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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 Rodriguez
London UK, 2018
**Abbreviations and conventions**


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)


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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>Mex. Mexico</td>
<td>Sp. Spain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bol. Bolivia</td>
<td>Republic</td>
<td>Nic. Nicaragua</td>
<td>Ur. Uruguay</td>
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<tr>
<td>CR Costa Rica</td>
<td>ES El Salvador</td>
<td>Par. Paraguay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ch. Chile</td>
<td>Guat. Guatemala</td>
<td>Pe. Peru</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cu. Cuba</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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.
‘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, río for rió, crei 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/aquel 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:

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

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.


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

(I) 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* rooster/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 chancho/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  
el oso/la osa bear/she-bear  
el pato/la pata duck  
el pavo/la pava turkey

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 cabero 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 campiona champion  
el capitán/la capitana captain
1.2 Group A: gender of nouns referring to human beings and to a few animals

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 policemman/woman
el/la psiquiatra psychiatrist

(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’.

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 teledirigente TV viewer
el/la teniente lieutenant
el/la transeúnte pass-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 comediente/la comedienta comic actor
el pariente/la parienta relative (la parienta is also humorous for ‘wife’)

(1) 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.
(2) *La presidenta* ‘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/lá 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:

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

Exceptions: *el huésped/lá huéspeda* ‘guest’ (more usually *la huésped*, which the Academy recommends), *el monje/lá monja* ‘monk’/‘nun’, *el sastre/lá 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:

- **Ellla 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.
- **Ellla 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 . . . jefa de relaciones públicas* ‘Maruja had been head of public relations’.
- **Ellla 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 médica 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*.
- **Ellla miembro** ‘member’ (of clubs), also *el socio/lá socia*. The NGLE 2.9f approves of *la miembro*.
- **Ellla 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 poet* is now preferred to *la poetisa* ‘poetess’.
- **La política** is accepted by the NGLE 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 sacerdotisa* 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 jefe 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?* ‘the only women friends I have are women’! *Tú eres la más inteligente de todas* ‘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
include females, so in notices and pamphlets one sometimes sees *alumn@es, candidat@es*, etc. *L@s alumn@es* 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine noun</th>
<th>Masculine noun</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>una bala perdida</td>
<td>un bala perdida</td>
<td>stray bullet/ne’er-do-well/waster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>una bestia</td>
<td>un bestia</td>
<td>wild beast/brute/lunatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la cabeza rapada</td>
<td>un cabeza rapada</td>
<td>shaved head/skinhead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la cámara</td>
<td>el cámara</td>
<td>camera/cameraman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la primera clase</td>
<td>un primera clase</td>
<td>first class/someone first-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la superventa</td>
<td>el superventa</td>
<td>top sale/top seller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la trompeta</td>
<td>el trompeta</td>
<td>trumpet/trumpet player</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

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

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* ‘trollop’/’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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plural Gender</th>
<th>Singular Gender</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Singular Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>la araña</td>
<td>el gorila</td>
<td>el panda</td>
<td>la nutria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la babosa</td>
<td>la hormiga</td>
<td>la rana</td>
<td>la vicuña</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la ballena</td>
<td>la mariposa</td>
<td>el puma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el canguro</td>
<td>el mirlo</td>
<td>la rana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el chimpancé</td>
<td>la mofeta</td>
<td>el puma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la cucaracha</td>
<td>la nutria</td>
<td>el puma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 champá ‘champagne’, usually el champán in spoken Spanish, but la champá 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 [bá-ɾsa]), 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
- el papayo / la papaya papaya
- el peral / la pera pear

See note 2
Some fruits are masculine: *el aguacate* ‘avocado’ (*la paltas* south of Ecuador), *el albaricoque* ‘apricot’, *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*.

‘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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>la nao (archaic)</th>
<th>la Gestapo the Gestapo</th>
<th>la mano hand (dim. la manita or la manito)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>la dinamo dynamo</td>
<td>la libido libido</td>
<td>la moto motorbike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(el dinamo in Lat. Am.)</td>
<td>la magneto magneto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la disco disco</td>
<td>(frequently masc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la foto photo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

- *el alerta* alert (*el alerta rojo* ‘red alert’ or *la alerta*)
- *el bocata* familiar in Spain for ‘sandwich’/‘baguette’ (*el bocadillo*)
Gender of nouns

- 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 gigabyte
- 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

(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:

- el (or la) anatema anathema
- el anagrama anagram
- el aroma aroma
- el cisma schism
- el clima climate
- el coma coma (la coma = ‘comma’)
- el crisma holy oil (but te rompo la crisma ‘I’ll knock your block off!’)
- el crucigrama crossword
- el diagrama diagram
- el dilema dilemma
- el diploma diploma
- el dogma dogma
- el drama drama
- el eczema eczema
- el enigma enigma
- el esquema scheme
- el esquina scheme
- el estigma stigma
- el fantasma ghost
- el fiancé fiancee
- el fogón firebox
- el higrometro hygrometer
- el holograma hologram
- el lema slogan/watchword
- el magna magna
- el miasma miasma
- el panorama panorama
- el piñata piñata
- el poema poem
- el poema poem
- el prisma prism
- el problema problem
- el program(me) program(me)
- el puma puma
- el fantasma ghost
- el fantasma ghost
- el reuma rheumatism (fem. in Mexico. Also reuma)
- el síntoma symptom
- el sistema system
- el telegrama telegram puzzle
- el tema theme/topic/subject
- el trauma trauma

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-ar-a]). El País rejects the latter form.

(2) ‘Pyjamas’/US ‘pajamas’ is la pajama or la pijama in Mexico, the Caribbean and much of Central America: en pijama 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, -sión, -dad, -dad, -umbre, -ia, -cie, -cia, -sis, -itis

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

But the following are masculine:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine Noun</th>
<th>Spanish Translation</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>el ajedrez</td>
<td>chess</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el pez</td>
<td>fish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el análisis</td>
<td>analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el doblez fold/crease, also la</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el éxtasis</td>
<td>ecstasy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el apocalipsis</td>
<td>apocalypse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el paréntesis</td>
<td>bracket</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el énfasis</td>
<td>emphasis/ pomposity of style</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine Noun</th>
<th>Spanish Translation</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>el alma</td>
<td>soul</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el arma</td>
<td>weapon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el asma</td>
<td>asthma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la alarma</td>
<td>alarm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la amalgama</td>
<td>amalgam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la broma</td>
<td>joke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la calma</td>
<td>calm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la cama</td>
<td>bed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la chusma</td>
<td>rabble</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la cima</td>
<td>summit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la crema</td>
<td>cream</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la Cuaresma</td>
<td>Lent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la diadema</td>
<td>diadem/tiara</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la doma</td>
<td>breaking-in/taming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la enzima</td>
<td>enzyme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la escama</td>
<td>scale (fish)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la esgrima</td>
<td>fencing (the sport)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la estima</td>
<td>esteem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la estratega</td>
<td>strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la estima</td>
<td>esteem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la fama</td>
<td>fame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la firma</td>
<td>firm/signature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la flema</td>
<td>phlegm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la forma</td>
<td>shape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la gama</td>
<td>selection/range</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la goma</td>
<td>rubber</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la lágrima</td>
<td>tear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la lima</td>
<td>file for nails, lime (fruit)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la llama</td>
<td>flame/llama</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la loma</td>
<td>hillock</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la máxima</td>
<td>maxim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la merma</td>
<td>decrease</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la norma</td>
<td>norm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12 Gender of nouns

la palma palm  
la paloma dove  
la pamena unnecessary  
fuss  
la pantomima  
pantomime

la prima female cousin;  
bonus/prize  
la quema burning  
la rama branch  
la rima rhyme  
la sima chasm/abyss

la marisma marsh  
la suma sum  
la toma taking  
la trama plot (of novel)  
la yema egg yolk/fingertip

*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.

la España/Francia/Argentina de hoy  
la conservadora Gran Bretaña  
la Alemania que yo conocía

Spain/France/Argentina today  
conservative Britain  
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’ (MVLl, Pe., dialogue). Compare the following, which refer to a place, not to people: toda Argentina está inundada de obras mías (MVLl, 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:

la Barcelona de ayer  
el Moscú turístico  
. . . un imaginario Buenos Aires (JLB, Arg.)

the Barcelona of yesterday  
the tourist’s Moscow  
. . . an imaginary Buenos Aires

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 Cartagó, 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:

- el abrelatas: can opener
- el cazamariposas: butterfly net
- el lanzallamas: flame thrower
- el paraguas: umbrella
- el sacacorchos: corkscrew
- el sacapuntas: pencil sharpener
- el saltamontes: grasshopper
- el salvapantallas: screensaver
- el paraguas: umbrella
- el quitanieves: snow blower
- el tragaperras: slot machine

Exceptions: la quitanieves and la tragaperras. See 2.1.8.

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.

- el anorak
- el bitmap
- el blogger (or bloguero/a)
- el Bluetooth
- el buldog
- el chatroom
- el cookie (in computing)
- el hacking
- el router (in computing)
- el selfie
- el tuit
- el tuitero

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

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

English borrowings in Spanish can confuse learners. Sometimes their pronunciation is unfamiliar: el iceberg is pronounced in Spain as [e-li-θe-βeɾ] (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-pú-θle] or [pú-θle].

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 escalexter 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,
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:

- la app (in computing)  
- la boutique (la tienda) shop/store  
- la chance chance (Lat. Am. only, also masc.)

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:

- el affaire affair (fem. in French)  
- el after-shave  
- el audiobook  
- el best-seller  
- el big-bang  
- los boxes pits (in motor-racing, better el taller)  
- el burka burka  
- el chalet detached house  
- el chándal track-suit (French)  
- el copyright  
- el echarpe (light) scarf (fem. in French; pronounced as a Spanish word)

(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:

- el ADN (el ácido desoxirribonucleico) DNA  
- el IVA (el Impuesto de Valor Añadido) VAT  
- el ovoi (el objeto volante no identificado)  
- UFO (Value Added Tax)  
- el ovni (el objeto volante no identificado)  
- la pizza  
- la saúna sauna (often masc. in Lat. Am.)  
- la suite (all meanings)  
- la guerra ‘war’
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/morená ‘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’)
duermevela m. or f. snooze/nap/light sleep
el herpes m. herpes
hojaldre m. puff pastry (Lat. Am. la hojaldrá)
tilte f. 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.
(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>affaire (f.)</td>
<td>el affaire</td>
<td>affair*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aigle (m.)</td>
<td>el águila (f.)</td>
<td>eagle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amalgame (m.)</td>
<td>la amalgama</td>
<td>amalgam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anagramme (f.)</td>
<td>el anagrama</td>
<td>anagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>analyse (f.)</td>
<td>el análisis</td>
<td>analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apocalypse (f.)</td>
<td>el apocalipsis</td>
<td>apocalypse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apostrophie (f.)</td>
<td>el apóstrofe</td>
<td>apostrophe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>armoire (f.)</td>
<td>el armario</td>
<td>closet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asperge (f.)</td>
<td>el espárrago</td>
<td>asparagus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asthme (m.)</td>
<td>el asma</td>
<td>asthma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(fem.) asthma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attaque (f.)</td>
<td>el ataque</td>
<td>attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>automobile (f.)</td>
<td>el automóvil</td>
<td>automobile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>banque (f.)</td>
<td>el banco</td>
<td>bank (la banca = banking system/ bank in card-games)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barbecue (m.)</td>
<td>la barbacoa</td>
<td>barbecue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>calme (m.)</td>
<td>la calma</td>
<td>calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cidre (m.)</td>
<td>la sidra</td>
<td>cider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coca/Pepsi Cola (m.)</td>
<td>la Coca/Pepsi Cola</td>
<td>current</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comète (f.)</td>
<td>el cometa</td>
<td>comet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>courant (m.)</td>
<td>la corriente</td>
<td>current</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dent (f.)</td>
<td>el diente</td>
<td>tooth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diabète (m.)</td>
<td>la diabetes</td>
<td>diabetes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dioèse (m.)</td>
<td>la diócesis</td>
<td>diocese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doute (m.)</td>
<td>la duda</td>
<td>doubt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>éclipse (f.)</td>
<td>el eclipse</td>
<td>eclipse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emphase (f.)</td>
<td>el énfasis</td>
<td>pomposity of style, also ‘emphasis’ in Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>énigme (f.)</td>
<td>el enigma</td>
<td>enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>équipe (f.)</td>
<td>el equipo</td>
<td>team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extase (f.)</td>
<td>el éxtasis</td>
<td>ecstasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fin (f.)</td>
<td>el fin</td>
<td>end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>front (m.)</td>
<td>la frente</td>
<td>forehead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(but el frente = military/ weather front)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fruit (m.)</td>
<td>la fruta</td>
<td>but ‘the fruit of their efforts’= el fruto de sus esfuerzos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fumée (f.)</td>
<td>el humo</td>
<td>smoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guide (m.)</td>
<td>la guía</td>
<td>guide book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hamburger (m.)</td>
<td>la hamburguesa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>horloge (f.)</td>
<td>el reloj</td>
<td>clock</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
- cólera (m.) cholera (f.) wrath/anger
- coma (m.) coma (f.) comma
- cometa (m.) comet (f.) kite (toy)
- consonante (m.) rhyming word (f.)
- corte (m.) cut (f.) the Court/’Madrid’
- cura (m.) priest (f.) cure
- delta (m.) river delta (f.) delta (Greek letter)
- doblez (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
- génesis (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)

*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) 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
Gender of nouns

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Main type of noun</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>See section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Add –s</td>
<td>• Nouns ending with an unstressed vowel</td>
<td>la casa-las casas</td>
<td>2.1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Many foreign words ending with a consonant</td>
<td>el chalet-los chalets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Nouns ending in é, ó and some nouns ending in á, ú</td>
<td>el jersey-los jerséis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>el cafés-los cafés</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>el capó-los capós</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>el sofá-los sofás</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>el menú-los menús</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Add –es</td>
<td>• Spanish nouns ending with a consonant other than -s</td>
<td>la flor-las flores</td>
<td>2.1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Nouns ending with a stressed vowel + s</td>
<td>el inglés-los ingleses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Nouns ending in ú</td>
<td>la tos-las toses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Nouns ending in -í</td>
<td>el tabú-los tabúes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>el israelí-los israelíes or los israelís</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. No change</td>
<td>• Nouns ending with an unstressed vowel + -s</td>
<td>la crisis-las crisis</td>
<td>2.1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Families of people or things</td>
<td>el virus-los virus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Some foreign nouns whose plural would be difficult to pronounce</td>
<td>los Blanco, los Ford</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>el test-los test (or tests)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>el kibbutz-los kibbutz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.1.2 Nouns that make their plural by adding -s

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>el huevo</td>
<td>los huevos egg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la cama</td>
<td>las camas bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el bebé</td>
<td>los bebés baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el café</td>
<td>los cafés coffee/cafés</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la serie</td>
<td>las series series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la tribu</td>
<td>las tribus tribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el pie</td>
<td>los pies foot/feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el té</td>
<td>los tés tea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>el bebé</td>
<td>los bebés baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el café</td>
<td>los cafés coffee/cafés</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el pie</td>
<td>los pies foot/feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el té</td>
<td>los tés tea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
20 Plural of Nouns

(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 reves – 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 marroquis ‘Moroccans’, pakistánis, iranís, etc. The following are in the formal style:

el bisturí – los bisturíes scalpel
hindú – hindúes (Asian) Indian
pakistání – pakistánies 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, menús occur in the River Plate area. In Spain a restaurant ‘menu’ is la carta and menú means ‘set menu’.
2.1 How to form the plural of nouns

(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 margen* – los 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 carmen* – los cármenes villa with a garden
- *el crimen* – los crímenes crime
- *el germen* – los gérmenes germ
- *el origen* – los orígenes origin
- *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 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 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 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 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

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:

- *el álbum* ‘album’. 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*.

(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 ultimatums*, *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.
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)

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/la bármanes barman/ barmaid
- el dólares – los dólares dollar
- el dosier – los dosieres dossier
- el dron – los drones drone

(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 [sáŋ-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 frac) ‘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 clubs is more common in writing than los clubs; El País prefers clubs. Los álbumes is generally preferred to los álbums ‘albums’. Los esloganes 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 pines 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
2.1 How to form the plural of nouns

Nacional de Identidad, not DNIs. 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 Péreces/Pérez  
nó todos los Juan Pérez del mundo (JD, Ch.)

This village is full of Morenos,  
Blancos and Péreces  
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  
el – los cumpleaños birthday  
el – los guardaespaldas bodyguard  
el – los lanzamisiles missile-launcher  
el – los limpiabotas shoeshine  
el – los portaaviones aircraft carrier  
la/las tragaperras gambling machine/slot machine

 la – las quitanieves snowplough/US snowplow. Seco (1998) says it is feminine  
el – los elevalunas automatic car window-opener

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:

 el año luz – los años luz light-year  
el arco iris – los arcos iris rainbow  
el bebé probeta – los bebés probeta test-tube baby  
el carril bus – los carriles bus bus lane  
la hora punta – las horas punta rush hour/peak hour (la hora pico in many Lat. Am. countries)

el perro policía – los perros policía police dog  
el satélite espía – los satélites espía spy satellite  
la tienda online – las tiendas online online shop/store. Also tiendas en línea/la cibertienda.

But always el país miembro – los países miembros ‘member country’, la tierra virgen – las tierras virgenes ‘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.
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:

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

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

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

Ejercía diversas soberbias (JLB, Arg.)
He practised various kinds of arrogance

. . . conductas que afectan el bolsillo de
d todos los mexicanos (La Jornada, Mex.)
. . . 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
- *los auriculares* earphones
- *las bragas* panties
- *las gafas* glasses (Lat. Am. *los anteojos/* *los lentes*)
- *las pinzas* tweezers

‘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)

(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 viveres* 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’. Buenas noches, 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:
2.3 Number agreement rules

Les cortaron la cabeza
They cut off their heads

Se quitaron el sombrero
They took off their hats

Todos tenían novia
All had girlfriends (one each)

tres israelíes con pasaporte alemán
three Israelis with German passports

La cara de Antonio no refleja el mismo entusiasmo. Ni la de sus cuñados tampoco
Antonio’s face doesn’t reflect the same enthusiasm. Nor do those (lit. ‘nor does (CRG, Sp.)
that’) of his brothers and sisters-in-law

(1) This rule is optional when the object possessed is not part of the body: quitense 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 corrieran 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.)
There were also a lot of girl students in jeans and T-shirts

A mí me parecía maravilloso ver tanto soldado (NC, Mex.)
It seemed wonderful to me to see so many soldiers

¿Cuál era el móvil de tanto ataque? (MS, Mex., dialogue)
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 . . .
The government consider(s) . . .

La tripulación está a su disposición
The crew are/is at your disposal

El resto de mis bienes es ya vuestro (AG, Sp.)
The rest of my goods is yours now
(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: cuando 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.)
Ese tipo de relaciones son siempre difíciles (MS, Mex., dialogue)

Why do men do this kind of thing?
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.)
—¿Cuánto le debo? —Son cien euros
Lo demás fueron un par de detalles burocráticos (ABE, Pe.)
Su morada más común son las ruinas (JLB, Arg.)
Lo que llega son series de números (MC, Mex., dialogue)

The document was our conditions
At first it was all jokes
‘How much do I owe you?’ ‘That’s 100 euros’
The rest was a couple of bureaucratic details
Their most usual dwelling-place is ruins
What arrives is series of numbers
2.3 Number agreement rules

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>El derrumbe del socialismo y la desaparición de la URSS causó el mayor daño</em> (FC, Cu., or <em>causaron</em>)</td>
<td>The collapse of socialism and the disappearance of the Soviet Union caused the greatest damage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 . . .’.
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 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>el</td>
<td>la (el before feminine nouns beginning with a stressed a sound. See 3.1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>los</td>
<td>las</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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
- el hampa the 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine article</th>
<th>Masculine article</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un aula oscura</td>
<td>el AVE (Alta Velocidad Española)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine article</th>
<th>Masculine article</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>una amplia estancia (FU, Sp.)</td>
<td>wide room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>una alta mujer (JLB, Arg.)</td>
<td>a tall woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Vas a comprar un móvil? La amplia gama de modelos complica la decisión (El País, Sp.)</td>
<td>Are you buying a mobile/cell phone? The wide range of models makes deciding more difficult</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 page one of El Comercio
Viajaron a El Cairo They travelled to Cairo
en el último número de El Vocero Cristiano in the latest number of The Christian Spokesman
(J JA, Mex.)

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.

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

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:

- la caída del gobierno
  - the fall of the government
- El gato se ha comido las salchichas
  - 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.

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

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:

- el padre y la madre
  - the father and mother
- entre el hotel y la playa
  - between the hotel and beach
- El desorden callejero y las piedras son contrarios a la democracia (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:

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

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

(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’.
The definite article

(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
  A scalded cat runs from cold water

- Oveja que bala, bocado que pierde
  A bleating sheep misses a nibble (i.e. you miss out if you talk too much)

- Turista que se enoja, no regresa (LS, Mex., dialogue. Enojarse = enfadarse in Spain)
  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 democracy
- el catolicismo español/la sociedad cubana Spanish Catholicism / Cuban society
- Mi relato será fiel a la realidad (JLB, Arg.) My story will be true to reality
- El debate sobre la cultura, los derechos, y la autonomía indígena (La Reforma, Mex.) 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 Bran is good for the digestion
- El acero inoxidable es carísimo Stainless steel is extremely expensive
- La sangre no tiene precio Blood has no price

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

- Los belgas beben mucha cerveza Belgians (in general) drink a lot of beer
- 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 The tiger is (‘tigers are’) a dangerous animal
- El periodista escribe para el olvido (JLB, Arg., dialogue) 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/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,
naças bastaria 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.
The definite article

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

- Quiero cerveza
  I want (some) beer
- Eso necesita valor
  That needs courage
- No hay agua
  There isn’t any water/There’s no water
- Su móvil no tiene cobertura
  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’:

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

(I) 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

- Estamos hablando de religión
  We’re talking (about) religion
- Está hecho de oro
  It’s made of gold

and

- Estamos hablando de la religión de los antiguos persas
  We’re talking about the religion of the ancient Persians
- Está hecho del oro que trajeron de las Indias
  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:

- Está hecho de oro macizo
  It’s made of solid gold
- Estamos hablando de religión antigua
  We’re talking about ancient religion
- No hablo con traidores de su patria
  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:
3.2 Uses and omission of the definite article

(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:

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

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

Los lagartos comen moscas  Lizards eat flies
Claro que uso jabón  Of course I use soap
Queremos paz  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:

Odio las películas violentas  I hate violent movies
Me encanta el helado de vainilla  I love vanilla ice cream
Hay que combatir el terrorismo  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:

la confusión por antonomasia  confusion personified/par excellence
a cántaros  in pitcherfuls
por avión  by plane
en tren/coche  by train/car
Estamos aquí de observadores  We’re here as observers
De niña yo solo/sólo hablaba catalán  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:
The definite article

el dolor de muelas  
la Edad de (la) Piedra, but usually  
la Edad del Hierro  
um 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*  
(AEl 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>en español, en inglés</td>
<td>in Spanish, in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sé quechua</td>
<td>I know Quechua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aprendo alemán/Habla griego</td>
<td>I’m learning German/(S)he speaks Greek</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entiendo (el) inglés</td>
<td>I understand English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escribe (el) italiano</td>
<td>(S)he writes Italian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

(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’, chapurrar ‘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) Tibet, (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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>La Rioja</th>
<th>La Haya the Hague</th>
<th>La Paz</th>
<th>Los Ángeles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El Cairo</td>
<td>la Mancha</td>
<td>la Plata</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la Habana, less often simply Habana</td>
<td>La Meca Mecca, or simply Mecca</td>
<td>La Coruña or simply Coruña</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

- **Vive en la plaza/la calle de la Independencia**
- **la Embajada de los EE.UU., en la avenida Wilson (Caretas, Pe.)**

(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:

- **Llegan el martes**
- **cerrado los viernes**
- **Los domingos las calles están casi vacías**
- **Odio los lunes**
- **El miércoles es cuando habrá menos gente**
- **a partir del domingo**

They’re arriving on Tuesday
closed on Friday(s)
On Sundays the streets are nearly empty
I hate Mondays
Wednesday’s the day there’ll be fewest people
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) 18th 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)
was never defeated’ (Cuba Internacional, Cu.), detuvieron a Ramón Pérez “el Duque” ‘they arrested Ramón Perez “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 escribidor (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’ ‘Father Blanco’. 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 mister, monsieur, herr: don Miguel, fray Bentos, santa Teresa, sor Juana, mister 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:

- Madrid, capital de España
- Lázaro Conesal, propietario del hotel
- Ricardo Balbín, jefe de la Unión Cívica Radical
- Amilpa, nuevo jefe de la CTM (JA, Mex.)

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:

- Vivo en el piso (Lat. Am. el apartamento/el departamento) 38 (piso = 'ground' in Lat. Am.)
- Vive en la calle Serrano, en el 23/en el 23 de la calle Serrano (but vive en Serrano 23)
- una disposición del artículo 277 de la Constitución
- unas fotos del 93
- el diez por ciento de los peruanos

(S)he lives at 23 Serrano Street

A provision of Art. 277 of the Constitution

Some photos from 1993

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:

- en (la) cama in bed
- en (el) Palacio at the Palace
- a/en/de la iglesia to/in/from church
- en la televisión on television (la optional)
- al/en el del cielo/infierno to/in/from Heaven/Hell

- en el espacio in space
- debajo de la tierra (but bajo tierra) underground
- al/en el del hospital to/in/from hospital
- en la cárcel/en la iglesia/ in prison/at church
- en el colegio/en el trabajo at school/at work

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 | 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 . . .
- . . . *la de veces* que han dicho eso
- . . . *la de lágrimas* que solté (LS, Ch., dialogue)
- . . . with all the dozens of lawyers’ numbers there are in the phone book . . .
- . . . the number of times they’ve said that!
- . . . the quantity of tears I shed . . .
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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>un</td>
<td>una</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>unos</td>
<td>unas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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 incomprendidos ‘they’re misunderstood geniuses’. See 4.2 for details.

(I) 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The plural indefinite article is des, cf. des gants, ce sont des clowns, je lui ai donné des roses</td>
<td>The plural is unos/unas: unos guantes, son unos payasos, but omitted in many cases: le di (unas) rosas. See 3.2.8, 4.2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 papelera 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* an actress and singer (same woman)
- *un cuchillo y abrelatas* a combined knife and tin-opener
- *Este libro está escrito con una maestría y (una) delicadeza insólitas* 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* I’m a pilot/They’re divers
- *Es soltero/Es casada* (compare *está casada* ‘she’s married’; see 33.4.1a)
- *Se hizo detective* (S)he became a detective
- *... y aunque Alejandra era mujer* (ES, Arg.) ... 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 Superman* ‘he is Superman’, *es un supermán* ‘he’s a superman’; *el sargento se decía: “No es un ladrón. Es un loco”* (MVLI, 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Es (una) coincidencia</td>
<td>It’s a coincidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es (una) cuestión de dinero</td>
<td>It’s a question of money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es (una) víctima de las circunstancias</td>
<td>(S)he’s a victim of circumstances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No es molestia/problema</td>
<td>It’s no bother/problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No es exageración</td>
<td>It’s no exaggeration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No es desventaja</td>
<td>It’s not a disadvantage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

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’.

Manuel tiene pareja
Mi ordenador/computadora tiene ratón óptico
Hay mercado/subasta
Vanos a buscarle novia
Siempre lleva anillo
Barcelona tiene puerto y parque y tranvía y metro y autobús y cine (LG, Sp.)
Hubo quien se ofendió y sacó pistola (MVLI, Pe.)
Ya he sacado entrada

Pepe’s got a partner (female or male)
My computer has an optical mouse
There’s a market/auction
Let’s look for a girlfriend for him
(S)he always wears a ring
Barcelona has a port, park, tramway, metro, buses and cinema(s)
One person took offence and pulled a gun
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 dólar?) ‘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’.
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 convirtieron unas galletas de agua con queso fresco (MVLI, Pe., in Spain convirtió 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:

El Español de hoy, lengua en ebullición
Spanish Today, a Language in Ferment
(book title)

Estuvimos quince días en Acapulco, lugar que nunca olvidaré
We spent two weeks in Acapulco, a place
I’ll never forget

Luego fue secuestrado Jorge Money, periodista del diario La Opinión (MSQ, Arg.)
They then kidnapped JM, a journalist
from the daily newspaper La Opinión

Buenos Aires, ciudad que no me atrae (JLB, Arg., dialogue)
Buenos Aires, a city that doesn’t attract me

Ahora, a buscar un digno sustituto de Pedro, tarea nada fácil (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:

Juan es cobarde/juan es un cobarde
John is cowardly/John is a coward

Papá es (un) fascista
Father is a fascist

Soy extranjero/un extranjero
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’:

a manera de prólogo
by way of a prologue

a modo de bastón
as/like a walking stick

como ejemplo
as an example

Utilicé mi zapato como martillo
I used my shoe as a hammer

Renunció . . . ‘como único medio de conseguir la tranquilidad’ (JA, Mex.)
He resigned . . . ‘as the only way of achieving tranquillity’
The indefinite article

(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/semelante 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* and about five minutes later it stopped

(GGM, Col.)
(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.)
Todavía tenía unos restos de fe
Sonreí . . . pero fue peor: unos dientes amarillos aparecieron (CRG, Sp.)
La compañía anunció unos resultados mucho peores de lo que esperaban los inversores (El País, Sp.)
Está a unas calles de sus casas (La Jornada, Mex.)

Not right now, but if you buy me a couple of drinks, maybe I’ll think about it
(S)he still had some vestiges of faith
I smiled, but it was worse: a set of yellow teeth appeared
The company announced a set of results much worse than investors expected
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 dificil and un dificil 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) Adjetival 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, -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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ends with a vowel</th>
<th>Masculine singular</th>
<th>Feminine singular</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ends with a vowel</td>
<td>bueno</td>
<td>buena ‘good’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ends with a consonant</td>
<td>hablador</td>
<td>habladora ‘talkative’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ends with a vowel</th>
<th>Masculine plural</th>
<th>Feminine plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ends with a vowel</td>
<td>buenos</td>
<td>buenas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ends with a consonant</td>
<td>habladores</td>
<td>habladoras</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>redondo</td>
<td>redonda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inglés</td>
<td>inglesa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>musulmán</td>
<td>musulmana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pillín</td>
<td>pillina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regordete</td>
<td>regordeta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>español</td>
<td>española</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>andaluz</td>
<td>andaluza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>batallador</td>
<td>batalladora</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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
5.2 Forms of adjectives

**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, -i.

The plural is formed: (a) if the adjective ends in a consonant or -i 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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>socialist</td>
<td>socialistas</td>
<td>azul</td>
<td>azules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grande</td>
<td>grandes</td>
<td>gris</td>
<td>grises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imponente</td>
<td>imponentes</td>
<td>feliz</td>
<td>felices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>útil</td>
<td>útiles</td>
<td>nacional</td>
<td>nacionales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irán</td>
<td>iránés/iraní</td>
<td>feroz</td>
<td>feroces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hindú</td>
<td>hindúes (Asian)</td>
<td>ruin</td>
<td>ruines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cortés</td>
<td>corteses</td>
<td>regular</td>
<td>regulares</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Adjectives ending in -i 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 *maoris* ‘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 -i 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 lentes! (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’ ([esta]mos 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’, monstro ‘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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>añil</th>
<th>indigo</th>
<th>carmín</th>
<th>escarlata</th>
<th>terciopelo</th>
<th>turquesa</th>
<th>turquise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>azafraín</td>
<td>saffron</td>
<td>canela</td>
<td>chocolate</td>
<td>granate</td>
<td>lila</td>
<td>lilac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beis</td>
<td>beige</td>
<td>chocolate</td>
<td>brown</td>
<td>lila</td>
<td>oro</td>
<td>gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>azur</td>
<td>azure</td>
<td>escarlata</td>
<td>scarlet</td>
<td>paja</td>
<td>sepia</td>
<td>sepia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>café</td>
<td>coffee brown</td>
<td>grana</td>
<td>dark red</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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: pliegues 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’. 
5.4 Adjectives formed from two words

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):

- hojas verde oscuro  
  dark green leaves
- calcetines rojo claro  
  pale/light red socks
- una masa gris castaño  
  a grey/US gray-brown mass
- [Mis ojos] son azul pálido (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:

- Tráeme agua hirviendo  
  Bring me some boiling water
- Tienes la frente ardiendo  
  Your forehead is burning
- Yo más bien soy un carbón ardiendo (i.e. sexually excited; MVLI, 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’.
Adjectives

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Short Form</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alguno</td>
<td>algún remoto día</td>
<td>some remote day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bueno</td>
<td>un buen cocinero</td>
<td>a good cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malo</td>
<td>un mal ingeniero</td>
<td>a bad engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ninguno</td>
<td>en ningún momento</td>
<td>at no moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>postrero</td>
<td>tu postrér día</td>
<td>(archaic) your last day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primero</td>
<td>mi primer amor</td>
<td>my first love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tercero</td>
<td>el tercer hombre</td>
<td>the third man</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 NGLE 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 decrépitos ‘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:

- Buscaban una tienda o un restaurante abiertos
  (abiertos clearly refers to both)
- Buscaban la mujer o el hombre capaces de
  asumir el cargo (for the absence of personal a see 26.2)

- They were looking for an open store or
  (an open) restaurant
- 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:

\[
\begin{align*}
su \text{ habitual sabiduría y tolerancia} & \quad \text{(ES, Arg.)} \quad \text{his usual wisdom and tolerance} \\
esas \text{ frescas rosas y claveles} & \quad \text{(JLB, Arg.)} \quad \text{those fresh roses and carnations}
\end{align*}
\]

(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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Es absurdo hacerlo sin ayuda} & \quad \text{It’s absurd to do it without help} \\
\text{Es peligroso, pero lo haré} & \quad \text{It’s dangerous, but I’ll do it} \\
\text{La miseria no tiene nada de sano y placentero} & \quad \text{Extreme poverty has nothing healthy or agreeable about it}
\end{align*}
\]

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

(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 estadounidense 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 Rio 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.
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(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* (for *hindú* versus *hindú* 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-xá-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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town or City</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Álava</td>
<td>alavés</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcalá: complutense.</td>
<td>See note 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ávila</td>
<td>abulense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badajoz</td>
<td>pacense</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barcelona: barcelonés</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Berlín</td>
<td>berlinés</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilbao</td>
<td>bilbaíno</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>bogotano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>bostoniano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buenos Aires: porteño/ bonaerense. See note 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burgos</td>
<td>burgalés</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cádiz</td>
<td>gaditano</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caracas</td>
<td>caraqueño</td>
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<tr>
<td>Córdoba</td>
<td>cordobés</td>
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<tr>
<td>La Coruña</td>
<td>coruñés</td>
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<td>Dublín</td>
<td>dublinés</td>
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<td>Florencia</td>
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<td>Granada</td>
<td>granadino</td>
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<td>La Habana</td>
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<td>Lima</td>
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<td>Lisboa</td>
<td>lisboeta Lisbon</td>
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<td>Londres</td>
<td>londinense</td>
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<td>Madrid</td>
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<td>Málaga</td>
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<td>Miami</td>
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<td>Moscú</td>
<td>moscovita</td>
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<td>Murcia</td>
<td>murciano</td>
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<td>Nápoles</td>
<td>napolitano</td>
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<td>Nueva York</td>
<td>neoyorquino</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pamplona</td>
<td>pamplonés/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamplona invariable</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>París</td>
<td>parisiense. See note 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Paz</td>
<td>paceño/pacense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quito</td>
<td>quiteño</td>
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<tr>
<td>Río de Janeiro</td>
<td>carioca</td>
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<td>Roma</td>
<td>romano</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salamanca</td>
<td>salmantino/</td>
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<td>Salamanqués</td>
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<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>sanfranciscano</td>
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<td>San Sebastián</td>
<td>donostiarrar</td>
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<td>Santander</td>
<td>santanderino</td>
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<td>Santiago</td>
<td>santiaguino</td>
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<td>(Ch.)</td>
<td>santiagués (Sp.)</td>
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<td>Segovia</td>
<td>segoviano</td>
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<td>Sevilla</td>
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<td>Toledo</td>
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<td>Valencia</td>
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<td>Valladolid</td>
<td>vallisoletano</td>
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<td>Washington</td>
<td>washingtoniano</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zaragoza</td>
<td>zaragozano</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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, io or eo if not stressed on the e: baladí ‘trivial’, arduo ‘arduous’, espontáneo ‘spontaneous’, rubio ‘blond’ (rubísimo is possible but infrequent), tardío ‘late’.


(b) Words stressed on the last syllable but two (palabras esdrújulas) ending in -ico, -fero, -éneo, -voro, político ‘political’, mamífero ‘mammalian’, 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’, ojitruerto ‘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 ‘skillful’.

(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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(h) Hirviendo ‘boiling’ and ardiendo ‘burning’.

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

5.8.3 Irregular intensive forms

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

antiguo: antiquísimo ancient
áspero: aspérrimo harsh
curso: cursilísimo affected/pseudo-refined
infeil: ínfimo (literary) inferior/least/lowest
joven: jovencísimo young
lejos: lejísimos distant/far

mayor: máximo supreme/greatest
menor: mínimo slightest/least
mejor: óptimo superb (literary)

(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:

amigo friendly/keen amiguísimo
célebre famous celebérrimo
fértil fertile ubérriimo/fertilísimo
fiel faithful fidelísimo/fidelísimo

libre: libre libre/libérrimo/muy libre
magnífico: magnificient magníficísimo/magnificentísimo
pobre: pobre pobrísimo/pobre/pobrísimo
sabio: wise sapientísimo
sagrado: sacred sacratísimo

(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 nuevo ‘very new’. Bracketed forms are literary:

bueno: buenísimo (bonísimo) good
cierto: ciertísimo (certísimo) certain
diestro: diestísimo (destrísimo) skilled
fuerte: fuertísimo (fortísimo) strong
reciente: recientísimo (recentísimo) recent
tierno: tiernísimo (ternísimo) tender

In some words the diphthong is never modified, e.g. viejo – viejísimo ‘old’, cuerdo – cuerdísimo ‘sane’.

5.9 Use of nouns as adjectives and adjectives as nouns

(a) Nouns may occasionally be used as adjectives:

Tienes que ser más persona decente
Este libro es menos novela que el otro

You’ve got to be more of a decent person
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 NGLE notes that nouns of negative meaning – enfermo ‘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:

- *el pan integral* wholemeal bread
- *el calentamiento global* global warming
- *los cazas computarizados* computerized fighter aircraft
- *la religión cristiana* the Christian religion

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:

- *Tráigame una cuchara limpia* Bring me a clean spoon (i.e. not a dirty one)
- *Tengo una camisa verde y otra azul* I have a green shirt and a blue one
- *No queremos agua salada* We don’t want salty water

(c) Scientific or technical adjectives:

- *la gramática transformacional* transformational grammar
- *la conexión inalámbrica* wireless connection
- *el correo electrónico* email*

*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:

- *el túnel ferroviario* railway tunnel
- *la energía eólica* wind energy

(e) Adjectives of place, nationality, affiliation, which are almost always restrictive:

- *el clima argentino* the Argentine climate
- *el campo inglés* the English countryside

*el Partido Democrático* the Democratic Party
5.10 Position of adjectives in relation to nouns

(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!
- un profesor, dueño de una amplísima cultura
- ¡Sensacional promoción de verano!
- esta popular y veterana suite de diseño gráfico . . .
- ¡Convierte tus vídeos en auténticas películas!

the magnificent ruins at/of Macchu Picchu
I’m not going to let you poison your daughter with the ideas in your sick head!
a teacher, a highly educated man
Sensational Summer Offer!
this popular and time-tested graphic design suite . . .
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 permanentemente 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
una guirnalda de blancas flores (LG, Sp.) a wreath of white flowers
La pera es de fácil digestión (cookery book, Spain) Pears are easily digested
el creciente costo de la tierra urbana the rising cost of land in the cities


(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:

mi distinguido colega my distinguished colleague
el peligroso tigre asiático the dangerous Asian tiger
un valiente torero a brave bullfighter
los volubles dioses romanos 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:
One could see imposing Mount Everest
the left-wing Farabundo Martí Front
your alarming age . . . (you only have one age)

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
my incredible luck

¡este maldito ordenador! (Lat. Am.
this damned computer!
computadora or computador)

Valiente soldado eres tú
A great soldier you are (I don’t think . . .)
tu dichosa familia
your blessed family . . .
estas condenadas hormigas
these damned ants
cinco cochinos/piojosos euros
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 anfibio
an amphibious assault craft

un curso básico de informática
a basic course in computing

un libro lleno de curiosas referencias de índole personal (JLB, Arg.)
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
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tengo un abrigo bueno para los fines de semana, y uno regular para los laborables</td>
<td>I’ve got a good coat for weekends, and a so-so one for weekdays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar Wilde dijo que no hay libros buenos o malos sino libros bien o mal escritos (JLB, Arg., contrast)</td>
<td>Oscar Wilde said there are no good or bad books only well or badly written books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponlo debajo del árbol grande</td>
<td>Put it under the big tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trae el martillo grande</td>
<td>Bring the big hammer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mi hermana mayor/menor</td>
<td>my elder/younger sister</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) Subjective qualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un buen carpintero</td>
<td>a good carpenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un gran éxito</td>
<td>a great success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un gran ruido/poeta/embustero</td>
<td>a great noise/poet/fraud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>los grandes narcotraficantes</td>
<td>the major drug dealers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un pequeño problema (see note 4)</td>
<td>a slight problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el mayor poeta mexicano</td>
<td>the greatest Mexican poet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ni la menor impresión de insinceridad</td>
<td>not even the slightest impression of insincerity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 lio 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After noun</th>
<th>Before noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>antiguo</td>
<td>ancient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cierto</td>
<td>sure/unquestionable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>falso</td>
<td>forged/falsified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medio</td>
<td>average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pobre</td>
<td>poor (i.e. not rich)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>raro</td>
<td>strange/rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rico</td>
<td>rich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>semejante</td>
<td>similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>simple</td>
<td>simple-minded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>triste</td>
<td>sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>valiente</td>
<td>courageous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verdadero</td>
<td>truthful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>varios</td>
<td>assorted/various</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

- Lo haré en ambos casos I’ll do it in both cases
- las llamadas democracias the so-called democracies
- la mera mención del asunto the mere mention of the topic
- Llevaba mucho dinero (S)he was carrying a lot of money
- Busquemos otro médico Let’s look for another doctor
- Me dejó en pleno centro (S)he left me right in the town centre
- menudo pájaro.../menudo follón... some guy.../some mess... (sarcastic tone)
- pocas veces rarely, poca paciencia not much patience
- el pretendido/presunto autor the alleged/supposed author
- un sedicente budista a self-styled Buddhist
- Trajeron sendos paquetes (literary) Each one brought a parcel
- el supuesto ladrón the alleged thief
- ante tamaña tontería in the face of such stupidity
- No puedo comer tanta cantidad 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’.
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 (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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>de + noun</th>
<th>Relational adjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>carestía del petróleo</td>
<td>la carestía petrolera high oil prices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crisis de la banca</td>
<td>la crisis bancaria bank crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defectos del oído</td>
<td>los defectos auditivos hearing deficiencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>industria de automóviles</td>
<td>la industria automovilística car industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>industria de hoteles</td>
<td>la industria hotelera hotel industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peces de río</td>
<td>los peces fluviales river-fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>política de energía</td>
<td>la política energética energy policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>programa de televisión</td>
<td>el programa televisivo television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sindicato de pilotos</td>
<td>el sindicato piloteril pilots’ union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>centro de deportes</td>
<td>el centro deportivo sports centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>el sistema operativo operating system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>la contaminación lumínica light pollution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 | los medios masivos the mass media |
| una persona nerviosa a nervous person | el gas nervioso nerve gas         |
| un gesto hospitalario a hospital gesture | un centro hospitalario a hospital centre |
| la política defensiva defence policy | la actitud defensiva defensive attitude |
| la poesía amorosa love poetry        | 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’, *insoportable* ‘unbearable’, *intocable* ‘untouchable’, *irreal* ‘unreal’, *improbable* ‘improbable’. But often a solution with *poco*, *no* or *sin* must be found:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no autorizado/sin autorizar unauthorized</td>
<td>poco inteligente unintelligent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no usado/sin usar unused</td>
<td>poco profesional unprofessional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poco amistoso unfriendly</td>
<td>sin comprender uncomprehending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poco apetitoso unappetizing</td>
<td>sin convencer unconvenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poco atractivo unattractive</td>
<td>sin principios unprincipled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poco caritativo uncharitable</td>
<td>sin probar untried</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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/tí.

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 | Lemons are bitterer than cherries |
| Tú andas más despacio que yo | You walk more slowly than me |
| Más vale solos que mal acompañados | Better alone than in bad company |
| (MVLL, Pe., dialogue) | |

(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 tímid 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’. 
The comparative of adverbs and, in some circumstances, of adjectives, has the same form as
the superlative. See 6.3.2 for discussion.

‘... 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.

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 llevás, se puede saber? (MVLI, 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Comparative singular</th>
<th>Comparative plural (adjective only)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bueno</td>
<td>good</td>
<td>mejor</td>
<td>mejores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malo</td>
<td>bad</td>
<td>peor</td>
<td>peores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pequeño</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>menor/más pequeño</td>
<td>menores/más pequeños</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grande</td>
<td>big</td>
<td>mayor/más grande</td>
<td>mayores/más grandes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poco</td>
<td>few/not much</td>
<td>menos</td>
<td>menos (invariable)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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
   Her/His sisters speak better than she does
   Aquí estamos mejor
   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’:

- una infernal espiral de sangre y muertes
- que nos ha convertido en el país más inseguro y violento del mundo, con la más alta tasa de homicidios (El Tiempo, Col.)
- lo mejor/peor que te puede suceder . . . (See Chapter 8 for the uses of lo)
- el mejor restaurante de 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):

- mi más leal amigo/mi amigo más leal
- pero mi capa más profunda se enristeció

(ES, Arg.)

- my most loyal friend
- But the deepest layer in me (lit. ‘my deepest layer’) was saddened

(b) After ponerse and other verbs of becoming, including quedar(se):

- María se pone más nerviosa
- queda mejor así

- Maria gets most nervous
- 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):

- una infernal espiral de sangre y muertes
- que nos ha convertido en el país más inseguro y violento del mundo, con la más alta tasa de homicidios (El Tiempo, Col.)
- lo mejor/peor que te puede suceder . . . (See Chapter 8 for the uses of lo)
- el mejor restaurante de Madrid

- an infernal spiral of blood and deaths
- that has turned us into the most unsafe and violent country in the world,
- with the highest murder rate
- the best/worst thing that can happen to you . . .
- the best restaurant in Madrid

- una infernal espiral de sangre y muertes
- que nos ha convertido en el país más inseguro y violento del mundo, con la más alta tasa de homicidios (El Tiempo, Col.)
- lo mejor/peor que te puede suceder . . . (See Chapter 8 for the uses of lo)
- el mejor restaurante de Madrid

- an infernal spiral of blood and deaths
- that has turned us into the most unsafe and violent country in the world,
- with the highest murder rate
- the best/worst thing that can happen to you . . .
- the best restaurant in Madrid
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 . . .
¿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
(Miguel, 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
Comparison of adjectives and adverbs

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 (S)he’s got more shoes than her/his mother has
(could be shortened to tiene más zapatos que su madre but the rest of these examples require a form of del que)

La conozco desde hace aún más años de los que lleva fuera de España I’ve known her for even more years than she has been out of Spain

. . . más novedades de las que Diego hubiera podido imaginar . . . more novelties than Diego could have imagined
(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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Es menos tonto de lo que cree} & \quad \text{(crees is genderless)} \\
\text{Nos lo explicarán mejor de lo que se lo explicaron a ellos} & \quad \text{(se lo explicaron is genderless)} \\
\text{El viento me vuelve mucho más loca de lo que mi marido y exmaridos dicen que estoy} & \quad \text{(CRG, Sp., 'Dicen que estoy' is genderless)} \\
\text{No estás ni la mitad de moreno de lo que está Celia} & \quad \text{(genderless phrase está Celia)} \\
\text{No me lo agradecas más de lo que merezco} & \quad \text{(LS, Sp., dialogue. Genderless merezco)} \\
\text{Así que . . . debía de ser aún más rico de lo que me imaginaba} & \quad \text{(JM, Sp., dialogue)} \\
\text{Convertirse en inversionista es más fácil de lo que cree} & \quad \text{(Excélsior, Mex.)}
\end{align*}
\]

(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.
Comparison of adjectives and adverbs

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mayor usage</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Esta aula es más grande/mayor que la otra</td>
<td>This lecture room is bigger than the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallorca es la más grande/la mayor de las</td>
<td>Majorca is the biggest of the Balearic Islands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baleares</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Sácale el mayor partido a tu PC!</td>
<td>Get the most out of your personal computer!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mayor usage</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mi hermano es mayor que el tuyo</td>
<td>My brother is older than yours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mi hermano mayor</td>
<td>My elder brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es ya mayor que su hermana mayor . . .</td>
<td>She’s already older than her elder sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en realidad mayor de lo que fue nunca Teresa</td>
<td>. . . actually older than Teresa ever was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(JM, Sp., dialogue)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Era cuatro años mayor que Daniel (AM, Mex.)</td>
<td>He was four years older than Daniel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mayor usage</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Más acentuado será el sabor del ajo, cuanta</td>
<td>The greater the quantity it contains, the more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mayor cantidad lleve (cookery book, Sp.)</td>
<td>pronounced the garlic flavour will be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mayor servicio prestado, mayor dignidad</td>
<td>The greater the service done, the greater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(El Diario de Hoy, ES)</td>
<td>the dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deseo recibir mayor información</td>
<td>I would like to receive more information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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’.
6.11 ‘The more . . . the more . . .’ / ‘the less . . . the less . . .’

(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/esa, not *menor que esa/esa; 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diego es tres años menor que Martita y cuatro que Sergio (CRG, Sp.)</td>
<td>Diego es tres años menor que Martita y cuatro que Sergio (CRG, Sp.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia era unos meses menor que yo (AM, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>Virginia era unos meses menor que yo (AM, Mex., dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usted no tendrá la menor dificultad (or mínima or más pequeña)</td>
<td>Usted no tendrá la menor dificultad (or mínima or más pequeña)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El riesgo de un enfrentamiento es cada vez menor</td>
<td>El riesgo de un enfrentamiento es cada vez menor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cuantas más fotos, mejor</td>
<td>cuantas más fotos, mejor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cuantos más chicos vengan, mejor</td>
<td>cuantos más chicos vengan, mejor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuanto mayor sea la distancia de una galaxia a la Tierra, más deprisa se aleja (Abc, Sp. For deprisa/de prisa see 35.3.1)</td>
<td>Cuanto mayor sea la distancia de una galaxia a la Tierra, más deprisa se aleja (Abc, Sp. For deprisa/de prisa see 35.3.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuanto más pensaba más me afligía (JC, Arg., dialogue)</td>
<td>Cuanto más pensaba más me afligía (JC, Arg., dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the more photos the better</td>
<td>the more photos the better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the more boys who come the better</td>
<td>the more boys who come the better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The greater the distance of a galaxy from the Earth, the faster it recedes</td>
<td>The greater the distance of a galaxy from the Earth, the faster it recedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The more I thought, the more upset I got</td>
<td>The more I thought, the more upset I got</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(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*:

> '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*
- *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
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 río/se río 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:

- No soy tan joven como tú
- Usted lo sabe tan bien como yo (MVLI, Pe., dialogue)
- No eres tan hombre como él
- No hablo tanto como tú
- Tanto los chicos como las chicas

(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):

- Escribe igual que/lo mismo que tú (not *igual como, *lo mismo como)
- Me trató igual que siempre (GGM, Col.)

(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: arguió 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cuando te conozcan sabrán apreciarte igual que yo (LO, Cu., dialogue)</td>
<td>When they get to know you they’ll value you the same way as I do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eres igual a tu padre (ES, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>You’re just like your father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es igual que tú (also igual a ti)/Es lo mismo que tú</td>
<td>(S)he’s the same as you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tú eres igualmente delgado/Tú eres igual de delgado</td>
<td>You’re just as slim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo hace igual de bien que tú</td>
<td>(S)he does it as well as you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>this</th>
<th>that (near)</th>
<th>that (far)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>masculine</td>
<td><em>este</em></td>
<td><em>ese</em></td>
<td><em>aquel</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminine</td>
<td><em>esta</em></td>
<td><em>esa</em></td>
<td><em>aquella</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neuter</td>
<td><em>esto</em></td>
<td><em>eso</em></td>
<td><em>aquello</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>these</th>
<th>those (near)</th>
<th>those (far)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>masculine</td>
<td><em>estos</em></td>
<td><em>esos</em></td>
<td><em>aquellos</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminine</td>
<td><em>estas</em></td>
<td><em>esas</em></td>
<td><em>aquellas</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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.
Demonstrative adjectives and pronouns

(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, Gramma, 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 aquéllaa*. 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 aquéllas* ‘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*
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.

