which both mean 'by the way'/'incidentally': *a propósito/por cierto vi a tu madre ayer* 'by the way/incidentally, I saw your mother yesterday'. *Por cierto* is slightly more colloquial than *a propósito* and it does not mean 'for certain'. *A propósito* can also mean *adrede* 'on purpose': *lo rompiste a propósito* 'you broke it on purpose'.

*A todo esto* is another, colloquial, equivalent of 'incidentally'.

### 37.11.2 Additions: 'moreover', 'apart from that'

There are several opening phrases that indicate the speaker's intention of adding – or not adding – new information:

<i>Es más, también se lo dije a su hermano</i> <i>Además, mi mujer era mecanógrafa</i> (GCI, Cu., dialogue)	Moreover, I also told his brother Moreover, my wife was a typist
<i>Encima/Para colmo no nos han dado el contrato</i> ( <i>encima</i> here is colloquial)	On top of everything they haven't given us the contract
<i>Por lo demás/Aparte de eso no tengo más que decirte</i>	Apart from that, I haven't got anything else to tell you

### 37.11.3 Qualification, reservation: ‘however’, ‘nevertheless’, ‘still . . .’, etc.

There are a number of ways of indicating that what has gone before is not a complete explanation of the facts or is not the whole truth:

(a) *Sin embargo* ‘nevertheless’/‘still . . .’/‘however’/‘in spite of that’ occurs in speech and in writing. *No obstante* means the same thing, but is more literary. *Empero* also means ‘nevertheless’, but is highly literary, uncommon and typical of journalese:

<i>Sin embargo a los extranjeros, y especialmente a los españoles, les gusta Montevideo</i> (MB, Ur.)	Nevertheless foreigners, and especially Spaniards, like Montevideo
<i>Sin embargo, cuando se le acababa el vermut iba corriendo a comprar otra botella</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue)	However, when her vermouth finished she used to rush off to buy another bottle
<i>Empero, si para llegar a Marte tardamos 24 meses terrestres . . .</i> (La Jornada, Mex.)	However, if it takes us 24 earth months to get to Mars . . .

(1) Colloquially *mira que* can express the idea of ‘nevertheless’: *las asistentas siempre se me van, y mira que las trato bien* ‘my home-helps always walk out on me, despite the fact that I always treat them well’. The phrase is quite strong: ‘but I’m telling you’ or ‘and mind you . . .’ might be better translations.

(2) A colloquial way of saying ‘however’ is *pero, bueno . . .*: *no tenemos mucho dinero, pero, bueno, tenemos que pagar nuestras deudas* ‘we don’t have a lot of money, but still, we have to pay our debts’.

### 37.11.4 Dismissing or downgrading information: ‘anyway’, ‘all the same . . .’

Words meaning ‘anyway’ indicate that the speaker has chosen to disregard some aspect of the previous information. They express some variant on the theme ‘it doesn’t matter . . .’/‘never mind . . .’.

Phrases like *de todas formas/maneras, sea como sea*, are usual in all styles; *sea como fuere* is literary: *de todos modos/de todas formas, llámame mañana* ‘anyway, call me tomorrow’.

(1) *Nada*, sometimes combined with *bueno*, is also much used in spoken European Spanish to discount information previously received: —*Es que nunca está aquí los viernes*—. (*Bueno*,) *nada, volveré el lunes* ‘“(S)he’s never here on Fridays.” “Never mind, I’ll come back on Monday”’. See the next section for *bueno*.

### 37.11.5 *Bueno*

In colloquial language the word *bueno* has many uses as an opener, i.e. as a way of starting a message of some kind. Its exact meaning depends a great deal on intonation.

(a) It may express disbelief or disagreement when combined with a sceptical intonation, e.g. ‘that’s as may be, but . . .’: —*Es que no pude venir a clase ayer porque tenía gripe*—. *Bueno, te has recuperado rápidamente . . .* ‘“I couldn’t come to class yesterday because I had the flu.” “Well, you got over it quickly . . .”’, —*Había cientos de personas en la fiesta*—. *Bueno, no tantas . . .* ‘there were hundreds of people at the party’. ‘Well, not that many . . .’, —*¿A las cuatro y media, entonces?* —*Bueno,*



*la verdad es que si pudiera ser a las cuatro, mucho mejor* (LS, Sp., dialogue) “‘Four thirty then?’ ‘Well, the truth is, if it could be at four o’clock it’d be a lot better.’”

(b) It may make the previous information less important, in which case it means something like a modest ‘anyway’: *yo digo que todos los días deberían ser diez de mayo, ¿no? Bueno, esa es mi opinión muy personal* (ES, Mex., dialogue) ‘I say that every day should be the tenth of May, don’t you? Anyway, that’s my very own personal opinion’ (10 May is Mother’s Day in Mexico).

(c) *Bueno*, without a sceptical intonation, is much used in spoken, but not written Spanish, to show that the speaker has taken previous remarks or circumstances into account before continuing. Its rough equivalent is ‘right . . .’/‘OK . . .’/‘fine . . .’: *bueno, yo no sabía todo eso, y si las cosas están así, tenemos que pensar . . .* ‘right/OK/fine, I didn’t know all that, and if that’s the way things are, we have to think . . .’, —*Bueno, ¿qué te parece si vamos al grano?* (ES, Mex., dialogue) ‘Right/OK, how about getting to the point?’

### 37.11.6 Resumption: ‘as a result’, ‘so . . .’

The effect of these words is to carry on or draw a conclusion from what has previously been said.

(a) The most common are *de modo que*, *de manera que*, *de forma que*, *así que*, *conque* (colloquial), *o sea que* (colloquial). They all mean ‘so’ in the sense of ‘carrying on from what I just said’, ‘as a result’ or ‘in other words’ (especially the colloquial *o sea que*):

<i>De modo/forma/manera que, como íbamos diciendo . . .</i>	So, as we were saying . . .
<i>De forma que lo extraordinario se ha convertido en ordinario</i> (MFÁ, Sp.)	So the extraordinary has become ordinary
<i>Así que/O sea que, en lugar de dejarlo allí, te lo llevaste</i>	So/In other words, instead of leaving it there, you took it with you
<i>Conque lo que pasó fue eso . . .</i>	So <i>that</i> was what happened . . .
— <i>¿Conque libros de Che?</i> (EP, Mex., dialogue. Accusing or challenging tone)	What’s this?! Books by Che Guevara?!

### 37.11.7 Emphasis and insistence: ‘really’, ‘actually’, ‘the fact is . . .’

There are various ways of driving home a point.

(a) *En realidad*, *realmente* are like the English ‘really’ or ‘actually’: they indicate that the speaker is about to reveal the ‘true’ facts: *en realidad/realmente este tipo de argumento no viene al caso* ‘in fact/in reality/to tell the truth, this type of argument is irrelevant’, *desaparecieron del alhajero de mi madre. En realidad nunca se usaron* (GZ, Mex., dialogue) ‘they vanished from my mother’s jewellery/US jewelry box. Actually, they were never used’.

(b) *De hecho* means ‘the fact is’: *de hecho es como si fuera mi padre* ‘in fact it’s just as if he were my father’, *de hecho, el país dependía de la autoridad carismática de un hombre de setenta y ocho años* (MSQ, Arg.) ‘the fact is that the country was depending on the charismatic authority of a seventy-eight year old man’.

(c) *Ahora bien* is, like the English ‘now’, used to insist on the following statement as something that may not yet have been fully taken into account. It is used more than its English equivalent: *ahora bien, hay que insistir en que los ejércitos de la Monarquía Católica estaban integrados por soldados de muy diversas nacionalidades* (MFA, Sp.) ‘now, it must be stressed that the armies of the Catholic Monarchy consisted of soldiers of widely differing nationalities’.

(d) Colloquially, Spanish makes much use of the formula *es que* . . . which conveys the idea of ‘the fact is . . .’ but is used mainly when offering explanations: —*Te llamé pero no contestaste*—. *Es que/El hecho es que no dormí en casa* “‘I called you but I couldn’t get an answer.” “The fact is/The thing is that I didn’t sleep at home”, *es que pocas veces los veo tan temprano* (EM, Mex., dialogue) ‘actually I don’t often see you (plural) this early’.

### 37.11.8 Summing up

There are several ways of summarizing the previous information.

(a) *En resumen* and *en suma* are literary phrases meaning ‘in short’/‘to sum up . . .’:

<i>En suma, todo cuanto pueda hacerle ganar en prestigio lo cuidará al máximo</i> (MFA, Sp.)	In short, he’ll be extremely careful about anything that can make him gain prestige
<i>En resumen, las cifras de este año son marcadamente superiores a las del año pasado</i>	To sum up, this year’s figures are markedly higher than last year’s

(b) *Total* can be thought of as a colloquial equivalent of *en resumen*. It indicates that the speaker has decided to get to the point. English often uses a slightly impatient ‘anyway’ in a similar way: *total, se levanta y se va* ‘to cut a long story short/anyway (s)he gets up and walks out’, *total, has metido la pata* ‘in a word, you’ve put your foot in it’, *total, ella confía en que será buenísima* (AM, Mex., dialogue) ‘anyway, she’s confident that she’ll be really good’.

(c) *En fin* is constantly used, but its meaning is, like *total*, rather indefinable. It means ‘well’ when this introduces a conclusion arrived at after a certain amount of thought. There are several English possibilities:

<i>En fin, a mí me sigue pareciendo que es como si Sherlock Holmes resolviera sus casos acudiendo a la Interpol</i> (JAM, Sp., dialogue)	Well, it still seems to me like Sherlock Holmes solving his cases by calling in Interpol
<i>En fin, lo que me estás diciendo es que no has perdido el dinero sino que te lo has gastado</i>	OK/Right, what you’re telling me is that you haven’t lost the money but you’ve spent it
<i>Pero en fin, los padres de uno son los padres de uno</i> (JJB, Mex., dialogue)	But, after all, one’s parents are one’s parents

### 37.11.9 Contradiction: ‘on the contrary’, ‘no way . . .’

These words show that the speaker does not agree with the previous information:

(a) *Por el contrario*, *al contrario*, *en absoluto* are standard equivalents of ‘on the contrary’. *Por el contrario* is normal in written language: —*¿Te encuentras mal?* —*Por el contrario/Al contrario/En absoluto, estoy estupendamente* “‘Are you feeling sick/ill?” “On the contrary, I feel great”.

(b) *Qué va* is a colloquial phrase expressing strong disagreement: —*Es que es riquísima*—. *Qué va, no tiene donde caerse muerta* “‘She’s really rich.” “No way! She hasn’t got a cent” (lit. ‘she hasn’t got anywhere to drop dead’).

(c) *De ninguna manera* expresses strong refusal, and is common in all styles. *De eso nada* is a colloquial phrase that conveys the same idea: —*¿Puedo pagarte a plazos?* —*De ninguna manera/De eso nada* “‘Can I pay you by instalments?” “Certainly not/no way.”

(d) *Oye* (*oiga* to a stranger or person held in special respect) is commonly used colloquially, above all in Spain, to reject an implication: *oye, si ya lo he pagado* ‘(I’m telling you) I’ve already paid’. It is constantly put at the end of statements in familiar speech (at least in Spain), (*si*) *ya lo he pagado, oye*, but some informants said this sounds ‘common’.

*¡Oye!* (or, respectfully, *¡oiga!*) can also be used to call someone’s attention, and it is not rude if the intonation is friendly, at least in Spain; but it may sound abrupt to Latin Americans, cf. *oiga joven, ¿sería tan amable de traerme una Superior si no es mucha molestia?* (ES, Mex., dialogue) ‘listen, young man, would you mind bringing me a Superior [beer] if it isn’t too much trouble?’

(e) The word *si*, which usually means ‘if’, is much used on both continents to disapprove of or express surprise at previous information (see also 35.4.8): —*Te tienes que levantar*—. *¡Si sólo son las cinco y media!* “‘You’ve got to get up.” “It’s only five-thirty, for heaven’s sake!”

(f) *Tampoco* is often used colloquially to play down certain types of statement, as in *tampoco es para tanto* ‘come on, it’s not such a big deal’. See 27.5.10.

(g) The words *ca* or *quia* used to be used, in Spain until the late 1940s, to mean ‘certainly not’. They now seem to be extinct.

### 37.11.10 Contrast: ‘on the other hand’

Various words and phrases imply contrast, like the English ‘on the other hand’.

*Por otra parte* is one equivalent of ‘on the other hand’: *por otra parte es posible pensar que tiene razón* ‘on the other hand, it’s possible to think that (s)he’s right’.

*En cambio*/*Por el contrario* can have a similar meaning but are more often used to express difference or contrast: *ella lo/le adora, en cambio/sin embargo/por el contrario, él no lo/le puede ver* ‘she adores him; on the other hand/however, he can’t stand him’, *en cambio, cabe suponer que nunca hubo vida en Marte* ‘on the other hand, there is room to suppose that life never existed on Mars’.

### 37.11.11 Consequence and result: ‘as a result’

These words and phrases show that what follows is the result of what preceded.

(a) *Por (lo) tanto*, *por lo consiguiente*, *en/como consecuencia* all mean ‘as a result’ and are all typical of formal styles: *por lo tanto, estamos ante otro instrumento de la Monarquía de los Austrias* (MFA, Sp.) ‘here we have, therefore, another of the tools used by the (royal house of the) Austrias’, *por lo consiguiente si en la Ciudad de México se redujera la polución, las visitas a los nosocomios disminuirían en mil 517 al año* (*La Jornada*, Mex. *Nosocomio*, a Latin-American word for ‘hospital’. *La contaminación* is used for ‘pollution’ in Spain) ‘as a result, if pollution in Mexico City were reduced, hospital visits would drop by 1,517 a year’.

(b) *Por ende* ‘hence’ is archaic, but is occasionally resurrected for stylistic effect. It could have replaced *por consiguiente* in the previous example, but the result would have sounded pompous.

(c) *De modo que*, *de forma que*, *así que*, *con que*, can all also mean ‘hence’, ‘as a result’. They are discussed above at 37.11.6.

(d) *Por eso* . . . ‘that’s why . . .’ is much used in everyday language in all styles: *por eso las generalizaciones no sólo son absurdas y peligrosas, sino indefectiblemente inexactas* (JM, Sp.) ‘that’s why generalizations are not only absurd and dangerous, they are also inevitably inaccurate’. *Por esta razón* ‘that’s why’ has the same meaning.

(e) *Entonces*, as well as meaning ‘then’ in the sense of ‘just after’, is much used to introduce a conclusion: *¿te gusta entonces?* (GCI, Cu., dialogue) ‘do you like me then?’, *entonces ¿estamos de acuerdo?* ‘so, are we in agreement?’. See 35.7.4 for a comparison with *luego*.

(f) *Pues* is discussed elsewhere, and it can mean ‘because’ in literary language; see 37.5.3. It is constantly used in colloquial language to introduce conclusions: —*No me gusta la forma*—. *Pues cámbialo* “‘I don’t like the shape.” “Then change it”, *pues eso mismo te iba a decir* ‘well, that’s just what I was going to tell you’.

### 37.11.12 Agreement

There are numerous ways of agreeing with the previous information or of asserting something as self-evident.

(a) *De acuerdo* means ‘I agree’, ‘agreed’, and expresses consent to some decision or request. *Ya* (see e), *bien*, and, in Spain, *vale* are much used for the same purpose: —*Tú quédate aquí mientras yo voy (a) por el coche*—. *De acuerdo/Ya/Vale/Bien* “‘You stay here while I fetch the car.” “Ok/Fine/Agreed.”

(b) *Claro* means ‘of course’ and is found in all styles, although it is slightly colloquial: *claro, como no me avisaste con tiempo, no pude ir* ‘of course, you didn’t warn me in time, I couldn’t go’, *claro que si no quieres venir, no vengas* ‘obviously if you don’t want to come, don’t come’. Sometimes it makes *sí* ‘yes’ unnecessary: —*¿Puedo pasar unos días en tu casa?* —*Hombre, claro, cuando quieras* “‘can I stay a few days at your house?” “Yes, of course, any time you want” (*hombre* can be said to a man or woman).

(c) *Desde luego* means ‘of course’: *desde luego, si quieres entrar tendrás que pagar* ‘obviously, if you want to go in you’ll have to pay’.

(d) *En efecto* and *efectivamente* both acknowledge the truth of what has occurred or has been said: *en efecto/efectivamente todos estaban de acuerdo conmigo* ‘they were indeed all in agreement with me’. —*Bueno, estamos fastidiados*—. *Efectivamente/En efecto* “‘Well, we’ve had it/we’re in trouble.” “You’re right.”

(e) *Ya* has many uses, listed at 35.7.1. It is often used to indicate agreement with the previous statement, although spoken sarcastically it can mean the exact opposite: —*Es que hay que darle un nombre al fichero antes de guardarlo*—. *Ya* “‘You have to give the file a name before saving it.” “Right/OK/I see”, —*Es que soy más listo que tú*—. *Ya, ya . . .* “‘I’m smarter than you.” “Yeah, sure . . .”.

(f) *De verdad* insists on the truth of a statement, rather like *en serio* ‘seriously’: *de verdad te digo que estoy loca por él* ‘I’m telling you, I’m really mad about him’. *A decir verdad* ‘to tell the truth . . .’ has a similar meaning.

# 38 Prepositions

In this chapter prepositions – equivalents of words like ‘above’, ‘at’, ‘behind’, ‘in’, ‘on’, ‘to’, ‘without’, etc. – are treated in alphabetical order and special emphasis has been given to aspects of Spanish usage likely to be unfamiliar to English speakers. The following prepositions are discussed:

<b>a</b> to, at 38.2	<b>de</b> of, from 38.8	<b>hasta</b> until, as far 38.14	<b>sobre</b> over, on, about 38.20
<b>ante, delante de</b> in front of, faced with 38.3	<b>desde</b> from 38.9	<b>mediante</b> by means of 38.15	<b>tras, detrás de</b> after, behind, 38.21 <i>versus</i> 38.22
<b>bajo, debajo de</b> beneath, underneath 38.4	<b>durante</b> during 38.10	<b>para</b> for. 38.16	
<b>cabe</b> (archaic) next to 38.5	<b>en</b> in, on, at 38.11	<b>por</b> 38.17	
		<b>prepositional phrases</b> 38.23	
<b>con</b> with 38.6	<b>entre</b> between, among 38.12	<b>según</b> according to 38.18	
<b>contra</b> against 38.7	<b>hacia</b> towards 38.13	<b>sin</b> without 38.19	

Most of these can be combined with other words to form prepositional phrases such as *frente a* ‘opposite’, *a razón de* ‘at the rate of’, etc.

## 38.1 Spanish prepositions: general remarks

### 38.1.1 They appear only before nouns and noun phrases

**Important:** Spanish prepositions can only appear before nouns and noun phrases (nouns, adjectives plus nouns, pronouns, infinitives: *en la casa, con muchos amigos, sin ella, para la que . . . , de fumar*, etc.). This makes English sentences like ‘which shop/store did you buy that in?’ impossible in Spanish because the preposition ‘in’ stands before nothing: *¿en qué tienda compraste eso?*, never **\*\*** *¿qué tienda compraste eso en?*

Some grammarians dislike sentences like *¿la cerámica es hecha por y para los mismos habitantes del pueblo* ‘the pottery is made by and for the villagers themselves’, since *por* stands before a conjunction, *y*: They prefer . . . *es hecha por los habitantes del pueblo y para ellos mismos*. Similarly, ‘I’ll go with or without you’ is *iré contigo o sin ti*, not *\*iré con o sin ti*. However, *con y sin . . .* is found: *apartamentos con y sin calefacción central* ‘apartments with and without central heating’. There are other common exceptions, mentioned at 38.1.2. The Academy, *NGLE* 31.4c, accepts *por y para* and *con y sin* but notes that this construction is rare and usually doubtful with other prepositions.

### 38.1.2 Prepositions should not be omitted

Omission of prepositions should be avoided: *\*personas acusadas de pertenecer y colaborar con el movimiento terrorista* ‘persons accused of belonging and collaborating with the terrorist movement’ sounds bad in both languages: . . . *acusadas de pertenecer al movimiento terrorista y de colaborar con él* is correct, . . . *pertenecer a y colaborar con el movimiento terrorista* may offend purists because the *a* is not followed by a noun phrase.

However, *entraban y salían del edificio* ‘they entered and left the building’ is nowadays heard, and no one would say *\*un billete de ida a Granada y de vuelta de ella* for *un billete de ida y vuelta a Granada* ‘a round trip to Granada’/‘a return ticket to Granada’.

### 38.1.3 English prepositions are sometimes untranslatable

English is very precise about location and direction; Spanish is often quite vague. The subtle differences between colloquial English prepositions of space, as in ‘I’m going to/across to/round to/down to/up to/over to the supermarket’ are virtually untranslatable: *voy al supermercado*.

### 38.1.4 ‘The book on the table’, ‘the house on the hill’

**Important:** English constantly joins nouns by prepositions as a way of avoiding relative clauses: ‘the plane to New York has arrived’ is short for ‘the plane (that is) going to New York has arrived’, ‘I’ve read the book on the table’ = ‘I’ve read the book that’s on the table’.

English speakers therefore write and say things like *?el avión a Nueva York ha llegado*, *?he leído el libro en la mesa*, but this often makes bad Spanish unless there is a word that supports the preposition, as in *iba en el tren a Madrid* ‘I was travelling on the train to Madrid’, *puse el libro en la mesa* ‘I put the book on the table’. *?Leí el libro en la mesa* sounds like ‘I was on the table when I read the book’.

There is no room for a lengthy discussion of this topic, but the best rule for beginners is: when an English phrase consisting of a noun + preposition + noun could be expressed by a relative clause, use a relative clause in Spanish unless the preposition is *de*:

#### Good Spanish

*La casa que está en la colina es de mi madre* (or *la casa de la colina es . . .*)  
*El avión que va a Lima ha salido ya* (or *el avión para Lima . . .*)  
*Los hombres de Ruritania son muy guapos*  
*El perro que está en el jardín es del vecino*  
*la chica del tren/el hombre de negro*  
*El hombre del Ford azul es mi tío*

#### Compressed English equivalent

The house on the hill is my mother’s  
 The plane to Lima has already left  
 The men in Ruritania are very good-looking  
 The dog in the garden is the neighbour’s  
 the girl on the train/the man in black  
 The man with the blue Ford is my uncle

These are much better Spanish than *?la casa en la colina . . .*, *?el avión a Lima . . .*, *los hombres en Ruritania . . .*, *\*la chica en el tren*, *?el perro en el jardín . . .*, while *\*el hombre en negro* is not Spanish. However, if the preposition is connected to a verb the construction may be normal: *vi a la chica en el tren* ‘I saw the girl in the train’, *construyeron la casa en la colina* ‘they built the house on the hill’. A noun can support a preposition, as in *una expedición a Marte* ‘an expedition to Mars’ (‘expedition’ implies motion), but not *?una nave especial a Marte* ‘a spaceship to Mars’, where the noun does not itself imply motion.

If the preposition does not indicate the place where something is *located*, the construction is often correct: *un café con leche*, *la gasolina sin plomo* ‘unleaded petrol/US gas’, *los pasajeros sin billete* ‘passengers without tickets’. Further remarks are included under the individual prepositions discussed in this chapter.

## 38.2 A

This very common preposition has many uses. Apart from the problems they have with personal *a* (discussed in Chapter 26), English speakers tend to misuse it when translating phrases like ‘at the dentist’s’, ‘at Cambridge’, ‘at the bus stop’. See 38.2.2 for discussion.

### 38.2.1 Motion, to, at, up, down, etc.

Almost any verb or noun indicating motion is likely to be followed by *a*. As a result, its meaning includes ‘on’, ‘into’, ‘in’, ‘onto’, ‘down’, ‘up’, as well as ‘to’ and ‘at’:

<i>Fui al dentista</i>	I went to the dentist
<i>Llegaron a Managua</i>	They arrived in Managua
<i>Me subí al coche/al tren</i>	I got into the car/train
<i>El gato se subió a un árbol</i>	The cat climbed up a tree
<i>Lo pegó al/en el sobre</i>	(S)he stuck it on the envelope
<i>Cuélgaselo al cuello</i>	Hang it round his/her neck
(cf. <i>Cuélgalo en la pared</i> )	(Hang it on the wall)
<i>Cayó al suelo/al mar</i>	It fell onto the ground, into the sea
<i>una expedición a Marte/un viaje a la Luna</i>	an expedition to Mars/a journey to the Moon

(1) *A* is omitted after verbs of motion before *aquí*, *acá*, *ahí*, *allí*, *allá*: *ven aquí/ven acá/ven para acá* ‘come here’, *allá voy/voy para allá* ‘I’m going there’.

(2) Spain *entrar en el cuarto*, Latin America *entró al cuarto* ‘(s)he entered the room’, the latter sometimes heard also in Spain. The nouns *entrada* and *salida* take *a*: *entrada a la galería* ‘entrance to the gallery’, *salida a la calle* ‘exit to the street’. Spain also prefers *en* with *penetrar* ‘penetrate’, *ingresar* ‘to join (club, etc.)’, *introducir* ‘to insert’, but *a* is common in Latin America, cf. *ingresa como adepto laico a la orden* (JLB, Arg.) ‘he enters (historic present) the order as a lay follower’.

(3) **Important:** as stated earlier, *a* should not be used to join nouns when motion is implied: *el tren que va a Madrid*, not *?el tren a Madrid* (see 38.1.4), unless the noun or a verb implies motion, as in *un viaje a África* ‘a journey to Africa’, *vuelos a La Paz* ‘flights to La Paz’, *íbamos en el tren a Córdoba* ‘we were going in the train to Córdoba’.

(4) Everyday spoken Mexican Spanish may use *con* instead of *a* after *ir* or *llevar* when a consultation is involved: *debe ir con el doctor*, *¿Por qué no lo lleva con el médico de don Pedro Castro?* (EM, dialogue) ‘he ought to see the doctor. Why don’t you take him to Pedro Castro’s doctor?’ (Spain: *debe ir al médico . . . por qué no lo/le lleva a . . .*).

### 38.2.2 A compared with the English ‘at’

*A* translates ‘at’ when motion or direction towards is involved:

<i>Mira al suelo y no te entrará agua en los ojos</i>	Look down at the floor and you won’t get water in your eyes
<i>Apunta a la bombilla</i>	Aim at the light bulb

**Important:** when no motion is involved, the use of the preposition *a* to indicate ‘at’ or ‘in’ a place is limited in Spanish. English speakers – especially those who know French, German or Italian – must not use *a* in sentences like *estoy estudiando en la universidad de Cambridge* ‘I’m studying at Cambridge University’, *te esperaré en la estación* ‘I’ll wait for you at the station’ (cf. *à la gare*, *am Bahnhof*, *alla stazione*, etc.). Apart from set phrases like *al lado de* ‘at the side of’, *a la luz de* ‘in the

light of', *a* can only be used with a few nouns like *salida* 'exit', *entrada* 'entrance' which denote actions or moments in time rather than places. *Os esperaré a la salida* is best thought of as 'I'll wait for you on the way out' rather than 'at the exit', which is *en la salida*.

*A* is, however, used to translate 'at' in a number of static situations involving close proximity to an object, e.g. *a la barra* 'at the bar', *a la mesa* 'at table' – especially after *sentarse* 'to sit down': *fue a sentarse a una mesa del fondo* (GZ, Mex.) 'he went to sit down at a table at the back'. But *en* is very common: *acababa de instalarme en una mesa con vista al mar* (LS, Sp.) 'I'd just settled at a table with a view of the sea', *en una mesa apartada, Angélica y Alberto reconciliándose* (ES, Mex.) 'Angelica and Alberto at a secluded table making up (i.e. after a quarrel)'. More examples of 'static' *a*:

<i>Vivo a la vuelta</i>	I live round the corner
<i>a orillas del mar</i>	on the seashore
<i>Oí pasos a mi espalda</i>	I heard footsteps at my back
<i>Se pasa horas sentada al ordenador</i>	She spends hours sitting at the computer
<i>Se arrodilló a los pies de la Virgen</i>	(S)he knelt at the feet of the Virgin
<i>Está con el agua al cuello</i>	(S)he's up to her/his neck (in troubles: <i>hasta</i> implies real water)
<i>a la izquierda/derecha de</i>	to the left/right of (cf. <i>a diestra y siniestra</i> 'to right and left', i.e. 'on all sides')
<i>Se sentaron al sol/a la luz/al calor del</i>	They sat in the sun/light/warmth of the
<i>fuego/a la sombra/al amparo de un roble</i>	fire/shade/in the shelter of an oak

But note:

<i>Espérame en la parada del autobús</i>	Wait for me at the bus stop
<i>Se detuvo en el primer semáforo</i> (MS, Mex.)	He stopped at the first traffic lights
<i>Mario está en el banco</i>	Mario is at/in the bank
<i>Los niños están en el colegio</i>	The children are in/at school
(cf. <i>mi hijo todavía no va al colegio</i> )	(my son isn't at school yet)
<i>... para que el coche no estuviera tanto</i>	... so the carriage wouldn't be parked so
<i>tiempo estacionado en la puerta</i>	long at the door
(GGM, Col. Refers to a horse-drawn carriage)	

(1) *A la puerta* is also good Spanish for 'at the door': *Morelli habla del napolitano que se pasó años sentado a la puerta de su casa* (JC, Arg.) 'Morelli speaks of the man from Naples who spent years sitting at the door of his house'; but we found that some Latin Americans preferred *en*, as in *al entrar ... se detuvo en la puerta* (GZ, Mex.) 'as he entered ... he paused at the door'.

(2) Spanish therefore has no prepositions that can differentiate 'he's at the hospital' (e.g. visiting) and 'he's in (the) hospital' (i.e. hospitalized). Context may make the meaning clear or verbs can be used instead: *ha ido al hospital* and *está internado* (i.e. 'hospitalized').

(3) 38.2.10 lists some other phrases in which *a* is used to join two nouns.

(4) Spanish differentiates *mirar a* 'to look towards/in the direction of' and *mirar* 'to look at', cf. *mira este cuadro con detenimiento* 'look at this painting attentively' and *mira a la derecha/a la izquierda* 'look to the right/to the left'.



### 38.2.3 A in adverbial phrases of manner

Adverbial phrases of manner with *a* are numerous:

<i>a pie/a mano/a lápiz</i>	on foot/by hand/in pencil
<i>a golpes/a tiros/a patadas</i>	with blows/by shooting/with kicks
<i>Pedía socorro a gritos</i>	(S)he/I was shouting for help
<i>un documento escrito a máquina</i>	a typed document
<i>Las patatas están a punto</i> (Lat. Am. <i>las papas</i> )	The potatoes are done
<i>El servicio queda a voluntad del cliente</i>	The service charge is at the customer's discretion

and many others which will be found in good dictionaries.

(1) The construction with *a* found in *sois dos a ganar* 'there are two of you earning', *ahora son cuatro a dormir* (JC, Sp., dialogue) 'there are four of them sleeping there now', may perhaps be included under this heading.

### 38.2.4 A in time phrases

<i>a las diez/a medianoche</i>	at 10 o'clock/at midnight
<i>Se cansa a los cinco minutos</i>	(S)he gets tired after five minutes
<i>Bonos del Estado a diez años</i>	ten-year Government Bonds
<i>Se casaron a los/con veinte años</i>	They got married at the age of twenty
<i>Estamos a miércoles/a quince</i>	It's Wednesday/the fifteenth
<i>tres veces al/por día</i>	three times a day
<i>A su muerte se dividió el reino en tres partes</i>	at his death the kingdom was divided into three parts

(1) *A* is particularly common in the construction *al* + infinitive, e.g. *al ver* 'on seeing', *al volverse* 'as (s)he turned round/back'. See 22.3.3.

(2) *A* is also used to indicate a stage in some process, as in *a la segunda taza no parece ya tan malo* (ET, Sp.) 'it doesn't seem so bad when you get to the second cup', *a la tercera llamada del teléfono* 'on the third ring of the phone'.

(3) Note the construction *ya deben estar al llegar* 'they must be about to arrive', or *están a punto de llegar*.

### 38.2.5 A translates 'of' or 'like' after verbs meaning 'smell', 'taste', 'sound' and after the nouns derived from some of these

<i>Me suena a cuento chino</i>	It sounds like a tall story to me
<i>Esto sabe a pescado</i>	This tastes of fish

and similarly after *oler* a 'to smell of' – *huele a quemado* 'there's a smell of burning' – *apestar* a 'to stink of'. Also *quiero ese rosado que viene con sabor a cereza* (LR, Col., dialogue) 'I want that rosé wine that comes with a cherry flavour', . . . *un olor a marihuana mezclada con lavanda y pólvora* (ES, Mex.) 'a smell of marihuana mixed with lavender and gunpowder'.

### 38.2.6 A = 'fitted with', 'propelled by', 'running on'

Some grammarians, and the Academy's DPD, criticize *a* as a borrowing from French in some of the following constructions, but most are normal in everyday language:

<i>olla a presión/caldera a/de gas-oil</i>	pressure cooker/oil-fired boiler
<i>la televisión a colores, qué regalo de bodas</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue. Spain <i>televisión en color</i> )	colour TV, what a fantastic wedding present
<i>un avión a/de dos motores</i>	a twin-engine plane
<i>un pantalón a rayas (or de rayas)</i>	striped trousers/US pants

(1) The Academy's recommended construction, *olla de presión, avión de reacción* 'jet plane', is more common in Latin America. The use of *a* before ingredients is occasionally seen in advertising language but it should not be imitated: *crema bronceadora a lanolina* 'suntan cream with lanolin', better and more usually nowadays *con lanolina*.

*A* is much used in the names of dishes, as in *pollo a la cerveza* 'chicken in beer', *chuletas de cerdo al ajillo* 'pork chops with chopped garlic'.

### 38.2.7 A used to indicate rate, measure, speed, amount, distance, time

<i>a cuatrocientos pesos el metro</i>	at 400 pesos a metre
<i>¿A cómo están las peras?</i>	How much are the pears?
<i>Volaba a más de dos mil kilómetros por hora</i>	It was flying at more than 2000 km per hour
<i>cambiar a razón de dos por uno</i>	to change at the rate of two for one
<i>Está a cinco manzanas (Lat. Am. cinco cuadras)</i>	It's five blocks away
<i>a montones</i>	in heaps
<i>Trabaja a ratos/a veces</i>	(S)he works now and again/sometimes

(1) The construction *a la tarde, a la noche* for *por la tarde, por la noche* is normal in Argentina and neighbouring countries. Other Latin-American countries may use *en la tarde, en la noche*.

### 38.2.8 A after verbs meaning 'begin', 'start', 'get ready to ...'

*Rompió a llorar/echó a correr* '(s)he burst into tears'/'(s)he broke into a run', *el cielo empezaba a despejarse* 'the sky was beginning to clear', and after *comenzar a* 'to begin', *ponerse a* 'to start to', *prepararse a* 'to get ready to', *disponerse a* 'to prepare oneself to', *meterse a* 'to take up ...', as in *no te metas a psicoterapeuta con él, porque solamente complicarás las cosas* 'don't get into being a psychotherapist with him, because you'll only complicate things'.

### 38.2.9 A used after other verbs, adjectives and adverbs

*A* is used after many other verbs, adjectives and adverbs, which must be learned separately:

<i>Se aferraba al árbol/a una idea</i>	(S)he clung to the tree/an idea
<i>Aspiraba a hacerse médico</i>	He was aiming to become a doctor
<i>Acostumbraban (a) hacerlo</i>	They habitually did it
<i>Tienes que hacerte al trabajo</i>	You have to get used to the work
<i>Prefiero una vida mediocre a ser héroe</i>	I prefer a mediocre life to being a hero
<i>Me pude salvar agarrándome a/de un árbol</i>	I managed to save myself by clinging to a tree
<i>No hay otro igual a él</i>	There is no other equal to him
<i>Tenía el jersey liado en torno a la cintura</i>	(S)he had his/her jersey tied round his/her waist
<i>Tendían emboscadas al enemigo</i>	They were laying ambushes for the enemy

*El viejo argumento de que la religión  
sirve de freno a los instintos  
adicto a los videojuegos  
un aficionado a la informática*

The old argument that religion serves as  
a curb on the instincts  
addicted to computer games  
computer hobbyist

and with other verbs, some listed at 26.11.

### 38.2.10 A to link two nouns

*el amor a la patria  
el respeto a la autoridad  
Insinué algo en el prólogo al libro de  
Lafaye . . . (OP, Mex., del possible)  
—¿Tiene usted miedo a volar? —Lo soporto  
(JV, Mex., dialogue)  
El culto al sol tendría sus ventajas*

love for one's home country  
respect for authority  
I hinted something in the prologue to  
Lafaye's book . . .  
'Are you scared of flying?' 'I can cope with it'  
Sun-worship would have its advantages

(1) With words like *miedo* 'fear' or *amor* 'love' one can use either *a* or *de* if no ambiguity arises, cf. *así que tiene miedo de las cucarachas* (CMG, Sp., dialogue; or *a*) 'so you're afraid of cockroaches . . .'.

(2) In some phrases *a* can remove the ambiguity of *de*: compare *el amor de Dios* = 'God's love' or 'love of God' and *el amor a Dios* = only 'love for God'. Often either preposition is possible:

### 38.2.11 A before indirect objects

*A* translates 'to' after verbs meaning 'give', 'send', 'say', 'rob, take away', 'buy from', etc.

*Le di mil euros a mi hijo  
Le dije la verdad a la policía  
Me envió una carta a mí  
Le robaron una sortija a mi tía  
Le compró un coche a su vecino  
una banda de traficantes de drogas, a los  
que aprehendieron trece kilos de cocaína  
(La Vanguardia, Sp.)  
Eso se lo oíste a tu padre*

I gave 1,000 euros to my son  
I told the truth to the police  
(S)he sent me a letter  
They stole a ring from my aunt  
(S)he bought a car from his/her neighbour  
a gang of drug-dealers from whom  
they confiscated 13 kilos of cocaine  
You heard that from your father

(1) **Important:** As we have said before, English-speaking learners must remember that in Spanish indirect objects can lose as well as gain, so *a* translates 'from' after a number of words with such meanings as 'steal', 'confiscate', 'buy', and after *oír* 'to hear', and similarly after *quitar* 'take away', *sustraer* 'steal', *confiscar* 'confiscate', *llevarse* 'take away', *sacar* 'to take out/remove', etc. However, *recibir* 'to receive', *adquirir* 'to acquire' and *aceptar* 'to accept' take *de*: *aceptar algo de alguien* 'to accept something from someone'.

### 38.2.12 A is used before certain types of direct object (personal a)

This is a special feature of Spanish not found in most other Romance languages, e.g. *vi al gitano* 'I saw the gypsy', *reconocí a Manuel* 'I recognized Manuel'. See Chapter 26 for a detailed discussion.

### 38.3 *Ante* and *delante de*

*Delante de* means ‘in front of’: *se puso delante de mí* ‘(s)he stood in front of me’. *Ante* can mean the same in written, but rarely in spoken, Spanish: *me eché en la cama ante la televisión* (JM, Sp.) ‘I lay down on the bed in front of the television’. *Ante* is, however, very common in the figurative meaning of ‘faced with’, ‘in the face of’. It must not be confused with the entirely separate word *antes* ‘before’ (in time). Examples:

<i>Tuvo que comparecer ante el tribunal</i>	(S)he had to appear before the court
<i>... ante esto, se exhorta a la población a ...</i>	... faced with/in view of this [air pollution]
<i>(Excélsior, Mex.)</i>	the public is encouraged to ...
<i>Ellas presumían de parienta famosa ante</i>	They boasted to the other older women
<i>las otras viejas</i> (MT, Sp.)	of having famous female relatives
<i>ante este dilema/insulto/problema</i>	faced with this dilemma/insult/problem
<i>Ante todo, quisiera agradecer al organizador</i>	Above all, I'd like to thank the organizer
<i>México ante la Naciones Unidas ...</i>	Mexico's position in the United Nations ...

(1) *Delante de* shows that physical location rather than figurative presence is implied, cf. *justificarse ante Dios* ‘to justify oneself before God’, but *arrodillarse delante de la Virgen* ‘to kneel before (a statue of) the Virgin’. For more about *delante de*, see 35.6.8.

(2) *Frente a* for *ante* in phrases like *frente a estos problemas* ‘faced with these problems’ is widespread: *una acción ... de las Fuerzas Armadas frente a la subversión* (MSQ, Arg.) ‘action by the Armed Forces in the face of subversion’.

(3) *Ante* and *delante de* should not be used to join nouns, as explained at 38.1.4: *el coche que está delante de la casa es mío*, not \**el coche delante de la casa es mío* ‘the car outside the house is mine’.

### 38.4 *Bajo, debajo de* and *so*

*Bajo* means ‘beneath’ or ‘under’. It may be a literary variant of *debajo de* ‘underneath’ (also discussed at 35.6.6), but in this sense it is spatially less specific, like ‘under’ compared with ‘underneath’: *bajo una masa de nubes* ‘beneath/under a mass of clouds’, *no me quedo ni un minuto más bajo este techo* ‘I’m not staying one more minute under this roof’, *un estudiante con una pila de libros bajo el brazo* (CF, Mex.) ‘a student with a pile of books under his arm’; but *enterró el botín debajo de un roble* ‘(s)he buried the loot under(neath) an oak tree’. ?*El perro está bajo la silla* ‘the dog’s beneath the chair’ sounds affected in both languages: ... *debajo de la silla* ‘under(neath) the chair’.