### 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?*  
—*¿Ese/Ese? —No, aquel/aquél*  
*No esa torre sino aquella/aquella*  
‘Who planted that tree?’  
‘That one?’ ‘No, the one behind’  
Not that tower but the one further away

---

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*.
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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Tráeme aquella/esa taza</em></th>
<th>Bring me that cup (from over there)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>¿Ve a aquel hombre que está tragando ron?</em> (EM, Mex. dial. Or <em>ese</em>)</td>
<td>Do you see that man (over) there swallowing rum?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

| *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) | He must have been getting on for sixty when he fell in with (lit. ‘set sail with’) that frightful woman |
| *Quise llorar aquella noche pero no pude* (CSG, Mex., dialogue) | I wanted to weep that night but I couldn’t |
| . . . *aquellas estrellas como un hielo hecho añicos* (LG, Sp.) | . . . those stars like shattered ice |
| *Aquellas* for a childhood memory | |
| *¡qué noche aquella/aquél!* | What a night that was! |
| *¡qué tiempos aquellos/aquellos!* (not *esos*/ésos) | 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 Quijote*’ 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’:

| *Existían dos partidos, el conservador y el liberal, este/éste anticlerical y aquel/aquél partidario de la Iglesia* | 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
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 them who applauded yesterday
those of us Nicaraguans who know the truth
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)
- véselas, arreglárseñas, 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/ aquella (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
The important thing is that they tell the truth
Lo bueno de tu casa es que tiene mucha luz
The good thing about your house is that it’s full of light
Para lo único que encontraba tiempo era para los tres caballos (EP, Mex.)
The only thing he found time for was the three horses
Intenta olvidar lo sucedido en busca de lo más parecido a un local comercial (CP, Arg.)
Try to forget what happened in search of something most closely resembling commercial premises
Lo ya dicho en el capítulo anterior lo nunca visto en Estados Unidos desde lo alto de la escala de Jacob (AO, Mex.)
what was said in the previous chapter what has never been seen before in the USA
Papá se ha enterado de lo nuestro
Father has found out about us
Lo mío ha sido igual de duro que lo de ustedes (GGM, Col., dialogue)
What happened to me was as tough as what happened to you
Felicitas había estudiado lo justo (SP, Sp.)
Felicitas had studied just as much as was necessary
Baja lo de allí arriba
Take down the things from up there
Ya te contaré lo de mi amiga Josefina
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
Hang it as high/as far up as you can
lo más atrás posible
as far back as possible
lo antes posible . . .
as soon as possible . . .
Lo antes que puedo salir de casa es a las seis
The earliest I can leave home is six o’clock
Siempre hacen lo menos posible
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¿No se ha fijado en lo delgada que se ha quedado? (ABV, Sp., dialogue)</td>
<td>Haven’t you noticed how thin she’s become?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo que resulta increíble es lo modernos y antiguos que son al mismo tiempo (ABE, Pe)</td>
<td>What’s incredible is how modern and ancient they are at the same time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya se sabe lo curiosos que somos los periodistas (JIV, Mex., dial.)</td>
<td>People know how curious we journalists are</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) with adverbs and adverbial phrases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yo llegué confiando en lo bien que lo iba a pasar</td>
<td>I arrived sure of what a good time I was going to have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haga que hablen de usted por lo bien que habla inglés (advertisement, Sp.)</td>
<td>Get them talking about you because you speak English so well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si vieras lo mal que patina</td>
<td>If you could see how badly (s)he skates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hay que ver lo tarde que es</td>
<td>I can’t believe how late it is (lit. ‘you have to see how late it is’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 metomentodo 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, préfero 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 préfero 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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No te preocupes por ello, que no se me olvida (see 37.4.4b for this use of que)</td>
<td>Don’t worry about it – I haven’t forgotten it (or ‘I won’t forget’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por ello ya no se fía de nadie</td>
<td>Because of that (s)he doesn’t trust anybody any more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las cosas que no importan no se entienden</td>
<td>Things that don’t matter aren’t understood because we don’t apply our minds to it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>porque no se pone uno a ello (CMG, Sp.)</td>
<td>I thought of nothing but work and school (lit. ‘I was an automaton of . . .’) and apart from that nothing interested me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo era un autómata del trabajo y de la escuela y fuera de ello nada me interesaba (EP, Mex.)</td>
<td>I thought of nothing but work and school (lit. ‘I was an automaton of . . .’) and apart from that nothing interested me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hábitó un siglo en la Ciudad de los Inmortales. Cuando la derribaron, aconsejó la fundación de otra. Ello no debe sorprendernos . . . (JLB, Arg.)</td>
<td>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 . . .</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¿Lo hacemos o no?</td>
<td>Are we going to do it or not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—¿No sabíais/sabían que estaba prohibido?</td>
<td>‘Didn’t you know it was forbidden?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—No, no lo sabíamos</td>
<td>‘No, we didn’t know (it)’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Neuter article and neuter pronouns

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) Le 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 neurones 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, habérse las, 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’)
- apanárselas* 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
- habérse las 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
- véselas con to have it out with
- véselas 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 . . .’.
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:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Si haces eso te las vas a tener que haber conmigo or te las vas a tener que ver conmigo.</td>
<td>If you do that you’re going to have to have it out with/face up to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eso me pasó por dármelas de genio.</td>
<td>That happened to me because I figured I was a genius.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pesar del susto se las arregló para dejarles una azucarera y una jarrita con leche en el centro de la mesa.</td>
<td>Despite the fright he managed to leave them a sugar bowl and a small jug of milk in the middle of the table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenía que ingeniárselas para mantener ocupados a sus guardianes.</td>
<td>She had to do her best to keep her guards occupied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por eso te digo que ella también se las trae (CRG, Sp., dialogue).</td>
<td>That’s why I’m telling you that she’s difficult too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Policía se las ve y se las desea para controlarlos.</td>
<td>The police have a hard time controlling them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

(1) The first-person present plural of *habérseis* 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’.

---

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’.

---

Note: The first-person present plural of *habérseis* is *nos las habemos*, not the expected *nos las hemos*:
Chapter 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/os/ls (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/os/ls) 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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal pronoun</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yo</td>
<td>mi</td>
<td>mis</td>
<td>my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tú (and vos, where it is used)</td>
<td>tu (no accent!)</td>
<td>tus</td>
<td>your (familiar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>él/ella</td>
<td>su</td>
<td>sus</td>
<td>his/her/its</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usted</td>
<td>su</td>
<td>sus</td>
<td>your (formal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nosotros/nosotras</td>
<td>nuestro (masc.)</td>
<td>nuestros (masc.)</td>
<td>our</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nuestra (fem.)</td>
<td>nuestras (fem.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vosotros/vosotras</td>
<td>vuestra (fem.)</td>
<td>vuestros (masc.)</td>
<td>your (familiar, Spain only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Possessive adjectives and pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal pronoun</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ellos/ellas</td>
<td>su</td>
<td>sus</td>
<td>their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ustedes</td>
<td>su</td>
<td>sus</td>
<td>your (formal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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.


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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal pronoun</th>
<th>Masc. singular and plural</th>
<th>Fem. singular and plural</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yo</td>
<td>mío – míos</td>
<td>mía – mías</td>
<td>mine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tú/vos</td>
<td>tuyo – tuyos</td>
<td>tuya – tuyas</td>
<td>yours (familiar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>él/ella</td>
<td>suyo – suyos</td>
<td>suya – suyas</td>
<td>his/hers/its</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usted</td>
<td>suyo – suyos</td>
<td>suya – suyas</td>
<td>yours (formal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nosotros/nosotras</td>
<td>nuestro – nuestros</td>
<td>nuestra – nuestras</td>
<td>ours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vosotros/vosotras</td>
<td>vuestro – vuestros</td>
<td>vuestra – vuestras</td>
<td>yours (familiar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ellos/ellas</td>
<td>suyo – suyos</td>
<td>suya – suyas</td>
<td>theirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ustedes</td>
<td>suyo – suyos</td>
<td>suya – suyas</td>
<td>yours (formal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

- mi padre/mis padres
- mi madre/mis flores
- ¿Dónde está tu coche?
- ¿Dónde están tus zapatos?
- Me fío de su amigo
- Me fío de sus amigos
- nuestro dinero/nuestra dignidad
- vuestra casa/vuestras casas (Sp.)
- Usted dejó sus cosas aquí
- Ustedes dejaron sus cosas aquí
- Si ellos no quieren dejarnos su cortacésped . . .

my father/my parents
my mother/my flowers
Where’s your car?
Where are your shoes?
I trust his/her/your/their friend
I trust his/her/your/their friends
our money/our dignity
your house/your houses
You (sing.) left your/his/her/their things here.
You (plur.) left your/his/her/their things here.
If they don’t want to lend us
their/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
- Bébete el 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:

\[
\begin{align*}
Usted póngase su camisa, no la mía & \quad \text{You put on your shirt, not mine} \\
Ví sus ojos grandes, fatigados, sonrientes y como lacrimosos (FU, Sp.) & \quad \text{I saw her eyes, big, tired, smiling and seemingly tearful} \\
Acerqué mi cabeza a la suya (CF, Mex., dialogue; contrast) & \quad \text{I moved my head closer to his} \\
X deja sus/tus manos suaves y perfumadas (or le/te deja las manos . . .) & \quad \text{X leaves your hands soft and perfumed} \\
Toco tus labios . . . (popular song) & \quad \text{I touch your lips . . .}
\end{align*}
\]

(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.:

\[
\begin{align*}
un amigo mío & \quad \text{a friend of mine} \\
un conocido tuyo & \quad \text{an acquaintance of yours}
\end{align*}
\]
9.4 Uses of mío, tuyo, suyo, etc.

un poema muy malo mío (Granma, Cu., Sp. un poema mío muy malo)
a very bad poem of mine
Marco ha vuelto a hacer una de las suyas
Marco’s up to his usual tricks again
(lit. ‘a thing of his’)
una actitud muy suya
a very typical attitude of his/hers/yours/their

(b) as a literary, rather stilted alternative for a possessive adjective:

en mi novela/en la novela mía
in my novel/in this novel of mine
nuestro pan/el pan nuestro de cada día
our daily bread

(c) in Spain, in these rather formal phrases (see note 1):

Bueno, hijo mío/hija mía, me voy
Well, dear, I’m off
Te aconsejo que no, amigo mío
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
‘Whose notepad is this?’ ‘Mine’
Este garabato es tuyo
This scrawl is yours
Este/éste es el vuestro, ¿verdad?
This one is yours, isn’t it?

(e) In a number of set phrases:

de nuestra parte/de parte
at my cost
a costa mía
muy señor mío (S. Cone de nuestra mi consideration)
dear
en torno suyo
around him/her/you
Sir (in letters)
a propuesta suya
her/your/their suggestion

(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
I know your cousin, but not his/hers
Si algo malo te ocurre, yo me haría cargo de los tuyos (MS, Mex., dialogue)
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
Take mine
Tu padre te deja salir, el mío no
Your father lets you go out, mine doesn’t
Qué vida tan triste la suya
What a sad life his/hers/yours/their
Los dos DVDs son buenos, pero el nuestro es mejor
The two DVDs are good but ours is better
Possessive adjectives and pronouns

(c) after ser ‘to be’, omission of the article emphasizes actual possession:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>la casa de Jeremiah Saint-Amour, que desde ahora era suya (GGM, Col.)</td>
<td>Jeremiah Saint-Amour’s house, which from now on was hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pero estas cualidades eran mucho más suyas que mías (ABE, Pe.)</td>
<td>But these qualities were much more hers than mine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9.4.3 The neuter article with lo mío, lo suyo, etc.

The neuter form of the possessive has various meanings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mi marido sabe lo nuestro</td>
<td>My husband knows about us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahora estás en lo tuyo</td>
<td>Now you’re in your element</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo vuestro/suyo fue alucinante</td>
<td>What happened to you was mind-boggling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No tuve hijos y nada me impedía dedicarme a lo mío (ES, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>I didn’t have any children and nothing was stopping me from doing my own thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo mío es confundir (M. de Unamuno, Sp.)</td>
<td>Confusing people is what I do</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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’.

(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’.

(l) 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 birome (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 mi 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):

?encima mía (encima de mí)

?enfrente suyo (enfrente de él/ella/usted

?aparte suyo (aparte de él/ella, etc.)

?fuera suyo (fuera de él/ella, etc.)

above/over me

opposite him/her/you/them

apart from him/her, 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 American 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 . . .’.
This chapter discusses a series of important words that may cause problems for English-speaking learners:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>ajeno</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>algo</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alguien</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alguno</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ambos</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cada</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cierto</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cualquier(a)</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demasiado</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medio</td>
<td>10.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mismo</td>
<td>10.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mucho y poco</td>
<td>10.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>otro</td>
<td>10.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>propio</td>
<td>10.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solo</td>
<td>10.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tanto</td>
<td>10.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>todo</td>
<td>10.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>varios</td>
<td>10.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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’:

- Te preocupas demasiado por lo ajeno
  - You concern yourself too much with other people’s business
- Que a la gente no le dé envidia el éxito ajeno
  - 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, apparentemente, 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:

- Detrás se veía algo grande, negro
  - Behind one could see something big, black
- A ver si se te ocurre algo
  - Try and think of something
- Esa casa tiene algo de siniestro
  - That house has something sinister about it
- Aquella frase era el preámbulo de algo muy grave (G GM, Col.)
  - That phrase was the prelude to something very serious
- ¿Ves algo?
  - Can you see anything?
- ¿Sabes algo que yo no sepa? (EM, Mex., dialogue)
  - Do you know something that I don’t know?
- Serán pocos los que hayan traído algo
  - 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’. 
The English question-opener ‘do you know something . . .?’ is ¿sabes una cosa? The phrase ¿sabes algo? means ‘do you know anything?’

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’.

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.

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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.

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 Algúin: invariable pronoun

It means ‘someone’, ‘somebody’, as in vi a algún ‘I saw someone’ (note personal a before algún; 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 algún llamara (GGM, Col.)
¿Conoces a algún que pueda darme un presupuesto para reparar el coche?
Siempre viene algún 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) *Algúin de los estudiantes, *algúin de ellos are rejected by grammarians, including the Academy, (DPD 38) in favour of algún de los estudiantes, alguno de (entre) ellos, but alguna de entre ellas ‘one of the girls/women’. Occasionally algún de is necessary since, unlike algún, it does not indicate gender: yo creo que alude a algún de esta casa ‘I think (s)he’s alluding to someone in this house’, algún 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 algún que él no desea is awkward since algún is too vague to be specifically masculine: dar a algún 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/alguno otra/alguna otra persona. *Algúin 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):

- *en algún momento de la historia de Perú* at one time or another in the history of Peru
- *Alguna vez la echaba de menos* (SP, Sp.) From time to time he used to miss her
- *Deben cuidar bien esos platos. Alguna vez, en el futuro, podrían donarlos a un museo* (LO, Cu., dialogue) You should look after those plates well. Some time in the future you could donate them to a museum
- *Mira a ver si queda alguna botella de vino* 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’:

- *Alguno lo sabrá* One or other of them will know
- *¿Has recibido cartas de tu familia?* ‘Have you had any letters from your family?’ ‘Well, one or two, yes’
- *Alguno tuvo que ir a la comisaría* (JLB, Arg., dialogue; Sp. ‘to frisk = cachear) frisked us. At least one had to go to the police station
- *Alguno habrá en la oficina que te guste* There must be *some* man at the office you like

In the plural ‘some’ or ‘a few’ are the usual translations:

- *Con algunos de tercero vas a tener que hacer ejercicios de verbos irregulares* You’re going to have to do irregular verb exercises with some of the third year
- *Algunos ya están deseando marcharse* Some already want to go
- *Mateo Alemán (a quien algunos llamaban “el Ratón Miguelito”)* (JA, Mex.), (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* (JM, 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, NGLE 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, NGLE 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 algún/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 despacio* (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.
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 hemos comprado 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’.

Important: *alguno* 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’.

### 10.4.2 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 *unos/unos* . . . *otros*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Algunos/Unos vinieron, otros no</th>
<th>Some came, others didn’t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>. . . las explicaciones teológicas que hacían plausible la venta de unos terrenos y la compra de otros (AM, Mex., or <em>algunos terrenos</em>)</td>
<td>. . . the theological (i.e. obscure) explanations that made acceptable the purchase of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En algunas semanas [la morera] estaría llena de frutas (SA, Arg., or <em>unas</em>)</td>
<td>In a few weeks the mulberry tree would be full of fruit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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.

- en ambos/los dos casos
- . . . cuando ambos se vinieron a vivir
- a la capital desde Acapulco (GZ, Mex.)
- —¿Cuál de los dos es correcto? —Ambos/Los dos ‘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:

- Cada loco con su tema
- cada uno de los alumnos . . .
- un libro por cada tres alumnos
- El fenómeno ocurre cada década aproximadamente (La Jornada, Mex.)
- Cada día me preocupa más esto de la taquicardia (ABE, Pe.)
- —¿Quiere de lana o de seda? —Uno de cada (colloquial; pronoun)

‘Each to his/her own’ (lit. ‘every madman with his obsession’)

‘Each of the students . . .

each one book for every three students

The phenomenon occurs roughly every decade

Every day I’m more worried by this tachycardia business (increased heart rate)

‘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 o ?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.
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’.

The phrase *cada que* ‘every time that’ is heard in Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela and Paraguay: *tomamos café cada que viene al Puerto* (from NGLE 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 *cualquesquiera*) 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.)
- *Un martes cualquiera . . . él dijo de un modo que apareciera casual* (GGM, Col. Sp. *pareciera casual*)

. . . not any old death, but one’s own death
One Tuesday (i.e. ‘one Tuesday out of the blue’) he said, in a way intended to seem casual
Miscellaneous adjectives and pronouns

Vamos a pasear por una calle cualquiera
Let’s just walk down any street

Su esposa no es una mujer cualquiera
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.)
Any of the three topics was thorny territory

Cualquiera que sea el resultado
Whatever the result is

Cualquiera diría que eres millonario
Anybody would think you’re a millionaire

. . . la necesidad en que se ven de desahogarse con cualquiera (ABE, Pe.)
. . . the need they find themselves in to let off steam in front of anybody

No cualquiera tiene un auto como el de nosotros (SV, Ch., dialogue. Sp. un coche como el nuestro)
Not everyone (lit. ‘not anyone’) has a car like ours

Era un hombre como otro cualquiera (LP, Mex.)
He was a man like any other

Cualesquiera que sean los desafíos en el camino de la construcción del comunismo (FC, Cuba)
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 (MVLl, 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
You’ve eaten too many grapes

Pero el calor era demasiado hasta para una danza tan calma (MP, Arg., dialogue)
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)

Nowadays *demasiado* is always placed before the noun.

(b) As an adverb (invariable in form)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tú hablas demasiado</td>
<td>You talk too much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A ese/ése me lo conozco demasiado</td>
<td>I know him only too well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . ahora puede que sea demasiado tarde</td>
<td>. . . it may be too late now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(La Jornada, Mex.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esto es demasiado difícil</td>
<td>This is too difficult</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Están medio borrachos</td>
<td>They’re half-drunk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo tenía medio abandonados a los santos</td>
<td>I’d more or less given up the Saints (i.e.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(PJG, Cu.)</td>
<td>‘I was no longer a believer’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Déjame. Estoy medio dormido</td>
<td>Leave me alone. I’m half asleep</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

adjective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>media pinta/media luna</td>
<td>half a pint/half-moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incautan media tonelada de marihuana</td>
<td>Half a ton of marihuana seized in Tijuana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en Tijuana (Excélsior, Mex. Marihuana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elsewhere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el americano medio</td>
<td>the average American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>las clases medias</td>
<td>the middle classes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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.
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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:

- **Lleváis/Llevan la misma blusa**
  You’re wearing the same blouse

- **. . . con los mismos mozos, pero un día griegos,**
  . . . with the same waiters, but (dressed
- **otro andaluces, otro franceses, aunque**
  another, French or yet another,
- **vinieran de donde vinieran (ABE, Pe.**
  regardless of where they came from

- **In Spain mozos = camareros, Mex. meseros**

- **Estos dos casos son el mismo**
  These two cases are the same (i.e. identical)

- **Estos dos son los mismos**
  These two are the same (i.e. as before)

- **—¿Es usted don Francisco? —El mismo**
  ‘Are you Don Francisco?’ ‘I am indeed’

(b) Placed either before or after a noun, *mismo* means ‘self-same’/‘very’/‘right’:

- **Vivo en Madrid mismo/en el mismo Madrid**
  I live in Madrid itself

- **Aparca el helicóptero en su mismo jardín/ en su jardín mismo**
  (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’:

- **—¿Quién construyó el chalet?**
  ‘Who built the house?’

- **—Yo mismo/misma**
  ‘I did myself’

- **(el chalet = ‘detached house’ in Spain)**

- **No se llora por los demás. Se llora por**
  One doesn’t weep for others. One weeps for

- **una misma (ES, Mex., dialogue)**
  oneself (woman speaking)

(d) Placed after an adverb or adverbial phrase, *mismo* is itself an adverb and is therefore invariable:

- **por eso mismo**
  for that very reason

- **ahora mismo/ya mismo**
  right now/right away

- **aquí mismo**
  right here

- **Mañana mismo empiezo a escribir**
  I’ll start writing tomorrow without fail

- **(ABE, Pe. Mañana is an adverb here)**

- **Estoy al lado mismo del súper**
  I’m right next to the supermarket

- **(¿mismo al lado de is dialect)**

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:

- **esta noche mismo/misma**
  this very night

- **Vino esta mañana mismo/misma**
  (S)he/it came this very morning

- **En España mismo/misma no se pudo**
  In Spain itself it was impossible to prevent

- **evitar la llegada del bikini**
  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/aquélla* ‘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

- Muchas se quejan de las nuevas horas de apertura (pronoun)

(b) Adverbial uses:

- Estoy añorando mucho a mi patria
- Poco antes de las siete llegó su hijo Andrés
  (GGM, Col.)

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’
Brevity is the soul of wit (lit. ‘little pleasures, much tires’)
Many women are complaining about the new opening hours
I’m missing my home country a lot
Shortly before seven his son Andrés arrived
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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

**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 much más 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’.

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.

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’.

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’.

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’.

Poco (but not un poco) negates a following adverb or adjective: poco frecuente = ‘infrequent’. See 5.12.

‘Very much’ = muchísimo. Muy mucho is archaic or jocular.

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...
¿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

(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 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 algun 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 | my own taxi/your own convictions |
| Cada quien se crea su propio infierno (EP, Mex.) | Everyone creates their own Hell |
| Si no lo veo con mis propios ojos no lo creo | If I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn’t have believed it |
| en defensa propia | 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:

| tanta nieve/tanto dinero/tantos problemas | so much snow/so much money/so many problems |
| . . . uno de tantos consuelos del pobre | . . . one of the many consolations of the poor |

It can also function as a noun or pronoun (invariable in form as tanto):

No creí que se atreviera/atreviese a tanto Cobrán un tanto por ciento de comisión
I didn’t think (s)he/you would be that daring They take a certain percentage as commission

(b) As an adverb it is invariable in form:

—Hay más de tres kilos—. ¡No tanto! Corrió tanto que no podía hablar Tanto era así que . . . (see note 2 for tan era así . . .)
tanto mejor/tanto peor para ellos
—Es nada menos que de cincuenta pesos— ¡Tanto mejor! (J JA, Mex. Dialogue)
Es tanto un problema para la oposición como para el gobierno
‘There are more than three kilos.’ ‘Not that much’ (S)he ran so much that (s)he couldn’t speak So much was it so that . . .
all the better/so much the worse for them ‘It’s 50 pesos no less.’ ‘So much the better It’s as much a problem for the opposition as for the government
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(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 20.7] 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’:

todo producto alimenticio que contenga colorantes artificiales . . .
todo español sabe que . . .
en todo caso

any food product containing artificial colouring . . .
every Spaniard knows that . . .
in any case

In all these cases cualquiera 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’:
10.17 *Todo*: adjective/pronoun, marked for number and gender

**todas las noche/durante todo aquel año**

all night/during all that year

**todos los cinco**

all five of them

Varadero. *Es una playa increíble*. *Todos los
etranjeros nos envidian* (LO, Cu., dialogue)

Varadero. It’s an incredible beach. All

the foreigners envy us

Incluso Ricardo, con toda su paciencia, se
salió del seminario

Even Ricardo, with all his patience,

walked out of the seminar

**Todo Barcelona habla de ello** (see 1.3.9 note 1 for the gender of *todo* here)

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’:

*El veterinario viene todos los meses*

The vet comes every month
todos los viernes/años
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
eaten them all
tomado todas

Where are the strawberries? ‘I’ve

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 oxi-
dada* ‘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:

*todos los que dicen eso*

all who say that
todo el que diga eso/todo aquel que diga eso

(anyone who says that

(the latter is literary)

Son todo cuentos

It’s all stories/make-believe

Cuanto/Todo cuanto escribe es bueno (literary)

Everything (s)he writes is good

or todo lo que escribe es bueno

este poeta, cuyas palabras todas quedarán

this poet, whose every word will remain

grabadas en nuestro corazón

engraved on our hearts

el césped, por toda cuya superficie crecían

the lawn, over all of whose surface

malas hierbas

weeds were growing

esta ciudad, de la que conozco todas las iglesias

this city, all of whose churches I know

estas novelas, todas las cuales he leído

these novels, all of which I have read
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(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 *todos 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 . . .** (Excélsior, 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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{flores de varios colores/de colores varios} & \quad \text{flowers of various colours} \\
(\text{the second option is more literary}) & \\
\text{La fauna de esta zona es muy varia/variada} & \quad \text{The fauna of this zone is very varied} \\
\text{tapas varias} & \quad \text{selection of tapas (snacks)}
\end{align*}
\]

(c) Translating ‘various’: *en diversas ocasiones* ‘on various occasions’, *en diferentes puntos de los Andes* ‘in various places in the Andes’.
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 *sietecientos*) 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:

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>cero</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>uno/una</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>tres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>cuatro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>cinco</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>seis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>siete</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>ocho</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>nueve</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>diez</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>doce</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>once</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>trece</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185</td>
<td>ciento ochenta y cinco</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>cuatrocientos/cuatrocientas</td>
<td>1001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>doscientos/doscientas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>205</td>
<td>doscientos cinco/doscientas cinco</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>trescientos/trescientas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>357</td>
<td>trescientos/as cincuenta y siete</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500.014</td>
<td>quinientos/as mil catorce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.000.000</td>
<td>un millón</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spanish numerals are simple and regular, although this makes the three unexpected forms *quinientos* 500 (not *cinco cientos*), *setecientos* 700 (not *sietecientos*) 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.
$1,000,000 \text{ un millón de dólares (for the use of de see 11.4a)}$

7,678,456 libras: siete millones seiscientas setenta y ocho mil cuatrocientas cincuenta y seis libras

1,000,000,000 \text{ mil millones } 1,000,000,000,000 \text{ 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, sesentaisiete 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 frescientos/as *un mil ochenta y cuatro* and trescientos/as *mil ochenta y cuatro* 301.084 and 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 Pioneros* (*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 domóticas 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’.
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’.

Roman numerals are written with centuries: el siglo XXI = el siglo veintiuno, although ordinary numerals are increasingly seen.

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.

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.

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yo puse un siete, no un nueve</strong></td>
<td>I put a 7, not a 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Los dos ochos del anuncio giraban</strong></td>
<td>The two 8s on the advertisement were spinning rapidly in opposite directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>velozmente en sentido contrario</em> (CMG, Sp.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>un cinco de bastos</strong></td>
<td>a five of clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tú eres el cuatro</strong></td>
<td>You’re number four</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is also true of cientos and miles when used as nouns (i.e. when followed by de):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>los miles de víctimas de los tifones</strong></td>
<td>the thousands of victims of the typhoons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>los escasos cientos de personas que asistían a la manifestación</strong></td>
<td>the few hundred persons present at the demonstration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>un peso/una libra</strong></td>
<td>one peso/pound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>veintiuna casas</strong></td>
<td>twenty-one houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>quinientos dólares</strong></td>
<td>five hundred dollars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>setecientas mujeres</strong></td>
<td>seven hundred women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>aprobaron trescientos un alumnos</strong></td>
<td>301 students passed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>en la página quinientas catorce</strong></td>
<td>on page 514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yo duermo en la cuatrocientas (habitation omitted)</strong></td>
<td>I’m sleeping in (room) 400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spain and Latin America</th>
<th>USA, Britain, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un millón = 1.000.000</td>
<td>same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mil millones = 1.000.000.000 (see note 2)</td>
<td>one billion (a thousand million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un billón = 1.000.000.000.000 (10^{12})</td>
<td>one trillion (a million million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un trillón = un millard de billones (10^{18})</td>
<td>a million trillion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

- un tigre, dos tigres, tres tigres → one tiger, two tigers, three tigers (a tongue-twister)
- veintiún mil hombres → 21,000 men
- veintiún mil mujeres (see 11.3 note 1) → 21,000 women
- un águila, veintiún armas, treinta y un hachas → 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:

- **cien mil bolívares**
  - 100,000 bolivares

- **cien millones**
  - 100 million

- **la iniciativa de eliminar cien de los 500 diputados (La Jornada, Mex.)**
  - the proposal to remove 100 of the 500 deputies

But

- **ciento once**
  - one hundred and eleven

- **en la página ciento dieciocho**
  - 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:

- **el cuarenta y tres por ciento**
  - forty-three per cent

- **tanto por ciento**
  - so much per cent

- **El PCE sólo obtuvo el 8 y pico por ciento de los votos (El País, Sp.)**
  - The Spanish Communist Party only obtained just over 8% of the votes

- **Se pronostica 60 por ciento de intervalos de chubascos en Chiapas y Oaxaca (La Jornada, Mex.)**
  - There is a 60% forecast of periods of showers in Chiapas and Oaxaca

- **. . . la seguridad, cien por cien, de que los vertidos son inocuos (El País, Sp.)**
  - . . . the hundred-per-cent guarantee that the waste matter is harmless

- **Estoy ciento por ciento tranquilo por la investigación (interview, La Jornada, Mex.)**
  - I’m 100% reassured by the investigation

- **Promete compromiso y profesionalidad al ciento por ciento (El País, Sp.)**
  - 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:
11.10 Fractions

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 cincuentena about fifty
una docena a dozen (often approximate, used less than in English)
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dos y (or dos más) tres son cinco</td>
<td>Two plus three equals five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dos por tres son seis</td>
<td>Two times three equals six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocho dividido por dos son cuatro (or ocho entre dos ...)</td>
<td>Eight divided by two is four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once menos nueve son dos</td>
<td>Eleven minus nine equals two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tres es la raíz cuadrada de nueve</td>
<td>Three is the square root of nine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nueve es el cuadrado de tres</td>
<td>Nine is three squared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forma un cuadrado de diez metros dos metros cuadrados tres metros cúbicos menos veinte</td>
<td>It’s ten metres square two square metres three cubic metres minus twenty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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/sextio/septimo/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
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish expression</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La mitad se salvó</td>
<td>Half were saved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un cuarto (de) kilo</td>
<td>a quarter (of a) kilo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un tercio/La tercera parte de los españoles piensa(n) que . . .</td>
<td>A third of Spaniards think that . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska y Venezuela sólo nos aseguran las dos terceras partes de ese suministro (CF, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>Alaska and Venezuela only guarantee us two-thirds of that supply</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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: ‘1/20th = la veinte parte, ‘1/90th = la noventa parte, ‘1/53rd = la cincuenta y tres parte. Forms like la vigésima parte ’1/20th, la nonagésima parte ‘1/90th, la quincuagésima tercera parte ‘1/53rd, 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 ‘3/200ths’; the word parte is often dropped.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish expression</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A partir de la primera cienmilésima de segundo, el Universo empieza a cobrar un aspecto conocido (Abc, Sp.)</td>
<td>After the first one hundred-thousandth of a second the Universe begins to take on a familiar appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La tasa de desempleo mostró una baja marginal de una centésima (Excélsior, Mex.)</td>
<td>The unemployment rate showed a marginal decline of 100th of a point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolt ganó por una centésima de segundo (La Jornada, Mex.)</td>
<td>Bolt won by 100th of a second</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 1/25th, tres ochenta y seisavas partes 3/86ths. 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 30th.

(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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish expression</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vivo en el cinco</td>
<td>I live in number five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuando George Burns cumplió los noventa años . . . (La Jornada, Mex.)</td>
<td>When George Burns reached the age of ninety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 representa 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:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinal</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>primer(o)</td>
<td>first</td>
<td>quinto</td>
<td>octavo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>segundo</td>
<td>second</td>
<td>sexto</td>
<td>noveno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tercer(o)</td>
<td>third</td>
<td>séptimo/sétimo ‘seventh’</td>
<td>décimo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cuarto</td>
<td>fourth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

el tercer hombre the third man  
la tercera vez the third time  
Isabel II (segunda) Elizabeth II  
Fernando VII (séptimo) Ferdinand VII  

(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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinal Number</th>
<th>Ordinal Form</th>
<th>Ordinal Form</th>
<th>Ordinal Form</th>
<th>Ordinal Form</th>
<th>Ordinal Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>undécimo</td>
<td>onceavo</td>
<td>60th</td>
<td>sexagésimo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>duodécimo</td>
<td>doceavo</td>
<td>70th</td>
<td>septuagésimo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13th</td>
<td>decimotercero</td>
<td>treceavo</td>
<td>80th</td>
<td>octogésimo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14th</td>
<td>decimocuarto</td>
<td>catorceavo</td>
<td>90th</td>
<td>nonagésimo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15th</td>
<td>decimoquinto</td>
<td>quinceavo</td>
<td>100th</td>
<td>centésimo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16th</td>
<td>decimosexto</td>
<td>dieciseisavo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th</td>
<td>decimoseptimo</td>
<td>dieciséptimo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th</td>
<td>decimoctavo</td>
<td>dieciocho</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th</td>
<td>decimonono</td>
<td>dieciochavo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>diecinueveavo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th</td>
<td>vigésimo</td>
<td>veinteaño</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st</td>
<td>vigésimo/a primero/a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25th</td>
<td>vigésimo/a quintio/a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>veinticincoavo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30th</td>
<td>trigésimo</td>
<td>treinta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36th</td>
<td>trigésimo/a sexto/a</td>
<td>treintiseisavo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40th</td>
<td>cuadragésimo</td>
<td>cuarenta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50th</td>
<td>quinquagésimo</td>
<td>cincuenta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) **Important**: in informal styles, written and spoken, these ordinal forms over tenth are avoided and the ordinary cardinal numbers are used, e.g. *conmemoran 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 65* [sesenta y cinco] 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*, *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 *vigésimoquinto/a*, *vigésimoséptimo/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

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.)

(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/esa

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
The cable’s 100m long

Tiene cinco metros de hondo/ancho
It’s five metres/meters deep/wide

un motor de ocho caballos
an 8-horsepower engine

un motor de dos tiempos
a two-stroke engine

un ángulo de treinta grados
a 30-degree angle

Forma un ángulo recto
It makes a right-angle

Debe de haber cinco bajo cero
It must be five degrees below zero

even/odd/prime numbers

dos nueveavos dividido por tres sieteavos
two-ninths divided by three-sevenths

(see 11.12.2 for discussion of -avo)
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), 24º (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, 2º 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.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>yo</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>tú (note accent!)</td>
<td>you informal: see 12.3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vos</td>
<td>you informal. Only in some Lat. Am. countries. see 12.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>usted</td>
<td>you formal: see 12.3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd masc.</td>
<td>él (note accent!)</td>
<td>he, it see 12.2.1–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd fem.</td>
<td>ella</td>
<td>she, it see 12.2.1–2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st masc.</td>
<td>nosotros</td>
<td>we see 12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st fem.</td>
<td>nosotras</td>
<td>we see 12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd masc.</td>
<td>vosotros</td>
<td>you informal, Spain only: see 12.3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd fem.</td>
<td>vosotras</td>
<td>you informal, Spain only: see 12.3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd formal</td>
<td>ustedes</td>
<td>you formal in Spain; formal or familiar in Lat. Am. See 12.3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd masc.</td>
<td>ellos</td>
<td>they see 12.2.1–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd fem.</td>
<td>ellas</td>
<td>they see 12.2.1–2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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
---
¿Quién lo ha hecho? — Nosotros/as
---
¿Quién es? — Yo

’Who’s come?’ ‘They have/Them’

’Who did it?’ ‘We did’

’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.

Tú eres listo, pero ella es genial
Mi mujer trabaja y yo me quedo en casa con los niños
¿Mami le cuenta a Dios que Mita no va a misa y que yo me porto mal? (MP, Arg., dialogue)
Él estaba con unos amigos y yo con un cliente (GZ, Mex., dialogue)

You’re clever but she’s a genius
My wife works and I stay at home with the children
Does Mummy tell God that Mita doesn’t go to Mass and that I misbehave?
He was with some friends and I was with a customer

(c) To emphasize the subject:

Pues yo no quiero salir
Tú haz lo que te dé la gana
Ríete de mí, pero tú vas a llegar muy alto

Well I don’t want to go out (i.e. even if you do)
You do whatever you like (implies ‘I don’t care’)
Laugh at me (if you like), but you’re 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 *sólo 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/éllos/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 ese/aquél) ‘the former’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La “oposición” ha desaparecido de la radio,</td>
<td>La “oposición” ha desaparecido de la radio,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de la televisión y de la prensa diaria . .</td>
<td>de la televisión y de la prensa diaria . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella subsiste, mínima, hostigada,</td>
<td>Ella subsiste, mínima, hostigada,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>desde las columnas de todos</td>
<td>desde las columnas de todos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>los periódicos (MVLI, Pe.)</td>
<td>los periódicos (MVLI, Pe.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
12.3 Formal and informal modes of address

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 cierr 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soy yo/Somos nosotros/Fuisteis</td>
<td>It’s me/It’s us/It was you/It was them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vosotros/Fueron ellos</td>
<td>(lit. ‘I am me’, ‘we are we’, ‘you were you’, ‘they were they’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El guapo de la foto eres tú</td>
<td>The handsome one in the photo is you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debería volver a escribir, pero no tiene estímulos ya. Y luego que tampoco la ayudamos nadie (CMG, Sp., dialogue)</td>
<td>She ought to start writing again, but there’s nothing to stimulate her any more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—¿Quién ha dicho eso? —He sido yo</td>
<td>And after all, none of us helps her either</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[any second- or third-person] y yo or nosotros vamos</td>
<td>‘Who said that?’ ‘It was me’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You/(S)he and I are going</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tú or vosotros y [usted(es) or third person] van
 You and (s)he/you are going

Él y usted(es) [or any third-person pronoun] van
 He and you/they are going

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, ustede, 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:

- No sabe nada de mí (S)he knows nothing about me
- No tengo nada contra ti I’ve nothing against you
- Entre más cerca de ti estoy, más energía recibo por minuto (EP, Mex., dialogue) The closer I am to you the more energy I get every minute
- Creo en vos (Arg. Sp.and Mex. . . . en ti) I believe in you
- no delante de usted/ustede I’m not in front of you
- Me refiero a él/ella I’m referring to him/her
- Confiamos en ustedes/vosotros/vosotras We trust/rely on you
- Corrió tras ellos (S)he ran after them
- aparte de ellas 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’:

- Todos lo hicieron menos/excepto/salvo tú They all did it except/save you
- Que se quede entre tú y yo Let’s keep it between you and me
- Es un asunto entre Hernán y yo (GZ, Mex.) It’s something between Hernán and me
- Hasta tú puedes hacer eso Even you can do that
- Según tú no sé nada de la vida 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 mi; 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/yourself’.

_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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No se refiere a sí misma</td>
<td>She’s not referring to herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Este fenómeno ya es muy interesante</td>
<td>This phenomenon is in itself very interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un brillante que para sí lo quisiерan</td>
<td>A diamond many would like for themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muchos (advert., Sp.)</td>
<td>(S)he came round (regained consciousness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volvió en sí (see note 3)</td>
<td>He put the glass next to himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colocó el vaso junto a sí (LOr, Cu.)</td>
<td>. . . <em>so lazy that she was hardly able to</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . tan perezosa que dificilmente era capaz</td>
<td><em>read by herself</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de leer por sí sola</td>
<td>(S)he’s doing the best (s)he can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No puede dar más de sí</td>
<td>One should always be sure of oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Una siempre debe estar segura de sí misma</td>
<td>(woman speaking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ES, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>He dedicated himself to destroying within</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se dedicaba a destruir dentro de sí todo lo que antes había amado (EP, Mex.)</td>
<td>himself everything he had once loved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Está disgustado consigo mismo</td>
<td>He’s cross with himself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personal pronouns used with prepositions

(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 . . .’, *guárdeselo 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 l’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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SINGULAR</th>
<th>Object pronoun</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject pronoun</td>
<td>Object pronoun</td>
<td>English equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yo</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tú (and vos)</td>
<td>te</td>
<td>you (familiar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>él, ella, usted</td>
<td>lo/le (masc.), la/le (fem.)</td>
<td>him, her, it, you (see note 1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PLURAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>nosotros, nosotras</th>
<th>nos</th>
<th>us</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vosotros, vosotras</td>
<td>os</td>
<td>you (familiar, Spain only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ellos, ellas, ustedes</td>
<td>los/les (masc.), las/les (fem.)</td>
<td>them, you (see note 1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 aparcaído el coche (S)he’s parked the car for me
Me compré 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 saw **me/**you/us (direct obj.)
- **Mario me/te/nos dio un regalo**
  - 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**
  - Dr Smith (fem.), I assure you I rang you/her yesterday
- **Le vi ayer (Spain only; see 15.5.1 and 2)**
  - I saw you/him yesterday
- **Lo vi ayer (Latin America and, optionally, Spain too)**
  - I saw it/him/you yesterday
- **Los/las vi ayer**
  - I saw you/them yesterday

14.2.4 Order of object pronouns

**Important:** when more than one object pronoun appears, their invariable order is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>se</td>
<td>te/os</td>
<td>me/nos</td>
<td>le/lo/la/les/los/las</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

i.e. *se*, if it occurs, comes first, second person precedes first person, and third-person pronouns come last:

- **María te lo dijo**
  - Maria told it to you
- **Me lo encontré el otro día (GZ, Mex., dialogue)**
  - I met him by chance the other day
- **No querían comunicárnoslo**
  - They didn’t want to tell it to us
- **Se te ha caído la tinta**
  - You’ve dropped the ink
- **Nos los vamos a comprar**
  - We’re going to buy them for ourselves
- **Se nos ha vuelto listísimo**
  - He’s turned into a genius ‘on us’
- **Yo me le fui encima (JC, Arg., Sp. yo me le eché encima)**
  - 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.
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’.

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.

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:

- **Se los entregamos** We gave them (masc.) to him/her/it/them/you (for se here see 14.9)
- **Te los enviaré luego** I’ll send them (masc.) to you later
- **Nos las guardan** 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:

- **Lo he comprado** I’ve bought it
- **Nos habían visto** 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-kri-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, encontrábale exiliado ‘he found himself exiled’ = se encontraba exiliado, ocurrióosele ‘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. habrás visto . . . ‘well, did you ever . . .’ (usually written with an unnecessary accent habráse visto), diríase (literary) ‘one might say’, dice (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 *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:

> **Sería una locura encenderlo**
> It would be crazy to set fire to it
> 
> **Rechazaron el proyecto por considerarlo demasiado caro**
> They rejected the project on the grounds it was too expensive
> 
> **Estamos hartos de oírtelo**
> We’re fed up with hearing it from you
> 
> **... amplios sectores que no están dispuestos a permitírselo** (*La Jornada*, Mex.)
> 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 *quito*.

(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:

> **Quiero hacerlo**
> I want to do it
> 
> **Pudieron salvarla**
> They managed to save her
> 
> **Intentaron robárnoslo**
> They tried to steal it from us
> 
> **Propusieron alquilarlos**
> They suggested renting them to us
> 
> **No tomé nada, alguien debió dármelo** (*Informador*, Mex.)
> 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):

**querer**

> **Te la quiero enviar/Quiero enviártela**
> I want to send it (fem.) to you
> 
> **Por mucho que yo se lo quiera dar/quiera dárselo, no puedo**
> 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 puedo 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.
14.3 Position of object pronouns

(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 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:

No quiero volver a decírtelo/No quiero volvértelo a decir/No te lo quiero volver a decir
Puedes empezar a hacerlo/Puedes empezarlo a hacer/Lo puedes empezar a hacer
Debes tratar de hacerlo/Debes tratarlo de hacer (lo debes tratar de hacer is colloquial)

I don’t want to tell you it again
You can start to do it
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:

Te lo estoy contando/Estoy contándotelo
Se estaba dejando ganar por la autocompasión
(MVLI, Pe., or estaba dejándose ganar)
Os lo estoy diciendo/Estoy diciéndoselo
(SPAIN only: note the double o. Lat. Am. se lo estoy diciendo/estoy diciéndoselo)
Se lo va contando a todos/Va contándoselo a todos
Se lo/le quedó mirando/Se quedó mirándolo/le

I’m telling you it/telling it to you
He was giving in to self-pity
I’m telling you
(S)he goes around telling it to everyone
(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 seguirlas 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, continuaba 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 ocurídole 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  
I saw her but not him  
Te lo darán a ti, pero no a ella  
They’ll give it to you, but not to her  
¡A mí me lo dices!  
You’re telling me!  
Si me retirara, pues, tampoco lo vería a usted  
If I retired, well, I wouldn’t see you  
(SG, Mex., dialogue)  
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 ustedes? (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*  
  They washed *themselves*
- *Es difícil vivir con quien no se estima a sí mismo* (Abc, Sp.)  
  It is difficult to live with someone who does not value himself/herself
- *Se quieren el uno al otro*  
  They love one another
- *Se quieren la una a la otra* (two females)  
  They love one another
- *Sólo nos tenemos los unos a los otros*  
  (La Jornada, Mex.)  
  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* ‘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 le 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 . . .
(MVLI, 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 le 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 Object pronouns with verbs of motion and with ser and resultar

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:

- Nos era imprescindible contactar a tus padres – We absolutely had to contact your parents
- Le era más fácil soportar los dolores ajenos que los propios (GGM, Col.) – It was easier for him to put up with other people’s suffering than his own
- Voy a serle muy franca (ABE, Pe., dialogue) – I’m going to be very frank with you
- Para serte sincero me repele Lombardo Toledano (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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Possible/Impossible</th>
<th>Possible/Impossible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agradable/desagradable</td>
<td>grato/ingrato</td>
<td>posible/impotible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agreeable/disagreeable</td>
<td>pleasing/displeasing</td>
<td>impossible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ajeno</td>
<td>indiferente</td>
<td>rentable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strange</td>
<td>indiferente</td>
<td>profitable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conocido/desconocido</td>
<td>leal</td>
<td>sabido</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>known/unknown</td>
<td>lícito</td>
<td>simpático/antipático/nice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doloroso</td>
<td>natural</td>
<td>nasty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>painful</td>
<td>lícito</td>
<td>(of persons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fácil/difícil</td>
<td>necesario/innecesario</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easy/difficult</td>
<td>necesario/innecesario</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>familiar</td>
<td>permitido/prohibido</td>
<td>suficiente/insuficiente</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>favorable/favourable</td>
<td></td>
<td>sufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fiel/infiel</td>
<td></td>
<td>útil/inútil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faithful/unfaithful</td>
<td>allowed/prohibited</td>
<td>usefull/useless</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

Me resulta muy triste la situación que está viviendo (Excélsior, Mex., not me es . . .) I find the situation he’s living through very sad

. . . un gesto que siempre me resulta llamativo (LS, Sp.) . . . a gesture that I always find striking

Me resulta difícil y absurdamente arriesgado comprar algo para quien conozco poco (CP, Arg.) I find it difficult and absurdly risky to buy something for someone I don’t know well

. . . envuelta en una sábana, pues ahora su desnudez le resultaba insoportable (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:

- aburrido boring
- apropiado appropriate
- atractivo attractive
- caro expensive
- cómodo comfortable
- conveniente suitable
- divertido amusing
- emocionante exciting
- evidente evident
- familiar familiar
- gracioso funny
- imposible impossible
- insólito unusual
- inteligible intelligible
- interesante interesting
Personal pronouns, object

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Si le es molestia, dígamelo</em></td>
<td>If it’s a nuisance for you, tell me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nos es de interés . . .</em></td>
<td>It’s of interest to us . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Me/Le era un gran placer/Era un gran placer</em></td>
<td>It was a great pleasure for/to me/him, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>También tu hermano resultó un traidor</em></td>
<td>Your brother turned out to be a traitor too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(ES, Mex., dialogue)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mujeres rubias que al final resultaron ser también hombres rubios</em></td>
<td>Blond women who eventually turned out to be blond men as well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(APR, Sp.)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>La salina resultó un buen negocio</em></td>
<td>The salt mine/salt works turned out to be a good business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(MVLl, Pe.)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pues atrévase a contarla . . . Resultaría una gran novela</em></td>
<td>Well, have the courage to tell it [<em>la . . . historia</em>. It would make a great novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(CMG, Sp., dialogue)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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/has 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 funcionaba (AA, Cu., dialogue; Sp. no le funcionaba)

¡Me le has estropeado tres camisas! (popular style)

Cuídenme 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:

Quiero dárselo

Se lo dije a ella

Se lo dije a ellos

¿Quiere usted que se lo envuelva?

Anne quiso ayudarnos con la maleta . . .

No se lo permitimos

I want to give it to him/her/you/them

I told it to her

I told it to them (masc.)

Do you want me to wrap it for you?

Anne wanted to help us with the suitcase.

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’.
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:

- **Bueno, si no le dicen a uno cómo hay que hacerlo**
  Well, if they don’t tell one how to do it . . .

- **Esta solución le pareció a doña Matilde la más acertada** (JMG, Sp.)
  This solution seemed to be the best one to Doña Matilde

- **Se le notan cada vez más los años a José**
  You can tell José’s age more and more

- **Les tenía mucho miedo a los truenos**
  (S)he was very frightened of thunder

- **No le ha dicho nada a su madre** (GZ, Mex., dialogue)
  He hasn’t told his mother anything

- **Traígale un jugo de naranja a la niña** (AM, Mex., dialogue. Jugo = meat juice in Spain; el zumo = 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’**, **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:

- **Cualquiera le da vuelta a las razones por las que te viniste conmigo (JMG, Sp., dialogue)**
  Anyone might ponder on the reasons why you came to me

- **no darle importancia a los detalles**
  not to ascribe importance to details

- **¿Quieres devolverle la isla de Manhattan a los Algonquins? (CF, Mex., dialogue)**
  Do you want to give Manhattan Island back to the Algonquins?

- **¿Le viene natural a los niños (educated Spaniard, overheard)**
  It comes naturally to children

- **Quiero dejarle un México mejor a mis nietos (EP, Mex., dialogue)**
  I want to leave a better Mexico to my grandchildren
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:

- Le quiere mucho a ese hijo (Spain, familiar) (S)he loves that son a lot
- Morgan también lo mandó llamar a Abdulmalik (JLB, Arg., dialogue; Sp. . . . .mandó llamar a Abdulmalik) Morgan also had Abdulmalik sent for
- No lo conocen a Perón en Córdoba, lo confunden con un cantante de tangos They’ve never heard of Perón in Cordoba. They confuse him with a tango singer
- Convénzalo a su amigo de que acepte la beca (MVLl, Pe., dialogue; Sp. convenza a su amigo . . . .) 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:

- Los gramáticos aconsejan muchas cosas que nadie las dice (Sp., informant) Grammarians recommend lots of things that no one says
- Te voy a hacer una confesión que nunca me animé a hacerla a nadie (Latin-American, from Kany, 150) I’m going to make you a confession I never had the courage to make to anybody
- Sólo por ti dejaría a don Memo a quien tanto le debo (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.
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, ellas*), 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct object</th>
<th>Indirect object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SINGULAR</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td><em>lo</em></td>
<td><em>le</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td><em>la</em></td>
<td><em>le</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PLURAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td><em>los</em></td>
<td><em>les</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td><em>las</em></td>
<td><em>les</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following sentences exemplify these rules:

- Ángela vio a Antonio
  - *Ángela* vio a *Antonio*: *Ángela* saw *Antonio*
- Vio el libro
  - *Vio* el libro: *He saw the book*
- María dijo hola a Juan
  - *María* dijo hola a *Juan*: *María* said hello to *Juan*
- Vio a los hombres
  - *Vio* a los hombres: *He saw the men*

(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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Le di/dijiste la carta</td>
<td>I gave/sent her/him/you the letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No les dijiste la verdad</td>
<td>I didn’t tell you/them the truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le tirábamos bolas de nieve</td>
<td>We were throwing snowballs at him/her/you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le pusieron una inyección</td>
<td>They gave you/him/her an injection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esa chaqueta le va</td>
<td>That jacket suits him/her/you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La secretaria le cayó bien</td>
<td>(S)he took a liking to the secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les gusta la miel</td>
<td>They/You like honey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Les han robado un millón de pesos</td>
<td>They’ve stolen a million pesos from them/you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le están sacando una muela</td>
<td>They’re taking one of her/his teeth out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se le cae el pelo</td>
<td>His/Her hair’s falling out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se le pasa pronto</td>
<td>(S)he gets over it quickly/You get over . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No le puedo aceptar tanto dinero</td>
<td>I can’t accept so much money from you/him/her</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Les basta decir que sí</td>
<td>All they/you have to do is say ‘yes’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le faltan mil pesos</td>
<td>(S)he’s/You’re 1000 pesos short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veinte dólares al día le alcanzaban para vivir</td>
<td>(S)he/you were managing to live on 20 dollars a day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El traje de Marco le está grande</td>
<td>Marco’s suit is too big for him</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(d) Requesting, requiring, ordering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Le hicieron varias preguntas</td>
<td>They asked him/her/you several questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les pidieron nuestras señas</td>
<td>They asked them/you for our names and addresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les rogaron que se sentasen/sentarán</td>
<td>They/You requested them/you to sit down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les ordenamos rendirse</td>
<td>We ordered them/you to surrender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Le(s) tengo miedo a los murciélagos (see 14.10.3)</td>
<td>I’m afraid of bats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana le tiene ojeriza</td>
<td>Ana has it in for him/her/you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le tenías un cariño tremendo</td>
<td>You were enormously fond of her/him</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Numerous set phrases consisting of *hacer* plus a noun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El frío le hacía mucho daño</td>
<td>The cold did them you a lot of harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El chico le hizo una mueca</td>
<td>The boy pulled a face at him/her you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No les hacíamos el menor caso</td>
<td>We didn’t give them you the slightest attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tienes que hacerle frente a la realidad</td>
<td>You have to face up to reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le hacía falta reflexionar</td>
<td>(S)he you needed to reflect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¡Le estás pisando los pies!</td>
<td>You’re treading on his/her feet!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A esa edad se les ablanda el cerebro</td>
<td>Their brains go soft at that age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tú no le viste los zapatos que llevaba</td>
<td>You didn’t see the shoes (s)he was wearing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a number of less easily classified cases which may all be seen to convey ideas of ‘giving’, ‘removing’, ‘benefiting’, ‘involving’, ‘affecting intimately’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¿Qué le vamos a hacer?</td>
<td>What can be done about it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No le hace (Southern Cone; Sp. no viene a cuento)</td>
<td>That’s irrelevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Dale!</td>
<td>Hit him! Go on! Get moving!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Y dale con el tema!</td>
<td>Oh no, not again! (i.e. we heard it before)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No le oigo nada</td>
<td>I can’t hear a thing (s)he’s saying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le agradezco</td>
<td>I thank you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La respuesta del abogado le afectó mucho</td>
<td>The lawyer’s reply affected him/her a lot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lo/Le interrogaron</td>
<td>They interrogated him you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La operaron</td>
<td>They operated on her you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coge estos papeles y quémalo</td>
<td>Take these papers and burn them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

I don’t know the director

La vi ayer en el mercado

I saw her / you yesterday in the market

El padre lo miraba con orgullo

His father gazed at him with pride

A uno de ellos lo identifiqué enseguida (JM, Sp., or le)

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

His/her/your teachers praise him / you

A las monjas les envidió mucho

I envy nuns a lot

Su marido la adora

Her / Your husband adores her / you

Yo la quiero mucho

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”

They named them / you ‘the decadents’

Lo/Le nombraron alcalde

They nominated him / you mayor

Las describió en términos cariñosos

(S)he described them / you (fem.) in affectionate terms

Lo calificó de éxito

(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’
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* 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.

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.

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* 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. ¿Quieres 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 has leído todavía?* ‘I haven’t read it [el libro] yet’, *unos niegan el hecho, otros lo 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 been 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 *leísta* 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.)

*El 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 admiró 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’, *distraer* ‘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 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 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’.

15.6 Le used for human direct objects throughout the Spanish-speaking world 167
Llamar ‘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/los/la 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’. Telefonear 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 acharres 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>habl-</th>
<th>com-</th>
<th>viv-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infinitive</td>
<td>hablar</td>
<td>comer</td>
<td>vivir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerund</td>
<td>hablando</td>
<td>comiendo</td>
<td>viviendo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past participle</td>
<td>hablado</td>
<td>comido</td>
<td>vivido</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>(tú) habla</td>
<td>come</td>
<td>vive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(vos) hablá</td>
<td>comé</td>
<td>viv (Argentine forms: see 12.3.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(vosotros/as) hablad</td>
<td>comed</td>
<td>vivid (Spain only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(usted) hable</td>
<td>coma</td>
<td>viva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ustedes) hablen</td>
<td>coman</td>
<td>vivan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.

- *hablo* | *hablamos* | *como* | *comemos* | *vivo* | *vivimos*
- *hablas* (hablás) | *hablais* | *comes (comés)* | *comés* | *vives (vivís)* | *vivís*
- *habla* | *hablan* | *come* | *comen* | *vive* | *viven*

**Perfect (see 16.13)**

See 16.11.22 for the conjugation of *haber.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>he</em> hablado, etc.</th>
<th><em>he</em> comido, etc.</th>
<th><em>he</em> vivido, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>hablé</em></td>
<td><em>hablamos</em></td>
<td><em>comí</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>hablaste</em></td>
<td><em>hablasteis</em></td>
<td><em>comiste</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>habló</em></td>
<td><em>hablaron</em></td>
<td><em>comió</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Preterite**

- *había* hablado, comido, vivido, etc.

**Pluperfect (see 16.13)**

**Pretérito anterior (rarely used. See 16.13)**

- *hubo* hablado, comido, vivido, etc.

**Future**

- *hablaré* | *hablaremos* | *comeré* | *comeremos* | *viviré* | *viviremos* |
- *hablarás* | *hablaréis* | *comerás* | *comeréis* | *vivirás* | *viviréis* |
- *hablará* | *hablarán* | *comerá* | *comerán* | *vivirá* | *vivirán* |

**Future perfect (see 16.13)**

- *habré* hablado, comido, vivido, etc.
Forms of Spanish verbs

Conditional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hablaría</th>
<th>Hablaríamos</th>
<th>Comería</th>
<th>Comeríamos</th>
<th>Viviría</th>
<th>Viviríamos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hablarías</td>
<td>Hablaríais</td>
<td>Comerías</td>
<td>Comeríais</td>
<td>Vivirías</td>
<td>Viviríais</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hablaría</td>
<td>Hablarían</td>
<td>Comería</td>
<td>Comerían</td>
<td>Viviría</td>
<td>Vivirían</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perfect conditional (see 16.13)

Habría hablado, comido, vivido, etc.

SUBJUNCTIVE (discussed in Chapter 20)

Present subjunctive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hable</th>
<th>Hablemos</th>
<th>Coma</th>
<th>Comamos</th>
<th>Viva</th>
<th>Vivamos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hablés</td>
<td>Habléis</td>
<td>Comas</td>
<td>Comáis</td>
<td>Vivas</td>
<td>Viváis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hable</td>
<td>Hablen</td>
<td>Coma</td>
<td>Coman</td>
<td>Viva</td>
<td>Vivian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hablara</th>
<th>Habláramos</th>
<th>Comiera</th>
<th>Comiéramos</th>
<th>Viviera</th>
<th>Viviéramos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hablaras</td>
<td>Hablarais</td>
<td>Comieras</td>
<td>Comierais</td>
<td>Vivieras</td>
<td>Vivierais</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hablara</td>
<td>Hablaran</td>
<td>Comiera</td>
<td>Comieran</td>
<td>Viviria</td>
<td>Vivirían</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) -se form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hablase</th>
<th>Hablásemos</th>
<th>Comiese</th>
<th>Comiésemos</th>
<th>Viviese</th>
<th>Viviésemos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hablases</td>
<td>Hablaseis</td>
<td>Comieses</td>
<td>Comieseis</td>
<td>Vivieses</td>
<td>Vivieseis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hablase</td>
<td>Hablasen</td>
<td>Comiese</td>
<td>Comiesen</td>
<td>Viviese</td>
<td>Viviesen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pluperfect subjunctive (see 16.13)

Hubiera hablado, comido, vivido, etc.

Hubiese hablado, comido, vivido, etc.

Future subjunctive (more or less obsolete, see 20.9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hablare</th>
<th>Habláremos</th>
<th>Comiere</th>
<th>Comiéremos</th>
<th>Viviere</th>
<th>Viviéremos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hablares</td>
<td>Hablareis</td>
<td>Comieres</td>
<td>Comiereis</td>
<td>Vivieres</td>
<td>Viviereis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hablare</td>
<td>Hablanren</td>
<td>Comiere</td>
<td>Comieren</td>
<td>Viviere</td>
<td>Vivieren</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16.4 Spelling changes affecting verbs

The spelling rules described in this section apply to all Spanish verbs.
16.4 Spelling changes affecting verbs

16.4.1 **Infinitive ends in -zar**
Z is written c before e: rezo ‘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) averigüé, (ustedes) averigüen
- **Preterite:** averigüé, (averiguaste), (averiguó), (averiguamos), (averiguasteis), (averiguaron)
- **Present subjunctive:** averigüe, averigüe, 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

*i* is written *e* and *ió* is written *o* after *ñ* or *ll*. The combinations *ñie*, *ñió*, *llie*, *llió* do not occur in Spanish:

- tañer ‘to chime’
- gruñir ‘to grunt’
- zambullirse ‘to dive’

- gruñendo
- gruñó
- 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 Radical-changing verbs

16.6.1 Conjugated like *contar* ‘to tell’/’to count’, 16.11.14


16.6.2 Conjugated like *cerrar* ‘to close’, 16.11.11


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’, genir ‘to groan’, impedir ‘to hinder’/’to impede’, medir ‘to measure’, perseguir ‘to persecute’/’to chase’, proseguir ‘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)freir ‘to fry’, sonreír ‘to smile’.

16.6.7 Conjugated like *sentir* ‘to feel’, 16.11.44


16.6.8 Conjugated like *oler* ‘to smell’, 16.11.30

(See 16.11.30 for verbs ending in -oler.)
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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

cernír ‘to sieve’ (cernírse = ‘to hover’/’to loom’), concernír ‘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’ > *produce* ‘I produce’, *poner* ‘to put’ > *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* hablais > *vos* hablais ‘you speak’, *vosotros* sois > *vos* sos ‘you are’, *vosotros* teméis > *vos* teméis ‘you fear’; but *vosotros* vivís > *vos* vivís ‘you live’, *vosotros* decis > *vos* decis ‘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*, *eran*, *eran*
*ir* ‘to go’: *iba*, *ibas*, *iba*, *íbamos*, *iban*
*ver* ‘to see’: *veía*, *veías*, *veía*, *veíamos*, *veíais*,
*veían* (not the expected* *vía*, *vías*, etc.)
16.7 Notes on the various tense forms

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: hacen, hiciste, hizo, hicimos, hicisteis, hicieron; traen, 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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sintió} & \rightarrow \text{sintieron} \\
\text{sintiera/sintiese} & \rightarrow \text{pidió/pidieron} \\
\text{pidiera/pidiese} & \rightarrow \text{durmió/durmieron} \\
\text{durmiera/durmiese} & \rightarrow
\end{align*}
\]

(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, hablas, 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
Forms of Spanish verbs

'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'

'estar 'to be'

'haber

'ir 'to go'

'saber 'to know'

'ser 'to be'

dé, des, dé, demos, deis, den. (the accent on dé distinguishes it from de 'of')
esté, estés, esté, estemos, estéis, estén

'haya, hayas, haya, hayamos, hayáis, hayan

'veya, vayas, vaya, vayamos, vayáis, vayan

'sepa, sepas, sepa, sepamos, sepáis, sepan

'sea, seas, sea, seamos, sedís, sean

(2) In the case of radical-changing verbs, the usual vowel changes occur, e.g. cuente, cuentes, cuente, 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Preterite stem</th>
<th>Imperfect subjunctives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sentir ‘to feel’ and verbs like it</td>
<td>sint(ió)</td>
<td>sintiera/sintiese, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pedir ‘to request’ and verbs like it</td>
<td>pid(ió)</td>
<td>pidiera/pidiese, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ser ‘be’</td>
<td>fu(e)</td>
<td>fuera/fuese, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>producir ‘to produce’, and all verbs ending in -ducir</td>
<td>produj(o)</td>
<td>produjera/prodijese, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tener ‘to have’</td>
<td>tuv(o)</td>
<td>tuviera/tuviése, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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’

'ser 'to be'

'traer ‘to bring’

dijera/dijese, etc.

fuera/fuese, etc.

trajera/trajese, etc.
16.7 Notes on the various tense forms

all verbs whose infinitive ends in -ducir
all verbs whose infinitive ends in -ñer,
-ñir or -llir

conduiera, 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, -areís, -aren. -er and -ir verbs: -iere, -ieres, -iere, -iéremos, -iereís, -ieren. The future subjunctive of the verbs shown at 16.7.6 note 2 has the endings -ere, -eres, -ere, -éremos, -ereís, -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, 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’, convencente ‘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., fueron 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. estoy 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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>prohibir</td>
<td>[proy-ðíɾ] (two syllables)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prohibe she</td>
<td>[pro-í-ðe] (three syllables)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reunir to join</td>
<td>[rrew-níɾ] (two syllables)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reunen they join</td>
<td>[rre-ú-ñen] (three syllables)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rehuir to flee from</td>
<td>[rre-wíɾ] (two syllables)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rehúye s(h)e flees from</td>
<td>[rre-ú-ye] (three syllables)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compare the following verb in which the diphthong is not broken:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>causar to cause</td>
<td>[kaw-sár] (two syllables)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>causa it causes</td>
<td>[káw-sa] (two syllables)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tú imperative:</th>
<th>aísla</th>
<th>reúne</th>
<th>prohíbe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usted(es) imperative:</td>
<td>aíslan/ aíslan</td>
<td>reúna/reúnan</td>
<td>prohíban/prohíban</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Present indicative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aísla, aíslas, aísla (aislamos), (aisláis), aíslan</td>
<td>reúne, reúnes, reúne (reunimos), (reunís), reúnen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prohibir, prohibes, prohíbe (prohibimos), (prohibís), prohíben</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Present subjunctive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aíslan, aíslas, aíslan, (aislamos), (aisláis), aíslan</td>
<td>reúna, reúñas, reúna, (reunamos), (reunáis), reúnan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prohibir: prohíba, prohíbas, prohíba, (prohibamos), (prohibáis), prohíban</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following verbs are similarly affected, but bracketed verbs are now archaic or rare:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aullar to howl</td>
<td>judaizára to Judaize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aunnar to unite</td>
<td>maullar to meow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aupar to help up</td>
<td>prohíjar to adopt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cohibir to restrain</td>
<td>rehilar to quiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(desahitarse to digest)</td>
<td>rehusar to refuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enraizar to take root</td>
<td>sobrehilar to over-cast (in sewing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>européen to Europeanize</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arcaizar to archaize</td>
<td>hebraizára to Hebraicize</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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’ > arraigó, encausar ‘to sue’ > encausára, 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’, embauar ‘to swindle’, embauar ‘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:

- agriar to sour (but often like cambiar)
- aliar to ally
- amnistiar to amnesty
- ampliar to expand/enlarge
- amparar to array (with clothes)
- autografiar to autograph
- auxiliar to aid (usually like cambiar)
- averiar to damage
- aviar to fit out
- biografiar to write the biography of
- conciliar to reconcile (usually like cambiar)
- contrariar to counter
- criar* to breed/raise
- desafiar to challenge
- desbozar to misdirect
- desviar to divert
- enviar to send
- enviar to spy
- expatriarse to emigrate
- expiar to expiate
- extasiar to make ecstatic
- extasiar to make ecstatic (also like cambiar)
- fiar* to confide
- historiar to chronicle
- inventariar to inventory
- liar* to tie/bundle
- mecanografiar to type
- palir to palliate
- (often like cambiar)
- piar* to cheep (like a bird)
- poriar to insist
- radiografiar to X-ray
- reconciliar to reconcile
- repatriar to repatriate (also like cambiar)
- resfriar to cool
- rociar to sprinkle
- televisar to telegraph
- vaciar to empty
- vanagloriarse to be boastful (almost always like cambiar)
- vanagloriarse to be
- variar to vary
- vidriar to glaze (also like cambiar)

* 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:

- acentuar to emphasize
- atenuar to attenuate
- conceptuar to deem
- continuar to continue
- desvirtuar to spoil
- devaluar to devalue
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
- **ejercer** to practise
- **convencer** to convince
- **vencer** to defeat
- **destorcer** to untwist

(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 abate ‘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: abolir  Gerund: aboliendo  Past participle: abolido
- Imperative: abolid (*abole is not used)
- Present indicative: only abolimos and abolís 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:

- agredir see 16.11.4
- arrecirse (Lat. Am.) ‘to be frozen stiff’
- aterirse ‘to be numb with cold’ (only infinitive and participle in current use)
- blandir ‘to brandish’
- empedernir ‘to harden’/‘to petrify’ (only the participle, empedernido, is in current use)
- garantir ‘guarantee’ (garantizar in Spain, but still used in Peru and the Southern 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, adquiere, (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, anduvó, anduvimos, anduvisteis, anduvieron*
- Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *anduviera, anduvieras, anduviera, anduvíramos, anduvierais, anduvieran*
- Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *anduviese, anduvieses, anduviese, anduvísemos, anduvieseis, 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 caerm* ‘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, cupiéraramos, 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*
Forms of Spanish verbs

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 coerer, 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 > ze before a or o. All forms are as for a regular -er verb except for (bracketed forms are regular)

Imperative: (usted) agradezca, (vosotros agradeced), (ustedes) agradezcan
Present indicative: agradezco, (agradeces, agradece, agradecemos, agradecéis, agradecen)
Present subjunctive: agradezca, agradezcas, agradeza, agradecamos, agradeceréis, agradecan

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, cierre, (cerramos), (cerráis), cieren
Present subjunctive: cierre, cierres, cierre, (cerramos), (cerréis), cieren

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, cuece, (cozamos), (cozéis), 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 *construí and an unexpected y is inserted in a number of forms, e.g. construyes for the predicted *construyes.

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, construíais, construían
Preterite: construí, construiste, construyó, construimos, construisteis, construyeron
Future (regular): construiré, etc. Conditional (regular): construiría, etc.
Present subjunctive: construya, construyas, construya, construyamos, construyáis, construyan
16.11 Model irregular and radical-changing verbs

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): construiera, 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, argúimos, argüí, 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) cuento, (usted) cuente, (vosotros contad), (ustedes) cuenten
Present indicative: cuento, cuentas, cuenta, (contamos), (contáis), cuentan
Present subjunctive: cuente, cuentes, cuente, (contemos), (contéis), cuen
ten

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, dais, dan
Imperfect (regular): daba, dabas, daba, dábanos, 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, deís, den
Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): diera, dieras, diera, diéramos, diérais, dieran
Imperfect subjunctive (-se): diese, diese, diese, diésemos, diéseis, diese

(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’, déle ‘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, dijeramos, dijerais, dijeron
Imperfect subjunctive (-se): dijese, dijeses, dijese, dijésemos, dijeseis, dijesen

(1) Predecir ‘to foretell’ and contradecir ‘to contradict’ are conjugated regularly in the future, conditional and tú imperative forms: predicére, etc., prediciría, 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, desdecídria 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, (nosotros discernimos), (ustedes) disciernan

Present indicative: discierno, disciernes, discierne, (discernimos), (discerní), disciernen

Preterite (regular): discerní, discerniste, discernió*, discernimos, discernisteis, discernieron*

Present subjunctive: discerna, discernas, disciera, (discernamos), (discernais), disciernan

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra) (regular): discerniera, etc.

Imperfect subjunctive (-se) (regular): discerniese, etc.

*Not the expected *discirnió, *discrimieron

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 dormís), (usted) duerna, (ustedes) duermen

Present indicative: duerme, duermes, duerme, (dormimos), (dormís), duermen

Preterite (regular): durmió, durmías, dormía, dormíamos, dormíais, dormían

Future (regular): dormirá, etc. Conditional (regular): dormirá, etc.

Present subjunctive: duermas, duermas, duerna, durmamos, durmáis, duerman

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): durmiera, durmieras, dormiera, durmiéramos, durmiéramos, 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: erguiendo Past participle: erguido

Imperative: (tú) yergue / y揉ue, (vosotros erguid), (usted) yerga / yergue, (ustedes) yergan / yerguen

Present indicative: yergo / yergue, yergues / yrgues, yergue / yrgue, (erguimos), (erquís), yerguen / yrguén

Imperfect (regular): erguí, erguías, ergúa, etc.
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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, irguíramos, irguierais, irguieran
Imperfect subjunctive (-se): irguiese, irguieses, irguiese, irguísemos, 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: erro, erras, erra, (erramos), (erráis), erran
- 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 estád, reg.), (usted) esté, (ustedes) estén
- Present indicative: estoy, estás, está, estamos, estáis, estan
- Imperfect (regular): estaba, estabas, estaba, estábamos, estabais, estaban
- Preterite: estuve, estuviste, estuvo, estuviéramos, estuviérais, estuvieron
- Future (reg.): estaré, etc. Conditional (reg.): estaría, etc.
- Present subjunctive: esté, estés, esté, estemos, estéis, estén
- Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): estuviera, estuvieras, estuviera, estuviéramos, estuviérais, estuvieron
- Imperfect subjunctive (-se): estuviese, estuvieses, estuviese, estuvísemos, 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: hubo, hubiste, hubo, hubimos, hubistes, hubieron
Future: habrá, 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 habemos ‘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, hicieráramos, hicierais, hicieran
Imperfect subjunctive (-se): hiciese, hicieses, hiciese, hiciésemos, hiciéseis, hiciesen

(1) Satisfacer ‘to satisfy’ is conjugated like hacer – satisfará, satisfizo, etc. – although the tú imperative can be either satisfaç 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, íba, 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, fuese, fuese, fuésemos, fueseis, fuesen

Note 1: Although the spelling hago, haces, hace, etc. is obsolete, it is frequently seen in a popular form where accent is not used.
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(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, jugas, juega, (jugamos), (jugaréis), juegan
- Preterite (regular): jugué, jugaste, jugó, (jugaron)
- Present subjunctive: juegue, jugues, 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

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: maldijé, 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, maldijeramos, maldijerais, maldijeron
- 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:
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) *oeye*, (usted) *ouela*, (vosotros oídal, (ustedes) *oiga*, (ustedes) *oigan*

**Present indicative:** *oigo*, *oyes*, *oye*, *ósos*, *óis*, *oyen*

**Imperfect (regular):** *oía*, *oías*, *oía*, *oíamos*, *oíais*, *oían*

**Preterite:** *oí*, *oíste*, *oyó*, *oímos*, *oísteis*, *oyeran*

**Future (regular):** *oíré*, etc.  
**Conditional (regular):** *oíría*, etc.

**Present subjunctive:** *oiga*, *oigas*, *oiga*, *oigamos*, *oigáis*, *oigan*

**Imperfect subjunctive** (-ra): *oiera*, *oieras*, *oiera*, *oieramos*, *oierais*, *oyeran*

**Imperfect subjunctive** (-se): *oyese*, *oyeses*, *oye*, *oysemos*, *oyeseis*, *oyesen*

(I) 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*, *hueles*, *huele*, (olémos), (oléis), *huelen*

**Present subjunctive:** *huela*, *huelas*, *huela*, (olámos), (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*, (usted) *pida*, (vosotros pedídad), (ustedes) *pidan*

**Present indicative:** *pido*, *pides*, *pide*, *pedimos*, *pidis*, *piden*

**Imperfect (regular):** *pidía*, *pidías*, *pidía*, *pidíamos*, *pidíais*, *pidían*

**Preterite:** *pidí*, *pidiste*, *pidió*, *pidimos*, *pidisteis*, *pidieron*

**Future (regular):** *pidiré*, etc.  
**Conditional (regular):** *pidiría*, etc.

**Present subjunctive:** *pida*, *pidas*, *pida*, *pidamos*, *pidáis*, *pidan*

**Imperfect subjunctive** (-ra): *pidiara*, *piérias*, *pieri*, *piieramos*, *piierais*, *piieren*

**Imperfect subjunctive** (-se): *pídiese*, *pídieses*, *pídiese*, *pídieseis*, *pídiesen*

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sing. plugo, plur. pluguieron</th>
<th>Present subjunctive</th>
<th>Imperfect subjunctive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>plega(n)</td>
<td>pluguiera(n)/pluguiese(n)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16.11.34 **Poder ‘to be able’**

Gerund: pudiendo

Imperative: not used

Present indicative: puedo, puedes, puede, podemos, podéis, pueden

Imperfect (regular): podía, podías, podía, podíamos, podíais, podían

Present subjunctive: pudiera, pudieras, pudiera, pudieran

Future: pondré, podrás, pondrá, podremos, podréis, podrán

Conditional: pondrá, etc.

16.11.35 **Poner ‘to put’**

Gerund: poniendo

Past participle: puesto

Imperative: (tú) pon, (vosotros) poned, (usted) ponga, (ustedes) pongan

Present indicative: pongo, ponen, pone, ponemos, ponéis, ponen

Imperfect (regular): ponía, ponías, ponía, poníamos, poníais, ponían

Present subjunctive: pusiera, pusieras, pusiera, pusieran

Future: pondré, pondrás, pondrá, pondremos, pondréis, pondrán

Conditional: pondría, etc.

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: posee, posees, posee, poseemos, poseéis, poseen

Imperfect (regular): poseía, poseías, poseía, poseíamos, poseíais, poseían
Forms of Spanish verbs

Preterite: poseí, poseístes, poseyó, poseimos, poseístes, 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, poseyeron
Imperfect subjunctive (-se): poseyese, poseyeses, poseyese, poseyésemos, poseyeséis, 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 -iero, -iera, -iese.

Imperative: (tú) produce, (vosotros) producids, usted produce, ustedes produzcan
Present indicative: produzco, produces, produce, producimos, producís, producen
Imperfect (regular): producía, etc.
Preterite: produje, produjiste, produjo, produjimos, produjisteis, produjeron
Future (regular): produciría, etc. Conditional (regular): produciría, etc.
Present subjunctive: produzca, produzcas, produzca, produzcamos, produzcásis, produzcan
Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): produjera, produjeras, produjera, produjéramos, produjerais, produjeron
Imperfect subjunctive (-se): produjese, produjeses, produjese, produjésemos, produjeséis, produjiesen

(1) Preterite forms like *producio, *conducir 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) queréis, (usted) quiera, (ustedes) quieran
Present indicative: quiere, quieres, quiere, queremos, queréis, quieren
Imperfect (regular): quería, querías, queria, queríamos, queríais, querían
Preterite: quisé, 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, quisiesemos, quisieséis, 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) ríeis, (usted) ría, (ustedes) rían
Present indicative: río, ríes, ríe, réimos, réis, ríen
Imperfect (regular): reía, reías, reía, reíamos, reíais, reían
Preterite: rei, reíste, río*, réimos, reísteis, rieron
Future (regular): reiré, reirás, reirá, reiremos, reiréis, reirán Conditional (regular): reiría, etc.
Present subjunctive: ría, ríes, ría, ríamos, ríais*, rían
Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): riera, rieras, riera, riéramos, rierais, rieran
Imperfect subjunctive (-se): riese, riese, riese, riésemos, rieseis, riesen.
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*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, sofrió, 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 > ò after ñ; see 16.4.10. Only the forms that differ from pedir are shown, and bracketed forms are also regular

Gerund: riñiendo
Preterite: (reñí), (reñiste), riñó, (reñimos), (reñisteis), riñeron
Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): riñiera, riñieras, riñiera, riñéramos, riñerais, riñenan
Imperfect subjunctive (-se): riñese, riñeses, riñese, riñésemos, riñesets, 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)
Preterite: roía, roías, roía, roíamos, roíais, roían
Future (regular): roeré, etc. Conditional (regular): roería, etc.
Imperfect subjunctive: roíera, roýer, roýer, roýéramos, roýerais, roýenan
Imperfect subjunctive (-se): royese, royeses, royese, royésemos, royesets, royesan

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: supé, supiste, supo, supimos, supisteis, supieron
Future: sabré, sabrás, sabrá, sabremos, sabréis, sabrán Conditional: sabría, etc.
Imperfect subjunctive: 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, salió, etc.
Future: saldré, saldrás, saldrá, saldremos, saldréis, saldrán Conditional: saldría, etc.
Present subjunctive: salga, salgas, salga, salgamos, salgáis, salgan
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 sentís), (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: fuí (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: tendrá, etc.

Present subjunctive: tenga, tengas, tenga, tengamos, tengáis, tengan

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): tuvieras, tuviéramos, tuvierais, tuvieran

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): tuviese, tuvieses, tuviese, tuviesemos, 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, trajó, trajimos, trajisteis, trajeron*  
(Not *trajeron*)

Future (regular): *traeré, etc.*  
Conditional (regular): *traería, etc.*

Present subjunctive: *traiga, traigas, traigáis, traigamos, traigáis, traigan*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *traiera, traieras, traieras, trajéramos, trajerais, trajeran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *trajese, trajeses, trajese, trajéramos, 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) *valen*, (usted) *valga*, (ustedes) *valgan*

Present indicative: *valgo, vales, vale, valimos, valéis, valen*

Imperfect (regular): *valía, valías, valía, valíamos, valíais, valían*

Preterite (regular): *valió, valiste, valió, valisteis, valieron*

Future: *valdré, valdrás, valdrá, valdremos, valdréis, valdrán*  
Conditional: *valdría, etc.*

Present subjunctive: *valga, valgas, valgáis, valgan, valgáis, valgan*

Imperfect subjunctive (-ra): *valiera, valieras, valiera, valiéramos, valierais, valieran*

Imperfect subjunctive (-se): *valiese, valiese, valiese, valiésemos, valieseis, valiesen*

16.11.49 *Venir* ‘to come’

Gerund: *viendo*  
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: *vinió, viniste, vino, 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, viniese, 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, veamos, veéis, 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, viera, viera, viéramos, viérais, vieran
Imperfect subjunctive (-se): viese, viese, viese, viésemos, viéseis, viesen

(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. entrevi ‘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, *viás, *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 (yago/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
aborrerecer: -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
aacecer: -cer 16.11.10
acertar: cerrar 16.11.11
acontecercer: -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
adolecercer: -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

amancercer: -cer 16.11.10
amoblar: contar 16.11.14, but
sometimes like amueblar:
reg. in Latin America
andar: 16.11.5
anocheecer: -cer 16.11.10
anteponer: poner 16.11.35
apacencercer: cerrar 16.11.11
aparecer: -cer 16.11.10
apotecer: -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
arquitecur: construir 16.11.13
arrecercer: abolir 16.11.12
arrependírse: sentir 16.11.44
ascender: perder 16.11.32
asentar: cerrar 16.11.11
aseñir: 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
ateral: like cerrar 16.11.11
aterirse: abolir 16.11.12
atraer: traer 16.11.47
atravesar: cerrar 16.11.11
atribuir: construir
16.11.13
avenir: venir 16.11.49
avenentar: cerrar 16.11.11
aavergonzar: contar 16.11.14
z > c before e: diphthong
spelt iie, e.g: subjunctive
aervoguere, etc.
balbucir: 16.11.7
bendecir: maldecir 16.11.27
(blandir: abolir 16.11.2)
bruirir: griñir 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
cenir: reinir 16.11.40
cernir: perder 16.11.32
cernir: discernir 16.11.17
cerrar: 16.11.11
circunscribir: irreg. past participle circunscrip to: 16.12

colar: contar 16.11.14
coligir: pedir 16.11.31
-g > j before a, o
colar: 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
condecir: pedir 16.11.31
-consentir
conordar: contar 16.11.14
condescender: perder 16.11.32
colunirse: 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
consobrar: contar 16.11.14
constituir: construir 16.11.13
constreñir: reinir 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
correr: roer 16.11.41
costar: contar 16.11.14
crecer: -cer 16.11.10
creren: poseer 16.11.36
cubrir: irreg. past participle 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
defecer: sentir 16.11.44
degollar: contar 16.11.14
diphthong spelt iue
demolir: 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
deretirar: pedir 16.11.31
derrocar: nowadays
regular: c > gu before e
desacertar: cerrar 16.11.11
desacodar: contar 16.11.14
desagradecer: -cer 16.11.10
desalentar: cerrar 16.11.11
desandar: andar 16.11.15
desaparecer: -cer 16.11.10
desapretar: cerrar 16.11.11
desaprobilar: contar 16.11.14
desasosegar: cerrar 16.11.11
-g > g before e
desatender: perder 16.11.32
desavenir: venir 16.11.49
descender: perder 16.11.32
descenir: reinir 16.11.40
descolgar: contar 16.11.14
g > gu before e
descollrar: 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 escrito
describir: past participle descubierto
desdecir: 16.11.16
desempedrar: cerrar 16.11.11
desengrasar: contar 16.11.14
desentenderse: perder 16.11.32
desenterrar: cerrar 16.11.11
desenvolver: mover 16.11.28
past participle desenvuelto
desfallecer: -cer 16.11.10
desgobernar: cerrar 16.11.11
deshacer: hacer 16.11.23
deshellar: cerrar 16.11.11
deshierrar: cerrar 16.11.11
desleír: reír 16.11.39
deslucir: lucir 16.11.26
desmembrar: cerrar 16.11.11
desmenuir: sentir 16.11.44
desmerecer: -cer 16.11.10
desobedecer: -cer 16.11.10
desoir: oír 16.11.29
desollar: contar 16.11.14
despídrar: pedir 16.11.31
desperdar: cerrar 16.11.11
despertar: cerrar 16.11.11
despejar: cerrar 16.11.11
usually despierz, regular: z > c before e
desplegar: cerrar 16.11.11
g > gu before e; now often regular
desplazar: contar 16.11.14
desproveer: poseer 16.11.36
past participle despro visto / desproveído
destenir: reinir 16.11.40
destetir: 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 iue
200 Forms of Spanish verbs

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
disolverse: 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
embeber: -cer 16.11.10
embellecer: -cer 16.11.10
embestir: pedir 16.11.31
embravecer: -cer 16.11.10
embrutece: -cer 16.11.10
empedrar: cerrar 16.11.11
empequeñecer: -cer 16.11.10
empazar: cerrar 16.11.11
  z > c before c
empobrecer: -cer 16.11.10
enaltecier: -cer 16.11.10
enardecir: -cer 16.11.10
encandilar: -cer 16.11.10
encargarse: -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
enfurcecer: -cer 16.11.10
engrandecer: -cer 16.11.10
engreirse: reír 16.11.39
engrosar: contar 16.11.14
  now often reg. Academy
  prefers irreg. conjugation
engullir: zamullir see 16.4.10
enloquecer: -cer 16.11.10
enmendar: cerrar 16.11.11
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: corrar 16.11.11
ensanchar: -cer(se)-cer 16.11.10
ensordecer: -cer 16.11.10
entender: perder 16.11.32
enterar: -cer 16.11.10
enterrar: cerrar 16.11.11
entreacto: past participle
  entreacto
entreceder: decir 16.11.16
entretener: oír 16.11.29
entretener: tener 16.11.46
entrever: ver 16.11.50
entrar a -cer 16.11.10
entumecer: -cer 16.11.10
envanecer: -cer 16.11.10
enviarse: -cer 16.11.10
envejecer: -cer 16.11.10
enrollar: mover 16.11.28
  past participle envelueto
  equivaler: valer 16.11.48
erguir: 16.11.19
errar: 16.11.20
escabullirse: zamullirse see
  16.4.10
escamotear: corrar 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
estreñecer: -cer 16.11.10
estirar: reír 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
facerecer: -cer 16.11.10
florececer: -cer 16.11.10
fluir: construir 16.11.13
forzarse: contar 16.11.14
  z > c before e
fregar: corrar 16.11.11
  g > gu before e
freir: reír 16.11.39
  past participle freído/frío
gemir: pedir 16.11.31
gobernar: corrar 16.11.11
gruñir: see 16.4.10
guarecer: -cer 16.11.10
guarecer: -cer 16.11.10
haber: 16.11.22
hacer: 16.11.23
heder: perder 16.11.32
helar: corrar 16.11.11
hembra: pedir 16.11.31
hender: perder 16.11.32
hendir: discernir 16.11.17
herir: sentir 16.11.44
heredar: corrar 16.11.11
herodir: sentir 16.11.44
holgar: contar 16.11.14
  g > gu before e
hollarse: 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: corrar 16.11.11
inclinar: 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
ingerir: 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
inuir: construir 16.11.13
invernar: corrar 16.11.11
  Academy prefers
  regular conjugation
inverter: sentir 16.11.44
16.12 List of irregular verbs

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<td><strong>ir</strong></td>
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<td><strong>jugar</strong></td>
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<td><strong>languidecer</strong></td>
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<td><strong>maldecir</strong></td>
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<td><strong>manifestar</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>mantener</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>medir</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>mentar</strong></td>
<td>cerrar</td>
<td>16.11.11 (often regular)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>mentir</strong></td>
<td>sentir</td>
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<td><strong>merecer</strong></td>
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<td><strong>nullir</strong></td>
<td>zambullir</td>
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<td><strong>nacer</strong></td>
<td>-cer</td>
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<td><strong>negar</strong></td>
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<td><strong>obra</strong></td>
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<td><strong>obedecer</strong></td>
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<td><strong>obscurecer</strong></td>
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<td><strong>obstuir</strong></td>
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<td><strong>ofrecer</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>oscurecer</strong></td>
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<td>(obscurecer is an older spelling)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>pacer</strong></td>
<td>-cer</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>padecer</strong></td>
<td>-cer</td>
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<td><strong>palidecer</strong></td>
<td>-cer</td>
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<td><strong>parecer</strong></td>
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<td><strong>perecer</strong></td>
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<td><strong>permanecer</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>perseguir</strong></td>
<td>pedir</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>quiero</strong></td>
<td>gu before a, o</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>pertenecer</strong></td>
<td>-cer</td>
<td>16.11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>pervirtir</strong></td>
<td>sentir</td>
<td>16.11.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>placer</strong></td>
<td>16.11.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>plegar</strong></td>
<td>cerrar</td>
<td>16.11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g &gt; gu before e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>poblar</strong></td>
<td>contar</td>
<td>16.11.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>poder</strong></td>
<td>16.11.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>podrir</strong></td>
<td>variant of pudrir, accepted in Lat. Am. rare in Spain: -u- used for all other forms save past part: podrido</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>poner</strong></td>
<td>16.11.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>poseer</strong></td>
<td>16.11.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>posponer</strong></td>
<td>poner</td>
<td>16.11.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>predecir</strong></td>
<td>16.11.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>predecir</strong></td>
<td>16.11.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>prescribir</strong></td>
<td>past participle prescrito</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>presuponer</strong></td>
<td>poner</td>
<td>16.11.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>prevalecer</strong></td>
<td>-cer</td>
<td>16.11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>valer</td>
<td>16.11.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>prevencion</strong></td>
<td>venir</td>
<td>16.11.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>pulgar</strong></td>
<td>ver</td>
<td>16.11.50</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>probar</strong></td>
<td>contar</td>
<td>16.11.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>producir</strong></td>
<td>16.11.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>proferir</strong></td>
<td>sentir</td>
<td>16.11.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>proferir</strong></td>
<td>mover</td>
<td>16.11.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>proponer</strong></td>
<td>poner</td>
<td>16.11.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>proseguir</strong></td>
<td>pedir</td>
<td>16.11.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**gu &gt; gu before a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>proteger</strong></td>
<td>construir</td>
<td>16.11.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>proveer</strong></td>
<td>tener</td>
<td>16.11.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>prover</strong></td>
<td>poseer</td>
<td>16.11.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>past participle provisto/ proveido</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>provenir</strong></td>
<td>venir</td>
<td>16.11.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>pudrir</strong></td>
<td>regular; see also podrir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>quebrar</strong></td>
<td>cerrar</td>
<td>16.11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>querer</strong></td>
<td>16.11.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>raer</strong></td>
<td>caer</td>
<td>16.11.9 (rayo is a rarer alternative to raigo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>reaparecer</strong></td>
<td>-cer</td>
<td>16.11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>reblanecer</strong></td>
<td>-cer</td>
<td>16.11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>recaer</strong></td>
<td>caer</td>
<td>16.11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>recluir</strong></td>
<td>construir</td>
<td>16.11.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>recoger</strong></td>
<td>coger</td>
<td>16.11.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>recomendar</strong></td>
<td>cerrar</td>
<td>16.11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>reconocer</strong></td>
<td>-cer</td>
<td>16.11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>reconvenir</strong></td>
<td>venir</td>
<td>16.11.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>recordar</strong></td>
<td>contar</td>
<td>16.11.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**recostar(se): contar</td>
<td>16.11.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>reducir</strong></td>
<td>producir</td>
<td>16.11.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>relegir</strong></td>
<td>pedir</td>
<td>16.11.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**g &gt; j before a, o</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>referir</strong></td>
<td>sentir</td>
<td>16.11.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>reformar</strong></td>
<td>cerrar</td>
<td>16.11.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**z &gt; c before e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>regresar</strong></td>
<td>cerrar</td>
<td>16.11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**g &gt; gu before e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>regresar</strong></td>
<td>cerrar</td>
<td>16.11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**g &gt; gu before e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>regimentar</strong></td>
<td>cerrar</td>
<td>16.11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>recoger</strong></td>
<td>coger</td>
<td>16.11.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**c &gt; z before a, o</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>retraer</strong></td>
<td>traer</td>
<td>16.11.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>retribuir</strong></td>
<td>construir</td>
<td>16.11.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>retrotraer</strong></td>
<td>traer</td>
<td>16.11.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
202 Forms of Spanish verbs

reventar: cerrar 16.11.11
reverdecerc: -cer 16.11.10
revertir: perder 16.11.32
revestir: pedir 16.11.31
revolver: contar 16.11.14
revolcar(se) contar 16.11.14
  c > qu before e
revolverse: mover 16.11.28
  past participle revuelto
roblustecer: -cer 16.11.10
rodar: contar 16.11.14
roer: 16.11.41
rogar: contar 16.11.14
  g > gu before e
romper: past participle roto
saber: 16.11.42
salir: 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
semebrar: cerrar 16.11.11
sentar: cerrar 16.11.11
sentir: 16.11.44
ser: 16.11.45
serrar: cerrar 16.11.11
serrar: 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
sorear: 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
subir: 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
temporar: cerrar 16.11.11
templar usually regular
  but often like
cerrar 16.11.11 in Mex:
tender: perder 16.11.32
tener: 16.11.46
tentar: cerrar 16.11.11
tener: reír 16.11.40
torcer: cocer 16.11.12
c > z before a, o
tostar: contar 16.11.14
traducir: producir 16.11.37
trasnferir: sentir 16.11.44
transgredir: 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
trocar: 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: 16.11.48
venir: 16.11.49
volver: 16.11.28
valor: 16.11.50
ver: 16.11.50
vestir: pedir 16.11.31
volar: contar 16.11.14
volcar: contar 16.11.14
  c > qu before e
volverse: mover 16.11.28
  past participle vuelto
yacer: 16.11.51
yazherrir: 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.

he visto  he has visto  he had visto
has visto  has has visto  has had visto
ha visto  ha has visto  ha had visto

Pluperfect ‘I had seen’, etc.

había visto  habías visto  habían visto
habíamos visto  habíais visto  habían visto
### Future perfect ‘I shall have seen’, etc.  
### Conditional ‘I would have seen’, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Future perfect</th>
<th>Conditional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>habré visto</td>
<td>habré visto</td>
<td>habrá visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habrás visto</td>
<td>habrás visto</td>
<td>habría visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habrá visto</td>
<td>habrá visto</td>
<td>habríamos visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habréis visto</td>
<td>habréis visto</td>
<td>habría visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habréis visto</td>
<td>habréis visto</td>
<td>habríamos visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habráis visto</td>
<td>habráis visto</td>
<td>habría visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habrán visto</td>
<td>habrán visto</td>
<td>habríamos visto</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Pretérito anterior ‘I had seen’, etc. (infrequently used. See 18.4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Pretérito anterior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hube visto</td>
<td>hube visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hubiste visto</td>
<td>hubiste visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hubo visto</td>
<td>hubo visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hubimos visto</td>
<td>hubimos visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hubisteis visto</td>
<td>hubisteis visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hubieron visto</td>
<td>hubieron visto</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Subjunctive

#### Perfect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Subjunctive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>haya visto</td>
<td>hayamos visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hayas visto</td>
<td>hayáis visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>haya visto</td>
<td>hayan visto</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Imperfect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>-ra form</th>
<th>-se form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hubiera visto</td>
<td>hubiéramos visto</td>
<td>hubiese visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hubieras visto</td>
<td>hubierais visto</td>
<td>hubieses visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hubiera visto</td>
<td>hubieran visto</td>
<td>hubiese visto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>hubiesen visto</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 (hablabá, 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name used in this book</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Spanish names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present indicative</td>
<td>hablas, tienes</td>
<td>presente de indicativo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperfect indicative</td>
<td>hablabá, tenías</td>
<td>pretérito imperfecto, copretérito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preterite</td>
<td>hablé, tuviste</td>
<td>pretérito perfecto simple, pretérito indefinido, pretérito, perfecto absoluto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect indicative</td>
<td>he hablado, has tenido</td>
<td>pretérito perfecto compuesto, pretérito perfecto actual, antepresente</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluperfect indicative</td>
<td>había hablado, habías tenido</td>
<td>pretérito pluscuamperfecto, antecopretérito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future indicative</td>
<td>hablaré, tendrás</td>
<td>futuro simple, futuro imperfecto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional</td>
<td>hablaría, tendrías</td>
<td>condicional simple, pospretérito, potencial, futuro hipotético</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 *hablabá* 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 lluyendo* ‘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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Llueve mucho en Irlanda</td>
<td>It rains a lot in Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fumo más de cuarenta al día</td>
<td>I smoke more than forty a day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta es venezolana</td>
<td>Marta’s Venezuelan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tengo tarjeta de crédito</td>
<td>I have a credit card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me deprime comer sola (CMG, Sp.)</td>
<td>Eating on my own depresses me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo me sé de memoria tus chistecitos</td>
<td>I know your feeble jokes by heart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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.
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Escribe/Está escribiendo una novela</td>
<td>(S)he's writing a novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Qué haces?/¿Qué estás haciendo? (they mean the same when they express surprise)</td>
<td>What are you doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nieva/Está nevando (but see 19.1.3)</td>
<td>It’s snowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La puerta necesita/está necesitando una mano de pintura (from NGLE 23.5f)</td>
<td>The door needs a coat of paint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

Me caso
¿Qué dices? (= ¿qué estás diciendo? when indignation or surprise are intended)
¡Que me ahogo/caigo!
¡Ya voy!
Merino pasa la pelota a Andreas
¿Vienes?

I’m getting married
What did you say (just then)?’ or ‘What do you say?’ or ‘What are you saying?’
I’m drowning/falling!
I’m coming!
Merino passes the ball to Andreas
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:

¿Cuántos pozos quedan por los alrededores?
— 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.
Bueno, pues me llama y me dice que por qué no nos vemos. ¿Vemos? ¿Dónde?, le digo yo. En cualquier sitio, me dice. Pero, ¿qué es lo que les pasa a tus amiguitas?, le

‘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, 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)

‘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 cai 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 (MVL, 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? Shall/Should I send it to you?
¿Esribo a los abuelos? Should I write to our grandparents?
¿Nos vamos?, preguntó él, y ella en respuesta ‘Shall we go?’ he asked, and in reply she le tomó la mano y sin soltársela salieron del restaurante (EP, Mex. dialogue) 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish phrase</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Es la primera vez que la veo</td>
<td>It’s the first time I’ve seen her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desde hace dos días estoy tratando de comunicarme con el señor Morales</td>
<td>I’ve been trying to contact Mr Morales for two days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Prensalibre, Guat., dialogue)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a list of some of the uses of the present indicative tense in Spanish.
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 ques-
tion 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La Segunda Guerra Mundial empezó en 1939</td>
<td>World War Two began in 1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hubo una explosión</td>
<td>There was an explosion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donde antes hubo césped, ahora había una tierra resquebrajada y seca (RM, Sp.)</td>
<td>Where once there was a lawn there was now a patch of broken, dry earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A nadie le gusta contratar a un hombre que estuvo en la cárcel (EM, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>No one likes to hire a man who was/has been in jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo primero que escribí fue un cuento (AGa, Sp.)</td>
<td>The first thing I wrote was a short story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martín la llamó cuatro veces</td>
<td>Martín called her four times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo escribió ochenta veces</td>
<td>(S)he wrote it eighty times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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.
17.4 The preterite: general remarks

(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:

- *Estuve destinado en Bilbao dos años*  
  I was stationed in Bilbao for two years

- *Durante el viaje, Eugenio estuvo muy comunicativo (SP, Spain)*  
  During the journey Eugenio was very communicative

- *Los dinosaurios reinaron sobre la tierra durante millones de años*  
  The dinosaurs reigned on earth for millions of years

- *Te olvidas de los años que trabajamos juntos*  
  You’re forgetting the years we worked together

- *Durante esos días Lorenzo se sintió muy cerca de Erro (EP, Mex.)*  
  During those days Lorenzo felt very close to Erro

- *Durante años no pudimos hablar de otra cosa (GGM, Col., dialogue)*  
  For years we could talk of nothing else

- *La fiesta fue un éxito*  
  The party was a success (from start to finish)

- *Fue un día magnífico*  
  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*
Use of indicative (non-continuous) verb tenses

*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:

- *Mi niñez fue/era feliz*  
  My childhood was happy
- *Recuerdo que llovió/llovía mucho cuando vivíamos en Canadá*  
  I remember it rained a lot when we lived in Canada
- *Alonso se levantó/se levantaba todos los días a las ocho para ir al trabajo (usualmente levantaba)*  
  Alonso got up every day at eight to go to work
- *Cuando vivíamos juntos no tuvimos/teníamos más usual problemas*  
  When we lived together we had no problems
- *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)*  
  He always used to sleep as his father (had) slept, with his gun hidden in his pillowcase
- *El nuevo secretario fue el poeta Jaime Torres Bodet, quien declaró: “Yo no soy político” (JA, Mx.)*  
  The new secretary was JTB who declared ‘I’m not a politician’
- *Stalin fue una presencia habitual en la casa de los Alliluyev (RM, Sp.)*  
  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:

- **Una vez el dinero estuvo en mis manos,** *compré la casa*  
  As soon as the money came into my hands, I bought the house
- **No reconocí a Selina hasta que estuvo delante de mí** (SP, Sp.)  
  I didn’t recognize Selina until she was in front of me
- **Una vez que estuvo mar adentro encendió el Evinrude** (EM, Mex.)  
  Once he was out at sea he started up the Evinrude (outboard motor)
- **La conversación se fue espaciando** (ir + gerund indicates a longish process; *fue* shows it ended)  
  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:

- **Fue un error decírselo**  
  It was a mistake to tell him/her (we committed it)
- **Era un error decírselo**  
  It was a mistake to tell him/her (we may or may not have committed it)
- **Fue una presa fácil**  
  (S)he/It was an easy prey (and was caught)
- **Era una presa fácil**  
  (same translation, but the victim may have escaped)
- **Costó trabajo conseguirlo**  
  It was hard work getting it (but we did)
- **Costaba trabajo conseguirlo**  
  It was hard work to get it (we may or may not have tried to get it)
- **El tren llegó a las ocho**  
  The train arrived at eight
- **El tren llegaba a las ocho**  
  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:

- **Hubo una nota de alarma en su voz**  
  There was a (brief) note of alarm in his/her voice
- **Cuando abrí el horno, sentí una ráfaga de calor**  
  When I opened the oven I felt a gust of heat
- **Estuve a punto de pensar que esas manos no eran suyas** (CF, Mex.)  
  (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:

- *Me cayó bien* (cf. *me caía bien* ‘I was getting on well with him/her’)
- *Rosa me gustó desde el primer momento* (Castilian translation, Sp.)
- *Fue niña y le pusimos Rita* (M. Rodoreda, Castilian translation, Sp.)
- *Todo lo que había dentro me pareció lejano y ajeno* (LS, Ch.)

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:

- *Cuando llegue, llegó* (S)he’ll be here when (s)he’s here (and that’s that!)
- *Cuando se acabe, se acabó* 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:

- *Para las dos ya lo acabé* (Mex., from Lope Blanch, 1991; Sp. *ya lo tendrá/ habré acabado*)
- *Mañana ya llegó el día* (LRS, PR, dialogue *mañana es el día*)
- *Nos fuimos* (colloquial Lat. Am., Sp. *nos vamos*)

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’:

- *Tuve la impresión de que...* I got the impression that...
- *Tenía la impresión de que...* I had the impression that...
- *Tuve una carta/Tenía una carta* I received a letter/I had a letter
- *Cuando tuvo ocasión de estudiar consiguió con la universidad a distancia el título de ingeniero* 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: 

\[ \text{tuvo fiebre durante tres días} \] ‘(s)he had a fever for three days’.

(b) \textit{Conocer:} Alejo conoció a Rafael ‘Alejo met Rafael’ (for the first time), Alejo conocía a Rafael ‘Alejo knew Rafael’.

\subsection*{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 

\[ \text{tuvieron tres niños} \] ‘they had (i.e. “produced”/“gave birth to”) three children’, which is usually three separate events, and 

\[ \text{tenían tres niños} \] which is a state of affairs, not an event. 

Less obvious is the difference between 

\[ \text{querían hacerlo} \] ‘they wanted to do it’, which is a state of mind, and 

\[ \text{quisieron hacerlo} \] which is an event with an outcome, i.e. they wanted to do it \textit{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:

\begin{align*}
\text{En noviembre se \textit{registraron} 85 320 contratos,} & \quad 85,320 \text{ job contracts were registered} \\
\text{de los cuales 83 419 \textit{fueron} indefinidos.} & \quad \text{in November, of which 83,419 were long-term.} \\
\text{Es decir, las colocaciones han caído} & \quad \text{In other words,} \\
\text{significativamente respecto a la cifra récord} & \quad \text{the number of persons hired has} \\
\text{del pasado octubre, que fue de más de un} & \quad \text{fallen significantly compared with} \\
\text{millón. El paro ha caído en 157 444 personas} & \quad \text{last October’s record figure, which} \\
\text{desde noviembre de 1996, cuando la tasa de} & \quad \text{was more than a million. Unemployment} \\
\text{paro era del 14,04\%} & \quad \text{has fallen by 157,444 persons since} \\
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{(1) English speakers find this distinction confusing when the verb is} & \quad \text{(1) English speakers find this distinction confusing when the verb is} \\
\text{ser. María Luz Gutiérrez Araus (1995, 32), cites an interesting example from García Márquez (Col.):} & \quad \text{ser. María Luz Gutiérrez Araus (1995, 32), cites an interesting example from García Márquez (Col.):} \\
\text{un perro . . . mordió a cuatro personas que se le atravesaron en el camino. Tres eran esclavos negros. La otra fue Sierva María} & \quad \text{un perro . . . mordió a cuatro personas que se le atravesaron en el camino. Tres eran esclavos negros. La otra fue Sierva María} \\
\text{‘a dog bit four people who got in its way. Three were black slaves. The other was Sierva María’.} & \quad \text{‘a dog bit four people who got in its way. Three were black slaves. The other was Sierva María’.} \\
\text{The preterite brings Sierva María into the foreground – she is a major character in the novel.} & \quad \text{The preterite brings Sierva María into the foreground – she is a major character in the novel.} \\
\text{The imperfect pushes the other three characters into the descriptive background. But such clear-cut} & \quad \text{The imperfect pushes the other three characters into the descriptive background. But such clear-cut} \\
\text{examples are rare and literary: in ordinary language one would say . . .} & \quad \text{examples are rare and literary: in ordinary language one would say . . .} \\
\text{era Sierva María.} & \quad \text{era Sierva María.}
\end{align*}

\subsection*{17.5 The imperfect: general}

The Spanish imperfect form indicates a past event or state viewed as continuing at the time referred to. Compare \(M. \text{ estaba en el ejército} \) ‘M. was in the army’ (at the time: imperfect) and \(M. \text{ estuvo en el ejército} \) ‘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**. 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**. The Greeks worshipped many gods.
- Cada vez que os veíais lo decía. 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**. 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.). They hadn’t seen one another for three years.
- Era la primera vez que la veía. It was the first time I had seen her.
- Me venía siguiendo desde hacía una semana. 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:
17.5 The imperfect: general

(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’:

Prometieron que venían/vendrían They promised they were coming/would come
Juró que lo haría/haría (S)he swore (s)he’d do it
Pensaba que ya no venías/vendrías I thought you weren’t coming/wouldn’t come any more
Sabíamos que los refuerzos llegaban/llegarían We knew the reinforcements were arriving/would arrive at any moment
de un momento para otro (see note 1)

(b) With deber and poder, in which case the imperfect is slightly more colloquial:

Podía ser una solución, mira . . . (CMG, Sp., dialogue; or podría) It could be a solution, you know . . .
Debías/Deberías hacerlo ahora (see note 2) You should do it now

c) In conditional sentences in familiar Spanish (see 29.5 for details, and see note 3):

Incluso si no tuvieras dinero, me casaba/casaría I’d marry you even if you had no money
Yo que tú compraba una nueva (ES, Mex., dialogue) If I were you I’d buy a new one

d) In familiar Spanish, to express a wish or denial:

Ya le decía yo cuatro verdades I wouldn’t mind giving him/her a piece of my mind! (lit. ‘telling him/her four truths’)
Tenían que hacer un monumento al tío* que inventó el café (MD, Sp., dialogue) They ought to build a monument for the guy who invented coffee
Yo ahora me tomaba un helado y me quedaba tan bien I’d like to have an ice-cream now and I’d feel great
. . . ni loca me casaba con un español (ES, Mex., dialogue) I wouldn’t marry a Spaniard even if I were crazy (Mexican woman speaking)
A primera vista, el hombre no mataba una mosca 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 Hablabo 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
Use of indicative (non-continuous) verb tenses

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

(i) 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, seré, 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish (informal)</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Si llueve se aplazará el partido</td>
<td>If it rains the match will be postponed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En el remoto futuro el sol se apagará</td>
<td>In the remote future the sun will go out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Para entonces todos estaremos calvos</td>
<td>We’ll all be bald by then (said of something that will take a long time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me ha dado cien euros. Con esto tiraré hasta la semana próxima, y luego veremos (luego vemos is impossible here)</td>
<td>(S)he gave me 100 euros. I’ll manage with that until next week. Then we’ll see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nos veremos mañana en Palacio, ¿no es cierto? (CF, Mex., dialogue. Nos vemos would imply more certainty)</td>
<td>We’ll see one another tomorrow at the Presidential Palace won’t we?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) The future is much used for promises or predictions, especially long-term ones, since these by nature are not pre-arrangements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish (informal)</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ten confianza en mí. No te decepcionaré ¡No pasarán!</td>
<td>Trust me. I won’t disappoint you They shall not pass!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No tenga miedo . . . ya nadie le hará daño (EM, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>Don’t be afraid . . . no one is going to hurt you any more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pero cuidalo como si fuera ya mío, porque en ese caso algún día será de mis hijas (ABE, Pe., dialogue)</td>
<td>But look after it as though it already belonged to me, because in that case one day it will belong to my daughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Una verdadera revolución no admitirá jamás la impunidad (VdC, Cu.)</td>
<td>A true revolution will never allow crimes to go unpunished</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 lollé 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No matarás</td>
<td>Thou shalt not kill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No saldrás de esta casa hasta que yo no te lo permita (see 27.2.4c for the second no)</td>
<td>You will not leave this house until I allow you to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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  
  We’re going to Bolivia next year
- Te llamo/Nos vemos  
  I’ll call you/See you later
- Esta noche hay tormenta, verás  
  Tonight there’ll be a storm, you’ll see
- El día menos pensado le tiran a tu madre la casa (CMG, Sp., dialogue)  
  One fine day (lit. ‘the day least expected’) they’re going to demolish your mother’s house
- Ahorita vengo, voy por el dinero (ES, Mex., dialogue. In Spain ahorita = ahora mismo)  
  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!’