**Important:** *bajo* and not *debajo de* must be used in the figurative sense of ‘under’ in phrases like *bajo el gobierno de* ‘under the government of’, *bajo ciertas condiciones* ‘under certain conditions’, *funciona bajo Windows 10* ‘it works under Windows 10’, etc.

<i>bajo las estrellas/la lluvia/</i>	beneath the stars/in the rain
<i>bajo tierra</i> (or <i>debajo de la tierra</i> )	underground
<i>bajo los efectos de la anestesia</i>	under the effects of the anaesthetic
<i>bajo la monarquía/la república/el socialismo</i>	under the monarchy/republic/socialism

(1) *Abajo de* is often heard for *debajo de* in Latin America: see 35.6.6.

(2) *Bajo* often alternates with *desde* in the phrase like *desde/bajo este punto de vista* ‘from this point of view’.

(3) *Bajo* and *debajo de* should not be used to join nouns, as explained at 38.1.4; but there are set phrases like *temperaturas bajo cero* ‘sub-zero temperatures’, *declaraciones bajo juramento* ‘statements under oath’.

(4) The preposition *so* is now extinct in everyday speech. It used to mean *bajo* and it survives in the set legal phrase *so pena de: so pena de muerte* ‘on pain of death’, *so pena de una multa* (*La Jornada*, Mex.) ‘on pain of a fine’, *so pena de ser destituido* ‘on pain of being removed from office’.

## 38.5 *Cabe*

An archaic or rustic equivalent of *junto a/cerca de* ‘by/near’, now effectively extinct.

## 38.6 *Con*

### 38.6.1 *Con* compared with ‘with’

In many contexts *con* coincides with the English ‘with’:

*Fui a la reunión con Niso*  
*Llegaron dos policías con perros*  
*Yo no podía quitarlo con una llave normal*

*con lo enferma que está . . .*  
*té con miel/café con leche*  
*Se levantó con el sol*  
*con la llegada del otoño*

I went to the meeting with Niso  
 Two policemen with dogs arrived  
 I couldn’t get it off with a normal  
     spanner/wrench  
 and with her being so ill . . .  
 tea with honey/coffee with milk  
 (S)he got up with the sun  
 with the arrival of autumn

(1) **Important:** English speakers constantly misuse *con* to join nouns in phrases like *el chico del Mercedes azul* ‘the boy with the blue Mercedes’ (not \**el chico con el Mercedes azul*), *el hombre de la cara fea y las manos hermosas era su marido* (CF, Mex.) ‘the man with the ugly face and beautiful hands was her husband’, *la astucia que caracterizaba al hombre de la corbatita de moño* (AJ, Mex. ‘bow tie’ = *la pajarita* in Spain) ‘the cunning that was characteristic of the man with the bow tie’.

(2) **Important:** *con* cannot be used in combination with the nominalizer *el*: *el de la americana blanca* ‘the one (masc.) with/in the white jacket’, not \**el con la americana blanca*. Phrases like \**la/el/los/las con paraguas/coches* for ‘the one(s) with umbrellas/cars’ are not Spanish: *el/la/los/las que tiene(n) paraguas/coche*, etc.

### 38.6.2 *Con* indicating attitude towards

After phrases meaning ‘to show an attitude towards’ *con* alternates with *para con*, much as ‘with’ alternates with ‘towards’: *es muy cariñoso (para) con su mujer* ‘he’s very affectionate towards/with his wife’, *su amabilidad es igual (para) con todos* ‘her kindness is the same towards all’.

*Es muy cariñoso con/para con su hijo* (but not  
 . . . *para su hijo*)  
*Era muy comprensiva con/para con sus*  
*pacientes*  
*Era una estrategia comprensible y disculpable,*  
*y tampoco podía considerarla irrespetuosa*  
*para con mi inteligencia* (LS, Sp., dialogue)

He’s very affectionate towards his son  
  
 She was very understanding towards her  
 patients  
 It was an understandable and excusable  
 strategy and I couldn’t consider that it lacked  
 respect for my intelligence

*Era buena y cariñosa con él y no le  
preguntaba nada de su pasado (MBD, Col.)  
Es poco confiada con sus compañeros*

She was good and affectionate towards him  
and asked him nothing about his past  
She's not very trusting with his/her  
colleagues

*Para con* is most commonly used with positive emotions, but also occurs with words like *crueldad/obligaciones/deberes/compromiso* 'cruelty/obligations/duties/commitment towards'.

### 38.6.3 *Con* after words meaning 'meeting', 'colliding', 'facing up to', etc.

*Me encontré/Tropecé hoy con tu jefe  
Ha vuelto con su marido (ha vuelto a is  
not used in this sense)  
Tengo que vérmelas con el vecino*

*Iba en la moto y me di un golpe  
con/contra un poste  
Se enfrentaron con los guerrilleros/con el  
problema  
Contactó con/a su padre  
Te paso con María*

I ran into/met your boss today  
She's gone back to her husband (or  
'she's come back with her husband')  
I'll have to have it out with the neighbour  
(i.e. have a frank talk with)  
I was on my motorbike and I crashed  
into a post  
They confronted the guerrillas/faced  
up to the problem  
(S)he contacted his/her father  
I'm handing the phone over to María

### 38.6.4 *Con* meaning 'containing'

It may – strangely to English speakers – mean 'containing':

*Pensó que un vaso con agua le sabría mal . . .  
(GZ, Mex. Or vaso de agua)  
Llevaba una cesta con pan, huevos, uvas y  
vino (de is not possible here)  
una jeringa con morfina*

He thought a glass of water would taste bad  
(S)he was carrying a basket of bread,  
eggs, grapes and wine  
a syringe of morphine

This use of *con* eliminates the ambiguity of *de*, which either means 'full of' or denotes the container and not the contents, cf. *una botella de coñac* 'a bottle of cognac' or 'a cognac bottle', but *una botella con coñac* 'a bottle with cognac in it'.

### 38.6.5 *Con* meaning 'despite'

*Con* can mean 'despite' or some similar phrase (*a pesar de* is often an equivalent):

*Con ser inteligente y rico nunca llegó  
a nada  
Con todo, la vida no es tan terrible  
Pero mi mamá, con todo y que ya pasa  
de los sesenta, sigue siendo una señora  
guapa, distinguida (ES, Mex., dialogue)*

Despite being intelligent and rich, he  
never came to anything  
Despite everything, life isn't so terrible  
But my mother, despite everything and  
being over sixty, is still an attractive,  
distinguished lady

### 38.6.6 *Con* plus an infinitive

This may have a conditional sense:

*Con hacer (or haciendo) lo que yo os/les digo, todo irá bien*

*Solo/sólo con pulsar una tecla el ordenador almacena los datos*

Provided you (pl.) do what I say everything will go well

If you simply press a key the computer stores the data

A subjunctive may also follow *con* in this conditional meaning but *con que* must then be used: *con que pulses una tecla . . .* 'if you press a key . . .'. This must not be confused with the conjunction *conque* or with *con* plus a relative pronoun:

*Con que me pagaran mis gastos me conformaría*

*Bastó con que ella me hiciera reír (LR, Col.)*

I'd be happy if they paid my expenses

It was enough that she made me laugh

### 38.6.7 *Con* used to indicate cause or origin

*Con* may indicate the cause or origin of a condition:

*Estamos muy entusiasmados/ilusionados con la perspectiva de un nuevo gobierno*

*Se puso enferma con paludismo/malaria (or enfermó de, Lat. Am. se enfermó de)*

*Estoy en cama con gripe*

*Se mareó con el vaivén del tren*

*Se alegró con/de la noticia del nacimiento de su nieto*

We're very excited about the prospect of a new government

She fell ill with/from malaria

I'm in bed with the flu

(S)he felt nauseous because of the swaying of the train

(S)he cheered up at the news of his/her grandson's birth

(1) *Con* is used with *soñar* 'to dream', e.g. *soñar con algo/alguien*, 'to dream of something/someone'. Compare *pensar en algo/alguien* 'to think about something/someone' and *pensar de* as in *¿qué piensas del feminismo?* 'what do you think of feminism?'

### 38.6.8 Miscellaneous examples of *con*

*Con* is used in other ways unfamiliar to English speakers: *hace años que él se escribe con ella* 'he and she have been writing to one another for years', *murió con más de setenta años* 'she died aged more than seventy', *usted fue el último que lo/le vio con vida* 'you were the last one to see him alive', *voy a verme con ella esta noche* 'I'm seeing her tonight', . . . *con lo mono que eres* (CF, Mex., dialogue) ' . . . and you being so cute/handsome'.

## 38.7 *Contra*

A close equivalent of 'against', but it may mean 'at' after verbs meaning firing, throwing, launching, etc. *En contra de* is an equivalent of *contra* when the latter means 'in opposition to'. It becomes *en contra de que* before a verb:

*una campaña contra/en contra de la corrupción*

*Contra lo que creen algunos . . .*

a campaign against corruption

Despite/Contrary to what some believe . . .

Apoya tu pala contra el árbol  
 Lanzó la piedra contra el árbol  
 inyectarse contra la gripe/la rabia  
 (not \*inyectarse para . . .)  
 ¿Está usted en contra de que lo hagan ellos?

Lean/Prop your spade against the tree  
 (S)he threw the stone at the tree  
 to get injected against flu/rabies  
 Are you against them doing it?

(1) For *contra mí, en contra tuya*, etc. 'against me'/'against you' see note to 9.7.

(2) For the popular use of *contra* for *cuanto* in phrases like *cuanto más trabajas, más te dan* 'the more you work, the more they give you', see 6.11 note 1.

(3) *Contra* can join nouns if the meaning of the first noun invites its use, as in *la guerra contra la corrupción*. But not ?*la moto contra la pared es mía* 'the motorbike against the wall is mine': *la moto que está apoyada contra la pared* . . . 38.1.4.

## 38.8 De

### 38.8.1 'Of', 'belonging to'

This is one of the most common uses of *de*:

la matrícula del coche  
 la moto de Felipe  
 el primero/uno de mayo  
 ¿De quién es esto?

the car number plate/US license plate  
 Felipe's motorbike  
 the first of May  
 Whose is this?

Speakers of French must resist the temptation to replace *de* by *a*: *c'est à vous?* = ¿es de usted?/¿es suyo/suya? 'is it yours?'

### 38.8.2 De used to make compound nouns

Note that *de* in such cases is not followed by a definite article:

un traje de baño  
 un reloj de pulsera  
 la estación de trabajo  
 la tecla de desplazamiento

a swimsuit  
 a wristwatch  
 the workstation  
 the scroll key

(1) This is the most frequent way of forming the equivalents of English compound nouns, but there are other methods, e.g. *un año luz* 'a light year', *un dispositivo USB* 'USB device', or *la pantalla táctil* 'touch screen'. These are mentioned at 2.1.9 and 5.11.

### 38.8.3 Origin (see 38.9 for the difference between *de* and *desde*)

Soy de México  
 un ser de otro planeta  
 un vino de solera  
 un dolor de cabeza

I'm from Mexico  
 a being from another planet  
 a vintage wine  
 a headache

(1) English speakers tend to use *en* to join nouns to indicate belonging to or originating from a place. Spanish prefers *de*: *los hombres de Grecia* 'the men in Greece' (= 'Greek men'), *las flores de los Andes* 'the flowers in (= of) the Andes', *las colinas de tierra adentro* 'the hills inland'. See 38.1.4 for details.



The temptation is strongest after a superlative: *este/éste es el mejor restaurante de Quito* 'this is the best restaurant in Quito', *el mejor momento de mi vida* 'the best moment in/of my life'. But Mexican Spanish often uses *en*: *el plan más ambicioso en el mundo* (Mexican TV) 'the most ambitious plan in the world', *el mejor surtido en México* 'the best range in Mexico' (advert.).

(2) *Viene de Toledo* normally only means '(s)he's coming from Toledo'; *es de Toledo* = '(s)he's from Toledo'.

### 38.8.4 **De = 'made of', 'consisting of'**

<i>una estatua de oro macizo</i>	a solid gold statue
<i>una base de datos</i>	a database
<i>una impresora de inyección de tinta</i>	an ink-jet printer
<i>Este yogur es de leche de oveja</i>	This is ewe's-milk yoghurt

### 38.8.5 **De = 'about' in the sense of 'concerning'**

*De* is much used for 'about' after verbs like *hablar*, *quejarse de*, *protestar de* (more usually *protestar por*) and after nouns like *carta* 'letter', *libro*, *poema*:

<i>Se queja mucho del frío</i>	(S)he complains a lot about the cold
<i>¿Podría hablarnos de su experiencia allí?</i> (JV, Mex., dialogue)	Could you tell us about your experience there?
<i>Hablan mucho de ti</i> (n.b. not <i>sobre ti</i> )	They're talking about you a lot
<i>¿De qué va la cosa?</i>	What's it all about?

(1) *De* as used here may imply something different from *sobre*: *una carta de amor* 'a love letter' is not a *una carta sobre el amor* 'a letter about love'. Compare *no quiero hablar de mis problemas personales* 'I don't want to talk about my personal problems' and *esta noche el terapeuta va a hablar sobre problemas personales* 'tonight the therapist is going to talk on the subject of "personal problems"'.

### 38.8.6 **De = 'costing'**

<i>Las naranjas de dos euros son las mejores</i>	The two-euro oranges are the best
<i>Han comprado un coche de diez mil dólares</i>	They've bought a 10,000 dollar car

### 38.8.7 **Emotions arising from something**

<i>Tengo miedo del/al agua</i>	I'm afraid of the water
<i>Pero tenía miedo de que la policía lo viera</i> (GZ, Mex.)	But he was scared the police would see him
<i>el respeto de/a/por los derechos humanos</i>	respect for human rights
<i>Me da pena de él</i>	I'm sorry for him
<i>un fan de los videojuegos</i>	a fan of computer games
<i>la obsesión del/por/con el golf</i>	the golf craze/the golf bug

And similarly *el horror de/a/hacia una cosa* 'horror towards/about a thing'. However, after *sentir*, *experimentar* and similar verbs the following words take *por* or *hacia*: *compasión* 'pity', *simpatía* 'affection'/'liking', *admiración* 'admiration', *desprecio* 'contempt', *odio* 'hatred', etc.

### 38.8.8 **De** used in certain adverbial phrases of manner:

*Lo escribió de manera/modo que nadie  
pudiera/pudiese leerlo  
Le ha venido de perlas  
Solo/sólo he estado en Sevilla de paso  
Intentaron entrar de balde  
Sale todos los sábados de juerga  
Estuvimos de bromas hasta las tres de la  
mañana*

(S)he wrote it in such a way that no one  
could read it  
It suited him/her perfectly  
I've only been in Seville on the way through  
They tried to get in free/without paying  
(S)he goes out 'on the town' every Saturday  
We were up until three telling jokes/  
fooling around

### 38.8.9 **De** to describe a person's state or condition

This construction is closely related to the previous one:

*De niña me gustaba mucho coser  
(MA, Cu., dialogue)  
Trabajó dos meses de camarero  
Tú aquí estás de más  
Vi a una criada de blanco paseando al niño  
Salió vestida de pirata (ES, Mex., dialogue),  
una chica joven de vaqueros y chaqueta  
de hombre (CMG, Sp.)  
enfermo de bronquitis  
loco de alegría*

As a child I really used to like sewing  
He worked as a waiter for two months  
You're not needed here  
I saw a maid in white out walking the child  
She appeared [on stage] dressed as a pirate  
a young girl in jeans and a man's jacket  
sick with/from bronchitis  
mad with joy

(1) *De* + an adjective is a common colloquial way of describing the condition something is in, especially when the condition is in some way extreme or surprising:

*La cesta de costura casi no cierra de puro  
llena (CMG, Sp.)  
De puro ansioso, Javier había bostezado  
(MB, Ur.)  
Me sudaban las manos de los puros nervios  
(ES, Mex., dialogue)*

The sewing basket almost won't shut  
because it's so full  
Javier was so anxious that he yawned  
My hands were sweating from sheer nerves

In the first two examples under (1) *puro* could be replaced by *tan*.

### 38.8.10 **De** used to mean 'if'

For *de* plus the infinitive for 'if', as in *de haberlo sabido no lo habrías hecho* 'had you known you wouldn't have done it', see 29.8.3.

### 38.8.11 **De** in expressions of age and measurements

*un hombre de cuarenta años  
Esta sogá tiene tres metros de largo  
una barra de memoria de 16 gigas  
Tiene más de seiscientos metros de profundidad*

a man aged forty  
This rope is three metres long  
a sixteen-gig(abyte) memory stick  
It's more than 600 metres deep

### 38.8.12 **Difícil de leer, fácil de hacer, etc.**

*De* is used in certain circumstances with adjectives before an infinitive. Compare: *su conducta es difícil de comprender* 'his/her behaviour is difficult to understand', and *es difícil comprender su conducta* 'it's difficult to understand his/her behaviour'. See 22.10.

### 38.8.13 **Más de lo que . . . , menos de lo que . . .**

*De* plus an article is used with *que* in comparisons involving a clause: *es más listo de lo que parece* 'he's cleverer than he seems', *no uses más de los que necesites* 'don't use more (masc.) than those you need'. See 6.6 for discussion.

### 38.8.14 **. . . de recomendar, . . . de creer, etc.**

*De* alternates with *para* in sentences of the type 'his attitude is not to be copied', 'his stories aren't to be believed':

*Sus excusas no son de/para creer*  
*Su veracidad no es muy de recomendarse*  
 (JJA, Mex., dialogue)

His/Her excuses aren't to be believed  
 One can't recommend his truthfulness  
 very highly

(1) For the phrase *muy de*, as in *no soy muy de misas* 'I'm not a great Mass-goer', see 35.4.2 note 2.

### 38.8.15 **De after certain verbs meaning 'to take by', 'seize by', 'pull on', etc.**

*La cogió de la mano/Me tiraba de la manga*  
*El profesor lo/le asió de una oreja*  
*. . . la fotografía del viejo y de doña Carolina,*  
*muy jóvenes, tomados de la mano* (GZ, Mex.)

(S)he took her by the hand/(S)he was  
 pulling my sleeve  
 The teacher grabbed him by an ear  
 . . . the photo of the old man and doña  
 Carolina, very young, holding hands

### 38.8.16 **De after participles and to indicate authorship**

*De* is sometimes used after participles to denote the agent of an action, and also often to indicate the author of a work or the main actor in a film or play:

*acompañado de/por su esposa*  
*un viejo acompañado de un perro* (MB, Ur.)  
*un cuento de Borges*

accompanied by his wife  
 an old man accompanied by a dog  
 a short story by Borges

See 38.17.2 note 1 for a discussion of the past participle + *de*.

### 38.8.17 **De in certain time phrases**

*De* is used in some set time phrases: *es un pastor alemán, pero de día está amarrado . . . Lo soltamos de noche, para que cuide* (GZ, Mex., dialogue) 'he's an Alsatian/German shepherd dog, but he's chained up by day . . . We let him loose at night to keep watch', *se levantó muy de mañana* '(s)he got up very early in the morning'.

### 38.8.18 **De used in constructions of the type *pobre de ti* 'poor you'**

*Tendrás que habértelas con ese gandul de Julio*  
*Sólo me dejaban ir al cine si Arturo me*  
*acompañaba y los pobres de mis novios*  
*tenían que pagar el boleto del chaperón*  
 (ES, Mex., dialogue. Boleto here =  
 la entrada in Sp.)

You'll have to tackle that lazy-bones Julio  
 They only let me go to the cinema if Alberto  
 went with me, and my poor boyfriends  
 had to pay for the chaperone's ticket

### 38.8.19 **Partitive *de***

*De* is occasionally used before adjectives – particularly demonstrative adjectives – to mean 'some of', 'one of': *hay de todo* 'there is a bit of everything' (see 3.2.8 note 1): *puedes comprar de todo* 'you can buy a little of everything', *tráiganos de ese vino que nos sirvió ayer* 'bring us some of that wine you served us yesterday'.

### 38.8.20 **De after verbs**

*De* is used after numerous verbs which must be learned separately, e.g. *acordarse de* 'to remember', *apoderarse de* 'to get hold of', *calificar/tachar/tildar de* 'to describe/label as', *compadecerse de* 'to take pity on', *culpar de* 'to blame for', *encargarse de* 'to take charge of', *jactarse de* 'to boast of', *librarse/deshacerse de* 'to get rid of', *burlarse de* 'to mock', *reírse de* 'to laugh at', and many more.

### 38.8.21 **De can replace relative clauses**

The following construction is quite common in spoken Spanish:

*Hace unos guisos sabrosos de mucho llenar*  
 (CMG, Sp., = *que llenan mucho*)  
*Es hombre de poco comer/que come poco*

She makes delicious, really filling stews  
 He isn't a big eater/He doesn't eat a lot

### 38.8.22 **Deber or deber de?**

For the choice between *debe ser* and *debe de ser* both translatable as 'she/he/it must be' see 25.3.

### 38.8.23 **Acompañado de, seguido de: see 38.8.16**

### 38.8.24 **De before *que***

Some verbs, all verbal phrases involving a noun or adjective, and some adverbial phrases should be followed by *de que* when they introduce a clause: *nos dimos cuenta de que ya no llovía* 'we realized that it was no longer raining'. See 37.4.2 for discussion.

### 38.8.25 **Dequeísmo**

For the popular but stigmatized tendency to use *de que* instead of *que* after verbs of belief and communication, e.g. *?Marta dice de que no viene* for ... *dice que no viene* 'Marta says she isn't coming', see 37.4.3.

### 38.9 Desde

The existence of two Spanish words which can both mean 'from' is a source of confusion for foreigners.

*Desde* emphasizes the point of origin or the idea of movement or distance more than *de*. It is therefore appropriate – but usually optional – when motion 'from' a place requires some unusual effort or when the point of origin is stressed as in *os veo desde mi ventana* 'I can see you from my window'. It is also freely used in time phrases to mean 'since': see 36.3.7.

In some of these examples *de* could replace *desde*, but in some cases *desde* must be used:

<i>Desde/De nuestro balcón se divisa la cima</i>	From our balcony one can make out the summit
<i>Desde aquí el camino es muy bueno</i>	From here the road is very good
<i>He venido andando desde el/del centro</i>	I've walked all the way from the centre
<i>Y entonces una soga lo atrapó desde atrás</i> (JC, Arg.)	Then he was caught from behind by a rope
<i>Desde hoy/A partir de hoy/De hoy en adelante tienen que llegar a tiempo</i>	From today you must arrive on time
<i>Los tenemos desde/de cincuenta pesos hasta doscientos</i>	We have them from 50 pesos to 200
<i>Desde siempre oí que ella era perfecta</i> (AM, Mex., dialogue)	I had always heard that she was perfect

(1) *Desde* clarifies sentences like *puedes enviar imágenes desde tu móvil* 'you can send images from your mobile/cell phone', where *de tu móvil* might mean 'images of your mobile/cell phone'. Cf. also *cómo enviar SMS gratis desde Internet* 'how to send free text messages via the Internet', where *de Internet* might sound like 'Internet texts'.

(2) If *a*, *hasta* or some other preposition of destination appears, *desde* is often interchangeable with *de*: *de/desde aquí a/hasta el centro* 'from here to the centre', *de/desde aquí a la cima mide ocho mil metros* 'from here to the summit it measures 8,000 metres', *desde/de 1982 a 1992 estuve en Colombia* 'from 1982 to 1992 I was in Colombia'.

If no such prepositional phrase of destination occurs *desde* is usually the safer option, though usage is fickle: *las partículas subatómicas que llegan desde/de otras galaxias* 'subatomic particles arriving from other galaxies', *¿desde dónde hablas?* 'where are you talking from?', *desde entonces no lo/le he vuelto a ver* 'since then I haven't seen him'.

In sentences like the following *de* and *desde* mean something different: *desde chiquitas nos enseñaron que debíamos abrirnos paso en la vida por nosotras mismas* (ES, Mex., dialogues) 'from the time we were little girls they taught us to make our own way in life', but *de chiquitas no nos dejaban salir de la casa* 'when we were little girls they didn't let us go out of the house'.

In the following types of sentence, only *de* is possible: *yo soy de Madrid* 'I'm from Madrid', *las hojas caen ya de los abedules* 'the leaves are already falling from the birches', *sacó tres diamantes de la bolsa* '(s)he took three diamonds from the bag', *pasó de secretaria a jefa en tres meses* 'she went from secretary to boss in three months', *hizo una maqueta de un trozo de madera* '(s)he made a model from a piece of wood', *del techo pendía una enorme araña de luces* 'from the ceiling hung an enormous chandelier', *se ha venido de España a vivir en Inglaterra* '(s)he's come from Spain to live in England', *solo/sólo la veo de Pascuas a Ramos* 'I only see her once in a blue moon' (lit. 'from Easter to Palm Sunday').

(3) The phrases *desde este punto de vista/desde esta perspectiva* ‘from this point of view’ are very common (*de este punto de vista* seems almost to have dropped out of use): *lo criticó desde una perspectiva/un punto de vista marxista* ‘(s)he criticized it from a Marxist perspective/standpoint’.

(4) *Desde ya* is commonly found in the River Plate region, and increasingly in Spain, for ‘right away’; *desde ahora ya* is more common in Spain. *Desde luego* means ‘of course’ on both continents.

(5) *Desde* should not be used to join nouns unless the meaning of the first noun justifies its use: *la vuelta desde Madrid* for ‘the return from Madrid’ is possible, but *\*el tren desde Madrid* should be rephrased *el tren que viene de Madrid*.

(6) *Desde* sometimes has a negative meaning in colloquial Mexican Spanish in sentences like *regresé desde el sábado* = Spain *no volví hasta el sábado* ‘I didn’t get back until Saturday’.

## 38.10 Durante

This word, which means ‘during’, ‘for . . .’ a period of time, and other ways of saying ‘for a period of time’ is discussed in Chapter 36.

## 38.11 En

*En* seems vague to English speakers since it means ‘in’ and ‘on’ as well as ‘at’, ‘into’ and ‘onto’: *en la caja* ‘in the box’, *en la mesa* ‘on/at the table’, *está en la comisaría* ‘(s)he’s in/at the police station’, *en el semáforo* ‘at the traffic lights’. Spanish-speaking learners of English have considerable problems differentiating ‘in’, ‘on’ and ‘at’. For *en* and ‘at’ in sentences like ‘at the station’, ‘at Cambridge’, see 38.2.2.

When it means ‘on a surface’, it alternates with *sobre* (see 38.20) and also sometimes with *encima* de ‘on top of’. One can say *en/sobre/encima de la mesa* ‘on the table’, but *mi hijo duerme en su cama* ‘my son sleeps in his bed’, since ‘inside’ is implied. *En* may be replaced by *dentro de* if the idea of ‘inside’ needs to be emphasized.

### 38.11.1 En as an equivalent of ‘in’, ‘on’ or ‘at’

*Tus camisas están en el cajón*  
*Cuelga el cuadro en la pared*  
*Dio unos golpes discretos en la puerta*  
*La llave está en la puerta*  
*Gasto mucho dinero en juegos de azar*  
*. . . sentado a/en una mesa* (see note 1)  
*Nos bajamos en la próxima parada*  
*El agua ha penetrado en las vigas*  
*Uno de mis pendientes se me ha caído*  
*en el agua* (see note 2)  
*Propusieron convertirlo en sanatorio*  
*en otoño/primavera/1924*  
*En las mañanas salíamos a montar a*  
*caballo* (AM, Mex., Sp. *por las mañanas*)  
*Todavía está en proyecto*

Your shirts are in the drawer  
 Hang the picture on the wall  
 (S)he tapped discreetly on/at the door  
 The key’s in the door  
 I spend a lot of money on gambling  
 . . . sitting at a table  
 We’re getting out at the next stop  
 The water has soaked into the joists  
 One of my earrings fell off in the water

They suggested turning it into a sanatorium  
 in autumn/spring/1924  
 In the mornings we used to go riding  
 It’s still at the planning stage

*Te da ciento y raya en latín*  
*Deja un mensaje en mi buzón de voz*

(S)he's miles better than you in Latin  
 Leave a message on my voice-mail

(1) Compare *se sentó a/en la mesa* '(s)he sat down at table' with *siempre se comporta bien en la mesa* '(s)he always behaves well at table'. See 38.2.2 for discussion.

(2) *Entrar* and similar verbs take *en* (often *a* in Latin America, and occasionally in Spain): *entró en el cuarto* '(s)he entered the room', but *no puedes entrar a mi casa si no te he invitado* (EM, Mex., dialogue) 'you can't come into my house if I haven't invited you', Spain *entrar en* . . .

(3) For the translation of phrases like 'the men in Mexico', 'the books in the drawer', see 38.1.4.

### 38.11.2 *En* used to express the thing by which something else is judged or estimated

*El tipo quedó fijado en 1,93 por dólar*  
*Lo vendieron en/por un millón de euros*  
 (por is more usual)  
*Te tenía en más estima*  
*El progreso logrado en esta investigación*  
*es computable en cero*  
 . . . *superar en cuatro a uno*  
*Me lo presupuestaron en cien mil*  
*El gobierno congeló el precio de la masa*  
*en veinticinco centavos* (JA, Mex.)  
*Lo/Le conocí en el andar*

The rate was fixed at 1.93 to the dollar  
 They sold it for a million euros

I thought better of you  
 The progress achieved in this investigation  
 can be reckoned at/as zero  
 . . . to be four times greater  
 They gave me an estimate of 100,000 for it  
 The Government froze the price of [tortilla]  
 dough at 25 centavos  
 I recognized him from the way he walked

### 38.11.3 *En* in a number of adverbial phrases

*Lo tomaron en serio*  
*en mangas de camisa/en cueros/en*  
 (or de) *broma/en balde*  
*en fila/en seguida* (or *enseguida*)  
*Estoy en contra*  
*Ve tú en mi representación* (ABV, Sp., dialogue)  
*Soy el primero en reconocerlo*

They took it/him seriously  
 in shirtsleeves/naked/as a joke/  
 pointlessly  
 in a row/straight away  
 I'm against  
 You stand in for me/represent me  
 I'm the first to admit/recognize it

### 38.11.4 Use of *en* after a number of common verbs, and in several miscellaneous constructions

*Pensé mucho en usted*  
*Se fijó en él*  
*Tardaron en reparar el coche*

I thought about you a lot  
 (S)he noticed him  
 They took time to repair the car

Also *quedar en* 'to agree to', *vacilar/dudar en* 'to hesitate over', *empeñarse/insistir/obstinarse en* 'to insist on', *abdicar en* 'to abdicate in favour of', *interesarse en/por* 'to be interested in', *ser el primero/último en* 'to be the first/last to . . .', *terminaron en la cárcel* 'they ended up in jail', *el partido acabó en empate* 'the game ended in a draw'.

See 22.2.2 for further remarks about prepositional usage with verbs. For the obsolete construction *en* + gerund see 24.5.

## 38.12 *Entre*

*Entre* means both 'between' and 'among'. It also has a number of uses unfamiliar to English speakers.

### 38.12.1 *Entre* = 'between'

*Estábamos entre la espada y la pared*

We were between the sword and the wall (i.e. had our backs to the wall)

*... constantemente entre la excitación y la depresión* (MVM, Sp.)

*... constantly between excitement and depression*

*Cuestan entre mil y dos mil*

They cost between one and two thousand between you and me ...

*entre tú/usted y yo ...* (See 38.12.5 note 1)

*Entre todos rehabilitaremos Madrid* (poster)

Between us all we'll modernize Madrid

*... trozos de una novela rosa que fuimos escribiendo entre las dos* (CMG, Sp.)

*... bits of a romantic novel we were writing between the two of us*

*Tuvieron que separarla del cadáver entre dos enfermeras* (ES, Mex., dialogue)

It took two nurses to drag her from the body

The previous example reflects a construction unfamiliar to English speakers: *llenar el pantano entre cuatro ríos* (from María Moliner, I, 1146; *pantano* also means 'swamp'/'marsh') 'four rivers combine to fill the reservoir', more naturally expressed by *se necesitan/son necesarios cuatro ríos para llenar el pantano*.

### 38.12.2 *Entre* = 'among'

It is used with a wider range of nouns than its English equivalent, e.g. *entre el humo* 'in/through the smoke', *encontraron la sortija entre la arena* 'they found the ring in the sand':

*Vivió entre los beduinos*

(S)he lived among the Bedouins

*La perdí de vista entre la muchedumbre*

I lost sight of her in the crowd

*... y entre el ruido de la lluvia se escuchaba el ladrido de los perros* (LS, Ch.)

*... and through/above the noise of the rain the barking of the dogs was heard*

*Entre la niebla se percibía una masa inquieta* (LMD, Sp.)

A shifting mass/shape could be seen in/through the fog

*Vimos a varios soldados escondidos entre la hierba* (EP, Mex.)

We saw several soldiers hiding in the grass

### 38.12.3 *Entre* = 'among themselves'

*Entre* is especially liable to appear with the pronoun *sí* (discussed in detail at 13.3).

*Hablan castellano entre sí* (or *entre ellos*)

They speak Spanish among themselves

*Es más fácil que dos personas vivan en armonía cuando se respetan entre sí*

It's easier for two people to live in harmony when they respect one another

*Enseguida notamos el recelo manifiesto que se dispensan entre sí* (EL, Arg.)

We immediately noticed the obvious distrust they felt for one another

One can also write *en seguida*)

*La idea del nuevo presidente era hacer que los dos polos políticos se enfrentaran entre sí* (JA, Mex.)

The new president's idea was to get the two opposing political extremes to clash with one another



38.12.4 **Entre = 'what with ...'**

*Entre los niños y el estruendo de los  
albañiles, me estoy volviendo loca  
entre pitos y flautas . . .*

What with the children and the din of  
the builders, I'm going crazy  
what with one thing and another . . . (lit.  
'what with whistles and flutes')

*Entre las presiones del lado sindical  
. . . y los reclamos del entorno palaciego,  
Isabel se enfermó (MSQ, Arg. Reclamos =  
quejas and enfermarse = enfermar in Sp.)*

What with the pressure from the trade  
unions . . . and the complaints from the  
palace milieu, Isabel [Perón] fell ill

38.12.5 **Miscellaneous uses of entre**

In certain phrases *entre* is used in a way which is strange to English speakers:

*Decía entre mí/sí . . .  
El museo está abierto entre semana  
Tengo un asunto entre manos*

I said to myself/(s)he said to her/himself  
The museum is open Monday to Saturday  
I've got some business in hand

(1) **Important:** prepositional forms of pronouns are not now used after *entre*: *entre Juan y tú recogeréis los papeles* 'you and John will pick up the pieces of paper between you' (not \**entre Juan y ti*), *entre tú y yo* 'between you and me'. But the prepositional form *sí*, from *se*, is used after *entre* – *hablan francés entre sí* 'they speak French with one another'. The form *entre nos* for *entre nosotros* is heard in Latin America: *eso lo digo aquí entre nos ¿eh? no lo publique* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'I'm saying that just between us, eh? Don't publish it'.

(2) In everyday Colombian Spanish *entre* is often used for *en* when the latter indicates spatial location: *todavía conservo esa nota, siempre la llevo conmigo entre la billetera* (LR, Col., dialogue) 'I still keep that note, I always carry it with me in my wallet', *optó por permanecer día y noche inactiva entre la cama* (ibid.) 'she chose to stay day and night in bed doing nothing'.

38.13 **Hacia**38.13.1 **Hacia = 'towards' a place or thing**

*Hacia* is a close equivalent of 'towards', but rather wider in application since it also translates the English suffix –'ward' / –'wards' and also 'around' in time phrases:

*La nave viaja hacia Venus  
Señaló hacia el este  
Maniobró su telescopio Zeiss y apuntó  
hacia Sirio (EP, Mex.)  
El incidente ocurrió hacia las tres  
El coche rodaba hacia atrás*

The spaceship is travelling towards Venus  
(S)he pointed to the east  
He adjusted his Zeiss telescope and  
pointed it towards Sirius  
The incident occurred around three o'clock  
The car was rolling backwards

38.13.2 **Hacia to express emotions and attitudes 'towards'**

*Por*, *con* and *para con* are also possible, but not always interchangeable. Deep emotions such as love or hatred prefer *hacia* or *por*; attitudes (e.g. kindness, severity, irritability) prefer *hacia* or *con*. For *para con* see 38.6.2.

*mi profundo amor hacia/por todo lo andaluz*  
*Mostraba una indiferencia total hacia/*  
*por las críticas*  
*... clara antipatía hacia Miguel Alemán*  
*(JA, Mex.)*

my deep love for everything Andalusian  
 (S)he displayed total indifference towards  
 criticisms  
 ... obvious dislike of Miguel Alemán

(1) In time phrases *hacia* can less commonly be replaced by *sobre*: *hacia/sobre finales de agosto* 'around the end of August', *hacia/sobre las tres de la tarde*, 'around 3 p.m.', or, with dates, by *para*: *para octubre* 'towards/around October'.

## 38.14 **Hasta** = 'as far as', 'until', 'up to'

*hasta ahora*  
*Llegaron hasta el oasis*  
*Algunos padres se quedaban hasta que se*  
*izara la bandera (CP, Arg.)*  
*Siguió leyendo hasta que no había luz*  
*Bailaron hasta no poder más*  
*Estoy hasta la coronilla de exámenes*  
*hasta luego*

until now / up to now  
 They got as far as the oasis  
 Some parents stayed until the flag was raised  
 (S)he kept reading until there was no light  
 They danced until they were exhausted  
 I'm sick to death of exams  
 goodbye / see you later

(1) **Important:** from Mexico to Colombia *hasta* has acquired the additional meaning in some contexts of 'not until': *perdona que te llame hasta ahora* (CF, Mex., dialogue), 'sorry for not ringing you before now', *bajamos hasta la Plaza de la Independencia* 'we're not getting off until Independence Square', *hasta entonces me di cuenta* 'I realized only then' or 'I didn't realize until then'. But *hasta* is also used in the standard way in these regions: *caminó enojado hasta la puerta del ascensor* (CF, Mex. Spain *enfadado hasta* . . .) 'he walked angrily as far as the lift/elevator door'.

(2) For *hasta que no* see 27.2.4.

(3) For *hasta* = *incluso* 'even', see 35.8.

## 38.15 **Mediante**

'By means of' some instrument or device:

*Lograron abrir la caja mediante/con una*  
*antorcha de butano*  
*También se podrán enviar canciones*  
*mediante los mensajes de texto*  
*(La Jornada, Mex.)*

They managed to open the safe by  
 means of a butane torch  
 It will also be possible to send songs by  
 means of text messages

## 38.16 **Para**

### 38.16.1 The basic difference *para* and *por*

*Para* and *por* both often translate 'for' although they nearly always mean different things. They also have many other uses, and this makes generalizations difficult.

One basic distinction between them when they seem to mean 'for' is that *para* expresses purpose or destination and *por* cause or motive. This is clear from the two sentences *hago esto para ti* 'I'm **making** this for you (to give to you)' and *hago esto por ti* 'I'm **doing** this for you/on your

behalf'/'because of you'. Cf. *quiero que me hagas un favor. Hazlo por mí* (MC, Mex., dialogue) 'I want you to do me a favour. Do it for my sake'.

English speakers are usually confused by sentences like 'they put up this fence for the rabbits'. Assuming this means 'because of the rabbits' and not 'for the benefit of the rabbits', one says *pusieron esta valla por los conejos*. The Spanish Civil Guards' motto *Todo por la Patria* 'Everything for our Country' means 'everything we do is done for our country's sake'. *Todo para la Patria* would mean 'everything we have or make is for our country'.

It is useful to recall that if 'for' can be replaced by 'out of' or 'because of' then *por* may be the correct translation, but not *para*: *lo hizo por amor* '(s)he did it for (out of) love', *lo hago por el dinero* 'I do it for (because of) the money':

<i>Llevo el abrigo por/a causa de mi madre</i>	I'm wearing this coat because of my mother (i.e. she'll be worried if I don't)
<i>Llevo este abrigo para/a mi madre</i>	I'm taking this coat to my mother
<i>Han llegado por ti</i>	They've come to get you/they've come because of you/instead of you
<i>Han venido estos paquetes para ti</i>	These parcels have come for you
<i>Lo has conseguido por mí</i>	You've got it through/thanks to me
<i>Lo has conseguido para mí</i>	You've got it for me

Particularly troublesome is the fact that *por* and *para* can mean almost the same thing in some sentences involving intentions, e.g. *ha venido por/para estar contigo* '(s)he's come to be with you', whereas in others only *para* is possible. This problem is discussed at 38.17.16.

(1) The form *pa* is substandard for *para*. It is accepted in a few humorous familiar expressions used in Spain and possibly elsewhere, e.g. *es muy echao palante* 'he's very forward' (*echao* is very familiar or substandard for *echado*), *estoy pal arrastre* 'I'm all-in/exhausted', *pal gato* 'junk' (literally 'for the cat').