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serán las nueve y media, por ahí</td>
<td>It must be around 9.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya habrás comido, ¿no?</td>
<td>I guess you’ve already eaten, haven’t you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un par de años hará . . . Gannon me escribió de Gualeguaychú</td>
<td>It must be a couple of years ago that Gannon wrote to me from Gualeguaychú</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pase usted, por favor. Siéntese. Estará cansado</td>
<td>Please come in. Sit down. You must be tired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Dónde está tu monedero? —Me lo habré dejado en casa</td>
<td>‘Where’s your purse?’ ‘I must have left it at home’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Qué hora será? (Lat. Am. ¿Qué horas serán?)</td>
<td>I wonder what the time is?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eh, no querrás que mi jefe vea eso</td>
<td>Hey, you don’t want my boss to see that, do you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Qué estará pensando de todo esto?</td>
<td>‘What can he be thinking of all this?’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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!’
Use of indicative (non-continuous) verb tenses

(b) Students must avoid using the future after cuando in sentences like comemos 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
En un rato todo el mundo se iría a dormir la siesta (AM, Mex., dialogue; Sp. Dentro de un rato)

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
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It could have been a good mystery novel</td>
<td>Hubiera podido ser una buena novela de misterio . . . (CMG, Sp., dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The disease would have crept in just the same through some crack in the walls of the castle</td>
<td>El mal lo mismo se hubiera colado por alguna grieta de las piedras del castillo (MP, Arg., dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perhaps it would have done me a lot of good to continue with therapy</td>
<td>A lo mejor me hubiera hecho mucho bien seguir con la terapia (AM, Mex.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Hubria* 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’.
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td>he estado hablando, etc.</td>
<td>I’ve been speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluperfect</td>
<td>había estado hablando, etc.</td>
<td>I had been speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future perfect</td>
<td>habré estado hablando, etc.</td>
<td>I will have been speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional perfect</td>
<td>hubría estado hablando, etc.</td>
<td>I would have been speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect subjunctive</td>
<td>haya estado hablando, etc.</td>
<td>No exact translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluperfect subjunctive</td>
<td>hubiera/hubiese estado hablando, etc.</td>
<td>No exact translation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 You may have forgotten
Se ha más que duplicado la cifra 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.)

(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)

(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.’
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 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 periodistas (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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin American</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alguien ha fumado un cigarrillo aquí. Huelo el humo</td>
<td>Someone has smoked a cigarette here. I can smell the smoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Quién ha roto esta ventana?</td>
<td>Who’s broken/Who broke this window?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todo el mundo habla de Fulano porque ha publicado otra novela</td>
<td>Everyone’s talking about so-and-so because he’s published a new novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estoy orgulloso de lo que han hecho con este muchacho—dijo—se ha convertido en un hombre</td>
<td>I’m proud of what they’ve done with this boy,’ he said. ‘He’s become a man’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pero el padre murió, y la madre ha muerto hace unos años</td>
<td>But the father died, and the mother died a few years ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?Bueno, he ido a hacerme el análisis hace quince días</td>
<td>Anyway, I went and had the test done two weeks ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mí todo lo que me ha sucedido me ha sucedido ayer, anoche a más tardar</td>
<td>Everything that has happened to me happened yesterday, last night at the latest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Esta mañana me he levantado/me levanté a las seis</td>
<td>I got up at six this morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han sonado hace poco dos tiros. ¿Los has oído?</td>
<td>There were two shots a moment ago. Did you hear them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—¿Quién ha dicho eso?— No he sido yo. Ha sido él</td>
<td>‘Who said that (just now)?’ ‘It wasn’t me. It was him’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La he visto hace un momento</td>
<td>I saw her a moment ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No he podido hacerlo</td>
<td>I couldn’t do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perdone, no he entendido bien lo que ha dicho</td>
<td>Sorry, I didn’t fully understand what you said (just now)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(CMG, Sp., dialogue)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 The perfect indicative tense

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)  Now we’ve got the modern answer!
—¿Ya organizaste? —le pregunté.  ‘Have you organized it?’, I asked
—Sí, ya organicé (AM, Mex., dialogue; Sp. lo has organizado/lo he organizado)  him. ‘Yes, I’ve organized it’
¿Nunca te fijaste en eso? (ibid., Sp. nunca te has fijado)  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).
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 hiciere/hiciese
- Niega que su mujer le abriera/abriese/le haya abierto la puerta
- Algunos no aceptan que Colón descubriera/ descubriesse/haya descubierto América

It’s impossible that (s)he did it
He denies that his wife opened the door for him/her
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
- Sabíamos que ya había vendido el coche
- Los patrones estaban celebrando que habían llegado a un acuerdo (EM, Mex., dialogue)
- Yo me había levantado, duchado y desayunado cuando sonó el teléfono (ABE, Pe.)
- They had already switched on the lights when I arrived
- We knew that (s)he had already sold the car
- The bosses were celebrating the fact that they had reached an agreement
- 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 The pluperfect: general

18.3.2 Pluperfect in -ra

The -ra imperfect subjunctive form of Spanish verbs – hablara, dijera, fueran, 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:

Fue el único rastro que dejó en el que fuera su hogar de casada por cinco horas (GGM, Col., for había sido)  
It was the only trace she left in what had been her marital home for five hours

Personajes de televisión recuerdan el que fuera su juguete especial (El Universal, Ec.)  
TV personalites recall what was their favourite toy

China investiga al que fuera su máximo responsable de seguridad (La Jornada, Mex.)  
China investigates person who was its head of security

Parece ser además que en el solar donde se construyera el hotel se alzaba antes el palacio (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 – coméremos 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:

. . . después de que las hijas mayores la ayudaron a poner un poco de orden en los estragos de la boda (GGM, Col.)  . . . after the elder daughters (had) helped her to put a bit of order in the devastation left by the wedding
Use of indicative (non-continuous) compound tenses

... after Victoriano Huerta killed Madero

Desde que se casó, Octavia nunca volvió a besarme (ABE, Pe. Or después de que . . .) 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:

... after Nigeria made public its decision to sign the communiqué/minutes

Vargas Llosa, who has kept many friends in Barcelona from when he lived in Spain

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:

When they had finished laughing, they examined my personal situation

He wrote to her the same day, when she had only just left

... so, as soon as I had taken my blouse off

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.
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’.

**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*  I’m (actually) eating (right now)
*Estabas hablando*  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
(VM, 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

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.
Continuous forms of verbs

(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/go ing 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 asómarse 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
19.2 Uses of the continuous forms 237

(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)

### 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.)

Ahí está el libro que me hizo perder pie . . . lo estuve buscando antes no sé cuánto rato

(CMG, Sp., dialogue)

Acuérdate, 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** (S)he’s going to the cinema a lot these days
- **En sus diarios siempre está hablando de la familia** In his diaries he’s always talking about the family
- **Lleva años que se está yendo pero nunca acaba de irse** (S)he’s been leaving for years but never gets round to going
- **Está haciendo frío** It’s been cold lately/The weather’s cold at the moment
- **Pero está usted tomando muy seguido esas hierbas y seguido hacen daño** 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** Tomorrow at this time we’ll be flying over the Pacific
- **¿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) 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!
- **Estarán comiendo a estas horas** They’ll probably be eating at this time of day
- **¿Qué estará haciendo ahora el hombre en la Estación Espacial Mir?** (DES, Mex., dialogue) I wonder what the man in the Mir Space Station is doing now
- **Pero, ¿vas a estar esperándola todo el día?** 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
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)
Estoy viendo que vamos a acabar mal
Asegura que está deseando conocerte
(ABV, Sp. dialogue)
Aún así, todo el dolor y todo el esfuerzo están mereciendo la pena (CORPES, Sp.)
Estoy temiendo que va a llegar tarde

She didn’t believe a word she said
I can see we’re going to end badly
He insists that he wants to meet you
Despite all this, all the suffering and all the effort is worthwhile
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:

Normally lleva corbata azul, pero hoy lleva una corbata roja
Treis arañas de luces colgaban del techo
Lo que falta es . . .
La luna brillaba alta, con reflejos plateados
(Parece cansada (see note 4)
¡Qué bien huele la madreselva hoy!

Normally he wears a blue tie, but today he’s wearing a red tie
Three chandeliers were hanging from the roof
What’s lacking is . . .
The moon was shining silver beams high in the sky
She’s looking tired
 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?
Viene ahora
Cuando volvíamos del cine (me) subí un momento a ver a la abuela
Estás pesado hoy

Where are you going?
(S)he’s coming now
When we were coming back from the cinema I went up to see grandmother for a moment
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.
Continuous forms of verbs

(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 antigo 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, Martín, 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 (MVLl, 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

‘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 andás 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
- The future subjunctive (Section 20.8)
- 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. *hablar*/*hablad*/*hubiere/hubiese* hablar (also mentioned at 18.2.9 and 18.5), and continuous forms of the subjunctive, e.g. *estar* 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 fue una discusión auténtica.* Maybe it was a real dispute. Maybe they were putting on an act for my benefit
- *Tal vez representaban una comedia en mi honor* (interview, Madrid press; both moods used)
- *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)

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/fésta sea la camioneta más lujosa que hayas visto en tu vida (Excélsior, Mex.)

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 volvería 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?
¿Acaso todos los paganos no odian a los huambisas? (MVLl, Pe., dialogue) 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:

- **A lo mejor se ha quedado en casa** Perhaps/Maybe (s)he’s stayed at home
- **Ni siquiera la nombró. A lo mejor se ha olvidado de ella** (MVLl, Pe., dialogue) He didn’t even mention her. Maybe he’s forgotten her
- **A lo mejor el loco era él** (EP, Mex.) 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? (MVLl, 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.

- ¡Ojalá nos toque la lotería! (parodies a gypsy curse) Let’s hope we win the lottery!
- ¡Ojalá se le quemé el arroz (AA, Cu. dialogue) I hope her rice burns
- . . . y pensé quién fuera escritor . . . (ABE, Pe.) . . . and I thought: if only I were a writer
- Ya/Así fueran/fuésen como tú todas las mujeres If only all women were like you . . .
- Así se te pegue mi catarro! (parodies a gypsy curse) I hope you get my cold!
The subjunctive

(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 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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{De ahí que el Papa haya incluso presionado al} & \quad \text{This is why the Pope has even put} \\
\text{nuevo Gobierno (El País, Sp.)} & \quad \text{pressure on the new Government} \\
\text{De ahí que en cada nuevo atentado sintieran} & \quad \text{Hence the fact that with every new terrorist} \\
\text{que recuperaban su primitiva fuerza} & \quad \text{attack they felt they were regaining their} \\
\text{(MSQ, Arg.)} & \quad \text{original strength}
\end{align*}
\]

But the indicative is possible: *de ahí que el costo de la que iba a ser vivienda presidencial, su aparatoso 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’:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ha dicho que tiene que trabajar, o sea} & \quad \text{(S)he said (s)he had to work, in other words} \\
\text{que no quiere venir} & \quad \text{(s)he doesn’t want to come}
\end{align*}
\]

(b) *Que . . . sepalque . . . recuerde*:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Que yo recuerde es la primera vez} & \quad \text{As far as I remember it’s the first time I’ve} \\
\text{que lo/le veo} & \quad \text{seen him} \\
\text{Nada que yo sepa (JMa, Sp., dialogue)} & \quad \text{Nothing, as far as I know} \\
\text{Que se sepa nadie lo ha hecho antes} & \quad \text{As far as is known, no one has done it before}
\end{align*}
\]

(c) *In a few other set phrases*:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{¡Acabíramos!} & \quad \text{So that’s what it’s all about! / Now I get it!} \\
\text{Otro gallo nos cantara} & \quad \text{That would have been another story . . .}
\end{align*}
\]
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense of verb in main clause</th>
<th>Tense of subjunctive verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present, Perfect, Future, Imperative</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional or any past tense</td>
<td>Imperfect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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: ¿crees 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.:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Es posible que/Puede que haya tormenta</td>
<td>There may be a storm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Era probable/previsible que sucediera/</td>
<td>It was probable/foreseeable that it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sucediese así</td>
<td>would happen that way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La sola posibilidad de que aquella muchacha no lo viese más lo desesperaba</td>
<td>The mere possibility that that girl wouldn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ES, Arg.)</td>
<td>see him again filled him with despair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existe el riesgo de que quienes reciben el dinero no sean capaces de</td>
<td>There is the risk that those who receive the money won’t be able to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resarcirlo (JV, Mex.)</td>
<td>pay it back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es inevitable que los autores . . . pierdan su capacidad creadora (JM,</td>
<td>It is inevitable that authors will lose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sp.)</td>
<td>their creative ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>También puede ocurrir que Santiago prefiera tener a Graciela en una</td>
<td>It may also be the case that Santiago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relación deteriorada (MB, Ur., dialogue)</td>
<td>prefers being with (lit. ‘having’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Está previsto que la tormenta . . . dure al menos 36 horas (El Periódico,</td>
<td>The storm is predicted to last at least</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sp.)</td>
<td>36 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

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 | We have to avoid them finding out |
| Es necesario / imprescindible que lo reciban para mañana | 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
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/empañarse 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)
preferrir 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 . . .’ or *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/contes- tasen 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 professionalizaran* (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 terminaran/terminasen* ‘(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 | It was necessary to get more petrol/US gas |
| Se exigía presentar los documentos | 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 accustomed 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 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
- 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
- reten a to challenge to
- tentar a to tempt to

Examples

| Le acostumbré a hacerlo / a que lo hiciera | I accustomed/encouraged/allowed/helped him/her to do it |
| Le condené a hacerlo / a que lo hiciera | I condemned/challenged/taught/forced/impelled/incited him/her to do it |
| Le dejó a hacerlo / a que lo hiciera | I induced/invited/sent/obliged/challenged/tempted him/her to do it |
| Le impidió a que lo hiciera / hiciera | (S)he let/made him/her do it |
| Le mandó a hacerlo / a que lo hiciera / hiciera | (S)he prevented him/her from doing it |
| Déjanos a los hombres conversar en paz (MVLII, Pe., dialogue) | Leave us men to talk in peace |
The dose of vanity that we all have within us made me feel the proudest man on Earth.

Let’s make him believe it cost us a big effort.

Irala invited me to accompany her.

She had ordered all her ladies-in-waiting to withdraw.

La dosis de vanidad que todos tenemos dentro hizo que me sintiera el hombre más orgulloso de la Tierra (Che Guevara, in Granma, Cu.)

Hagámosle creer que nos costó un gran esfuerzo (ES, Mex., dialogue)

Irala me convidó a acompañarla (JLB, Arg., dialogue; or a que la acompañara)

Había ordenado retirarse a todas sus sirvientas (AG, Sp., or . . . a todas sus sirvientas que se retirasen/retiraran)

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aconsejar</td>
<td>Te propuse hacerlo/que lo hiciéramos/hiciésemos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obstaculizar</td>
<td>Te confieso que te propusí fugarlos (ABE, Pe., dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pedir</td>
<td>Octavia, a quien una vez le sugerí pasar a la otra parte (ibid.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proponer</td>
<td>Incluso las radioemisoras aconsejaron con insistencia a los capitalinos abstenerse de salir (La Jornada, Mex.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recomendar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sugerir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I suggested to you that we should do it.

I admit that I suggested to you that we should elope.

Octavia, to whom I once suggested that she should go over to the other side.

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/fuésemos*) 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It’s natural for her to be upset</td>
<td><em>Es natural que esté alterada</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s not a bad thing that they protect you</td>
<td><em>Que te protejan no está mal</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(ABV, Sp., dialogue)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t stand them talking to me like that</td>
<td><em>No aguanto que me hablen de esa manera</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You only need to be offered a lot of money to suddenly realize that you don’t even know what use it is</td>
<td><em>Basta que te ofrezcan mucho dinero para que de repente no sepas ni para qué sirve</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m sick to death that it’s always us women who have to clear the table</td>
<td><em>Estoy hasta el moño de que tengamos que ser siempre nosotras las que debamos recoger la mesa</em> <em>(CRG, Sp.)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Andrés era el culpable de que me pasaran todas esas cosas</em> <em>(AM, Mex., dialogue)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was Andrés’s fault that all these things were happening to me</td>
<td><em>Que la locomotora arrancara emocionó a Lorenzo</em> <em>(EP, Mex.)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorenzo was excited by the locomotive starting up</td>
<td><em>Yo sentía mucho que pensaras/pensases eso</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was really sorry you thought that</td>
<td><em>Están de acuerdo en que los militares entreguen sus armas</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They agree that the troops should hand in their weapons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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
The subjunctive 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’, alarma ‘to alarm’, alegar ‘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’, connover ‘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 encañiñarse 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>comprobar que</th>
<th>to note that</th>
<th>with indicative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>denunciar que</td>
<td>to report (e.g. to police) that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garantizar que</td>
<td>to guarantee that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soñar que</td>
<td>to dream (while asleep) that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ver que</td>
<td>to see/observe that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verificar que</td>
<td>to note/confirm that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

*Lo lógico*/lo normal*/lo habitual es que no venga*

*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* (La Época, Ch.)

*The logical thing*/the normal thing is that he doesn’t come*

*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 . . .* 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:

*Lo peor será/es que no venga nadie*

*Lo malo sería que no terminaran/terminasen el trabajo a tiempo*

*Lo más provocante de la ley es que provoque una reacción violenta del gobierno cubano* (La Jornada, Mex.)

*The worst thing will be if no one comes*

*The problem would be if they didn’t finish the work on time*

*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.)
Lo que más me sorprendió . . . fue que . . . se habían detenido y vuelto (JM, Sp.)
Lo malo es que soñé nuevamente con Emilio (MB, Ur., dialogue)
Lo que me extraña es que no me di cuenta (GZ, Mex., dialogue)

(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)
Esto no significa que haya que esperar un cambio radical de actitud (JC, Arg.)
No ocurre/sucede que haya eclipse todos los días
No se trata de que tengas que quedarte todos los días hasta las nueve de la noche
Pero eso no indica que se vaya a dar una crisis (Excélsior, Mex.)
No es verdad que existan las hadas

I don’t think it’s possible
Mayta denied he was involved in the kidnapping
I didn’t say you were a hysteric
This doesn’t mean that one must expect a radical change of attitude
It doesn’t happen that there’s an eclipse every day
It’s not a question of your having to stay till nine p.m. every day
But that doesn’t show that there is going to be a crisis
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 sabia 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Indicative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¿No es verdad que ha dicho eso?</td>
<td>Isn’t it true that he said that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿No sientes que el corazón se te ensancha al ver esto? (JI, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>Don’t you feel your heart getting bigger when you see this?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 . . .’:
Dudo que sea verdad
I doubt whether it’s true

No dudo que sea verdad lo que dices
I don’t doubt whether what you say is true (tentative remark)

No dudo que es verdad lo que dices
I don’t doubt (i.e. ‘I’m convinced’) that what you say is true

No dudo que irá/vaya
I don’t doubt he’ll go

No hay duda que ella puede ser discutida
There’s no doubt that it [the claim: la afirmación] can be debated

(MVLL, Pe., Sp. no hay duda de que . . .)

No dudé que el adjetivo “perfecta” era el único que le convenía (JV, Mex., dialogue)
I didn’t doubt that the adjective ‘perfect’ was the only one appropriate for her

No dudé que el adjetivo “perfecta” era el único que le convenía

No hay duda que ella puede ser discutida

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:

_Temo que_ le moleste/ _Temo que le va a molestar /
I’m afraid it may bother him/her molestar/ molestará/ le vaya a molestar

_Temíamos que_ le molestara/ molestara/ molestara/ Temíamos que le iba/ fuera a molestar
We were afraid it would bother

_Yo tenía miedo de que_ te hubieras ido
I was scared that you’d gone

(GCI, Cu., dialogue)

. . . _para no ver el mar por la escotilla porque_
. . . so as not to see the sea through the hatch

dos díe miedo de que entre (EP, Mex.)
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 traer 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 discreto ‘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:
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.

(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:
Sospecho que es / sea mentira
Como si la Historia fuera una especie de saltamontes; y parece que lo sea (AS, Sp.)
¿Por qué estás así? Parece que te estuvieras ahogando (ABE, Pe., dialogue)
... una de esas veces... en que parece que hubiera explotado una bomba en alguna parte muy, muy remota (MS, Mex.)

I suspect it’s a lie
As if History were a sort of grasshopper and it seems that it is
Why are you like that? It looks as though you were drowning... 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 ayuda? ‘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’:

Comprendo que mucha gente en la comunidad afroestadounidense pudiera no entender eso (interview, La Jornada, Mex.)
También aceptó que el Parlamento francés examine el pacto (El País, Sp.)
Acepto que no quieras ir con nosotros

I understand that a lot of people in the US Afro-American community may not understand that
He also accepted that the French parliament should examine the agreement
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’:

- Espero que lo/le convenzas/convencerás . . . con la esperanza de que ella haría lo mismo (CF, Mex., dialogue)
- Por un momento la invadió la esperanza de que su marido no habitará ya el reino de los vivos (SP, Mex.)
- Espero que no se le ocurra meterse por mitad del caño que hay entre las piedras (APR, Sp., dialogue)
- Espero que me vas a pagar

I hope/expect you’ll convince him
. . . with the hope that she’d do the same
For a moment she was filled with
the hope that her husband no longer
inhabited the realm of the living
I hope he doesn’t get the idea of sailing
through the channel between the rocks
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:

- Te lo di cuando llegaste
- Te lo daré cuando llegues
- Yo iba a dártelo cuando llegaras/llegases

I gave it to you when you arrived
I’ll give it to you when you arrive
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’.
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 cuándo te casos 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lo haré antes/después de salir</td>
<td>I’ll do it before/after I go out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muchos lo consultaban antes de tomar decisiones políticas (JA, Mex.)</td>
<td>Many people consulted him before taking political decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo escribió con el objeto de alabar a sus compañeros de trabajo</td>
<td>(S)he wrote it with the intention of praising his/her work colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El hecho de saber cuatro lengua es me ayuda</td>
<td>The fact of knowing four languages helps me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

- *Afueras, para que la solidaridad se sienta,* hay que reunir un millar de personas
  *(MB, Ur., dialogue. Sp. *Fuera* . . .)*
  - Outside, so that people should sense the (level of) solidarity, we need to assemble about a thousand people
- *La enorme fuerza que cobraba la derecha fue determinante para que el presidente eligiera sucesor* *(JA, Mex.)*
  - The enormous strength the political Right was acquiring was what decided the President to choose a successor
- *He escrito una circular a fin de que se enteren todos*
  - I’ve written a circular so that everyone knows about it
- *Debemos esforzarnos porque/para que los demás tengan menos trabajo*
  *(MB, Ur., dialogue. Sp. *Esforzarnos* . . .)*
  - We should make an effort so that the others have less work
- *Estoy un tanto apurado y como impaciente porque pase el trago*
  *(MB, Ur., dialogue. Sp. *Apurado* . . .)*
  - 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*
  *(AM, Mex., dialogue)*
  - Work harder so they don’t fire you
- *Me subí al coche en tres minutos no se me fuera a arrepentir de la invitación*
  *(AM, Mex., dialogue)*
  - I got into the car within three minutes lest he regretted so that he wouldn’t regret the invitation
- *No corras tanto, no vaya a darte un infarto*
  *(AM, Mex., dialogue)*
  - Don’t rush (lit. ‘run’) so much – you don’t want to give yourself a heart attack
- *No vaya a ser que los secuestradores se den cuenta* *(EM, Mex., dialogue)*
  - We don’t want the kidnappers to find out
- *Devuélveles el dinero, no ocurra que nos demanden*
  *(EM, Mex., dialogue)*
  - 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’:

- *pues* because (see 37.5.3) *ya que* since/seeing that
- *como quiera que* since *puesto que* since

(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 / Como tienes tanto dinero me puedes invitar
(in this meaning como must appear at the head of the clause; see 37.5.2)
Como quiera que los perros no leen
debía de estar ahí el letrero para que lo leyera la gente (como quiera for ‘since’ is literary)

Since you have so much money you can pay for me
Since dogs can’t read, the notice must have been there for people to read

(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
Que nadie venga a nosotros porque piense que va a obtener enchufes
. . . no tanto porque fuera imprescindible su aval (JA, Mex.)
Me perdí y llegué tarde. No porque yo me oriente mal, sino porque iba un poco sonada (CMG, Sp., dialogue)

I’m not doing it just because you say so
Let no one come to us (just) because they think that they’ll get special favours
. . . not so much because his approval was absolutely necessary
I lost my way and was late. Not because I have a poor sense of direction but because I was a bit stoned,

But:

No lo hago porque tú lo digas
No lo hago solo/sólo porque tú lo dices
No salgo contigo solo/sólo porque tienes un Ferrari

I’m not doing it because you say I should
I’m doing it, but not simply because you’re telling me to
The fact that you have a Ferrari isn’t 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 porque estuviera cansado, el caso es que no estuvo muy amable con nosotros
. . . ya fuese para apuntalar al Gobierno, ya para atacarlo (Abc Color, Par.)
Fuera porque no sea costumbre de los arrabales estadounidenses, fuera porque a nadie le interesara demasiado su vida . . .
(Sp, Sp. . . . bien porque . . . o porque could have been used)
Me gusta, ya sea idea de Pedro, ya sea de otro

Whether he had something to do or whether he was tired, the fact is that he wasn’t very kind to us
. . . whether in order to support the government, or to attack it
Whether because it wasn’t usual in the suburbs in the USA, or because her life didn’t interest anyone too much . . .
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’.

(I) 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjunctive Subordinator</th>
<th>Indicative Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>así que so</td>
<td>de manera que in such a way that/so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conque so (esp. in questions, e.g.</td>
<td>de suerte que in such a way that/so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿conque lo has hecho tú? 'so it was you that did it?')</td>
<td>de forma/modo que in such a way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tú tienes la culpa, de modo que/ así que/ conque no te puedes quejar

El río Niágara sigue fluyendo debajo de la capa de hielo, de modo que las cataratas no están totalmente congeladas (Excélsior, Mex.)

You’re to blame, so you can’t complain

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.)

. . . procurando colocar la cámara de tal manera que mi rostro . . . no estropeara la foto (ES, Mex., dialogue)

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

. . . 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjunctive Subordinator</th>
<th>Indicative Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hazlo como quieras</td>
<td>Do it however you like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te dije que podías venir como quisieras/quiseses</td>
<td>I told you that you could come any way you liked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjunctive Subordinator</th>
<th>Indicative Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Me miró como si no me viera/viese</td>
<td>(S)he looked at me as if (s)he couldn’t/didn’t see me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las trató con gran familiaridad, como si las viera todos los días (CF, Mex.)</td>
<td>He treated them very familiarly, as though he saw them every day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>En caso de que no esté, llámame</td>
<td>Si (s)he’s not in call me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperaremos dos minutos para darle tiempo</td>
<td>We’ll wait two minutes for you to make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de ponerse cómodo, en el caso de que se</td>
<td>yourself comfortable if you happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>esté usted durmiendo (ABE, Pe., dialogue)</td>
<td>to be taking a shower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No les voy a soltar esa información, es sólo</td>
<td>I’m not going to let them have that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en caso de que me pregunten</td>
<td>information; it’s only in case they ask me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(GZ, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Llévate el paraguas por si (acaso)</td>
<td>Take the umbrella in case it rains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>llueve/lloviere/lloviese</td>
<td>but (not *por si llueve)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siempre estaba haciendo favores a la gente</td>
<td>She was always doing people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>por si acaso a alguien se le ocurriera</td>
<td>favours in case someone thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>devolverseles (SP, Sp.)</td>
<td>of repaying them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Está apuntando hacia la otra acera, por si</td>
<td>He’s aiming at the other pavement/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hay un ataque por retaguardia</td>
<td>sidewalk in case there’s an attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(JI, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>from the rear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Por si fuera poco . . . (set phrase)</td>
<td>As if that wasn’t enough . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convien que vayas enterado por si alguien</td>
<td>It would be best if you were informed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>te pidiera una aclaración (EM, Sp.)</td>
<td>(lit ‘went informed’) in case someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>asks you for an explanation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The subjunctive

(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:

- *a medida que* / *según* / *conforme as*  
- *después (de) que* after  
- *antes (de) que* before  
- *cuando when*  
- *desde que* since  
- *mientras (que) as*  
- *en cuanto/nada más/apenas/tan pronto* long as, while (see 20.4.9)  
- *como/una vez que/nomás que* (Lat. Am.) every time  
- *hasta que* until

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:

- **Llegamos antes de que empezara/empezase a nevar (for antes de que see note 2)**
  - We arrived before it started snowing
- **No sea muy dura con su empleada, después que se haya tranquilizado (SV, Ch., dialogue)**
  - Don’t be very hard on your maid after you’ve calmed down
- **Tú conoce a mi prima. Cuando venga le diré que te lo cuente (AA, Cu., dialogue)**
  - You know my cousin. When she comes I’ll tell her to tell you about it
- **Íbamos a cenar cuando llegaran/legasen los demás**
  - We were going to have supper when the rest arrived (i.e. they hadn’t arrived yet)
- **Reparte los folletos conforme los diputados vayan entrando**
  - Hand out the pamphlets as the members of parliament come in
- **En cuanto pueda me compraré un reloj** (MB, Ur., dialogue)
  - As soon as I can, I’ll buy a watch
- **Nomás que oscurezca te vas por la carretera (JI, Mex., dialogue; Sp. en cuanto oscurezca. For nomás see 27.6)**
  - As soon as it gets dark you go down the road
- **Apenas pueda, te llamo (JA, Arg. Apenas is discussed more fully at 27.5.7. See also note 2)**
  - As soon as I can, I’ll ring you
- **Hasta que no llegue a ser ministro no se quedará contento** (see 27.2.4 for the use of no here)
  - He won’t be satisfied until he becomes a Minister
- **Siempre que la vea se lo recordaré**
  - 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:

- **Me saludan cuando llegan (habitual)**
  - They greet me when they arrive
- **tan pronto como acabó la huelga . . .**
  - as soon as the strike was over . . .
- **Me doy cuenta, a medida que Rosita pasa mis notas a máquina, de que he reunido cerca de doscientas páginas** (CF, Mex.)
  - I realize, as Rosita types out my notes, that I’ve assembled nearly 200 pages
- **Hasta que no llegó a ser ministro no se quedó contento** (see 27.2.4 for no here)
  - 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 llamare 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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>con tal (de) que</th>
<th>a condición de que</th>
<th>a cambio de que</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>siempre (also ‘whenever’. See 20.4.7)</td>
<td>con la condición de que</td>
<td>(also ‘in return for’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siempre y cuando (emphatic)</td>
<td>bajo (la) condición de que</td>
<td>mientras as long as. See 20.4.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

El Gobierno está dispuesto a negociar siempre que/a condición de que sean razonables The Government is ready to negotiate provided they are reasonable
The subjunctive

... con tal de que mi hijo se eduque en otro ambiente soy capaz de todo

(ES, Mex., dialogue)

... provided that my child is educated in a different environment I'm capable of anything

... siempre que su muerte se debiera a causas naturales (LS, Ch., dialogue)

... provided his death was due to natural causes

Firmaremos a cambio de que no se haga público hasta la semana que viene

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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a no ser que unless</td>
<td>a menos que unless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salvo que unless/save that</td>
<td>como no (sea que) unless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excepto que unless/except that</td>
<td>como no fuera que unless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en vez de que instead of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 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

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 sospechoso 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’. 
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 hicieramos 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subordinator</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *aunque*     | *He’s a brave man, he won’t talk even if they threaten him*  
| *así*        | *He’s a brave man, he won’t talk even if they threaten him*  
| *si bien*    | *He’s a brave man, he won’t talk even if they threaten him*  
| *y eso que*  | *He’s a brave man, he won’t talk even if they threaten him*  
| *a pesar de que* | *He’s a brave man, he won’t talk even if they threaten him*  
| *pese a que* | *He’s a brave man, he won’t talk even if they threaten him*  

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Es un valiente, no hablará así/aunque lo/le amenacen</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>No lo confesó aunque le ofrecieron dinero</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>No lo confesaría aunque lo/le mataran/</em> matasen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . tienen que cumplir, así caminen bajo la lluvia (La Jornada, Mex.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vendieron la finca, a pesar de que el abuelo se oponía</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>¿A pesar de que tus padres se opongan?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ABV, Sp., dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A pesar de que no posee el aura de misterio de los primeros años</em> (JV, Mex.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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’.
The subjunctive

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, voy a donde voyas (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 .

. . . whether you work on a network or from a PC at home .

Estuviese/Estuviera o no enfermo, lo cierto es que no vino al trabajo

Whether he was ill/sick or not, the fact is he didn’t come to work

México está cambiando, les guste o no (El Economista, Mex.)

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

However hot it gets/is, they won’t open the window

A una por más liberada que esté siempre le gustará que el hombre le abra la puerta del coche (ES, Mex., dialogue)

However liberated one is, one will always like the man to open the car door for one

Por más que llueva no se le van a resucitar los novillos muertos (MP, Arg., dialogue)

However much it rains, his dead steers won’t come back to life

Por mucho que corriera y que se escondiera, él acabaría por encontrarla (RM, Sp.)

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’.
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 (JJA, 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/á/os/as más . . . más and cuanto/á/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 dificilmente 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
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 quando 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:
20.8 Tense agreement with the subjunctive in all subordinate clauses

Dondequiera que vaya / Vaya donde vaya me lo encontraré

Wherever I go I’ll meet him

Dondequiera que fuese / Fuese donde fuese, me lo encontraría (or fuera . . .)

Wherever I went I met him

Estés donde estés, busca un teléfono público

Wherever you are, look for a public phone

(ES, Ch., dialogue)

Seán de donde sean, lo que importa es saber dónde tienen a tu padre

Wherever they’re from, the important thing is to find where they’re keeping your father

(EM, Mex. dialogue)

(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 ‘whenever 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 hablas ‘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 le déje 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 creí que fueras/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_
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 quieres compré 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/estuviere 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’ . . . *llevara 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 fuera/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 hora 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 ayuda?* (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/tuviere 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 vengan* 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 NGLE 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/éstas 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:
The imperative

¡Tú bájate de ahí!/Usted bájese You get down from there!
¡Vosotros callaos! (Lat. Am. ustedes cállense) 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’, ¡ándale ‘wow!’/‘get moving!’, ¡correle! ‘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:

decir to say: di
hacer to do/make: haz
ir to go: ve (vete = ‘go away’)

Anda, sé bueno y márchate
(¡Ma, Sp., dialogue)
Ven a tomar el café cuando quieras
Ten cuidado
—Vete —le dijo—. Vete, antes de que
te cobre el dinero que me debes
(AM, Mex., dialogue)
Haz clic en/Pincha en el icono

Come on, be good and go away
Come and have coffee whenever you want
Be careful
‘Go away,’ she told him. ‘Go away before I collect the money you owe me’
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 > defiende. 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:

Decile que pase (dile que pase) Tell him to come in
Suscríbete y defiende tus derechos (suscríbete, defiende) Sign up/Register and defend your rights
Vení cuando puedas (ven cuando puedas) Come when you can
Levantate (levántate) Get up
Oíme, Pozzi (MP, Arg., oyeme) Listen to me, Pozzi
Mostrame (muéstrame) 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Imperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ser</td>
<td>sed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ir</td>
<td>id</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tener</td>
<td>tened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>venir</td>
<td>venid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cantar</td>
<td>cantad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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, veniós = veniros, 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: digame ‘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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vaya a descansar. Preséntese aquí a las 11</td>
<td>Go and rest. Be here at 11 o’clock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(MVM, Sp., dialogue)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Ayúdeme, doctora! (MVLL, Pe.)</td>
<td>Help me, doctor!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perdone si parece impertinente (LO, Sp.)</td>
<td>Excuse me if I seem impertinent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No me vengan con que es poético ladrarle a la luna (EM, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>Don’t try telling me that it’s poetic to bark at the moon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the position of the pronouns and the popular Latin-American form ?siénte(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:
Las habrá amenazado con algo. Estate seguro (JM, Sp., dialogue)
—No se mueva. Por favor estése tranquilo (CF, Mex. dialogue)
—Esté tranquila —le dijo . . . si se mueve le va mal, así que estése 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 esté 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 esté 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 ‘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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affirmative imperative</th>
<th>Negative imperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>canta</td>
<td>sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vete</td>
<td>go away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(usted) levántese</td>
<td>stand up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vosotros) sentaos</td>
<td>sit down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ustedes) dénselo</td>
<td>give it to him/her/ them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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: levántate > no te levantes. No te levántes 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):

(Tú) dame la mano Hold my hand
(Tú) ponte la chaqueta (Arg., vos ponete el saco) Put your jacket on
(Listed) démelo Give it to me
(Vosotros/as) dádmelo Give it to me
(Vosotros) despertaos (colloquial despertaros; see 21.2.4 note 2) Wake up
(Listed) dénmoslo Give it to us
Déjamelo ver, déjamelo ver (AM, Mex., dialogue; or déjame verlo) 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:

- No me des la lata (tú)  Stop pestering me
- No te pongas la chaqueta (tú)  Don’t put your jacket on
- No me lo dé (usted)  Don’t give it to me
- No os quejéis (vosotros)  Don’t complain
- No se lo den (ustedes)  Don’t show it to him/her/Them
- Es una chica que trabaja conmigo no te vayas  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: ?levántense or ?levátesen (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, dele, 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:

- Empecemos  Let’s get started
- Asegúrenos primero de la verdad de los hechos (not *asegurémosnos)  Let us first assure ourselves of the truth of the facts
- Generemos un ambiente en donde todas estas luchas hay que continuarlas (interview, Mex.)  Let us generate an environment in which all these struggles must be continued
- No nos enfademos (Lat. Am. no nos enojemos)  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 intentemoslo (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’.
The imperative

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.

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’, celebremoslo ‘let’s celebrate it’.

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 *digámossele), démoselos ‘let’s give them to him/her/them’.

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) digannos ‘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—. ‘There’s a phone call for your husband.’
     Pues que lo/le llamen a la oficina ‘Then tell them to call him at his office’
¡Que trabaje tu PC! (Computer Hoy, Sp.) Get your PC working!
     ¡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 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.

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!’, ¡salvese 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!’

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! Have a good weekend
¡Que no pierdas el dinero! Don’t lose the money!
¡Que se diviertan! 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:

Rellénese en mayúsculas
Fill out in capital letters (lit. ‘let it be filled out . . .’)

Tradúzcanse al castellano las siguientes frases
Translate the following phrases into Spanish

No obstante, permítansenos aquí algunas palabras
However, may we be allowed to say a few words here

(C. Sánchez López in GDLE)

Cuézanse las patatas durante 15 minutos, córtense en rodajitas, déjense enfriar y cúbranse con mayonesa
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 = decídeme 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

Empujar (notice on doors, sometimes empújen or, in Spain, empújad)
Push

Poner los medallones en un plato, salsearlos,
y acompañarlos con las bolitas de papa,
zanahorias y un ramito de brócoli
(La Reforma, Mex. Papas = patatas in Spain; salsear = sazonar, brócoli = brécol)
Put the medallions (of beef) on a plate, season them and serve them with the potato balls, carrots and a floret of broccoli

Descolar y esperar. Percibirá una señal acústica continua y uniforme. No demorar el marcar (phone book, Sp., marcar = discar 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.
The imperative

(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:

—Todavía está sucio—. Bueno, *a* lavarlo *otra vez* (sounds colloquial without the *a*).
—*¡No tengo novio todavía!* —*Las ganas no te faltan. ¡A buscarlo!* (AA, Cu., dialogue)
—¡Todos a callar!
—¡A dormir inmediatamente!

‘It’s still dirty’ ‘Well wash it again.’
‘I haven’t got a boyfriend yet!’ ‘You’re keen enough. Look for one!’
Be quiet everybody!
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:

*Si tienes dinero, me lo das*  
If you’ve got money, give it to me
*De acuerdo. No te guardo el sitio para mañana, pero pasado me haces dos páginas*  
OK. I won’t keep the space for you tomorrow, but the day after you do two pages for me
*Nomás que oscurezca te vas por la carretera y tiras en una barranca el cuerpo de una muchacha que se murió* (JI, Mex., dialogue.   
As soon as it gets dark, you go down the road and you throw the body of a girl who died into a ravine
*In Spain nomás que = en cuanto or nada más and barranca is el barranco*

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*:

¿*Podrían/Podían hacer menos ruido (por favor)*?  
Would you mind making less noise? /  
Could you make less noise?
¿*Podrías hacerme el favor de no fumar*?  
Would you mind not smoking?
21.12 Miscellaneous imperative constructions

(b) Use querer. The conditional makes the imperative even milder:

¿Quieres decirmelo la verdad?
Would you mind telling me the truth?
¿Querrías (hacerme el favor de) darle un recado a Pedro?
Would you mind giving a message to Pedro?

(c) Use the phrase a ver ‘let’s see . . .’:

A ver si vienes a verme más a menudo
Try to come and see me more often
A ver si me devuelves el dinero que te presté
Perhaps you could give me back the money I lent you

(d) Turn the request into a question:

¿Me pasas el agua (por favor)?
Pass the water please
¿Me pone con el 261-84-50 (por favor)? (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?:

Vamos al cine, ¿quieres?/¿vale?
Let’s go the cinema, okay?
Abre la puerta, ¿puedes?
Open the door would you
No chilles, ¿eh?
Stop screaming

21.12 Miscellaneous imperative constructions

Oye/Oiga (usted) (por favor)
(lit. ‘hear!’)
Excuse me! (to call someone’s attention)

No lo vuelvas a hacer/No vuelvas a hacerlo
Don’t do it again
Mira lo que he comprado
Look what I bought
Fijate en lo que me ha pasado
Look what happened to me
Imaginate qué disgusto
Imagine how upset I was (lit. ‘imagine what displeasure’)

Ténmelo/Téngamelo preparado
Have it ready for me
Trae que te lleve la bolsa (colloquial, Sp. only?)
Let me carry your bag
Trae aquí (colloquial, Sp. only?)
Give it here/Let me take it
No se te ocurra hacer eso
Don’t even think of doing that
No dejes de llamarme/No se te olvide llamarme
Don’t forget to call me
Vete a saber
Goodness knows/Heaven knows why
The imperative

No me digas (incredulous tone)  You don’t say!
Vayan entrando  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 habernoslo 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
The infinitive is ambiguous, i.e. it could also mean ‘Juan says that he (someone else)/she/you know(s) her’. Compare these pairs:

- *Desmintieron que hubieran/hubiesen lanzado el misil*  They denied that they’d launched the missile (i.e. themselves or someone else)
- *Desmintieron haber lanzado el misil*  They denied launching the missile
- *Afirmaba que era francés*  He claimed he was French (himself or someone else)
- *Afirmaba ser francés*  He claimed to be French

Further examples:

- *Dijo llamarse Simón . . . tener 42 años, ser casado, mexicano y estar radicado en el Salto de la Tuxpana* (JI, Mex. Imitates police report language)  He said he was called Simón, was 42, married, Mexican and lived in Salto de la Tuxpana
- *Había creído volverse loco, pensado en matarse (MVLl, Pe.)*  He had imagined he was going mad, thought about killing himself
- *La información . . . revela ser falsa (CF, Mex., dialogue)*  The information turns out to be false
- *Reconoció/Confesó haberlo hecho*  (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 que: *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 quelque chose*) ‘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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Verb</th>
<th>English Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>abstenerse de</td>
<td>to refrain from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acabar de*: i.e. acabo de verla or la acabo de ver 'I've just seen her/it/you'</td>
<td>to end by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acabar por* to end by</td>
<td>acercarse a/para to approach (Fr. s'approcher de)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aceptar a* to accept</td>
<td>acercarse a/para to approach (Fr. s'approcher de)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acertar a* to manage to/to succeed</td>
<td>acercarse a/para to approach (Fr. s'approcher de)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*acercarse a/para to approach (Fr. s'approcher de)</td>
<td>acercarse a/para to approach (Fr. s'approcher de)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adquirirse de to acquire</td>
<td>acercarse a/para to approach (Fr. s'approcher de)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>afirmar* to claim/to state</td>
<td>acercarse a/para to approach (Fr. s'approcher de)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>afanarse por to do one's best to</td>
<td>albergarse a to shelter oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*afanarse por to do one's best to</td>
<td>albergarse a to shelter oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acusar de to accuse of</td>
<td>albergarse a to shelter oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*acusar de to accuse of</td>
<td>albergarse a to shelter oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acostumbrar a* to be accustomed to</td>
<td><em>acostumbrar a</em> to be accustomed to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§instar a to urge to
intentar* to try to (Fr. essayer de): lo intentaron hacer is more colloquial than intentaron hacerlo interesarse en (or por) to take interest in (Fr. s’intéresser à)

§invidiar a to invite to
ir a* to go to (esto va a hacerse pronto ‘this will be done soon’)

jactarse de to boast of
jurar to swear to
lamentar to regret to
limitarse a to limit oneself to
llegar a* to go so far as to . . . (the unshifted form is much more usual)
llevar a to lead to
lograr* to succeed in
luchar por struggle to
§mandar* to order to (Fr. ordonnner de)
§mandar a to order (to do something)
manifestar to state/to declare (usually with que . . .)
maravillarse de to marvel at
mecer to cause to move to and fro
meterse a to start to
molestarse en to bother to
necesitar* to need to: lo necesitamos hacer is colloquial
negar to deny (negarse a refuse to)
§obligar a to oblige to (Fr. obriger de)
obstosarse en to insist obstinately on (Fr. s’obstiner à)

ofrecer to offer (usually with que . . .)
oír* to hear. See 22.2.4
olvidar to forget; olvidarse de, olvidárselo: to forget. See 30.7.26
optar (usually optar por) to opt to
§ordenar to order to (Fr. ordonner de)
parar de to stop
parecer to seem to
pasar a to go on to
pasar de to be uninterested in
pedir to ask to (Fr. demander à)
pensar* pienso hacerlo ‘I plan to do it’
pensar en to think of (Fr. penser à)
§permitir* to allow to (Fr. permettre de)
persistir en to persist in (Fr. persister à)
poder* to be able to
ponerse a to start to
precipitarse a to rush to
preferir to prefer to
prepararse a to get ready to
presumir de to boast about
pretender to claim to/to try to
proceder a to proceed to
procurar to try hard to
§prohibir to prohibit from (Fr. défendre de)
prometer to promise to (Fr. promettre de)
quedar en to agree to
querer* to want to
§recomendar to recommend that

reconocer to acknowledge (more usually with que)
recordar to remember to (see note 4)
rehuir to shun/to avoid
rehusar to refuse to (Fr. refuser de)
renunciar a to renounce
§reprochar to reproach for
resignarse a to resign oneself to
resistirse a to resist
resultar to turn out to be resolver to resolve to (Fr. résoudre de)
saber* to know how to
sentir to regret/to be sorry for soler*: solía hacerlo ‘(s)he habitually did it’ (see 25.6)
solicitar to apply to
soñar con to dream of (Fr. rêver de)
tardar en to be late in/to be a long time in (Fr. tarder à)
temper to fear to
tender a* to tend to: sometimes shifted colloquially
tener que* to have to
§tentar a to tempt to
terminar de to finish
tratar de* try to; but lo trató de hacer is colloquial
vacilar en to hesitate over
venir de to come from . . .
ver* to see. See 22.2.4
ver de to try to
volver a (hacer)* to (do) again. See 36.6
votar por to vote for

(1) An asterisk marks verbs that allow pronoun shifting: one can say acabó de hacerlo or lo acabó 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.
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 acuerdo como un niño muy timido* ‘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 hiciéran* ‘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’:

- **Te vi entrar**
- **Te lo vi firmar**
- **Notábamos entrar a varias personas de aspecto sospechoso**
- **Millones vieron una manzana caer, pero solo Newton se preguntó por qué** (El Economista, Mex.)
- **Vi a Beatriz Noguera suplicar ante la puerta de Muriel** (JM, Sp.)
- **No he oído nunca aullar a un lobo, pero sé que era un lobo** (JLB, Arg., dialogue)
- **Marés sentía desintegrarse día a día su personalidad** (JMs, Sp.)
- **Se lo oí decir**
- **Quiero escuchárselo decir** (RB, Ch., dialogue)

I saw you come in
I saw you sign it
We noticed several suspicious-looking people entering
Millions saw/had seen an apple fall, but only Newton asked why
I saw Beatriz Noguera pleading at Muriel’s door
I’ve never heard a wolf howl, but I know it was a wolf
Marés felt his personality disintegrating day by day
I heard her/him/you (usted/es)/them say it
I want to hear you (usted) say it

(1) **Important**: the crucial ‘rule of two *lo*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 *lo*, becomes *se*: *la vi fírmarlo* ‘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
The infinitive

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’, repende 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’.

Further examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lo haré después de comer</td>
<td>I’ll do it after I’ve had lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo haré después de que hayas comido</td>
<td>I’ll do it after you’ve had lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entré sin verte</td>
<td>I entered without seeing you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entré sin que tú me vieras/vieses</td>
<td>I entered without you seeing me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se fue antes de contestar</td>
<td>(S)he left before answering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se fue antes de que yo contestase/contestara</td>
<td>(S)he left before I answered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enfermó (Lat. Am. se enfermó) por no comer</td>
<td>(S)he fell sick from not eating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¿Le miraba sin él darse cuenta</td>
<td>He watched him without him realizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Te voy a ver antes de irte? (Spanish informant, i.e. . . . antes de que te vayas)</td>
<td>Am I going to see you before you go?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Me podés comprar postales para mandar yo? (Argentine informant, i.e. para que yo las mande; Sp. puedes for podés)</td>
<td>Could you buy me some postcards for me to send?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(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**
  - (S)he was happy when (s)he found out.
- **Al fumarlo el indios experimentaban una especie de éxtasis**
  - (El País, Sp.) experienced a sort of ecstasy
- **Al terminar el bachillerato Gladys pasó a un organismo estatal**
  - (MP, Arg.) moved to a government organization
- **Se detuvo un instante sorprendido, al ver de nuevo los rasgos olvidados del conserje**
  - (CF, Mex.) 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* ‘What do we do now?’ ‘Wait’
- ¿*Pero se puede saber que está usted* ‘But do you mind saying what you’re
The infinitive

haciendo? —¡Sacar a mi mujer! (EA, Sp., dialogue)

(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)

Más que proteger a la naturaleza, los zapatistas manifiestan su identidad con ella (JV, Mex.)

. . . todo, menos/excepto volver a escribirlo

(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

(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) Transcurrieron años sin tener noticias de lo ocurrido . . . trabajos para hacer por el estudiante

This is still to be seen an unopened beer Time passed unnoticed In her room there were four half-packed suitcases Years passed without (lit. ‘without having’) news of what had happened being received . . . 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.)

| Subject | Action
|---------|---------|
| 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.)

| Subject | Action
|---------|---------|
| 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.
The article is required in some constructions involving *en*:

- *La moda en el vestir influye en la moda del maquillaje*  
  Fashion in dressing influences fashion in make-up
- *Algunos españoles son un poco enfáticos en el hablar*  
  Some Spaniards are rather ponderous in their manner of speaking
- *Lo/le conocí en el andar*  
  I recognized him from his way of walking

The indefinite article *un* is also found before infinitives:

- *en un abrir y cerrar de ojos* in the wink of an eye
- *Después de dos años de un agitado avanzar por el camino de la libertad* . . . after two years of agitated progress along the road to liberty . . .
- *. . . siluetas, grupos, en un ir y venir sin prisas* . . . 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:

- ¡*Pagar yo cien mil por eso!* Me pay 100,000 for that!
- ¡*Enamorarme yo a mis años!* Me fall in love at my age!
- *Pero, ¿cómo abrirlo sin llave?* But how do you open it without a key?
- *Pero no tiene sentido, si es en hebreo ¿por qué usar caracteres gregios?* (MC, Mex., dialogue) But it doesn’t make sense. If it’s in Hebrew why use Greek letters?
- *¿Por qué condenar el proyecto estrella de toda una gestión presidencial?* (Vértice, ES) 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.*:

- **Tengo muchas cosas que hacer/decir** I’ve got a lot of things to do/say
- **Voy a comprar algo que/para leer** I’m going to buy something to read
- **Dame algo que/para hacer** Give me something to do
- **Eso nos ha dado bastante que hacer** This has given us enough to do
- **Te queda mucho que ver en este mundo** You’ve a lot left to see in this world
- **No tiene mucho que ver con este problema** 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:

- **Necesito algo para comer** I need something to eat
- **Quiero algo para beber** I want something to drink
- **Pidió algo para (or con que) calmar su dolor de muelas** (S)he asked for something to soothe his/her toothache
- **Busco algo para . . .** I’m looking for something to . . .