### 38.16.2 *Para* to express purpose, object or destination

Before a verb other than an infinitive, *para que* must be used.

<i>Una mesa para dos, por favor</i>	A table for two, please
<i>Para hacer login hay que teclear la contraseña</i>	To log in you have to enter the password
<i>Viniste para espiarnos, ¿verdad?</i> (MC, Mex., dialogue)	You came to spy on us, didn't you?
<i>Un coche hecho para durar</i> (advert., Sp.)	A car made to last
<i>Estudia para médico</i>	(S)he's studying to become a doctor
<i>Mañana te daré instrucciones para que nos entregues el dinero</i> (EM, Mex., dialogue)	I'll give you instructions tomorrow so you can hand over the money to us

(1) See 38.17.16 for the possible use of *por* in certain contexts to indicate purpose.

(2) *A que* can replace *para que* after verbs of motion like *ir*, *venir*, *subir*, *bajar*: *¿a/para qué has venido?* 'what have you come for', *fui al dentista a que/para que me sacara/sacase una muela* 'I went to the dentist to have a tooth out'.

(3) *Para* can also express ironic or thwarted purpose, like the English 'only to': *corrió a casa para encontrarse con que ya se habían marchado* '(s)he hurried home only to find that they'd already left'.

(4) The following construction may also be thought of as expressing object or purpose: *sus historias no son para/de creer* 'his/her stories aren't to be believed' (lit. 'aren't for believing'), *no es para tanto* 'it's not that serious/no need for so much fuss', *¿no es un poco tarde para pensar en casarse?* 'isn't it a bit late for thinking of getting married?'

(5) For the difference between *¿por qué?* 'why?' and *¿para qué?* 'what for?', see 28.10.

### 38.16.3 Para used to indicate direction after verbs of motion

*La secretaria ya ha salido para Burgos*  
*Acaba de llamar la señora y dice que viene para*  
*la casa (GR, Mex., dialogue)*  
*Ya va para viejo*  
*Va para millonario*  
*Visualizó a Juan caminando para arriba*  
*y para abajo (EP, Mex.)*

The secretary has already left for Burgos  
 The señora has just called and she says she's  
 coming home  
 (S)he's getting old now  
 He's on the way to becoming a millionaire  
 He pictured Juan walking up and down

(1) Para can link two nouns where we would use 'to' or 'for': *ha llegado el tren para/de Madrid* 'the train to/for Madrid has arrived', *agua para perros* 'water for dogs'. See 38.1.4.

### 38.16.4 Para used to indicate advantage, disadvantage, usefulness, need

*Fumar es malo para la salud*  
*La paciencia es un requisito indispensable*  
*para los profesores*  
*Que para él lo nuestro era lo más sublime,*  
*que adónde iba a ir yo que más me quisieran.*  
*(ES, Mex., dialogue)*

Smoking is bad for the health  
 Patience is an indispensable  
 requirement for teachers  
 [he said] that for him what we had was  
 the most wonderful thing of all, where  
 would I go where they'd loved me more?

### 38.16.5 Para to indicate reaction, response, mood

*Esto para mí huele a vinagre/Esto a mí me*  
*huele a vinagre*  
*Yo no tengo amigos. Para mí, que mi mujer*  
*los espanta*  
*Para su padre es un genio*  
*No estoy para bromas*

This smells of vinegar to me  
 I haven't got any friends. If you ask me,  
 my wife scares them away  
 (S)he's a genius in his/her father's eyes  
 I'm not in the mood for jokes

(1) For para con in sentences like *es muy atento para con los invitados* 'he's very courteous towards guests', see 38.6.2.

### 38.16.6 Para = 'considering', 'in view of'

*Está muy alto para su edad*  
*Estás muy viejo para esos trotes*  
*Es poco dinero para tanto trabajo*  
*Para lo que hace ese departamento*  
*sería mejor cerrarlo*  
*... un matrimonio bastante rápido*  
*para lo mucho que siempre se dice que*  
*hay que pensárselo (JM, Sp.)*

He's very tall for his age  
 You're very old for all that nonsense  
 It's not much money for so much work  
 For all/Considering what that department  
 does, one might as well close it  
 ... a pretty quick marriage considering  
 how much they always say you ought  
 to think it over

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*Para ser extranjera sabe mucho de política argentina*

She knows a lot about Argentine politics for a foreigner

### 38.16.7 **Para** to translate 'to' in certain reflexive expressions

*Me lo guardo para mí*

I'm keeping it to/for myself

*Esto acabará mal, me decía para mí/entre mí*

This will end badly, I said to myself

*Murmuraba para/entre sí*

(S)he was muttering to himself/herself

### 38.16.8 **Para** = 'about' in the meaning of 'on the point of':

*Ya deben estar para/al llegar*

They must be about to arrive

*La leche está para/a punto de hervir*

The milk's about to boil

*Pues yo estoy para cumplir treinta*

Well, I'm going to be thirty-five next week

*y cinco la semana que viene (EA, Sp., dialogue)*

(1) In Latin America *estar por* is used: *en 1942, cuando volvió definitivamente, estaba por cumplir veinte años* (SP, Mex.) 'in 1942, when he came back for good, he was on the verge of his twentieth birthday', *oye bien. Un pájaro está por cantar* (JLB, Arg.) 'listen. A bird is about to sing', *el helicóptero está por llegar* (MC, Mex., dialogue) 'the helicopter's about to arrive'.

### 38.16.9 **Para** in time phrases

#### (a) To translate 'by' a certain time:

*Lo tendré preparado para las cinco*

I'll have it ready by/for five o'clock

*Si ensayamos fuerte durante todo el año, para el verano estaremos en condiciones de actuar (SP, Sp., dialogue)*

If we rehearse hard all year we'll be ready to perform by summer

*Para entonces ya vivíamos en Brooklyn (JV, Mex., dialogue)*

By then we were already living in Brooklyn

*La derecha tradicional para esas alturas ya no dudaba de las bondades del régimen (JA, Mex.)*

By that stage [of the affair], the traditional right wing no longer had any doubts about the good aspects of the regime

#### (b) To translate 'for' a period of time:

*Para* sometimes expresses the idea of 'for *n* days/weeks/years'. See 36.3.6.

(1) In *volvemos para agosto*, *para* is more precise than *hacia* and *por* and less precise than *en*.

(2) *Ir para* is a colloquial translation of 'for nearly . . .' in time phrases: *va para cinco años que trabajo aquí* 'I've been working here for nearly five years'.

### 38.16.10 **Para** to translate 'enough to', 'considering how much'

*No había tomado suficientes pastillas (como) para ponerse enfermo*

He hadn't taken enough pills to make himself sick/ill

*Leva encima tres dry martinis, suficientes para sentirse liberada (JV, Mex.)*

She's downed three dry martinis, enough to feel liberated

## 38.17 *Por*

### 38.17.1 *Por* = ‘because of’

*Por* often means ‘because of’, ‘on account of’:

*No pudimos salir por/a causa de la nieve*  
*la razón por la que me voy*  
*muchas gracias por el regalo*  
*todo por un arranque de genio . . .*  
*Te ha pasado por dejado*  
*Se creía en la gloria por llevar un*  
*remendado vestido de novia*  
 (ES, Mex., dialogue)  
*El profesor la calificó con un cero por no*  
*saber la lección* (MP, Arg.)  
*Liquidación por cierre*

We couldn’t go out because of the snow  
 the reason for my leaving  
 many thanks for the present  
 all because of a fit of anger . . .  
 It happened to you because you’re careless  
 She thought she was in Heaven (‘glory’)  
 (just) because she was wearing a patched-  
 up wedding dress  
 The teacher gave her a zero because  
 she didn’t know the lesson  
 Closing-down sale

*Por* may therefore indicate the origin or inspiration of an emotion or mental state:

*La admiro por su generosidad*  
*nuestro amor por/hacia/a nuestros hijos*  
*Era famoso por mandón y arrogante* (JA, Mex.)  
*Tu mamá se desmaya por todo* (EM, Mex.,  
 dialogue)  
*No por previsible la foto anual dejaba de*  
*ser un acontecimiento excepcional* (EL, Arg.)

I admire her for her generosity  
 our love for our children  
 He was notoriously bossy and arrogant  
 Your mother faints over everything  
 Predictability did not stop the annual  
 photograph being an exceptional event

(1) Note the expression common to Spain and Latin America, *darle a uno por* ‘to take up (a hobby, etc.)’/‘to get keen on’, e.g. *a Carlos le ha dado por el arte* (LO, Cu., dialogue) ‘Carlos has taken up art’.

### 38.17.2 *Por* = ‘by’ in passive constructions

*Fuimos atacados por los policías* (EP, Mex.,  
 dialogue)  
*La catedral fue diseñada por Gaudí*

We were attacked by the police  
 The cathedral was designed by Gaudí

(1) *De* is not nowadays used in passive sentences to mean ‘by’, except with certain verbs which are best learned separately. Where there is a possibility of using either *por* or *de*, the former usually implies an activity, the latter a state or condition. *De* is therefore common when *estar* is used (see 32.2.5 for *ser destruido* contrasted with *estar destruido*): *me sentía tentado de tomar el atajo* ‘I felt tempted to take the short cut’, *María dijo algunas palabras en voz muy baja . . . seguidas de un ruido de sillas* (E S, Arg.) ‘Maria said a few words in a very low voice . . . followed by a noise [i.e. scraping] of chairs’, *el formulario debe estar/ir acompañado de dos fotos* ‘the form must be accompanied by two photos’, *las zonas pantanosas suelen estar plagadas de mosquitos* ‘marshy zones are usually plagued with mosquitoes’; but *en verano las vacas son atormentadas por las moscas* ‘in summer the cows are tormented by flies’.

(2) Phrases like *Hamlet por William Shakespeare* are seen and heard, perhaps with increasing frequency, but *Hamlet de William Shakespeare* is the time-honoured construction.

38.17.3 **Por = 'runs on', 'works by'; 'by means of'**

*La alarma funciona por rayos infrarrojos*  
*el tratamiento por/con rayos X (equis)*  
*un coche que marcha por/con/a hidrógeno*  
*La televisión por cable tiene 16 millones de*  
*suscriptores (La Jornada, Mex.)*  
*[el Buda] enseñaba la aniquilación del*  
*dolor por la aniquilación del deseo (JLB, Arg.)*

The alarm works by infra-red rays  
 Treatment by X-rays  
 a car running on hydrogen  
 Cable TV has 16 million subscribers  
 [the Buddha] taught the extinction of  
 suffering by the extinction of desire

38.17.4 **Por = 'in support of', 'in favour of', 'on behalf of', 'for ... 's sake'**

*Yo voté por que tu libro fuera premiado*  
*(RA, Cu.)*  
*¿Estás tú por la no violencia?*  
*Encuentro de Escritores por la Paz*  
*Es senador por Massachusetts*  
*Aprendió a tocar el piano por sí misma/ella sola*  
*Está por ti*

I voted in favour of your book getting  
 the prize  
 Do you support non-violence?  
 Conference of Writers for Peace  
 He's Senator for Massachusetts  
 She learned to play the piano by herself  
 (S)he finds you attractive

38.17.5 **Por = exchange for, substitute for, distribution per**

*Te lo cambiarán por uno nuevo*  
*Ahora daría lo que no tengo por oírla*  
*(CMG, Sp.)*  
*Te han dado gato por liebre*  
  
*¿Por quién me toma usted?*  
*Lo doy por supuesto/sentado*  
*Él dará la clase por mí*  
*Comes por tres*  
*tres raciones por persona*  
*cient kilómetros por hora*  
*40 horas a la/por semana (a is more usual)*  
*la media anual por español*  
*El dos por ciento es protestante/son protestantes*  
*Fueron entrando uno por uno*

They'll change it for a new one for you  
 Now I'd give everything I haven't got  
 to hear her  
 They've served you cat for hare (i.e.  
 swindled you)  
 Who do you take me for?  
 I take it for granted  
 He'll give the class instead of me  
 You eat enough for three people  
 three helpings/servings per person  
 100 km an hour  
 40 hours a week  
 the annual average per Spaniard  
 Two per cent are Protestants  
 They came in one by one

38.17.6 **Por in expressions of price and amounts of money**

*un cheque por/de cien dólares*  
*Compró una casa por un millón de dólares*

a cheque/US check for 100 dollars  
 (S)he bought a house for one million dollars

**(1) Important:** in Spain *por* is used with *pagar* only when the latter already has a direct object in the form of a quantity of money: *he pagado mil dólares por este ordenador* (Lat. Am. *por esta computadora* or *este computador*) 'I paid \$1000 for this computer', *he pagado mucho por él* 'I paid a lot for it'; but *yo lo pagué la semana pasada* 'I paid for it last week'. NGLC 36.31 reports that sentences like *pagaste por las cervezas* (Sp. *pagaste las cervezas*) 'you paid for the beers' are common in some Latin-American countries.

**38.17.7 *Por* = 'to judge by'**

... *por las señas que me ha dado* ...

... *por lo que tú dices* ...

*por lo visto*

*Evidentemente, por su voz, por su aspecto,*

*por su ropa era una persona decente*

(GCI, Cu.)

*Por mí haz lo que quieras*

... from the description (s)he's given me ...

... from what you say ...

apparently

Evidently, to judge by his voice, looks and

clothes, he was a respectable person

As far as I'm concerned, do what you like

**38.17.8 *Por* = 'in search of'**

European speech prefers *a por*, a construction rejected by Latin Americans but now accepted by the Academy (NGLE 29.5n) and welcomed by Manuel Seco on the grounds that *fui por ella* could mean 'I went instead of her/on her behalf', whereas ... *a por ella* is only 'to look for her'/'to find her':

*Voy al baño a por Kleenex* (CRG,

Sp., Lat. Am. *por Kleenex*)

*Fui por mi abrigo* (AM, Mex., Sp. *a por*)

I'm going/I go to the bathroom to get

a tissue

I went for my coat/I went to get my coat

**38.17.9 *Por* = 'through' in the sense of 'by means of'**

*Conseguí el empleo por/a través de mi tío*

*Me enteré por un amigo*

*Consiguió el puesto por sus contactos*

I got the job through my uncle

I found out from a friend

(S)he got the job through her/his contacts

**38.17.10 *Por* in adverbial phrases of manner**

*por correo/avión/mar* (but *en tren, en*

*coche, en bicicleta, a pie*)

*Los denuncio por igual*

*por lo general/generalmente*

*por lo corriente/corrientemente*

*Me lo tendrás que decir por las buenas o*

*por las malas*

*por orden alfabético*

*Es agrimensor, o algo por el estilo*

by mail/air/sea/ (by train/car/by

bicycle/on foot)

I denounce both/all sides equally

generally

usually

You'll have to tell me one way or another

in alphabetical order

He's a surveyor, or something like that

and numerous others which must be learned from the dictionary.

**38.17.11 *Por* = 'however ...' in concessions (see 20.5.2)**

*Por más inteligente que seas, no lo vas a*

*resolver*

*No entendió, por más que se esforzó,*

*la frase que le repetía* (EP, Mex.)

However intelligent you may be, you

won't solve it

However much she tried, she didn't grasp

the phrase he was repeating to her

**38.17.12 *Por* = 'multiplied by', 'measured by'**

*Cinco por tres son quince*

*Mide 7 por 5*

5 times 3 equals 15

It measures 7 by 5



*Una sociedad se mide por el trato  
que otorga a los débiles (La Jornada, Mex.)*

The measure of a society is the way it treats  
the weak

### 38.17.13 **Por** used with numerous verbs

*Por* is used with many verbs which must be learned separately, e.g.

*afanarse por* to strive to  
*apurarse por* get anxious about  
*asustarse por/de* get frightened about  
*decidirse por* to decide on  
*desvelarse por* to be very concerned about  
*disculparse por* to apologize for  
*esforzarse por* to make an effort to  
*interesarse por/en* to be interested in  
*jurar por* swear by/on

*luchar por* to struggle to  
*molestarse por* to bother about  
*optar por* to opt for  
*preguntar por* to ask about/after  
*preocuparse por* to worry about  
*rezar por* to pray for  
*tomar por* to take for  
*votar por* to vote for

These verbs may be followed by *porque* to express purpose, e.g. *me esforzaba porque/para que todos comieran/comiesen bien* 'I made an effort so that they would all eat well'. In this construction, they are followed by the subjunctive (see 20.4.3, note 1).

### 38.17.14 **Por** in time phrases

(a) *Por* = 'in', but less precise than *en* where the latter is also possible:

*Debió de ser por mayo  
por aquellos días  
Por esa época la mayoría de los países  
sudamericanos estaban gobernados por  
dictaduras militares (QSM, Arg.)*

It must have been some time in May  
in those days/during those days  
At that time the majority of Latin-  
American countries were ruled by  
military dictatorships

(b) For 'just for', 'only for' and for more details on *por* in time phrases see 36.3.5.

### 38.17.15 **Por** as a preposition of place

(a) 'All over', 'throughout'

*Han cancelado su gira por Latinoamérica  
Había muchos libros desparramados por el suelo  
Oye, ¿me das crema por/en la espalda?  
Es duro por fuera pero por dentro es blando*

They've cancelled their Latin-American tour  
There were many books scattered  
over the floor  
Could you please put cream on my back?  
It's hard outside but soft on the inside

(b) 'In': less precise than *en* and often implying motion:

*La vi por/en la calle  
Creo que las mujeres andan por Europa  
(MB, Ur., dialogue)  
Debe de estar por el jardín  
Yo no sabía por dónde empezar*

I saw her in the street  
I think the women are somewhere  
in Europe  
It must be somewhere in the garden  
I didn't know where to begin

(c) 'Up to':

*El agua le llegaba por/a/hasta la cintura*

The water was up to his/her waist

*Me llegas por los hombros*

You reach my shoulders (e.g. to a growing child)

**(d) 'Through', 'out of', 'down':**

*respirar por la boca*

*Entró por la puerta/la ventana*

*Se cayó por la escalera*

*Salía agua por el/del grifo*

*El tren pasó por/a través del túnel*

*por/vía Madrid*

to breathe through the mouth

(S)he came through the door/window

(S)he fell down the stairs

Water was coming out of the tap

The train went through the tunnel

through/via Madrid

**(e) In conjunction with adverbs of place, to denote direction or whereabouts:**

*por aquí*

*por delante/detrás*

*por entre*

this way/around here

in front/from behind

in between

### 38.17.16 *He venido por hablarle or para hablarle?*

Both prepositions may translate 'to' or 'in order to' in sentences like 'I've come to talk to you'. In some cases, they are virtually interchangeable:

*¿Para qué has venido?*

*¿Por qué has venido?*

*Estoy aquí para/por verlo/le*

*Ella le habría vendido el alma al Diablo*

*por casarse con él (GGM, Col.)*

*... mientras no se resignara a la decadencia*

*física o hiciera algo por evitarla (ES, Mex.)*

What have you come for?

Why have you come?

I've come to see him

She'd have sold her soul to the Devil to

marry him

... as long as she didn't resign herself to a

physical decline or do something to

avoid it

**(1) Important:** if an English sentence can be rewritten using a phrase like 'out of a desire to' or 'from an urge to', then *por* can be used. If not, *para* is indicated. Thus, *me dijeron que estabas en Madrid y he venido por verte de nuevo* 'I heard you were in Madrid and I've come to (out of an urge to) see you again' is possible (*para* could be used). But *\*el fontanero* (Lat. Am. *plomero*) *ha venido por reparar el grifo* is as absurd as 'the plumber has come because he feels like mending the tap/faucet'. Another example: —*¿Para qué salgo a cenar contigo?* —*Para comer* (not *por*) "'What am I going out to dinner with you for?" "(In order) to eat"', —*¿Por qué salgo a cenar contigo?* —*Por/Para estar conmigo* "'Why am I going out to dinner with you?" "To be with me"'.

**(2)** After some words *por* is required: *teníamos prisa por verla* 'we were in a hurry to see her', *el celo por la reforma* 'eagerness for reform', *el anhelo por la gloria* 'the longing for glory'. There is a list of verbs that take *por* at 38.17.13.

### 38.17.17 *Some vital differences between por and para*

*Tengo muchas cosas por/sin hacer*

*Tengo muchas cosas para/que hacer* (que is more usual)

*Estoy por hacerlo*

*Estoy (aquí) para hacerlo*

*Estaba para hacerlo* (Lat. Am. *por*)

I have a lot of things still to do

I have many things to do

I feel inclined to do it

I'm here in order to do it

I was about to do it

*Está por/sin acabar*

*Está para (Lat. Am. por) acabar de un momento a otro*

It isn't finished yet

(S)he/It's about to finish at any moment

### 38.17.18 'For' not translated by *por* or *para*

*la razón de mi queja*

*Los días eran cortos pues era ahora*

*noviembre (see 37.5.3 for pues)*

*el deseo de fama*

*Lloró de alegría*

*Es una buena secretaria a pesar de lo que gruñe*

*No dijo una palabra durante dos horas*

*No lo/le he visto desde hace meses*

*Llevamos tres semanas sin que recojan la basura*

*Estuvimos horas esperando*

*Se podía ver muy lejos*

*ir a dar un paseo*

*ir de vacaciones*

*Me voy a Madrid unos días*

the reason for my complaining

The days were short, for it was now

November

the desire for fame

(S)he wept for joy

She's a good secretary, for all her grumbling

(S)he didn't say a word for two hours

I haven't seen him for months

They haven't collected our rubbish/

US garbage for three weeks

We waited for hours

You could see for miles

to go for a walk

to go for a holiday/vacation

I'm going to Madrid for a few days

### 38.18 *Según*

The basic meaning of *según* is 'according to' or 'depending on':

*según el parte meteorológico*

*Iremos modificando el programa de estudios*

*según el tipo de estudiante que se matricule*

*Los precios varían según a qué dentista vayas*

*(or según el dentista al que vayas)*

*Los hombres salían al campo . . . a labrar con*

*el arado según la época del año (EP, Mex.)*

*Me decidiré luego, según cómo salgan las cosas*

according to the weather report

We'll modify the syllabus according to

the type of student that signs on

The prices vary according to which

dentist you go to

The men went out into the fields to

plough/US plow depending on

the time of the year

I'll decide later, depending on how

things turn out

(1) **Important:** as with *entre*, a following pronoun appears in the ordinary subject form: *según yo/tú* 'according to me/you', not \**según mí/ti*: *según tú, Lencho, ¿cuál es la solución si los mexicanos no tienen ni voz ni voto en las decisiones de gobierno?* (EP, Mex., dialogue) 'in your opinion, Lencho, what's the solution if Mexicans have no say (lit. 'have neither voice nor vote') in the Government's decisions?'

(2) As some of the examples show, *según* often functions as an adverb: —¿*Vas tú también?* —*Según* "'Are you going too?" "It depends"', *según llegábamos al aparcamiento . . . un automóvil abandonaba un lugar grande y espacioso* (CRG, Sp.) 'just as we were arriving at the parking lot . . . a car was leaving a large and roomy space', *según dicen* . . . 'according to what they say . . . '.

(3) The following are colloquial or dialect: *dirías que es un millonario según habla* (por la manera en que habla) 'you'd think he was a millionaire from the way he talks', *a mí, según qué cosas, no me gusta hacerlas* (regional for *ciertas cosas* . . .) 'there are certain kinds of thing I don't like doing', the latter example being typical of eastern Spain.

### 38.19 *Sin*

'Without'. *Sin* raises few problems for the English-speaker, except when it appears before an infinitive, in which case it sometimes cannot be translated by the English verb form ending in -ing: cf. *dos Coca-Colas sin abrir* 'two Coca-Colas, unopened' (or 'not opened'). See 22.5.

*No subas al tren sin billete*  
*Se fueron sin siquiera despedirse*  
*Fumabas sin cesar*  
*sin nadie que me ayude*  
*Está más guapa sin peinar*

Don't get on the train without a ticket  
 They left without even saying goodbye  
 You were smoking non-stop  
 without anyone to help me  
 She's more attractive without her hair done

(1) *Sin* can be used to create a new noun, e.g. *los sin casa* 'the homeless', *los sin papeles* (or *indocumentados*) 'illegal immigrants'. *Sin* exists as a prefix in a few words, like *sinnúmero/sinfin* 'vast abundance', *sinrazón* 'insanity'/'absurdity', *sinvergüenza* 'shameless person'.

### 38.20 *Sobre* (and *encima de*)

This preposition combines some of the meanings of the English words 'on', 'over', 'on top of' and 'above'.

#### (a) As a preposition of place:

It is an equivalent of *en* in the sense of 'on': *en/sobre la mesa* 'on the table', *en/sobre la pared* 'on the wall'; it is rather more literary than *en*. *Encima de* is also used of horizontal surfaces: *encima de la mesa* 'on (top of) the table'. However, where 'on top of' is impossible in English *encima de* is impossible in Spanish: *los hinchas se encuentran todavía en/sobre el terreno* 'the fans are still on the field/pitch' (i.e. sports fans).

*Querían edificar sobre estos terrenos un hotel nuevo*  
*Se sentó sobre la cama y abrió un grueso tratado de economía (JV, Mex.)*  
*Este neumático tiene poco agarre sobre mojado*  
*Los rebeldes marcharon sobre la capital*  
*El castillo está edificado sobre un pintoresco valle*  
*Dios vela sobre sus hijos*  
*Un árbol agita unas hojas secas sobre sus cabezas (JC, Arg.)*

They wanted to build a new hotel on this land  
 He sat down on the bed and opened a thick treatise on economics  
 This tyre has poor grip on wet surfaces  
 The rebels marched on the capital  
 The castle is built overlooking a picturesque valley  
 God watches over his children  
 A tree is waving a few dry leaves over their heads

Compare *sobre*, *encima de* and *por encima de* in the following examples:

*El rey está por encima de/sobre todos* (rest, not motion)  
*Mi jefe siempre está encima de mí*  
*La bala pasó por encima de su cabeza, rozándole el pelo* (motion)  
*El avión voló por encima de/sobre la ciudad* (motion: *sobre* implies higher altitude and is often more literary than *encima de*)

The King is above everyone  
 My boss is always breathing down my neck  
 The bullet passed over his/her head, just touching his/her hair  
 The plane flew over the city

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(1) *Sobre*, when used as a spatial preposition, should not be used to join nouns in the way described at 38.1.4: *?el libro sobre la mesa es mío* should be *el libro que está sobre la mesa es mío* ‘the book on the table is mine’.

### (b) Approximation (especially with time phrases):

<i>Llegaremos sobre las cinco de la tarde</i>	We’ll arrive around 5 p.m.
<i>Tenía sobre veinte años (unos 20 años is more usual)</i>	(S)he was about twenty
<i>Costó sobre cien mil (= unos/unas 100.000)</i>	It cost around 100,000

### (c) ‘About’ (= ‘on the subject of’)

In this sense, *sobre* implies formal discourse ‘about’ something, i.e. ‘on the subject of . . .’. Informal discourse usually requires *de*, as *hablar de . . .* ‘to talk about’. See 38.8.5 note 1.

### (d) Centre of rotation:

<i>Las puertas se mueven sobre bisagras</i>	Doors turn on hinges
<i>Dio media vuelta sobre el pie izquierdo</i>	(S)he did a half-turn on her/his left foot
<i>Júpiter da una vuelta sobre sí mismo cada diez horas</i>	Jupiter rotates on its axis every ten hours

### (e) Superiority or precedence ‘over’:

<i>El triunfo del partido sobre la izquierda</i>	The party’s victory over the Left
<i>Sobre todo, quisiera agradecer a mi mujer</i>	. . . Above all, I would like to thank my wife . . .
<i>Y, sobre cualquier escrúpulo, estaba mi hijo (AG, Sp., dialogue)</i>	And over and above any scruples was my [still unborn] child
<i>El crecimiento, en términos reales, supera el 50% sobre enero de 1983 (El País, Sp.)</i>	In real terms, the growth in exports is 50% higher than January 1983
<i>impuestos sobre la renta</i>	income tax
<i>No les gustó para nada el gravamen sobre ganancias excedentes (JA, Mex.)</i>	They really didn’t like the tax on excessive profits

## 38.21 *Tras*

‘Behind’, ‘after’. It is an equivalent of the more usual *detrás de* ‘behind’ (location) and *después de* ‘after’ (time). Its brevity makes it popular with journalists but it is rare in everyday speech. *Tras de* is an equally literary but less common variant:

<i>Dos siluetas deformes se destacaron tras el vidrio esmerilado (LG, Sp.)</i>	Two distorted outlines loomed through/ behind the frosted glass
<i>un generoso proyecto tras el cual se esconden intenciones menos altruistas</i>	a generous project behind which less generous intentions lurk
<i>Me oculté tras el marco de la puerta (GC, Cu.)</i>	I hid behind the door frame
<i>Una banda de gaviotas venía tras el barco</i>	A flock of gulls was following the boat
<i>La cola de pasajeros formada tras ella la empujó hacia la puerta (ES, Mex.)</i>	The line of passengers that had formed behind her pushed her towards the door

*Detrás de* could be used in all the above examples. In the following examples *tras de* or *tras* could be replaced by *después de*:

<i>Así, tras de los duros años de 1936 a 1939 (Sp., popular press; usually simply <i>tras</i>)</i>	. . . So, after the hard years between 1936 and 1939 . . .
--	--

*Resultó dañadoísimo tras el terremoto de 1985 (JA, Mex.)*

It was badly damaged after the 1985 earthquake

(1) Occasionally *tras* is unavoidable: *siguieron el mismo ritmo de trabajo, año tras año/día tras día* 'they followed the same work-pace, year after year/day after day', . . . *una beca para primer año, que será renovada para segundo . . . y así año tras año* (MP, Arg., dialogue) ' . . . a grant for the first year, which will be renewed for the second year . . . and so on year after year', *han puesto un detective tras (de) sus pasos* 'they've put a detective on his trail'.

(2) Note also the following construction: *tras tener él la culpa, se enfada* (or *encima de tener él . . .*) 'not only is it his fault; he has the nerve to get angry', *tras ladrones, bufones* (BCB, Col.) 'as well as thieves, they're clowns'.

## 38.22 *Versus*

The NGLE 29.2k reports the recent spread of this English preposition in scientific and technical language, e.g. *federalismo versus descentralización* 'federalism versus decentralization', *PC de sobremesa versus portátil* 'desktop PC versus laptop'. Conservative usage still favours *contra*.

## 38.23 Prepositional phrases

The following is a list of common prepositional phrases, not exhaustive. They can appear before nouns and, if their meaning is appropriate, before pronouns and infinitives. They should generally not be used to join nouns in the way described at 38.14: *\*los senadores a favor de este proyecto* is dubious Spanish for *los senadores que apoyaban/estaban a favor de este proyecto* 'the senators in favour of this project'.

*a base de* based on/consisting of (see note 1)

*a bordo de* on board (of)

*a cambio de* in exchange for

*a cargo de* in charge of

*a causa de* because of

*a costa de* at the cost of

*a despecho de* in spite of

*a diferencia de* unlike

*a disposición de* at the

disposal of

*a espaldas de* behind the back of

*a excepción de* with the exception of

*a expensas de* at the expense of

*a falta de* for lack of

*a favor de* in favour of

*a fin de* with the aim of

*a finales/fines de* towards the end of

*a fuerza de* by dint of

*a guisa de* (literary) = *a modo de*

*a gusto de* to the taste of

*a juicio de* in the opinion of

*a la hora de* at the moment

of/when it comes to . . .

*a la sombra de* in the shadow of

*a la vera de* (literary) = *al lado de*

*a lo largo de* throughout/along

*a más de* as well as

*a mediados de* towards the middle of

*a modo de* in the manner of

*a partir de* starting from

*a pesar de* despite

*a por* see 38.17.8

*a principios de* towards the beginning of

*a prueba de* proof, e.g. *a prueba de incendios*

fireproof

*a punto de* on the verge of

*a raíz de* immediately

after/as an immediate result of

*a razón de* at the rate of

*a riesgo de* at the risk of

*a sabiendas de* with the knowledge of

*a través de* through/across

*a vista de* in the sight/presence of

*a voluntad de* at the discretion of

*a vuelta de* e.g. *a vuelta de correo* by return of post

*abajo de* (Lat. Am. only) underneath; see 35.6.6

*además de* as well as

*adentro de* (Lat. Am. only) inside; see 35.6.5

*afuera de* (Lat. Am. only) outside; see 35.6.5

*al alcance de* within reach of

*al amor de* in the warmth of (e.g. a fire)

*al cabo de* at the end of

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*al contrario de* contrary to  
*al corriente de* informed  
 about

*al estilo de* in the style of  
*al lado de* next to  
*al nivel de* at the level of  
*al tanto de* = *al corriente de*  
*alrededor de* around  
*atrás de* (Lat. Am. only)  
 behind; see 35.6.7

*bajo (la) condición de que*  
 on condition of  
*bajo pena de* on pain of . . .  
*cerca de* near

*con arreglo a* in accordance  
 with

*con miras a* bearing in  
 mind/with a view to

*con motivo de* on the  
 occasion of  
*con objeto de* with the object  
 of

*con relación a* in respect of/in  
 relation to

*con respecto a* with respect/  
 reference to/in  
 comparison with

*con rumbo a* in the direction  
 of (i.e. moving towards)

*con vistas a* with a view to  
*de regreso a* on returning to  
*debajo de* see 38.4, 35.6.6

*delante de* see 38.3, 35.7.5

*dentro de* see 35.6.5

*después de* after (time)

*detrás de* behind; see 38.21,  
 35.6.7

*en base a* see note 1

*en busca de* in search of

*en caso de* in case of

*en concepto de* as/by way  
 of e.g. *este dinero es en*  
*concepto de ayuda* 'this  
 money is by way of  
 assistance'

*en contra de* against

*en cuanto a* as for/concerning

*en forma de* in the shape of

*en honor de/a* in honour of

(but *en lugar de* instead of)

*en medio de* in the middle of

*en pos de* (literary) in search  
 of (also = *tras de*)

*en pro de* (literary) = *a favor de*

*en torno a* around (the subject  
 of)/concerning

*en vez de* instead of

*en vías de* on the way to: *país*

*en vías de desarrollo*

'developing country', now  
 often *país emergente*

*en vísperas de* on the eve of

*en vista de* in view of

*encima de* see 38.20

*enfrente de* opposite

*fuera de* see 35.6.5

*lejos de* far from

*luego de* after

*más allá de* beyond

*por causa de* = *a causa de*

*por encima de* over

*por parte de* on the part of

*por razón de* = *a causa de*

*sin embargo de* (literary)

notwithstanding

*so pena de* (literary) = *bajo*

*pena de*

# 39 Relative clauses and relative pronouns

The main topics discussed in this chapter are:

- Forms of relative pronouns and adjectives (Section 39.1.1)
- Definition of 'restrictive' and 'non-restrictive' relative clauses (Section 39.1.2)
- The uses of *que* as a relative pronoun (Section 39.2)
- Relative pronouns in non-restrictive relative clauses (Section 39.3)
- Relative pronouns after prepositions (Section 39.4)
- Remarks on individual relative pronouns and adjectives: *el cual* (39.5), *lo cual* and *lo que* (39.6), *cuyo* (39.7)
- *Donde*, *como* and *cuando* used to form relative clauses (Sections 39.10–12)
- The subjunctive in relative clauses (Section 39.15)

For word order in relative clauses see 42.2.

## 39.1 General

There are four relative pronouns and a relative adjective in Spanish: *que*, *quien(es)*, *el que*, *el cual* and *cuyo*. These introduce relative clauses like the English relative pronouns 'that', 'who(m)', 'which' and 'whose' as in 'the book that I read', 'the woman that/who(m) we saw', 'the book that/which I'm talking about', 'students whose grades are satisfactory', etc.

(1) **Important:** Spanish relative pronouns and adjectives are *never* written with an accent.

### 39.1.1 Forms of relative pronouns and adjectives

*Quien* has a plural *quienes* but no separate feminine form. *Que* is invariable. *El que*, *el cual* and *cuyo* agree in number and gender, as follows:

	Singular	Plural
<b>Masculine</b>	<i>el que</i>	<i>los que</i>
	<i>el cual</i>	<i>los cuales</i>
	<i>cuyo</i>	<i>cuyos</i>
<b>Feminine</b>	<i>la que</i>	<i>las que</i>
	<i>la cual</i>	<i>las cuales</i>
	<i>cuya</i>	<i>cuyas</i>

(1) Agreement is with the noun referred to: *el bolígrafo con el que firmaron* 'the ballpoint pen they signed with', *las ruinas entre las cuales encontraron el amuleto* 'the ruins among which they found the amulet'.



(2) When it is used as a relative pronoun, *el que* is found after prepositions, e.g. *el restaurante en el que cenamos* ‘the restaurant in which we had dinner’/‘the restaurant we had dinner in’ (it has other uses as a nominalizer, explained in Chapter 40).

(3) *Cuando*, *donde* and *como* may also introduce relative clauses: see 39.10–39.12 for discussion.

### 39.1.2 Restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses

This chapter uses the terms ‘restrictive’ and ‘non-restrictive’ relative clauses.

Restrictive clauses limit the scope of what they refer to: *no comimos las manzanas que estaban verdes* ‘we didn’t eat the apples that were unripe’. This refers only to the unripe apples and therefore implies that some were ripe.

Non-restrictive clauses do not limit the scope of what they refer to: *no comimos las manzanas, las cuales/que estaban verdes* ‘we didn’t eat the apples, which were unripe’. This sentence indicates that all the apples were unripe. More examples:

#### Restrictive relative clauses

Don’t buy a car that has faulty brakes

You should read books that make you laugh

*those students who passed the exam*

... only those men who are blond

#### Non-restrictive relative clauses

In some states there are rattlesnakes, which are poisonous and dangerous

I love daffodils, which are my favourite flower

the people of Iraq, who mostly speak Arabic

those men, who all have blond hair

In writing, non-restrictive clauses are typically marked in both languages by a comma, and in speech by a pause – though they are not very common in speech. English does not allow the relative pronoun ‘that’ before non-restrictive relative clauses: ‘water, \*that’ (correctly ‘which’) is H<sub>2</sub>O’.

A relative clause which refers to the whole of something unique is bound to be non-restrictive: *las pirámides egipcias, que/las cuales son uno de los monumentos más visitados por los turistas* ‘the Egyptian pyramids, which are one of the monuments most visited by tourists’.

### 39.1.3 English and Spanish relative clauses compared

Spanish relative clauses differ from English in five important ways:

(a) modern English constantly separates prepositions from relative pronouns: ‘the path (that/which) we were walking **along**’. This is never possible in Spanish: *el camino por el que caminábamos*. Sentences like \**el camino que caminábamos por* are Spanglish. According to the GDLE, they are sometimes heard in Puerto Rico and the USA.

(b) A relative pronoun cannot be omitted in Spanish: ‘the plane I saw’ = *el avión que (yo) vi*. English constantly omits relative pronouns when they are the direct object of a verb, ‘the girl I knew’, ‘the film they made’, etc.

(c) English and French constantly express relative clauses by using a gerund: ‘a box containing two books’/ *une boîte contenant deux livres*. This is usually impossible or not recommended in Spanish: *una caja que contiene/contenía dos libros*. See 24.3.

(d) English constantly avoids relative clauses by using prepositions to join phrases: ‘the shirt on the chair is mine’ = *la camisa que está en la silla es mía*. This is often impossible in Spanish: see 38.1.4.

(e) Spoken English sometimes allows a relative pronoun to be separated by a verb phrase from what it refers to, as in ‘the man doesn’t exist whom/that I’d want to marry’, better ‘the man (whom/that) I’d want to marry doesn’t exist’. This cannot be translated by *\*el hombre no existe con el que/con quien yo quisiera casarme*. The correct equivalents are *no existe el hombre con el que/con quien yo quisiera casarme* or *el hombre con el que/con quien yo quisiera casarme no existe*. The first of these two translations is preferable, and this has consequences for the word order of Spanish sentences containing relative clauses. See 42.2.1 for discussion. Further examples:

*Han vuelto las cigüeñas que hicieron su nido en el campanario el año pasado*  
(not *\*las cigüeñas han vuelto que . . .*)

The storks that made their nest in the bell-tower last year have returned

*Han regresado al país más de 900 mil mexicanos que vivían en Estados Unidos*  
(*La Jornada*, Mex. Not *\*900 mil mexicanos han regresado al país que vivían en Estados Unidos*)

More than 900,000 Mexicans who were living in the USA have returned to the country

## 39.2 The relative pronoun *que*

*Que* is by far the most frequent relative pronoun and may be used in the majority of cases in restrictive clauses to translate the English relative pronouns ‘who’, ‘whom’, ‘which’ or ‘that’. However, there are certain cases in which *el que*, *quien* or *el cual* are used, especially after prepositions. See 39.4 and 39.5 for further discussion. Examples of *que* as a relative pronoun:

*los expertos que se equivocaron*  
*las hojas que caían de las ramas*  
*el libro que compré ayer*  
*las enfermeras que contrataron el año pasado*  
*Le decía a cada momento que era diferente*  
*a todos los hombres que había conocido*  
(*SP*, Mex.)

the experts who got it wrong  
the leaves that were falling from the branches  
the book (that) I bought yesterday  
the nurses (that/who(m)) they hired last year  
She told him constantly that he was different  
to all the men she had known

(1) *Quien/quienes* are not used in restrictive clauses except after a preposition (see 39.4). Incorrect forms like *\*la chica quien viene*, *\*los hombres quienes dijeron eso* are often heard in the Spanish of English-speakers. *La chica que viene . . .* ‘the girl who’s/that’s coming’, *los hombres que dijeron eso*, ‘the men who/that said that . . .’ are the correct forms.

(2) In some colloquial sentences *que* can have a verb or verb phrase as its antecedent (see Glossary): *llovía que daba miedo* ‘it was raining enough to scare you witless’, *da unos cortes que lo deja a uno patidifuso* (*Sp.*, colloquial; from *GDLE* 7.4.1.1) ‘(s)he comes out with some really embarrassing things that knock you sideways’ (note singular form *deja*).

## 39.3 Use of *que*, *quien*, *el cual* in non-restrictive relative clauses

When no preposition appears before the relative pronoun and the relative clause is **non-restrictive**, *que*, *quien* or *el cual* may be used. *Quien* is nowadays used only for human beings, and *el cual* is emphatic and tends to be restricted to formal language (see 39.5 for discussion):

*Fueron a hablar con José, que/quien/el cual  
estaba de buen humor  
los Líderes Agropecuarios del Grupo Cairns,  
el cual incluye 18 países exportadores  
(advert., Arg.)  
Recibió la inesperada visita de su madre,  
la cual ahora se hacía llamar Rachel Smith  
(JV, Mex.)  
... algunos miembros del Consejo Nacional  
del PAN, quienes indignados comentaron ...  
(AH, Mex.)*

They went to talk to José, who was in  
a good mood  
the leaders in Agriculture and  
Fisheries in the Cairns Group, which  
includes 18 exporting countries  
He received the unexpected visit from his  
mother, who was now calling herself  
Rachel Smith  
... some members of the National Council of  
the National Action Party, who remarked  
indignantly ... ,

*El cual* or *quien* is more likely to be used whenever the relative pronoun is separated from what it refers to or from the verb of which it is the subject or object, or after a heavy pause. *El cual* is discussed further at 39.5.

(1) Only *que* can be used after personal pronouns: *yo que me preocupo tanto por ti ...* 'I who worry so much about you ...', ... *y ahora, hablando con ella, que tenía el sol de la tarde en el rostro* (FU, Sp.) '... and now, talking to her, who had the evening sun on her face', *él, que en el fondo es muy clase media* (MB, Ur.) 'he, who at heart is basically very middle-class ...', *y ella, que apenas empezaba a disfrutar su popularidad, no se resignaba a perderla* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'and she, who was only just beginning to enjoy her popularity, was not disposed to lose it'.

(2) In 'cleft' sentences (discussed in Chapter 41) a nominalizer, e.g. *el que* or *quien*, must be used: *soy consciente de que tengo que ser yo misma la quelquien resuelva el problema* (female speaking) 'I'm aware that I must be the one to solve the problem myself', *dice que fue su marido quien lo mató* (AG, Sp., dialogue; or *el que*) 'she says it was her husband who killed him'.

(3) *El que* also translates 'the one who/which' and is discussed under nominalizers in Chapter 40: *aquella chica es Charo—la que lleva el chándal rojo* 'that girl over there is Charo – the one wearing the red tracksuit'. This is not a relative clause but a phrase in apposition (see Glossary). *El que* is used as a relative pronoun only after prepositions (see 39.4).

## 39.4 Relative pronouns after prepositions

### 39.4.1 After prepositions *el que, quien* or *el cual* are used

The relative pronouns required after a preposition are:

(a) **For non-human antecedents** (see Glossary): *el que* or *el cual*:

*la amenaza de guerra bajo la que vivimos  
la puerta tras la que se escondió  
... comunicados en los que se recuerda la  
ilegalidad de las acciones propuestas  
(Abc, Sp.)  
... una parte de su memoria ... a la cual  
recurría con cada vez menos frecuencia  
(JV, Mex.)  
... como si fuera alguna enfermedad contra la  
cual había que vacunarse* (EP, Mex.)

the threat of war we're living under  
the door behind which (s)he hid  
... communiqués recalling the illegality  
of the actions proposed  
... a part of his memory ... which he  
accessed less and less  
... as if it were some illness one had to get  
vaccinated against

(b) **For human antecedents:** *el que*, *quien* (or *el cual*). *Quien* is slightly more formal than *el que*:

<i>Hay gente con la que la vida se enseña</i> (AM, Mex., or <i>con quien</i> or <i>con la cual</i> )	There are people that life has it in for
<i>Todo el mundo sabe que el tipo al que</i> <i>detuvieron es un chivo expiatorio</i> (MS, Mex., dialogue)	Everyone knows the guy they arrested is a scapegoat
<i>el chico del que hablo/el chico de quien hablo</i>	the boy I'm talking about

(1) If the gender of a human antecedent is unknown or irrelevant, the genderless *quien* is used: *no hay nadie con quien hablar* 'there's no one to talk to', *busca a alguien de quien te puedas fiar* 'look for someone you can trust'.

(2) To refer to neuter words like *algo*, *nada* and *mucho*, *lo que* or *que* are used as relative pronouns: *no hay nada con (lo) que puedas sacarle punta* 'there's nothing you can sharpen it with', *esto es algo sobre lo que tenemos que reflexionar* (JCB, Sp.) 'this is something we have to reflect on', *si noto algo en lo que yo no deba estar* (EM, Mex., dialogue) 'if I notice something I shouldn't be mixed up in . . .'

(3) *Quien(es)* was often used for non-living antecedents before the eighteenth century, e.g. *un monasterio en quien era priora una su hermana* (Don Quijote) 'a convent in which a sister of his was prioress', nowadays *en el que* or *donde*, and *una hermana suya*.

(4) For the popular but stigmatized construction *?la chica que fui con ella* for *la chica con la que fui*, see 39.8b.

(5) Historically *quien* had no plural – it descends from a Latin accusative singular form *quem* – and popular speech still sometimes uses the singular for the plural, e.g. *¿y todas esas con quien has salido?* (ABV, Sp., dialogue) '... and all those girls you've been out with?' (for *con quienes*).

(6) As we have said in this section, the relative pronoun *el que* normally appears after a preposition as in *el lápiz con el que lo escribiste* 'the pencil you wrote it with'. However, the NGLE 44.30 notes the occasional use before non-restrictive clauses and especially in Latin America of *el que* without a preposition, e.g. *ahogada en un mar de sellos y de rúbricas, los que se repiten . . .* 'drowning in a sea of rubber stamps and signatures that are repeated . . .', *su inglés, el que estudió en la escuela* 'his English, which he studied at school'. The more usual forms are . . . *de rúbricas, que se repiten, . . . su inglés, que estudió*.

### 39.4.2 The relative pronoun *que* after a preposition

*Que* without the definite article is preferred as a relative pronoun after the prepositions *a*, *con*, *de* and *en*, in certain circumstances difficult to define – as GDLE 7.5.1.3 acknowledges. This deletion of the definite article is almost always optional (NGLE 44.2e). It occurs most often when the antecedent (see Glossary) is definite, e.g. preceded by the definite article and particularly when it is an abstract noun:

(a) **After *a*** (when it is not personal *a*), after *con* and after *de*, except when the latter means 'from'. Use of *que* alone is especially common after abstract nouns:

<i>la discriminación a que están sometidas</i> <i>nuestras frutas y hortalizas</i> (El País, Sp.)	the discrimination which our fruits and vegetables are subject to
<i>los litros de tónico capilar con que se</i> <i>bañaba la cabeza cada día</i> (LS, Ch.)	the litres of hair tonic he bathed his head with every day
<i>la generosidad de que hace alarde</i> <i>la aspereza con que la trataba</i> (SP, Mex.)	the generosity (s)he boasts about the harshness with which he treated her

*El/la/los/las que* would be possible, though less elegant, in the preceding examples. In *la mujer a la que conoció en Santiago* 'the woman he met in Santiago' the *la* cannot be omitted because the *a* is personal *a*, but . . . *la mujer que conoció . . .*, without personal *a*, is possible.

(b) **Frequently, but optionally, after *en* when precise spatial location is not intended.** Compare *la caja en la que encontré la llave* 'the box I found the key in', but *la casa en que/donde vivo* 'the house I live in', not \*'the house "inside which" I live':

<i>el desierto humano en que ella estaba perdida</i> (FU, Sp.)	the human desert she was lost in
<i>Me gustaría vivir en un sitio en que/ donde no hubiera/hubiese coches</i>	I'd like to live in a place where there were no cars
<i>las formas racionales en que se basa la vida social</i> (MVLI, Pe.)	the rational forms on which social life is based
<i>La obra en que sale se llama Muchacha del alma</i> (EM, Mex., dialogue)	The play she's in is called 'My Best Girlfriend' (lit. 'Soul Girl')
<i>Tenía días estupendos en que era desprendida y jovial</i> (EM, Mex.)	She had really good days on which she was generous and good-humoured

(c) After periods of time. After *día, semana, mes, año, momento* the *en* is also often omitted.

<i>el día que te vi</i>	the day I saw you
<i>el único día que se produjeron diferencias de importancia fue el jueves</i> (La Nación, Arg.)	the only day on which any important differences were recorded was Thursday
<i>el mes que llovió tanto</i>	the month it rained so much
<i>en los meses que estuvo Edwards en Cuba</i> (MVLI, Pe.)	during the months Edwards spent in Cuba
<i>Luego, en los pocos días que anduvo con la tropa villista</i> (CF, Mex.)	Then, during the few days he was with Pancho Villa's troops

(1) If precise spatial location is intended *el/la/los/las que* is needed: *trenzó primero su melena en la que se le habían multiplicado las canas* (AM, Mex.) 'she first plaited her long hair, where grey/US gray hairs had multiplied'.

## 39.5 *El cual*

*El cual* can also be used after prepositions. In general, it is more formal than *el que* or *quien*: foreigners spoil much good Spanish by over-using it. But it may be preferred in the following contexts:

(a) After *según* when this word means 'according to' rather than 'depending on':

<i>el argumento según el cual . . .</i>	the argument according to which . . .
<i>esa maldita tentación teológica que tienen los críticos literarios . . . según la cual los textos son como versiones actualizadas de la Biblia</i> (JV, Mex.)	that accursed theological temptation that literary critics suffer from according to which texts are like updated versions of Bible

(b) After prepositions of more than one syllable like *para, sobre, contra, entre, mediante*, and after prepositional phrases, e.g. *a pesar de* 'despite', *debajo de* 'underneath', *delante de* 'in front of', *frente a* 'opposite', *en virtud de* 'by reason of', *a consecuencia de* 'as a consequence of which', etc.:

... una formación profesional mediante la cual los funcionarios de grado medio estén capacitados para ...

... professional training whereby middle-grade government employees will be equipped to ...

However, *el que* is also found even after such prepositions:

... mi pobre y sucio uniforme de enfermero, sobre el que me había puesto un veterano jersey (LS, Sp.)

... my poor and dirty nurse's uniform, over which I had put an ancient jersey

**(c) Important:** *el cual* (or *quien* for humans) is favoured when the relative pronoun is separated from what it refers to by intervening words, or when the relative is separated from its verb:

un gran árbol, en cuyo tronco algunos muchachos vagos han pintado ciertas palabrotas u obscenidades, pero en **el cual** no deja de circular la vida que proviene de la savia (La Prensa, Nic.)

a large tree, on whose trunk some idle boys have painted certain swearwords or obscenities, but in which the life coming from the sap still flows

Fueron a hablar con su tío, un setentón de bigote blanco y acento andaluz, que hacía alarde de ideas muy avanzadas. **El cuall** **Quien** tras un largo silencio, contestó ...

They went to talk with his uncle, a seventy-year-old with a white moustache and an Andalusian accent who boasted of very advanced ideas. Who, after a long, silence, replied ...

A statistical survey of spoken Spanish (DeMello 1994, 3) amply confirms this tendency.

**(d)** *El cual* is usual in the Spanish equivalents of phrases that in English require ... 'of which/whom', e.g. 'the majority of whom/which', 'some of whom/which', 'in the middle of which', 'on one side of which', 'the best of which', 'beneath which', etc.

los jóvenes españoles, la mayoría de los cuales son partidarios del divorcio  
... los miles de galaxias de las cuales sólo éramos una más (EP, Mex.)  
muchos alumnos, entre los cuales había varias chicas

young Spaniards, the majority of whom are in favour of divorce  
... the thousands of galaxies of which we were merely one more  
many students, among whom there were several girls

**(1)** A survey of the corpus of educated spoken Spanish by DeMello (1994 2), reveals that *el cual* is the favoured form after prepositions in spontaneous speech in Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, Lima, Bogotá and Caracas. *El que* was preferred in Mexico, Havana, Madrid and Seville. Nevertheless, *el cual* is often seen in the dialogue of Mexican novels, even in the speech of uneducated characters: *no habrá lugar en este mundo en el cual esté seguro* (GR, Mex., dialogue) 'there can't be a place in this world where I'd be safe'.

## 39.6 *Lo cual* and *lo que*

These are used when the relative pronoun refers not to a noun or pronoun but to a whole sentence or to an idea, which, being neither masculine nor feminine in gender, require a neuter pronoun. Since the clause is always non-restrictive, *lo cual* is very common. Compare: *Juan compró un traje nuevo que le gustó a su mujer* 'Juan bought a new suit that his wife liked' (restrictive) and *Juan compró un traje nuevo, lo que/lo cual le gustó a su mujer* 'Juan bought a new suit, which (i.e. the fact he bought it) she liked' (non-restrictive). Further examples:

*En un primer momento se anunció que los misiles eran americanos, lo cual fue desmentido en Washington (El País, Sp.)*  
*... altos índices de abstencionismo, lo cual siempre benefició al gobierno (AH, Mex.)*  
*Es lo único que he hecho en mi vida de lo cual no he de arrepentirme (JV, Mex., dialogue)*

Initially it was stated that the missiles were American, which was denied in Washington  
 ... high levels of abstention [in elections], which always favoured the Government  
 It's the only thing I've done in my life that I won't have to regret

(1) For *lo que* as a nominalizer (= 'the thing that ...') see 40.1.5.

### 39.7 *Cuyo* (relative adjective)

This translates 'whose': see 39.1.1 for its plural and feminine forms. It agrees in number and gender with the following noun, but if there is more than one noun it agrees only with the first: *un hombre cuyas manos y pies estaban quemados por el sol* 'a man whose hands and feet had been burnt by the sun'. More examples:

*la Asamblea Constituyente, cuyos miembros serían elegidos en diciembre (GGM, Col)*  
*la luz, cuya velocidad se mantiene constante sin importar desde donde se la observe (JV, Mex.)*  
*... un volumen en inglés cuyo título he olvidado (JM, Sp.)*

the Constituent Assembly, whose members would be elected in December  
 light, whose speed remains constant regardless of from where it is observed  
 ... a volume in English whose title I've forgotten

(1) **Important:** although it is common in written Spanish, *cuyo* is rare in spontaneous speech. See 39.8c.

(2) Grammarians, including the Academy (NGLE 22.5m), condemn such sentences as *?se alojó en el Imperial, en cuyo hotel había conocido a su primera mujer* 'he stayed at the Imperial, in which hotel he had met his first wife', better ... *el Imperial, donde/hotel en el cual había conocido a su primera mujer*. But this construction occurs with *caso*, *circunstancia(s)*, *motivo*, *fin* and a few other nouns: *se adoptará el sistema de 24 horas, en cuyo caso huelga añadir si se trata de la mañana o de la tarde (El País, Libro de estilo 2014, 11.14)* 'the 24-hour clock will be used, in which case it is unnecessary to add whether it is morning or afternoon', *se han registrado fuertes nevadas, por cuyo motivo la circulación está suspendida* 'heavy snowfalls have occurred, for which reason traffic is suspended'.

(3) *Del que/de quien* are occasionally used for *cuyo*, although this is criticized by Seco (1998), 143: *un torero, de quien alabó el tesón y el valor a toda prueba* (i.e. *cuyo tesón y valor a toda prueba alabó* ...) 'a bullfighter, whose indefatigable steadfastness and courage he praised', *Alidio era un preso del que nunca se supo con exactitud su delito (LMD, Sp., i.e. cuyo delito nunca se supo ...)* 'Alidio was a prisoner whose crime was never precisely known'.

(4) There used to be an interrogative form *cúyo*, but it is no longer used except in some local Latin American dialects, e.g. rural Colombia. One now says *¿de quién es esa mochila?* 'whose rucksack is that?', not \**¿cúya mochila es esa/ésa?*

### 39.8 Relative clauses in familiar speech

Students will hear a number of popular or familiar constructions that should probably be left to native speakers.

(a) There is a colloquial tendency, which may sound uneducated, to insert a redundant pronoun in relative clauses: *dicen cosas que nadie (las) entiende* ‘they say things no one understands’. See 14.10.5.

(b) Popular and very relaxed informal speech often avoids combining prepositions and relative pronouns by a type of construction banned from writing and rejected by grammarians:

<i>?en casa de una mujer que yo vivía con ella (con la que yo vivía)</i>	in the house of a woman I was living with
<i>?Te acuerdas del hotel que estuvimos el año pasado? (. . . en el que estuvimos . . .)</i>	Do you remember the hotel we stayed in last year?
<i>?Soy un emigrante que siempre me han preocupado los problemas de la emigración (i.e. . . . al que siempre han preocupado los problemas . . ., letter in El País, Sp.)</i>	I am an emigrant who has always been concerned with the problems of emigration

This construction is not uncommon in Golden-Age texts, but it should not be imitated by foreign learners.

(c) As we said before, *cuyo* is very rare and it is disappearing in spontaneous speech. The *GDLE* 15.5 says that it is virtually extinct in Mexico, and the same could probably be said of other countries, especially in the speech of young persons; but it is common in written Spanish everywhere. There are many correct alternatives, e.g. *las mujeres cuyo marido las ayuda en casa* ‘women whose husbands help them in the house’ can be recast as *las mujeres que tienen un marido que las ayuda en casa*.

(1) Popular speech constantly uses a construction called *quesuismo* which is stigmatized and rejected by the Academy (NGLE 22.5n): *?los alumnos que sus (for cuyas) notas no están en la lista (cuyas notas no están . . .)* ‘the students whose marks/grades are not on the list’. This construction quite often slips into educated speech, as DeMello (1992, 5), shows.

## 39.9 *Cartas a contestar . . . , etc.*

The following construction is nowadays quite common in journalism, official documents or business letters: *un libro y una tesis a tomar muy en serio por estudiosos y ciudadanos en general* (for *que deben ser tomados en serio . . .*) ‘a book and a thesis to be taken very seriously by students and citizens in general’. See 22.13.

## 39.10 *Donde, adonde, en donde* before relative clauses

(a) *Donde* is commonly used as a relative adverb, especially after *hacia, a* (in the meaning of ‘towards’), *desde, de* meaning ‘from’, *por* meaning ‘along’/‘through’, *en* meaning ‘place in’, etc. As a relative its use is rather wider than the English ‘where’:

<i>Lo recogí en la calle donde te vi</i>	I picked it up in the street where I saw you
<i>Perquín, la ciudad donde impera la limpieza (La Prensa, ES)</i>	Perquín, the city where cleanliness rules
<i>Ese/Ése es el cajón de donde sacó los papeles la Cámara de Diputados, donde la izquierda tenía mayoría (JA, Mex.)</i>	That’s the drawer (s)he took the papers from The Chamber of Deputies, where the Left had a majority



In all the four examples, *el que* or *el cual* could be used with the appropriate preposition. However, in the following non-restrictive clause only *donde* is possible (just as ‘where’ is in English): *volvieron a encontrarse en París, donde se habían conocido veinte años antes* ‘they met again in Paris, where they had met for the first time twenty years before’.

(b) *Adonde* is a relative adverb used before verbs of motion and it refers to some clearly identified place, e.g. *el pueblo adonde yo iba* (relative) ‘the village I was going to’, *Tacubaya, adonde ningún político, por mejor intencionado, dedicaría una mirada siquiera* (EP, Mex.) ‘Tacubaya, at which no politician, however well intentioned, would even bother to glance’.

(c) *A donde* is an adverb used with verbs of motion when no noun of place appears, as in *fueron a donde no debían ir* ‘they went where they shouldn’t have gone’.

(d) *Adónde* is not a relative adverb: it is found in direct or indirect questions: *¿adónde va usted?* ‘where are you going?’, *¿adónde habrán ido rodando las pastillas de Optalidón?* (CMG, Sp.) ‘where can the Optalidon tablets have rolled to?’ (direct questions), and *cuídate mucho de no saber adónde vas porque puedes no llegar* (EM, Mex., dialogue) ‘make absolutely sure you don’t know where you’re going because you might not get there’. In these cases *dónde* alone could have been used.

(e) *En donde* is spatially more specific than *donde*, and is rather literary: *hay una tienda pequeña en Westwood en donde venden infinidad de camisetas con letreros increíbles* (CRG, Sp.) ‘there’s a little store in Westwood where they sell a vast range of T-shirts with fantastic things written on them’ (or . . . *Westwood donde venden* . . .), *los domingos se leía El Figaro . . . en donde abundaban fotos de las bellas* (JA, Mex.) ‘on Sundays they read *El Figaro* . . . in which there was an abundance of photos of beautiful women’, literally, ‘*El Figaro* was read . . .’

(1) For *donde* meaning ‘at the house of’, see 28.9.

## 39.11 *Como* as a relative

*Como* occurs after *la manera* and *el modo*, although *en que* is nowadays more usual:

*La manera como un país se fortalece y desarrolla su cultura es abriendo sus puertas y ventanas* (MVLI, Pe.)

*No estoy desconsolado del modo en que se aplica esa palabra a quien ha sufrido una pérdida* (JM, Sp.)

*Si Florencio se hubiera dado cuenta de la forma en que incidía en la vida de su hijo . . .* (EP, Mex.)

The way a country strengthens and develops its culture is by opening its doors and windows

I’m not distraught in the way the word is used of people who have suffered a loss

If Florencio had realized the way he was impinging on his son’s life . . .

## 39.12 *Cuando* before relative clauses

*Cuando* is used in non-restrictive clauses: *en agosto, cuando les den las vacaciones a los niños, nos iremos al campo* ‘in August, when the children have their holidays/vacation, we’ll go to the countryside’, *incluso en nuestros días, cuando nadie cree ya en los unicornios* ‘even in our day, when no one believes in unicorns any more’, *vestida aún con la blusa blanca y la falda azul de la mañana cuando se encontró con Valentín Cobelo* (JRIG, Mex.) ‘still dressed in the white blouse and blue skirt from the morning when she’d met Valentín Cobelo’. But *solamente puedo salir los días (en) que no trabajo* ‘I can only go out on the days I’m not working’ (restrictive clause).

(1) *Cuando* is used with *apenas, aún, todavía, entonces, no, no bien*: *apenas había aparcado el coche cuando se acercó un policía* '(s)he had hardly parked the car when a policeman came up', *aún/todavía no había empezado a estudiar cuando le dieron un empleo* '(s)he hadn't yet started studying when they gave him/her a job'. Compare the following restrictive clauses: *en un momento en que . . .* 'at a moment when . . .', *en una época en que . . .* 'in a period when . . .', *en un año (en) que . . .* 'in a year when . . .', etc. English-speakers tend to say \**en un año/día cuando . . .*

(2) *Que* is used in the following phrases: *ahora que usted sabe la verdad* 'now (that) you know the truth', *luego que haya terminado* 'as soon as (s)he's finished', *cada vez que me mira* 'whenever (s)he looks at me', *de modo que/de manera que* 'so that'.

(3) In cleft sentences (see Chapter 41) *donde, como* or *cundo* may be obligatory and *que* disallowed, especially in European Spanish: *es así como hay que hacerlo* 'this is how it must be done' (not . . . *que hay que hacerlo*), *fue entonces cuando lo notó* 'it was then that (s)he noticed it' (not *entonces que lo notó . . .*).

### 39.13 Relative clauses after a nominalizer

A nominalizer (e.g. *el que* meaning 'the one who/which') cannot be followed by the relatives *el que* or *el cual*. A noun must be used or, in written language, *aquel* is used. In other words, one cannot say \**. . . vecinos de los a los que conocen* for '*. . . neighbours of those they know*'; either *. . . vecinos de la gente que conocen* or *. . . vecinos de aquellos a los que conocen*:

*Se imagina un nuevo don Julián, una versión moderna de aquel al que rinde homenaje el título del libro* (MVLI, Pe., not \**el al que . . .*)

He imagines a new Don Julian, a modern version of **the one to whom** the book's title pays homage

*Traiga otro plato, que no me gusta comer en los platos en los que han comido otros* (spoken language; not \**los en los que*)

Bring another plate – I don't like eating off those that others have eaten off

(1) *Ese/Este* cannot replace *aquel* in this construction: *los que/aquellos que suspendan en junio deberán presentarse de nuevo en septiembre* (from GDLE 14.3.1), not \**esos/estos que . . .* 'those who fail in June must sit the examination again in September'.

### 39.14 Miscellaneous examples of relative clauses

*Falta saber las condiciones en que está*  
*Falta saber en qué condiciones está*  
*Falta saber en las condiciones que está*  
*Según el cine a que vayas/Según al cine que vayas* (examples from M. Moliner)

We've yet to know what conditions (s)he's in  
 " "  
 " "

*Era la habitación más pequeña en (la) que jamás he estado*  
*Era la habitación más pequeña de todas las que he estado* (familiar spoken language)

Depending on what cinema you go to  
 It was the smallest room I've ever been in  
 " "

*¿Cómo se explica el fenómeno singular que fue la victoria de los liberales?*  
*el espectáculo conmovedor que son las ruinas de Machu Picchu*

How does one explain the singular phenomenon of the liberals' victory?  
 the moving spectacle of the Machu Picchu ruins

## 39.15 Subjunctive in relative clauses

In this section, nominalizers like *el que* ‘the one that’, *quien* ‘the one who’, *aquellos que* ‘those who’ etc., are treated as relative pronouns. They are also discussed under nominalizers at 40.1.4. See 20.5.8 for *dondequiera*.

### 39.15.1 Subjunctive in relative clauses that refer to something not yet identified

**Important:** Spanish uses the subjunctive in these cases to express a nuance that English usually ignores. Compare *los que digan eso* ‘those who say that’ (if anyone does) and *los que dicen eso* ‘those who say that’ (some do). The difference in Spanish is clear: contrast *voy a estudiar una carrera que me guste* ‘I’m going to study a degree course that I like’ (you haven’t found one yet) and *que me gusta* (you have already chosen one); *busco un médico que sepa acupuntura* ‘I’m looking for a doctor (i.e. ‘any doctor’) who knows acupuncture’, *conozco a un médico que sabe acupuntura* ‘I know a doctor who knows acupuncture’. Further examples:

<i>Haz lo que quieras</i>	Do whatever you like
<i>Necesitamos a alguien que esté en el local</i>	We need somebody who’ll be on the spot
<i>Cualquier reacción que uno pueda tener suena a sobreactuado</i> (CRG, Sp.)	Any reaction one might have sounds like overacting/sounds overdone
<i>¿Sabes de alguien que tenga apellido en este país?</i> (ES, Arg., dialogue)	Do you know anyone in this country who has a surname (i.e. a famous name)
<i>Dígame qué tienen que esté muy sabroso</i> (JL, Mex., dialogue)	Tell me what you’ve got that tastes really good
<i>¿Has traído todos los libros que nos hagan falta?</i> (. . . <i>nos hacen falta</i> suggests that you have certain books in mind)	Have you brought all the books we may need?
<i>Buscó una zona donde el mar llegara debilitado</i> (MVM, Sp.)	He looked for an area where the sea was coming in with less force
<i>Iremos a donde tú decidas</i> (JV, Mex., dialogue)	We’ll go anywhere you decide

(1) Sometimes a subjunctive introduces or reinforces the idea of ‘any’: *un PC que no **tenga** muchos gigabytes de RAM no vale la pena* ‘any PC (personal computer) that doesn’t have many gigabytes of RAM isn’t worth the trouble’. The indicative would have been possible here.

(2) In literary styles, the subjunctive is common in relative clauses when the main clause is introduced by *como* ‘like’: . . . *como un joven impertinente que arrancara la peluca a una solterona* (ES, Mex.) ‘like a cheeky youngster pulling off some elderly spinster’s wig’.

(3) However, sensitive native speakers will accept the following sentences, quoted in the NGLE 25.10d: *he de buscar a la persona que **tiene** las llaves* ‘I’ve got to look for the person who’s got the keys’ (person not yet identified), *la hipotética máquina que **traduce** correctamente de una lengua a otra sin ayuda del hombre sigue siendo hoy un mero proyecto* ‘the hypothetical machine that translates accurately from one language to another without human aid is still a mere project today’ (refers to a non-existent machine), *este año solo/sólo he leído una novela que **tuviera** verdadero valor literario* ‘I’ve only read one novel this year that had any real literary value’ (the novel exists despite the subjunctive).

It seems that the acceptability of such sentences depends partly on geographical region, and the rules given in 39.15 could have been applied in all of them. Foreign learners will do well to abide by the rules given in this section since a sentence like *\*conozco a un chico que **sepa** vasco* (for *sabe vasco* . . .) ‘I know a boy who knows Basque’ is absolutely incorrect.

(4) French also uses the subjunctive when the antecedent is not yet identified: *queremos comprar una casa que **tenga** piscina* = *nous voulons acheter une maison qui **ait** une piscine* ‘we want to buy a house that has a swimming pool’ (i.e. if we can find one).

### 39.15.2 Subjunctive after *cualquiera que, quienquiera (que)* ‘anyone who’

The same rule applies to these words since they refer to something not yet identified.

*Cualquiera que te vea pensará que vas a una fiesta*  
*El obstáculo más inmediato para quienquiera que esté en el poder es recuperar la gobernabilidad de este país fracturado*  
*(La Jornada, Mex.)*

Anyone who sees you will think you’re going to a party  
 The most immediate obstacle for anyone who is in power is making this broken country [Brazil] governable again

(1) If ‘anyone who ...’ means ‘those who ...’, ‘people who ...’, a nominalizer (*el/la/los/las que* or *quien/quienes*) with the subjunctive is used: *el que/quien se crea eso está loco* ‘anyone who believes that is mad’. *Quienquiera* ... is also found: Seco (1998, 378), says that it is exclusively literary in Spain, but it survives elsewhere in ordinary speech: *quienquiera se crea eso está loco* (GCI, Cu., dialogue; Spain *el que crea* ... or *quien crea* ...; also *quienquiera que* ...), *pregunta ¿en qué puedo servirle? a quienquiera que entre* (DT, Mex., dialogue) ‘he asks anyone who comes in “how can I help you?”’

(2) *Quienquiera que sea* ‘whoever it is’ seems to alternate freely with the *forma reduplicativa* (see 20.5): *si alguien cometió un crimen, que responda ante la ley, sea quien sea* (*El Economista*, Mex., or *quienquiera que sea*) ‘if someone committed a crime let them answer before the law, whoever it is’, *íntimo amigo del Jefe del Gobierno, fuera el que fuese* (MVM, Sp., or *quienquiera que fuera/fuese*) ‘a close friend of the Head of the Government, whoever the latter happened to be’.

### 39.15.3 Subjunctive in relative clauses that refer to non-existent things

If the relative clause refers to something that does not exist, the subjunctive must be used:

*No hay nadie que sepa tocar más de un violín a la vez*  
*Jamás la oí hablar de algo que mereciera la pena* (SP, Sp., dialogue)  
*¿Sabes algo que yo no sepa?* (EM, Mex., dialogue)  
*¿A quiénes conoces que se vean feas esperando un hijo?* (AM, Mex., dialogue; *se vean* = *estén* in Spain)

There is no one who can play more than one violin at the same time  
 I never heard her talk about anything worthwhile  
 Do you know something I don’t know?  
 Who do you know who looks ugly when they’re expecting a baby?

(1) French has a similar rule: *il n’y a personne qui **puisse*** = *no hay nadie que **pueda*** ‘there is no one who can ...’

### 39.15.4 Subjunctive in relative clauses when the main verb is in the future tense

The subjunctive is used in relative clauses when the main clause refers to the future:

*Seré yo el que tenga que solucionar mis propios problemas (cf. soy yo el que tengo/ tiene que solucionar . . .)*

*No será hasta el primer Consejo de Ministros cuando el Gobierno apruebe el proyecto de ley (La Vanguardia, Sp.)*

*Pero serán las investigaciones las que determinen qué fue lo que sucedió (El Diario de Hoy, ES)*

I'll be the one who has to solve my own problems

It won't be until the first Council of Ministers (Brit. 'Cabinet meeting') that the Government will approve the draft law

But the police investigation will discover what happened

### 39.15.5 Subjunctive in relative clauses after superlative expressions

The subjunctive may appear in relative clauses following superlative statements, but it is less usual in everyday written or spoken language:

*el mayor incendio que jamás se ha/haya visto*  
*la mayor transacción con divisas fuertes que se haya hecho en el Río de la Plata (ES, Arg.)*  
*lo más hermoso que haya visto en mi miserable vida (EM, Mex., dialogue)*

the greatest fire ever seen  
 the largest hard-currency transaction ever made in the River Plate region  
 the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in my miserable life

Compare these less literary examples:

*Eres la chica más simpática que he conocido*  
*Yo debía ser el extranjero más inteligente que madame Forestier había visto en su vida (ABE, Pe.)*

*Dijo que era la mayor barbaridad que a nadie se le había ocurrido (or hubiera/hubiese)*

You're the most likeable girl I've ever met  
 I must have been the most intelligent foreigner Madame Forestier had seen in her life

(S)he said it was the greatest stupidity anybody had ever thought of

(1) The indicative is normal in positive sentences after words like 'first', 'only': *es la primera vez que se habla de esto* 'it's the first time people have talked about this', *es la única película que ha hecho* 'it's the only film (s)he's made'. However, if the main verb is in the future, the subordinate verb will be in the subjunctive: *será la primera vez que se hable de esto* 'it'll be the first time it's talked about'; see 39.15.4.

(2) Where the subjunctive is possible it makes the statement more emphatic: *eres la persona más generosa que haya conocido en toda mi vida!* 'you're the most generous person I've met in my whole life!'

(3) French differs from Spanish in requiring the subjunctive after almost all superlative statements and after 'only': *elle est la seule personne qui comprenne le chinois* = *es la única persona que entiende chino* 'she's the only person who understands Chinese'.

# 40 Nominalizers

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- *el de, la de, los de, las de* (= ‘the one(s) from . . .’) (Section 40.1.2)
- *lo de* (Section 40.1.3)
- *el que, la que, los que, las que* (‘the one(s) that . . .’) (Section 40.1.4)
- *lo que* (Section 40.1.5)
- *quien/quienes* when it means ‘the person(s) who . . .’ (Section 40.1.6)

## 40.1 Nominalizers

### 40.1.1 General

Nominalizers are words that turn other words or phrases into noun phrases: *los que interrogan* ‘those who interrogate’ is close in meaning to *los interrogadores* ‘the interrogators’, *la de antes* ‘the one (fem.) from before’ to *la anterior* ‘the previous one’, *quien* (no accent) *es inteligente* ‘the one who is intelligent’ roughly means *la persona inteligente* ‘the intelligent person’, etc.

For the use of *el que* and *quien* as relative pronouns (*el hombre con el que/con quien hablaba, la mesa en la que escribo*) see 39.3–4. For *quién* in questions, see 28.5. For *el que* + subjunctive meaning ‘the fact that’ (= *el hecho de que*), see 20.3.19.

### 40.1.2 *El de, los de, la de, las de*

‘The one(s) belonging to’, ‘that/those of’, ‘the one(s) from’, etc., French *celui de, celle de, ceux de, celles de*. *El de* agrees in number and gender with the noun it refers to:

*De los alumnos, los de cuarto son los mejores*  
—¿Quién ha venido? —Las de siempre

Of the students, the fourth-year are the best  
‘Who’s come?’ ‘The same women/girls as usual’

*Así que eres la de la droguería . . .* (SP, Sp.,  
dialogue)

So you’re the girl from the drugstore . . .

*Espera cotejar el ADN de los restos hallados*  
*con los del familiar enterrado* (Granma, Cu.)

She hopes to compare the DNA from  
the remains discovered with those  
of the buried family member

*Sus manos parecían las de otro hombre*  
(EP, Mex.)

His hands looked like those of another man

*la industria del petróleo y la del carbón*

the oil and coal industries

Translation by a Saxon genitive (i.e. apostrophe *s*) or by a compound noun is sometimes the solution:

*Quita los de ayer y pon los de hoy*  
*Necesitaba llorar en el hombro de*  
*alguien, así fuera en el de su peor enemiga*  
(ES, Mex. Spain: *aunque fuera/fuese . . .*)

Take away yesterday’s and put today’s  
She needed to cry on someone’s shoulder,  
even if it was her worst female enemy’s

(1) **Important:** *de* is the only preposition that can follow *el/la/los/las*. Mistakes like *\*los con coche* ‘those with cars’, *\*la para María* ‘the one (e.g. *carta*) for María’ are not Spanish. One says *los que tienen coche, la que es para María*, etc.

(2) *La de* can mean ‘the amount of’/‘how many’ in colloquial language: *no sé la de temas que tengo apuntados* (CMG, Sp.) ‘I don’t know how many topics I’ve got jotted down’, *me recordó la de veces que me he reído* (*La Jornada*, Mex.) ‘he reminded me how many times I’ve laughed . . .’ See also 3.2.30.

### 40.1.3 *Lo de*

This is the neuter version of *el de*. Like all neuter pronouns, it must be used if there is no gendered noun or pronoun to which it can refer, otherwise *el/la/los/las de* must be used. It is invariable in form.

*Lo de* often means ‘the business/affair of . . .’ in such phrases as *lo del dinero perdido* ‘the affair of the lost money’:

*Siempre está a vueltas con lo de que cuándo  
nos vamos a casar*

*De lo de la abuela poco les debe quedar*  
(CMG, Sp.)

*Eso es lo de menos*

*Todo lo del maldito telegrama se me vino a  
la memoria* (ABE, Pe.)

*¿Le cuento lo de los otros tres novios?*  
(ES, Mex., dialogue)

(S)he’s always going on about  
when we’re going to get married

They must have very little left of  
grandma’s things/money

That’s the *least* problem

The whole business of the damned  
telegram came into my mind

Should I tell you about the other  
three boyfriends?

(1) *Lo de* is used in the Southern Cone and Bolivia to mean ‘. . .’s house’, cf. *de camino, pasá por lo de Paula Limorgui y decíle a Sofi que venga a más tardar a las siete para cambiarse* (CP, Arg., dialogue) ‘on the way call in at Paula Limorgui’s house and tell Sofi to come at seven at the latest to get changed’ (Sp. *pasa por la casa de Paula . . . y dile a Sofi*).

### 40.1.4 *El/la/los/las que*

This translates ‘the one(s) who/which’, ‘that/those which’, etc. (Fr. *celui/celle/ceux/celles qui/que*). It agrees in number and gender with the noun it replaces:

*la que está fuera*

*el que llegó ayer*

*los que dicen eso*

*Pobre de la que se case contigo* (EP, Mex.,  
dialogue)

*Yo no soy el que fui* (JM, Sp., dialogue)

*Me atraían las que le tuvieron cariño, las  
que incluso le parieron hijos* (AM, Mex.,  
dialogue)

the one (fem.) who/that is outside/away

the one (masc.) who/that arrived yesterday

the ones/those (masc.) who say that

Poor woman who marries you . . .

I’m not the man/person I was

I felt drawn to those women who had  
been fond of him, even the ones  
who had borne his children

(1) *El de* and *el que* can be combined: *la libertad de la televisión debería ser siempre la del que la contempla, no la del que la programa* (*El País*, Sp.) ‘freedom in television should always belong to the person watching it, not to the person programming it’.

(2) *La que* is often used on both continents instead of *lo que* in humorous warnings: *no sabes la que te espera* ‘you don’t know what’s waiting for you . . .’, *mira en la que te metiste* (CF, Mex., dialogue) ‘look at the mess you’ve got into . . .’, *pobre Narciso, en la que se ha metido por ser tan buena gente con su patrón* (MVLl, Pe., dialogue) ‘poor Narciso, the mess he’s got into from being so nice to his boss’.