**22.12 No tengo qué comer, no sabía dónde ir, etc.**

This construction is similar to English:

- **No tenían qué comer** They had nothing to eat
- **Había sitios a donde ir a bailar** (JA, Mex.) There were places to go dancing
- **No encontró dónde cambiar dólares** (ibid.) He didn’t find anywhere to change dollars

(1) In the first example the accent on *qué* is crucial: cf. *no tenían qué 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 NGELE 26.61, 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’.
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’, convincente, ‘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 -escribir):
  - escrito
- **satisfacer** and other verbs ending in -facir:
  - satisfecho
- **frír**: 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>Participles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>absorber</td>
<td>absorbido/absorto absorbed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bendecir</td>
<td>bendecido/bendito blessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONFESAR</td>
<td>confesado/confeso confessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONFUNDIR</td>
<td>confundido/confuso confused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>despertar</td>
<td>despertado/despierto woken up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elegir</td>
<td>elegido/electo elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maldecir</td>
<td>maldecido/maldito cursed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prender</td>
<td>prendido/preso. See note 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proveer</td>
<td>proveído/provisto equipped with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soltar</td>
<td>soltado/suelto released</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suspender</td>
<td>suspendido/suspenso failed (e.g. exams)/hanging</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>Participles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>convencer</td>
<td>convencido/convicto convinced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>corromper</td>
<td>corrompido/corrupto corrupt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>describir</td>
<td>descrito/descripto described</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It happens in the Antarctic regions described with extraordinary vividness . . .

It includes all the shampoos prescribed by doctors

The person who fired the shots was enrolled on the course . . . 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 *hábía comprado la casa y pintándola* for *hábía 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.
Participles

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: deprimente depressing
entrar: entrante incoming
existir: existente existing
fluir: fluyente flowing
ocurrir: ocurrente witty

There are a few slightly irregular forms:

convencer: convenciente convincing
dormir: durmiente sleeping
herir: hiriere wounding

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 a changing/stressful situation
el ministro saliente/entrante the outgoing/incoming minister
condiciones vinculantes binding conditions
resultados sobresalientes outstanding results
el millón y medio restante the remaining 1.5 million
157.000 personas, pertenecientes a diferentes social classes and originating from
 clases sociales y procedentes de lugares widely different places of birth
muy distintos de nacimiento . . . (El País, Sp.)
El gran impacto que tuvieron en un escenario the great impact they had on an
internacional resulta desconcertante, international stage is disconcerting,
alentador y excitante (La Jornada, Mex.) 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’, *aguas potables* ‘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.
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, riendo, 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 -(i)endo: 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: diciendo
- poder: pudiendo
- dormir, morir: durmiendo, muriendo
- ir: yendo (regular, despite appearances)
- tener: teniendo
- verb like pedir, elegir: pidiendo, eligiendo, riñiendo, hiriendo, irguiéndose
- poder: pudiendo
- verbs like reír: riendo, sonriendo
- verbs like sentir: sintiendo, hiriendo, mintiendo
- oír and its compounds: oyendo (regular)
- verbs like pedir, elegir: pidiendo, eligiendo, riñiendo, hiriendo, irguiéndose
- ir: yendo (regular, despite appearances)
- oír and its compounds: oyendo (regular)
- verbs like pedir, elegir: pidiendo, eligiendo, riñiendo, hiriendo, irguiéndose
- ir: yendo (regular, despite appearances)
- poder: pudiendo
- verbs like reír: riendo, sonriendo
- verbs like sentir: sintiendo, hiriendo, mintiendo
- oír and its compounds: oyendo (regular)
- verbs like pedir, elegir: pidiendo, eligiendo, riñiendo, hiriendo, irguiéndose
- ir: yendo (regular, despite appearances)
- poder: pudiendo
- verbs like reír: riendo, sonriendo
- verbs like sentir: sintiendo, hiriendo, mintiendo
- oír and its compounds: oyendo (regular)
- verbs like pedir, elegir: pidiendo, eligiendo, riñiendo, hiriendo, irguiéndose

(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 -ñer, -ñir or -llir obey the spelling rule shown at 16.4.10, e.g. tañer – tañiendo, ceñir – ceñiendo (conjugated like pedir), bullir – bulliendo, 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
- We need a girl speaking French
- He had a box that contained several books
- He had a box containing several books
- Vous cherchez un médecin qui parle votre langue? (‘Are you looking for a doctor who speaks your language?’)
- 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 habla francés
- (not *hablando francés)
- Tenían una caja que contenía varios libros
- (not *conteniendo varios libros)
- ¿Busca usted un médico que hable su lengua?
- 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 escribió 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
- Two fighter aircraft being readied for take-off
- El Avante publicó mi foto quitándome los aretes (AM, Mex., dialogue. Aretes = los pendientes in Spain)
- 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 ardienotraining ‘burning’ and hiriendo ‘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’;
The gerund

(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)

(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 27.7l 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:
Se fue gritando  
Nos recibió bañándose  
Me bajé del caballo queriendo un zumo de naranja (AM, Mex.)  
Un día, caminando por la playa, tuvo una idea  
—Aquí tiene mi tarjeta, dijo Félix entregándosela al chofer (CF, Mex., in Spain chofer = chófer)  
(S)he went off shouting  
She received us while having a bath  
I got down from my horse as I wanted (lit. ‘wanting’) an orange juice  
One day, while walking along the beach, (s)he had an idea  
‘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’:

| Hicieron su fortuna comprando acciones a tiempo | They made their fortune (by) buying shares at the right time |
| Hacéis divinamente no teniendo niños | You’re doing just the absolutely right thing by not having children |
| Estás obligado a escribir otra novela. No publicando esta/ésta te he hecho un favor | You’re obliged to write another novel. I’ve done you a favour by not publishing this one |
| . . . como si supiera la verdad y no quisiera ofenderlo diciéndosela (CF, Mex.) | . . . 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:

- Me escribió diciéndome/para decirme que fuera/ fuese a verle
- Nos llamó pidiendo/para pedir ayuda
- Recibí una llamada . . . diciéndome que estaba en la caseta de cobro de la autopista
  (AH, Mex.)
- (S)he wrote telling me to come and see him
- (S)he rang us asking/to ask for help
- 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)

- Siendo estudiante, tendrá usted derecho a una beca
- Siendo gobernador del Estado de México, fue uno de los dos principales clientes del Centro Fox (AH, Mex.)
- Tratándose de usted, no faltaba más
- No queriendo molestar me fui
- Un día, no teniendo nada que hacer, fue a verla

- Since you’re a student, you’ll be entitled to a grant
- Since/While he was governor of the state of Mexico he was one of the main clients of the Fox Centre
- Since it’s you, there’s no need to mention it
- Not wanting to be a nuisance, I left
- 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’:

- Siendo inteligente como es, a veces parece tonto
- Llegando tarde y todo, nos ayudó mucho
- Es probable que este servicio no se ofrezca en su provincia o que, aun existiendo, no se haya anunciado (Yellow Pages, Sp.)
  . . . incluidos aquellos que, siendo soldados, se entreguen sin combatir a nuestras fuerzas
  (JV, Mex.)

- Although intelligent, he sometimes seems stupid
- Although (s)he arrived late, (s)he helped us a lot
- It is probable that this service is not available in your province or, even if it exists (‘even existing’) it has not been advertised
  . . . 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*

- Me miró como calculando mi edad
  (SP, Sp., = *como si estuviera calculando*)
- 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)
- She looked at me as though calculating my age
- 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
arrivant 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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lo/Le cogí/pillé robando</td>
<td>I caught him stealing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me sorprendí repitiendo entre dientes...</td>
<td>I caught myself repeating between my teeth... (i.e. ‘muttering’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dejamos a Andrés durmiendo</td>
<td>We left Andrés sleeping</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La pinté tocando el clavicémbalo</td>
<td>I painted her playing the harpsichord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esta fotografía muestra al rey bajando del avión</td>
<td>This photo shows the King getting out of the plane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los imaginaba caminando por la playa cargados de armas (EM, Mex.)</td>
<td>He pictured them walking along the beach loaded with guns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 oir ‘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:
No se me olvida mi hijo bailando con ella.
I can’t forget my son dancing with her.

Me gustaba sentir la lluvia azotando los avellanos de la huerta.
I liked to hear the rain lashing the hazelnut trees in the garden.

Cuando Félix divisó al doctor leyendo una revista política . . .
When Felix caught sight of the doctor reading a political magazine . . .

Por eso los recuerdo siempre bebiendo
That’s why I remember them always drinking

(ABE, Pe., dialogue)

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.

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/oi 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. lo/le 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 (MVLL, 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’.

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/oa buscando camorra  
(S)he always goes round looking for trouble

Era profesor de geografía, y siempre anduve solicitando traslados  
He was a geography teacher, and was always applying for transfers (to other schools)

Anduve maldiciendo todo el jueves  
All day Thursday I went around swearing

Anda escribiendo una novela  
(S)he’s writing a novel on and off

(from NGLE 28.14a)

(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  
  We’re (gradually) getting wiser
- Ella se fue doblando hasta caer al suelo  
  She gradually doubled up until she fell to the ground
- Así ha ido perdiendo todos los clientes,  
  That’s how he’s been losing all his clients, 
  por estar pensando en otra cosa  
  through thinking about other things
  . . . los libros que fui leyendo después (SG, Mex.)  
  . . . the books I went on to read later
- Gano lo necesario para ir tirando  
  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  
  It’s time we got on with finishing this
- Ya puedes ir preparando todo para  
  You can start getting things ready for when
  cuando lleguen  
  they arrive
- Ve escribiendo todo lo que te dicte  
  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  
  I stayed on for a while to help them
- Me quedé meditándolo durante algunos  
  I spent a few minutes thinking it over
  momentos (JV, Mex., dialogue)
- Yo me le quedé mirando . . . (JH, Mex., dialogue)  
  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:
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 not 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
Comer demasiada mantequilla es malo para el corazón
No smoking
Prohibido fumar
Skiing is expensive
Esquiar/El esquí cuesta mucho
Salmon fishing is an art
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 like swimming
(S)he gave up gambling
Try calling him
There’s nothing I like better than working in the garden

(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 didn’t mind him/her living here
I recommended promoting her
I approve of your getting up early

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
This needs attending to
You’re not worth listening to
It wants/needs polishing

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 prefer swimming to running
He was punished for being late
This is a good opportunity for showing what you mean
You get nothing in life without working
He was furious at being mistaken for his/her brother

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
dancing shoes
fishing rod
(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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the chiming bells</td>
<td>las campanas que tañen/tañían (*tañente does not exist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a worrying problem</td>
<td>un problema inquietante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a flying object</td>
<td>un objeto volante/volador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a convincing reply</td>
<td>una respuesta convincente</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But often an idiomatic solution must be sought in either case:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>boiling point</td>
<td>el punto de ebullición</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>changing room</td>
<td>el vestuario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conditioning cream</td>
<td>la crema suavizante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dining room</td>
<td>el comedor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drinking water</td>
<td>el agua potable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flying planes</td>
<td>aviones en vuelo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flying saucer</td>
<td>el platillo volante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>riding boots</td>
<td>las botas de montar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sleeping bag</td>
<td>el saco de dormir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>steering wheel</td>
<td>el volante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>turning point</td>
<td>el punto decisivo/la vuelta de la marea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walking boots</td>
<td>las botas de senderismo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the exceptional use of *hirviendo* ‘boiling’ and *ardiendo* ‘burning’ as adjectives, see 5.3.
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¿Sabes nadar?</td>
<td>Can you swim? (do you know how to?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Puedes nadar hoy?</td>
<td>Can you swim today? (are you able to/are you allowed to?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nunca podía salir con sus amigas</td>
<td>She could never/was never allowed to go out with her girlfriends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soy libre. Puedo hacer lo que quiero</td>
<td>I’m free. I can do whatever I want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La importancia de saber comer es mucho</td>
<td>Knowing how to eat is highly important (La Jornada, Mex.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia se sabe ganar/sabe ganarse las simpatías de todo el mundo</td>
<td>Julia knows how to win everyone’s affection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo único que sabía hacer era trabajar honradamente (CORPES, CR)</td>
<td>The only thing he could do was honest work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nunca había podido descifrarlo/nunca podrá descifrarlo</td>
<td>(S)he had never been able to decipher it/(S)he’ll never be able to decipher it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) No poder (por) menos de means the same as no poder evitar + infinitive: *no podré (por) menos de decírselo* ‘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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjugation</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No pudo escaparse</td>
<td>(S)he couldn’t escape (. . . didn’t manage to)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No podía escaparse</td>
<td>(S)he couldn’t escape (no information about whether (s)he eventually did)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No me pudo ver porque yo estaba ocupada</td>
<td>(S)he didn’t get to see me because I was busy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No podía verme porque estaba siempre ocupada</td>
<td>(S)he couldn’t see me because she/I was always busy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo ya sabía la verdad</td>
<td>I already knew the truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuando supe la noticia de tu éxito . . .</td>
<td>When I heard the news of your success . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esa noche también traía mis copas y nunca supe bien qué pasó (ES, Mex., dialogue. Sp. . . . llevaba unas copas encima y . . .)</td>
<td>I was pretty drunk as well that night and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me miró con una expresión sobria y grave que no supe descifrar (JM, Sp.)</td>
<td>He looked at me with a sober, serious expression that I was unable to decipher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjugation</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lo que podíamos/podríamos hacer es tirar este tabique</td>
<td>What we could do is to knock down this partition wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creo que esta/ésta podría ser una salida digna para todos (JV, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>I think this could be a dignified way out [of the problem] for everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puede/Podría/Podía haberle ocurrido algo</td>
<td>Something could have happened to him/her</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

¿Podría/Podía usted abrir la ventana? Could you open the window?
—¿Podríamos hablar con ella? —le pregunté (IV, Mex., dialogue)
¿Podrías/Podías decirle al jefe que estoy enfermo? 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:

El día que pudo haber estallado la Tercera Guerra Mundial
. . . pensando en lo que pudo haber sido y no fue (JM, Sp.)
El hombre que pudo ser Presidente
(Excélsior, Mex.)

The day World War III could have broken out
. . . thinking of what might have been and wasn’t
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:

Me lo podías/pudiste haber dicho
Podías haber puesto algún adornito de Navidad (CRG, Sp., dialogue)
You could have told me
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’.
 Auxiliary verbs

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)  
Hubo un verano en el que el marido debió ausentarse de más por razones profesionales (JM, Sp.)  
¿Quién debe manejar las finanzas hogareñas, el hombre o la mujer? (La Jornada, Mex.)

Your/His/Her son must work harder if he wants to pass the examination.  
There was a summer when her husband had to be away more often than usual for professional reasons.  
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  
Debe (de) haber sido muy bella  
Deben (de) ser las cinco  
Se te ha roto el vestido por detrás, sí, sí, has debido de engancharte en un clavo (RC, Sp.)  
En verano debió de ser una bella alameda (LS, Ch.)  
Debieron de haber abandonado su base antes de que comenzara el ataque (AH, Mex.)

You must have arrived late  
She must have been very beautiful  
It must be five o’clock  
Your dress has got torn at the back, yes, yes, you must have got caught on a nail (RC, Sp.)  
In summer it must have been a fine tree-lined avenue (LS, Ch.)  
They must have left their base before the attack began (AH, Mex.)

(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 NGLE 28.6k accepts it but prefers deber de for suppositions.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Debió decirte antes</td>
<td>(S)he ought to/should have told you before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debió decirte antes</td>
<td>(S)he ought to/should tell you before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No debiste hacerlo</td>
<td>You shouldn’t have done it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En ese momento debí desconfiar</td>
<td>At that moment I ought to/should have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pero no lo hice (JI, Mex., dialogue. Sp. debió desconfiar)</td>
<td>been suspicious, but I wasn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volvió al sitio del que nunca debió salir</td>
<td>He went back to the place he should never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(EA, Sp., dialogue)</td>
<td>have left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debieron llamarla PDUSA, no PDVSA (Rebelión, Ven.)</td>
<td>They should have called it [i.e. Venezuela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oil Inc.] PDUSA, not PDVSA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tienes que formatear el disco duro</td>
<td>You have to format the hard disc/disk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te guste o no tienes que arreglar ese coche (ES, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>Like it or not, you’ve got to fix that car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Por qué tuviste que contarles todo?</td>
<td>Why did you have to tell them everything?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiene que haberlo hecho Marta</td>
<td>Marta must have done it (supposition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tienes que estar loco</td>
<td>You’ve got to be crazy (supposition)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:
Auxiliary verbs

**Ha debido hacerlo/Lo ha debido hacer**
(S)he must/should have done it

**Debe haberlo hecho/Lo debe haber hecho**
(S)he must have done it

**Ha podido hacerlo/Lo ha podido hacer**
(S)he could have done it

**Puede haberlo hecho/Lo puede haber hecho**
(S)he might/could have done it

**Habían podido hacerlo/Lo habían podido hacer**
They could have done it (before)

**Habría debido hacerlo/Debería haberlo hecho**
(S)he ought to have done it

**Ha tenido que hacerlo/tiene que haberlo hecho**
(S)he must have done it

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.

(I) **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:

- **He de hacerlo cuanto antes**
  I have to do it as soon as possible

- **Si su compañía tiene bancos de datos que han de ser accesibles desde varias sedes . . .**
  If your company has data banks that are to be accessed from several sites

- **Hubo de repetir el experimento (JM, Sp.)**
  (S)he had to repeat the experiment

- **las dos tendencias, centralista y federalista, que habían de marcar la historia de Colombia (Promocomicio, Col.)**
  the two tendencies, centralist and federalist, that were to leave their imprint on Colombian history

(b) It may express probability or suppositions:

- **Ha de haberle dicho todo (usually debe (de) haberle dicho . . .)**
  (S)he must have told her/him everything

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 (II, 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:

¿Por qué habría/había de ofenderse si yo no dije nada? (or, more colloquially, iba a ofenderse)  
¿Por qué habría de acusar a Samuel?  

Why should (s)he get offended if I didn’t say anything?  
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:

Hay que darles tiempo  
No había que hacer autopsia (GGM, Col.)  
Hubo que llamar a los bomberos  
Hay que estar loco para viajar de noche en camión (MS, Mex., dialogue. In Spain ‘bus’ is el autobús and el camión means ‘lorry’ / ‘truck’)

One has to give them time/It’s necessary to give them time  
There was no need to do an autopsy  
It was necessary to call the firemen (implying ‘and we did’)  
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 NGLE 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 (NGLE 16.4).

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Los zapatos de tacón alto suelen ser incómodos</em></th>
<th><em>Soler translates the idea of ‘usually’, ‘to be used to’. It is used only in the present and imperfect tenses.</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High-heeled shoes are usually uncomfortable</td>
<td>He used to talk to himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solía hablar solo</td>
<td>They usually fire one or several shots into the air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suelen disparar uno o varios tiros al aire</td>
<td>(MS, Mex., dialogue)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 acostumbraba pernoctar* (MVLL, Pe., Sp. *rancho* = *choza, casuchá*) ‘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’ debieras/debieras/debias 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’ tienes 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 traté 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
Llevó a las niñas al zoo
Jamás volvieron a ver a Amado ni Trini
(DES, Mex. Sp. . . . ni a Trini)

I don’t know Feliciano
(S)he took the girls to the zoo
They never saw Amado or Trini again
No me importa que encuentre al o a los asesinos (LS, Ch., dialogue)

I don’t care whether you find the murderer or murderers

Admiran mucho al cámara (cf. admitran la cámara ‘they admire the camera’)

They admire the cameraman a great deal

¿Quieres pasear al el perro?

Do you want to take the dog for a walk?

Dejad/Dejen de atormentar al el gato

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

I’m looking for a husband who will help me in the house

No conozco un solo farmacéutico en todo Bruselas (ABE, Pe., dialogue)

I don’t know a single pharmacist in the whole of Brussels

Veía un chico que jugaba en silencio (ES, Arg.)

I saw a child playing in silence

Los universitarios eligieron una reina de belleza (IA, Ch.)

The university students elected a beauty queen

Matar periodistas no mata la verdad (Excélsior, Mex.)

Killing journalists does not kill the truth

Utilizaron un pastor alemán para el experimento

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 . . ., mataron 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 releyendo 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

I had to pick my sister up as though she were a bundle

Usted no me considera como a un igual

You don’t consider me to be your/an equal
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’.

### 26.4.1 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, 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

(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
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/ésos 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) What I’m scared of is damned random chance
- *Se iba feliz a su casa para no seguir desafiando al azar* (GGM, Col.) He went off happily to his home so as not to go on tempting fate
- *Los cazas llevan bengalas para confundir a un misil dirigido* The fighters carry flares to confuse a guided missile
- *Bien sabes cuánto temo a los huracanes* (PJG, Cu., dialogue) 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’, *tener* ‘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* I’ve got a son and a daughter
- *Tenemos una asistenta griega* 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* I’ve got my uncle to act as guarantor to want a child/son
- *querer a un hijo* 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 loco 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
  - They recruited 200 young people

- Bayardo San Román . . . vio las dos mujeres vestidas de negro (GGM, Col.)
  - Bayardo San Román saw the two women dressed in black

- Solo/sólo conozco un hombre capaz de componer esta emboscada maestra (. . . a un hombre also possible)
  - 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
  - I introduced my husband to my boss

- Denuncié el ladrón al guardia
  - I reported the thief to the policeman

- Mande el paciente al especialista
  - Send the patient to the specialist

- Yo prefiero Dickens a Balzac
  - 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
  - I didn’t know the rest of the group

- . . . un paso que podría poner a Estados Unidos en una posición delicada (La Prensa, Arg.)
  - . . . a step which could put the United States in a delicate position

- Eso pondría en peligro a la compañía
  - That would put the company in danger

- Admiro al pueblo cubano
  - I admire the Cuban people

- La explosión aterró a la ciudad
  - The explosion terrified the city

- Sacudió a la sociedad mexicana (EP, Mex.)
  - It shook Mexican society
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’.

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’.

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* (IH, 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish expression</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mándales un texto</td>
<td>Send them a text message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escribe poesía</td>
<td>(S)he writes poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tus palabras delataban tu derrotismo</td>
<td>Your words betrayed your defeatism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish expression</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Este producto es el que mejor impermeabiliza al algodón</td>
<td>This product is the one that best waterproofs cotton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es difícil saber en qué medida afectó esto a la economía cubana (MVLI, Pe.)</td>
<td>It is difficult to know to what extent this affected the Cuban economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cómo afecta a tu salud el problema de Volkswagen? (Excélsior, Mex.)</td>
<td>How does the Volkswagen [emissions] problem affect your health?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 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.)

Both believed the stars ruled the passions

... soluciones mixtas de un litro embozadas en bolsas negras para proteger a la ponzóna de la luz (JH, Mex.)

... one-litre/liter mixed solutions wrapped in black bags to protect the poison from the light

El suicidio de la muchacha... excitó a la opinión pública (MVLL, Fe.)

The girl’s suicide... stirred public opinion

Este fenómeno caracteriza al norte de Escocia

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.)

... the ‘platform’, as they call the andén (of a railway station) in England

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 . . .’)

In Spain they used to call the money from bribery and graft ‘Mexican grease’

La inversión es indispensable si se quiere convertir al sistema ferroviario en un sector atractivo para los inversionistas (La Hora, Ec.)

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.)

He considers that the wisest option is to gradually give up nuclear energy

Los dirigentes nacionales renunciaron a sus puestos en el sindicato (JA, Mex.)

The national leaders gave up their positions in the union

Esto obedece a unas normas de comportamiento

This obeys certain norms of behaviour

Le gustaba todo lo que le gustara a su mujer, pero no que su mujer les gustara tanto a los hombres (MVM, Sp.)

He liked everything his wife liked but not the fact that men liked his wife so much

Este nuevo producto ayuda al cabello a recobrar su brillo natural

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’. 

334 Personal a
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**, **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  Mario wasn’t there
No perdamos tiempo  Let’s not waste time
No todos son capaces de tocar el piano  Not everyone is capable of playing the piano
Arguyen—y no sin razón—que . . .  They argue – and not without reason – that . . .
No intentabas verla  You weren’t trying to see her
Intentabas no verla  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 quies 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
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... 

(RGM, Col.)

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...

(b) Optionally in interjections involving cuánto or qué de 'how much', 'how many' and also after cuál in exclamations.

¡Cuántas veces no lo había soñado en los últimos tiempos! (LG, Sp.)

¡Cuántas veces no me la habré jugado por él! (ES, Mex., dialogue)

¡Qué de angustias (no) habrán pasado!

¡Cuál no sería mi sorpresa cuando a los dos meses... me lo encuentro a la salida del Sarape (ES, Mex., dialogue)

Cuál no sería mi sorpresa cuando a los dos meses... me lo encuentro a la salida del Sarape

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:

... su prohibición de salir del país hasta que no se haya hecho firme el auto (La Jornada, Mex.)

Y todo el mundo tiene derecho a que se le trate como inocente hasta que no se pruebe lo contrario (LS, Sp., dialogue)

Adolfito, hasta que no tomes el bocadillo no te vas a jugar (EA, Sp., dialogue)

Quítale la cámara a este muchacho... y no se la devuelvas hasta que no aprenda a hacer buen uso de ella (LR, Col., dialogue)

... 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

(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:

Temo no le haya sucedido/Temo que le haya sucedido alguna desgracia (1)

Tenía miedo no (or tenía miedo de que) lo/le vieran/viesen desde arriba (2)

I’m worried (s)he might have suffered some misfortune

He was afraid that they would see him from above

(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**

No dice nada (S)he says nothing  
Nadie dijo nada No one said anything  
Nadie había visto nada; nadie sabía nada No one had seen anything, no one knew anything  
Apenas come nada (HR, Mex.) (S)he scarcely eats anything  
Tampoco vino nadie Nor did anyone come  
Nunca trae ninguno (S)he never brings a single one  
Pero no había ningún otro síntoma (EL, Arg.) But there was no other symptom  
No sabe ni latín ni francés (S)he knows neither Latin nor French  
No la he visto nunca con nadie I’ve never seen her with anyone

**Single negatives**

Tampoco vino (S)he didn’t come either  
Apenas habla (S)he scarcely talks  
Nadie sabe cuánto se lava (Excélsior, Mex.) No one knows how much [money] is being laundered  
Ninguna era más bella que ella No woman was more beautiful than her  
Jamás/Nunca la volvería a ver (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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Más que nada, es taimado</td>
<td>Más que nada, es taimado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me irrité más por eso que por nada</td>
<td>Me irrité más por eso que por nada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podría ser la mayor esfera tallada nunca por manos humanas (El Periódico, Sp.)</td>
<td>Podría ser la mayor esfera tallada nunca por manos humanas (El Periódico, Sp.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salió más temprano que nunca</td>
<td>Salió más temprano que nunca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(AM, Mex., dialogue; not jamás)</td>
<td>(AM, Mex., dialogue; not jamás)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . y allí un capataz, el mejor que jamás</td>
<td>. . . y allí un capataz, el mejor que jamás</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hubiera (MP, Arg., dialogue)</td>
<td>hubiera (MP, Arg., dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Este libro es más complicado que ninguno</td>
<td>Este libro es más complicado que ninguno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de los que yo he leído</td>
<td>de los que yo he leído</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es más lista que ninguno de los otros</td>
<td>Es más lista que ninguno de los otros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la mayor tontería que haya dicho nadie</td>
<td>la mayor tontería que haya dicho nadie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) In sentences which involve expressions of doubt, denial, abstention, impossibility, etc.:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Es dudoso que nadie/alguien pueda pasar por nativo en más de tres idiomas</td>
<td>Es dudoso que nadie/alguien pueda pasar por nativo en más de tres idiomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hace mucho que nadie me traía flores</td>
<td>Hace mucho que nadie me traía flores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(MC, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>(MC, Mex., dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . sin nada ni nadie en el mundo</td>
<td>. . . sin nada ni nadie en el mundo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se negó siquiera a hablar a nadie de la emisora</td>
<td>Se negó siquiera a hablar a nadie de la emisora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(GCI, Cu.)</td>
<td>(GCI, Cu.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es demasiado difícil para que nadie/alguien entienda esto</td>
<td>Es demasiado difícil para que nadie/alguien entienda esto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es imposible ver nada de lo que está sucediendo</td>
<td>Es imposible ver nada de lo que está sucediendo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pocos libros dirían nada semejante</td>
<td>Pocos libros dirían nada semejante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No tolera que nadie lo contradiga (EM, Mex.)</td>
<td>No tolera que nadie lo contradiga (EM, Mex.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es horrible contar todo esto a nadie/alguien</td>
<td>Es horrible contar todo esto a nadie/alguien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo no sé dónde está nada en esta casa</td>
<td>Yo no sé dónde está nada en esta casa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In questions or exclamations that expect a negative answer:

¿A usted cuándo le han preguntado nada/algo?  When did anyone ask you anything?
¿Quién ha visto a nadie/alguien que trabaje más que él?  Who has ever seen anyone who works more than he does?
¿Para qué despedirme de nadie ni de nadie?  Why should I say goodbye to anyone or anything?
¿Quién puede pensar en nada cuándo se está rodeado de idiotas?  Who can think of anything when one’s surrounded by idiots?
¿Quién hubiera pensado nunca/jamás/alguna vez que se casaría con Julia?  Who would ever have thought he’d have married Julia?

After antes de, antes que, and sin

He venido sin nada  I’ve come without anything
sin nadie que lo/le cuidara/cuidase  without anyone to look after him
Él tenía la culpa por llegar antes que nadie  It was his fault for arriving before anyone else
Esto hay que hacerlo antes de empezar nada  This must be done before starting anything else

(1) Statements of emotion involve a subtlety: me sorprendería que nadie me llamara/que no me llamará 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/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 ‘. . . 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:

No sé nada  I know nothing/I don’t know anything
No sé nada de nada  I don’t know anything about anything
Contestó que no conocía a nadie (NC, Mex.)  She replied that she knew no one
No hay nada/nadie  There’s nothing/nobody
No lo haría por nada/nadie  I wouldn’t do it for anything/anyone

But in literary or emotive styles they may precede the verb:

Desde hace tiempo para nadie es desconocido que el Sol emite rayos ultravioletas (Gramma, Cu.)  For some time now no one has been unaware of the fact that the sun gives off ultraviolet rays
A nadie conozco más apto para esta labor literaria  I know no one more suited for this literary task
Por nada del mundo quisiera perderme eso (set phrase in everyday use)  I wouldn’t miss that for anything in the world
27.5 Further remarks on individual negative words

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
Nothing seems certain in all this

Dentro de la pensión reinaba el silencio,
Inside the boarding-house silence
como si nadie la habitara (JMs, Sp.)
reigned, as if no one were living in it

Nada en el mundo nos podrá separar
Nothing in the world will be able to
(AA, Cu., dialogue)
separate us

Nada en la pieza es histórico (MVLl,
Nothing in the play is historical
Pe. Sp. nada en la obra . . .)

En caso de que lo atacaran nadie saldría a
defenderlo (MS, Mex.)
In the event of anyone attacking him no one

Nadie cree eso ya
would come forward to defend him

No one believes that any more

(1) A double negative construction is frequent in questions: ¿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
Manuel does absolutely no work

No hemos dormido nada
We haven’t slept a wink

La separación de su marido no había sido nada dramática (SP, Sp.)
The break from her husband had not been at all dramatic

No me gusta nada lo que acabas de decir
I really don’t like what you just said
(ABE, Pe., dialogue)

La junta no empezó nada bien (MS, Mex.,
The meeting didn’t start too well
Sp. la reunión no empezó . . .)

(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
I hardly know anybody

No se veía a nadie en la playa
There was no one to be seen on the beach

Dígale hoy no quiero ver a nadie
Say that I don’t want to see anybody today
(DT, Mex., dialogue)

(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* (MVLL, 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*:

- **Vives en el siglo pasado . . . no tienes computadora, ni celular, ni fax, ni auto, ni tarjetas de crédito y ni siquiera una contestadora telefónica** (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
- **No hay nada que me ligue ni con él ni contigo** (CF, Mex., dialogue)
  - There’s nothing linking me to him or to you
- **Ni fumo ni bebo**
  - I neither smoke nor drink
- **No hubo tiempo ni de llamar a una ambulancia** (CMG, Sp.)
  - There wasn’t even time to call an ambulance
- **Ni con ella, ni con nadie, me puedo comunicar** (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

Ninguno de los que hablan un idioma está libre de dudas (Manuel Seco, Sp.)
O se lleva todos, o ninguno
Llamo a mis hermanas pero ninguna responde
(Sp. ninguna contesta)
Si he sido insincero con ninguno/alguno de vosotros, decídmtelo (ninguno is literary)

None of those who speak a language
is free of doubts
Either you take/(s)he takes them all, or none
I call/phone my sisters but none of them
is answering
If I have been insincere with any of
you, tell me so

(b) Adjectival forms

Otra vez el Oscar no incluye a ningún actor negro (Excélsior, Mex.)
Tampoco recibimos ninguna contestación/
—Si es molestia, puedo esperar—.
Molestia ninguna/Ninguna molestia
Había llegado al climaterio con tres hijas y ningún varón (GGM, Col.),

Once again the Oscar list features no black actor
Neither did we receive any reply
‘If it’s a nuisance I can wait.’ ‘No
nuisance at all’
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 said that’, ¿no salisteis (Lat. Am. salieron) ninguna anoche? ‘didn’t any of you girls/women go out last night?’.

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?’.

(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 nosotras 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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish (EN)</th>
<th>Spanish (ES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yo nunca/jamás conocí a un extranjero que hablase/hablará tan bien (el) español</td>
<td>I’ve never met a foreigner who spoke Spanish so well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamás imaginó que su hijo pudiera caer preso</td>
<td>She never imagined her son might be arrested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No sale nunca/jamás de casa</td>
<td>(S)he never goes out of the house</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish (EN)</th>
<th>Spanish (ES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apenas llegamos/habíamos llegado/hubimos llegado/cuando empezó a llover</td>
<td>We had scarcely arrived when it started raining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apenas den con algún posible testigo, si es que dan, que nos avisen</td>
<td>As soon as they find some possible witness, assuming they do, tell them to let us know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apenas había dado treinta pasos la invadió el terror</td>
<td>She had scarcely walked thirty paces when she was overcome by terror</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following examples it is an adverb:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish (EN)</th>
<th>Spanish (ES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No te conozco apenas/Apenas (sí) te conozco</td>
<td>I hardly know you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hace apenas seis años</td>
<td>barely six years ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu pensión apenas llega para cubrir gastos</td>
<td>Your pension’s barely enough to cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(APR, Sp., dialogue)</td>
<td>expenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el entusiasmo apenas contenido de los profesores universitarios (RB, Ch.)</td>
<td>the barely repressed enthusiasm of the university teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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.
27.5 Further remarks on individual negative words

(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* (JM, 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 llegó* ‘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 conocísemos 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:
Negation

—¿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
mucha (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 no 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 in Spain, to reduce the importance of a pre-
ceding 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 (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.
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) ¿Cuyo? 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 quién 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.
Questions and exclamations

(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):

¿Qué hizo usted? What did you do?
¿Cómo se llama tu hermana? What’s your sister called?
¿Cómo cena la gente decente? How do decent people have dinner?
(EM, Mex., dialogue)
¿A qué viene la pregunta? (GGM, Col. dialogue) What’s the question for?
¿Desde cuándo no fuma tu marido? Since when has your husband not smoked?
¡Qué inteligentes son las ardillas! 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:

¿Cuál prefieres? Which one do you prefer?
¿A cuál prefieres? Which of the (people) do you prefer?
¿A cuál de los tres se refiere usted? To which of the three are you referring?
Dime cuál debo elegir Tell me which (one) I should choose
Cayó ahora en la cuenta de cuál era el verdadero sesgo de mi indiscreción posible (JM, Sp.) He now realized what was the real intention of my possible indiscretion
Sería difícil decir cuál era la más arreglada de las tres mujeres allí presentes (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?     What is life?
¿Qué hora es?       What’s the time?
¿Qué es su hermana?  What is his/her sister? (i.e. what does she do?)

¿Cuál es el problema?     What’s the problem?
¿Cuál es su impresión de los acontecimientos? We already know what answer any writer
¿Ya sabemos cuál es la respuesta que cualquier would have given to the lady’s letter
escritor hubiera dado a la carta de la
señora (JC, Sp.)
¿Cuál no sería mi sorpresa? Imagine my surprise . . .
¿Pero ya que usted me pregunta cuáles son mis planes para el futuro (ES, Mex., dialogue) But since you’re asking me what my plans
¿Qué es la vida?     What is life?
¿Qué hora es?       What’s the time?
¿Qué es su hermana?  What is his/her sister? (i.e. what does she do?)

¿Cuál es el problema?     What’s the problem?
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¿Cuál no sería mi sorpresa? Imagine my surprise . . .
¿Pero ya que usted me pregunta cuáles son mis planes para el futuro (ES, Mex., dialogue) But since you’re asking me what my plans
¿Qué es la vida?     What is life?
¿Qué hora es?       What’s the time?
¿Qué es su hermana?  What is his/her sister? (i.e. what does she do?)

(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:

     Sp. ¿qué gatos?)
—¿Recibiste mi carta? —¿Cuál carta?
     (JF, Mex., dialogue. Sp. ¿qué carta?)
—Me dijo que eran las mentiras las que la     ‘She told me it was the lies that were
volvían loca—, ¿Cuáles mentiras? (LR, Col.,     driving her crazy.’ ‘What lies?’
     Sp. ¿qué mentiras?)

(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?
Questions and exclamations

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
I don’t know what to say to you

Discutían sobre qué iban a decirles
They were arguing about what to tell them

No recuerdo ya qué fue de Antonio
I can’t remember what became of Antonio

¿Quién ha dicho qué?
Who said what?

¿Y qué . . .?
So what?

Nunca voy a tener con qué pagarte
I’ll never have enough to pay you with

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

(b) Qué as an adjective (see 28.3.3 for the Latin-American use of cuál in this context):

¿A qué párrafo te refieres?
Which paragraph are you referring to?

¿Qué animales prefieren fotografiar?
What animals do they/you prefer to photograph?

Entender qué casa quiere comprar un cliente
Understanding what house a client wants to buy
ahorra tiempo y malos entendidos (CP, Arg.)
save time and misunderstandings

No sabía qué sentido tenía esa
I didn’t know what meaning that survival
supervivencia (SP, Sp.)
could have

(c) Adverbially to reinforce adjectives or adverbs:

¡Qué generoso es!
Isn’t he generous!

¡Qué tarde se ha hecho!
Look how late it is!/Gosh, it’s late!

¡Qué bien cantan!
They really sing well!

Boston, ¡qué bella ciudad de tabiques rojos!
Boston, what a beautiful red brick city!

(AM, Mex., dialogue. Tabiques = ladrillos in Spain)

No sé qué decirte
Discutían sobre qué iban a decirles
No recordó ya qué fue de Antonio
¿Quién ha dicho qué?
¿Y qué . . .?
Nunca voy a tener con qué pagarte

(AM, Mex., dialogue)

(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 . . .
¿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. mende) “‘María answers back a lot.’ ”What?/Pardon?’” (i.e. ‘what did you say?’).

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sé de lo que te hablo (CF, Mex., dialogue; or de qué te hablo)</td>
<td>I know what I’m talking to you about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ni sé qué piensa y tampoco sé lo que pienso yo (ES, Arg., dialogue)</td>
<td>I don’t know what he thinks, and I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Sabe Dios en qué nos metemos!</td>
<td>God knows what we’re getting into!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No sé lo que/qué voy a hacer</td>
<td>I don’t know what I’m going to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No sé qué hacer (not *no sé lo que hacer)</td>
<td>I don’t know what to do</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 28.4.3 Qué: some idiomatic uses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¿Qué tal estás? (= ¿cómo estás?)</td>
<td>How are you? How are things?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Qué tal es como profesor?</td>
<td>What’s he like as a teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Qué te parece?</td>
<td>What do you think of it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿A santo de qué haces eso?</td>
<td>What on earth are you doing that for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿A mí qué?/¿Y qué?</td>
<td>What’s the point of this purchase?/What’s the point of buying this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿A qué viene esta compra? (JA, Sp., dialogue)</td>
<td>What’s it all about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿De qué va la cosa?</td>
<td>And what about the homeless families?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Y qué de las familias sin hogar?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¡Qué vida!</td>
<td>What a life!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Qué día más/tan hermoso!</td>
<td>What a lovely day!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Qué cara! (Spain, familiarly, ¡qué morro!)</td>
<td>What a nerve/cheek!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Los grandes tazones de café con leche, ¡qué maravilla! (EP, Mex.)</td>
<td>The big cups of white coffee: wonderful!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Qué libro más/tan interesante!</td>
<td>What an interesting book!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Qué nunca más/tan estúpida esta/esta!</td>
<td>Wow, is this is refrigerator stupid!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronie fue directo al bar. “Qué raro tan temprano” (CP, Arg., dialogue)</td>
<td>Ronie went straight to the bar. ‘That’s strange, [drinking] so early’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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(1) The colloquial cómo . . . de is common with estar on both continents: ¡cómo estás de guapa! ‘aren’t you looking attractive!’, pero ¡cómo estás de gordo! ‘wow, isn’t he fat!’

(2) Qué de . . . is a rather old-fashioned alternative for cuánto in exclamations: ¡qué cosas/cuántas cosas tengo que contarte! (familiarly ¡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/quiénes 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 NGLE 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.’
(b) In exclamations, ‘how much!’, ‘what a lot!’

¡Cuántas veces (no) te lo habré dicho!  How many times have I told you!
¡Mira cuánta nieve! Look at all that snow!
¡Cuántas medidas drásticas e innecesarias, ‘What a lot of drastic and unnecessary
suspiró el Director General! (CF, Mex.) measures!’ the Director General sighed
¡Cuánto más trágico! How much more tragic!
¡Cuánto mejor estarías así! 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 cuánto
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)
  She herself was surprised at how
  distant he was from her life
  Sólo han conseguido exponer cuán soeces,
  cuán ineptos y cuán interesados son
  nuestros dirigentes políticos
  (La Jornada, Mex.) They have merely managed to expose how
  coarse, inept and self-interested our
  political leaders are
  Luego se echó en el suelo con naturalidad
  cuan largo era (JM, Sp.) Then he casually lay down full length on
  the floor
  No aguanta el sueño y el cansancio. Se tira en
  el suelo cuan largo es (CREA, Mex.) He can’t stand the sleepiness and tiredness.
  He lies/US lays down full length on the

(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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¿Cómo te llamas?</td>
<td>¿Cómo te llamas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cómo quieres que me peine?</td>
<td>¿Cómo quieres que me peine?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No sé cómo hacerlo</td>
<td>No sé cómo hacerlo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Cómo llueve!</td>
<td>¡Cómo llueve!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cómo/Por qué no me llamaste ayer?</td>
<td>¿Cómo/Por qué no me llamaste ayer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cómo es de inteligente tu cuñado? (Mex., Col. ¿Qué tan inteligente es . . .?)</td>
<td>¿Cómo es de inteligente tu cuñado? (Mex., Col. ¿Qué tan inteligente es . . .?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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? (Excélsior, 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 as 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)

- *Si* viene me quedo/quiero
- *Si* han llegado, me quedaré
- *Lleva* cinco semanas en cama. *Si* eso no es grave, ya me dirás
- *Si* el televisor funcionaba, lo comprarían

(b) **Remote conditions** (Section 29.3)

- *Si yo* tuviera/tuvieses cien dólares, lo compraría
- *Si yo* fuera/fuese millonario te compraría un yate

(c) **Unfulfilled conditions** (Section 29.4)

- *Si yo hubiera/hubiese tenido* cien mil dólares, lo habría comprado

(d) **Fulfilled conditions** (Section 29.7)

- *Si no salía, era porque prefería quedarse en casa*
- *Si llegaba temprano comíamos a las doce*

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

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Si tenemos que pagar tanto no vale la pena} & \quad \text{If we have to pay so much it isn’t worth it} \\
\text{Si (el elitismo) significa que selecciona a sus miembros en razón de su aptitud, todas las universidades del mundo son elitistas} & \quad \text{If elitism means they select their members according to their ability, every university in the world is elitist}
\end{align*}
\]

(b) Si + present + future, or present with future meaning

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Si el contrato no está mañana en Londres, no hay/habrá trato} & \quad \text{If the contract isn’t in London by tomorrow, there will be no deal} \\
\text{Si llueve me quedo/queré en casa} & \quad \text{If it rains I’ll stay at home} \\
\text{Si lo veo por la calle, lo voy a reconocer} & \quad \text{If I see him in the street, I’ll recognize him} \\
\text{(RC, Sp., dialogue)} & \quad \text{If your dad hears you he’ll die}
\end{align*}
\]

(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.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Si han contestado ya, no les escribiré} & \quad \text{If they’ve already answered, I won’t write to them} \\
\text{Avisó que la huelga sería legal, pero si encontraban obstáculos entonces “sería revolucionaria”} & \quad \text{He warned that the strike would be legal, but if they ran into obstacles ‘it would be revolutionary’} \\
\text{Si no lo hicieron estamos salvados} & \quad \text{If they didn’t do it, we’re saved}
\end{align*}
\]

(d) Si + present + imperative

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Si queréis ver el desfile salid al balcón} & \quad \text{If you want to see the parade go out on to the balcony} \\
\text{Si lo compras en DVD, que sea en Blu-ray} & \quad \text{If you buy it on DVD, make sure it’s Blu-Ray}
\end{align*}
\]

(e) A past tense + the conditional or an indicative past tense (see note 1)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{La operarían si tenía algún hueso roto} & \quad \text{They would operate on her if she had any broken bones} \\
\text{(Dije que) me quedaba en casa si llovía} & \quad \text{(I said) I’d stay at home if it rained}
\end{align*}
\]

(1) Important: open conditions in the past are typical of reported speech: \textit{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 \textit{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 \textit{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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Si la policía la detenía, ya escarmentaría} & \quad \text{If the police arrested her, that would teach her a lesson}
\end{align*}
\]
Conditional sentences

Si no actuaba pronto, Gianni terminaría por resquebrajarse (SP, Mex.)
If she didn’t act promptly Gianni would eventually break down
¿En qué se convertiría su vida si estallaba el escándalo? (MVLI, Pe.)
What would become of his life if the scandal got out?
Me pareció que si me mostraba disponible te ibas a cansar (MP, Arg., dialogue)
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 pagarás/pagarases 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 fantasmas, pero mentiría si dijera que aquellas sesiones no sirvieron para nada (JC, Sp.)
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
Si supieras hacer el nudo como todos los chicos de tu edad, no te tendrías que quejar (IA, Sp., dialogue)
If you knew how to make a knot like all the boys of your age, you wouldn’t have to complain
Si no fuera por los embotellamientos de tránsito sería la más feliz de las mujeres (ES, Mex., dialogue)
If it weren’t for the traffic jams I’d be the happiest of women
Quería saber qué haría si fuese el presidente de la atribulada red social Twitter (La Jornada, Mex.)
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,   | If (s)he’d had money (s)he’d have       |
| habría/hubiera saldado la cuenta       | settled the bill                        |
| Si no hubiera sido por las contracciones del estómago, se habría sentido muy bien | If it hadn’t been for the stomach       |
| (JC, Arg., dialogue)                   | cramps, he’d have felt fine             |
| Mi mamá trajo luto un año y lo habría  | My mother wore widow’s black for a year |
| llevado más tiempo si no le hubiéramos | and would have worn it longer if we     |
| dicho que a papá no debía gustarle     | hadn’t told her that father surely didn’t |
| (ES, Mex., dialogue)                   | 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   | Of course, if I were a man I wouldn’t   |
| (LG, Sp., dialogue)                             | 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? |
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Si me estaba contando todos aquellos proyectos era porque inexorablemente pensaba realizarlos (FU, Sp.)</td>
<td>If he was telling me about all those plans it was because he was inevitably intending to carry them out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si he tenido suerte, la culpa no es mía</td>
<td>It’s not my fault if I’ve been lucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si teníamos dinero, íbamos al teatro</td>
<td>If (i.e. ‘whenever’) we had any money we used to go to the theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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’)</td>
<td>If I brought you to the beach it’s so you could keep an eye on little Alvaro, not so you could start reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si en el siglo XX la guerra fue por el petróleo, en el actual será por el agua (La Jornada, Mex.)</td>
<td>If (i.e. ‘whereas’) war in the 20th century was about oil, in the present century it will be about water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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/sea/sea 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 sabia 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:

¡Como se me vuelva a colgar la tableta la tiro por la ventana! If my tablet crashes again I’ll throw it out of the window!

Me dijo que como no se lo pagara/pagase, se lo llevara/llevaría (S)he told me that if I didn’t pay her/him, for it, (s)he would take it away

¿Está enfermo su hijo? —Enferma me ‘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 ‘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 ‘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:

Se me ocurrió que, de estar viva, la mujer me habría parecido más vieja y más digna (AM, Sp., dialogue)

Un experimento . . . que, de confirmarse, supondría el hallazgo de la fuente de energía más buscada por los científicos (Granma, Cu.)

De haber sido hija única a lo mejor sí me hubiera vuelto una niña mimada (ES, Mex., dialogue)

It occurred to me that, had she been alive, the woman would have seemed older and more dignified to me.

An experiment which, if confirmed, would mean the discovery of the energy source most sought after by scientists.