### 40.1.5 *Lo que*

The invariable neuter version of the above: it refers to no specific noun. It can normally be translated by the phrase ‘the thing that . . .’ or by the pronoun ‘what’ (cf. Fr. *ce qui/ce que*):

<i>Lo que más me gusta es cuando haces versos</i> (CMG, Sp., dialogue)	What I like best is when you make up verses/poems
<i>Octavia, un hombre es lo que siente</i> (ABE, Pe., dialogue)	Octavia, a man is what he feels
<i>Cruzaron lo que parecía un pueblo fantasma</i> (MS, Mex.)	They passed through what seemed like a ghost town
<i>Se prolonga todo lo que da de sí la vista</i>	It stretches as far as the eye can see
<i>Me pasa lo que a ti</i>	The same thing’s happening to me as to you

(1) Compare *por Rosario fue por la que se pelearon* ‘Rosario was **the woman** they fought over’, and *por Rosario fue por lo que se pelearon* ‘Rosario was **what** (i.e. the issue/problem) they fought over’.

(2) *Cuanto* can be used as an equivalent of *todo lo que* ‘everything that . . .’: *te crees cuanto te dicen = te crees todo lo que te dicen* ‘you believe everything they tell you’.

### 40.1.6 *Quien/quienes* as an equivalent of ‘the one(s) who’

*Quien/quienes* (no accent, but see note 2) can optionally replace *el que* in many contexts provided it refers to a human being. Since *quien* is not marked for gender it is not an exact equivalent of *el que* and must be used when reference to a specific gender is to be avoided. Only *quien* is possible in the meaning of ‘no one’, as in *no tengo con quien hablar* ‘I’ve got no one to talk to’:

<i>Quien/El que diga eso es un cobarde</i> ( <i>quien</i> is slightly more literary)	The person who says that is a coward
<i>Quienes/Los que no estén de acuerdo, que se vayan</i>	Anyone not in agreement should go
<i>Quien no es mala persona es el sargento</i> <i>El coronel no tiene quien le escriba</i> (GGM, Col.; <i>el que</i> impossible here)	Someone who’s not a bad guy is the sergeant The colonel has no one to write to him
<i>Escuchaba sin oír las conversaciones de quienes se cruzaban con nosotros</i> (SP, Sp.)	He listened absent-mindedly (lit. ‘without hearing’) to the conversations of the people walking past us
<i>No saludaba a personas que no eran quienes decían ser</i> (CF, Mex.)	He didn’t say hello to people who weren’t who they claimed to be
<i>Cada quien tiene sus ritos</i> (AM, Mex.)	Everyone has different rites/rituals

(1) *Quien/quienes* cannot be used when the identity or sex of the person referred to is known and emphasized: *lo/le vimos con la que vive al lado* ‘we saw him with the girl/woman who lives next door’ (not *\*lo/le vimos con quien vive al lado*).



(2) A common colloquial construction is *tú no eres quién para decirme eso* 'you're no one to tell me that' / 'who are you to tell me that?' See 28.5 note 3 for the accent on *quién* in this construction.

(3) Note the phrase *hay quien(es)*: *hay quien prefiere la paella sin mejillones* 'some people like paella without mussels', *hay quien dice que . . .* 'some people say that . . .', *hay quienes no reciben ni el salario mínimo* (*La Jornada*, Mex.) 'there are some who don't even get the minimum wage'.

# 41 Cleft sentences

The main points discussed in this chapter are:

- Definition of 'cleft' sentences (Section 41.1)
- Cleft sentences of the type 'it was X that said it', etc. (Section 41.2)
- Cleft sentences involving prepositions or adverbs, e.g. 'it was here that it happened' (Section 41.3)
- Translating 'that's why . . . ' (Section 41.4)
- Verb agreement in cleft sentences: (Section 41.5)

## 41.1 General

### 41.1.1 Definition of 'cleft sentences'

'Cleft sentences' are called by the Academy *construcciones* or *fórmulas relativas de relieve*, or *construcciones copulativas enfáticas* (NGLE 44.7e). They are sentences in which one of the elements is focused by using 'to be' /*ser*. This can be done in one of several ways:

#### Simple sentence

The fire started here

John said it

I cut it with this knife

I like sausages

I realized then

#### Cleft sentence

It was here that the fire started

This is where the fire started

Here was where the fire started

It was John who said it

John was/is the one who said it

The one who said it was/is John

It was this knife I cut it with

This is the knife I cut it with

This knife is the one I cut it with

What I like is sausages

Sausages are what I like

It was then that I realized

The structure of cleft sentences differs in Spanish from their French and English counterparts, and there are important differences between European and Latin-American usage with respect to cleft sentences containing prepositions.

### 41.1.2 Tense agreement in cleft sentences

In cleft sentences the tense of the verbs is normally the same: *fue aquí donde la vi* 'it was here that I saw her', *ha sido aquí donde la he visto* (same meaning, but perfect of recency), *era aquí donde la veía* 'it was here that I used to see her'. One should not, for example, say *\*era aquí donde la vi*, although *es aquí donde la vi* 'it is here that I saw her' is allowed and, according to NGLE 40.11j is equivalent to *fue aquí donde la vi*.

(1) **Important:** when *ser* is in the future or conditional tense, the other verb is usually in the present subjunctive form: *seré yo quien tenga que solucionarlo* ‘it’ll be me who has to solve it’. See 39.15.4.

## 41.2 ‘She is the one who ...’, etc.

English-speakers, especially those who know French, are tempted to link this type of cleft sentence by the word *que*, but only a nominalizer, i.e. *el que* or *quien* for humans can be used. *Lo que* must be used to refer to a genderless word or phrase:

<i>Es este libro el que compré</i>	It’s this book that I bought
<i>Este libro es el que compré</i>	This book’s the one that I bought
<i>Fueron esas chicas las quel/quienes lo hicieron</i>	They were the girls who did it
<i>Esas chicas fueron las quel/quienes lo hicieron</i>	Those girls were the ones who did it
<i>Esto es lo que más rabia me da</i>	This is what makes me most furious
<i>Lo que más rabia me da es esto</i>	What makes me most furious is this
<i>Porque nunca es ella la que aporta el dinero</i>	Because it’s never her who brings in the money
<i>Eres tú el que no me entiende</i> (JMa, Sp., dialogue)	You’re the one who doesn’t understand me
<i>Nosotros nos ocupamos de él. Es él quien no sabe ocuparse de sí mismo</i> (CF, Mex., dialogue)	We look after him. He’s the one who can’t look after himself
<i>El pelaje overo es el que prefieren los ángeles</i> (JLB, Arg.)	Lamb’s fleece is the one that angels prefer

(1) **Important:** the use of *que* on its own in this type of sentence produces bad Spanish like *\*fue él que me dijo* for *fue él quien/el que me dijo* ‘it was he who told me’, *\*fue esto que* (or even *\*\*qué*) *descubrió Darwin* for the correct *fue esto lo que descubrió Darwin / esto fue lo que descubrió Darwin* ‘this is what Darwin discovered’.

The accented forms *quién*, *qué*, *cuál*, *dónde*, *cómo*, are never used to join cleft sentences.

## 41.3 Cleft sentences involving prepositions or adverbs

(a) **Important:** if the first half of a Spanish cleft sentence contains a preposition, the preposition must normally be repeated in the second half: Spanish says ‘it’s **with** her **with** whom you must speak’ *es con ella con la que/con quien tienes que hablar*; *del que más se hablaba era de David Siqueiros* (EP, Mex.) ‘the person most talked about was David Siqueiros’, *por lo que más se distinguía era por su incansable afición a molestar* (SP, Sp.) ‘what most distinguished him was his tireless fondness of being a nuisance’, *era para esto para lo que he tenido que esperar tanto* (J. Ma, Sp., dialogue) ‘it was for this that I’ve had to wait so long’.

However, when the cleft sentence begins with *ser*, informal Latin-American Spanish (especially in the Southern Cone) often uses *que* alone in a way similar to the French *que* or to the English ‘that’; this *que* is called by grammarians the *que galicado* or ‘Frenchified *que*’. It is vehemently rejected by many Spaniards, although it is heard increasingly among younger generations in Spain:

Sp. <i>Es desde esta ventana desde donde se ve el mar</i> ; Lat. Am. . . . <i>desde esta ventana que se ve el mar</i>	It’s from this window that you can see the sea
---	--

*Desde esta ventana es desde donde se ve el mar* This window is where you can see the sea from

Sp. *Fue por eso por lo que cambió de empleo* That was why (s)he decided to change job  
 Lat. Am. *Fue por eso que cambió de empleo*

*Pero es con la Maga que hablo* (JC, Arg., dialogue; Sp. . . . *con la que/con quien hablo*) But it's Maga I'm talking to

*No fue por el champagne que vine aquí día tras día* (SP, Mex. Sp. *por lo que . . . champañita* or *champán*) It wasn't because of the champagne that I came here day after day

**(b) Important:** if the first part of a cleft sentence contains an adverb or adverbial phrase of time, place or manner it must be joined to the second part by *cuando*, *donde* or *como* respectively, although Latin Americans may use *que* if the cleft sentence begins with *ser*, especially in informal speech: Lat. Am. *fue ahí que la vi*, Sp. *fue ahí donde la vi* 'that's where I saw her/you/it'. See note 4 for details.

*Fue en casa de ella que tuvo lugar aquel encuentro con Vallejos* (MVLL, Pe., Sp. . . . *donde tuvo lugar*) It was in her house that that meeting with Vallejos took place

Sp. and Lat. Am. *Así es como hay que hacerlo* This is how you have to do it  
*Fue entonces cuando comenzó la historia del automóvil* (El País, Sp.) It was then that the history of the car began

*Fue entonces que se preguntó y planteó a cientos de personas presentes: ¿pero somos también un país de lectores?* (La Jornada, Mex. Sp. *entonces cuando . . .*) It was then that hundreds of the persons present were asked and challenged: are we also a nation of readers?

**(1)** If the original sentence contained *lo que* this neuter pronoun is retained in the cleft sentence: *lo que me sorprende es su timidez > su timidez es lo que me sorprende* 'his/her shyness is what surprises me', *es la inseguridad lo que lo/le hace reaccionar de esa forma* 'it's insecurity that makes him react like that', *ha hecho cine, teatro, televisión, pero es con la canción con lo que le gustaría triunfar* 'he has worked in cinema, theatre and TV, but it is in singing that (s)he would like to succeed'.

**(2)** *Lo que* is used when the thing referred to is non-specific. *Era un traje negro lo que llevaba* 'it was a black suit that (s)he was wearing' answers the question 'what was (s)he wearing?', but *el que llevaba era el traje negro/era el traje negro el que llevaba* 'the one (s)he was wearing was the black suit' is an answer to 'which suit (el traje, masc.) was (s)he wearing?'

**(3)** English makes the verb 'to be' singular when it is shifted to the head of a cleft sentence: 'the mosquitoes are what annoys him' / 'it is the mosquitoes that annoy him'. In Spanish *ser* normally remains plural in such cleft sentences (especially in Spain): *lo que me irrita son los mosquitos* 'it is the mosquitoes that annoy me/what annoys me is the mosquitoes', **son** *los mosquitos lo que me irrita* 'the mosquitoes are what annoys me'. See 2.3.3 for more on this construction.

If a preposition follows *ser*, the latter is singular: *es de ellos de quienes no me fío* 'they're the ones I don't trust'.

**(4)** The standard construction with repeated pronouns is often used in Latin America in formal styles, cf. *es por lo anterior por lo que nos gusta la idea de Ecopetrol* (El Tiempo, Col.) 'it is because of the previous point that we like the idea of Ecopetrol'. The construction with *que* alone seems to be more acceptable in writing in Argentina than elsewhere. The GDLE, 27.3.8, notes that the construction with repeated pronouns is usual in Mexico, but cf. *fue por ese infundio que Rodolfo me*

*quiso sacar del ambiente artístico* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'it was because of that baseless rumour that Rodolfo wanted to get me out of the show-business world'.

## 41.4 Translating 'that's why'

*Por eso* is the simplest construction and avoids a cleft sentence: *por eso decidieron ir a París* 'that's why they decided to go to Paris'.

A more complicated alternative involves the phrase *por eso + ser*, or *ser + por eso*. This generates a cleft sentence:

<i>Es también por eso <b>por lo que</b> se traiciona a cualquiera</i> (JM, Sp.)	That's also why one betrays anyone
<i>Fue por eso por lo que me quedé en casa</i>	That's why I stayed at home

But Latin Americans may simply use *por eso que*, a construction rejected in Spain: *es por eso que no se había casado* (AM, Mex.) 'That's why she hadn't got married' (Spain. . . *por lo que no se había casado*).

(1) **Important:** *porque* means 'because' and it cannot be used to translate sentences like 'she's got the flu, **that's why** she's stayed at home'. A construction with *por* is called for: *tiene gripe, por eso se ha quedado en casa/por eso es por lo que se ha quedado en casa* '(s)he's got the flu, that's why she's stayed at home'. A common mistake among English-speaking students is \*... *eso es porque se ha quedado* . . . French is like English in this respect: *et c'est pourquoi elle est restée chez elle*.

## 41.5 Verb agreement in cleft sentences

The best rule for foreign learners is to make the verb agree in person and number with the subject of *ser*, *tú fuiste el que lo/le viste* 'you're the one who saw him'. Strict agreement seems to be required in the plural: *vosotros fuisteis los que lo/le visteis/ustedes fueron los que lo vieron* 'you were the ones who saw him'. However, in the singular, Spanish often uses third-person agreement, i.e. *tú fuiste el que lo/le vio*. The following examples reveal some of the uncertainty surrounding this question:

<i>Yo fui la que se lo bebió/la que me lo bebí</i>	I was the one (fem.) who drank it
<i>Soy yo quien no se soporta a sí misma</i> (JMa, Sp., dialogue)	It's me (fem.) who can't stand myself
<i>Ahora eres tú la que habla como cuento de ciencia ficción</i> (MC, Mex., dialogue)	Now it's you (fem.) who's talking like a science fiction story
<i>Fui yo finalmente quien la convencí</i> (GCI, Cu., dialogue)	It was me who eventually convinced her
<i>La que te equivocas, como casi siempre, eres tú</i> (AG, Sp., dialogue; or <i>que se equivoca</i> )	The one who's making a mistake, as almost always, is you
<i>Vos sos el que no me aguanta. Vos sos el que no aguantás a Rocamadour</i> (JC, Arg. dialogue; both constructions used. Sp. <i>tú eres</i> for <i>vos sos</i> , <i>aguantas</i> for <i>aguantás</i> )	You're the one who can't stand me. You're the one who can't stand Rocamadour
<i>Somos los únicos que no tenemos ni un centavo para apostar</i> (GGM. Col. dialogue; not 'tienen')	We're the only ones who haven't got a centavo to bet

(1) When the nominalizer is the first element in the sentence, either option is possible: *el que tengo/tiene que hacerlo soy yo* 'I'm the one who has to do it', *los que tienen/tenéis que trabajar más sois vosotros* (Lat. Am., *tienen . . . son ustedes*) 'you're the ones who have to work harder'.

(2) In reflexive sentences, third-person agreement is usual: *eres tú el que siempre se afeita con máquina* 'you're the one who always shaves with a shaver', not . . . *te afeitas . . .* (NGLE 40.11i).

# 42 Word order

The main subjects discussed in this chapter are:

- General remarks on Spanish and English word order (Section 42.1)
- Verb-Subject-Object order in sentences containing relative clauses (Section 42.2.1–3)
- Word order in questions and exclamations (Section 42.3)
- —*Gracias* —*dijo Juan* (not —*Juan dijo*) (Section 42.4)
- Verb-Subject order after adverbials (Section 42.5)
- Miscellaneous word order rules (Section 42.7)
- The position of adverbs and adverbial phrases (Section 42.8)
- Sentences like *tonta no es, dinero tiene*, etc. (Section 42.9.1)
- *Viene el profesor* or *el profesor viene?* (Section 42.9.2)
- *Ana leyó el libro, el libro lo leyó Ana*, etc. (Section 42.9.3)

## 42.1 Spanish word order: general

Word order is a subject that defies brief explanation in any language and especially in Spanish, so the account given in this chapter is simplified. Readers who need more information should consult such topics as *orden de palabras*, *dislocación*, *extraposición*, *foco*, *inversión del sujeto* and *tema* in the Academy's *GDLE*.

This chapter mentions the most obvious differences between Spanish and English word order. We are here discussing only plain twenty-first and late twentieth-century Spanish prose. In poetry, poetic prose and texts from earlier periods word order can be much freer.

### 42.1.1 Flexibility of Spanish word order

Compared with English and French, Spanish word order is fairly variable. One can say *en el pasado remoto* or *en el remoto pasado* 'in the remote past': see 5.10. *Juan vuelve* and *vuelve Juan* 'Juan's coming back' are both possible with a difference of emphasis; see 42.9.2. An object may follow or precede the verb: *no tengo hambre* 'I'm not hungry', but *hambre no tengo*; see 42.9.1. As in English, adverbs and adverbial phrases may occupy various positions in a sentence: *a veces llueve/llueve a veces* 'sometimes it rains'/'it rains sometimes'; see 42.5 and 42.8. This list is not exhaustive.

This chapter assumes that the normal and most usual word order in Spanish sentences is Subject-Verb-(Object), e.g. *Carolina contestó* 'Carolina answered' *Mario no reconoció a los demás* 'Mario didn't recognize the rest of them', while other arrangements of Verb, Subject and Object are departures from this norm. e.g. *contestó Carolina, a los demás Mario no los reconoció*

### 42.1.2 A fundamental difference between Spanish and English

**Important:** spoken English relies heavily on stress to focus or emphasize words. Consider the differences between 'I'm going to school' (neutral sentence), '*I'm* going to school' (even if you aren't), 'I *am* going to school' (you said I wasn't), 'I'm *going* to school' (no need to tell me again),

'I'm going *to* school' (not coming back), 'I'm going *to school*' (not somewhere else). When used in Spanish these English stress patterns can sound very foreign. This kind of emphasis can play a part in Spanish – see 42.9 – but Spanish tends to use different sentence patterns or word orders to achieve the same effect: *voy al colegio, yo voy al colegio, pero sí voy al colegio, al colegio es adonde voy*, etc.

### 42.1.3 A note on Subject-Verb-Object word order

**Important:** this order is most common when the direct object is a noun or noun phrase: *Jorge vendió su coche* 'Jorge sold his car', *los rusos han lanzado una sonda a Venus* 'the Russians have launched a probe to Venus'. But if the noun is replaced by unstressed object pronouns, the order becomes Subject-Object-Verb: *Jorge lo vendió* 'Jorge sold it', *los rusos la han lanzado* 'the Russians have launched it'.

## 42.2 Word order in sentences containing relative clauses

This section explains an extremely frequent departure from the usual Subject-Verb word order.

### 42.2.1 Verb-Subject order in the main clauses

In a sentence like *compró la casa un señor que había vivido en Florida* 'a man who had lived in Florida bought the house', the words in bold are the main clause, and the rest is a relative clause.

Verb-Subject order is preferred in Spanish in the main clause in order to keep the relative pronoun close to the subject of the main verb – in the previous example *un señor* is the subject of the main verb. For this reason, the following is very bad Spanish: *\*un señor compró la casa que había vivido en Florida*, which breaks the strong rule (also mentioned at 39.1.3e) that a verb phrase (*compró la casa*) cannot come between a noun phrase (*un señor*) and a relative pronoun that refers to it (*que*). Another example: *no existe todavía el coche que yo quiera comprar* 'the car that I want to buy doesn't exist yet', not *\*el coche no existe todavía que yo quiera comprar* 'the car doesn't exist yet that I want to buy'. The second sentence is not Spanish.

Another order in Spanish that is more familiar to English speakers is also allowed, e.g. *un señor que había vivido en Florida compró la casa, el coche que yo quiero comprar no existe todavía*. This order is often perfectly acceptable – as in these two cases – but it may be awkward when the subject is separated from its verb by many words. *Tienen suerte las mujeres cuyo marido siempre las ayuda en casa* 'women whose husbands always help them in the house are lucky', is better than the typical 'English' order *las mujeres cuyo marido siempre las ayuda en casa tienen suerte*. Spanish dislikes leaving verbs dangling at the end of a sentence.

Likewise *me llama una chica que se llama América* (CRG, Sp., dialogue) 'a girl called América rings/calls me' is better than *una chica que se llama América me llama*; but the latter is acceptable if the verb – in this case *llama* – does not come last in the sentence, as in *una chica que se llama América me llama para pedirme un favor* or *me llama una chica que se llama América para pedirme un favor*.

### 42.2.2 Word order in relative clauses

Verb-Subject order is also strongly preferred in relative clauses to keep the verb close to the relative pronoun and to avoid leaving the verb at the end of the sentence. Spanish dislikes sentences



like 'that's the dog that my friend from Kansas City **bought**', best translated *ese/ése es el perro que compró mi amigo de Kansas City* and not *?ese/ése es el perro que mi amigo de Kansas City compró*. This rule also applies to subordinate clauses introduced by such words as *donde*, *como* and *cuando*. Examples (subordinate clause in bold):

*Estas acciones han rendido más **que las que compró tu madre***

*el carnaval de invierno **que organiza el***

***Departamento de Turismo***

*la enorme fuerza **que cobraba la derecha** (JA, Mex.)*

*Un noble y heroico pasado en **el que muy pocos españoles habían sido franquistas y en el que habían sido resistentes o disidentes antifranquistas muchos que no habían movido un dedo contra el franquismo** (JC, Sp. SV order in first relative clause, VS order in second)*

*Ya verás **cuando regrese tu padre, él sabrá meterte en cintura con unos buenos cintarazos** (EM, Mex., dialogue)*

*Pasamos tan rápido **como nos lo permiten los lomos de burro** (CP, Arg. Un lomo de burro or 'donkey's back' is called un badén in Spain)*

These shares have yielded more than the ones your mother bought the Winter Carnival that the Department of Tourism is organizing the enormous strength the political Right was acquiring

A noble and heroic past in which very few Spaniards had been Franco supporters and in which many who had never lifted a finger against Franco had been in the anti-Franco resistance or been dissidents

You'll soon see when your father gets back. He'll know how to make you behave with a few good thwacks with his belt

We drove through as fast as the speed humps let us

### 42.2.3 Word order when both 42.2.1 and 42.2.2 apply

When the rules outlined in the two preceding sections are applied, the word order may be very different from English: *paga el invitado que más cerveza bebe*, literally 'pays the guest who most beer drinks', i.e. 'the guest who drinks most beer pays' (but . . . *que bebe más cerveza* is equally acceptable). Further examples:

*Así dice la carta **que nos envió tu padre***  
*Son innumerables las dificultades **que plantea la lucha contra el terrorismo***  
*(La Vanguardia, Sp.)*

*Gana el jugador **que pierda primero todas sus cartas** (La Jornada, Mex.)*

That's what the letter your father sent says  
 The difficulties posed by the struggle against terrorism are innumerable

The first player to lose all her/his cards wins

## 42.3 Word order in questions (direct and indirect) and in exclamations

### 42.3.1 Word order after question words

Verb-Subject order is used after question words, e.g.:

*¿cómo?* how?

*¿cuál (de)?* which (of)?

*¿cuándo?* when?

*¿cuánto?* how much/many?

*¿dónde?* where?

*¿por/para qué?* why?

*¿qué?* what?/which? (see note 1)

*¿a quién?* whom?

Examples (verb and its subject in bold):

¿Cómo **va una** a estar esperando y delgada?  
(AM, Mex., dialogue)

¿Qué tal **va tu nuevo trabajo**?

¿Con quién **se casó Marco**?

¿Sabes en dónde **estudió tu novio**?

No recuerdo cómo **iba vestida su mujer**  
(JC, Sp., dialogue)

Se pudo ver cuánta razón **tenía Cosío Villegas** casi 40 años antes (JA, Mex.)

How's one going to be expecting a baby and be thin?

How's your new job going?

Who(m) did Marco marry?

Do you know where your boyfriend studied?

I don't remember how his wife was dressed

One could see how right Cosío Villegas had been nearly forty years earlier

This also applies to exclamations:

¡Cómo **se parece Chelo** a su madre!

¡Cuánta carne **come tu hermano**!

¡Qué inútil **es este teclado**!

Qué bonito **estuvo eso**, me sonó como a canción ranchera (ES, Mex., dialogue.  
canto ranchero = a type of traditional Mexican song)

Doesn't Chelo look like her mother!

What a lot of meat your brother eats!

This keyboard is really useless!

That was so pretty, it sounded like *canción ranchera* to me

(1) See 42.3.4 for regional exceptions to the above rule.

(2) English tends to put verbs at the end of indirect questions, as in this sentence from a BBC documentary: 'I don't know what the answer to the question "is there life on Mars?" **is**'. This must be reordered in Spanish: *no sé **cuál es** la respuesta a la pregunta ¿hay vida en Marte?* Spanish does not usually allow verbs to be left at the end of a clause or sentence far from their subjects or objects.

## 42.3.2 Word order in questions containing subjects and direct objects

(a) When the object is shorter than the subject, Verb-Object-Subject order is common but not always obligatory (direct objects in bold type):

### Short direct objects

¿Dónde compra **fruta** el dueño de la tienda de enfrente?

¿A quién ha escrito **la carta** tu amigo Federico?

Where does the owner of the shop/store opposite buy fruit?

Who(m) did your friend Federico write the letter to?

(b) When the direct object is longer than the subject, Verb-Subject-Object order is preferred.

### Long direct objects

¿Dónde compran los adolescentes **las drogas vendidas por los narcotraficantes**?

¿Cuándo va a incluir su revista **programas y artículos dedicados a ordenadores tales como los ya citados**? (Lat. Am. *la computadora* or *el computador* for *el ordenador*)

Where do (the) teenagers buy the drugs sold by the dealers?

When is your magazine going to include program(me)s and articles devoted to computers like the ones mentioned above?

(c) When subject and object are of equal length, either order may be used.

### Subjects and objects of equal length

*¿Cuándo piensan hacer**lo** ustedes?/*

When are you thinking of doing it?

*¿Cuándo piensan ustedes hacer**lo**?*

*¿Dónde compra **pan** mamá?*

Where does Mother buy bread?

*/¿Dónde compra mamá **pan**?*

(1) A noun phrase introduced by *¿qué?* meaning 'which?', or by *¿cuál de?* 'which?' always appears before the verb: *¿qué programas han gustado más al público?* 'which programmes did the public like most?', *¿qué frutas ha comprado Marta?* 'what fruits did Marta buy?', *¿cuál de los móviles tiene más autonomía?* 'which of the mobile phones/cell phones has the longest battery life?'

(2) A similar rule affects *cuánto/a* when it refers to the subject of the verb: the order Subject-Verb-Object is used (direct objects in bold): *¿cuántos hombres venderían **su alma** al diablo por estar con ella en ese cuarto?* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'how many men would sell their souls to the Devil to be in that room with her?' Compare this sentence where *cuánto* is the direct object or refers to the object of the verb: *¿cuánto pagó tu primo por la moto?* 'how much did your cousin pay for the motorbike?', *me pregunté cuánto tiempo llevarían aquellos dos viéndose así*, (JM, Sp., dialogue) 'I wondered how long these two must have been meeting like that'.

(3) When an indirect object is also involved, keep the subject and the direct object close to the verb: *¿ha devuelto Alfredo **los libros** a la biblioteca?* 'has Alfredo returned the books to the library?' (direct object in bold, indirect object underlined).

### 42.3.3 Word order in questions that do not contain a question word

When no question word is included in a question Verb-Subject order is also usual: *¿sabe Carlos la verdad?* 'does Carlos know the truth?', *¿ha llegado el paquete?* 'has the parcel arrived?', *¿se habrá apagado la caldera?* 'has the boiler gone out?'. But Subject-Verb order can be used, in which case, question (i.e. rising) intonation is the only thing in speech that shows that a question is intended, and in writing the upside-down question mark warns the reader that a question is coming:

*¿Julia viene esta noche? (usually ¿viene Julia esta noche?)*

Is Julia coming tonight?

*¿Tú también notaste lo bonito que se ríe? (AM, Mex., dialogue; Sp. lo bonita que es su risa)*

Did you also notice how prettily she laughs?

*¿El XIII [decimotercer] Congreso va a ser el de la desaparición de su partido?*

Is the 13th Congress going to be the one at which your party disappears?

*¿Usted no sabe dónde está? (ES, Mex., dialogue)*

'You don't know where he is, do you?'

### 42.3.4 Unusual SV word order after question words in parts of Latin America

The Spanish of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and occasionally of Venezuela and Colombia – but not of Mexico – is unusual in retaining Subject-Verb order after question words (subject in bold): *¿cómo **usted** conoció que Tony tenía negocio de narcotráfico?* (VdeC, standard Spanish *cómo se enteró **usted** de que . . .*) 'how did you find out that Tony had a drug-dealing business?', *¿en qué fecha **usted** ingresó en la Corporación CIMEX?* (ibid., standard Spanish *ingresó **usted***) 'on what date did you join the CIMEX Corporation?', *¿qué **tú** crees del acto de hoy en el Teatro Oriente?* (LO, Cu., dialogue, standard *¿qué piensas tú del acto?*) 'what do you think of the event today at the Oriente Theatre?'

## 42.4 Inversion in dialogue identifiers

Verb-Subject order is required in writing in dialogue identifiers of the sort 'Mary said', 'John replied' when they follow the words quoted:

— <i>Tengo razón —dijo el presidente</i>	'I'm right,' the President said
— <i>Te invito a cenar hoy o a comer mañana —dijo él como si ordenara—. A comer mañana —contestó ella (AM, Mex., dialogue)</i>	'I'm inviting you to supper today or lunch tomorrow,' he said, as though giving an order. 'Lunch tomorrow,' she replied
— <i>No te hace gracia, ¿verdad? —le preguntó aquella noche Anita (AG, Sp., dialogue)</i>	'You don't find it amusing, do you?' Anita asked him that night

(1) In this respect Spanish is more conservative than English: ' "I'm right," said the President' for 'the President said' sounds old-fashioned nowadays.

## 42.5 Verb-Subject order is common after many adverbs and adverbial phrases

Verb-Subject order is common when an adverbial (an adverb or adverbial phrase) appears at the head of a phrase or clause, particularly when the verb following the adverbial is **intransitive**. This occurs in English as well, as the following examples show, where speakers of both languages would probably prefer sentences (a) to (b) (subjects in bold throughout this section):

(a) <i>Delante de mí se levantaba <b>un enorme edificio</b></i>	Before me stood/rose an enormous building
<i>Delante de ella aparecieron <b>dos hombres chillando y gesticulando</b></i>	Before her there appeared two men screaming and gesticulating
(b) <i>?Delante de mí <b>un enorme edificio</b> se levantaba</i>	?Before me an enormous building rose
<i>?Delante de ella <b>dos hombres chillando y gesticulando</b> aparecieron</i>	?Before her two men screaming and gesticulating appeared

Inversion of the usual order after certain adverbials also occurs in literary English: 'never **had I** seen so much gold' for 'I had never seen so much gold', 'hardly **had Robert** arrived home when the storm broke'. This construction is more common in Spanish. In the following cases, inversion is overwhelmingly the norm:

<i>Siempre me dijeron <b>las brujas y echadoras de cartas</b> que mi número mágico era el tres (CRG, Sp.)</i>	Witches and card-readers always told me that my magic number was three
<i>Siempre fue altanera <b>la Sofía</b> (AM, Mex., dialogue. See 3.2.21 for the <i>la</i>)</i>	Sofia was always haughty/arrogant
<i>Nunca me hablaban <b>los vecinos</b></i>	The neighbours never spoke to me
<i>Apenas salían <b>sus padres</b>, ponía música rock</i>	(S)he used to put on rock music as soon as his/her parents went out
<i>Así era <b>este monstruo</b> que sin pestañear podía mandar a la muerte a cientos de miles de sus propios soldados (RM, Sp.)</i>	Such was this monster [Hitler] who could send hundreds of thousands of his soldiers to their deaths without blinking

Bien saben **las autoridades** que . . .  
 Todavía humeaban **algunos incendios**  
 Para tales personas existen **las cárceles**  
 Ahí vivo **yo**  
 Junto a la puerta colgaba **una deshilachada toalla** (LS, Ch.)  
 A esta computadora llegan **una serie de datos** (MC, Mex., dialogue. Sp. a este ordenador)

The authorities know very well that . . .  
 Some fires were still smoking  
 Prisons exist for such people  
 That's where I live  
 Next to the door hung a frayed towel  
 A stream of data comes to this computer

But inversion is not always obligatory, as these sentences show:

Así **Lorenzo** aprendió a jugar billar (EP, Mex.,  
 or así aprendió Lorenzo . . .)  
 Siempre **alguien** le leía en voz alta lo que  
 publicaban sus periódicos (JA, Mex.),  
 (or siempre le leía alguien)  
 Quizá **Daniel** le sacara dos o tres años  
 (RM, Sp.)

in this way Lorenzo learned to play  
 snooker/pool  
 Someone always read to him out loud  
 what his newspapers were publishing  
 Maybe Daniel was two or three years older  
 than her

It is difficult to formulate rules about this kind of inversion. Stylistic factors and sentence rhythm and balance often determine the choice of word order.

(1) If the adverbial is not placed at the head of the sentence or phrase, Subject-Verb order is restored:

**Las brujas y echadoras de cartas** siempre me  
 dijeron que  
**Algunos incendios** humeaban todavía  
**Las cárceles** existen para tales personas

Witches and card-readers always told me  
 that . . .  
 Some fires were still smoking  
 Prisons exist for such people

(2) When the verb is **transitive**, various word orders are possible in Spanish (subject in bold):  
*delante de ella dos mujeres* voceaban sus mercancías 'before her two women were calling out their wares', or *delante de ella voceaban sus mercancías dos mujeres*.

## 42.6 Word order in imperatives

See 21.4 for discussion of this topic. Verb-subject order is especially common in third-person imperative sentences introduced by *que* (see 21.6): *que venga tu hermana en seguida* 'get your sister to come right now', *que no vuelva Lucía a comprar ese queso horrible* 'don't let Lucía buy that horrible cheese again'.

## 42.7 Miscellaneous word order rules

This section includes a number of miscellaneous but important rules that explain various features of Spanish word order.

### 42.7.1 Prepositions stay with the word they modify

**Important:** Spanish does not separate prepositions from the word or phrase that they modify. An English sentence like 'that's the hotel we're going to' must be expressed *ese/ése es el hotel al que vamos* 'that's the hotel to which we're going' (for more on this point, see 38.1.1):

*Su nombramiento se demoró **por estar**  
siempre la vacante ocupada* (not \**por la vacante estar siempre ocupada*)  
*Tú eras la persona **en la que** estaba pensando*  
(never \*\**la persona que estaba pensando en*)

His nomination (to the post) was  
delayed because the vacant position  
was always occupied  
You were the person I was thinking about

(1) In general only a few words like *no*, *siempre*, *nunca* can separate a preposition from its infinitive: *se había echado a llorar frente al micrófono por no poder hilvanar tres frases* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'she started crying in front of the microphone because she wasn't capable of putting three sentences together', *por llegar siempre tarde/por siempre llegar tarde* 'because of always being late'.

### 42.7.2 Set phrases are not broken up

Set phrases, particularly set verbal phrases like *tener que* 'to have to', *llevar a cabo* 'carry out', *hacer público* 'make public', *surtir efecto* 'produce an effect', *tener lugar* 'take place', *darse cuenta de que* 'realize', should not be broken up by the insertion of other words:

*No se cansaba de sugerir que llevaría a  
cabo las rectificaciones que se exigían*  
(JA, Mex., not \**que llevaría las  
rectificaciones que se exigían a cabo*)  
*Hacemos pública esta información*  
(and not the typical English word  
order . . . *hacemos esta información pública*)  
*Justo lo último que un investigador juicioso  
desea hacer, hasta que no tiene atados  
todos los cabos* (LS, Sp. Not . . . *hasta que  
no tiene todos los cabos atados*)

He never tired of suggesting that he would  
make the amendments that were required

We are making this information public

Exactly the last thing a smart investigator  
wants to do until/before he's got all the loose  
ends tied up

### 42.7.3 No insertion of words between *haber* and participles

Words should not be inserted between *haber* and a participle, e.g. *siempre he dicho* or *he dicho siempre* 'I've always said', but not \**he siempre dicho* (students of French take note: *j'ai toujours pensé que . . .* is *siempre he pensado que . . .* or *he pensado siempre que . . .*). This rule is occasionally broken: see 18.1.1.

### 42.7.4 Unstressed object pronouns remain with their verb

Unstressed object pronouns (*me, te, se, la, lo, le, nos, os, los, las, les*) are never separated from their verb: *te lo diré luego* 'I'll tell you later', *solo/sólo te quiero a ti* 'I only love you'/'I love only you', etc. There are often optional positions when a finite verb governs an infinitive or gerund: *no debí decírtelo* or *no te lo debí decir*, *estoy haciéndolo* or *lo estoy haciendo* 'I'm doing it'. This is discussed at 14.3.

(1) **Important:** no words, and especially not *y* or *o*, can come between these unstressed pronouns: 'I saw him and her' is *(los) vi a él y a ella*, never \*\**lo y la vi* or \*\**le y la vi*. See 14.2.4. note 4.

### 42.7.5 Adjectival phrases are kept close to the noun they modify

Spanish does not like to separate adjectival phrases (in bold) from the noun they modify:

*Regresó como a las seis y media con un  
ejemplar **arrugado y manchado de**  
**huevo** de las Últimas Noticias del mediodía*  
(CF, Mex.)

He returned around 6.30 with a  
crumpled and egg-stained copy of  
the midday *Últimas Noticias*

This sentence would sound awkward, at least in careful styles, if the adjectival phrase were put at the end: ? . . . *con un ejemplar de las Últimas Noticias del mediodía arrugado y manchado de huevo* (but more acceptable if a comma is inserted after *mediodía*).

Compound nouns formed with *de* are not broken up. One says *un lápiz de memoria barato* ‘a cheap memory-stick/flash drive’ not \**un lápiz barato de memoria*. See 5.10.5.

### 42.7.6 Numerals may be avoided in careful styles at the beginning of sentences

See 11.16 note 1 for discussion.

### 42.7.7 Word order in apposition

When two nouns are in apposition (see Glossary), nothing should separate them: one says *había muerto J.M., leyenda de la música rock de los años sesenta* ‘J. M., legend of sixties rock music, had died’, in order to keep J. M. and *leyenda* together, not ?*J.M. había muerto, leyenda de la música rock* . . . . Another example: *le abrió el portero, un indio viejo con cara de sonámbulo* (CF, Mex.) ‘the doorman, an old Indian with a face like a sleepwalker’s, opened the door for him’, rather than *el portero le abrió, un indio viejo* . . .

## 42.8 Position of adverbs and adverbial phrases

### 42.8.1 Adverbs and adverb phrases are kept close to the words they modify

To repeat what has been implicit so far in this chapter, adverbials (i.e. adverbs, adverbial phrases and adverbial clauses) are usually placed either immediately before or immediately after the word(s) that they modify. In this respect the *Libro de estilo* of *El País*, 2014, 13.1, specifically admonishes its journalists and editors against:

(a) separating adverbs from their verb: *el Rey ha inaugurado hoy* . . . ‘the King today inaugurated . . .’, not *hoy, el Rey ha inaugurado* . . .;

(b) breaking up verbal phrases by inserting adverbs in them: *el presidente está dispuesto claramente a dimitir* ‘the president is clearly prepared to resign’, not *el presidente está claramente dispuesto a dimitir* (*Libro de estilo*, *ibid.*). This is the usual English order and, despite *El País*, common in Spanish.

### 42.8.2 Adverbials are not left at the end of sentences

**Important:** it follows from the preceding section that English differs from Spanish by constantly putting adverbs and adverb phrases at the end of sentences: ‘I saw that lady who won the lottery **yesterday**’ is a typically irritating English sentence which does not make clear whether you saw her yesterday or she won the lottery yesterday. For the reason given at 42.8.1, Spanish puts ‘yesterday’ close to the verb it refers to: *vi ayer/ayer vi a esa señora que ganó la lotería* means you saw her yesterday. *Vi a esa señora que ganó ayer la lotería* means that she won the lottery yesterday.

This preference for keeping adverbs close to their verb therefore produces the un-English order Verb-Adverbial-Object (adverbials in bold):

<i>Besó <b>fervorosamente</b> la mano de su anfitriona</i>	(S)he kissed his/her hostess's hand fervently
<i>El tribunal fijará <b>discrecionalmente</b> la duración de la fianza</i> (Spanish legal dictionary)	The Court will fix the period of the bail bond at its discretion
<i>Casi siempre <b>a la una</b> seguía en chancas y bata</i> (AM, Mex., dialogue; in Spain <i>las chancas</i> are 'flip-flops' and slippers are <i>las zapatillas</i> )	She was nearly always still in her slippers and dressing-gown/US bathrobe at one o'clock

Note particularly the position of the adverbials in the following sentences (other orders are possible but are not shown here):

<i>Fue inútil que los párrocos advirtieran <b>en los pueblos</b> a las mujeres que sus maridos las abandonarían si llegaba la ley del divorcio</i>	It was no use the parish priests in the villages warning women that their husbands would leave them if the divorce law was introduced
<i>Parece que la habilidad más importante es la de memorizar información para <b>luego</b> escupirla en un examen</i> (Spanish popular press)	It seems the most important skill is memorizing information in order to churn (lit. 'spit') it out later in an examination
<i>Me di cuenta de que había estado <b>antes</b> en aquel sitio</i>	I realized I'd been in that place before
<i>¿Sabes que el presidente Romeo Lucas sufrió <b>ayer</b> un atentado? Estaba en su coche parado en un semáforo cuando <b>desde una bicicleta</b> le arrojaron un diccionario</i> (joke about an illiterate Guatemalan dictator)	Do you know someone made an attempt on President Romeo Lucas's life yesterday? He was waiting in his car at some traffic lights when they threw a dictionary at him from a bicycle

**(1) Important:** adverbs of time are very often put before adverbials of place: 'we went to grandma's house yesterday' = *ayer fuimos/fuimos ayer a casa de la abuela*.