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)
A decir verdad, no me cae bien
(= si digo la verdad)

He was nervous too to judge by how
he was licking his moustache
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
Compramos otra botella por si acaso
Por si esto fuera poco, también me han puesto una multa
Prefiero que envíe protección a mi esposa, y que asegure el entierro de mi hijo por si llega algún indeseable (MS, Mex., dialogue)

I looked out of the window in case
he was coming
We’ll buy another bottle just in case
As if that weren’t enough, they’ve
given me a fine too!
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 . . .’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yo que usted/Si yo fuera usted, me callaría</td>
<td>If I were you, I’d keep quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si yo fuera usted, ya estaría buscando un abogado (MS, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>If I were you I’d already be looking for lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo que usted compraba una nueva (ES, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>If I were you I’d buy a new one (refers to una máquina de escribir – typewriter)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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. Santamaria 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’.
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Singular or plural verb?</th>
<th>Person of verb</th>
<th>Living or non-living subject?</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reflexive</td>
<td><em>me lavo</em></td>
<td>either</td>
<td>any</td>
<td>living</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reciprocal</td>
<td><em>nos queremos, os habláis</em></td>
<td>plural</td>
<td>any</td>
<td>living</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Intransitive</td>
<td><em>me alegro, se rompió la taza</em></td>
<td>either</td>
<td>any, if living, otherwise 3rd</td>
<td>either</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Se de matización</td>
<td><em>se fue, se murió, te bajaste, me lo esperaba, se lo cree, etc.</em></td>
<td>either</td>
<td>any, if living, otherwise 3rd</td>
<td>either</td>
<td>30.5–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ‘Unusual consumption’</td>
<td><em>se bebió un litro de vino</em></td>
<td>either</td>
<td>any</td>
<td>living</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Passive se</td>
<td><em>se construyó el puente</em></td>
<td>either</td>
<td>third only</td>
<td>non-living (usually)</td>
<td>Chapter 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. ‘Special construction’</td>
<td><em>se arrestó a dos personas</em></td>
<td>singular</td>
<td>third only</td>
<td>human, with some exceptions</td>
<td>Chapter 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Impersonal se</td>
<td><em>en España se vive bien</em></td>
<td>singular</td>
<td>third only</td>
<td>human</td>
<td>Chapter 32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Se está maquillando</em></td>
<td><em>Se está maquillando</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Me corté con una lata</em></td>
<td><em>Me corté con una lata</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>¡Qué bien se peina!</em></td>
<td><em>¡Qué bien se peina!</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>¿Cuidado, que te vas a salpicar!</em></td>
<td><em>¡Qué bien se peina!</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ex presidente hondureño se declara culpable</em></td>
<td><em>Ex presidente hondureño se declara culpable</em> (La Jornada, Mex.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lávate las manos</em></td>
<td><em>Lávate las manos</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Esto me lo pido, esto me lo pido ...</em></td>
<td><em>(children overheard in a toy shop before Epiphany. See note 4)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Se mató en un accidente</em></td>
<td><em>(see note 2)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Se daban crema para el sol</em></td>
<td><em>(see note 2)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 NGLE 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
30.3 Reciprocal meaning of pronominal verbs

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 (mi/ti/si/nosotros/osotros/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 o 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 herself: 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, débiles 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nos escribimos periódicamente</th>
<th>We write to one another regularly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hace años que no se hablan</td>
<td>They haven’t been talking to one another for years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasó mucho tiempo sin que nos viésemos/oiéramos</td>
<td>We didn’t see one another for a long time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los novios hacían como que se odiaban, pero en el fondo se querían (ES, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>The bride and groom pretended to hate one another, but deep down they loved one another</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transitive</th>
<th>Intransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>abrir to open (but see 30.7.1)</td>
<td>abrirse to open (intransitive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acabar to finish (transitive and intransitive)</td>
<td>acabarse to end (intransitive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acostar to put someone to bed</td>
<td>acostarse to go to bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aprovechar to make the most of</td>
<td>aprovechar(se) (de) to take advantage of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beneficiar to benefit</td>
<td>beneficiarse (de) to benefit from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>casar to marry someone off (also intransitive in archaic or regional styles)</td>
<td>casarse to get married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cerrar to close</td>
<td>cerrarse to close (intransitive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>colgar to hang something</td>
<td>colgarse ‘to hang’ (computers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>despertar to wake someone up (also intransitive)</td>
<td>despertarse to wake up (intransitive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>desplazar to shift/scroll</td>
<td>desplazarse to move about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>divorciar to divorce (someone)</td>
<td>divorciarse to get divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dormir to put somebody to sleep (also ‘to sleep’)</td>
<td>dormirse to go to sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enamorar to make someone fall in love</td>
<td>enamorarse de to fall in love with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>estropear to spoil something</td>
<td>estropearse to get spoilt/break down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involucrar to implicate</td>
<td>involucrarse to be/get involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meter to put in</td>
<td>meterse to get in/to interfere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perder to lose</td>
<td>perderse to get lost (but see 30.7.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preocupar to worry somebody</td>
<td>preocuparse to worry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presentar to introduce people</td>
<td>presentarse to appear unexpectedly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>terminar (see acabar)</td>
<td>terminarse (see acabarse)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tirar to throw/pull</td>
<td>tirarse to jump/to dive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
30.4.2 Pronominalization can radically change the meaning of a verb

Sometimes the pronominal form of the verb is radically different in meaning:

- **cambiar** to change
- **correr** to run
- **desenvolver** to unwrap
- **despedir** to see someone off/to fire/sack someone
- **empeñar** to pawn/pledge
- **gastar** to spend
- **llevar** to take/to wear
- **negar** to deny
- **oponer** to contrast two views
- **valer** to be worth

- **cambiarse de** to change clothes/house
- **correrse de** to be ashamed/to move over/to come (Sp., sexually: vulgar)
- **desenvolverse** to be good at/skillful in something
- **despedirse de** to take one’s leave/say goodbye
- **empeñarse en** to insist on doing something, gastarse to wear out
- **gastarse** to wear out
- **llevarse** to take with one/to steal
- **negarse a** to refuse to do something
- **oponerse** to oppose
- **valerase de** 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 *(entreno 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:

- **abstenerse** to abstain
- **acurrucarse** to crouch
- **arrepentirse** to repent
- **atenerse a** to limit oneself to
- **atreverse a** to dare
- **comportarse** to behave
- **dignarse** to deign to
- **ensimismarse** to become introspective
- **fugarse** to flee
- **inmiscuirse** to interfere
- **jaçtarse** to boast
- **mofarse** to mock
- **quejarse de** to complain
- **rebelarse** to rebel
- **regodearse** to delight in
- **resentirse** to feel the effects of
- **sincerarse** to be sincere
- **suicidarse** to commit suicide
- **vanagloriarse** 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
pronominal verbs

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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb</th>
<th>meaning</th>
<th>verb</th>
<th>meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>acabar*</td>
<td>to end (see 30.7.2)</td>
<td>conectar*</td>
<td>to connect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aclarar*</td>
<td>to brighten/lighten/</td>
<td>crecer</td>
<td>to grow (for crecerse)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adelgazar*</td>
<td>e.g. after a storm</td>
<td>despertar*</td>
<td>to wake up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aflojar*</td>
<td>to loosen</td>
<td>disminuir*</td>
<td>to diminish/ reduce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aprobar</td>
<td>to approve/to pass</td>
<td>empeorar*</td>
<td>to worsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aumentar*</td>
<td>grow bigger/to make bigger</td>
<td>encoger*</td>
<td>to shrink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avanzar*</td>
<td>to advance/move forward</td>
<td>enfermar</td>
<td>to make/get sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bajar*</td>
<td>to go down/to lift down (see 30.6.1)</td>
<td>enfriar*</td>
<td>to grow cold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comenzar</td>
<td>to begin</td>
<td>engordar*</td>
<td>to fatten/get fat</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>enloquecer*</td>
<td>to go mad</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>herir</td>
<td>to boil</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*iniciar</td>
<td>(can be intransitive</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mejorar*</td>
<td>in Mexico) ‘to start’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>oscurecer*</td>
<td>to darken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>quebrar*</td>
<td>to snap/break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>resucitar</td>
<td>to come back to life, to resuscitate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sangrar*</td>
<td>to bleed/to indent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>secar*</td>
<td>to dry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>subir*</td>
<td>to go up/to lift up</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>terminar*</td>
<td>to end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>vestir*</td>
<td>to wear (see 30.7.37)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 descendarse, 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb</th>
<th>meaning</th>
<th>verb</th>
<th>meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>abrir</td>
<td></td>
<td>acabar</td>
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<tr>
<td>acabar</td>
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<td>coger</td>
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<td>aguantar</td>
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<td>correr</td>
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<td>aparecer</td>
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<td>crecer</td>
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<tr>
<td>bajar</td>
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<td>decidir</td>
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<td>caer</td>
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<td>dejar</td>
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<tr>
<td>callar</td>
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<td>desvanecer</td>
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<tr>
<td>cambiar</td>
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<td>despertar</td>
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<td>cerrar</td>
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<td>devolver*</td>
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<td>empeorar</td>
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<td>encontrar</td>
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<td>enfermar*</td>
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<td>figurar</td>
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<td>guardar</td>
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<td>imaginar</td>
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<td>levar</td>
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<td>marchar</td>
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<td>mejorar</td>
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<td>olvidar</td>
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<td>parar</td>
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<td>parecer</td>
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<td>quedar</td>
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<td>regresar*</td>
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<td>reír</td>
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<td>resbalar</td>
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<td>resistir</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>robar*</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>sanar</td>
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<td>soir</td>
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<td>suger</td>
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<td>tomar</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>trae</td>
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<td>vestir</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>volver</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
*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
Pronominal verbs

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Espérame abajo/arriba que bajo/subo enseguida</td>
<td>Wait for me downstairs/upstairs – I’ll be down/up right away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subía siempre las escaleras lentamente</td>
<td>(S)he always used to go upstairs slowly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Se) subió las escaleras de un tirón (the whole flight of stairs; see 30.9)</td>
<td>(S)he rushed upstairs without stopping</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) When the urgency or figurative nature of the action is stressed, the pronominal form is usual:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Se subieron a la tapia de un salto</td>
<td>They jumped on top of the garden wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Súbase por los andenes, como sea, pero arranque (GGM, Col., dialogue. Sp. los andenes = las aceras)</td>
<td>Drive up onto the pavements/sidewalks, anything you like, but get moving!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se subía por las paredes</td>
<td>(S)he was climbing up the wall (with rage, not literally)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cayó en la guerra</td>
<td>(S)he fell (was killed) in the war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Gobierno ha caído</td>
<td>The government has fallen/has been toppled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esa calle cae lejos de aquí</td>
<td>That street lies far from here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caer en la tentación</td>
<td>to fall into temptation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya caigo</td>
<td>I get it/I understand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Caerse suggests accidental falling (‘falling over’, ‘falling down’), although caer alone can be used for the same meaning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Se) cayó de la mesa</td>
<td>It fell off the table (accidentally)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Que no se te caiga el paquete!</td>
<td>Don’t drop the parcel!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No sé si corrió a pesar de la herida, no sé si se cayó, no sé qué fue de él</td>
<td>I don’t know whether he ran despite the wound, I don’t know whether he fell over, I don’t know what happened to him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(EP, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

| Vamos a casa de Pepe (destination stressed) | We’re going to Pepe’s house |
| Me voy a casa de Pepe (departure stressed) | I’m off to/leaving for Pepe’s house |
| Se casaron en el tren y se fueron de luna de miel a Bariloche (Río Negro, Arg.) | They got married on the train and left on their honeymoon for Bariloche |
| . . . un beso como el que recibía Jim antes de irse a la escuela (JP, Mex.) | . . . a kiss like the one Jim used to get before he left for school |
| Vete (point of departure stressed) | Go away |
| Este avión va a Caracas (destination stressed) | This plane’s going to Caracas |
| ¡Voy!/¡Ya voy! (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’:

| Llegamos a Madrid | We arrived in Madrid |
| Llégale/Acércate a la tienda de enfrente | Go over to the shop/store opposite |
| Me hice paso entre la gente y me llegué a la Reina | I made my way through the crowd and got as far as the Queen |
| El iPhone se llegó a México (Excélsior, Mex.) | The iPhone has reached Mexico! |
| In Spain el iPhone llegó is more likely | |
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

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)
Sí estuviera Valeria aquí no te pasarías de listo

(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. pásate el bien/pásate 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)
Sali 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 saltes 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
Se ha venido de Madrid porque no aguanta la contaminación
¿Por qué no Vienes conmigo? (destination stressed)
¿Por qué no te vienes conmigo? (point of departure stressed)
Le ofreció más por venirse con él
Véngase para acá y conversamos

(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 . . .
Pronominal verbs

Mira la tormenta que se nos viene encima (accidental) Look at the storm that’s going to hit us (lit. ‘that’s coming down on us’)
Toda la sangre se le vino a los pies (ES, Mex.) 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nunca volveré a aquella casa</td>
<td>I’ll never return to that house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has vuelto muy moreno</td>
<td>You’ve come back very suntanned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo volví al espectáculo cuando me divorció (ES, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>I went back into show business when I got divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vuelve la primavera</td>
<td>Spring returns/is returning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selene se volvió a su asiento (ES, Mex.)</td>
<td>Selene went back to her seat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Me) volví antes de llegar</td>
<td>I turned back before arriving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Había pensado muy seriamente en divorciarse y volverse a Dinamarca (LS, Sp.)</td>
<td>He’d thought very seriously about getting divorced and going back to Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vuélvanse a Montevideo que yo en quince días estoy allá (Tenfield Digital, interview, Ch.)</td>
<td>Go back to Montevideo. I’ll be there in 15 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 agunta 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuel apareció en la iglesia</th>
<th>Manuel appeared/turned up at the church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La Virgen de Guadalupe se apareció al indio Juan Diego</td>
<td>The Virgin of Guadalupe appeared before the Indian Juan Diego</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 (MVLÍ, 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 **Calar/callarse**

*Calar* must be used when it is transitive: no me van a calar ‘they are not going to silence me’. Used intransitively, *calar* 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 \textit{(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 \textit{(CSG, Mex., dialogue)} ‘then we used to stop talking and we listened to the radio’, calló y corrió a otro lugar de la tienda \textit{(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’: \textit{¡este quieto!} ‘sit still!/stop moving around!’

30.7.6 \textbf{Cambiar/cambiarse}

\textit{Cambiar} means ‘to change’ in the sense of ‘to alter’, and is used transitively or intransitively: \textit{hay que cambiar el aceite} ‘we have to change the oil’, \textit{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 \textit{cambiarse} is ‘to get changed’ or ‘to move on’: \textit{me trajo ropa, quién sabe de dónde, para que me cambiara} \textit{(AC, Mex.)} ‘he brought me some clothes, who knows where from, so I could change’, \textit{me cambié de trabajo} \textit{(Prensa Gráfica, ES)} ‘I changed jobs’.

30.7.7 \textbf{Coger/cogerse}

\textit{Coger} is used for physical catching or grasping hold of: \textit{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 \textit{coger un catarro} ‘to catch a cold’ and \textit{cogerse} (or \textit{coger}) \textit{una borrachera} ‘to get drunk’.

\textit{Coger} can also mean ‘to take’, ‘to pick up’ in Latin America: tardé en decidirme a coger el teléfono \textit{(ES, Mex., dialogue)} ‘I took my time before picking up the phone’. However, since in the Americas \textit{coger} is a vulgar or very familiar word for the sex act, many speakers there prefer to use \textit{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 \textit{(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 \textbf{Conocer/conocerse}

\textit{Conocer} covers all meanings of the French \textit{connaître} ‘to know a person/place’ (cf. \textit{saber} ‘to know a fact/the truth/a language’, etc.). It can also mean ‘to meet for the first time’: \textit{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: \textit{se conoce todo Madrid} ‘(s)he knows the whole of Madrid’ (but not just ‘\textit{se conoce Madrid}, \textit{me lo conozco} . . . ‘I know him (and his little tricks . . .)’, \textit{me los conozco de arriba a abajo} (Río Negro, Arg.) ‘I know them from top to bottom’, \textit{me conozco esa carretera de día y de noche} \textit{(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 \textit{reunirse con, verse con, quedar con}.

30.7.9 \textbf{Correr/correrse}

\textit{Correr} is overwhelmingly the more frequent form and is used for meanings including ‘to run’, ‘to flow’, ‘to hurry’, even for vehicles: \textit{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’, \textit{le pidió a Félix que se corriera. Él le contestó que no, se iba a bajar pronto} \textit{(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 \textit{venirse}).
30.7.10 **Crecer/crecerse**

*Crecer* means to grow in size. *Crecerse* means to grow in worth or value:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La hierba crece mucho con tanta lluvia</td>
<td>The grass grows quickly with so much rain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Ya crezcan idiotas! (graffiti in Mexico)</td>
<td>Grow up you idiots!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City. In Spain <em>crecer</em> means physical growth)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hay personas que se crecen con el peligro</td>
<td>There are people who grow stronger when they are in danger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Éste, por su parte, se crecía ante el castigo y, en vez de ceder . . .</td>
<td>The latter, for his part, grew stronger under attack and instead of yielding . . .</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creo que han llegado</td>
<td>I think they’ve arrived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creo en ella</td>
<td>I believe in her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ese/Ése (se) cree que habla francés</td>
<td>He thinks he speaks French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Se) cree todo lo que le dicen</td>
<td>(S)He believes everything they tell her/him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No se cre que era un irresponsable</td>
<td>Don’t get the idea that he was irresponsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ES, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pero no crea que soy tan parlanchina (ibid.)</td>
<td>But don’t get the idea that I’m such a gossip</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 tienen 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’ *¡decídete!* ‘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**  
  Leave your suitcase here
- **Déjame tu móvil**  
  Lend me your mobile/cell phone
- **cuando dejó el ejército . . .**  
  when (s)he left the army . . .
- **Me he dejado la llave en casa**  
  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 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: *desayunense con nosotros* (advertisement, Ur.) ‘have breakfast with us’, quienes tengan la fortuna de desayunarse hoy lunes un par de huevos 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*  
  I found the book I was searching for
- *(Me) encontré una moneda de oro*  
  I found a gold coin
- *(Me) encontré a Pepe en la calle*  
  I met Pepe (by chance) in the street
- *Me encontré con que no me quedaba nada de sal*  
  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/espérarse

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? What are you waiting for?
Te estamos esperando We’re waiting for you
No me esperaba este 5–0 (Terra, Col.) I wasn’t expecting this 5–0 win (in soccer)
Hay que esperar(se) a que te atiendan One has to wait to be served
No es lo que uno se espera, perdón Sorry, but it isn’t what one expects . . .
Buscan vida en otros planetas esperando They’re searching for life on other planets encontrar seres como nosotros hoping to find beings like us

(1) Espera/espere and espere/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: ¡estase 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) You used to stay on the estate, and we women were so peaceful here
Me estuve estudiando toda la noche (from María Moliner. Not ‘studying myself’!) I stayed up all night studying
He tenido que estar(me) a la cola todo el día I had to queue/US stand in line all day
Y aquí que se esté para lo que se ofrezca And let him remain here in case
(se esté aquí para lo que sea) anything turns up

Quédate 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          | (S)he earns 10,000 euros every month                     |
| Ellos saben que yo me gano la vida     | They know I earn my living                               |
| trabajando por ahí con los campesinos  | out there with the country folk                          |
| (Río Negro, Arg.) *Ganarse* la vida is a set phrase |                                         |
| Se gana el cariño de todos             | (S)he gains/wins everybody’s affection                   |
| Nos ganó cien mil pesos al póker       | (S)he won 100,000 pesos off us at poker                   |
| Muy pronto se ganó la confianza del   | He very soon won the trust of the secretary              |
| secretario del Tesoro (JV, Mex.)       | 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        | (S)he thought of a new way of doing it                   |
| Te puedes imaginar lo que yo estaba pensando | You can imagine what I was thinking                     |
| Me los imagino divirtiéndose            | I imagine them amusing themselves                        |
| En contra de lo que yo me imaginaba,    | Contrary to what I imagined,                             |
| no cuenta siquiera con banda ancha      | it doesn’t even have broadband                           |
| (JV, Mex., dialogue)                    |                                                         |

(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   | I’m going to take my suit to the cleaner                |
| No se te olvide llevarte los libros    | Don’t forget to take the books with you                 |
| Llevaba un abrigo negro                | She was wearing a black coat                           |
| Trae que te lleve ese paquete (trae is here a colloquial interjection in Spain) | Here, let me carry that parcel for you                   |
| La crisis se llevó lo poco que quedaba | The crisis took away the little that was left           |
| (Río Negro, Arg.)                     |                                                         |
| No se lleva mi basura si no le doy una lana semanal (GZ, Mex. dialogue. *Lana* = *dinero* in familiar Mexican Spanish) | 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:

- La situación ha mejorado
  - The situation has improved
- Se encuentra bien y mejora cada día
  - He feels fine and is improving every day
- ¡Mejórate pronto!/¡Que te mejores pronto!
  - Get well soon!

(1) In the following sentence *mejorarse* is not *se de matización* but passive *se*:

| Pidieron que se mejore el servicio de recogida de animales abandonados
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘they are requesting that the service for collecting abandoned animals should be improved’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

| Ha muerto el primer ministro (formal style)
|---|
| The Prime Minister has died
| La propia Tránsito Arias se murió convencida de que . . . (GGM, Col.)
| Tránsito Arias herself died convinced that . . .
| Los iban a abandonar en el desierto, para que se murieran de sol y de hambre (MS, Mex. dialogue)
| They were going to abandon them in the desert so they died from sun and hunger
| Se moría Franco, surgía, por fin, un momento de prometedora incertidumbre en el país (RC, Sp.)
| Franco was dying, at last a moment of promising uncertainty was dawning in the 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’:

| Esto lleva ocurriendo desde hace algún tiempo
|---|
| This has been happening for some time
| Que me cuente cualquier idea que se le ocurra (LS, Sp., dialogue)
| Get him to tell me about any idea that he may have
| Se les ocurrió tocar la puerta de las habitaciones del hotel a las tres de la mañana (La Reforma, Mex.)
| They had the idea of knocking on the hotel-room doors at 3 a.m. |
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/oscurecerse

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 Montera ‘the express train stops at Montera’. 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

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)

(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 perdió 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish expression</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quedamos en ir al cine</td>
<td>We agreed to go to the cinema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habían quedado de verse (EM, Mex.)</td>
<td>They had agreed to meet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conseguí su teléfono, le llamé, quedamos</td>
<td>I got his phone number, called him, we agreed to meet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quedamos en que no íbamos a mencionar el pacto (ES, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>We agreed we weren’t going to mention the agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habían quedado en que sólo trabajaría hasta esa hora. (CP, Arg.)</td>
<td>They’d agreed that she would only work until that time (‘hour’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

  (b) ‘To be left’ as in ‘there are only three sandwiches left’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish expression</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La cabeza me la he tenido que lavar con el poco champú que quedaba en la botella</td>
<td>I had to wash my hair (lit. ‘head’) with the few drops of shampoo left in the bottle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y luego sólo él quedó vivo (EM, Mex.)</td>
<td>And he was the only one left alive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queda por ver . . .</td>
<td>It remains to be seen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soy un viejo y no me queda mucho tiempo (ES, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>I’m an old man and I haven’t got much time left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No me queda otra alternativa</td>
<td>I have no other alternative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

  (c) As an equivalent of estar when referring to location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish expression</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¿Dónde quedaba México exactamente? ¿Junto a Perú? (ES, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>Where was Mexico exactly? Next to Peru?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pudimos llegar al lugar del crimen antes de que expirase el ultimátum de la juez.</td>
<td>We managed to get to the crime scene before the judge’s ultimatum expired. It wasn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No quedaba lejos de la carretera. (LS, Sp.)</td>
<td>far from the road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿La Plaza del Rey dónde queda?</td>
<td>Where is the Plaza del Rey?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queda bastante lejos</td>
<td>It’s quite a long way away</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish expression</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Se quedaron en el Hotel Continental</td>
<td>They stayed in the Hotel Continental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo me quedé de pie ante él (CMG, Sp.)</td>
<td>I remained standing in front of him</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Se quedó quieto, escuchando las voces de la calle
(EM, Mex.)
He remained motionless, listening to the voices in the street

Por no salir a tiempo hombre se quedó
encerrado en un banco (headline, Terra, Col., Sp. un hombre se quedó . . .)
Man locked in bank after failing to leave in time

Los últimos tiempos él se quedaba toda la semana, solo, con las persianas bajas
(CP, Arg.)
Lately he was staying alone for the whole week with the blinds drawn

quedarse dormido/quedarse mirando (both very common phrases)
to go to sleep/to stare at

Mi retrato se quedó a medio esbozar
My portrait remained half sketched

(e) To mean ‘to keep’, as in ‘keep the book, I don’t need it’

Quédese la vuelta
Keep the change

Te lo puedes quedar si lo necesitas
You can keep it if you need it

El carro se lo quedaron los federales
The ‘feds’ (Policía Federal) kept the car

(EM, Mex., dialogue. El carro = el coche)

Pero no podía tomarse el atrevimiento de quedársela (CP, Arg.).
But she couldn’t dare to keep it

(f) Colloquially, probably only in Spain, to mean ‘to tease’/‘to wind up’

Menos mal que sé que te estás quedando conmigo (LS, Sp., dialogue)
It’s a good thing that I know you’re winding me up

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.

(Se) quedó cojo/sordo/calvo
He became lame/blind/deaf/bald

Una mañana se despertó en la habitación de su hotel y no vio nada. Se había quedado ciego (RB, Ch.)
One morning he woke in his hotel room and could see nothing. He had gone blind.

(Se) quedó descolocada
She was ‘thrown’/disconcerted

Sí. Y me quedé embarazada, si eso es a lo que se refiere (LS, Sp., dialogue)
Yes. And I got pregnant, if that’s what you’re referring to

Todo el mundo quedaría admirado (LR, Col)
Everyone would be surprised

Los hombres la veían y quedaban hipnotizados
Men saw her and were hypnotized

(EM, Mex.)

Los hombres que carezcan de un acceso completo e instantáneo al Internet quedarán rezagados (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 arregarlo 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 arregarlo en seguida. Likewise *se queda prohibido for queda prohibido is incorrect. The following examples refer to states, usually long-lasting ones:

| El pueblo quedó destruido a causa de la inundación | The town/village was destroyed because of the flood |
| Quiero que este punto quede claro | I want this point to be clear |
| Ahora que lo hemos pintado, el dormitorio queda realmente bien | Now we’ve painted it, the bedroom looks really good |
| Queda feo que duermas hasta que te ponga el plato en la mesa, te lo zampes y luego te largues (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 |
| . . . por no exponerme a que mi carrera quedase truncada por un bobo delito contra la seguridad vial (ibid.) | . . . so as not to expose myself to my career being cut short because of a stupid road safety offence |
| Tenía una personalidad de insecto que había quedado fielmente plasmada en su foto de bodas (ES, Mex.) | He had an insect-like personality that was faithfully reflected in his wedding photo |
| Ahora que lo he corregido queda mucho mejor | Now I’ve corrected it it’s much better |

The following sentences suggest short-lived events, but examples like these are not very common:

| Mi pelo se quedó azul (temporary, we assume) | My hair turned/went blue |
| Hasta que su revólver se quedó sin balas (MVLI, Pe.) | Until his revolver ran out of bullets |
| Primero el líquido se queda verde, luego se queda negro | 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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Se rio de su propia risa (GGM, Col. See note 1)</td>
<td>She laughed at her own laughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todos se rieron de él</td>
<td>They all laughed at him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consiguió dejar de reírse y retomar la conversación (MS, Mex.)</td>
<td>He managed to stop laughing and pick up the conversation again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reí y me senté en un banco de madera frente a su escritorio (JV, Mex.)</td>
<td>I laughed and sat down on a wooden bench in front of his desk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) The spelling río for río 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 (JM, Sp., dialogue) ‘you’ve been retired for years, and you suddenly kill a security guard and bring home someone who’s on the run’, si quiere usted traerse su bloque de taquigrafía (CF, Mex. dialogue. Spain bloc de taquigrafía) ‘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 traen? 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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vestía como lo haría una ejecutiva un viernes de ropa informal (LS, Sp.)</td>
<td>She dressed like a female executive at a casual-dress Friday party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Vestía de rosa con frecuencia? (MS, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>Did she often wear pink?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pronominal verbs

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 (vomitar, 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 herédarsela 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 tenida (SV, Ch., dialogue: Sp. no estás nada mal; la tenida = el traje) ‘and you don’t look at all bad in that outfit’, Véase y sientase 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
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 *se*s 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)**  
  (S)he/It was/You were dying of cold in that house
- **Se moría uno de frío en esa casa**  
  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, aumentar, 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)
- Qedar(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:

- aburrirse (de) to get bored
- alegarse (de) to become happy
- asustarse (de) to get frightened
- cansarse (de) to get tired
- deprimirse to get depressed
- divertirse to enjoy oneself
- endurecerse to become hard
- enloquecer (de) to go mad
- extrañarse (de) to be puzzled
- envejecer to grow old
- fastidiarse to get annoyed
- indignarse to get indignant
- irritarse (por) to get irritated
- marearse to feel sick
- molestarse (por) to be bothered
- vaciarse to become empty

(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: amaneci 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 enfrascó, se enfadó could also be used)  
When she heard about it she became very happy/sad/bad-tempered/cross

Se puso/Se quedó ronco/Enronqueció de tanto hablar  
(S)he got hoarse from talking so much

El FMI se puso duro (Clarín, Arg. Sp. se ha puesto)  
The IMF (International Monetary Fund) has got tough

Se puso/Está mejor/Mejoró de su enfermedad  
(S)he got better from his/her illness

¡No te pongas difícil/tonto!  
Don’t get difficult/silly!

En estos últimos años se me ha puesto el pelo rizado  
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’.

We get more right-wing with age
I’ve become allergic to wool
Recently everything has become surprises
Where did that boy learn to be a murderer?
The worst nightmare for a mother these days is for her children to announce they’ve become vegetarians
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He became a Catholic</td>
<td>Se hizo católico/Se convirtió al catolicismo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You need to know how to draw to become an architect</td>
<td>Para hacerte arquitecto necesitas saber dibujo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I made friends with a lot of rich people</td>
<td>Me hice amigo de mucha gente rica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What became of (our) idols/heroes?</td>
<td>¿Qué se hicieron los ídolos? (La Prensa, Pan., Sp. . . . se hizo de los ídolos . . .)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He emigrated to Mexico and became immensely rich</td>
<td>Emigró a México, se hizo inmensamente rico (AGa, Sp.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . when Isabel became Esteban’s girlfriend</td>
<td>. . . cuando Isabel se hizo novia de Esteban (JP, Mex., dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . like spirals of smoke growing progressively thicker</td>
<td>. . . como volutas de humo que se hace progresivamente más espeso (CMG, Sp.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The nights are getting longer</td>
<td>Las noches se hacen más largas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s turning into a chore (lit ‘uphill’) for me to have to get up early</td>
<td>Se me hace cuesta arriba tener que levantarme temprano</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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’.
Verbs of becoming

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(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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Rendering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trabajó mucho y con el tiempo llegó a ser alguien/director general/una persona importante</td>
<td>He worked hard and in due time he became someone/general manager/an important person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretendía, con el tiempo, llegar a Jefe de la Interpol (ES, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>He aimed eventually to become head of Interpol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pasar a (ser)* means ‘to go on to be’ but it does not imply difficulty or lapse of time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Rendering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De secretario pasó a (ser) jefe</td>
<td>From being a secretary he went on to become the boss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasó a ser uno de los partidos políticos del mundo con el porcentaje más alto de afiliados (La República, Ur.)</td>
<td>It became one of the world’s political parties with the highest percentage of members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De hija pasé a ser esposa (CRG, Sp.)</td>
<td>From being a daughter I went on to become a wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . el momento en que Baviera pasó a formar parte del Reich alemán (JV, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>. . . the moment when Bavaria became part of the German Reich</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

31.3.5 **Convertirse en ‘to become/change/turn into’**

This verb precedes noun phrases and usually suggests total changes or transformations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Rendering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nada más tocarlo/le el hada con la varita el príncipe se convirtió en rana</td>
<td>As soon as the fairy touched him with her wand, the prince turned into a frog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu socarronería ha dejado de ser irónica para convertirse en vitriólica (CMG, Sp., dialogue)</td>
<td>Your sarcasm has stopped being ironic; it’s become vitriolic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El golf se convirtió en pasión de multitudes (Río Negro, Arg.)</td>
<td>Golf has become a mass craze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La silla se convierte fácilmente en una escalera</td>
<td>The chair turns easily into a step-ladder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Había descendido socialmente hasta convertirse en lo que ahora era (CF, Mex.)</td>
<td>It [an apartment block] had gone downhill socially to become what it was now</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 quedársen**

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 unpredictable 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 *devine* 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive with ser</td>
<td>el libro fue publicado</td>
<td>the book was published</td>
<td>le livre a été publié</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive se</td>
<td>se publicó el libro</td>
<td>the book was published</td>
<td>le livre s’est publié</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>se bebe vino</td>
<td>wine is drunk</td>
<td>on boit du vin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>se bebe mucho</td>
<td>a lot of it is drunk</td>
<td>on en boit beaucoup</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Special construction’</td>
<td>se recibió a los embajadores</td>
<td>the ambassadors were received</td>
<td>les ambassadeurs ont été reçus/on a reçu les ambassadeurs</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>se les recibió</td>
<td>they were received</td>
<td>on les a reçus/ils ont été reçus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impersonal se</td>
<td>se entra por aqui/se bebe mucho</td>
<td>one goes in here/people drink a lot</td>
<td>on entre par ici/on boit beaucoup</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 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*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Passive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solucionaron los problemas</td>
<td>Los problemas fueron solucionados</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They solved the problems</td>
<td>The problems were solved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuel escribió la respuesta</td>
<td>La respuesta fue escrita por Manuel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuel wrote the reply</td>
<td>The reply was written by Manuel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 fueiste educada (RM, Sp., dialogue)
- Los derechos de filmación del fin del mundo ya fueron 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’)

\[\ldots\] 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
Passive and impersonal sentences

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 | It’s enough to know a man’s being sought for everyone to look at him in a different way |
| El exministro de Hacienda es investigado por la Fiscalía (La Razón, Bol.) | The ex-minister of finance is investigated by the State Prosecutor |
| El parlamento gibraltareño tiene 17 miembros, de los que dos son puestos por el Gobierno inglés (El País, Sp. See note 3) | 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:

Los ministros fueron preguntados . . .
(El País, Sp.)
. . . fue preguntado en relación con la falta de sanciones . . . (La Jornada, Mex.)
Serás pagado por la Secretaría del Trabajo
Por la contundencia de su voz deduje que estaba acostumbrada a ser obedecida
(AG, Sp., dialogue)

The minsters were asked . . .
He was questioned about the lack of measures against . . .
You’ll be paid by the Labour Ministry
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Passive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los críticos lo/le alabaron (=fue alabado por los críticos)</td>
<td>He was praised by the critics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspendieron la sesión (=la sesión fue suspendida)</td>
<td>The session was suspended</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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’, está equivocado ‘you’re mistaken’, está oxidado ‘it’s rusty’ (ser impossible).

In some cases, a special participle is used with estar: cf. estaba despertado 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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Eventual</th>
<th>Spanish Resultative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La ciudad fue destruida <em>(event)</em></td>
<td>The city was destroyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La ciudad estaba destruida (state)</td>
<td>The city was in ruins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fui detenido/Yo estaba detenido</td>
<td>I was arrested/I was under arrest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El manuscrito fue escrito en alemán <em>(event)</em></td>
<td>The manuscript was written in German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El manuscrito estaba escrito en alemán (state)</td>
<td>The manuscript was in German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[El libro] estaba muy leído, subrayado en algunos pasajes, e incluso con notas al margen</td>
<td>[The book] had been read a lot, underlined in some places, and even had marginal notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los hechos históricos no están gobernados por leyes (OP, Mex.)</td>
<td>Historical facts are not governed by laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En los días finales Berlín estuvo defendido por niños y ancianos (RM., Sp.)</td>
<td>During the final days Berlin was defended by children and old people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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:

This is our new car. It’s fantastic.

**Este/Éste es nuestro coche nuevo. Es fantástico** (not a ‘result’, so not quedar(se))

They’re going to auction a painting by Velázquez. It’s magnificent (not a result, so not quedar(se))

**Van a subastar un cuadro de Velázquez. Es magnífico**

We’ve washed the car and it looks/is fantastic

**Hemos lavado el coche y ha quedado fantástico** (as a result)

They’ve restored this painting by Velázquez. It looks magnificent

**Han restaurado este cuadro de Velázquez. Ha quedado magnífico** (as a result)

This use of quedar(se) to indicate the result of some process or activity is common in passive sentences:

**Con este aguacero va a quedar hecho una sopa** (ES, Mex., dialogue)

**With this downpour you’ll end up soaked to the skin (lit. ‘turned into a soup’) **

**Las casas (se) quedaron desprovistas de luz**

**The houses were left without light**
We’ve got into a real mess
It was stated at the beginning of this 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:

- *Las pelotas de golf son redondas* (expected)
- *Me esperaba lo peor, pero la fiesta resultó ser un éxito* (unexpected)

*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’:

- *Mis ingresos eran reducidos, ya que se veían afectados por la piratería informática* (letter, *El País*, Sp.)
- *Se veía arrinconada en medio de una familia hostil* (ES, Mex.)
- *Me veo obligado a denunciarte* (Spanish phone book)

(d) *Venir*

Use of *venir* also emphasizes that a condition has arisen from some previous event. It is confined to formal styles:

- *En el caso de producirse omisiones y errores en la guía, la Compañía Telefónica vendrá obligada a corregirlas* (Spanish phone book)
- *Todas estas condiciones han complicado su estado de salud, que ya venía afectado desde su traslado* (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 frien 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 (MVL, 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 sepá

Eso no se hage

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* ‘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 . . .’, *tengase 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 *dícense 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:

Se mezclan en la batidora los tomates sin pepitas y sin piel
Se enviaron los hombres y las armas necesarios para concluirla (i.e. la lucha: FC, Cu.)
Son maravillas que se ven una sola vez en la vida (ES, Mex., dialogue)

The tomatoes, without skin and pips, are mixed in the liquidizer
The men and weapons necessary to finish it [the fight] were sent
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 ha tenido noticias de su paradero (Abc, Sp., for se han tenido . . .) And no more news has been received of his whereabouts
?Se necesita agallas para hacer eso (Spanish informant overheard: se necesitan agallas)
?Se les dio varios premios (for se les dieron . . .) Several prizes were given to them
?Se vende máquinas de coser usadas (notice in Mexico City) Used sewing machines for sale
Passive and impersonal sentences

(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:

| Se tienen que resolver varios problemas/ Several problems must be solved |
| Tienen que resolverse varios problemas |
| Se deben limpiar bien antes de cocerlas/ They should be washed well before cooking (or deben limpiarse) |
| . . . cosas que no se quieren hacer / cosas que no quieren hacerse |
| ¿Se pueden prevenir las várices? (El Comercio, Pe., Sp. usually las varices) Can varicose veins be prevented? |
| En Londres por la calle se pueden observar los tipos de personas más extrañas/ In London the oddest types of people can be seen in the streets |
| (Cosmopolitan, Sp.) |

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 *NGLE* 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 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 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 destroz 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.
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English (special construction)</th>
<th>Spanish (se)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Eugenio d’Ors <em>se lolle</em> lee poco</td>
<td>Eugenio d’Ors isn’t read much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los libros de Eugenio d’Ors <em>se leen</em> poco</td>
<td>Eugenio d’Ors’s books aren’t read much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Se lolle</em> lee poco (refers to a male author: ‘special’ construction)</td>
<td>He isn’t read much / people don’t read him much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Se leen</em> poco (refers to a book: passive <em>se</em>)</td>
<td>It isn’t read much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Se le/la admira mucho</em> (i.e. a woman: ‘special’ construction)</td>
<td>She’s admired a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Se admira mucho</em> (e.g. some non-living thing: passive <em>se</em>)</td>
<td>It’s admired a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Se las/les criticó duramente</em> (i.e. some women: ‘special’ construction)</td>
<td>They were strongly criticized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Se criticaron duramente</em> (i.e. some non-living things: passive <em>se</em>)</td>
<td>They were strongly criticized</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

No se puede entrar.
Siempre se vuelve a los sitios a los que se pertenece (AG, Sp., dialogue; or uno vuelve . . . uno pertenece)
O se va a referéndum, o habrá guerra civil
¿Quién puede pensar en nada cuando se está rodeado de idiotas? (CS, Mex., dialogue)
. . . que en vez de ser pobre, se es rico; que en vez de ser nadie, se es alguien . . .
(SV , Ch., dialogue; or uno es rico, . . . uno es alguien)
Pareció llegarse a un acuerdo tácito para descansar (JC, Arg.)
Se cruza si el semáforo está en verde y se espera si está en rojo (El País, Sp.)

It is impossible to enter/No entry
One always returns to the places one belongs to
Either a referendum is held, or there will be a civil war
Who can think of anything when one’s surrounded by idiots?
. . . that instead of being poor, one’s rich, that instead of being nobody, one’s somebody
It appeared that a tacit agreement was reached to get some rest
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’.
Impersonal se may even appear in combination with the passive with ser, although this is rare: *no se debe hablar más con personas a las que se ha sido ya presentado* ‘one should only talk to people one has been introduced to’ (CRG, Sp., dialogue).

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.

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>En España se come mucho</th>
<th>People eat a lot in Spain (in general; does not refer to any specific food)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sí, se habla, se habla . . .</td>
<td>Yes, people talk and talk . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Es difícil vender periódicos en un país donde se lee poco (cf. se leen poco, passive se: ‘they aren’t read much’)</td>
<td>It’s difficult to sell newspapers in a country where people don’t read much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se hablaba de todo menos de asuntos laborales (ES, Mex.)</td>
<td>Everything was talked about except work matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se critica mucho pero se alaba poco</td>
<td>People criticize a lot but don’t praise much</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.

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 (MVLl, Pe., dialogue, woman speaking; or no se hablaban 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 Sofia 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 . . .?

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
**Passive and impersonal sentences**

*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 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 Ávila 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 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)
- S er 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 oxi- dado ‘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 cork-screw?’ See 33.2.5.

Ser is used to form the ‘dynamic’ passive la puerta fue abierta ‘the door was open’ (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:

- **París es la capital de Francia**
  - Paris is the capital of France
- **Era médico/abogado/bibliotecario**
  - He was a doctor/lawyer/librarian
- **Es la una/Son las doce**
  - It’s one o’clock/twelve o’clock
- **Ha sido un año/verano frío**
  - It’s been a cold year/summer
- **Otro gran problema fue la cuestión de los braceros (JA, Mex.).**
  - Another major problem was the issue of the seasonal farm labourers
- **Una conexión de banda ancha es la solución**
  - A broadband connection is the solution
- **Son ellos/ellas**
  - It’s them

**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 dunce 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.

**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:

- **¿Cómo eres? —Soy alto, moreno y delgado**
  - ‘What are you like?’ ‘I’m tall, dark and slim’
- **Esa chaqueta es bien bonita**
  - That jacket is very nice
- **Así soy de testarudo (GCI, Cu., dialogue)**
  - That’s how stubborn I am
- **Uno de ellos será bueno y el otro malvado (JV, Mex., dialogue)**
  - One of them will be nice and the other one nasty

**Important:** *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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ahora que el precio del petróleo ha bajado,</em></td>
<td>Now that the price of (crude) oil has dropped, this country is poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>este país es pobre</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>El acusado dijo que era inocente/culpable</em></td>
<td>The accused said he was innocent/guilty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Soy consciente de mis limitaciones</em></td>
<td>I’m conscious/aware of my limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pocas veces fue tan feliz como en las horas que precedieron a la entrevista</em></td>
<td>He was seldom so happy as during the hours before the interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(ES, Arg.)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ella decía ser más o menos feliz</em> (JV, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>She said she was more or less happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>—Soy tan desgraciada— me dijo</em> (GCI, Cu., dialogue)</td>
<td>‘I’m so unhappy,’ she told me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>La fiesta es/se celebra en su casa</em></td>
<td>The party is at his/her place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hay un incendio en el edificio pero no sé en qué piso es</em></td>
<td>There’s a fire in the building but I don’t know which floor it’s on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
¿Dónde es la manifestación?  Where is the demonstration?
El encuentro fue en el Hotel Washington  The meeting was in the Washington Hotel
(  )
El entierro sería a las cinco  The funeral was to be at five o’clock
(GGM, Col.)
—¿Dónde fue?  —En su casa.  ‘Where did it happen?  ‘In his house’
(GZ, Mex., dialogue)

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Está más bien triste/contenta</td>
<td>He’s rather sad/pleased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoy no estoy muy católico</td>
<td>I don’t feel too great today (lit. ‘I’m not feeling too Catholic’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El destino no está predeterminado por nada</td>
<td>Fate isn’t predetermined by anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El agua que se añada tiene que estar caliente</td>
<td>The water to be added has to be hot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Está parado desde febrero</td>
<td>He’s been out of work since February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estuvo callado todo el tiempo</td>
<td>He was silent all the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pero ¡qué alto estás!</td>
<td>Wow, you’ve grown tall!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Estás muy española hoy—. Claro, es que soy española</td>
<td>‘You’re looking very Spanish today’. ‘Obviously. I am Spanish’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sitges está en Cataluña</td>
<td>Sitges is in Catalonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sí buscan a mi hijo no está</td>
<td>If you’re looking for my son, he’s not at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(  )</td>
<td>dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Está encima de todo</td>
<td>It’s on top of everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo soy el que está ahí</td>
<td>I’m the one who’s on the spot (i.e. ‘there’/‘available’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(1) With nouns that are permanent fixtures or features there is a colloquial tendency to use *ser*:

¿Dónde es la casa de tu amigo?  
*Where’s your friend’s house?*

Aquí era la plaza de las Carretas (JLB, Arg., dialogue)  
*This is where Carretas Square used to be (dialogue)*

—¿Dónde es Puebla? —preguntó Eusebio  
*‘Where is Puebla?’ Eusebio asked (SG, Mex., dialogue)*

*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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estructura</th>
<th>Ejemplo</th>
<th>Traducción</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estar de buen/mal humor</td>
<td>(S)he’s in a good/bad mood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuenta la razón por la que estuvo de mesero y auxiliar de cocina (El Heraldo, Col.)</td>
<td>He tells why he worked as a waiter and kitchen help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Están de veraneo</td>
<td>They’re taking their summer vacation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A las tres necesitamos estar de regreso en la oficina (EP, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>We need to be back at the office by three</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estás de un guapo subido/de un antipático/de brona/de buen humor . . .</td>
<td>You’re looking really good / You’re in a really bad mood/joking/in a good mood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 33.3.4 *Estar con*

*Estar* followed by *con* + noun:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estructura</th>
<th>Ejemplo</th>
<th>Traducción</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estoy en cama con gripe (Revista Uno, Arg.)</td>
<td>I’m in bed with the flu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Puedo tomar helados cuando estoy con tos o resfriado? (AméricaTV, Pe.)</td>
<td>Can I eat ice cream when I’ve got a cough or cold?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estaba con un traje de chaqueta muy bonito</td>
<td>She was wearing a very attractive suit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estoy contigo</td>
<td>I support you/I’m with you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi simpatía está con los conservadores</td>
<td>I support/back the conservatives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 33.3.5 *Estar + adverb*

*Estar* followed by an adverb or an adjective used as an adverb:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estructura</th>
<th>Ejemplo</th>
<th>Traducción</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>—¿Cómo estás? —Estoy bien/mal</td>
<td>How are you? ‘I’m well/not well’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El nombre está mal. Se llamaba Luis José</td>
<td>The name is wrong. His name was Luis José</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ese día los técnicos llegaron, revisaron las conexiones y estaban fatal (LaMula, Pe.)</td>
<td>The technical experts arrived that day, checked the connections and they were awful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Estar que muerde</strong></td>
<td>(S)he’s in a lousy mood (lit. ‘ready to bite’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hoy estás que no hay quien te aguante</strong></td>
<td>You’re unbearable today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aquí el aire está que congela</strong> (MS, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>The air’s freezing here today</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 33.3.7 *Estar meaning ‘to suit’, or ‘to fit’*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Este vestido me está muy bien</td>
<td>This dress suits me/fits well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El abrigo te está corto</td>
<td>The coat is too short for you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El puesto de ministro le está grande</td>
<td>The ministerial job is too big for him/her</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miguel dice que andan recelosos y no le falta razón</td>
<td>Miguel says they’re suspicious, and he’s right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andan muy atareados estos días</td>
<td>They’ve got a lot of work these days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No se da cuenta de que todos los hombres andan locos por ella</td>
<td>She doesn’t realize that all the men are crazy about her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cómo andas? (= ¿cómo estás?)</td>
<td>How are things?/How are you doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No le ponía atención por andar todo el tiempo en reuniones feministas</td>
<td>She neglected him because she was in feminist meetings all the time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ir* ‘to go’ is also often used instead of *estar* with certain adjectives and participles, especially when movement is involved:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ella era joven, iba bien vestida, muy abrigada, llevaba el pelo suelto y ningún maquillaje</td>
<td>She was young, well-dressed, warmly clad, with her hair loose and no make-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Era evidente que no iba armado</td>
<td>It was obvious that he wasn’t armed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El que iba de negro viajaba de copiloto</td>
<td>The one in black was travelling as the co-driver [of a truck]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telefoné desde el coche que iba conduciendo Arnau</td>
<td>I called from the car that Arnau was driving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### (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’:

Sale con una chica que es/está divorciada  (S)he’s going out with a girl who’s divorced
Tiene que mantener a su madre que es/está viuda  (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’
Pero si es casado debe estar cenando en casa a estas horas (MP, Arg., dialogue; or está casado)  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:

¡Mujer, pero qué delgada estás!  Good heavens, haven’t you got thin!
Siempre ha sido calvo/gordo, pero ahora está más calvo/gordo que nunca  He’s always been bald/fat but now he’s balder/fatter than ever
Dentro de cien años todos seremos calvos  We’ll all be bald in a hundred years
(LRS, PR)
¿Te has fijado que está gordo . . . y además calvo? (GZ, Mex., dialogue)  Did you notice that he’s fat . . . and bald as well?
Un periodista güero que antes era gordo me daba buenas propinas (EM, Mex., dialogue)  A blond journalist who was previously fat gave me good tips (money, not information)
In Spain güero = rubio
Las mujeres de esa tribu son muy delgadas  The women of that tribe are very slim
(generalization)

(c) With adjectives applied to events and vida and situación:

La conferencia fue/estuvo muy interesante  The lecture was very interesting
La situación es/está caótica  The situation is chaotic
La fiesta fue/estuvo muy animada  The party was very lively
La vida es/está cara hoy día  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’.
With adjectives describing social manner when ‘to be’ = ‘to behave’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estuvo/Fue muy cortés conmigo</td>
<td>(S)he was very courteous towards me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siempre está/es cariñosa</td>
<td>She’s always affectionate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tienes que estar/ser más amable con él (usually ser)</td>
<td>You must be kinder to him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si soy amable con él luego no me lo quito de encima (MS, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>If I’m nice to him I can’t get rid of him later</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

- ¿Cuánto (es lo que) le debo? How much do I owe you?
- ¿Cuántos somos hoy para comer? How many are we for lunch today?
- Somos doce en mi familia pero hoy solo/sólo estamos tres en casa there are twelve of us in my family but there are only three of us at home today
- Los sobrevivientes fueron pocos There were few survivors

But either can be used for fluctuating prices:

- ¿A cuánto/A cómo son/están las uvas? How much are the grapes?
- Son/Están a tres euros (con) veinte el kilo They’re 3 euros 20 cents a kilo
- ¿A cuánto/A cómo están/son esas acciones? 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Es muy guapa/Está muy guapa</td>
<td>She’s very good-looking/She’s looking very attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Este niño es muy alto/Está muy alto</td>
<td>This child is very tall/He’s grown very tall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Este sillón es ya viejo/Está ya viejo</td>
<td>This armchair is old/It’s getting old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El pollo es riquísimo*/Está riquísimo</td>
<td>[The] chicken is very good/It tastes delicious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El café es horrible* /Está horrible</td>
<td>(The) coffee is horrible/It tastes awful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tráelo como sea/Tráelo como esté</td>
<td>Bring it any way you can/Bring it as it is</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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’.
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>ser</em></th>
<th><em>estar</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>ser aburrido</em></td>
<td><em>estar aburrido</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser atento</em></td>
<td><em>estar atento</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser bueno</em></td>
<td><em>estar bueno</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser cansado</em></td>
<td><em>estar cansado</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser católico</em></td>
<td><em>estar católico</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser decidido</em></td>
<td><em>estar decidido</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser consciente</em></td>
<td><em>estar consciente</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser despierto</em></td>
<td><em>estar despierto</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser (un) enfermo</em></td>
<td><em>estar enfermo</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser fatal</em></td>
<td><em>estar fatal</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser fresco</em></td>
<td><em>estar fresco</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser interesado</em></td>
<td><em>estar interesado</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser listo</em></td>
<td><em>estar listo</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser (un) loco</em></td>
<td><em>estar loco</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser malo</em></td>
<td><em>estar malo</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser rico</em></td>
<td><em>estar rico</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser verde</em></td>
<td><em>estar verde</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser violento</em></td>
<td><em>estar violento</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ser vivo</em></td>
<td><em>estar vivo</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 es 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)

(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:
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. Ramirez? —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 There’s a manager in the company (i.e. ‘a manager exists’)

Está el gerente The manager’s there/here/in

No hay dinero There’s no money (anywhere)

No está el dinero/El dinero no está The money isn’t here/there

¿Hay tortilla española? Do you have Spanish omelette/US omelet?

¿Está la tortilla española? Is the Spanish omelette on the list?/Is the Spanish omelette ready?

Predominaban las tiendas pequeñas, aunque por supuesto había ya las grandes (JA, Mex.) There were mainly small shops/stores, although there were the big ones

No se pueden subir ni perros ni cosas ... You can’t take up dogs and things . . .

para eso está el montacargas (EA, Sp., dialogue) The service lift is there for that

Las mujeres no estaban para hablar de temas que no fueran domésticos (AM, Mex.) 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 *está* 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 *está 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:

- *Ha habido un accidente*  
  There’s been an accident
- *Ha habido aquí tres presidentes* (i.e. ‘have existed’)  
  There have been three presidents here/
  We’ve had three presidents (in this country)
- *¿Es que en España no hay problemas de empleo?* (interview, *La Jornada*, Mex.)  
  Are there no employment problems in Spain?

  but –

- *Han estado aquí tres presidentes*  
  Three presidents have been here

### 34.3.3 *Hay* used before partitive nouns and numbers

Before partitive nouns (quantities, parts of a whole), only *hay* can be used:

- *Hay leche*  
  There’s (some) milk
- *Sólo hay agua vieja, agua de salitre*  
  (CF, Mex., CREA)  
  There’s only old water, water full of saltpetre (or ‘salts’)
- *Había gente*  
  There were (some) people
- *No hay champú*  
  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:

- *Éramos cuarenta en la fiesta*  
  (GZ, Mex., dialogue)  
  There were forty *of us* at the party
- *Los que estábamos ahí nos quedamos callados*  
  Those of us who were there kept quiet
- *Estábamos más de cinco personas encerradas en el ascensor*  
  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
  \[ \text{Si no hubiera habido (un) médico, habría muerto/De no haber habido (un) médico, habría muerto} \]

- If the doctor hadn’t been *there*, he’d have died
  \[ \text{Si no hubiera *estado* el médico, habría muerto} \]

- There’s no such thing as fairies
  \[ \text{Las hadas no existen/No hay hadas/No existen las hadas} \]

- There have always been economic crises
  \[ \text{Siempre ha habido crisis económicas} \]

- *Horchata* available/*Horchata* sold here
  \[ \text{Hay horchata (a refreshing drink made from crushed tiger nuts or chufas)} \]

- There’s a book on the table
  \[ \text{Hay un libro encima de la mesa} \]

- The book isn’t there any more
  \[ \text{El libro ya no está ahí} \]
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. tranquila-
mente ‘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.)
Siguí 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:
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/inevitamente ‘inevitable’/‘inevitably’, critico/criticamente ‘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:

| ni intelectual, ni política, ni económicamente | and neither intellectually, nor |
| se puede mantener tal postura (El País, Sp.) | politically, nor economically can |
| La inflación se encuentra total y absolutamente controlada (El Economista, Mex.) | such a position be maintained |
| Significa mucho personalmente, pero también cultural e intelectualmente (Granma, Cu.) | Inflation is totally and absolutely under control |
| 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:


(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: primero ‘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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>abatido: abatidamente downcast</td>
<td>equivocado: equivocadamente mistaken(ly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abierto: abiertamente open(ly)</td>
<td>exagerado: exageradamente exaggerated(ly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acentuado: acentuadamente marked(ly)</td>
<td>irritado: irritadamente irritated(ly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atrevido: atrevidamente daring(ly)</td>
<td>perdido: (‘lost’) perdidamente hopeless(ly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>debido: debidamente due/duly</td>
<td>(e.g. in love)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decidido: decididamente decided(ly)</td>
<td>reiterado: reiteradamente repeated(ly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deliberado: deliberadamente deliberate(ly)</td>
<td>resuelto: resueltamente resolute(ly)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 podia (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.:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>en vano/vanamente</td>
<td>in vain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de inmediato/inmediatamente</td>
<td>immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>directo/directamente</td>
<td>directly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siempre obra locamente/a lo loco</td>
<td>(S)he always acts wildly/in a mad way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Adverbs

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th><em>-ísimamente</em></th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>claramente</td>
<td>clarísimamente</td>
<td>extremely clearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intensamente</td>
<td>intensísimamente</td>
<td>extremely intensely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recientemente</td>
<td>recientísimamente</td>
<td>extremely recently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>urgentemente</td>
<td>urgentísimamente</td>
<td>extremely urgently</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 cerquísima ‘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:

- Económicamente, este país va a la ruina
- Políticamente, Planck nunca simpatizó con la democracia
- Personalmente, lo dudo
- Editorialmente, lo apruebo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economically</td>
<td>Economically, this country is heading for ruin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politically</td>
<td>Politically, Planck never sympathized with democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personally</td>
<td>Personally, I doubt it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorially</td>
<td>From a publishing point of view, I approve</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

- **Hable despacio por favor**  
  Speak slowly please
- **Lo quieren así**  
  They want it that way
- **Esta está mal hecho**  
  This is badly made/This is the wrong thing to do
- **Está bien**  
  It/He/She’s OK/You’re OK
- **Me da igual**  
  It’s all the same to me
- **Aquí estamos mejor/peor**  
  We’re better/worse (off) here
- **Informése gratis** (advert., Sp.)  
  Get information free
- **—Era totalmente desequilibrada— volvió a comentar (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:

- **¿No te das cuenta que una mujer así no puede ser aristócrata?** (SV, Ch., dialogue; Sp. usually cuenta de que)  
  Don’t you realize that a woman like that can’t be an aristocrat?
- **Visiones así no se olvidan** (MS, Mex., dialogue)  
  You don’t forget sights like that
- **una niña bien** (pejorative)  
  a ‘nice’ girl/a girl from a ‘respectable’ or ‘posh’ family
- **dos coñacs con hielo, y dos cafés igual**  
  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:

- **a buen paso** at a smart pace  
  a la carrera at full speed
- **a caballo** on horseback  
  a la fuerza by force
- **a ciegas** blindly  
  a la ligera hastily/without proper thought
- **a conciencia** conscientiously  
  a las claras without beating about the bush
- **(el agua sale) a chorros** The water’s pouring out  
  (llorar) a lágrima viva to shed floods of tears
- **a destiempo** inopportunistly  
  a mano by hand
- **(entrar) a empujones** to push one’s way in  
  a máquina machine-made/by machine
- **a escondidas** secretly/clandestinely  
  a macaballo at breakneck speed
- **a fuego lento** on a low flame  
  a medias by halves
- **a hurtadillas** by stealth  
  a oscuras in the dark
- **al alimón** together by turns/jointly  
  a quemarropa point-blank
- **a regañadientes** reluctantly/unwillingly
Adverbs

*a sabiendas de que…* fully aware that…
*a tiempo* in time (e.g. for the train)
*a tintas* 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*

---

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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hablan alto/bajo</td>
<td>They talk loudly/ softly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo hemos comprado barato/caro</td>
<td>We’ve bought it cheap/ dear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El tren va directo a Tuy</td>
<td>The train goes direct to Tuy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A la niña no le gustaron y lloró más</td>
<td>The little girl didn’t like them and she cried louder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fuerte (ES, Mex.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se me apiló firme (JC, Arg., dialogue. Spain</td>
<td>He pushed himself tight up against me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se me arrimó)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anda rápido que vamos a llegar tarde</td>
<td>Walk fast or we’ll arrive late</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(see 35.3.6 for rápido)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respiraba hondo</td>
<td>(S)he was breathing deeply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me sentó fatal</td>
<td>It didn’t agree with me at all/ I didn’t like it all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Él no juega limpio</td>
<td>He doesn’t play fair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following are typical of familiar speech and are not to everyone’s taste:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lo hemos pasado estupendo/fantástico/bárbaro</td>
<td>We had a tremendous/ fantastic time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La chaqueta le sienta bárbaro a Mariluz</td>
<td>The jacket looks terrific on Mariluz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inicialmente pensé que podíamos haber conseguido unos dólares fácil, sin problemas para la revolución (VdC, Cu.)</td>
<td>Initially I thought we could easily have got a few dollars without any problems for the Revolution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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)
Viven felices (normal style)) They live happily

35.3.5 Nouns used adverbially

For familiar constructions like lllover 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 plain omelette/US omelet
lenguado a la normanda 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trabaja intensivamente en una segunda novela</td>
<td>(S)he is working very hard on a second novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El aeropuerto de Cancún . . . servía principalmente para repostar combustible (AH, Mex.)</td>
<td>Cancún airport was used mainly for refuelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esa cara de asco que parece ser habitualmente la suya</td>
<td>That look of disgust which seems habitually to be his/hers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But, less commonly, an adverb may precede the verb to add emphasis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tu vida inevitablemente se dispone a recorrer el tramo final (JM, Sp., dialogue)</td>
<td>Your life is inevitably getting itself ready for the last lap</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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’, sobrema- nera ‘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:

Es muy inteligente
‘(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. Atrabancado = atrevido/imprudente
in Spain)
‘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/fluidiz 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.