For further remarks about the position of adverbials see 42.5 and 35.3.8.

## 42.9 Word order not explainable by sentence structure

Even when all the preceding more or less codifiable rules are taken into account, there are many cases in which Spanish word order differs from that of English due to factors that reflect the information content of the sentence. It is not easy to explain these factors in grammar books which necessarily quote fragments of language out of context.

One example of this is the contrast between *ha llegado el cartero* and *el cartero ha llegado* 'the postman's arrived' (see 42.9.2). Another example is *y no crea que a mi niño le voy a contar la historia* (ES, Mex., dialogue), 'and don't think that I'm going to tell the story to my child', which could have been equally well expressed *y no crea que le voy a contar la historia a mi niño*. Likewise, *es un poco lento, pero tonto no es* 'he's a bit slow, but he's no fool' is the same – with a difference of emphasis – as *es un poco lento pero no es tonto*.



As was stated at 42.1.2, English constantly uses stress and intonation to make clear these differences whereas Spanish prefers to use variations of word order.

### 42.9.1 The topic of a sentence tends to come first

Utterances naturally consist of a 'topic' or 'theme' – something we want to say something about – and a 'comment' – what we say *about* the topic. In simple declarative sentences, i.e. ones which are neither questions nor orders, the subject of the main verb is usually also the topic of the sentence: '**Marta** loves strawberry yoghurt' is about Marta, '**polar bears** have amazingly thick fur' is about polar bears, and the normal order in such sentences in both English and Spanish is topic – comment: *Marta adora el yogur de fresa, los osos polares tienen un pelaje extraordinariamente espeso.*

But the topic need not necessarily be the subject of the verb. It may be some adverbial phrase, as in *los viernes suelo jugar al bridge* '**on Fridays** I usually play bridge'; or it may be the direct object of a transitive verb or the predicate of a verb like 'to be', as in the emotional assertions *caracoles no como* '**snails** I'm not eating!', *muy seguro estás tú de ti mismo* 'you're very sure of yourself!'

As the NGLE 40.2k says, topics rarely come at the end of a sentence in Spanish. This makes sentences like ? *sabe mucho de informática y contabilidad* Pilar '(as for) Pilar, she knows a lot about computing and accounting' infrequent in Spanish: *(en cuanto a) Pilar sabe mucho de informática y contabilidad.*

Another feature not found in Spanish is the topicalization of subject pronouns of verbs by repeating them. This occurs in English and is common in French: 'me, I hate mustard', *moi, je déteste la moutarde*, simply *yo odio la mostaza*, or *yo la mostaza la odio*, or *en cuanto a mí, odio la mostaza*. As explained at 12.2.1, subject pronouns like *yo, tú, él* are themselves already stressed so they usually do not need further emphasis: *conduzco* means 'I drive', *yo conduzco* means 'I drive'.

In the following sentences, the topic has been focused by shifting it to the head of the sentence or clause in a way often unfamiliar to English speakers (topics in bold):

*¡De dinero no quiero volver a oír ni una palabra!*

About money I don't want to hear another word!

*Lo de la bomba no me lo trago* (MVLI, Pe., dialogue)

I don't swallow (i.e. 'believe') that business about the bomb

*Millonaria no soy, tendré que hacer sacrificios para costearle sus estudios* (ES, Mex., dialogue)

I'm not a millionaire, I'll have to make sacrifices to pay for his studies

*Americano vino uno solamente* (Cuban TV interview)

As for Americans, only one came

*Como en la foto de la boda no creo que yo vuelva a estar*

I don't think I'll be like I was in the wedding photo again

*El capitalismo lo está salvando la clase obrera* (MVM, Sp., dialogue)

As for capitalism, the working class is saving it

*Sombrero no creo que lleve*

As for a hat, I don't think (s)he's wearing one

*Yo recuerdo que, como maestra, reclamaba la más absoluta entrega*

I recall that, as a teacher, she demanded the most absolute commitment

*Ya te digo, Alberto, de eso, no sabe nada ¿Y tú para qué quieres un consejero?*

I tell you Alberto knows nothing about that And what do you want a counsellor for?

(AM, Mex., dialogue)

*Creo que algo había escuchado* (MC, Mex. dialogue)

I think I had heard something

*Eso sí que no lo pude soportar* (ES, Mex. dialogue)

I really couldn't put up with that!

(1) When a direct or indirect object is placed before the verb, it is almost always resumed or echoed by a ‘redundant’ pronoun: *al verano inglés debían llamarlo estación de las lluvias* ‘the English summer ought to be called the rainy season’, *a José no le dije nada* ‘I didn’t say anything to José’. See 14.10 for details and exceptions. Direct objects that are not defined by an article or some other word are not echoed: *dinero no tengo* ‘I’ve no money’, *risa me das tú* ‘you make me laugh’.

(2) One of the functions of the passive with *ser* is to make the direct object of the equivalent active sentence into a topic by putting it at the head of the utterance: *Miguel fue atropellado por el coche* ‘Miguel was run over by the car’ is more likely than *?el coche atropelló a Miguel ?* ‘the car ran over Miguel’ which answers the question ‘what did the car do?’, which is obviously less important than what happened to Miguel.

Since informal Spanish generally avoids the passive with *ser*, placing the direct object at the head of the sentence is a good way of producing the same effect as a passive: *a Miguel lo/le atropelló el coche*.

(3) Latin-American headline writers often exploit the fact that the topic of an utterance can be dramatically focused by putting it first: *a tres coches quemaron* (Colombian headline) ‘three cars burnt’, *ingeniero buscamos* (advert., Ven.) ‘engineer sought’, *signada por muchos altibajos estuvo la actividad bursátil* (headline in *La Nación*, Arg., *signada = caracterizada* in Spain) ‘Stock Exchange activity marked by many rises and falls’, *gigantesco tiburón de una especie desconocida capturó un pesquero frente a las costas del Chuy* (*El País*, Ur.) ‘giant shark of unknown species caught by fishing boat off Chuy coast’, *aumentan fenómenos extremos ante cambio climático* (*La Jornada*, Mex.) ‘extreme [weather] phenomena increase as a result of climate change’. This word order often sounds strange to Spaniards.

(4) The topic may be identified by some phrase like *en cuanto a* ‘as for’, *con respecto a* ‘with regard to’, *en/por lo que se refiere a . . .* ‘with reference to’, ‘as far as . . . is concerned’, e.g. *por lo que se refiere a Pedro, no lo/le he visto* ‘as far as Pedro’s concerned, I haven’t seen him’. Use of such phrases is more common in written language: informally one might say *a Pedro no lo/le he visto*.

### 42.9.2 *El profesor viene or Viene el profesor?*

This section deals with sentences that do not have a direct object.

Context is all-important in the following discussion. In this example, we are watching two persons, Martín and Julia, and one of them has said something. Consider the following three possible questions:

- (a) ‘Who spoke?’ *¿Quién ha hablado?* (assuming we don’t know who spoke)
- (b) ‘What did Martín do?’ *¿Qué ha hecho Martín?* (assuming we know Martín did something)
- (c) ‘What happened?’ *¿Qué ha pasado?* (assuming we simply know something happened but have no idea what)

(a) asks for information about the subject of the verb. (b) asks for information about what Martín did. Question (c) simply asks what happened.

In (a) the new information in the answer is Martín, and it is likely to come after the verb in Spanish, although we are more likely to drop the old information altogether: *(ha hablado) Martín*. The answer *?Martín ha hablado* sounds quite wrong unless we heavily stress *Martín*, just as stressing ‘spoke’ would sound wrong in English.

In (b) ‘spoke’ is the new information in the answer, so it tends to come last and, again, we are likely to drop the old information: *(Martín) ha hablado*; *?ha hablado Martín* sounds wrong, just as stressing Martín would sound wrong in English.

In (c) all the information is new – assuming we heard an unidentified noise and don't know who made it – so the subject is likely to come first and none of the information is dropped: *Martín ha hablado*, although we could emphasize Martín – *ha hablado Martín*. Alternatively we might say *alguien ha hablado* 'someone spoke'.

This principle explains the word order of the following sentences in which the words in bold are 'new' information which the speaker wants to emphasize:

*Viene **la democracia y la justicia** para el pueblo de Honduras (La Prensa, Hon.)*

*—¿Por qué **estáis tan contentos**? —Ha vuelto a casa **el perro***

*¡Ojo! Viene **la policía***

*Pasó la **mañana de trabajo**; pasó la **hora de un almuerzo demasiado largo** (CF, Mexico)*

Democracy and justice are coming for the people of Honduras

'Why are you so pleased?' 'The dog's come back home'

Watch out! The police are coming!

The morning of work ended; the excessively long lunch hour ended

However, as we have seen, this word order can often be over-ridden by stress and intonation, so *el perro ha vuelto a casa*, *la policía viene ahora* in which the bold words are emphasized, sound normal. As a result, word order in many cases seems fairly arbitrary, for example in these sentences, where the subjects in bold could have come before or after the verb with little detectable stylistic effect: . . . *la primera vez que **eso** ocurrió en un gobierno estatal en décadas* (JV, Mex.) 'the first time that had happened in a state government in decades', *brillaban **algunas estrellas** en el cielo azul añil* (MVLI, Pe.) 'a few stars were shining in the indigo blue sky', *acababa de entrar **el verano** y hacía mucho calor* (ES, Mex., dialogue) 'Summer had just begun and it was very hot', *si un día se diese la noticia de que **Enric Marco** ha muerto, la plaza de Cataluña se quedaría pequeña para acoger a la gente que iría a llorarlo* (JC, Sp., dialogue) 'if the news broke one day that Enric Marco had died, the Plaza de Cataluña wouldn't be room enough for the people who'd come to mourn (lit. 'weep for') him'.

Verb-Subject word order in this type of sentence was more common in the past than now. Beginning a paragraph with *volvió Jacinta al comedor, y el último cuento que trajo fue este . . .* (Galdós, Sp., late nineteenth century) 'Jacinta returned to the dining room, and the latest story that she brought with her was this . . .' sounds quite literary and would now almost certainly be written *Jacinta volvió al comedor, y . . .*

(1) Nouns preceded by an indefinite article or by no article at all are likely to constitute new information: *ha ocurrido **un error*** 'an error has occurred', *ha llamado **un amigo de Raúl*** 'a friend of Raúl's has called', *caía **mucha nieve*** 'a lot of snow was falling'. That *un error*, *un amigo de Raúl* and *nieve* are new information is demonstrated by the bizarre effect of stressing 'occurred', 'has called' or 'was falling' in the English translations'.

### 42.9.3 Word order in sentences other than questions that include direct objects

Bearing in mind the points previously raised in this chapter, a sentence consisting of a subject, verb and direct object can therefore theoretically appear in Spanish in the following forms:

(a) *Ana leyó el libro*

Subject-Verb-Direct Object

(b) *El libro lo leyó Ana*

Direct Object-(redundant pronoun)-Verb-Subject

(c) *El libro Ana lo leyó*

Direct Object-Subject-(redundant pronoun)-Verb

**(d)** *Leyó Ana el libro*

Verb-Subject-Direct Object

**(e)** *Leyó el libro Ana*

Verb-Direct Object-Subject

Of these possibilities, only the first three are at all common in ordinary language. Sentences **(d)** and **(e)** are only found in archaic or flowery literary styles unless they are questions, as in *¿leyó Ana el libro?*, *¿leyó el libro Ana?* 'did Ana read the book?'

**(a)** is a neutral word order corresponding to an English sentence spoken with equal emphasis on 'Ana' and 'book'. Since, in neutral sentences, the subject of the verb tends naturally to be the topic, Subject-Verb-Object order is normal.

**(b)** clearly makes the direct object, the book, into the topic of the sentence, and then adds the comment about what Ana did to it: 'as for the book, Ana read it'. It also may focus Ana: 'Ana (not someone else) read the book'. Another example: . . . *porque todo eso lo supo en el confesionario* (GZ, Mex., dialogue) 'because he learned about *all that* in the confessional', where *todo eso* is the topic. See 14.10.1 for the use of the redundant pronoun here. This order creates the same effect as the passive with *ser*, i.e. *el libro fue leído por Ana*, which is less natural in spoken Spanish.

**(c)** makes Ana into the topic of the sentence and also focuses the direct+ object – the book. It therefore means something like 'as for Ana, she read the book'.

# 43 Diminutive, augmentative and pejorative suffixes

This chapter discusses:

- Diminutive suffixes like *-ito*, *-illo*, *ín*, etc. (Section 43.2)
- Augmentative suffixes like *-ón*, *-azo*, *-ote*, *-udo* (Section 43.3)
- Pejorative suffixes like *-aco*, *-acho*, *-ajo*, *-uco*, *-ucho*, etc. (Section 43.4)

## 43.1 General

There are numerous Spanish affective suffixes that alter the emotional tone of a word, e.g. *-ito*, *-illo*, *-ón*, *-ote*, *-azo*, *-aco*, *-ejo*, etc. Their effect is unpredictable. Sometimes they simply create new words without any emotional colouring at all: *ventana* = 'window', *ventanilla* = 'window of a vehicle' among other things; *la caja* = 'box', *el cajón* = 'drawer' (in furniture); *el coche* means 'car' in Spain, but *el cochecito*, as well as being the diminutive of 'car', also means 'baby pram'/'baby carriage'; *el carro* is 'car' in Mexico and other Latin-American countries, but *el carrito* is a supermarket or baggage trolley. These words must be learned separately.

Often these suffixes add an emotional shade to a word or phrase, e.g. affection, contempt, irony, repugnance, and they may sound affected, effeminate, childish or offensive if used wrongly. Learners are therefore advised not to experiment with them, since inexpert use may produce non-words or unexpected effects: *cocinita* is a small *cocina* or kitchen, but *\*dormitorio* from *dormitorio* 'bedroom' is not Spanish; *figura* = 'figure'/'shape', *figurín* means, among other things, 'fashion magazine'.

In view of this and the fact that the forms and frequency of the suffixes differ widely from place to place – they are used much less in Argentina than in Mexico – and also in some regions seem to be more common in women's speech than men's, the following account is very condensed. Except where indicated, the following remarks apply to educated usage in central Spain, and they should be checked against the speech habits of other regions and of the Latin-American republics.

## 43.2 Diminutive suffixes

Diminutive suffixes have various uses, described at 43.2.1–6. A few words must be said about their relationship with the adjective *pequeño*. The following remarks apply to spoken rather than to formal written Spanish.

*Pequeño* means 'small', but it does not usually have the emotional overtones of the English word 'little' or the French *petit*. *Pequeño* is used:

(a) to mean 'slight'/'unimportant' with abstract nouns: *un pequeño problema* 'a slight problem' (familiarily also *un problemita/problemitilla*), *esas pequeñas complicaciones que mencionamos* 'those slight complications that we mentioned', *España era una pequeña potencia* 'Spain was a small/unimportant power'.

(b) To mean 'small' as opposed to 'large' without any warm overtones or implications of 'cute': *un ratón es más pequeño que una rata* 'a mouse is smaller than a rat', *una pequeña cantidad de azufre* 'a small quantity of sulphur', *un niño pequeño* 'a small child', *no podía manejar ni siquiera esa pequeña empresa* (AH, Mex.) 'she wasn't even able to run that small business'.

The English combination of 'little' followed by a noun is, in spoken Spanish, very often expressed by a diminutive. One says *esta casa es pequeña* but, colloquially, *una casita* for a 'little house'; *un perrito* rather than *un pequeño perro* 'a little dog', *un pajarito* rather than *un pequeño pájaro* 'a little bird': . . . *desde la primera vez que la vio leyendo bajo los árboles del parquecito* (GGM, Col.) 'since the first time he had seen her reading under the trees in the little park', *conozco un barecito ahí en la calle del Pez* (JMa, Sp., dialogue). 'I know a little bar nearby in Pez street', *sacó un kleenex de una bolsita de plástico* (MS, Mex.) 'he took a tissue out of a little plastic bag'. In more formal styles one might have said *el pequeño parque*, *un pequeño bar*, *una pequeña bolsa*.

(1) *Chico*, or familiarly *chiquito*, is often used colloquially for *pequeño*, above all in Latin America, but it does not come before nouns: *España era bonita pero chica y en las playas el agua estaba demasiado fría* (ES. Mex., dialogue) 'Spain was pretty but small and the water on the beaches was too cold', *no faltará quien lo entere, en este mundo tan chiquito* (CF, Mex., dialogue. Spain *quien se lo diga* or *quien le informe*) 'there's bound to be someone in this tiny world who'll tell him'.

(2) Sometimes abbreviations are used in familiar speech instead of suffixes, e.g. *cole* from *colegio* 'school', *la tele* from *televisión*, *la peli* for *la película* 'film', etc. In Spain a little child is often affectionately called *el chiquitín*, *el nene*, *el pequeño*, *el pequeñín* or even *el peque*.

### 43.2.1 Formation of the diminutive

*-ito* is the most common diminutive suffix throughout the Hispanic world. *-illo* is used especially in southern Spain, while *-ico*, *-iño* and *-ín* have a north-western Spanish flavour. The usual form is shown first, with variant forms in brackets:

<i>-ito</i> ( <i>-cito</i> , <i>-ecito</i> )	<i>-ico</i> ( <i>-cico</i> , <i>-ecico</i> )	<i>-ín</i>
<i>-ete</i> ( <i>-cete</i> , <i>-ecete</i> )	<i>-illo</i> ( <i>-cillo</i> , <i>-ecillo</i> )	<i>-iño</i>
		<i>-uelo</i> ( <i>-zuelo</i> , <i>-ezuelo</i> )

All are marked for gender in the usual way: for the feminine a final vowel is replaced by *-a*; *-ín* makes its feminine *-ina*.

(1) In Spain words of more than one syllable ending in *-n* or *-r*, and words ending in *-e* or having the diphthong *-ie* or *-ue* in their first syllable, usually take the form in *-c-*. The following forms were generated spontaneously by informants from Spain, but not all are guaranteed to be in common use:

<i>cajón</i> drawer: <i>cajoncito</i>	<i>nieto</i> grandson: <i>nietecito</i>	<i>siesta</i> afternoon nap: <i>siestecita</i>
<i>cofre</i> case/box: <i>cofrecito</i>	<i>padre</i> father: <i>padrecito</i>	<i>viejo/vieja</i> old man/woman
<i>madre</i> mother: <i>madrecita</i>	<i>pedra</i> stone: <i>pedrecita</i>	<i>viejecito/viejecita</i>
<i>mayor</i> bigger: <i>mayorcito</i>	<i>puente</i> bridge: <i>puentecito</i>	
<i>mujer</i> woman: <i>mujercita</i>	<i>puerta</i> door: <i>puertecita</i>	

But note *un café* 'a coffee' > *un cafecito* or *cafetito* or *cafelito*. Also *el alfiler* > *alfilerito* 'pin', *la mano* > *la manita/la manecita* 'hand' (*la manito*, is not uncommon in Latin America).

In Latin America words containing *ie* or *ue* tend to make their diminutive regularly, i.e. *viejito/viejita*, *siesta/siestita*, *puerta/puertita*, *después de un sueñito de 50 o de 100 años* (*La Jornada*, Mex.) 'after a sleep lasting 50 or 100 years', *como una piedrita en el zapato* (*La Nación*, Arg.) 'like a stone

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in one's shoe', *donde había nacido su otro nietito* (El Comercio, Pe.) 'where his other grandson had been born'.

(2) Words of one syllable commonly take forms in *-ec-*, at least in Spain:

<i>flor</i> flower <i>florecita</i>	<i>rey</i> king <i>reyecito</i>	<i>tos</i> cough <i>tosecilla/tosecita</i>
<i>pan</i> bread <i>panecillo</i> bread roll	<i>sol</i> sun <i>solecillo/solecito</i>	<i>voz</i> voice <i>vocecita/vocecilla</i>
<i>pez</i> fish <i>pececito/pececillo</i>		

But note the following Latin-American forms: *tiene el vestido a florcitas verdes* (MP, Arg., dialogue; Spain *florechitas*) 'she's got the dress with green flowers', *y el solcito está lindo* (MB, Ur., dialogue) 'and the sun's lovely', *piecillo/piecito* from *el pie* 'foot', usually *piecillo/piecito* in Spain.

(3) Words ending in an unaccented vowel or diphthong lose their final vowel, but if the vowel is accented it may be preserved and its accent transferred to the *i* of *-ito*:

<i>armario</i> wardrobe <i>armarito</i>	<i>papá</i> daddy <i>papaíto</i> or <i>papito</i>
<i>estatua</i> statue <i>estatuilla</i>	<i>silla</i> chair <i>sillita</i>
<i>mamá</i> mummy <i>mamaíta</i>	<i>tío/tía</i> uncle/aunt <i>tiíto/tiíta</i>
or <i>mamita</i>	

(4) Diminutive suffixes are not added – at least in Spain and in most of Latin America – to nouns of more than one syllable ending in *-d* like *la ciudad* 'city', *el césped* 'lawn'.

(5) Note that diphthongs in a word are not modified when these suffixes are added: *vuelta* > *vueltecita* 'a walk' > 'a short walk', not *\*voltecita*. However, *calentito*, from *caliente*, is used in Spain for 'nice and hot', Lat. Am. *calientito*.

### 43.2.2 Uses of the diminutive suffix *-ito*

The main effects of this suffix are:

(a) To give a friendly tone to a statement:

This very common use of the diminutive (and not only the suffix *-ito*) may simply give a warm tone to a remark. In a bakery, one might say *deme una barrita de pan* 'give me a loaf of bread', which is merely a friendly equivalent of *deme una barra de pan*. This use of the diminutive does not imply smallness but merely signals the speaker's attitude to the hearer:

<i>Dame un paquetito por ahora</i>	Give me just one packet for now
<i>Tómate un cafelito</i> (J. Ma, Sp., dialogue)	Have/Get a coffee
<i>Me vas a tirar el vaso con el codo. A ver si tenemos más cuidadito . . .</i>	You're going to knock my glass over with your elbow. Let's see if we can have a bit more care . . .
<i>Si quería comprarme ropa o alguna cosita para mi hermana le pedía dinero</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue)	If I wanted to buy clothes or a little something for my sister I asked him for money
<i>Un momentito, por favor</i>	Just a moment, please
<i>¿Alguna cosita más?</i> (often used in shops/stores) (cf. <i>¿Alguna cosa más?</i> )	Would you like anything else?
<i>¿Te puedo coger una almendrita?</i>	Anything else?
	Can I have just one of your almonds?

(b) To modify the meaning of adjectives and adverbs by adding a warm tone or, sometimes, by making them more precise, e.g. *ahora* 'now', *ahorita* (Mexican colloquial) 'right now', *todo* / *todito* 'all' / 'absolutely all':

<i>cerquita de la catedral</i>	just by the cathedral
<i>Ahora mismito se lo sirvo</i>	I'll serve you in just a second
<i>Espéreme tantito, ahorita le seguimos,</i> (ES, Mex., dialogue. Sp. <i>Espéreme</i> <i>un momentito, ahora mismo le seguimos</i> )	Wait for me for a second, we'll follow you right away
<i>Ya eres mayorcito</i>	You're a big boy now
<i>Está gordito/Está gordo</i>	He's put on a bit of weight/He's fat
<i>¡tontito!/¡tonto!</i>	silly!/fool!
<i>Es igualito</i>	It's exactly the same

'Nice' or 'lovely' can be the English equivalent of some adjectival and adverbial diminutives in -ito: *¿un café calentito?* 'a nice cup of hot coffee?', *despacito* 'nice and slow' / 'take it easy'.

(c) To denote endearment or affection: *hermanita* (lit. 'little sister') is often a term of endearment and does not necessarily imply that the sister is younger than the speaker. *Abuelita* 'grandma' is merely an affectionate form for *abuela* 'grandmother':

<i>Vamos, m'hijito</i> (Lat.-Am., Sp.)	Come on son
<i>vamos, hijo mío</i>	
<i>Se ha hecho daño en la patita</i>	It's hurt its paw
<i>¡Pobrecito! ¿Te has caído?</i>	Poor little thing! Did you fall down?
<i>Mi abuelo está muy mal, pobrecito</i>	My grandfather is really sick, poor thing

(d) To denote smallness:

<i>el perro/el perrito</i> dog/little dog	<i>el sillón/el silloncito</i> armchair/little armchair
<i>la puerta/la puertecita</i> door/little door	<i>la botella/la botellita</i> bottle/little bottle

Sometimes the diminutive is reinforced, as in *¿tienes un sobrecito pequeño?* 'Have you got a little envelope?' or — *¿quieres un poco?* — *Solo/Sólo un poquito. No tanto, un poquitín* "'Do you want a bit?" "Just a little bit. Not so much, just a tiny little bit"'.

(e) Occasionally in an ironic way to stress a quality: *¡menuda casita!* 'some house' (looking at a vast mansion), *¡mira el cochecito ese!* 'nice little car!' (pointing at a gold-plated Rolls Royce), *la cerebrita de tu hermana* (from GDLE 8.4) 'that genius of a sister of yours' (*el cerebro* = 'brain'), *¡vaya semanita!* 'what a week!'

### 43.2.3 Diminutive suffix -illo

The suffix -illo is used:

(a) as a diminutive:

<i>pan/panecillo</i>	bread/bread roll
<i>flor/florequilla</i>	flower/little flower

(b) To downgrade the importance of something:

<i>Tengo unas cosillas que hacer</i>	I've got a few little things to do
<i>Ahora solo/sólo queda el jaleíllo de las</i> <i>entradas</i> (jaleo = row, fuss)	All that's left is the business of the entrance tickets



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*Hacía un airecillo agradable*  
*Fuimos a tomar unas cervecitas*  
*el truco/el truquillo*

There was a pleasant breeze  
We went and had a couple of beers  
trick/'knack'

(c) To soften a word that otherwise might sound too offensive:

*mentiroso/mentirosillo*  
*Es un poquillo dejada* (less often *es dejadilla*.  
Dejado = 'careless' / 'sloppy')  
*Tú eres un poquillo comilón* (less often  
*eres comiloncillo*)  
*Es un buen restaurante pero algo carillo*  
*graciosillo*

liar/'fibber'  
She's a bit careless/She doesn't take a  
lot of care  
You eat quite a lot/You sure like your food  
It's a good restaurant but a bit pricey  
funny/'funny guy' (sarcastic tone)

(d) To give an affectionate tone:

*Pero ¿qué haces, chiquilla?*  
*He comprado un cachorrillo/cachorrito*

But what **are** you doing, honey/darling?  
I bought a little puppy

(e) To give a specialized meaning to a word, cf. English 'book'/'booklet'. In some of these cases the diminutive ending has no diminutive function:

*el bolso/el bolsillo* handbag/pocket  
*el palo/el palillo* stick/toothpick  
*la bomba/la bombilla* bomb/light bulb  
*la caja/la cajetilla* box/pack for cigarettes, etc.  
*la cama/la camilla* bed/stretchers  
*la guerra/la guerrilla* war/guerrilla warfare

*la manzana/la manzanilla* apple/camomile  
(also a type of dry sherry)  
*la masa/la masilla* dough/putty  
*la parra/la parrilla* vine/a la parrilla  
grilled/US broiled  
*la vara/la varilla* rod/thin stick, spoke  
(but *la varita mágica* 'magic wand')

(f) To denote a combination of diminutive and pejorative:

*la cultura/la culturilla* culture/smattering  
of culture  
*la mujer/la mujercilla* woman/unimportant  
woman

*listo/listillo* clever/'know-all'

(1) Diminutives in *-illo* are typical of Andalusia but they are also often used elsewhere.

### 43.2.4 Diminutive suffix *-ín*

*-ín* is typical of Asturias, but it is used to express affection in many contexts in the rest of Spain:

*¿Dónde está el chiquitín?*  
*¡chiquirriquitín!*  
*¡mi (niña) chiquitina!* (not *\*mi pequeña niña!*)

Where's baby?/the little one?  
my tiny little thing!  
my little girl!

and also to form new words (note how it may change the gender of the noun to masculine):

*el cerebro/el cerebrín* brain/brainy person  
*la espada/el espadín* sword/dress sword

*la maleta/el maletín* suitcase/briefcase  
*la silla/el sillín* chair/saddle  
*la tesis/la tesina* thesis/dissertation

### 43.2.5 Diminutive suffixes *-uelo*, *-eto*, *-ete*

(a) *-uelo* can denote a combination of diminutive and pejorative:

*el arroyo/el arroyuelo* stream-trickle/rivulet      *la calleja/callejuela* alley/narrow little alley  
*el rey/el reyezuelo* king/petty king/princeling      *tonto/tontuelo* stupid/dumbo(affectionate)

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Examples of augmentative suffixes:

<i>amigo/amigote</i> friend/ 'buddy' (not pejorative)	<i>fácil/facilón</i> easy/ facile
<i>cursi/cursilón</i> affected/ incredibly affected	<i>la ginebra/un ginebrazo</i> gin/ an enormous shot of gin
<i>el coche/el cochazo</i> car/ 'heck of a car'	<i>la palabra/la palabrota</i> word/ swear word
<i>grande/grandote</i> big/ pretty big (not really pejorative)	<i>pedante/pedantón</i> pedantic/ insufferably pedantic
<i>el soltero/el solterón</i> bachelor/ confirmed bachelor	<i>rico/ricachón</i> rich/ stinking rich, 'loaded'

Note that when *-ón* is added to a feminine noun the latter usually becomes masculine: *la cabeza* > *un cabezón* 'head' > 'big head', *noticia* > *notición* 'news item' > 'sensational news item', *una chuleta* 'a meat chop'/'cutlet' > *un chuletón* 'large meat cutlet', *una fortuna* 'a fortune' > *un fortunón* 'an absolute fortune', *la fresa* 'strawberry' > *el fresón* 'large strawberry'.

*-azo* is also much used to form nouns which denote a blow or a flourish with some object:

<i>el aldabón/el aldabonazo</i> door knocker/ thump of a knocker on the door	<i>la bayoneta/el bayonetazo</i> bayonet/ bayonet thrust
<i>el codo/el codazo</i> elbow/ dig with the elbow	<i>el septembrazo</i> the September coup/ revolt

(b) To form an entirely new word. The suffix may then have no connotations of size or awkwardness and may even imply smallness:

<i>la rata/el ratón</i> rat/ mouse (animal or computer*)	<i>el fuego/el fogón</i> fire/ stove
<i>la calle/el callejón</i> street/ alleyway	<i>la cuerda/el cordón</i> string/ shoelace
<i>la cintura/el cinturón</i> waist/ belt	<i>la culebra/el culebrón</i> grass-snake/ soap opera
	<i>la tela/el telón</i> cloth/ theatre curtain

\*In Latin America *el mouse*, plural *los mouses*, is often used for computer mouse.

(1) The suffix *-ón* is quite often used colloquially to form adjectives that usually, but not always, imply something repetitive or excessive, e.g. *contestón* 'always answering back', *coquetón* 'flirtatious', *preguntón* 'always asking questions', *comodón* 'easy-going'/'always seeking the easy way out', *peleón* 'always looking for a fight', *copión* 'copycat', *resultón* 'attractive' (see note 2), *respondón* 'cheeky'/'lippy', *ligón* 'flirtatious'/'constantly trying to "pull" women/men', *tardón* 'slowcoach'/'always late'. The feminine is formed regularly: *preguntona*, *ligona*, etc.

(2) *Resultón* is not easily translated. Applied to people it means something like 'not stunning but nevertheless attractive'. The term *guapetón* means the same applied to males, although *resultón* can be used for both sexes (feminine *resultona*). It can also be applied to non-living things like plays, films, gadgets, recipes as in *recetas fáciles y resultonas* 'easy recipes that do the job/hit the mark'.

## 43.4 Pejorative suffixes

These are not particularly commonly used and the words formed by them should be learned as separate items. Typical suffixes are *-aco*, *-arraco*, *-acho*, *-ajo*, *-astro*, *-uco*, *-ucho*, *-ejo* and a few others. They variously denote ugliness, wretchedness, dirtiness, meanness, etc.

*el hotel/el hotelucho* hotel/dingy hotel, flop house  
*el latín/el latinajo* Latin/horrid Latin word  
*el libro/el libraco* book/boring tome  
*el pájaro/el pajarraco* bird/sinister, unpleasant bird

*el poeta/el poetastro* poet/rhymer/poetaster  
*el pueblo/el poblacho* village/'dump', squalid village, dead-end town  
*la casa/la casucha* house/hovel  
*la palabra/la palabreja* word/horrible word  
*la ventana/el ventanuco* window/tiny window

(1) Some of these suffixes can be used affectionately: *¿cómo va a poder estudiar con tres pequeñas como esas/ésas?* 'how is she going to be able to study with three little terrors (i.e. little girls) like them?'

The terms *la madrastra* 'stepmother', *el padrastro* 'stepfather' are not pejorative.

## 43.5 The suffix *-ata*

This suffix is quite common in familiar language among young people in Spain. Its effect is unpredictable: it may make a word sound popular, humorous or slangy, or it may simply be pejorative:

*el bocadillo/el bocata*  
*el cuba libre/el cubata*  
*el ordenador/el ordenata*

*socialista/el or la sociata*  
*la droga/el or la drogata*  
*ciego/cegata*

sandwich (from a baguette)  
 Cuba libre (the drink)  
 computer. The *-ata* form is humorous or slang  
 socialist/'pinko', 'lefty'  
 drug/'junkie', 'drug addict'  
 blind/short-sighted (colloquial)

# 44 Spelling, accent rules, punctuation and word division

This chapter discusses the following points:

- Alphabet and spelling (Section 44.1)
- Use of the written accent (Section 44.2)
- Upper- and lower-case letters (Section 44.3)
- Punctuation (Section 44.4)
- Division of words (Section 44.5)

For the phonetic symbols used in this chapter see the Preface.

## 44.1 Spelling

### 44.1.1 The Academy's spelling rules

The spelling rules of modern Spanish are laid down by the Academy in the *Nuevas normas de prosodia y ortografía* which came into official use in January 1959. This introduced several important changes, but more than 55 years later some pre-1959 spellings are still used by some editors and publishers. A new set of spelling rules appeared in 2010. It reaffirms the rules of 1959 with some additions which are mentioned at 44.2.4.

Among the more striking innovations of 1959 were the removal of the accent from the words *fui*, *fue*, *vi*, *dio*, *vio*, its adoption in words like *búho*, *rehúso*, *reúne*, *ahínca*, *aísla*, *prohíbe* (for the verbs affected see 16.9.1), and the decision to remove the accent from the pronouns *éste*, *ése* and *aquél* (see 7.3) and from the word *sólo* = 'only' (see 10.15).

### 44.1.2 The Spanish alphabet

Until 1994, the Spanish alphabet had 29 letters since the signs *ch* and *ll* were treated as separate single letters: as a result in alphabetical lists *mancha* followed *mancornas* and *collado* followed *colza*, etc. This was inconvenient for computerized sorting and out of line with other languages that use the Latin alphabet, so in April 1994 the tenth Conference of Academies of the Spanish Language voted to abolish *ch* and *ll* as separate letters. The Spanish alphabet therefore now has 27 letters. The names used in Spain and recommended by the Academy are:

a <i>a</i>	h <i>hache</i>	ñ <i>eñe</i>	u <i>u</i>
b <i>be</i>	i <i>i</i>	o <i>o</i>	v <i>uve</i>
c <i>ce</i>	j <i>jota</i>	p <i>pe</i>	w <i>uve doble</i>
d <i>de</i>	k <i>ka</i>	q <i>cu</i>	x <i>equis</i>
e <i>e</i>	l <i>ele</i>	r <i>erre</i>	y <i>ye</i> (formerly <i>i griega</i> )
f <i>efe</i>	m <i>eme</i>	s <i>ese</i>	z <i>zeta</i>
g <i>ge</i>	n <i>ene</i>	t <i>te</i>	

Double *r* (normally called *erre doble*) is a separate sound (rolled or trilled ‘r’), but it is not treated as a separate letter of the alphabet.

(1) The names of *b*, *v*, *w*, *y* and *z* vary from country to country. *B* may be called *be*, *be alta* or *be larga*. *V* may be called *ve* (common in Latin America) or *uve* (normal in Spain); it may also be called *ve baja* or *ve corta* in Latin America since *v* and *b* sound the same in Spanish. *W* may be *uve doble*, *doble uve*, *ve doble* or *doble ve*. *Y* is still usually called *i griega* although the Academy prefers *ye*. *Z* may be *zeta* (preferred by the Academy), *zed*, *ceta* or *ceda*.

(2) The Academy insists that accents should always be written on capital letters, a rule that is often broken because it creates awkwardly tall letters.

(3) Letters of the alphabet are all feminine – *la cu*, *la uve* – and one says *la/una a* and *la/una hache*, despite the rule that singular feminine words beginning with a stressed *a* sound require the articles *el/un*, cf. *el/un arma* (fem.) ‘the/a weapon’. See 3.1.2 for discussion.

(4) For the Academy’s recently recommended spellings of the words traditionally written *truhán*, *guión*, *crié*, *crió*, *frió*, *guié*, *guió* and similar words, see 44.2.4.

### 44.1.3 Relationship between sounds and letters

Spanish spelling is much more logical than French or English but not entirely rational. Basically, one sound corresponds to one letter except in the following cases:

#### **B and V**

*B* and *v* sound exactly the same and are pronounced as a voiced bilabial fricative [β], or like the English *b* after *n* or *m* or after a pause. The English sound [v] as in ‘vat’ does not exist in Spanish but English-speakers often wrongly distinguish *b* from *v* in pronunciation. For this reason they usually do not confuse these letters in writing.

Native speakers who are bad spellers make blunders like *tubo* for *tuvo* [tú-βo] ‘had’, *Premio \*Nóvel* for *Premio Nóbel* [pré-myó-nó-βel] ‘Nobel Prize’, *\*el revelde* for *el rebelde* ‘the rebel’, mistakes which are at least the sign of a correct pronunciation.

#### **C and Z**

*Z* is pronounced [θ] (like the *th* of ‘think’) in standard European Spanish, like the *s* of ‘sit’ throughout Latin America, in southern Spain and in the Canary Islands. The sound [θ] – as it would be pronounced in Spain – is almost always written *c* before *i* or *e*: *cebra* [θé-βra/sé-βra] ‘zebra’, *hacer* [a-θér/a-sér] ‘to do/make’, *nación* [na-θyón/na-syón] ‘nation’. For this reason, a verb like *realizar* ‘attain’/‘achieve’/‘bring about’ undergoes spelling changes: *realizo*, *realice*, *realicé*, *realizó*, etc. See 16.4 for this and other spelling rules in the verb system.

*Z* appears before *e* or *i* only in a few words: *el eczema* (or *el eccema*) ‘eczema’, *la enzima* ‘enzyme’, *zeta* ‘zed’/US ‘zee’, *Nueva Zelanda* (in Latin America *Nueva Zelandia*) ‘New Zealand’, *zigzag* (plural *zigzags*), *Zimbabue*, *zinc*, *zipizape* ‘rumpus’/‘fuss’/‘noisy quarrel’.

Spelling in Latin America is therefore more troublesome than in Spain since pairs of words like *haz* ‘do’ and *as* ‘ace’, *ves* ‘you see’ and *vez* ‘time’ (as in ‘three times’), *Sena* ‘the river Seine’ and *cena* ‘supper’ sound the same.

## C, Qu and K

The sound of *c* in *cama* [k] is written *qu* before *e* and *i*: *querer* [ke-rér] ‘to want’, *quiso* [kí-so] ‘(s)he wanted’, *saqué* [sa-ké] ‘I took out’ (first-person preterite of *sacar*), etc. The letter *k* is therefore not needed in Spanish and is found only in foreign words, for example measurements preceded by *kilo-* and in such words as *kantiano* ‘Kantian’, *el anorak*, *el karaoke*, *el kiwi* [el-kí-βi] ‘kiwi’/‘kiwi fruit’, *Kuwait* [ku-βáyɪt], *búnker* [bún-ker], etc. In the word *okupa* ‘squatter’ the unorthodox *k* suggests an alternative lifestyle.

The sound [kw] should always be written *cu*, e.g. *cuestión* [kwes-tyón] ‘issue’ (*la pregunta* = a question one asks), *cuáquero* [kwá-ke-ro] ‘Quaker’. In 2010, the Academy recommended the following spellings: *cuark* ‘quark’, *cuásar* ‘quasar’, *cuórum* ‘quorum’.