Es que eres más tonto . . .  Wow, are you stupid!
Está más borracho . . .  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 cuestas . . . ¡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).

Sí (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 of la primera vez!’ ‘but I heard you the first time!’; pero sí 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 = pone 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bien</th>
<th>She’s pretty clever</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bien bueno que está, ¿eh?</td>
<td>Great, isn’t it? (sarcastic)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Adónde vas así de guapa? or . . . vas tan guapa?</td>
<td>Where are you off to looking so pretty?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 adelante ‘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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>este</td>
<td>this near me/us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ese</td>
<td>that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aquel</td>
<td>that further away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aquí</td>
<td>here near me/us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ahí</td>
<td>(just) there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allí</td>
<td>there further away/over there</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

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

‘I bought it in that shop/store.’ ‘Oh yes, I always shop there’

Ya están ahí monsieur Fréjus y monsieur Bebé, y quieren cocktails (JC, Arg., dialogue.

M. Fréjus and M. Bebé are here, and they want cocktails

Están ahí = ‘have arrived’

Remember that they fired me. I don’t work work there any more

Acuérdate que me corrieron, ya no trabajo ahí (MS, Mex., dialogue. Spain

My sister was born in Caracas, and I was born there too

me despidieron or me echaron)

Mi hermana nació en Caracas, y yo también nací allí

(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:
Adverbos

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 quieres 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 hacia 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
Adverbs

Afuera de un banco nos encontramos a un hombre negro vestido con harapos (DES, Mex. España 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 abajo, 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’:

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:

- dar un paso atrás
- Ella subió las escaleras sin siquiera mirar hacia atrás (GCI, Cu.)
- Ponte detrás de mí
- detrás del árbol/detrás de la mesa

. . . dirigiéndose hacia la pequeña plaza que habían dejado dos calles atrás (AM, Mex.)

¡No te quedes atrás!

(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:

- Yo iba delante
- Delante de ti no hablará
- ¡Lo hemos tenido delante de nosotros todo el tiempo! (JV, Mex., dialogue)
- Sigue adelante que yo te alcanzaré
- ¡Adelante!

(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:

- **Ya** están 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

Further examples:

- **Ya no soy el de antes** I’m not the man I was
- **¿Quién se acuerda ya del Charleston?** Who remembers the Charleston anymore?
- **Ya no tengo edad para trabajar** I’m no longer of an age to be working/I’m too old to work
- **Ya llegarán** They won’t be coming any more

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** Go on, off you go to the beach while
  - (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** (S)he’s been in bed six months. If that’s not serious, then you tell me what is
  - (S)he can go right now, as far as I’m concerned
- **Sirve ya la cena** (impatient tone) Serve supper now
- **Ya siéntate y deja de interrumpir** Sit down and stop interrupting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ya le pasaré la cuenta cuando gane el gallo</th>
<th>I’ll send you the bill when your cockerel/rooster wins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ya cuando uno los trata se da cuenta de que son magníficas personas</strong></td>
<td>As soon as you have anything to do with them you straightaway realize they’re great people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

- **Ya quisiera la Diana Ross para sus días festivos ser tan linda como tú** Diana Ross on a good day (lit. ‘on her holidays’) would like to be as pretty as you
  - (RS, PR, dialogue)
- **Por mí, ya puede llover, que tenemos tienda de campaña** As far as I’m concerned, it can go ahead and rain – we’ve got a tent

- **Bueno, eso es el colmo ya** As far as I’m concerned
  - (GGM, Col., dialogue)

- **¡Basta ya! ¡Calla ya!/¡Ya está bien!** That’s enough! Not another word!
  - (GGM, Col., dialogue)

- **Bueno, eso es el colmo ya** That’s enough! Not another word!
  - (GGM, Col., dialogue)
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?

(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 ves 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:
Adverbs

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’:

Abrió 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 oían a agua de colonia el entonces catedrático de griego Hasta luego (cf. hasta ahora, ‘see you in a minute’)

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

(b) Both entonces and luego may mean ‘in that case’. In this meaning luego is not stressed:

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.)

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
—En Madrid hace 40 grados, en Sevilla 38. —\[en Madrid it's 40 degrees, in Seville 38.\]
Entonces/Luego hace más calor en Madrid que en Sevilla
\[‘Then it’s hotter in Madrid than in Seville’\]
Es mi secreto. Entonces ya me lo contarás. Los secretos siempre se cuentan (ABV, Sp., dialogue; luego not possible in conjunction with ya)
\[‘It’s my secret’. ‘Then you’ll soon tell me. Secrets always get told’\]
Pienselo luego existo (set phrase)
\[I think, therefore I am\]

(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 preferiría hablar contigo
\[‘First I’d prefer to talk to you’\]
Es que antes las parejas sí se tomaban en serio lo de hasta que la muerte los separe
\[‘The thing is that in the past couples really used to take the bit about ‘till death do us part’ seriously’\]
(LS, Mex., dialogue)
Lo antes que te puedo llamar es a las cinco
\[The earliest I can call you is at five\]
Lola se levantó antes que nadie
\[Lola got up before everyone else\]
Si la ves antes que yo . . .
\[If you see her before I do . . .\]

(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
\[Even today some people still believe in fairies\]
Incluso/Aun si le das dinero, no lo hará . . . e incluso en los años ochenta (JA, Mex.)
\[Even if you give him money he won’t do it . . . and even in the 1980s\]
Yo soy débil y extranjera y aun en mi condición de aristocracia, empobrecida (CF, Mex. Dialogue)
\[I’m feeble and foreign, and despite my aristocratic status (lit. ‘even in my aristocratic status’), impoverished\]
Adverbs

**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/aun 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:
  - llevar (36.3.1)
  - durante (36.3.4)
  - para (36.3.6)
  - hace . . . que (36.3.2)
  - por (36.3.5)
  - desde (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: estudio español desde hacía tres años ‘I 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’.
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:

- *Llevamos cinco años viviendo juntos* (CRG, Sp.) *We’ve been living together for five years*
  - *El ascensor lleva estropeado dos meses* (ibid.) *The lift / elevator has been broken for two months*

- *¿Cuánto (tiempo) llevas en este trabajo?* *How long have you been in this job?*
  - *Llevo diez años sentada aquí esperando que me lo preguntas* (GGM, Col. dialogue) *I’ve been sitting here for ten years waiting for you to ask me that*
  - *Llevas media hora hablando de lo mismo* (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):

- *Llevabas años diciéndolo* *You had been saying it for years*
  - *El chalet llevaba más de diez años cerrado* (RM, Sp.) *The house had been closed up for more than ten years*
  - *Se comportaba como si llevara veinticinco años trabajando en la compañía* (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 confundirá 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/hacia/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? (JM, 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):

- **Hace años que** *vienen pagando una especie de ahorro previo para asegurarse la plata* (CP, Arg., dialogue; *plata* = dinero in Spain)
- *Me dijo que la señorita Brines hacía más de un mes que venía merodeando por el edificio* (ABE, Pe., dialogue)
- *Hará siglos que no se lava* (JM, Sp., dialogue: suppositional future)
- *El disco era viejísimo. Hacía diez años que no lo escuchaba* (ES, Mex.)

Negative sentences:

- *Hace años que no la veo y también años que no me han hablado de ella* (MVM, Sp., dialogue) (both tenses used)
- *… como no bebo hace tiempo . . .* (MVLI Pe., dialogue. *Sp. desde hace tiempo*)
- *Hacía años que no veía a David* (JA, Sp., dialogue)
- ¿Cuánto hacía que no desayunaba huevos con chorizo? (EM, Mex. Redundant no. See 27.2.4)

**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.
Expressions of time

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estuvimos (durante) cuatro días y al quinto nos trasladaron a la Cárcel de Mujeres (EP, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>We were there for four days and on the fifth day they transferred us to the Women’s Prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trabajé (durante) varios años en Madrid</td>
<td>I worked in Madrid for several years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿cuánto tiempo ha estado usted/estuvo en Madrid? (addressed to someone who has left Madrid)</td>
<td>How long were you in Madrid?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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
Expressions of time

Desde hace unos meses atrás alguien me había susurrado la verdad (WU, Mex., dialogue)

Since then nothing has lasted long for him

Desde entonces nada le ha durado mucho (JM, Sp., or . . . nada le dura)

I’ve known it since I saw you in the hospital

Lo sé desde que te vi en el hospital (GGM, Col., dialogue; or Sp. lo he sabido)

. . . what has been happening since July last year

. . . lo que está pasando desde julio del pasado año (Granma, Cu., or Sp. ha estado pasando)

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

I’ve smoked three times since October

Yo había fumado tres veces desde entonces

I had smoked three times since then

Claro que he vuelto a hacerlo/olvité a hacerlo desde entonces (preterite preferred in Latin America)

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 hacía/desde había 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 (MVLl, 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 mencioné ayer 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 . . . /hacia . . . 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’.
36.4 Translating ‘ago’

The usual formula is hace/hacia with a preterite or pluperfect tense, or, in Spain, with a perfect tense if the event is recent (see 18.2.3):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I saw him years ago</td>
<td>Lo/Le vi hace años</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’d seen him years ago/before then</td>
<td>Lo/Le habíamos visto hacia años</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But you tried to steal them [my notes] from me a month ago</td>
<td>Pero hace un mes quisiste robármelos (MC, Mex., dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I saw her a couple of months ago</td>
<td>La vi hace cosa de dos meses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I saw her a moment ago</td>
<td>La he visto (Lat. Am. la vi) hace un momento (Sp. perfect of recency)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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? — Dentro de tres días  ‘When does it start?’  ‘In three days’ time
Dentro de algunos años entrará en los libros de texto (DT, Mex., dialogue)  ‘In a few years’ time it’ll appear in the textbooks
Dentro de hoy en ocho días  ‘In eight days’ time
Me faltan/ quedan tres días para irme  ‘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 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’.
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36.6 ‘Again’

There are numerous ways of translating ‘again’:

(a) \textit{Volver a} . . . plus an infinitive. This is probably the most usual construction before a verb:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Han vuelto a hacerlo} \hspace{1cm} \textit{They’ve done it again}
\item \textit{Cuando cerró la puerta volví a llorar} \hspace{1cm} \textit{When he shut the door, I started crying again}
\item \textit{Como me vuelvas a hablar de esa manera . . .} \hspace{1cm} \textit{If you talk to me like that again . . .}
\end{itemize}

(b) \textit{Otra vez}:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{No te lo digo otra vez/No te lo vuelvo a decir/No vuelvo a decírtelo} \hspace{1cm} \textit{I won’t tell you again}
\item \textit{Otra vez más vuelve a subir la bencina} \hspace{1cm} \textit{Petrol/US Gas price up again}
\item \textit{Se habían revocado los acuerdos y Ahumada era otra vez presidente del Congreso} \hspace{1cm} \textit{The agreements had been revoked and Ahumada was president of Congress again}
\end{itemize}

(c) \textit{De nuevo} is more literary than \textit{otra vez}:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{De nuevo volvieron las suspicacias y los recelos} \hspace{1cm} \textit{Once again suspicion and distrust returned}
\item \textit{Esperemos que EE.UU. después no quiera meterse de nuevo en todo (La Razón, Bol.)} \hspace{1cm} \textit{Let us hope that the USA won’t want to interfere in everything again}
\end{itemize}

36.7 \textit{Tardar}

\textit{Tardar}, as well as meaning ‘to be late’ (\textit{no tardes} ‘don’t be late’), may translate ‘to take’ in expressions of time:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Tardó un año en escribirnos} \hspace{1cm} \textit{(S)he took a year to write to us/(S)he didn’t write to us for a year}
\item \textit{Poco tardaron en vengarse (Crónica, Arg.)} \hspace{1cm} \textit{They soon got their own back}
\item \textit{Se tarda media hora andando} \hspace{1cm} \textit{It takes half an hour to walk it}
\item \textit{Cuánto tardaste, Mamá (JP, Mex., dialogue)} \hspace{1cm} \textit{You were such a long time Mother!}
\end{itemize}

\textbf{(1)} \textit{Llevar} may also be used in third-person expressions: \textit{eso te llevará horas} ‘that’ll take you hours’, \textit{me llevó días} ‘it took me days’; but \textit{el viaje duró varias horas} ‘the journey took several hours’. Note the difference between this third-person construction, i.e. \textit{les llevó tres años construir el puente} and \textit{tardaron tres años en construir el puente} ‘they took three years to build the bridge’. English-speakers tend to forget the \textit{en} in the second of these sentences.

This impersonal use of \textit{llevar} must not be confused with \textit{llevar} in phrases like \textit{lleva años cerrado} ‘t’s been closed for year’, \textit{llevó horas aquí} ‘I’ve been here for hours’. See 36.3.1.

\textbf{(2)} \textit{Tardarse} is heard in Mexico and no doubt elsewhere in Latin America: \textit{Carvajal se tardó en responder, traspiraba} (EM, Mex.) ‘Carvajal took time to answer; he was perspiring’, Sp. . . . \textit{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 quelquechose, 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)
Continuaban/Seguían viéndose
Pero ella sigue soltera (CF, Mex., dialogue)
Negó con firmeza su culpabilidad, como continuaría haciendo hasta el día del juicio (ES, Sp.)

You’ve realized that you’re still wearing
wearing your pyjama/US ‘pajama’ jacket
They went on seeing one another
But she’s still unmarried
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’ (MVLI, 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 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’.
Expressions of time

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

¿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 o’clock
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.

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)

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 NGLE 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
Hoy es lunes, martes, etc.
Hoy es el/estamos a 28 de marzo
—¿A cuántos estamos? ¿Qué fecha es hoy?
—(Estamos) a 17 de enero de 2019
Estamos a mediados/principios/finales/últimos/de mes
e l 5 del corriente (business language)
Saldremos el viernes 28 (veintiocho)
al/a mediodía
la semana pasada/el mes/el año pasado
Se casaron el 20 de julio pasado
Nació en (el mes de) abril del año pasado
al cabo de un año
a los cinco minutos quería irse
al día siguiente
de hoy en ocho días
ayer/anteayer

‘What day is it today?’ ‘Sunday’
Today’s Monday, Tuesday, etc.
Today’s the 28th of March
‘What’s the date today?’ ‘The 17th of January 2019’
We’re at the middle/beginning/end of the month
the 5th of this month
We’ll leave on Friday the 28th at midday
last week, month, year
They got married on the 20th of last July
(S)he was born in April last year
a year later
after 5 minutes (s)he wanted to leave
the following/next day
a week today
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’:

al año siguiente, el/al mes/la semana que viene (but que viene is not used with the months: el próximo mes de julio ‘next July’)
La próxima vez que nos veamos, te llevo tus mil quinientos dólares (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’.

Mi hermano tiene quince años
A los 15 años se mudó a La Habana
(Latina, New York)
—¿Cuántos años tienes? —Veinte (the word años can be omitted only when answering this question)
¿A qué edad andan los niños?
Acaba de cumplir los cincuenta años

My brother is fifteen
At fifteen she moved to Havana
‘How old are you?’ ‘I’m twenty’
At what age do children walk?
(S)he has just turned fifty
Andará por los cuarenta (años can be omitted)  (S)he must be around forty
Tiene sus sesenta años  (S)he’s a good sixty years old
un joven de quince años  a young man/youth of fifteen
¿Qué tiempo tiene?/¿Qué edad tiene?  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/ese
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)

Before a verb sino que must be used:

No sólo le creo sino que estoy dispuesto a ayudarle (GZ, Mex., dialogue)
No ponía, sino que arrojaba las tazas sobre la bandeja (CRG, Sp.)

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.)

(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 soporté, 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 apartaís, u os arañó (dialogue in a popular novel, Sp.) ‘I’m telling you, either you get out of my way or I’ll scratch you’.
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(2) *O* was often written with an accent when it appears alongside a digit so as to avoid confusion with zero: *4 0 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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dice que viene</td>
<td>(S)he says (that) (s)he’s coming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cree que no ha pagado</td>
<td>(S)he thinks (that) (s)he hasn’t paid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parece que va a llover</td>
<td>It seems (that) it’s going to rain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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’.
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

The idea that (s)he likes bullfighting is absurd (‘which’ impossible)

More examples:

Me desesperaba ante la idea de que mi madre debía morirse 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 . . .
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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/(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 seguro 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).
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
Conjunctions and discourse markers

¡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
va a por tu dinero (AGa, Sp., dialogue) money
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
te puede salir un balazo (MC, Mex., might let fly a bullet
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. Ah – so you’re the plumber then . . .
el plomero)
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., He asked you if dinner was ready
dialogue)
Yo me preguntó (que) dónde estará ella I wonder where she’s studying
estudiando
Uno de los jugadores me preguntó que si One of the players asked me if I wanted to
quería ser porrista del equipo de fut be a cheerleader for the American
americano (ES, Mex., dialogue. Porrista = football team
animadora and fut = fútbol in Spain)
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.)
No importa le tilden de bufón (popular press, Sp., better no importa que le tilden . . .)
Solicitan se les solucione la deuda que mantiene el Estado con ellos (La Prensa, Pan.), for solicitan que . . .
```

(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
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.)
```

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!
```

37.5 Causal conjunctions

The most common are:

```
porque because          en vista de que seeing that          puesto que because
ya que because/since   como as/since                  pues see 37.5.3
```
37.5.1 **Porqué**

*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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No saben porque llegaron tarde</th>
<th>They don’t know because they arrived late</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No saben por qué llegaron tarde</td>
<td>They don’t know <em>why</em> they arrived late</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Puesto que quieres que me quede, me quedo</th>
<th>Since you want me to stay, I’m staying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La reunión se aplazó en vista de que no vino casi nadie</td>
<td>The meeting was postponed since hardly anyone turned up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya que no tenía rivales . . . podía pasear a cualquier hora por cualquier lugar (EM, Mex.)</td>
<td>Since he had no rivals/competition, he could move around at any time anywhere</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Es de peor educación todavía insinuar que, como soy una mujer, se supone que no soy nadie (CRG, Sp., dialogue)</th>
<th>It’s even more ill-mannered to hint that, since I’m a woman, it’s assumed that I’m nobody</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Como se sentía cansado y no quería que le molestan les ordenó que escribieran una composición (SG, Mex.)</td>
<td>As he was feeling tired and didn’t want them to bother him, he told them [the schoolchildren] to write an essay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

—*No queremos comer ahora—. Pues, cuando ustedes quieran...* (or entonces/en ese caso)  
—*No lo sabía.—Pues ya lo sabes*  
—*No voy a encontrar ninguna tienda abierta—. Pues rompe las puertas* (RM, Mex., dialogue)  

‘We don’t want to eat now.’ ‘In that case, whenever you like...’  
‘I didn’t know.’ ‘Well, you do now’  
‘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:

—¿*En qué situación se encuentran las negociaciones entre los dos gobiernos?*  
—*Pues, el hecho es que no hay negociaciones*  

‘What is the state of the negotiations between the two governments?’ ‘Well, the fact is, there are no negotiations’
Conjunctions and discourse markers

—¿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):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{aunque} & \quad \text{although} \\
\text{bien que} & \quad \text{although} \\
y \text{eso que} & \quad \text{despite the fact that} \\
\text{así} & \quad \text{despite} \\
\text{por más que} & \quad \text{however much} \\
\text{si bien} & \quad \text{although} \\
\text{a pesar de que} & \quad \text{despite} \\
\text{por mucho que} & \quad \text{however} \\
\text{a despecho de que} & \quad \text{despite} \\
\text{y eso que} & \quad \text{despite the fact that} \\
\text{por mucho que} & \quad \text{however much} \\
\end{align*}
\]

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 esos 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’:

\[
\begin{align*}
\ldots & \text{y eso que no leo novelas eróticas (ABE, Pe.)} \\
\text{—Qué paz se respira aquí —dijo—} & \quad \text{‘It’s so peaceful here,’ she said. ‘Despite it}
Y eso que es el gran pueblo de la comarca— anoté (LS, Sp., dialogue) & \quad \text{being the main town in the region,’ I added}
Y eso que unos días antes del golpe había invitado a cenar a algunos de sus dirigentes . . . (JV, Mex.) & \quad \text{Despite the fact that a few days before the coup he’d invited some of its leaders to dinner . . .}
\end{align*}
\]

Si bien is used like y eso que to refer only to an established fact (i.e. it cannot refer to the future):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Si bien la lluvia es frecuente, el verano inglés es a menudo agradable} & \quad \text{Despite the fact that rain is frequent, the English summer is often pleasant}
\text{Si bien la guerra mundial había favorecido las exportaciones, una vez que esta/ésta concluyó todo se fue modificando (JA, Mex.)} & \quad \text{Although the World War had favoured exports, once the latter ended everything started changing}
\end{align*}
\]

(1) The usual word for ‘although’ is aunque, discussed at 20.4.10.
37.9 Subordinating conjunctions of result

37.9 Subordinating conjunctions of result

(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’):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>con tal (de) que</td>
<td>provided that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siempre que</td>
<td>provided that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a condición de</td>
<td>on condition that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siempre y cuando</td>
<td>provided that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bajo (la) condición de que</td>
<td>on condition that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mientras (no)</td>
<td>as long as</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a menos que</td>
<td>unless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a no ser que</td>
<td>unless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fuera de que</td>
<td>except</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excepto que</td>
<td>except</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salvo que</td>
<td>except</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>como no</td>
<td>lest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>para que</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de modo que</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a fin de que</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de manera que*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a que</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>con el objeto de que</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>porque</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de forma que*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) lest/in order that not . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no sea que . . .</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no fuera que . .</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ no fuese que .</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>de modo que</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de manera que</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de forma que</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>así que</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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.
Conjunctions and discourse markers

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:

- *a la vez que* at the same time as
- *a partir del momento en que* from the time that
- *a poco de que* shortly after
- *al mismo tiempo que* at the same time as
- *al poco rato de que* shortly after
- *antes de que* before
- *apenas* scarcely/as soon as
- *así que* as soon as
- *cada vez que* every time that
- *cuando* when
- *después de que* after
- *en cuanto* as soon as
- *hasta que* until
- *mientras* while
- *nada más que* as soon as
- *no bien* (que) as soon as
- *siempre que* whenever
- *tan pronto como* as soon as
- *una vez que* once/as soon as

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:

- *Es más, también se lo dije a su hermano* Moreover, I also told his brother
- *Además, mi mujer era mecanógrafa* (GCI, Cu., dialogue) Moreover, my wife was a typist
- *Encima/Para colmo no nos han dado el contrato* (encima here is colloquial) On top of everything they haven’t given us the contract
- *Por lo demás/Aparte de eso no tengo más que decirte* 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Phrase</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sin embargo a los extranjeros, y especialmente a los españoles, les gusta Montevideo (MB, Ur.)</td>
<td>Nevertheless foreigners, and especially Spaniards, like Montevideo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin embargo, cuando se le acababa el vermut iba corriendo a comprar otra botella (ES, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>However, when her vermouth finished she used to rush off to buy another bottle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empero, si para llegar a Marte tardamos 24 meses terrestres . . . (La Jornada, Mex.)</td>
<td>However, if it takes us 24 earth months to get to Mars . . .</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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,
Conjunctions and discourse markers

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):

 De modo/forma/manera que, como íbamos diciendo . . . 
 So, as we were saying . . .

 De forma que lo extraordinario se ha convertido en ordinario (MFÁ, Sp.)
 So the extraordinary has become ordinary

 Así que/O sea que, en lugar de dejarlo allí, te lo llevaste
 So/In other words, instead of leaving it there, you took it with you

 Conque lo que pasó fue eso . . .
 So that was what happened . . .

 —¿Conque libros de Che? (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 . . .’:

*En resumen, todo cuanto pueda hacerle ganar*  
In short, he’ll be extremely careful about

*en prestigio lo cuidará al máximo* (MFA, Sp.)  
anything that can make him gain prestige

*En resumen, las cifras de este año son*  
To sum up, this year’s figures are

*marcadamente superiores a las del año pasado*  
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:

*En fin, a mí me sigue pareciendo que es*  
Well, it still seems to me like Sherlock

*como si Sherlock Holmes resolviera sus*  
Holmes solving his cases by calling

*casos acudiendo a la Interpol* (JAM, Sp., dialogue)  
in Interpol

*En fin, lo que me estás diciendo es que no*  
OK/Right, what you’re telling me is

*has perdido el dinero sino que te lo has*  
that you haven’t lost the money but

*gastado*  
you’ve spent it

*Pero en fin, los padres de uno son los*  
But, after all, one’s parents are one’s parents

*padres de uno* (JJB, Mex., dialogue)

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.’”
Oye (oiga to a stranger or person held in special respect) is commonly used colloquially, above all in Spain, to reject an implication: 

\[ oye, \text{si ya lo he pagado}' (I'm telling you) I've already paid'. \]

It is constantly put at the end of statements in familiar speech (at least in Spain), \( (s) i \) ya lo 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?’

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!”

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.

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’.

\[ \text{Por otra parte is one equivalent of } \text{‘on the other hand’; por otra parte es posible pensar que tiene razón ‘on the other hand, it’s possible to think that (s)he’s right’}. \]

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.

\[ \text{(a) Por (lo) tanto, por lo consiguiente, en/como consecuencia all mean ‘as a result’ and are all typical of formal styles: por lo tanto, estamos ante otro instrumento de la Monarquía de los Austrías (MFA, Sp.) ‘here we have, therefore, another of the tools used by the (royal house of the) Austrías’, por lo consiguiente si en la Ciudad de México se redujera la polución, las visitas a los nosocomios disminuirían en mil 517 al año (La Jornada, Mex. Nosocomio, a Latin-American word for ‘hospital’. La contaminación is used for ‘pollution’ in Spain) ‘as a result, if pollution in Mexico City were reduced, hospital visits would drop by 1,517 a year’}. \]

\[ \text{(b) Por ende ‘hence’ is archaic, but is occasionally resurrected for stylistic effect. It could have replaced por consiguiente in the previous example, but the result would have sounded pompous.} \]

\[ \text{(c) De modo que, de forma que, así que, con que, can all also mean ‘hence’, ‘as a result’. They are discussed above at 37.11.6.} \]

\[ \text{(d) Por eso . . . ‘that’s why . . .’ is much used in everyday language in all styles: por eso las generalizaciones no sólo son absurdas y peligrosas, sino indefectiblemente inexactas (JM, Sp.) ‘that’s why generalizations are not only absurd and dangerous, they are also inevitably inaccurate’. Por esta razón ‘that’s why’ has the same meaning.} \]
Entonces, as well as meaning ‘then’ in the sense of ‘just after’, is much used to introduce a conclusion: ¿te gusto 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.

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.
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:

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<th>Preposition</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>mediante</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>tras, detrás de</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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, el 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’. *Let 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:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good Spanish</th>
<th>Compressed English equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>La casa que está en la colina es de mi madre</em> (or <em>la casa de la colina es . . .</em>)</td>
<td><em>The house on the hill is my mother’s</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>El avión que va a Lima ha salido ya</em> (or <em>el avión para Lima . . .</em>)</td>
<td><em>The plane to Lima has already left</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Los hombres de Ruritania son muy guapos</em></td>
<td><em>The men in Ruritania are very good-looking</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>El perro que está en el jardín es del vecino</em></td>
<td><em>The dog in the garden is the neighbour’s</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>la chica del tren/el hombre de negro</em></td>
<td><em>the girl on the train/the man in black</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>El hombre del Ford azul es mi tío</em></td>
<td><em>The man with the blue Ford is my uncle</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
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’:

- Fui al dentista: I went to the dentist
- Llegaron a Managua: They arrived in Managua
- Me subí al coche/al tren: I got into the car/train
- El gato se subió a un árbol: The cat climbed up a tree
- Lo pegó al/en el sobre: (S)he stuck it on the envelope
- Cuélgaselo al cuello: Hang it round his/her neck
- Me subí al coche/al tren: I got into the car/train
- Cayó al suelo/al mar: It fell onto the ground, into the sea
- una expedición a Marte/un viaje a la Luna: 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/voys 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 Cordoba’.

(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:

- Mira al suelo y no te entrará agua en los ojos: Look down at the floor and you won’t get water in your eyes
- Apunta a la bombilla: 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:

Vivo a la vuelta a orillas del mar
Olí pasos a mi espalda
Se pasa horas sentada al ordenador
Se arrodillé a los pies de la Virgen
Está con el agua al cuello

a la izquierda/derecha de

Se sentaron al sol/a la luz/al calor del fuego/a la sombra/al amparo de un roble

I live round the corner on the seashore
I heard footsteps at my back
She spends hours sitting at the computer
(S)he knelt at the feet of the Virgin
(S)he’s up to her/his neck (in troubles: hasta implies real water)
to the left/right of (cf. a diestra y siniestra ‘to right and left’, i.e. ‘on all sides’)
They sat in the sun/light/warmth of the fire/shade/in the shelter of an oak

But note:

Espérame en la parada del autobús
Se detuvo en el primer semáforo (MS, Mex.)
Mario está en el banco
Los niños están en el colegio
(cf. mi hijo todavía no va al colegio)
. . . para que el coche no estuviera tanto tiempo estacionado en la puerta
(GGM, Col. Refers to a horse-drawn carriage)

Wait for me at the bus stop
He stopped at the first traffic lights
Mario is at/in the bank
The children are in/at school
(my son isn’t at school yet)
. . . so the carriage wouldn’t be parked so long at the door

(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:

- a pie/a mano/a lápiz  
  on foot/by hand/in pencil
- a golpes/a tiros/a patadas  
  with blows/by shooting/with kicks
- Pedía socorro a gritos  
  (S)he/I was shouting for help
- un documento escrito a máquina  
  a typed document
- Las patatas están a punto  
  (Lat. Am. las papas)  
  The potatoes are done
- El servicio queda a voluntad del cliente  
  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**

- a las diez/a medianoche  
  at 10 o’clock/at midnight
- Se cansa a los cinco minutos  
  (S)he gets tired after five minutes
- Bonos del Estado a diez años  
  ten-year Government Bonds
- Se casaron a los/con veinte años  
  They got married at the age of twenty
- Estamos a miércoles/a quince  
  It’s Wednesday/the fifteenth
- tres veces al/por día  
  three times a day
- A su muerte se dividió el reino en tres partes  
  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**

- Me suena a cuento chino  
  It sounds like a tall story to me
- Esto sabe a pescado  
  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:
38.2 A 485

olla a presión/caldera a/de gas-oil
pressure cooker/oil-fired boiler
la televisión a colores, qué regalazo de bodas
colour TV, what a fantastic wedding
(ES, Mex., dialogue. Spain televisión en color)
present
un avión a/de dos motores
a twin-engine plane
un pantalón a rayas (or de rayas)
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

- a cuatrocientos pesos el metro
- at 400 pesos a metre
- ¿A cómo están las peras?
- How much are the pears?
- Volaba a más de dos mil kilómetros por hora
- It was flying at more than 2000 km per hour
- cambiar a razón de dos por uno
- to change at the rate of two for one
- Está a cinco manzanas (Lat. Am. cinco cuadras)
- It’s five blocks away
- a montones
- in heaps
- Trabaja a ratos/a veces
- (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:

Se aferraba al árbol/a una idea
(S)he clung to the tree/an idea
Aspiraba a hacerse médico
He was aiming to become a doctor
Acostumbraban (a) hacerlo
They habitually did it
Tienes que hacerte al trabajo
You have to get used to the work
Prefiero una vida mediocre a ser héroe
I prefer a mediocre life to being a hero
Me pude salvar agarrándome a/de un árbol
I managed to save myself by clinging to a tree
No hay otro igual a él
There is no other equal to him
Tenía el jersey liado en torno a la cintura
(S)he had his/her jersey tied round his/her waist
Tendían emboscadas al enemigo
They were laying ambushes for the enemy
Prepositions

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

love for one’s home country respect for authority

Insinué algo en el prólogo al libro de Lafaye . . . (OP, Mex., del possible)

I hinted something in the prologue to Lafaye’s book . . .

—¿Tiene usted miedo a volar? —Lo soporto

‘Are you scared of flying?’ ‘I can cope with it’

(JV, Mex., dialogue)

El culto al sol tendría sus ventajas

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 tienes 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

I gave 1,000 euros to my son

Le dije la verdad a la policía

I told the truth to the police

Me envió una carta a mí

(S)he sent me a letter

Le robaron una sortija a mi tía

They stole a ring from my aunt

Le compró un coche a su vecino

(S)he bought a car from his/her neighbour

una banda de traficantes de drogas, a los que aprehendieron trece kilos de cocaína

a gang of drug-dealers from whom they confiscated 13 kilos of cocaine

(La Vanguardia, Sp.)

Eso se lo oíste a tu padre

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’, reconoci 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:

Tuvo que comparecer ante el tribunal
. . . ante esto, se exhorta a la población a . . .
(Excélsior, Mex.)
Ellas presumían de parienta famosa ante
las otras viejas (MT, Sp.)
ante este dilema/insulto/problema
Ante todo, quisiera agradecer al organizador
México ante la Naciones Unidas . . .

(S)he had to appear before the court
. . . faced with/in view of this [air pollution]
the public is encouraged to . . .
They boasted to the other older women
of having famous female relatives
faced with this dilemma/insult/problem
Above all, I’d like to thank the organizer
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.

bajo las estrellas/la lluvia/ beneath the stars/in the rain
bajo tierra (or debajo de la tierra) underground
bajo los efectos de la anestesia under the effects of the anaesthetic
bajo la monarquía/la república/el socialismo 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

(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
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...
(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 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**  
  Provided you (pl.) do what I say everything will go well

- **Solo/sólo con pulsar una tecla el ordenador almacena los datos**  
  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 con que or with con plus a relative pronoun:

- **Con que me pagaran mis gastos me conformaría**  
  I’d be happy if they paid my expenses

- **Bastó con que ella me hiciera reír (LR, Col.)**  
  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**  
  We’re very excited about the prospect of a new government

- **Se puso enferma con paludismo/malaria** (or enfermó de, Lat. Am. se enfermó de)  
  She fell ill with/from malaria

- **Estoy en cama con gripe**  
  I’m in bed with the flu

- **Se mareó con el vaivén del tren**  
  (S)he felt nauseous because of the swaying of the train

- **Se alegró con/de la noticia del nacimiento de su nieto**  
  (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 con when the latter means ‘in opposition to’. It becomes **en contra de que** before a verb:

- **una campaña contra/en contra de la corrupción**  
  a campaign against corruption

- **Contra lo que creen algunos . . .**  
  Despite/Contrary to what some believe . . .
Apoya tu pala contra el árbol  
Lean/Prop your spade against the tree  
Lanzó la piedra contra el árbol  
(S)he threw the stone at the tree  
inyectarse contra la gripe/la rabia  
(not *inyectarse para . . .)  
¿Está usted en contra de que lo hagan ellos?  
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  
the car number plate/US license plate  
la moto de Felipe  
Felipe’s motorbike  
el primero/uno de mayo  
the first of May  
¿De quién es esto?  
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  
a swimsuit  
un reloj de pulsera  
a wristwatch  
lavación de trabajo  
the workstation  
la tecla de desplazamiento  
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  
I’m from Mexico  
un ser de otro planeta  
a being from another planet  
un vino de solera  
a vintage wine  
un dolor de cabeza  
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’

- una estatua de oro macizo: a solid gold statue
- una base de datos: a database
- una impresora de inyección de tinta: an ink-jet printer
- Este yogur es de leche de oveja: 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*, *poeema*:

- Se queja mucho del frío: (S)he complains a lot about the cold
- ¿Podría hablarnos de su experiencia allí? (JV, Mex., dialogue): Could you tell us about your experience there?
- Hablan mucho de ti (n.b. not *sobre ti*): They’re talking about you a lot
- ¿De qué va la cosa?: 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’

- Las naranjas de dos euros son las mejores: The two-euro oranges are the best
- Han comprado un coche de diez mil dólares: They’ve bought a 10,000 dollar car

### 38.8.7 Emotions arising from something

- Tengo miedo del/al agua: I’m afraid of the water
- Pero tenía miedo de que la policía lo viera (GZ, Mex.): But he was scared the police would see him
- el respeto de/a/por los derechos humanos: respect for human rights
- Me da pena de él: I’m sorry for him
- un fan de los videojuegos: a fan of computer games
- la obsesión del/por/con el golf: 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
(As a child I really used to like sewing

Trabajó dos meses de camarero
(He worked as a waiter for two months

Tú aquí estás de más
(You’re not needed here

Vi a una criada de blanco paseando al niño
(I saw a maid in white out walking the child

Salió vestida de pirata (ES, Mex., dialogue), una chica joven de vaqueros y chaqueta de hombre (CMG, Sp.)
She appeared [on stage] dressed as a pirate a young girl in jeans and a man’s jacket

enfermo de bronquitis
sick with/from bronchitis

loco de alegría
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.)
The sewing basket almost won’t shut because it’s so full

De puro ansioso, Javier había bostezado
(Javier was so anxious that he yawned

(MB, Ur.)

Me sudaban las manos de los puros nervios
My hands were sweating from sheer nerves

(ES, Mex., dialogue)

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
a man aged forty

Esta soga tiene tres metros de largo
This rope is three metres long

una barra de memoria de 16 gigas
a sixteen-gigabyte memory stick

Tiene más de seiscientos metros de profundidad
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* | His/Her excuses aren’t to be believed |
| *Su veracidad no es muy de recomendarse* | One can’t recommend his truthfulness |
| *(JJA, Mex., dialogue)* | 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* | *(S)he took her by the hand/(S)he was pulling my sleeve* |
| *El profesor lo/le asió de una oreja* | The teacher grabbed him by an ear |
| * . . . la fotografía del viejo y de doña Carolina, muy jóvenes, tomados de la mano* *(GZ, Mex.)* | . . . 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* | accompanied by his wife |
| *un viejo acompañado de un perro* *(MB, Ur.)* | an old man accompanied by a dog |
| *un cuento de Borges* | 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)  She makes delicious, really filling stews

_Es hombre de poco comer/que come poco_  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  **Dequeísimo**

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:

Desde/De nuestro balcón se divisa la cima

Desde aquí el camino es muy bueno

He venido andando desde el/del centro

Y entonces una soga lo atrapó desde atrás

(JC, Arg.)

Desde hoy/A partir de hoy/De hoy en adelante tienen que llegar a tiempo

Los tenemos desde/de cincuenta pesos hasta doscientos

Desde siempre oí que ella era perfecta

(AM, Mex., dialogue)

From our balcony one can make out the summit

From here the road is very good

I’ve walked all the way from the centre

Then he was caught from behind by a rope

From today you must arrive on time

We have them from 50 pesos to 200

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’).
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’.

*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.

*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*.

*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’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tus camisas están en el cajón</td>
<td>Your shirts are in the drawer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuelga el cuadro en la pared</td>
<td>Hang the picture on the wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dio unos golpes discretos en la puerta</td>
<td>(S)he tapped discreetly on/at the door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La llave está en la puerta</td>
<td>The key’s in the door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gasto mucho dinero en juegos de azar</td>
<td>I spend a lot of money on gambling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . sentado a/en una mesa (see note 1)</td>
<td>. . . sitting at a table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nos bajamos en la próxima parada</td>
<td>We’re getting out at the next stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El agua ha penetrado en las vigas</td>
<td>The water has soaked into the joists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uno de mis pendientes se me ha caído</td>
<td>One of my earrings fell off in the water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en el agua (see note 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propusieron convertirlo en sanatorio</td>
<td>They suggested turning it into a sanatorium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en otoño/primavera/1924</td>
<td>in autumn/spring/1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En las mañanas salíamos a montar a</td>
<td>In the mornings we used to go riding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caballo (AM, Mex., Sp. por las mañanas)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todavía está en proyecto</td>
<td>It’s still at the planning stage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Te da ciento y raya en latín  
(S)he’s miles better than you in Latin
Deja un mensaje en mi buzón de voz  
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  
The rate was fixed at 1.93 to the dollar
Lo vendieron en/por un millón de euros
(‘is more usual’)
I thought better of you
Te tenía en más estima  
The progress achieved in this investigation can be reckoned at/as zero
El progreso logrado en esta investigación
. . . superar en cuatro a uno
. . . to be four times greater
Me lo presupuestaron en cien mil
They gave me an estimate of 100,000 for it
El gobierno congeló el precio de la masa en veinticinco centavos (JA, Mex.)
The Government froze the price of [tortilla] dough at 25 centavos
Lo/Le conocí en el andar

38.11.3 *En* in a number of adverbial phrases

Lo tomaron en serio  
They took it/him seriously
en mangas de camisa/en cueros/en (or de) broma/en balde
in shirtsleeves/naked/as a joke/
En fila/en seguida (or enseguida)
pointlessly
Eslo en contra
in a row/straight away
Ve tú en mi representación (ABV, Sp., dialogue)
I’m against
Soy el primero en reconocerlo
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  
I thought about you a lot
Se fijó en él
(S)he noticed him
Tardaron en reparar el coche
They took time to repair the car

Also quedar en ‘to agree to’, vacilar/dudar en ‘to hesitate over’, empezarse/insistir/obstinar en ‘to insist on’, abdicar en ‘to abdicate in favour of’, interesarse en/por ‘to be interested in’, ser el primero/únano 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
- . . . constantemente entre la excitación y la depresión (MVM, Sp.)
- Cuestan entre mil y dos mil
- entre tú/usted y yo . . . (See 38.12.5 note 1)
- Entre todos rehabilitaremos Madrid (poster)
- . . . trozos de una novela rosa que fuimos escribiendo entre las dos (CMG, Sp.)
- Tuvieron que separarla del cadáver entre dos enfermeras (ES, Mex., dialogue)

We were between the sword and the wall (i.e. had our backs to the wall)
. . . constantly between excitement and depression
They cost between one and two thousand between you and me . . .
Between us all we’ll modernize Madrid
. . . bits of a romantic novel we were writing between the two of us
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
- La perdí de vista entre la muchedumbre
- . . . entre el ruido de la lluvia se escuchaba el ladrido de los perros (LS, Ch.)
- Entre la niebla se percibía una masa inquieta (LMD, Sp.)
- Vimos a varios soldados escondidos entre la hierba (EP, Mex.)

(S)he lived among the Bedouins
I lost sight of her in the crowd
. . . and through/above the noise of the rain the barking of the dogs was heard
A shifting mass/shape could be seen in/through the fog
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)
- Es más fácil que dos personas vivan en armonía cuando se respetan entre sí
- Enseguida notamos el recelo manifiesto que se dispensan entre sí (EL, Arg.
  One can also write *en seguida*)
- La idea del nuevo presidente era hacer que los dos polos políticos se enfrentaran entre sí (JA, Mex.)

They speak Spanish among themselves
It’s easier for two people to live in harmony when they respect one another
We immediately noticed the obvious distrust they felt for one another
The new president’s idea was to get the two opposing political extremes to clash with one another
Entre los niños y el estruendo de los albañiles, me estoy volviendo loca entre pitos y flautas . . .

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 children and the din of the builders, I’m going crazy what with one thing and another . . . (lit. ‘what with whistles and flutes’) What with the pressure from the trade unions . . . and the complaints from the palace milieu, Isabel [Perón] fell ill

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’.

Hacia

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

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
(Anota 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 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’:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Llevo el abrigo por/a causa de mi madre} & \quad \text{I’m wearing this coat because of my mother (i.e. she’ll be worried if I don’t)} \\
\text{Llevo este abrigo para/a mi madre} & \quad \text{I’m taking this coat to my mother} \\
\text{Han llegado por ti} & \quad \text{They’ve come to get you/they’ve come because of you/instead of you} \\
\text{Han venido estos paquetes para ti} & \quad \text{These parcels have come for you} \\
\text{Lo has conseguido por mí} & \quad \text{You’ve got it through/thanks to me} \\
\text{Lo has conseguido para mí} & \quad \text{You’ve got it for me}
\end{align*}
\]

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.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Una mesa para dos, por favor} & \quad \text{A table for two, please} \\
\text{Para hacer login hay que teclear la contraseña} & \quad \text{To log in you have to enter the password} \\
\text{Viniste para espiarnos, ¿verdad?} & \quad \text{You came to spy on us, didn’t you?} \\
\text{(MC, Mex., dialogue)} & \\
\text{Un coche hecho para durar} & \quad \text{A car made to last (advert., Sp.)} \\
\text{Estudia para médico} & \quad \text{(S)he’s studying to become a doctor} \\
\text{Mañana te daré instrucciones para que nos entregues el dinero} & \quad \text{I’ll give you instructions tomorrow (EM, Mex., dialogue)} \\
& \quad \text{so you can hand over the money to us}
\end{align*}
\]

(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’, fuí 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.)

(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
Prepositions

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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 (S)he was muttering to himself/herself

Murmuraba para/entre sí


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 y cinco la semana que viene (EA, Sp., dialogue)

Well, I’m going to be thirty-five next week

(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/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

Lleva 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
  - We couldn’t go out because of the snow
- la razón por la que me voy
  - the reason for my leaving
- muchas gracias por el regalo
  - many thanks for the present
- todo por un arranque de genio . . .
  - all because of a fit of anger . . .
- Te ha pasado por dejado
  - It happened to you because you’re careless
- Se creía en la gloria por llevar un remendado vestido de novia
  - (just) because she was wearing a patched-up wedding dress
- El profesor la calificó con un cero por no saber la lección (MP, Arg.)
  - The teacher gave her a zero because she didn’t know the lesson
- Liquidación por cierre
  - Closing-down sale

*Por* may therefore indicate the origin or inspiration of an emotion or mental state:

- La admiro por su generosidad
  - I admire her for her generosity
- nuestro amor por/hacia/a nuestros hijos
  - our love for our children
- Era famoso por mandón y arrogante (JA, Mex.)
  - He was notoriously bossy and arrogant
- Tu mamá se desmaya por todo (EM, Mex., dialogue)
  - Your mother faints over everything
- No por previsible la foto anual dejaba de ser un acontecimiento excepcional (EL, Arg.)
  - 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)
  - We were attacked by the police
- La catedral fue diseñada por Gaudí
  - 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* (ES, 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  
The alarm works by infra-red rays
el tratamiento por/con rayos X (equis)  
Treatment by X-rays
un coche que marcha por/con/a hidrógeno  
a car running on hydrogen
La televisión por cable tiene 16 millones de  
subscriptores (La Jornada, Mex.)  
Cable TV has 16 million subscribers
[el Buda] enseñaba la aniquilación del  
dolor por la aniquilación del deseo (JLB, Arg.)  
[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  
I voted in favour of your book getting  
the prize
¿Estás tú por la no violencia?  
Do you support non-violence?
Encuentro de Escritores por la Paz  
Conference of Writers for Peace
Es senador por Massachusetts  
He’s Senator for Massachusetts
Aprendió a tocar el piano por sí misma/ella sola  
She learned to play the piano by herself
Está por ti  
(S)he finds you attractive

38.17.5 *Por* = exchange for, substitute for, distribution per

Te lo cambiarán por uno nuevo  
They’ll change it for a new one for you
Ahora daría lo que no tengo por oírla  
Now I’d give everything I haven’t got  
to hear her
Te han dado gato por liebre  
They’ve served you cat for hare (i.e.  
swindled you)
¿Por quién me toma usted?  
Who do you take me for?
Lo doy por supuesto/sentado  
I take it for granted
Él dará la clase por mí  
He’ll give the class instead of me
Comes por tres  
You eat enough for three people
tres raciones por persona  
three helpings/servings per person
cien kilómetros por hora  
100 km an hour
40 horas a la/por semana (a is more usual)  
40 hours a week
la media anual por español  
the annual average per Spaniard
El dos por ciento es protestante/son protestantes  
Two per cent are Protestants
Fueron entrando uno por uno  
They came in one by one

38.17.6 *Por* in expressions of price and amounts of money

un cheque por/de cien dólares  
a cheque/US check for 100 dollars
Compró una casa por un millón de dólares  
(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’. NGLE 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 numerous verbs which must be learned separately, e.g.

- afanarse *por* to strive to
- apurarse *por* to get anxious about
- asustarse *por/de* to 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* to 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* It must have been some time in May
- por aquellos días in those days/during those days
- Por esa época la mayoría de los países sudamericanos estaban gobernados por military dictatorships
- dictaduras militares (QSM, Arg.)

(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 They’ve cancelled their Latin-American tour
- Había muchos libros desparramados por el suelo There were many books scattered over the floor
- Oye, ¿me das crema *por/en* la espalda? Could you please put cream on my back?
- Es duro *por fuera pero por dentro es blando* 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 I saw her in the street
- Creo que las mujeres *andan* por Europa I think the women are somewhere in Europe
- (MB, Ur., dialogue)
- Debe de estar *por el jardín* It must be somewhere in the garden
- Yo no sabía *por dónde empezar* 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
to breathe through the mouth
Entró por la puerta/la ventana
(S)he came through the door/window
Se cayó por la escalera
(S)he fell down the stairs
Salía agua por el/del grifo
Water was coming out of the tap
El tren pasó por/a través del túnel
The train went through the tunnel
por/vía Madrid
through/via Madrid

(e) In conjunction with adverbs of place, to denote direction or whereabouts:
por aquí
this way/around here
por delante/detrás
in front/from behind
por entre
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?
What have you come for?
¿Por qué has venido?
Why have you come?
Estoy aquí para/por verlo/le
I’ve come to see him
Ella le habría vendido el alma al Diablo
She’d have sold her soul to the Devil to
por casarse con él (GGM, Col.)
marry him
... mientras no se resignara a la decadencia
... as long as she didn’t resign herself to a
física o hiciera algo por evitarla (ES, Mex.)
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tengo muchas cosas por/sin hacer</td>
<td>I have a lot of things still to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tengo muchas cosas para/que hacer (que is more usual)</td>
<td>I have many things to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estoy por hacerlo</td>
<td>I feel inclined to do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estoy (aquí) para hacerlo</td>
<td>I’m here in order to do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estaba para hacerlo (Lat. Am. por)</td>
<td>I was about to do it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 mi/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 (CGR, 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 sinúmero/sinfín ‘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
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):**

- Llegaremos sobre las cinco de la tarde  
  We’ll arrive around 5 p.m.
- Tenía sobre veinte años (unos 20 años is more usual)  
  (S)he was about twenty
- Costó sobre cien mil (= unos/unas 100.000)  
  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:**

- Las puertas se mueven sobre bisagras  
  Doors turn on hinges
- Dio media vuelta sobre el pie izquierdo  
  (S)he did a half-turn on her/his left foot
- Júpiter da una vuelta sobre sí mismo cada diez horas  
  Jupiter rotates on its axis every ten hours

(e) **Superiority or precedence ‘over’**:

- El triunfo del partido sobre la izquierda  
  The party’s victory over the Left
- Sobre todo, quisiera agradecer a mi mujer . . .  
  . . . Above all, I would like to thank my wife . . .
- Y, sobre cualquier escrúpulo, estaba mi hijo (AG, Sp., dialogue)  
  And over and above any scruples was my [still unborn] child
- El crecimiento, en términos reales, supera el 50% sobre enero de 1983 (El País, Sp.)  
  In real terms, the growth in exports is 50% higher than January 1983
- No les gustó para nada el gravamen sobre ganancias excedentes (JA, Mex.)  
  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:

- Dos siluetas deformes se destacaron tras el vidrio esmerilado (LG, Sp.)  
  Two distorted outlines loomed through/behind the frosted glass
- un generoso proyecto tras el cual se esconden intenciones menos altruistas  
  a generous project behind which less generous intentions lurk
- Me oculté tras el marco de la puerta (GC, Cu.)  
  I hid behind the door frame
- Una banda de gaviotas venía tras el barco  
  A flock of gulls was following the boat
- La cola de pasajeros formada tras ella la empujó hacia la puerta (ES, Mex.)  
  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**:

- Así, tras de los duros años de 1936 a 1939 (Sp., popular press; usually simply **tras**)  
  . . . So, after the hard years between 1936 and 1939 . . .
It was badly damaged after the 1985 earthquake in Mexico.

(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 38.1.4: ‘*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*
  - *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
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)
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
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>el que</td>
<td>los que</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>el cual</td>
<td>los cuales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cuyo</td>
<td>cuyos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>la que</td>
<td>las que</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>la cual</td>
<td>las cuales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cuya</td>
<td>cuyas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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’.
Relative clauses and relative pronouns

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restrictive relative clauses</th>
<th>Non-restrictive relative clauses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t buy a car that has faulty brakes</td>
<td>In some states there are rattle-snakes, which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You should read books that make you laugh</td>
<td>are poisonous and dangerous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>those students who passed the exam</em></td>
<td>I love daffodils, which are my favourite flower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . only those men who are blond</td>
<td>the people of Iraq, who mostly speak Arabic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 H₂O’.

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*.

(b) A relative pronoun cannot be omitted in Spanish: ‘the plane I saw’ = *el avión que* (yo) *víd*. 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 avoid 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'The storks that made their nest in the bell-tower last year have returned'</td>
<td>Han vuelto las cigüeñas que hicieron su nido en el campanario el año pasado (not *las cigüeñas han vuelto que . . .)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'More than 900,000 Mexicans who were living in the USA have returned to the country'</td>
<td>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)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'the experts who got it wrong'</td>
<td>los expertos que se equivocaron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'the leaves that were falling from the branches'</td>
<td>las hojas que caían de las ramas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'the book (that) I bought yesterday'</td>
<td>el libro que compré ayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'the nurses (that/who(m)) they hired last year'</td>
<td>las enfermeras que contrataron el año pasado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'She told him constantly that he was different'</td>
<td>Le decía a cada momento que era diferente a todos los hombres que había conocido</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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): *lluvía 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):
Relative clauses and relative pronouns

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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 . . . . .’ 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 alguien 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fueron a hablar con José, que/quien/el cual estaba de buen humor</td>
<td>They went to talk to José, who was in a good mood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>los Líderes Agropecuarios del Grupo Cairns, el cual incluye 18 países exportadores (advert., Arg.)</td>
<td>the leaders in Agriculture and Fisheries in the Cairns Group, which includes 18 exporting countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recibió la inesperada visita de su madre, la cual ahora se hacía llamar Rachel Smith (JV, Mex.)</td>
<td>He received the unexpected visit from his mother, who was now calling herself Rachel Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . algunos miembros del Consejo Nacional del PAN, quienes indignados comentaron . . . (AH, Mex.)</td>
<td>. . . some members of the National Council of the National Action Party, who remarked indignantly . . .</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Only que can be used after personal pronouns: yo que me preocupo tanto por ti . . . ‘I who worry so much about you . . . . .’ 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’.</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(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 alguien 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’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(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).</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) For non-human antecedents (see Glossary): el que or el cual:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la amenaza de guerra bajo la que vivimos</td>
<td>the threat of war we’re living under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la puerta tras la que se escondió</td>
<td>the door behind which (s)he hid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . comunicados en los que se recuerda la ilegalidad de las acciones propuestas (Abc, Sp.)</td>
<td>. . . communiqués recalling the illegality of the actions proposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . una parte de su memoria . . . a la cual recurrió con cada vez menos frecuencia (JV, Mex.)</td>
<td>. . . a part of his memory . . . which he accessed less and less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . como si fuera alguna enfermedad contra la cual había que vacunarse (EP, Mex.)</td>
<td>. . . as if it were some illness one had to get vaccinated against</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(b) **For human antecedents:** el que, quien (or el cual). *Quien* is slightly more formal than *el que*:

- **Hay gente con la que la vida se ensaña** (AM, Mex., or con quien or con la cual)
- **Todo el mundo sabe que el tipo al que detuvieron es un chivo expiatorio** (MS, Mex., dialogue)
- **el chico del que hablo/el chico de quien hablo**

There are people that life has it in for

Everyone knows the guy they arrested is a scapegoat

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 44.3o* 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:

- *la discriminación a que están sometidas* la discriminación which our fruits
- *nuestras frutas y hortalizas* and vegetables are subject to
- *los litros de tónico capilar con que se bañaba la cabeza cada día* the litres of hair tonic he bathed his
- *la generosidad de que hace alarde* head with every day
- *la aspereza con que la trataba* the harshness (s)he boasts about
- *la aspereza con que la trataba* 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 *a* 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’:

```
the human desert she was lost in
el desierto humano en que ella estaba perdida

I’d like to live in a place where there were no cars
Me gustaría vivir en un sitio en que/donde no hubiera/hubiese coches

the rational forms on which social life is based
las formas racionales en que se basa la vida social

The play she’s in is called ‘My Best Girlfriend’ (lit. ‘Soul Girl’)
La obra en que sale se llama Muchacha del alma

She had really good days on which she was generous and good-humoured
Tenía días estupendos en que era desprendida y jovial
```

(c) After periods of time. After *día, semana, mes, año, momento* the *en* is also often omitted.