## G, Gu- and Gü-

The sound of *g* in *tengo*, *hago* is written *gu* before *e* and *i*: *ruegue* [rrwé-ye] present subjunctive of *rogar* ‘to request’, *la guirnalda* [la-γir-nál-da] ‘wreath’/‘garland’. The silent *u* in these words shows that the *g* is not pronounced like Spanish *j* [χ].

The syllables pronounced [gwe] and [gwi] are written *güe* and *güi*, e.g. *lingüístico* [lin-gwís-ti-ko], *el desagüe* [el-de-sá-γwe] ‘drainage’/‘water outlet’, *averigüe* [a-βe-rí-γwe] present subjunctive of *averiguar* ‘to check’, *nicaragüense* [ni-ka-ra-γwén-se] ‘Nicaraguan’, *el pingüino* [el-pin-gwí-no] ‘penguin’. This is the only use of the dieresis in the modern language.

## H

*H* is always silent except in some rural dialects, but it is common in writing, where it is merely a burden on the memory. *H* had one useful function in the past: it showed that two vowels separated by *h* did not form a diphthong, as in words like *prohibe* [pro-í-βe] ‘prohibits’ or *buho* [bú-o] ‘owl’. The Academy abolished this rule in 1959, so one must now write *prohíbe*, *búho*, *rehíla*, *la retahíla*, etc. This recommendation is now usually followed everywhere, at least in print.

The sound [w] at the beginning of a syllable is spelt *hu*: *huele* [wé-le] ‘it smells’, *ahuecar* [a-we-kár] ‘to hollow out’, *Náhuatl* [ná-watl] ‘Nahuatl’ (a native American language of Mexico), etc.

## J

The sound [χ] (like *ch* in Scottish ‘loch’) is always written *j* before *a*, *o* and *u*, and is usually written *g* before *e* and *i*: *general* [xe-ne-rál], *Gibraltar* [xi-βral-tár], *rige* [rrí-xe] ‘he/she/it rules’, *rugir* [rru-χír] ‘to roar’, etc. There are fairly numerous exceptions to the latter rule, e.g. irregular preterite and imperfect subjunctive forms of the type *dije*/*dijiste*/*dijeron*/*dijera(n)*/*dijese(n)* ‘said’, *traje*/*trajiste*/*trajeron*/*trajera(n)* ‘brought’, and of all verbs whose infinitive ends in *-ducir* (see 16.11.37), and many other words, e.g.:

*la bujía* spark plug  
*crujir* to rustle/to crackle  
*dejé* I left behind (from  
*dejar*)  
*el equipaje* luggage  
*el garaje* garage  
*la injerencia* meddling/  
interference

*la jeringa* syringe  
*el jersey* jersey  
*Jesús* Jesus  
*Jiménez* (a family name,  
also *Giménez*)  
*la jirafa* giraffe

*el paisaje* landscape  
*el peaje* toll (on a road  
or bridge)  
*tejer* to weave  
*el traje* suit  
*el ultraje* outrage

**Ll**

*Ll* is properly a palatalized *l* [ʎ], but it is nowadays pronounced like the letter *y* by many speakers, although not everyone approves of this tendency, called *el yeísmo*. Poor spellers sometimes make mistakes like *\*cullo* for *cuyo* ‘whose’, *\*vállase* for *váyase* ‘go away’, and it is much better to pronounce it *y* than to pronounce it like the *lli* of ‘million’, which is written *li* in Spanish: *polio* [pó-ljo] ‘polio’ (the illness) and *pollo* [pó-ʎo] ‘chicken (for eating)’ sound quite different. In much of Argentina *ll* and consonantal *y* are pronounced like the *s* in ‘measure’.

**M**

*M* is often pronounced *n* at the end of words by many, though not by all speakers: *el álbum* = [e-lál-βun] or [e-lál-βum] ‘album’, *el referéndum* = [el-rre-fe-rén-dun] ‘referendum’, *el ultimátum* = [e-lul-ti-má-tun] ‘ultimatum’.

**N**

*N* is pronounced *m* before *b*, *v* and *p*: *en Barcelona* = [em-bar-θe-ló-na/em-bar-se-ló-na] ‘in Barcelona’, *invitar* = [im-bi-tár] ‘to invite’, *en París* = [em-pa-rís] ‘in Paris’. It is pronounced [ŋ] (like *ng* in American and Southern British ‘thing’) before *q*, hard *c*, [χ], hard *g* and *k*: *inglés* [iŋ-glés], *monje* [món-ʎe] ‘monk’, *en cambio* [eŋ-kám-byo], *sin querer* [siŋ-ke-rér], *cien kilos* [θyeŋ-kí-los]/[syen-kí-los].

**P**

The *p* in *septiembre* ‘September’ and *séptimo* ‘seventh’ is sometimes silent (but not in Mexico and usually not in Spain) and may be dropped in writing according to the Academy. But many, including *El País*, find the forms *setiembre*, *sétimo* unsightly, so the spelling with *p* is more common and the Academy admits that ‘educated usage’ prefers them.

**Ps, Mn, Gn**

*Ps*, *mn* and *gn* at the beginning of words are pronounced *s*, *m* and *n* and may, since the Academy’s reform of 1959, be spelt simply *s-* and *n-*. But most people, including *El País Libro de estilo* 2014, item ‘psico-’, cannot bring themselves to write *la sicología* for *la psicología* ‘psychology’ or *la siquiatria* for *la psiquiatria* ‘psychiatry’, and very few would write *nemónico* for *mnemónico* ‘mnemonic’, *la nosis* or *nóstico* for *la gnosis*, *gnóstico* ‘gnosis’, ‘gnostic’. The older spellings *ps-*, *gn-*, *mn-* are still preferred, even by the Academy itself (cf. DPD p. 480). *El seudónimo* ‘pseudonym’ is, however, universally used and forms like *sicoanálisis*, *siquiatra*, *sicología* are used in the Latin America media.

**R and Rr**

*R* and *rr* represent a flapped *r* [ɾ] and a rolled (trilled) *r* [rr] respectively, and in a few words they indicate a difference of meaning, e.g. *pero* [pé-ro] ‘but’, *perro* [pé-rro] ‘dog’; *caro* [ká-ro] ‘dear’, *carro* [ká-rro] ‘car’/‘cart’; *enteró* [en-te-ró] ‘(s)he informed’, *enterró* [en-te-rró] ‘(s)he buried’.

But *r* is pronounced like *rr* (rolled/trilled) when it is the first letter in a word, e.g. *Roma* [rró-ma], *la ropa* [la-rró-pa] ‘clothes’, or when it occurs after *s*, *n* or *l*: *Israel* [is-rra-él], *la sonrisa* [la-son-rrí-sa] ‘smile’, *alrededor* [al-rre-ðe-ðór] ‘around’.

When a prefix ending in a vowel is added to a word beginning with *r*, the *r* is doubled in writing and is therefore rolled in speech: *infra+rojo* = *infrarrojo* ‘infra-red’, *contra+revolucionario*



= *contrarrevolucionario* 'counter-revolutionary', *anti+republicano* = *antirrepublicano* 'anti-Republican'. Such words are not spelt with a hyphen in Spanish.

## Re-

If the prefix *re-* is added to a word beginning with *e* one of the *es* may be dropped in writing: *re + emplazo* > *reemplazo* or *reemplazo* 'replacement', *re + embolso* > *reembolso* or *reembolso* 'reimbursement'. The new spelling is seen, but not universally, in the Latin-American media, but the spelling with *ree-* is much more usual in Spain. The Academy's *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* recommends retaining the double vowels. Some verbs, e.g. *reeligir* 'to re-elect' and *reenviar* 'to forward' (emails, post, etc.) seem never to be spelt with a single *e*.

## X

In Spain, *x* (*equis*) is often pronounced *s* before a consonant: *extender* = [es-ten-dér] 'extend', *el extracto*, = [e-les-trák-to] 'extract', etc. Seco (1998, 459), rejects the pronunciation of *x* as [ks] in this position as 'affected', but Latin Americans insist on it, and it is spreading in Spain. For the pronunciation and spelling of place names like *México*, *mexicano*, *Oaxaca*, *Texas*, *Xcaret*, see 5.7.1, note 4.

The pronunciation [ks] is normal between vowels and at the end of words: *el examen* [e-lek-sá-men] 'examination', *el taxi* 'taxi' [el-ták-si], *el fax* [el-fáks] 'fax'. Learners should avoid popular pronunciations like [e-sá-men], [tá-si], often heard in Spain.

*X* is pronounced [s] at the beginning of words: *la xenofobia* [la-se-no-fó-βya] 'xenophobia', *el xilófono* [el-si-ló-fo-no] (colloquially *el xilofón* [el-si-lo-fón]) 'xylophone'.

## @

For the use of the at-sign (*la arroba*, @) to stand for '-o or -a', thus creating gender-neutral forms (e.g. *l@s alumn@s* for 'male students and female students'), see 1.2.8 note 3.

### 44.1.4 *Trans-* or *-tras-*

Some uncertainty surrounds the spelling of words that begin with the prefix *trans-* or *tras-*. Educated usage, according to Seco (1998, 437), seems to be:

(a) usually *trans-*

<i>transalpino</i>	<i>transferencia</i>	<i>transmediterráneo</i>	<i>transpirar</i>
<i>transatlántico</i>	<i>transferir</i>	<i>transmigración</i>	<i>transpirenaico</i>
<i>transbordar</i>	<i>transformación</i>	<i>transmisión</i>	<i>transportar</i>
<i>transbordo</i>	<i>transformar</i>	<i>transmitir</i>	<i>transporte</i>
<i>transcribir</i>	<i>transfusión</i>	<i>transparencia</i>	<i>transposición</i>
<i>transcripción</i>	<i>transgredir</i>	<i>transparentar</i>	<i>transversal</i>
<i>transcurrir</i>	<i>transgresión</i>	<i>transparente</i>	
<i>transcurso</i>	<i>transgresor</i>	<i>transpiración</i>	

(b) usually *tras-*

<i>trascendencia</i>	<i>trascender</i>	<i>trasvasar</i>
<i>trascendente</i>	<i>trasponer</i>	<i>trascendental</i>

(c) always *tras-*

<i>trasfondo</i>	<i>trasluz</i>	<i>trasplantar</i>	<i>trastornar</i>
<i>trashumancia</i>	<i>trasmochar</i>	<i>trasplante</i>	<i>trastorno</i>
<i>trashumante</i>	<i>traspapelar</i>	<i>traspunte</i>	<i>trastrocarse</i>
<i>trasladar</i>	<i>traspasar</i>	<i>trasquilar</i>	<i>trastroyer</i>
<i>traslado</i>	<i>traspaso</i>	<i>trastienda</i>	
<i>traslucir</i>	<i>traspasar</i>	<i>trastocar</i>	

(1) In the case of (a) and (b) the alternative spellings in *tras-* and *trans-* are ‘tolerated’ by the Academy but are not in general use.

### 44.1.5 Common non-Castilian forms

(a) Words written in the other official languages of Spain are nowadays often seen in Spanish texts printed in Castilian. Common pronunciations are:

-aig, -eig, -oig, -uig (Catalan): -ach, -ech, -och, -uch	j (Basque): Castilian j
g (Basque): like g in English ‘get’	j (Catalan, Galician) like s in ‘pleasure’
g before i or e (Catalan, Galician): like s in ‘pleasure’	l·l (Catalan): double l (not as Castilian ll)
h (Catalan, Galician, Basque): silent	ny (Catalan): like Castilian ñ
tz (Basque): like ts in ‘cats’	tx (Basque, Catalan): like Castilian ch
x (Catalan, Galician, Basque): like sh in ‘ship’	z (Basque): like Castilian s
	z (Catalan): like English z

For the pronunciation of x in Mexican place names, see 5.7.1, note 4.

(b) Grammarians often recommend that foreign words should be spelt according to their Spanish pronunciation, e.g. *güisqui* for *whisky*, *yip* for *jeep*, *yóquey* or *yoqui* for *jockey*, *tique* for *ticket* (see note 1), etc. Such forms are found in dictionaries and in some writers, but since they tend to imply ignorance of foreign languages they may have a slightly embarrassing appearance. *El País* prefers *béisbol* (usual everywhere), *biquini*, *cóctel* (usual everywhere), *coñac* (for *cognac*), *esprín* (‘sprint’), *suéter* (usual everywhere), *gánster*, *pipermín* (‘peppermint’), *poni* (‘pony’), *póquer*, *rali* (‘rally’), *tique*, *yacusi*, *yóquey*, but permits *ballet*, *hockey*, *lady* (not *ladi*), *motocross* (not *motocrós*), *striptease*, *thriller*, *whisky*, *yuppy*.

(1) Several words for ‘ticket’ are used in Spain. *Un billete* is for travel. *Una entrada* is for places of entertainment like museums, cinemas, theatres. *Un tique* or *un ticket* allows the holder to use facilities, e.g. toll roads, car parks, cloakrooms, dry cleaners, left-luggage offices; it is also often the receipt in shops and stores. *El boleto* seems to cover most types of ticket in Latin America but it is not used in Spain.

## 44.2 The written accent

The Academy and grammarians in general call both the curly sign over an ñ and the acute accent over vowels *la tilde*. In everyday language *el acento* is used as well as *la tilde* for the acute accent.

### 44.2.1 General rules

Native Spanish-speakers are often careless about the use of the written accent in handwriting, but in printing and formal writing the rules must be observed. The basic rules are:

(a) if the word ends in a consonant other than *n* or *s* and the stress falls on the last syllable no written accent is required: *contestad* ‘answer!’, *Madrid*, *natural*, *Paraguay*, *hablar* ‘to talk’;

(b) if the word ends in a vowel or *n* or *s* and the stress falls on the last syllable but one, no written accent is required. Examples: *la calle* ‘street’, *el juego*, ‘game’, *hablan* ‘they speak’, *la imagen* ‘image’, *hablas* ‘you talk’, *Francia* ‘France’ (see 44.2.2 for diphthongs);

(c) in all other cases the position of the stress must be shown in writing by an acute accent.

<i>el álbum</i> album	<i>difícil</i> difficult	<i>el rehén</i> hostage
<i>alérgicamente</i> allergically	<i>dirán</i> they will say	<i>la/las síntesis</i> synthesis/
<i>contésténles</i> answer them	<i>fácil</i> easy	syntheses
( <i>ustedes</i> imperative)	<i>las imágenes</i> images	<i>las vírgenes</i> virgins
<i>colocó</i> (s)he placed	<i>la nación</i> nation	
<i>decídmelo</i> tell me it	<i>la química</i> chemistry	
( <i>vosotros</i> imperative)	<i>el récord</i> record (in sports)	

(d) Words of one syllable do not have an accent except for those shown at 44.2.7. For this reason one writes *fui*, *fue*, *dio*, *pie*, *fe*, and, since the end of 2010, *guion* for *guión* ‘script’ [gión], *rio* for ‘(s)he laughed’ [rrió] and *truhan* for *truhán* ‘rascal’ [trwán]. See 44.2.4 for more on this subject.

(1) It follows from these rules that all Spanish words stressed more than two syllables from the end must have a written accent on the stressed vowel: *háganmelo*, *teléfono*, *el régimen*, etc.

(2) Words ending in two consonants of which the second is *s* (all of them foreign words) are stressed on the last syllable: *Orleans*, *los complots* ‘plots’, *los cabarets* ‘cabarets’. *El/los fórceps* ‘forceps’, *el/los bíceps* ‘biceps’ and *los récords* (in sport, etc.) are exceptions.

(3) When, as happens in archaic or very flowery styles, an object pronoun is added to a stressed final vowel, the accent on the vowel should be dropped: *acabó* + *se* = *acabose* for *se acabó* ‘it ended’, *habrase visto* ‘did you ever!?’ = *habrá* + *se*; see 14.3.1 note 2 for a discussion of this construction. This is the Academy’s recommendation, but many printers still use the accent, as did *El País* until recently. It now recommends spellings like *acabose*, *pidiome*, which many find disconcerting.

When one pronoun is added to an imperative the accent is not written if it becomes unnecessary, e.g. *detén* ‘stop’ but *detenlos* ‘stop them’. This rule is generally observed. For *dele* or *déle* ‘give him/her’, see 44.2.7 note 1.

(4) If a word bearing a written accent is joined to another to form a compound, any acute accent on the first word is discarded: *tío* + *vivo* = *tiovivo* ‘merry-go-round’, *balón* + *cesto* = *baloncesto* ‘basketball’, *décimo* ‘tenth’ + *séptimo* ‘seventh’ = *decimoséptimo* ‘seventeenth’.

## 44.2.2 Diphthongs, triphthongs and the position of the stress

Spanish vowels are divided into two types:

(1) Strong vowels	(2) Semi-vowels
<i>i</i> when pronounced as in <i>ti</i>	<i>i</i> when pronounced [y] as in <i>bien</i> , and <i>y</i> as in <i>voy</i>
<i>u</i> when pronounced as in <i>tú</i>	<i>u</i> when pronounced [w] as in <i>bueno</i> , <i>causa</i>
<i>a</i> , <i>e</i> , <i>o</i> in any position	

Vowels may appear in combinations of two or three, e.g. *eai*, *au*, *uai*, *iai*, *ee*, *ao*, etc. An intervening *h* is disregarded, so that *au* and *ahu*, *ua* and *uha*, *ai* and *ahi*, etc., are treated the same way – at least

since the publication of the Academy's *Nuevas normas* in 1959. Thus *la buhardilla* [la-βwar-ðí-ʎa] 'attic apartment', *rehusar* [rrew-sár] 'to refuse', *cohibido* [koy-βí-ðo] 'timid'/'inhibited'.

(a) When two or more strong vowels appear side by side, they are, in careful speech, pronounced as separate syllables and do not form diphthongs or triphthongs:

*leo* [lé-o] I read

*créamelo* [kré-a-me-lo] believe me

*pasee* [pa-sé-e] pres. subjunctive of

*pasear* 'to go for a walk'

*moho* [mó-o] mildew

*Seoane* [se-o-á-ne] (a personal surname)

*creí* [kre-í] I believed

*aún* [a-ún] still/yet

(b) A combination, in either order, of a strong vowel and a semi-vowel creates a diphthong and is counted as a single vowel for the purpose of finding the position of the written accent. Therefore the following words are stressed predictably and require no written accent:

*arduo* [ár-ðwo] arduous

*continuo* [kon-tí-nwo] continuous

*erais* [é-rays] you were

*Francia* [frán-θya/frán-sya] France

*la historia* [lays-tó-rya] history/story

*la lengua* [la-lén-gwa] tongue/language

*hablabais* [a-βlá-βays] you were speaking

*produjisteis* [pro-ðu-χís-teys] you produced

*causan* [káw-san] they cause

*fuego* [fwé-γo] fire

and the following words do not follow these rules and therefore require a written accent:

*amáis* [a-máys] you love

*debéis* [de-βéys] you owe

*continúo* [kon-ti-nú-o] I continue

*hacías* [a-θí-as/así-as] you were doing

*volvió* [bol-βyó] (s)he returned

*sonreí* [son-rre-í] I smiled

(c) If a semi-vowel is added to a diphthong, a triphthong is formed. Triphthongs are also counted as a single vowel when deciding where a written accent should appear:

*continuáis* [kon-ti-nwáys] you continue (three syllables)

*las vieiras* [las-βyéy-ras] scallops (two syllables, a Galician word. Also called *zamburriñas*)

*cambiais* [kam-byáys] you change (two syllables)

(1) Students of Portuguese must remember that the latter language has the opposite rule and writes *colónia*, *história*, but *temia* (all stressed the same as the Spanish *colonia*, *historia*, *temía*).

(2) Words ending in a vowel + *y* are considered to end in a consonant and therefore are naturally stressed on the last syllable: *Paraguay*, *Uruguay*, *el convoy* 'convoy' (also sometimes 'railway train').

(3) The soccer stadium in Madrid, *el Bernabeu*, and other names ending in a diphthong such as *Berneu* and *Palau* ought to be spelt with an accent on the penultimate vowel, which is stressed. But these Catalan names are not written with an accent in their home language and therefore not usually in Castilian.

### 44.2.3 Written accent on stressed diphthongs, triphthongs and combinations of strong vowels

If one of a group of combined vowels is stressed, the written accent may or may not appear on it. There are two possibilities:

(a) If the combination is strong vowel and semi-vowel (in either order) the stress falls predictably on the strong vowel, so the following require no written accent:

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*vais* [báys] you go (*vosotros* form)  
*el aire* [e-láy-re] the air  
*el peine* [el-péy-ne] comb  
*la causa* [la-káw-sa] cause  
*El Cairo* [el-káy-ro] Cairo  
*alcaloide* [al-ka-lóy-ðe] alkaloid  
*fui* [fwí] I was/I went  
*huido* [wí-ðo] fled (from *huir* 'to flee')  
*la viuda* [la-βyú-ða] widow

*la ruina* [la-rrwí-na] ruin  
*tiene* [tyé-ne] (s)he has (from *tener*)  
*luego* [lwé-yo] then/later  
*la tiara* [la-tya-ra] tiara  
*acuoso* [a-kwó-so] watery  
*vio* [byó] (s)he saw  
*dio* [dyó] (s)he gave  
*el pie* [el-pyé] foot

and the following are exceptions to rule (a):

*el país* [el-pa-ís] country  
*el baúl* [el-βa-úl] trunk/large suitcase  
*reír* [rre-ír] to laugh  
*reís* [rre-ís] you (*vosotros*) laugh  
*el dúo* [el-dú-o] duet/duo  
*el búho* [el-βú-o] owl  
*el frío* [frí-o] cold

*reúne* [rre-ú-ne] (s)he unites/brings together  
*prohíbe* [pro-í-βe] (s)he prohibits  
*heroína* [e-ro-í-na] heroine/heroin  
*el arcaísmo* [e-lar-ka-ís-mo] archaism  
*ahí* [a-í] there  
*oís* [o-ís] you (*vosotros*) hear  
*ríe* [rrí-e] (s)he laughs (from *reír*)  
*se fía* [se-fí-a] (s)he trusts (from *fiarse*)

(b) If the combination is strong vowel + strong vowel the two vowels form separate syllables, so the following are stressed predictably:

*los jacarandaes* [los-χa-ka-ran-dá-es]  
jacaranda trees (old plural of  
*el jacarandá*, now *los jacarandás*)  
*los noes* [los-nó-es] noes (plural of *no*)  
*el caos* [el-ká-os] chaos

*feo* [fé-o] ugly  
*leen* [lé-en] they read  
*la boa* [la-βó-a] boa (the snake may be  
*el boa* in Latin America)  
*el azahar* [e-la-θár/ e-la-sár] orange blossom

See 44.2.2a for more examples:

and the following are exceptions to rule (b);

*aéreo* [a-é-re-o] air (adjective)  
*el león* [el-le-ón] lion

*el deán* [el-de-án] dean (ecclesiastical)  
*el rehén* [el-rre-én] hostage

(1) *Huido*, *construido* and other words ending in *-uido* are stressed regularly because the *ui* is the diphthong [wi]; but words like *creído* 'believed' (past participle of *creer*) and *reído* 'laughed' (past participle of *reír*) are written with an accent because they fall under the exceptions to (a), i.e. the *i* is not pronounced [y].

(2) Words like *rió* or *rio* (s)he laughed, *crié* or *crie* 'I created' are problematic and are discussed in the next section.

(3) As mentioned in 44.2.2c, a triphthong is treated like a single vowel for the purpose of determining the position of the stress, so that *continuáis* [kon-tin-wáys] (from *continuar* 'to continue') and all second-person plural verb forms of more than one syllable ending in *-áis* or *éis* are exceptions and require an accent. However, *bueyes* [bwéy-es] 'oxen', *las leyes* [las-lé-yes] 'laws' and similar words are regularly stressed on the penultimate syllable and therefore require no accent.

### 44.2.4 *Guión or guion? Fió or fio? Lié or lie?*

The Academy's spelling rules clearly state that words of one syllable must be written without an accent (see 44.2.7 note 1 for exceptions like *té* 'tea', *tú* 'you', *más* 'more'). For this reason words like

*bien* [byén], *buen* [bwén], *la sien* [la-syén] ‘temple’ (on the side of the head), *el pie* [pyé] ‘foot’, *la fe* [la-fé] ‘faith’ and *pues* [pwés] ‘then’/‘well . . .’ are not written with an accent.

In 1959, the Academy extended this rule to the preterites of *ser*, *ver* and *dar* – *fui*, *fue*, *vio*, *dio* – on the grounds that they also are pronounced as one syllable: [fwí], [fwé], [byó], [dyó]. Publishers and editors everywhere have now adopted the unaccented forms.

Like many well-intentioned reforms this new rule seems to have had unforeseen consequences since certain other words may be pronounced as one syllable despite having always been written with an accent on the final vowel. This affects words like the following:

*crié*, *crió*, *criáis*, *criéis* [kryé], [kryó], [kryáys], [kryéys] from *criar* ‘to breed’/‘raise’  
(e.g. children)  
*fié*, *fió*, *fiáis*, *fiéis* [fyé], [fyó], [fyáys], [fyéys] from *fiar* ‘to sell on credit’; *fiarse* ‘to trust’  
*fluí*, *fluís* [flwí], [flwís] from *fluir* ‘to flow’  
*frió*, *friáis* [fryó], [fryáys] from *freír* ‘to fry’  
*guíe*, *guío*, *guíais*, *guíeis* [gyé], [gyó], [gyáys], [gyéys] from *guiar* ‘to guide’  
*guión* [gyón] ‘script’  
*huí*, *huís* [wí], [wís] from *huir* ‘to flee’  
*lié*/*lió*/*liáis*/*liéis* [lyé], [lyó], [lyáys], [lyéys] from *liar* ‘to roll up’/‘to bundle’  
*rió*, *riáis* [ryó], [ryáys] from *reír* ‘to laugh’  
*truhán* [trwán] ‘rascal’, ‘knave’

The Academy now recommends that the words listed, and a few other words like *muon*, *ion*, etc., should be written without an accent so as to reflect their widespread monosyllabic pronunciation: *crie*, *crio*, *rio*, *fiais*, *guio*, *guion*, *hui*, *huís*, *lie*, *liais*, *truhan*, etc. The present grammar adopts the new spelling. However, the Academy admits that many Spanish-speakers pronounce these words as two syllables: [ri-ó], [gi-é], [gi-ón], [li-éys], etc. It does not consider this pronunciation to be incorrect but insists that no accent should be written.

The new rules are spreading slowly. *El País* of Spain and some well-known publishers have adopted them, as have recent versions of Microsoft Word’s spelling checker; but *La Jornada* (Mex.), *La Nación* (Arg.), *Abc* (Sp.) had apparently not adopted them by mid-2018, and *La Vanguardia* (Sp.) and *Granma* (Cu.) seem to apply them inconsistently.

#### 44.2.5 Written accent: some common doubtful cases

The following forms are recommended (where *el/la* precedes the noun the latter may refer to a male or a female; when no accent is written the stressed vowel is shown in bold>:

<i>la acrobacia</i> acrobatics	<i>el fútbol</i> soccer; see note 5	<i>policiaco</i> police (adjective; see note 7)
<i>afrodisiaco</i> aphrodisiac; see note 7	<i>hipocondriaco</i> hypochondriac see note 7	<i>el/la políglota</i> polyglot
<i>amoniaco</i> or <i>amoníaco</i> ammonia; see note 7	<i>ibero</i> (less commonly <i>íbero</i> ) Iberian	<i>el/la psiquiatra</i> psychiatrist
<i>austriaco</i> Austrian; see note 7	<i>el láser</i> laser	<i>el géiser</i> geyser (geological)
<i>cardiaco</i> or <i>cardíaco</i> cardiac; see note 7	<i>la metempsicosis</i> metempsychosis	<i>el omóplato</i> shoulder blade
<i>el cartel</i> or <i>cártel</i> drugs cartel	<i>el meteoro</i> meteor	<i>la quiromancia</i> palmistry/hand-reading; see note 6
<i>el/la chófer</i> driver; see note 1	<i>el misil</i> (less commonly <i>mísil</i> ) missile	<i>el reptil</i> reptile
<i>el cóctel</i> cocktail	<i>la olimpiada</i> Olympiad	<i>el reuma</i> rheumatism (also <i>el reuma</i> )
<i>disponete</i> familiar imperative of <i>disponerse</i> ‘to get ready’; see note 3	<i>la ósmosis</i> or <i>osmosis</i> osmosis	<i>el sánscrito</i> Sanskrit
		<i>el termóstato</i> thermostat
		<i>la tortícolis</i> stiff neck

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<i>el electrodo</i> electrode	<i>el pabilo</i> wick (of a candle)	<i>la utopía</i> utopia
<i>etíope</i> Ethiopian	<i>el parásito</i> parasite	<i>el vídeo</i> is usually <i>video</i> in
<i>la exégesis</i> or <i>la exegesis</i>	<i>el/la pediatra</i> paediatrician/	Latin America
exegesis	US pediatrician	<i>el zodiaco</i> zodiac; see note 7
<i>el frijol</i> bean; see note 4	<i>el periodo</i> or <i>período</i> period	

Some 'mispronunciations' are common in speech, e.g. *soviet* 'Soviet', *el oceano* 'ocean' (written and correctly pronounced *el océano*).

- (1) Written and pronounced *chofer* [cho-fér] in Latin America.
- (2) *El dínamo* in some Latin-American countries, including Argentina and Cuba.
- (3) Similarly *componte* 'compose yourself', *detente* 'stop'.
- (4) *El frijol* is more common than *el fríjol*.
- (5) *El fútbol* is heard in some Latin-American countries.
- (6) Likewise all words ending in *-mancia* that have the meaning 'divination'.
- (7) *El País* prefers the unaccented form of words ending in *-iaco*, i.e. not *-iaco*, but everyday usage is variable.

### 44.2.6 Accent on interrogative forms

In the case of some words, the form used in direct and indirect questions has an accent. These words are: *cómo* 'how', *cuál* 'which', *cuándo* 'when', *cuánto* 'how much', *dónde* 'where', *qué* 'what/which', *quién* 'who'. Chapter 28 gives further details.

### 44.2.7 Accent used to distinguish words having identical pronunciations

In the case of some two dozen common words the written accent merely eliminates ambiguities:

	without accent	with accent
<i>de/dé</i> (see note 1)	of	3 <sup>rd</sup> -person singular present subjunctive of <i>dar</i>
<i>el/él</i> <i>este/éste, ese/ése, aquel/</i> <i>aqué</i> : see 6.3	the (def. article)	he/it
<i>mas/más</i>	but (rare)	more
<i>mi/mí</i>	my	me (after prepositions)
<i>se/sé</i>	reflexive pronoun	(1) I know, (2) <i>tú</i> imperative of <i>ser</i>
<i>si/sí</i>	if	(1) yes, (2) prepositional form of <i>se</i>
<i>solo/sólo</i> (see 9.15)	alone	only ( <i>solamente</i> )
<i>te/té</i>	object form of <i>tú</i>	tea
<i>tu/tú</i>	your	you

(1) *Dé* ought to lose its accent if a pronoun is attached and the stress becomes regular: *denos*, 'give us', *deme* 'give me', etc. However, the spellings *déme*, *déles*, etc. are often seen.

(2) The Academy no longer recommends that *o* 'or' should take an accent when it appears between two numerals, as in *4 o 2* '4 or 2'. See 37.2.

(3) *Aun* 'even' [áwn] and *aún* 'still'/'yet' [a-ún] are pronounced differently.

## 44.3 Upper- and lower-case letters

### 44.3.1 Upper-case letters

Capital letters are used less than in English. They are written:

- (a) At the beginning of sentences, as in English.
- (b) With proper nouns, but not with the adjectives derived from them: *Madrid*, but *la vida madrileña* 'Madrid life'; *Colombia*, *la cocina colombiana* 'Colombian cooking'; *Shakespeare*, *el lenguaje shakesperiano* 'Shakespearean (or Shakespeare's) language'.

Adjectives that are part of an official name are capitalized, e.g. *Nueva Zeland(i)a* 'New Zealand', *el Reino Unido* 'the United Kingdom', *Los Estados Unidos* 'the United States', *El Partido Republicano* 'The Republican Party', *Las Naciones Unidas* 'The United Nations', etc.

When a proper name includes the definite article, the latter is written with a capital letter: *El Cairo* 'Cairo', *La Haya* 'the Hague'. But in the case of countries that appear with the definite article, the article is not part of the name so a lower-case letter is used: *la India* 'India', *la Argentina*. See 3.2.17 for a discussion of this use of the article.

### 44.3.2 Lower-case letters

Lower-case letters are used for:

- (a) Months, seasons and days of the week: *julio* 'July', *agosto* 'August', *verano* 'summer', *invierno* 'winter', *martes* 'Tuesday', *jueves* 'Thursday', *viernes* 'Friday', etc.
- (b) Names of religions and their followers: *el cristianismo* 'Christianity', *el catolicismo* 'Catholicism', *el protestantismo* 'Protestantism', *el islam* 'Islam', *un testigo de Jehová* 'a Jehovah's witness', *los musulmanes* 'Muslims', *los judíos* 'Jews', etc.
- (c) Official titles, e.g. *el presidente de la República*, 'the President of the Republic', *la reina de Gran Bretaña* 'the Queen of Great Britain', *el papa Juan XXIII* 'Pope John XXIII', *los reyes de España* 'the King and Queen of Spain', *el señor García* 'Sr. Garcia', *el ministro de Obras Públicas* 'the Minister for Public Works', etc.
- (d) Book and film titles: only the first letter is in upper case, as well as the first letter of any proper name that appears in the title: *Cien años de soledad* 'One Hundred Years of Solitude', *El otoño del patriarca* 'The Autumn of the Patriarch', *El espía que surgió del frío* 'The Spy who Came in from the Cold', *La guerra de las galaxias* 'Star Wars', *Vida de Manuel Rosas* 'The Life of Manuel Rosas', etc. But the titles of newspapers and magazines are capitalized: *El País*, *La Nación*, *Ordenador Personal* 'Personal Computer', etc.
- (e) Points of the compass: *norte* 'North', *sur* 'South', *este* 'East', *oeste* 'West'. They are capitalized if they are part of a name: *América del Norte*, 'North America', etc.

## 44.4 Punctuation

These remarks refer only to major differences between Spanish and English. Readers who need a detailed account of Spanish punctuation should refer to specialized manuals.



### 44.4.1 Full stops/periods and commas

The full stop/US period (*el punto*) is used as in English, except that abbreviations are usually always written with a full stop:

#### English

Dr Moreno

Sr González

#### Spanish

*Dr. Moreno*

*Sr. González*

For the use of points and commas in writing numbers, see 11.1 note 3.

(1) Commas are not written before the conjunction *y* in a series of words: *pumas, coyotes y monos* ‘pumas, coyotes and monkeys’. Two clauses with different subjects are separated by a comma whereas in English the comma is nowadays often omitted: *Juan es uruguayo, y Remedios es chilena* ‘Juan is Uruguayan and Remedios is Chilean’.

### 44.4.2 Colons

Colons (*dos puntos*) are used as in English except that they often appear after salutations in letters: *Muy Sr. mío*: (the formula used in the Southern Cone is *De mi consideración*): ‘Dear Sir’, *Querida Ana*: ‘Dear Ana’. A comma can be used in this context, especially in informal letters.

### 44.4.3 Semi-colons

Semi-colons (*punto y coma*) are used much as in English, and they are often used after a series of commas to denote a longer pause:

*Tenía pan, huevos y vino; pero no tenía carne*

*Miguel entró cansado, confuso; Celia le siguió, radiante y orgullosa.*

(S)he had bread, eggs and wine, but  
(s)he had no meat

Miguel came in, tired, confused; Celia followed him, radiant and proud

The semi-colon is also often used before phrases like *sin embargo/no obstante* ‘nevertheless’, *a pesar de esto* ‘despite this’ that are themselves often followed by a comma:

*Les escribí más de una vez; sin embargo, no me contestaron*

I wrote to them more than once.  
However, they did not reply

Seco (1998, 369), notes that the semi-colon is often used before words like ‘but’ to separate long clauses, as in *el camino no ofrecía grandes peligros; pero no me atreví* ‘the trail presented no great dangers, but I didn’t have the courage’.

### 44.4.4 Quotations and the representation of dialogue

There is no clear agreement over the use of *comillas* or inverted commas.

(a) Chevrons (« » *comillas francesas* or *comillas angulares*) are little used nowadays. The *Libro de estilo* of *El País* 2014, 12.3.3, requires use of “ ” for quoted material and ‘ ’ for quotations within quotations. This convention is used in many publications.

Single quotation marks are much used to enclose isolated words: *la palabra ‘esnob’ viene del inglés* ‘the word “snob” comes from English’.

(b) There are three types of dash in Spanish:

<i>el guion</i> (see 44.2.4 for spelling)	hyphen	short -
<i>el signo de menos</i>	minus sign	medium length –
<i>la raya</i>	dash	double length —

In the representation of continuous dialogue inverted commas are not used, the words spoken being introduced by a *raya* or by a shorter dash.

A *raya* marks the beginning of dialogue, a change of speaker or a resumption of dialogue after an interruption: —*Ahora váyase— dijo—, y no vuelva más hasta que yo le avise.*

Except for question and exclamation marks, punctuation at the end of a string of direct speech is disconcertingly placed after the *raya*: —*Aprovecha ahora que eres joven para sufrir todo lo que puedas —le decía—, que estas cosas no duran toda la vida* (GGM, Col.).

### 44.4.5 Question and exclamation marks

As far as we know, Castilian is unique among the world's languages in that questions and exclamations are always introduced by upside-down question or exclamation marks and followed by normal question and exclamation marks (this system is optional in Catalan but is now officially rejected in Galician). The justification for the Castilian system is that it gives readers an advance warning of when to use the right intonation. Words not included in the question or exclamation are written outside the signs:

<i>Oye, ¿quieres una cerveza?</i>	Hey, d'you want a beer?
<i>Hace calor, ¿verdad?</i>	It's hot, isn't it?
<i>Si te digo que no he gastado más que</i> <i>doscientos dólares, ¿me vas a creer?</i>	If I tell you I've only spent 200 dollars, will you believe me?
<i>Pero, ¡qué estupidez!</i> (not ¡pero qué estupidez!)	But what stupidity!
<i>¡Lo voy a hacer! ¿Me oyes?</i>	I'm going to do it! Do you hear me?

Mixing of these signs is allowed but is rare: *¿qué estás haciendo?! 'what are you doing?!*

The Academy, NGL 42.6h, recommends that the name of a person addressed should not be left outside the question or exclamation marks: *¿qué dices, Marco?, not ¿qué dices? Marco.*

### 44.4.6 Hyphens

Hyphens (*los guiones*) are used sparingly since compound words are usually written as single words: *latinoamericano* (not \**latino-americano*), *antisubmarino* 'anti-submarine', *hispanohablante* 'Spanish-speaking', *posmoderno* 'post-modern', *ultraligero* 'ultra-light', *superinteligente* 'super-intelligent', etc.

Hyphens are used between compound adjectives in which each part represents separate things or people (not the case, for example, in *latinoamericano*). Only the second of two adjectives agrees in number and gender:

<i>las guerras árabe-israelíes</i>	the Arab-Israeli wars
<i>las negociaciones anglo-francesas</i>	Anglo-French negotiations
<i>el complejo militar-industrial</i>	the military-industrial complex

A hyphen may be used to join two nouns:

*los misiles superficie-aire*  
*la carretera Madrid-Barcelona*

surface-to-air missiles  
the Madrid-Barcelona road

But hyphens are not used in compound nouns of the sort *el perro policía* 'police-dog', *el año luz* 'light year', *la conexión Bluetooth* 'Bluetooth connection'.

(1) In 2010 the Academy decreed that *ex* should not take a hyphen, so one should now write *exalcalde* 'former mayor', *exfuncionario* 'ex-government employee', *exmarido/exesposo* 'ex-husband', *exjefe* 'former chief/boss', *exnovia* 'ex-girlfriend'. *Ex preso* or *ex-preso* 'ex-convict' is an exception to avoid confusion with *expreso* 'express'. If what follows *ex* is a compound noun consisting of more than one word, a space is used: *ex primer ministro*, *ex ministro de Agricultura*. *El/la ex* can be used as a noun: *Manolo es mi ex* 'Manolo is my ex'.

The same rule also applies to prefixes like *pos-* 'post-', and *pro-* 'pro-', e.g. *la posguerra* 'the post-war period', *el hospital prociegos* 'the hospital for the blind'.

A hyphen is used if the following word begins with a capital letter: *pro-Kennedy*, *pro-Cataluña* 'pro-Catalonia'.

## 44.5 Division of words at end of line

A knowledge of the structure of Spanish syllables is necessary for a good pronunciation and failure to follow the rules in speech helps to create a foreign accent. As far as word division at the end of a line is concerned, the following rules apply:

(a) *Ch, ll, qu, gue, gui, rr* and the following combinations of consonants are not divided (but see (d) for more on *rr*):

<i>br</i>	<i>cr</i>	<i>fr</i>	<i>gr</i>	<i>pr</i>	<i>dr</i>	<i>tr</i>
<i>bl</i>	<i>cl</i>	<i>fl</i>	<i>gl</i>	<i>pl</i>		

(b) Bearing in mind that the combinations listed under (a) are not divided and count as single consonants, a single consonant is grouped with the following vowel:

<i>ha-ba</i>	<i>ro-ca</i>	<i>nu-do</i>	<i>a-gua</i>	<i>pe-lo</i>	<i>ra-za</i>	<i>mar-ca</i>
<i>mu-cho</i>	<i>ca-lle</i>	<i>pe-rro</i>	<i>ca-bra</i>	<i>co-fre</i>	<i>o-tro</i>	<i>co-pla</i>
<i>sa-que</i>	<i>pa-gue</i>	<i>de-sa-güe</i>	<i>é-xi-to</i> pronounced [ék-si-to]			

and no syllable begins with more than one consonant:

<i>cal-do</i>	<i>cos-ta</i>	<i>cuan-do</i>	<i>par-te</i>	<i>can-cha</i>
<i>Es-pa-ña</i>	<i>hem-bra</i>	<i>em-ble-ma</i>	<i>com-bi-nar</i>	<i>in-na-to</i>
<i>re-cla-mar</i>	<i>con-lle-var</i>	<i>cons-truc-ción</i>	<i>ins-pec-tor</i>	<i>re-hén</i>
<i>blan-den-gue</i>				

(c) *El País* advises against separating vowels, and this is the easiest rule to remember:

<i>viu-do</i>	<i>cié-na-ga</i>	<i>teo-cra-cia</i>	<i>can-táis</i>	<i>a-ma-bais</i>
<i>bue-no</i>	<i>ha-cia</i>	<i>pe-río-do</i>	<i>ha-cía-mos</i>	<i>con-ti-núas</i>

(d) When a prefix ending with a vowel is added to a word beginning with *r-*, the latter consonant is doubled in writing: *contrarrevolucionario* 'counter-revolutionary', *prorrogar* 'to adjourn'. If the

prefix is divided from the word at the end of a line, the single *r* reappears: *contra-revolucionario*, *pro-rogar*.

(1) The Academy states that when a word is clearly divisible on etymological grounds it may be divided accordingly: this usually affects prefixes. ?*Su-bya-cen-te* for *sub-ya-cen-te* 'underlying' is unnatural. Further examples:

*de-sa-gra-da-ble* or *des-a-gra-da-ble* disagreeable  
*sub-rep-ti-cio* (better than *su-brep-t-i-cio*) surreptitious  
*sub-ru-ti-na* (better than *su-bru-ti-na*) subroutine  
*sub-ra-yar* (better than *su-bra-yar*) to underline  
*sud-a-me-ri-ca-no* or *su-da-me-ri-ca-no* South American  
*vos-o-tros* or *vo-so-tros* you (familiar plural)

(2) Any of these rules is overridden to avoid a comical or embarrassing effect. One does not write *sa-cerdote*, *cal-culo*, *dis-puta*, *al ser-vicio del gobierno*.

(3) There is some disagreement over the combination *tl*. The rule is that it is optionally separable but usually inseparable in Latin America. It is inseparable in Mexican words like *Tenochtitlán* because *tl* is a single consonant in the Nahuatl language of the Aztecs.

(4) Foreign words should be divided according to the rules used in the language of origin.

(5) Words containing the sequence *interr-* or *contrarr-* are divided thus at the end of a line: *inter-relacionado* (*inter-* is the first part of the compound), *contra-revolucionario* (*contra-* is the first part of the compound).

# Glossary of grammatical terms

Many terms are already defined in the text of the grammar at the section shown. Words printed in capital letters are defined elsewhere in the Glossary. Spanish grammatical terms vary widely according to the preferences of grammarians and teachers: the Spanish equivalents shown here are, with a couple of exceptions, those used in the Academy's *NGLE* (*Nueva gramática de la lengua española*). It must be remembered that the Spanish word *pretérito* simply means 'past' and not 'preterite'.

<b>accent</b> <i>el acento</i>	see TILDE, STRESS
<b>active voice</b> <i>la voz activa</i>	the form of the verb in which the subject of the verb really performs the action, e.g. ' <b>Mike painted</b> the kitchen' as opposed to the passive 'the kitchen was painted by Mike' in which the kitchen is the subject but not the agent of the action. See Chapter 32 for more details.
<b>adjectival participle</b> <i>el participio adjetival</i>	defined in Section 23.6.
<b>adjective</b> <i>el adjetivo</i>	a word that describes a NOUN or PRONOUN, e.g. 'a <b>red</b> book' / <i>un libro rojo</i> , 'you're <b>tall</b> ' / <i>eres alto</i> .
<b>adverb(ial)</b> <i>el adverbio/el adverbial</i>	a word or phrase that modifies a VERB, ADJECTIVE or ADVERB, often giving extra information on <b>how</b> , <b>when</b> , <b>where</b> or <b>why</b> : 'she came <b>yesterday</b> ' / <i>vino ayer</i> , 'I left it <b>here</b> ' / <i>lo dejé aquí</i> , 'it's <b>totally</b> untrue' / <i>es completamente falso</i> , 'to work in <b>vain</b> ' / <i>trabajar en balde</i> , 'fairly well' / <i>bastante bien</i> .
<b>agreement</b> <i>la concordancia</i>	the rules whereby a feature of one word is repeated or echoed in other related words. In English, verbs usually agree in person and number, so we must say 'he is' and not *'he are'. Spanish verbs have similar but stronger rules. Spanish ARTICLES and ADJECTIVES agree in number and gender with NOUNS and PRONOUNS: <i>la casa blanca</i> 'the white house', <i>él es guapo</i> 'he is good-looking', <i>ellas son guapas</i> 'they (females) are good-looking', etc.
<b>antecedent</b> <i>el antecedente</i>	the noun or pronoun that a RELATIVE CLAUSE refers to, e.g. ' <b>the woman</b> who lives over the road' / <i>la mujer que vive al otro lado de la calle</i> .
<b>anterior preterite</b> <i>el pretérito anterior</i>	a Spanish verb tense with no exact equivalent in English, e.g. <i>hube terminado</i> , defined at 18.4.
<b>apposition</b> <i>la aposición</i>	the use of a phrase to extend or clarify the meaning of a NOUN PHRASE without being connected to it by a PREPOSITION: 'Paris, <b>the capital of France</b> ' / <i>París, capital de Francia</i> . See 3.2.25.
<b>article</b> <i>el artículo</i>	the grammatical name given to the words 'the' and 'a(n)' in English, and <i>el/la/los/las</i> and <i>un/una/unos/unas</i> in Spanish, as in ' <b>the</b> fox ate a duck' / <i>el zorro se comió un pato</i> . Words meaning 'the' are called 'definite articles' / <i>el artículo definido</i> , and words meaning 'a(n)' are 'indefinite articles' / <i>el artículo indefinido</i> . See Chapters 3 and 4.

**aspect** *el aspecto*  
(*verbal*)

regardless of *when* they occur, events can have other qualities: they may be completed or finished ('I broke my leg', 'I will have finished my exams by then'), or incomplete at the time ('the sky was blue'), or 'continuous' ('I was smoking a cigar') or 'non-continuous' ('I smoked a cigar'). These features are described by many linguists as differences of verbal 'aspect'. It has been claimed that the Spanish PRETERITE and IMPERFECT reflect a difference between completed and non-completed aspect. However, other experts deny this and this book avoids the term since it is controversial and not very helpful to learners. See Chapter 17, especially 17.4, for more on this point.

**augmentative suffix** *el sufijo aumentativo*

suffixes like *-ón*, *-azo* that indicate, among other things, large size. See 43.3. English does not have augmentative suffixes.

**auxiliary verb** *el verbo auxiliar*

(1) a VERB used in combination with the PAST PARTICIPLE of another verb to form a COMPOUND TENSE. In English the auxiliary used is 'to have' as in 'I **have** drunk it'; in Spanish it is *haber*, as in *lo he bebido*, or, more rarely *tener*. See 18.1.3. (2) A VERB such as *poder*, *deber*, *tener que* which is added to an INFINITIVE to mean such things as 'to be able to . . .', 'to have to . . .', etc. In some accounts, *ser* in passive sentences – *era considerada muy inteligente* 'she was considered very intelligent' – is also classified as an auxiliary verb.

**cardinal number** *el número cardinal*

the form of a number used for counting: 'one, two, three'; 'I bought **eight** novels' / *compré ocho novelas*.

**clause** *la cláusula*

a part of a SENTENCE which itself contains a FINITE VERB. A MAIN CLAUSE can stand on its own as a separate sentence, a SUBORDINATE CLAUSE cannot. In 'your car is parked where you left it yesterday', 'your car is parked' is a main clause, 'where you left it yesterday' is a subordinate clause dependent on the main clause. Sentences therefore consist either of a main clause alone – 'John likes music' – or a main clause plus one or more subordinate clauses, e.g. 'John likes listening to music **when he's at home**'.

**cleft sentence** *las construcciones relativas de relieve or las fórmulas relativas de relieve or las construcciones copulativas enfáticas*

defined at 41.1.1.

**collective noun** *el sustantivo colectivo*

defined at 2.3.1.

**comment** *el comentario or el rema*

defined at 42.9.1.

**comparative** *la forma comparativa*

the form of an ADJECTIVE or ADVERB used to show that something or someone has more or less of a quality: 'faster', 'less/more hard-working', 'better', 'worse', *más rápido*, *más/menos laborioso*, *mejor*, *peor*, etc. See Chapter 6. See also SUPERLATIVE.

**compound noun** *el sustantivo compuesto*

a noun formed by joining two or more words, e.g. 'police dog' / *el perro policía*, 'missile launcher' / *lanzamisiles*, 'lawn-mower' / *el cortacésped*.

<b>compound tense</b> <i>el tiempo compuesto</i>	TENSES formed by using an AUXILIARY VERB (normally <i>haber</i> in Spanish) with the PAST PARTICIPLE of another verb, e.g. <i>he visto</i> 'I have seen', <i>han vuelto</i> 'they've returned'. See Chapter 18.
<b>conditional</b> <i>el condicional</i> or <i>el potencial</i>	a form of the VERB used to express conditions, e.g. 'it would break' / <i>se rompería</i> , 'I would be delighted' / <i>me encantaría</i> , etc.
<b>conditional sentence</b> <i>la oración condicional</i>	a SENTENCE which expresses a condition, e.g. 'if I had money I'd buy a helicopter'. See Chapter 29.
<b>conjugate</b> <i>conjugar</i>	the way a verb takes different forms to show AGREEMENT with the SUBJECT, and to indicate TENSE or MOOD. The statement ' <i>hablar</i> conjugates exactly like <i>amar</i> ' means that the endings of both verbs are identical: <i>hablo/amo, hablas/amas, hablé/amé</i> , etc.
<b>conjugation</b> <i>la conjugación</i>	see 16.1 and 16.2.
<b>conjunction</b> <i>la conjunción</i>	a word or phrase (other than a RELATIVE PRONOUN or RELATIVE ADVERB) used to link words, phrases or CLAUSES within a SENTENCE, e.g. 'and', 'but', 'or', <i>y, o, pero, que</i> (as in <i>dijo que nos llamaría</i> '(s)he said (s)he'd call us'), etc. See Chapter 37.
<b>consonant</b> <i>la consonante</i>	as far as the written Spanish is concerned, all the letters of the alphabet except for the VOWELS <i>a, e, i, o</i> and <i>u</i> . As far as spoken language is concerned, (roughly) a sound made by partially or briefly obstructing the flow of air through the mouth. Typical consonants in Spanish are <i>b, c, ch, d, g, l, ll, m, n, ñ</i> , etc.
<b>continuous form</b> <i>la forma continua</i>	the Spanish verb form made up of <i>estar</i> + the gerund: <i>estoy hablando</i> 'I'm talking', <i>estabas durmiendo</i> 'you were sleeping', etc. See Chapter 19.
<b>count noun</b> <i>el sustantivo contable</i>	defined at 2.2.1.
<b>dative</b> <i>el dativo</i>	a term occasionally used in this book to refer to the third-person pronouns when they are used to indicate an INDIRECT OBJECT, i.e. <i>le</i> or <i>les</i> or 'I gave <b>her</b> five dollars'. It has wider meanings in general linguistics.
<b>defective verb</b> <i>el verbo defectivo</i>	a verb of which certain forms are not used. <i>Abolir</i> is – or used to be – an example: see 16.11.2.
<b>definite article</b> <i>el artículo definido</i>	see ARTICLE.
<b>demonstrative</b> <i>el adjetivo demostrativo</i> and <i>el pronombre demostrativo</i>	an ADJECTIVE or PRONOUN which points to something specific, e.g. 'this' / <i>este</i> , 'that' / <i>ese/aquel</i> , 'those' / <i>esos/aquellos</i> . See Chapter 7.
<b>descriptive adjective</b> <i>el adjetivo calificativo</i>	the opposite of RELATIONAL ADJECTIVE.
<b>determiner</b> <i>el determinante</i>	a word used with NOUNS and ADJECTIVES to make them definite or specific or, in the case of adjectives, to turn them into nouns. They include the ARTICLES, DEMONSTRATIVES like <i>este, ese</i> or <i>aquel</i> , numerals and POSSESSIVES. See 5.1d and 5.9 for their effect on adjectives.

<b>dieresis</b> <i>la diéresis</i>	the two dots over the <i>ü</i> in words like <i>lingüista</i> , <i>averigüe</i> which show that the <i>u</i> is not silent.
<b>diminutive suffix</b> <i>el sufijo diminutivo</i>	a SUFFIX added to a word to denote smallness, affection or sometimes contempt, e.g. 'piglet', 'kitchenette', <i>casita</i> , <i>ahorita</i> , <i>listillo</i> . English makes little use of such suffixes, but they are very common in Spanish. See Chapter 43.
<b>diphthong</b> <i>el diptongo</i>	the combination of a strong vowel and a semi vowel, in any order (see 42.2.2b for definitions). The bold letters in the following words are diphthongs: <i>fu<b>er</b>on</i> , <i>re<b>y</b></i> , <i>cue<b>st</b>ión</i> , <i>cuo<b>t</b>a</i> , <i>qu<b>i</b>en</i> , <i>cau<b>s</b>a</i> , <i>Paragu<b>a</b>uy</i> , <i>Mo<b>i</b>sés</i> . See also SYLLABLE and TRIPHTHONG.
<b>direct object</b> <i>el complemento directo</i>	a NOUN, NOUN PHRASE or PRONOUN that receives the direct action of the verb. In 'Mary gave Bill a present', 'a present' is the direct object since the action is done to it; Bill is the INDIRECT OBJECT since he is the receiver.
<b>direct speech</b> <i>el discurso directo</i>	the words actually spoken by a person or character: "'I love Mondays,'" María said' / <i>adoro los lunes</i> — <i>dijo María</i> . See also REPORTED SPEECH.
<b>discourse marker</b> <i>el conector discursivo</i> or <i>el marcador discursivo</i> or <i>el operador discursivo</i>	words and phrases like 'nevertheless', 'on the contrary', 'incidentally', 'obviously', 'well . . .', that are used to connect or introduce statements. See 37.11.
<b>dynamic</b> <i>dinámico</i>	a dynamic verb refers to an action done by someone or something: 'he <b>broke</b> a window', 'I <b>wrote</b> a novel'. Some verbs do not denote actions but 'states', i.e. no one is actually <i>doing</i> anything, as in 'the sky <b>is</b> overcast', 'Jill <b>seems</b> absent-minded', 'the sun <b>is shining</b> '. Such verbs are 'non-dynamic'.
<b>ending</b> <i>la terminación</i>	a SUFFIX which gives grammatical information, e.g. about the NUMBER, TENSE, MOOD, PERSON or GENDER of a word. Typical Spanish endings are <i>hablaron</i> , <i>buenos</i> , <i>vivas</i> , etc. Typical English endings are 'ships', 'liked', 'walking', etc.
<b>exclamation</b> <i>la exclamación</i>	an expression of surprise, anger, wonder, admiration, etc., e.g. 'what a nerve!' / ¡qué cara!
<b>existential sentence</b> <i>la oración existencial</i>	see Chapter 34.
<b>feminine</b> <i>femenino</i>	one of the two GENDERS into which Spanish NOUNS are divided.
<b>finite verb</b> <i>el verbo finito</i>	a form of a VERB which gives information about TENSE, PERSON and NUMBER. <i>Hablan</i> /'they talk' (present, third-person and plural) and <i>contesté</i> 'I answered' (preterite, first-person and singular) are finite verbs. <i>Hablar</i> , <i>hablado</i> , <i>hablando</i> are non-finite forms since they do not indicate tense, person or number.
<b>fulfilled condition</b> (a term not used by the Academy)	used in this book to refer to sentences that look like conditions but actually are not: 'if she slept all day it was because she went clubbing all night', 'if (i.e. 'whenever') it rained I stayed at home'. See 29.7.



<b>future perfect</b> <i>el futuro compuesto or el futuro perfecto</i>	a TENSE formed with a future form of AUXILIARY VERB 'to have' / <i>haber</i> and a PAST PARTICIPLE, used to refer to an action or event which will occur before another in the future: 'I <b>will have finished</b> it by then' / <i>para entonces lo <b>habré terminado</b></i> . See 18.6.
<b>future tense</b> <i>el futuro simple</i>	in Spanish, the tense forms like <i>hablaré, vendrá, irán</i> used to refer, among other things, to future time. See 17.6.
<b>gender</b> <i>el género</i>	all Spanish NOUNS (except for a few undecided ones) are divided into two classes called MASCULINE and FEMININE: see Chapter 1. These labels have nothing to do with sex when the nouns refer to plants, most wild animals or to non-living things. Some Spanish pronouns have neuter gender: see Chapter 8.
<b>generic</b> <i>genérico</i>	a generic noun refers to concepts, things or people in general: ' <b>monkeys</b> are intelligent', 'I don't like <b>beer</b> ', ' <b>freedom</b> means many things'. 'Partitive' nouns refer only to a part of the whole: 'she brought <b>some roses</b> ' / <i>trajo <b>rosas</b></i> (not roses in general), 'there's <b>bread</b> on the table', i.e. 'some' bread.
<b>gerund</b> <i>el gerundio</i>	a NON-FINITE Spanish verb form, always ending in <i>-ndo</i> and defined at 24.1.
<b>historic present</b> <i>el presente histórico</i>	the use, for dramatic effect, of the present tense to refer to the past: 'and then Jane <b>walks</b> in and <b>says</b> . . .', <i>la Segunda Guerra Mundial empieza en 1939</i> . See 17.3.5.
<b>idiom</b> <i>el modismo</i>	a group of words whose meaning cannot be deduced from the meaning of the individual words in the group. The meaning of 'he was hung over' cannot be deduced from the words 'to hang' and 'over'. <i>Echar de menos</i> 'to miss (someone/something)' must be learned separately: its meaning has no relation to <i>echar</i> 'to throw', <i>de</i> 'of' and <i>menos</i> 'less'.
<b>imperative</b> <i>el imperativo</i>	a MOOD of the VERB used to give commands or instructions or to make requests. See Chapter 21.
<b>imperfect tense</b> <i>el pretérito imperfecto</i>	an important TENSE form of Spanish verbs that refers to actions or states that are viewed as going on <i>at the time</i> , e.g. <i>hablaba, comías, eran</i> , etc. See 17.5 for definition.
<b>impersonal</b> <i>se se impersonal</i>	see <i>SE IMPERSONAL</i> .
<b>impersonal sentences</b> <i>las oraciones impersonales</i> .	see 32.1 and 32.4.
<b>indefinite article</b> <i>el artículo indefinido</i>	see ARTICLE.
<b>indefinite pronoun</b> <i>el pronombre indefinido</i>	see PRONOUN.
<b>indicative</b> ( <i>el</i> ) <i>indicativo</i>	the verb forms used to state facts or beliefs: 'the earth <b>is</b> round' / <i>la tierra es redonda</i> ; 'I think Anne is away' / <i>creo que Ana <b>está</b> fuera</i> : see Chapter 17.

<b>indirect object</b> <i>el complemento indirecto</i>	in Spanish, a NOUN, NOUN PHRASE or PRONOUN that receives or loses something as a result of the meaning of a verb, adjective or participle. In <i>Miguel le dio mil euros</i> 'Miguel gave him/her/you 1000 euros' <i>le</i> receives the money and is therefore the indirect object. In Spanish, but not in English, indirect objects can lose as well as gain: <i>me robaron mil euros</i> = 'they stole 1,000 euros off/from me', but <i>me dieron mil euros</i> 'they gave 1,000 euros to me'. See Chapters 14 and 15 for details.
<b>indirect question</b> <i>la pregunta indirecta, la oración interrogativa indirecta</i>	a question reported in INDIRECT SPEECH. 'When did you arrive?' / <i>¿cuándo llegaste?</i> is a direct question, 'I wonder when you arrived?' / <i>me pregunto cuándo llegaste</i> is an indirect question. So is 'I don't know how to do it' / <i>no sé cómo hacerlo</i> (the direct question is: 'how do I do it?' / <i>¿cómo lo hago?</i> ). Another definition: a sentence which has a SUBORDINATE CLAUSE beginning with an INTERROGATIVE word like <i>cómo, cuál, cuándo, dónde, qué, quién</i> .
<b>indirect speech</b> <i>el discurso indirecto</i>	see REPORTED SPEECH
<b>infinitive</b> <i>el infinitivo</i>	a NON-FINITE form of a verb which, in Spanish, always ends in <i>-ar, -er, -ir</i> or <i>-ír</i> . See Chapter 22.
<b>interrogative (el)</b> <i>interrogativo</i>	<b>question</b> words like 'when?', 'where?', 'who?', 'which?', 'what?', 'how?', <i>cómo, cuál, cuándo, dónde, qué, quién</i> , used to ask questions. In Spanish interrogative or question words are written with an accent.
<b>intransitive verb</b> <i>el verbo intransitivo</i>	a VERB is <b>intransitive</b> if it cannot have a DIRECT OBJECT: 'I come' / <i>vengo</i> is classified as intransitive since one cannot 'come' something or someone.
<b>irregular verb</b> <i>el verbo irregular</i>	a VERB which is conjugated in a way that does not follow the pattern of the majority of Spanish verbs. See Chapter 16 for lists of these verbs.
<b>masculine</b> <i>masculino</i>	one of the two GENDERS into which Spanish NOUNS are divided.
<b>mass noun</b> <i>el sustantivo no contable</i>	defined at 2.2.1.
<b>monosyllable</b> <i>el monosílabo</i>	a word consisting of only one syllable. 'dog', 'house', 'yes', <i>sí, fui, dio</i> are all monosyllabic words. 'Porpoise', <i>casa, perro</i> , etc. have more than one syllable and are therefore polysyllabic.
<b>mood</b> <i>el modo</i>	Spanish and English verbs have three 'moods': the INDICATIVE mood, the IMPERATIVE mood and the SUBJUNCTIVE mood, the latter being rare in modern English but much used in Spanish. English-speakers sometimes confuse this term with the word used in 'I'm in a bad <i>mood</i> ', but the grammatical term derives from a Latin word meaning 'mode'.
<b>neuter</b> <i>neutro</i>	in Spanish, the special form of some pronouns and articles used to refer to things that are not nouns and are therefore genderless. See 7.1.
<b>nominalizer (el)</b> <i>nominalizador</i>	See Chapter 40 for definition.

<b>non-dynamic</b>	see DYNAMIC.
<b>non-finite verb form</b> <i>las formas no finitas del verbo</i>	see FINITE VERB
<b>non-restrictive no restrictivo</b>	see RESTRICTIVE.
<b>noun el sustantivo</b>	a type of word which refers to a person, animal, plant, lifeless object, place or abstraction: 'man', 'student', 'dog', 'oak-tree', <i>libro</i> , <i>Nueva York</i> , <i>justicia</i> , <i>felicidad</i> are all nouns. In Spanish, nouns have either masculine or feminine GENDER.
<b>noun phrase la frase nominal</b>	a group of connected words containing a NOUN (or a PRONOUN) and any other words accompanying it, i.e. a DETERMINER and/or an ADJECTIVE: 'bread', 'white bread', 'the shop/store on the corner', etc.
<b>number el número</b>	the grammatical distinction between SINGULAR and PLURAL.
<b>object pronouns</b> ( <i>los pronombres de complemento directo e indirecto</i> )	used in this book to refer to the Spanish pronouns <i>me/te/lo/la/les/nosotros/los/las</i> and <i>les</i> .
<b>open conditions las oraciones condicionales reales</b>	defined at 29.2.
<b>ordinal number los numerales ordinales</b>	a form of a numeral used as an ADJECTIVE to indicate the place something occupies in a series: 'my <b>first</b> kiss' / <i>mi primer beso</i> , 'the <b>sixth</b> chapter' / <i>el sexto capítulo</i> .
<b>participle el participio</b>	a NON-FINITE form of the VERB. Spanish has a PAST PARTICIPLE, e.g. <i>hablado</i> and an ADJECTIVAL PARTICIPLE, e.g. <i>saliente</i> , <i>pertene-ciente</i> . See Chapter 23.
<b>participle clause la construcción absoluta</b>	a clause in which the FINITE VERB is replaced by a PARTICIPLE: 'having realized the truth, I left' from 'when I had realized the truth, I left' or <i>llegados a Madrid se alojaron en un buen hotel</i> 'having arrived in Madrid they stayed in a good hotel'.
<b>partitive partitivo</b>	see GENERIC.
<b>passive la pasiva</b>	a verbal construction where the agent of the action is not necessarily mentioned and the SUBJECT is typically a person or thing to which something happens, e.g. 'Claudia was elected as chairperson'. Spanish has various passive constructions, (1) passive with <i>ser</i> – <i>la casa fue construida</i> – defined at 32.2; (2) the PASSIVE WITH <i>ESTAR</i> – see the next item; (3) passive <i>se</i> – <i>la casa se construyó</i> – defined at 32.4. A special version of the latter construction is used when the noun or pronoun refers to a human being, e.g. <i>se identificó a tres personas</i> 'three persons were identified'. See 32.5.
<b>passive with estar la pasiva resultativa or la pasiva de resultado</b>	a passive construction formed with <i>estar</i> and a participle, e.g. <i>el ladrón estaba detenido</i> 'the thief was under arrest'. It focuses on the result of an action whereas the passive with <i>ser</i> focuses on the action itself. See 32.2.5 for details.

<b>past participle</b> <i>el participio pasado</i>	a NON-FINITE form of the VERB typically ending in <i>-ado</i> , <i>-ido</i> or, occasionally, <i>-to</i> or <i>-so</i> , e.g. <i>hablado</i> , <i>vivido</i> , <i>comido</i> , <i>vuelto</i> , <i>abierto</i> , <i>impreso</i> .
<b>past tense</b> <i>el tiempo pretérito</i>	in Spanish, any TENSE that refers to the past, e.g. PRETERITE, IMPERFECT, PERFECT, or PLUPERFECT, as opposed to PRESENT or FUTURE tenses. <i>Pretérito</i> simply means 'past' in Spanish, and not just 'preterite'.
<b>pejorative suffix</b> <i>el sufijo despectivo</i>	a suffix like <i>-ajo</i> , <i>-ucho</i> that expresses distaste or revulsion, as in <i>hotelucho</i> 'a doss-house'/'dingy hotel'. See 43.4. English does not have pejorative suffixes.
<b>perfect tense</b> <i>el pretérito perfecto compuesto</i>	a COMPOUND TENSE of the verb, e.g. <i>he dicho</i> 'I have said', <i>hemos contestado</i> 'we have answered'. It is called 'present perfect' in some grammar books since the AUXILIARY verb <i>haber</i> is in the present tense.
<b>person</b> <i>la persona</i>	a grammatical category indicating the identity of the subject of a verb. Spanish and English have three 'persons': the 'first' person: 'I'/'we'/'yo'/'nosotros(as)', the second person, i.e. the person addressed, 'you'/'tú'/'vos'/'usted'/'vosotros(as)'/ <i>ustedes</i> ; and the third person, i.e. the persons or things that we are talking about: 'he'/'she'/'it'/'they', <i>él/ella/ellos/ellas/ello</i> .
<b>personal</b> <i>a</i>	defined at 22.1.
<b>personal pronoun</b> <i>el pronombre personal</i>	see PRONOUN.
<b>phrase</b> <i>la frase</i>	any meaningful combination of words that does not contain a FINITE VERB. 'Coffee with milk' is a phrase, whereas 'I like coffee with milk' is a SENTENCE.
<b>pluperfect tense</b> <i>el pretérito pluscuamperfecto</i>	a COMPOUND TENSE, e.g. <i>habíamos visto</i> 'we had seen', defined at 18.3.
<b>plural</b> <i>(el) plural</i>	a grammatical term indicating more than one person or thing. 'dog' is a SINGULAR noun, 'dogs' is a plural noun. <i>Blancos</i> 'white' is a masculine plural form of the adjective <i>blanco</i> .
<b>possessive adjective or pronoun</b> <i>los adjetivos o pronombres posesivos</i>	a word that indicates the identity of the possessor, e.g. 'my'/'your'/'his', <i>mi/tu/su</i> , 'mine'/'hers'/'mío/suyo', etc. See Chapter 9.
<b>predicate</b> <i>el predicado</i>	the part of the sentence which says something about the SUBJECT. In this grammar the word is used only of the predicates of the verb 'to be', e.g. <i>Miguel es amigo de Pedro</i> 'Miguel is a friend of Pedro'.
<b>prefix</b> <i>el prefijo</i>	letters added to the beginning of the root form of a word so as to alter or add meaning, e.g. ' <b>pre</b> conception', ' <b>re</b> place', <i>descubrir</i> 'to discover', <i>rehuir</i> 'to shun'/'to avoid'
<b>preposition</b> <i>la preposición</i>	a word or phrase used before a noun or pronoun to relate it grammatically to another word or phrase: 'the dog's sleeping <b>on</b> the bed', <i>fuimos a Caracas</i> , 'I came back <b>with</b> her'/'volví <b>con</b> ella', etc. See Chapter 38 for details.

<b>present participle</b>	in Spanish studies, a rather inaccurate alternative name for the ADJECTIVAL PARTICIPLE, e.g. <i>preocupante</i> ‘worrying’, <i>convinciente</i> ‘convincing’.
<b>present tense</b> <i>el tiempo presente de indicativo</i>	the simple present TENSE, e.g. <i>hablo, comes, son</i> , that indicates – among other things – that an action is occurring <i>now</i> . See 14.3.
<b>preterite tense</b> (American spelling ‘preterit’) <i>el pretérito perfecto simple</i>	a TENSE of Spanish verbs that indicates actions or events in the past that are viewed as completed at the time, e.g. <i>habló, hice, supieron</i> . See 17.4.
<b>pronominal verb</b> <i>el verbo pronominal</i>	any Spanish verb which is conjugated with an object pronoun of the same person as the verb’s subject. e.g. <i>lavarse, me voy, te dormiste, se salió</i> . Many grammars call these ‘reflexive verbs’, a term that we reject for the reasons given at 30.1.1.
<b>pronoun</b> <i>el pronombre</i>	a word that replaces a NOUN PHRASE already mentioned, or about to be mentioned, in a sentence: ‘John came in and <b>he</b> said to <b>me</b> ’, <i>¿conoces a <b>alguien</b> que pueda ayudarme?</i> Personal pronouns refer to known people or things: ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘you’, ‘it’, etc. Indefinite pronouns refer to unidentified persons or things: ‘someone’, ‘anyone’, ‘something’, <i>algo, alguien</i> , etc.
<b>reciprocal</b> <i>recíproco</i>	one possible meaning of plural PRONOMINAL VERBS, i.e. when the subjects perform an action on or for one another as in <i>se quieren (el uno al otro)</i> ‘they love one another’. See 30.3.
<b>reflexive</b> <i>reflexivo</i>	used in this book to refer to one possible <i>meaning</i> of a Spanish PRONOMINAL VERB, i.e. when the subject performs an action upon or for himself/herself, as in ‘I wash myself’ / <i>me lavo</i> . See 30.2.
<b>relational adjective</b> <i>el adjetivo relacional</i>	a type of Spanish ADJECTIVE that typically replaces a phrase consisting of <i>de</i> + a noun, e.g. <i>problemas <b>estudiantiles</b></i> for <i>problemas de los estudiantes</i> ‘student problems’, <i>industria <b>petrolera</b></i> for <i>industria del petróleo</i> ‘oil industry’. See 5.11 for details. Adjectives that merely describe qualities (the majority), like <i>hombre <b>inteligente</b>, pájaro <b>blanco</b></i> , are ‘descriptive’ adjectives or <i>adjetivos calificativos</i> .
<b>relative clause</b> <i>la cláusula relativa</i>	a SUBORDINATE CLAUSE that modifies a noun or pronoun used earlier in a sentence, e.g. ‘the house <b>that Jack built</b> ’, <i>el amigo <b>con el que fui al cine</b></i> ‘the friend <b>I went to the cinema with</b> ’. All Spanish relative clauses must be introduced by a RELATIVE PRONOUN. See Chapter 39.
<b>relative pronoun</b> <i>el pronombre relativo</i>	defined at 39.1.
<b>remote conditions</b> <i>la condición improbable o irreal</i>	defined at 29.3.
<b>reported speech</b> <i>el discurso indirecto</i>	a construction by which what someone said is built into a sentence rather than given in the speaker’s original words. ‘Bill said “I feel tired”’ reports Bill’s DIRECT SPEECH; ‘Bill said that he felt tired’ is an example of indirect or reported speech.

<b>restrictive</b> <i>restrictivo</i>	a term applied to ADJECTIVES (see 4.11.1) and to RELATIVE CLAUSES (see 39.1.2) that create a subset of something, as in ‘ <b>Spanish</b> fruit’, ‘houses <b>that have red roofs</b> ’. Non-restrictive adjectives and clauses do not create a subset, as in ‘the <b>holy</b> Bible’, ‘the galaxies <b>that fill the universe</b> ’; see 39.1.2 for details.
<i>se de matización</i>	defined at 30.5.
<i>se impersonal</i>	a name for the Spanish pronoun <i>se</i> when it has the same meaning as the French word <i>on</i> , German <i>man</i> , English ‘people’/‘one’, as in <i>se entra por aquí</i> ‘one goes in this way’, <i>se come demasiado</i> ‘people eat too much’. It must be distinguished from <i>SE PASIVO</i> .
<i>se pasivo</i>	see PASSIVE.
<b>semivowel</b> <i>la semivocal</i>	in Spanish these are <i>y</i> or <i>i</i> when they are pronounced like the <i>y</i> in <i>yo</i> , and <i>u</i> when it is pronounced [w], as in <i>bueno</i> . The semivowels in the following words are in bold: <i>viene</i> , <i>Italia</i> , <i>dio</i> , <i>viuda</i> , <i>hay</i> , <i>buey</i> , <i>Uruguay</i> , <i>tuerca</i> , etc.
<b>sentence</b> <i>la oración</i>	the longest unit of grammar, ending with a full stop in writing. It must have at least one main CLAUSE, e.g. <i>Miguel compró un coche</i> , and the main clause(s) can have one or more dependent SUBORDINATE CLAUSES: <i>Miguel compró un coche que tiene cuatro puertas</i> . ‘Fantastic party last night!’ is not a sentence but a phrase since it has no FINITE VERB. See also PHRASE.
<b>singular</b> <i>singular</i>	a grammatical term referring to one person or thing. See also PLURAL.
<b>stress</b> <i>el acento tónico</i>	a feature of Spanish, English and many, but not all, languages whereby one syllable in a word is pronounced more energetically than the rest, as in ‘ <b>com</b> fortable’, <i>verdad</i> . The position of the stress can affect meaning in both Spanish and English, compare ‘a <b>rebel</b> ’ and ‘they <b>rebel</b> ’, or <i>hablo</i> and <i>habló</i> .
<b>subject</b> <i>el sujeto</i>	the person or thing that performs the action of a verb, as in ‘ <b>Mike</b> slammed the door’, ‘ <b>Jill’s</b> sleeping’. In the case of verbs like ‘to be’ or ‘to seem’ that do not denote actions, the subject is the person or thing about which something is predicated or stated, as in ‘ <b>Robert</b> is blond’, ‘ <b>bread</b> can go stale’, <i>María parece contenta</i> .
<b>subjunctive mood</b> <i>el modo subjuntivo</i>	a MOOD of the VERB. It is much used in Spanish, usually, but not always, in SUBORDINATE CLAUSES, but attempts to give a single definition of its various uses invariably generate confusion. See Chapter 20.
<b>subordinate clause</b> <i>la cláusula subordinada</i>	a CLAUSE which does not in itself form a sentence but depends on a MAIN CLAUSE. Thus ‘strawberries are delicious’ is a sentence and also a main clause, complete in itself. ‘When they are fresh’ only makes sense when subordinated to a main clause: ‘strawberries are delicious <b>when they are fresh</b> ’. A sentence consisting of a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses is traditionally called a ‘complex’ sentence, <i>una oración compuesta</i> or <i>una oración compleja</i> . Spanish subordinate clauses often – but by no means always – require subjunctive verbs. See Chapter 20.

<b>subordinator</b> <i>el nexo subordinante</i>	a word or phrase that introduces a SUBORDINATE CLAUSE, e.g. <i>te lo diré cuando llegues</i> 'I'll tell you <b>when</b> you arrive', <i>Alfredo me dijo que se sentía mejor</i> 'Alfredo told me <b>that</b> he felt better', <i>no sé dónde están</i> 'I don't know <b>where</b> they are', <i>los puse ahí para que los vieras/vieses</i> 'I put them there <b>so that</b> you would see them'.
<b>suffix</b> <i>el sufijo</i>	letter(s) added to the end of the root form of a word so as to alter or add meaning, e.g. 'social <b>ism</b> ', 'artist', 'deep <b>en</b> ', <i>contestación</i> 'answer', <i>impermeable</i> 'waterproof'.
<b>superlative</b> <i>el superlativo</i>	the form of an adjective or adverb used to show that a noun or pronoun has the most or least of a quality, e.g. 'he is the <b>tallest</b> ' / <i>él es el más alto</i> , 'the <b>least expensive</b> ' / <i>el menos caro</i> .
<b>syllable</b> <i>la sílaba</i>	'a unit of pronunciation having one vowel sound, with or without surrounding consonants, and forming a part of a word' ( <i>Oxford Concise Dictionary</i> ). This definition is valid for Spanish provided one remembers that DIPHTHONGS and TRIPHTHONGS are counted as single vowels. One-syllable words: <i>no, sin, dio, quien, riais</i> (new spelling). Two syllable words: <i>cama, poder, caer, caimán, maguey, rieron, Francia, vieira</i> . Three-syllable words: <i>examen, público, continuo, continuáis, Uruguay</i> . Four-syllable words: <i>Argentina, república, averiguó, ministerio, religioso</i> .
<b>tense</b> <i>el tiempo (verbal)</i>	a form of the VERB which indicates the time of an event or state. Tenses can be past, present or future, but there are more than three tense forms in English and Spanish. See Chapter 16.
<b>tilde</b> (fem.)	any written accent in Spanish, i.e. the acute accents in <i>áéíóú</i> , the sign over an <i>ñ</i> or the dieresis (two dots) over a <i>ü</i> as in <i>desagüe</i> . In everyday speech the word <i>el acento</i> is often used for the acute accent over vowels like <i>á, é, í</i> , etc., but <i>la tilde</i> is the usual word in grammar books.
<b>topic</b> <i>el tema</i>	the element in a sentence about which we wish to say something. It usually, but by no means always, coincides with the SUBJECT of the sentence, e.g. ' <b>Peter</b> won the lottery'. But it could be a DIRECT OBJECT, e.g. ' <b>pork</b> I'm not eating, so there!', or some other word or phrase, as in ' <b>as for cricket</b> , it's a game I don't really understand'. See 42.9.1.
<b>transitive verb</b> <i>el verbo transitivo</i>	a VERB is transitive if it can have a DIRECT OBJECT: 'I <b>broke</b> a glass', <i>Ángel la admira</i> 'Angel admired her'. See also INTRANSITIVE VERB.
<b>triphthong</b> <i>el triptongo</i>	a combination of vowels consisting of one strong vowel and two semivowels (see 42.2.2b and c for definitions). The bold letters in the following words are triphthongs: <i>evacuáis, construyáis, cambiéis, buey</i> . See also SYLLABLE, DIPHTHONG.
<b>unfulfilled conditions</b> <i>la (oración) condicional imposible o contrafactual</i>	defined at 29.4.
<b>verb</b> <i>el verbo</i>	a type of word which refers to an action, event, process or state: 'to repair', 'to shine', 'to go', 'to be', <i>comer, brillar, estar, ser</i> .

**verb phrase** *la frase verbal*

the part of a SENTENCE containing a VERB and – optionally – its DIRECT or INDIRECT OBJECT(s). In 'Peter's girlfriend ate five kebabs', 'Peter's girlfriend', the SUBJECT, is a NOUN PHRASE and 'ate five kebabs' is a verb phrase.

**vowel** *la vocal*

difficult to define but easy to identify. In Spanish the vowels are *a*, *e*, *i*, *o* and *u*.



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### Sources of examples

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