```
the day I saw you
el día que te vi

the only day on which any important differences were recorded was Thursday
el único día que se produjeron diferencias de importancia fue el jueves

the month it rained so much
durante los meses que estuvo Edwards en Cuba en los meses que estuvo Edwards en Cuba

Then, during the few days he was with Pancho Villa’s troops
Luego, en los pocos días que anduvo con la tropa villista Luego, en los pocos días que anduvo con la tropa villista
```

(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’:

```
the argument according to which . . .
el argumento según el cual . . .

that accursed theological temptation that
esa maldita tentación teológica que tienen los críticos literarios . . . según la cual los textos son como versiones actualizadas de la Biblia (JV, Mex.) esa maldita tentación teológica que tienen los críticos literarios . . . según la cual los textos son como versiones actualizadas de la Biblia (JV, Mex.)

literary critics suffer from according to which texts are like updated versions of the 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.:
... professional training whereby middle-grade government employees will be equipped to...

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.

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:
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) the Constituent Assembly, whose members would be elected in December
la luz, cuya velocidad se mantiene constante sin importar desde donde se la observe (JV, Mex.) light, whose speed remains constant regardless of from where it is observed
. . . un volumen en inglés cuyo título he olvidado (JM, Sp.) . . . 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/esa?

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.
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.

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:

- en casa de una mujer que yo vivía con ella (con la que yo vivía) in the house of a woman I was living with
- Te acuerdas del hotel que estuvimos el año pasado? ( . . . en el que estuvimos . . . ) Do you remember the hotel we stayed in last year?
- Soy un emigrante que siempre me han preocupado los problemas de la emigración (i.e. . . . al que siempre han preocupado los problemas . . . ) 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.

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*.

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.

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**

*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’:

- Lo recogí en la calle donde te vi I picked it up in the street where I saw you
- Perquín, la ciudad donde impera la limpieza Perquin, the city where cleanliness rules
- Ese/Ese es el cajón de donde sacó los papeles That’s the drawer (s)he took the papers from
- la Cámara de Diputados, donde la izquierda tenía mayoría 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* (EM, 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 debian 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 *cuidate 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 Fígaro . . . 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 . . .’

(l) 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 cuando 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 . . .)  
Traiga otro plato, que no me gusta comer en los platos en los que han comido otros (spoken language; not *los en los que)

(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)  
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)  
¿Cómo se explica el fenómeno singular que fue la victoria de los liberales? el espectáculo conmovedor que son las ruinas de Machu Picchu

We’ve yet to know what conditions (s)he’s in  
‘ ‘ ‘  
Depending on what cinema you go to  
It was the smallest room I’ve ever been in  
‘ ‘ ‘  
How does one explain the singular phenomenon of the liberals’ victory? the moving spectacle of the Machu Picchu ruins
Relative clauses and relative pronouns

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haz lo que quieras</td>
<td>Do whatever you like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necesitamos a alguien que esté en el local</td>
<td>We need somebody who’ll be on the spot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cualquier reacción que uno pueda tener suena a sobreactuado (CRG, Sp.)</td>
<td>Any reaction one might have sounds like overacting/sounds overdone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Sabes de alguien que tenga apellido en este país? (ES, Arg., dialogue)</td>
<td>Do you know anyone in this country who has a surname (i.e. a famous name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dígame qué tienen que esté muy sabroso (JI, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>Tell me what you’ve got that tastes really good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Has traído todos los libros que nos hagan falta? (... nos hacen falta suggests that you have certain books in mind)</td>
<td>Have you brought all the books we may need?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buscó una zona donde el mar llegara debilitado (MVM, Sp.)</td>
<td>He looked for an area where the sea was coming in with less force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iremos a donde tú decidas (JV, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>We’ll go anywhere you decide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 | Anyone who sees you will think you’re going to a party |
| El obstáculo más inmediato para quienquiera que esté en el poder es recuperar la gobernabilidad de este país fracturado | 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 | There is no one who can play more than one violin at the same time |
| Jamás la oí hablar de algo que mereciera la pena (SP, Sp., dialogue) | I never heard her talk about anything worthwhile |
| ¿Sabes algo que yo no sepa? (EM, Mex., dialogue) | Do you know something I don’t know? |
| ¿A quiénes conoces que se vean feas esperando un hijo? (AM, Mex., dialogue; se vean = estén in Spain) | 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:
Relative clauses and relative pronouns

**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* = the greatest fire ever seen
- *la mayor transacción con divisas fuertes que se haya hecho en el Río de la Plata* (ES, Arg.) = the largest hard-currency transaction ever made in the River Plate region
- *lo más hermoso que haya visto en mi miserable vida* (EM, Mex., dialogue) = 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* = You’re the most likeable girl I’ve ever met
- *Yo debía ser el extranjero más inteligente que Madame Forestier había visto en su vida* (ABE, Pe.) = I must have been the most intelligent foreigner Madame Forestier had seen in her life
- *Dijo que era la mayor barbaridad que a nadie se le había ocurrido (or hubiera/hubiese)* = (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 comprend le chinois = es la única persona que entiende chino* ‘she’s the only person who understands Chinese’.
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

Así que eres la de la droguería . . . (SP, Sp., dialogue)

Espera cotejar el ADN de los restos hallados con los del familiar enterrado (Granma, Cu.)

Sus manos parecían las de otro hombre

(EP, Mex.)

la industria del petróleo y la del carbón

Of the students, the fourth-year are the best
‘Who’s come?’ ‘The same women/girls as usual’

So you’re the girl from the drugstore . . .

She hopes to compare the DNA from the remains discovered with those of the buried family member

His hands looked like those of another man

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
Nominalizers

(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 Maria’ 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* (CMG, Sp.)
*De lo de la abuela poco les debe quedar* (La Jornada, Mex.)
*Eso es lo de menos* (ABE, Pe.)
*Todo lo del maldito telegrama se me vino a la memoria* (ABE, Pe.)
*¿Le cuento lo de los otros tres novios?* (ES, Mex., dialogue)

(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 decile 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/elles qui/que*). It agrees in number and gender with the noun it replaces:

*la que está fuera* (EP, Mex., dialogue)
*el que llegó ayer* (JM, Sp., dialogue)
*los que dicen eso* (AM, Mex., dialogue)
*Pobre de la que se case contigo* (EP, Mex., dialogue)
*Yo no soy el que fui* (JM, Sp., dialogue)
*Me atraján las que le tuvieron cariño, las que incluso le parieron hijos* (AM, Mex., dialogue)

(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*):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish expression</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Lo que más me gusta es cuando haces versos</em> (CMG, Sp., dialogue)</td>
<td>What I like best is when you make up verses/poems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Octavia, un hombre es lo que siente</em> (ABE, Pe., dialogue)</td>
<td>Octavia, a man is what he feels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cruzaron lo que parecía un pueblo fantasma</em> (MS, Mex.)</td>
<td>They passed through what seemed like a ghost town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Se prolonga todo lo que da de sí la vista</em></td>
<td>It stretches as far as the eye can see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Me pasa lo que a ti</em></td>
<td>The same thing’s happening to me as to you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish expression</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Quien/El que diga eso es un cobardé</em> (quien is slightly more literary)</td>
<td>The person who says that is a coward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Quienes/Los que no estén de acuerdo, que se vayan</em></td>
<td>Anyone not in agreement should go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Quien no es mala persona es el sargento</em></td>
<td>Someone who’s not a bad guy is the sergeant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>El coronel no tiene quien le escriba</em> (GGM, Col.; el que impossible here)</td>
<td>The colonel has no one to write to him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Escuchaba sin oír las conversaciones de quienes se cruzaban con nosotros</em> (SP, Sp.)</td>
<td>He listened absent-mindedly (lit. ‘without hearing’) to the conversations of the people walking past us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>No saludaba a personas que no eran quienes decían ser</em> (CF, Mex.)</td>
<td>He didn’t say hello to people who weren’t who they claimed to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cada quien tiene sus ritos</em> (AM, Mex.)</td>
<td>Everyone has different rites/rituals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple sentence</th>
<th>Cleft sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The fire started here</td>
<td>It was here that the fire started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This is where the fire started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Here was where the fire started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John said it</td>
<td>It was John who said it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John was/is the one who said it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The one who said it was/is John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I cut it with this knife</td>
<td>It was this knife I cut it with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This is the knife I cut it with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This knife is the one I cut it with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like sausages</td>
<td>What I like is sausages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sausages are what I like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I realized then</td>
<td>It was then that I realized</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*. 
Cleft sentences

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Es este libro <em>el que</em> compré</td>
<td>It’s this book that I bought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Este libro es <em>el que</em> compré</td>
<td>This book’s the one that I bought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fueron esas chicas <em>las quel/quieres</em> lo hicieron</td>
<td>They were the girls who did it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esas chicas fueron <em>las quel/quieres</em> lo hicieron</td>
<td>Those girls were the ones who did it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esto es <em>lo que</em> más rabia me da</td>
<td>This is what makes me most furious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lo que</em> más rabia me da es esto</td>
<td>What makes me most furious is this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porque nunca es ella la que aporta el dinero</td>
<td>Because it’s never her who brings in the money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eres tú el que no me entiende</td>
<td>You’re the one who doesn’t understand me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(JMa, Sp., dialogue)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nosotros nos ocupamos de él. <em>Es él quien no sabe ocuparse de sí mismo</em></td>
<td>We look after him. He’s the one who can’t look after himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(CF, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>El pelaje overo es el que prefieren los ángeles</em> (JLB, Arg.)</td>
<td>Lamb’s fleece is the one that angels prefer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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* ‘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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sp. <em>Es desde esta ventana desde donde se ve el mar; Lat. Am. . . desde esta ventana que se ve el mar</em></td>
<td>It’s from this window that you can see the sea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
41.3 Cleft sentences involving prepositions or adverbs

(c) 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 (MVLI, 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?

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 fio ‘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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Sentence</th>
<th>Cleft Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desde esta ventana es desde donde se ve el mar</td>
<td>This window is where you can see the sea from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sp. Fue por eso por lo que cambió de empleo</td>
<td>That was why (s)he decided to change job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lat. Am. Fue por eso que cambió de empleo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pero es con la Maga que hablo (JC, Arg., dialogue; Sp. con la que/con quien hablo)</td>
<td>But it’s Maga I’m talking to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No fue por el champá que vine aquí día tras día (SP, Mex. Sp. por lo que . . . champá or champán)</td>
<td>It wasn’t because of the champagne that I came here day after day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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 (MVLI, 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?

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 fio ‘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:

> Es también por eso **por lo que** se traiciona a cualquiera (JM, Sp.)
> Fue por eso por lo que me quedé en casa

That’s also why one betrays anyone

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* ‘(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:

> Yo fui la que se lo bebí/la que me lo bebí
> Soy yo quien no se soporta a sí misma
> Ahora eres tú la que habla como cuento de ciencia ficción
> Fui yo finalmente quien la convencí
> La que te equivocas, como casi siempre, eres tú
> Vos sos el que no me aguantás. Vos sos el que no aguantás a Rocamadour
> Somos los únicos que no tenemos ni un centavo para apostar

I was the one (fem.) who drank it
It’s me (fem.) who can’t stand myself
Now it’s you (fem.) who’s talking like a science fiction story
It was me who eventually convinced her
The one who’s making a mistake, as almost always, is you
You’re the one who can’t stand me.
You’re the one who can’t stand
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/ténéis 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 si 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?  ¿Cómo se parece Chelo a su madre!
(AM, Mex., dialogue)   ¡Cómo se parece Chelo a su madre!
¿Qué tal va tu nuevo trabajo?  ¡Cuánta carne come tu hermano!
¿Con quién se casó Marco?  ¡Qué inútil es este teclado!
¿Sabes en dónde estudió tu novio?  Qué bonito estuvo eso, me sonó como a
delgada?  canción ranchera
tiende de enfrente?  ¿A quién ha escrito la carta tu amigo
No recuerdo cómo iba vestida su mujer  ¿Cuándo va a incluir su revista
(JC, Sp., dialogue)  A ordenadores tales como los ya
Se pudo ver cuánta razón tenía Cosío  programas y artículos dedicados
Villegas casi 40 años antes (JA, Mex.)  a ordenadores tales como los ya
citados? (Lat. Am. la computadora
or el computador for el ordenador)

How’s one going to be expecting a baby and be thin?
How’s your new job going?
Who(m) did Marco marry?
I don’t remember how his wife was dressed
One could see how right Cosío Villegas had been nearly forty years earlier

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

This also applies to exclamations:

¡Qué bonito estuvo eso, me sonó como a canción ranchera (ES, Mex., dialogue.
canción ranchera = a type of traditional Mexican song)

(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?  Where does the owner of the shop/store opposite buy fruit?
¿A quién ha escrito la carta tu amigo Federico?  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?  Where do (the) teenagers buy the drugs sold by the dealers?
¿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)  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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¿Cuándo piensan hacer<strong>lo</strong> ustedes?/</td>
<td>When are you thinking of doing it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cuándo piensan ustedes hacer<strong>lo</strong>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Dónde compra<strong>pan</strong> mamá?</td>
<td>Where does Mother buy bread?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/¿Dónde compra mamá<strong>pan</strong>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¿Julia viene esta noche? (usually ¿viene Julia esta noche?)</td>
<td>Is Julia coming tonight?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Tú también notaste lo bonito que se ríe? (AM, Mex., dialogue; Sp. lo bonita que es su risa)</td>
<td>Did you also notice how prettily she laughs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿El XIII [decimotercer] Congreso va a ser el de la desaparición de su partido?</td>
<td>Is the 13th Congress going to be the one at which your party disappears?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Usted no sabe dónde está? (ES, Mex., dialogue)</td>
<td>‘You don’t know where he is, do you?’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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:

—Tengo razón —dijo el presidente
—I’m right,’ the President said

—Te invito a cenar hoy o a comer mañana —dijo él como si ordenara—. A comer mañana —contestó ella (AM, Mex., dialogue)
—I’m inviting you to supper today or lunch tomorrow,’ he said, as though giving an order. ‘Lunch tomorrow,’ she replied

—No te hace gracia, ¿verdad? —le preguntó aquella noche Anita (AG, Sp., dialogue)
—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) Delante de mí se levantaba un enorme edificio
Before me stood/rose an enormous building

Delante de ella aparecieron dos hombres chillando y gesticulando
Before her there appeared two men screaming and gesticulating

(b) ?Delante de mí un enorme edificio se levantaba
?Before me an enormous building rose

?Delante de ella dos hombres chillando y gesticulando aparecieron
?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:

Siempre me dijeron las brujas y echadoras de cartas que mi número mágico era el tres (CRG, Sp.)
Witches and card-readers always told me that my magic number was three

Siempre fue altanera la Sofía (AM, Mex., dialogue. See 3.2.21 for the la)
Sofia was always haughty/arrogant

Nunca me hablaban los vecinos
The neighbours never spoke to me

Apenas salían sus padres, ponía música rock (S)he used to put on rock music as soon as his/her parents went out

Así era este monstruo que sin pestañear podía mandar a la muerte a cientos de miles de sus propios soldados (RM, Sp.)
Such was this monster [Hitler] who could send hundreds of thousands of his soldiers to their deaths without blinking
Word order

Bien saben las autoridades que . . .  
Todavía humeaban algunos incendios  
Para tales personas existen las cárceles  
Ahi 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):
42.7 Miscellaneous word order rules 545

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 o 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):

- Besó fervorosamente la mano de su anfitriona (S)he kissed his/her hostess’s hand fervently
- El tribunal fijará discrecionalmente la duración de la fianza (Spanish legal dictionary)
The Court will fix the period of the bail bond at its discretion
- Casi siempre a la una seguía en chanclas y bata (AM, Mex., dialogue; in Spain las chanclas are ‘flip-flops’ and slippers are las zapatillas)
  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):

- Fue inútil que los párrocos advirtieran en los pueblos a las mujeres que sus maridos las abandonarían si llegaba la ley del divorcio
  It was no use the parish priests in the villages warning women that their husbands would leave them if the divorce law was introduced
- Parece que la habilidad más importante es la de memorizar información para luego escupirla en un examen
  It seems the most important skill is memorizing information in order to churn (lit. ‘spit’) it out later in an examination
- Me di cuenta de que había estado antes en aquel sitio
  I realized I’d been in that place before
- ¿Sabes que el presidente Romeo Lucas sufrió ayer un atentado? Estaba en su coche parado en un semáforo cuando desde una bicicleta le arrojaron un diccionario (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 grand-ma’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 in 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 (MVL, 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? (AM, Mex., dialogue)  I tell you Alberto knows nothing about that And what do you want a counsellor for?
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 estás 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 (MVLl, 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
(b) El libro lo leyó Ana
(c) El libro Ana lo leyó

Subject-Verb-Direct Object
Direct Object-(redundant pronoun)-Verb-Subject
Direct Object-Subject-(redundant pronoun)-Verb
42.9 Word order not explainable by sentence structure

(d) *Leyó Ana el libro*  
(e) *Leyó el libro Ana*

Verb-Subject-Direct Object  
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 cochechito, 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 cochechito 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 *dormitorito 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’ (familiarly also un problemita/problemilla), 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 
bym 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 affec-
tionately 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:

- **-ito** (-cito, -ecito)  
  - **-ecito**  
  - **-cito**  
  - **-ete** (-cete, -ecete)

- **-ecito**  
  - **-ino**  
  - **-iño**  
  - **-ino**  
  - **-ueto** (-zuelo, -ezuelo)

All are marked for gender in the usual way: for the feminine a final vowel is replaced by - **~-a**; - **~-in** 
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:

- **cajón** drawer: **cajoncito**  
  - **cofre** case/box: **cofccito**  
  - **padre** father: **padrecito**

- **madre** mother: **madrecita**  
  - **mayor** bigger: **mayorcito**  
  - **mujer** woman: **mujercita**

- **nieto** grandson: **nietecito**  
  - **padre** father: **padrecito**

- **piedra** stone: **piedrecita**

- **puente** bridge: **puentecito**

- **puerta** door **puertecita**

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
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:

```
flor flower florecita
pan bread panecillo bread roll
pez fish pececito/pececillo
```

But note the following Latin-American forms: tiene el vestido a florcitas verdes (MP, Arg., dialogue; Spain florecitas) ‘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/piececillo 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:

```
armario wardrobe armarito
estatua statue estatuilla
mamá mummy mamaita
or mamita
```

(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 dime una barrita de pan ‘give me a loaf of bread’, which is merely a friendly equivalent of dime una barra de pan. This use of the diminutive does not imply smallness but merely signals the speaker’s attitude to the hearer:

```
Dame un paquetito por ahora
Tómate un cafelito (J. Ma, Sp., dialogue)
Me vas a tirar el vaso con el codo. A ver si tenemos más cuidadito . . .
Si quería comprarme ropa o alguna cosita para mi hermana le pedía dinero (ES, Mex., dialogue)
Un momentoito, por favor
¿Alguna cosita más? (often used in shops/stores) (cf. ¿Alguna cosa más?)
¿Te puedo coger una almendrita?
```

```
Give me just one packet for now
Have/Get a coffee
You’re going to knock my glass over with your elbow. Let’s see if we can have a bit more care . . .
If I wanted to buy clothes or a little something for my sister I asked him for money
Just a moment, please
Would you like anything else?
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’:

- cerquita de la catedral
  just by the cathedral
- Ahora mismo se lo sirvo
  I’ll serve you in just a second
- Espéreme tantito, ahorita le seguimos,
  (ES, Mex., dialogue. Sp. Éspéreme
  un momentito, ahora mismo le seguimos)
  Wait for me for a second, we’ll
- Ya eres mayorcito
  You’re a big boy now
- Está gordito/Está gordo
  He’s put on a bit of weight/He’s fat
- ¡tontito!/¡tonto!
  silly!/fool!
- Es igualito
  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’:

- Vamos, m’hijito (Lat.-Am., Sp. vamos, hijo mío)
  Come on son
- Se ha hecho daño en la patita
  It’s hurt its paw
- ¡Pobrecito! ¿Te has caído?
  Poor little thing! Did you fall down?
- Mi abuelo está muy mal, pobrecito
  My grandfather is really sick, poor thing

(d) To denote smallness:

- el perro/el perrito
  dog/little dog
- el sillón/el silloncito
  armchair/little armchair
- la puerta/la puertecita
  door/little door
- la botella/la botellita
  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 cocheito ese! ‘nice little car’ (pointing at a gold-plated Rolls Royce), la cerebrito de tu hermana (from GDLE 8.4) ‘that genius of a sister of yours’ (el cerebro = ‘brain’), ¡vaya manerita! ‘what a week!’

43.2.3 Diminutive suffix -illo

The suffix -illo is used:

(a) as a diminutive:

- pan/panecillo
  bread/bread roll
- flor/floreccilla
  flower/little flower

(b) To downgrade the importance of something:

- Tengo unas cosillas que hacer
  I’ve got a few little things to do
- Ahora solo/sólo queda el jaleillo de las
  entradas (jaleo = row, fuss)
  All that’s left is the business of the
  entrance tickets
Diminutive, augmentative and pejorative suffixes

**Hacía un airecillo agradable**
There was a pleasant breeze

**Fuimos a tomar unas cervecitas**
We went and had a couple of beers

**el truco/el truquillo**
trick/‘knack’

(c) To soften a word that otherwise might sound too offensive:

**mentiroso/mentirosillo**
liar/‘fibber’

*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**
graciasillo

It’s a good restaurant but a bit pricey
ingreatly

(d) To give an affectionate tone:

**Pero ¿qué haces, chiquilla?**
But what are you doing, honey/darling?

**He comprado un cachorrillo/cachorrito**
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
la manzana/la manzanilla apple/camomile
(also a type of dry sherry)

**el palo/el palillo** stick/toothpick
la masa/la masilla dough/putty

**la bomba/la bombilla** bomb/light bulb
la parra/la parrilla vine/US broiled

**la caja/la cajetilla** box/pack for cigarettes, etc.
la varita/la varilla rod/thin stick, spoke
(but *la varita mágica* ‘magic wand’)

**la cama/la camilla** bed/stretcher
la guerra/la guerrilla war/guerrilla warfare

(f) To denote a combination of diminutive and pejorative:

**la cultura/la culturilla** culture/smattering of culture
liso/llistillo clever/‘know-all’

**la mujer/la mujercilla** woman/unimportant woman

(l) 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?**
Where’s baby?/the little one?

**¡chiquirriquitín!**
my tiny little thing!

**¡mi (niña) chiquitina!** (not *¡mi pequeña niña!*)
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 maleta/el maletín suitcase/briefcase

**la espada/el espadín** sword/dress sword
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:

-uelo can denote a combination of diminutive and pejorative:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>el arroyo/el arroyuelo</td>
<td>stream-trickle/rivulet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la calleja/callejuela</td>
<td>alley/narrow little alley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el rey/el reyezuelo</td>
<td>king/petty king/princeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tonto/tontuelo</td>
<td>stupid/dumbo (affectionate)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It may also be used to form new words: el paño/el pañuelo ‘cloth’/‘handkerchief’.

(b) -eto/eta, -ete/eta may add a specialized meaning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>el avión/la avioneta</td>
<td>aircraft/light aircraft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el camión/la camioneta</td>
<td>truck/van</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or light truck. Often ‘bus’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in Mexico</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el caballo/el caballete</td>
<td>horse/easel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la cultura/la cultureta</td>
<td>culture/pseudo-culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultura also = a person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who fancies him/herself as</td>
<td>‘cultured’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘cultured’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(c) -ete may add a humorous tone:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>amigo/amiguete</td>
<td>friend/ ‘pal’, ‘crony’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gordo/regordete</td>
<td>fat/chubby</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

43.2.6 Diminutive forms in Latin America

In many areas of Latin America, especially Central America and Mexico, diminutive forms pervade everyday speech:

Viene ya merito (Mex., i.e. ahora mismo)  
merito ayer nomás (Mex., i.e. ayer mismo)  
Ahorita lo voy a hacer (i.e. ahora mismo/ahora mismo)  
Clarito la recuerdo  
Reciencito llegó (Latin-American. See 35.7.2)  
Las caras de los gringos son todititas igualitas  
(CF, Mex., dialogue)

(S)he’s coming right now  
only yesterday  
I’ll do it straightaway (in practice it usually means ‘when I can . . .’)  
I remember her vividly  
(S) he arrived just a minute ago  
Gringos’ faces are all exactly the same

(1) The colloquial device of making adverbs more precise by adding a diminutive is much more common in Latin America. The NGLE 9.2b records ahí > ahicito ‘just there’, apenas > apenitas ‘scarcely’/‘hardly’, detrás > detrasito ‘right behind’, ahí nomasito ‘just there’, none of these diminutives being heard in Spain.

43.3 ‘Augmentative’ suffixes

Typical, in order of frequency, are -ón/-ona, -azo/-aza, -ote/-ota, -aco/-aca.

(a) These are mainly used to denote intensity or large size, often – but not always – with some idea of clumsiness, unpleasantness, awkwardness, excess, etc., as in se me ha pegado un catarrazo ‘I’ve caught one heck of a cold’ (un catarro = ‘a cold’), a través de la puerta, muchachones vestidos de negro y con el pelo al cero alborotaban (JMa, Sp.) ‘on the other side of the door some young toughs in black with shaved heads were causing a din’, ¿dónde compraste esas pezuñotas? ‘where did you buy those clodhoppers?’ (i.e. enormous shoes/boots, also los zapatones; la pezuña = ‘hoof’).

-azo can also imply admiration, as in debes ser un profesorazo ‘you must be one heck of a teacher’, un exitazo ‘a great success’, un golazo ‘a brilliant goal’ (in soccer).
Examples of augmentative suffixes:

- **amigo/amigote** friend / ‘buddy’
  - (not pejorative)
- **cursi/cursiñón** affected / incredibly affected
- **el coche/el cochazo** car / ‘heck of a car’
- **grande/granote** big / pretty big
  - (not really pejorative)
- **el soltero/el solterón** bachelor / confirmed bachelor
- **fácil/facilón** easy / facile
- **la ginebra/un ginebrazo** gin / an enormous shot of gin
- **la palabra/la palabrota** word / swear word
- **pedante/pedantón** pedantic / insufferably pedantic
- **la rata/el ratón** rat / mouse (animal or computer*)
- **la calle/el callejón** street / alleyway
- **la cintura/el cinturón** waist / belt
- **la cuerda/el cordón** string / shoelace
- **la bayoneta/el bayonetazo** bayonet / bayonet thrust
- **el codo/el codazo** elbow / dig with the elbow
- **el septembrazo** the September coup / revolt
- **la fresa/el fresón** strawberry / large strawberry.
- **el alabón/el alabonazo** door knocker / thump of a knocker on the door
- **la bayoneta/el bayonetazo** bayonet / bayonet thrust

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:

- **el alabón/el alabonazo** door knocker / thump of a knocker on the door
- **la bayoneta/el bayonetazo** bayonet / bayonet thrust
- **el codo/el codazo** elbow / dig with the elbow
- **el septembrazo** 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:

- **la rata/el ratón** rat / mouse (animal or computer*)
- **la calle/el callejón** street / alleyway
- **la cintura/el cinturón** waist / belt
- **el fuego/el fogón** fire / stove
- **la cuerda/el cordón** string / shoelace
- **la bayoneta/el bayonetazo** bayonet / bayonet thrust
- **el codo/el codazo** elbow / dig with the elbow
- **el septembrazo** the September coup / revolt

*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: **preguntóna**, **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, -uco, -ejo** and a few others. They variously denote ugliness, wretchedness, dirtiness, meanness, etc.
Some of these suffixes can be used affectionately: ¿cómo va a poder estudiar con tres pequeñajas 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: sandwich (from a baguette)
- el cuba libre/el cubata: Cuba libre (the drink)
- el ordenador/el ordenata: computer. The -ata form is humorous or slang
- socialista/el or la sociata: socialist/‘pinko’, ‘lefty’
- la droga/el or la drogata: drug/‘junkie’, ‘drug addict’
- ciego/cegata: blind/short-sighted (colloquial)
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*, *aisla*, *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`: a
- `b`: be
- `c`: ce (formerly *i griega*)
- `d`: de
- `e`: e
- `f`: efe
- `g`: ge
- `h`: hache
- `i`: i
- `j`: jota
- `k`: ka
- `l`: le
- `m`: eme
- `n`: ene
- `ñ`: eñe
- `o`: o (formerly *u* on its own)
- `p`: pe
- `q`: cu
- `r`: erre
- `s`: ese
- `t`: te
- `u`: u (formerly *e* on its own)
- `v`: v
- `w`: uve
doble
- `x`: equis
- `y`: ye (formerly *i griega*)
- `z`: zeta
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), zeta, 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, guíó 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-myo-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-θé/r/a-sé-r] ‘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), Zimbabwe, 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-ɾeɾ] ‘to want’, quiso [ki-so] ‘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 kivi [el-ki-βi] ‘kiwi’/‘kiwi fruit’, Kuwait [ku-fáyt], 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-ɾo] ‘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-γe] present subjunctive of rogar ‘to request’, la guirnalda [la-γiɾ-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 [li-ŋ-γwi-sti-ko], el desagüe [el-de-γa-ywe] ‘drainage’/‘water outlet’, averigüe [a-ße-ɾí-ywe] present subjunctive of averiguar ‘to check’, nicaragüense [ni-ka-ra-γwe-n-se] ‘Nicaraguan’, el pingüino [el-piŋ-gwi-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-i-βe] ‘prohibits’ or buho [bú-o] ‘owl’. The Academy abolished this rule in 1959, so one must now write prohibe, búho, retahíla, 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 [ze-ne-rál], Gibraltar [xi-βral-tár], rige [ri-γe] ‘he/she/it rules’, rugir [rru-γir] ‘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) ‘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.:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Word</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>la bujía</td>
<td>spark plug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crujir</td>
<td>rustle/to crackle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dejé (dejar)</td>
<td>I left behind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el equipaje</td>
<td>luggage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el garaje</td>
<td>garage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la injerencia</td>
<td>meddling/interference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la jeringa</td>
<td>syringe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el jersey</td>
<td>jersey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesús</td>
<td>Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiménez</td>
<td>(a family name, also Giménez)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el paisaje</td>
<td>landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el peaje</td>
<td>toll (on a road)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or bridge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tejer</td>
<td>to weave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el traje</td>
<td>suit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el ultraje</td>
<td>outrage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LI

LI is properly a palatalized /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’, *válase 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-li-o] ‘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-ȳn] or [e-lál-ȳm] ‘album’, el referéndum = [el-re-fe-re-ðun] ‘referendum’, el ultimátum = [e-lul-ti-má-tun] ‘ultimatum’.

N


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 psiquiatría for la psiquiatría ‘psychiatry’, and very few would write nemónico for mnemónico ‘mnemonic’, la gnosis or gnóstico 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, siciatría, sicología are used in the Latin America media.

R and Rr


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-ra-él], la sonrisa [la-son-rrí-sa] ‘smile’, alrededor [al-re-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
Spelling, accent rules, punctuation and word division

= 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 > remplazo or reemplazo ‘replacement’, re + embolso > rembolso or reembolso ‘reimbursement’. The new spelling is seen, but not universally, in the Latin-American media, but the spelling with reee- is much more usual in Spain. The Academy’s Diccionario panhispánico de dudas recommends retaining the double vowels. Some verbs, e.g. reelegir ‘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-fóż-yá] ‘xenophobia’, el xilófono [el-si-lo-fóno] (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-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>transalpino</th>
<th>transferencia</th>
<th>transmediterráneo</th>
<th>transpirar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>transatlántico</td>
<td>transferir</td>
<td>transmigración</td>
<td>transpirenaico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transbordar</td>
<td>transformación</td>
<td>transmisión</td>
<td>transportar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transbordo</td>
<td>transformar</td>
<td>transmitir</td>
<td>transporte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transcribir</td>
<td>transfusión</td>
<td>transparencia</td>
<td>transposición</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transcripción</td>
<td>transgredir</td>
<td>transparentar</td>
<td>transversal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transcurrir</td>
<td>transgresión</td>
<td>transparente</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transcurso</td>
<td>transgresor</td>
<td>transpiración</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) usually tras-

| trascendencia             | trascender                     | trasvasar                     |             |
| trascendente              | trasponer                      | trascendental                 |             |
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 
 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 
 or s and the stress falls on the last syllable but one, no written 
accent is required. Examples: la calle 'street', el juego, 'game', hablar '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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>el álbum</td>
<td>album</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alérgicamente</td>
<td>allergic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contestenles</td>
<td>(ustedes imperative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>colocó (s)</td>
<td>(vosotros imperative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decídmete</td>
<td>tell me it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dificil</td>
<td>difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dirán</td>
<td>they will say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fácil</td>
<td>easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>las imágenes</td>
<td>images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la nación</td>
<td>nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la química</td>
<td>chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>las síntesis</td>
<td>synthesis/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>las vírgenes</td>
<td>virgins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el récord</td>
<td>record (in sports)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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' [gjón], rio for (s)he laughed' [rryó] 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, pidione, 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
   i when pronounced as in ti
   u when pronounced as in tú
   a, e, o in any position

(2) Semi-vowels
   i when pronounced [y] as in bien, and y as in voy
   u when pronounced [w] as in bueno, causa

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

(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
- créame lo [kre-a-me-lo] believe me
- pasee [pa-sé-e] pres. subjunctive of pasear ‘to go for a walk’
- moho [mó-o] mildew
- Sèoane [se-o-á-ne] (a personal surname)
- creí [kre-í] I believed
- aúñ [a-úñ] 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 [áɾ-ðwo] arduous
- continuo [kon-tí-nwo] continuous
- erais [é-rays] you were
- Francia [frán-ðya/fra-ðya] France
- la lengua [la-lé-ŋ-gwa] tongue/language
- hablabais [a-ðlá-βays] you were speaking
- produjisteis [pro-ðu-ðís-tees] you produced
- causan [káw-san] they cause
- la historia [lays-tó-ðya] history/story
- 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-βeys] you owe
- continúo [kon-ti-nú-o] I continue
- 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-βyé-ras] scallops (two syllables, a Galician word. Also called zamburriñas)
- cambiáis [kam-byáys] you change (two syllables)

(1) Students of Portuguese must remember that the latter language has the opposite rule and writes colónia, historia, 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:
Spelling, accent rules, punctuation and word division

vai [báys] you go (vosotros form)  la ruina [la-rrwí-na] ruin
el aire [e-láy-re] the air  tiene [tyé-ne] (s)he has (from tener)
el peine [el-péy-ne] comb  luego [lwé-yo] then/later
la causa [la-káw-sa] cause  la tiara [la-tya-ra] tiara
El Cairo [el-káy-ro] Cairo  acuoso [a-kwó-so] watery
alcaloide [al-ka-lóy-ðe] alkaloid  vio [byó] (s)he saw
fui [fwí] I was/I went  dio [dyó] (s)he gave
huido [wi-ðo] fled (from huir ‘to flee’)  el pie [el-pyé] foot
la viuda [la-βyú-ða] widow

and the following are exceptions to rule (a):

el país [el-pa-ís] country  reíne [re-ú-ne] (s)he unites/brings together
el baúl [el-ba-úl] trunk/large suitcase  prohibe [pro-i-be] (s)he prohibits
reír [re-ír] to laugh  heroína [e-ro-í-na] heroine/heroin
reís [re-í-s] you (vosotros) laugh  el arcaísmo [e-la-ɾka-í-s-mo] archaism
el dúo [el-dú-o] duet/duo  ahi [a-i] there
el búho [el-βu-o] owl  oís [o-í-s] you (vosotros) hear
el frío [frí-o] cold  ríe [rrí-e] (s)he laughs (from reír)
se fía [se-fi-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-ya-ká-ran-dá-es]  feo [fé-o] ugly
jacaranda trees (old plural of  leen [lé-en] they read
el jacarandá, now los jacarandás)  la boa [la-βo-a] boa (the snake may be
los noes [los-no-es] noes (plural of no)  el boa in Latin America
el caos [el-ká-os] chaos  el azahar [e-la-θar/ 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 deán [el-de-án] dean (ecclesiastical)
el león [el-le-oñ] lion  el rehén [el-re-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 [konz-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-ley-es] ‘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, criéis [kɾyé], [kɾyó], [kɾyáys], [kɾyéys] 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’
rió, riáis, riéis [ryó], [ryáys] from reír ‘to laugh’
truhán [tɾwán] ‘rascal’, ‘knavish’

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,iais, giou, hui, huis, 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-éjs], 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):

- **la acrobacia** acrobatics
- **afrodisíaco** aphrodisiac; see note 7
- **amoniaco** or amoníaco ammonia; see note 7
- **austriaco** Austrian; see note 7
- **cardiaco** or cardíaco cardiac; see note 7
- **el cartel** or cártel drugs cartel
- **el chaófer** driver; see note 1
- **el cóctel** cocktail
- **disponte** familiar imperative of disponerse ‘to get ready’; see note 3
- **el fútbol** soccer; see note 5
- **hipocondríaco** hypochondriac; see note 7
- **iberico** (less commonly iberico) Iberian
- **el láser** laser
- **la metempsiosis**
  - **metempsis**
  - **metepsiosis**
- **el meteoro** meteor
- **el misil** (less commonly misil) missile
- **la olimpiada** Olympiad
- **la ósmosis** or osmosis
- **policíaco** police (adjective; see note 7)
- **el/la poliglota** polyglot
- **el/la psiquiatra** psychiatrist
- **el gëiser** geyser (geological)
- **el omóplato** shoulder blade
- **la quiroamnecia** palmistry/
  - **hand-reading; see note 6**
- **el reptil** reptile
- **el reúna** rheumatism (also el reuma)
- **el sánscrito** Sanskrit
- **el termostato** thermostat
- **la torticolis** stiff neck
Spelling, accent rules, punctuation and word division

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>el electrodo</td>
<td>electrode</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etíope</td>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la exégesis</td>
<td>exegesis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el frijol</td>
<td>bean; see note 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el pabilo</td>
<td>wick (of a candle)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el parásito</td>
<td>parasite</td>
<td>el vídeo is usually video in Latin America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el/la pediatra</td>
<td>paediatrician/US pediatrician</td>
<td>el zodiaco zodiac; see note 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el pabiko</td>
<td>wick (of a candle)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la utopía</td>
<td>utopia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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-féɾ] in Latin America.
2. El dinamo in some Latin-American countries, including Argentina and Cuba.
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 -íaco, 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Without Accent</th>
<th>With Accent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>de/dé</td>
<td>of</td>
<td>3rd-person singular present subjunctive of dar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el/el</td>
<td>the (def. article)</td>
<td>he/it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>este/éste, ese/ése, aquel/ aquél</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mas/más</td>
<td>but (rare)</td>
<td>more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mi/mí</td>
<td>my</td>
<td>me (after prepositions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se/sé</td>
<td>reflexive pronoun</td>
<td>(1) I know, (2) tú imperative of ser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>si/sí</td>
<td>if</td>
<td>(1) yes, (2) prepositional form of se</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sólo/sólo</td>
<td>alone</td>
<td>only (solamente)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>te/té</td>
<td>object form of tú</td>
<td>tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu/tú</td>
<td>your</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Dé ought to lose its accent if a pronoun is attached and the stress becomes regular: denos, ‘give us’, déme ‘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 shakespeareano ‘Shakespearean (or Shakespeare’s) language’.

Adjectives that are part of an official name are capitalized, e.g. Nueva Zeland(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:


(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 frio ‘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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr Moreno</td>
<td>Dr. Moreno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sr González</td>
<td>Sr. González</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tenía pan, huevos y vino; pero no tenía carne</td>
<td>(S)he had bread, eggs and wine, but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(s)he had no meat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel entró cansado, confuso; Celia le</td>
<td>Miguel came in, tired, confused; Celia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siguió, radiante y orgullosa.</td>
<td>followed him, radiant and proud</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Les escribí más de una vez; sin embargo, no</td>
<td>I wrote to them more than once.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me contestaron</td>
<td>However, they did not reply</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>el guión (see 44.2.4 for spelling)</td>
<td>hyphen</td>
<td>short -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el signo de menos</td>
<td>minus sign</td>
<td>medium length –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la raya</td>
<td>dash</td>
<td>double length —</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question/exclamation</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oye, ¿quieres una cerveza?</td>
<td>Hey, d’you want a beer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hace calor, ¿verdad?</td>
<td>It’s hot, isn’t it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si te digo que no he gastado más que doscientos dólares, ¿me vas a creer?</td>
<td>If I tell you I’ve only spent 200 dollars, will you believe me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pero, ¡qué estupidez!</td>
<td>But what stupidity!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Lo voy a hacer! ¿Me oyes?</td>
<td>I’m going to do it! Do you hear me?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mixing of these signs is allowed but is rare: ¿qué estás haciendo?! ‘what are you doing?!’

The Academy, NGLE 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>las guerras árabe-israelíes</td>
<td>the Arab-Israeli wars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>las negociaciones anglo-francesas</td>
<td>Anglo-French negotiations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el complejo militar-industrial</td>
<td>the military-industrial complex</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A hyphen may be used to join two nouns:

- los misiles superficie-aire: surface-to-air missiles
- la carretera Madrid-Barcelona: 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 ex-calde ‘former mayor’, exfuncionario ‘ex-government employee’, exmarido/exesposo ‘ex-husband’, exjefe ‘former chief/boss’, exnovia ‘ex-girlfriend’. Ex preso or ex-presó ‘ex-convict’ is an exception to avoid confusion with expresó ‘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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>br</th>
<th>cr</th>
<th>fr</th>
<th>gr</th>
<th>pr</th>
<th>dr</th>
<th>tr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bl</td>
<td>cl</td>
<td>fl</td>
<td>gl</td>
<td>pl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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:

- ha-ba
- ro-ca
- nu-do
- a-gua
- pe-lo
- ra-za
- mar-ca
- mu-cho
- ca-lle
- pe-rro
- ca-bra
- co-fre
- o-tro
- co-pla
- sa-que
- pa-gue
- de-sa-güe
- é-xi-to pronounced [ék-si-to]

and no syllable begins with more than one consonant:

- cal-do
- co-s-ta
- cuan-do
- par-te
- can-cha
- Es-pa-ña
- hem-bra
- em-ble-ma
- com-bi-nar
- in-na-to
- re-cla-mar
- con-lle-var
- cons-truc-ción
- ins-pec-tor
- re-hén
- blan-den-gue

(c) El País advises against separating vowels, and this is the easiest rule to remember:

- viu-do
- cié-na-ga
- teo-cra-cia
- can-táis
- a-ma-bais
- bue-no
- ha-cia
- pe-río-do
- ha-cía-mos
- con-ti-núas

(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 inter- 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).
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 Acanomy’s NGL (Nueva gramática de la lengua española). It must be remembered that the Spanish word preterito simply means ‘past’ and not ‘preterite’.

accent el acento see TILDE, STRESS
active voice la voz activa the form of the verb in which the subject of the verb really performs the action, e.g. ‘Mike painted 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.

adjectival participle el participio adjetival defined in Section 23.6.
adjective el adjetivo a word that describes a NOUN or PRONOUN, e.g. ‘a red book’/un libro rojo, ‘you’re tall’/eres alto.
adverb(ial) el adverbio often giving extra information on how, when, where or why: ‘she came yesterday’/vino ayer, ‘I left it here’/lo dejé aquí, ‘it’s totally untrue’/es completamente falso, ‘to work in vain’/trabajar en balde, ‘fairly well’/bastante bien.

agreement la concordancia 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: la casa blanca ‘the white house’, él es guapo ‘he is good-looking’, ellas son guapas ‘they (females) are good-looking’, etc.

antecedent el antecedente the noun or pronoun that a RELATIVE CLAUSE refers to, e.g. ‘the woman who lives over the road’/la mujer que vive al otro lado de la calle.

anterior preterite el pretérito anterior a Spanish verb tense with no exact equivalent in English, e.g. hube terminado, defined at 18.4.

apposition la aposición the use of a phrase to extend or clarify the meaning of a NOUN PHRASE without being connected to it by a PREPOSITION: ‘Paris, the capital of France’/París, capital de Francia. See 3.2.25.

article el artículo the grammatical name given to the words ‘the’ and ‘a(n)’ in English, and el/la/los/las and un/una/unos/unas in Spanish, as in ‘the fox ate a duck’/el zorro se comió un pato. Words meaning ‘the’ are called ‘definite articles’/el artículo definido, and words meaning ‘a(n)’ are ‘indefinite articles’/el artículo indefinido. 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 defined at 41.1.1.

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.
compound tense el tiempo compuesto
TENSES formed by using an AUXILIARY VERB (normally haber in Spanish) with the PAST PARTICIPLE of another verb, e.g. he visto ‘I have seen’, han vuelto ‘they’ve returned’. See Chapter 18.

conditional el condicional or el potencial
a form of the VERB used to express conditions, e.g. ‘it would break’ / se rompería, ‘I would be delighted’ / me encantaría, etc.

conditional sentence la oración condicional
a SENTENCE which expresses a condition, e.g. ‘if I had money I’d buy a helicopter’. See Chapter 29.

conjugate conjugar
the way a verb takes different forms to show AGREEMENT with the SUBJECT, and to indicate TENSE or MOOD. The statement ‘hablar’ conjugates exactly like ‘amar’ means that the endings of both verbs are identical: hablo/amo, hablas/amas, hablé/amé, etc.

conjugation la conjugación
see 16.1 and 16.2.

conjunction la conjunción
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’, y, o, pero, que (as in dijo que nos llamaría ‘(s)he said (s)he’d call us’), etc. See Chapter 37.

consonant la consonante
as far as the written Spanish is concerned, all the letters of the alphabet except for the VOWELS a, e, i, o and u. 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 b, c, ch, d, g, ll, m, n, ñ, etc.

continuous form la forma continua
the Spanish verb form made up of estar + the gerund: estoy hablando ‘I’m talking’, estabas durmiendo ‘you were sleeping’, etc. See Chapter 19.

count noun el sustantivo contable
defined at 2.2.1.

dative el dativo
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. le or les or ‘I gave her five dollars’. It has wider meanings in general linguistics.

defective verb el verbo defectivo
a verb of which certain forms are not used. Abolir is – or used to be – an example: see 16.11.2.

definite article el artículo definido
see ARTICLE.

demonstrative el adjetivo demostrativo and el pronombre demostrativo
an ADJECTIVE or PRONOUN which points to something specific, e.g. ‘this’ / este, ‘that’ / ese/aquel, ‘those’ / esos/aquellos. See Chapter 7.

descriptive adjective el adjetivo calificativo
the opposite of RELATIONAL ADJECTIVE.

determiner el determinante
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 este, ese or aquel, numerals and POSSESSIVES. See 5.1d and 5.9 for their effect on adjectives.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dieresis la diéresis</td>
<td>the two dots over the ü in words like lingüista, averigüe which show that the u is not silent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diminutive suffix el sufijo diminutivo</td>
<td>a SUFFIX added to a word to denote smallness, affection or sometimes contempt, e.g. ‘piglet’, ‘kitchenette’, casita, ahorita, listillo. English makes little use of such suffixes, but they are very common in Spanish. See Chapter 43.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diphthong el diptongo</td>
<td>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: fueron, rey, cuestión, cuota, quien, causa, Paraguay, Moisés. See also SYLLABLE and TRIPHTHONG.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct object el complemento directo</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct speech el discurso directo</td>
<td>the words actually spoken by a person or character: “I love Mondays,” María said’. Adoro los lunes —dijo María. See also REPORTED SPEECH.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discourse marker el conector discursivo or el marcador discursivo or el operador discursivo</td>
<td>words and phrases like ‘nevertheless’, ‘on the contrary’, ‘incidentally’, ‘obviously’, ‘well . . .’, that are used to connect or introduce statements. See 37.11.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dynamic dinámico</td>
<td>a dynamic verb refers to an action done by someone or something: ‘he broke a window’, ‘I wrote a novel’. Some verbs do not denote actions but ‘states’, i.e. no one is actually doing anything, as in ‘the sky is overcast’, ‘Jill seems absent-minded’, ‘the sun is shining’. Such verbs are ‘non-dynamic’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ending la terminación</td>
<td>a SUFFIX which gives grammatical information, e.g. about the NUMBER, TENSE, MOOD, PERSON or GENDER of a word. Typical Spanish endings are hablaron, buenos, vivas, etc. Typical English endings are ‘ships’, ‘liked’, ‘walking’, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exclamation la exclamación</td>
<td>an expression of surprise, anger, wonder, admiration, etc., e.g. ‘what a nerve!’/¡qué cara!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>existential sentence la oración existencial</td>
<td>see Chapter 34.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminine femenino</td>
<td>one of the two GENDERS into which Spanish NOUNS are divided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finite verb el verbo finito</td>
<td>a form of a VERB which gives information about TENSE, PERSON and NUMBER. Hablan/they talk’ (present, third-person and plural) and contesté ‘I answered’ (preterite, first-person and singular) are finite verbs. Hablar, hablado, hablando are non-finite forms since they do not indicate tense, person or number.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fulfilled condition (a term not used by the Academy)</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
future perfect el futuro compuesto or el futuro perfecto

a TENSE formed with a future form of AUXILIARY VERB ‘to have’/haber and a PAST PARTICIPLE, used to refer to an action or event which will occur before another in the future: ‘I will have finished it by then’/para entonces lo habré terminado. See 18.6.

future tense el futuro simple

in Spanish, the tense forms like hablaré, vendrá, irán used to refer, among other things, to future time. See 17.6.

gender el género

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.

generic genérico

a generic noun refers to concepts, things or people in general: ‘monkeys are intelligent’, ‘I don’t like beer’, ‘freedom means many things’. ‘Partitive’ nouns refer only to a part of the whole: ‘she brought some roses’/trajo rosas (not roses in general), ‘there’s bread on the table’, i.e. ‘some’ bread.

gerund el gerundio

a NON-FINITE Spanish verb form, always ending in -ndo and defined at 24.1.

historic present el presente histórico

the use, for dramatic effect, of the present tense to refer to the past: ‘and then Jane walks in and says . . .’, la Segunda Guerra Mundial empieza en 1939. See 17.3.5.

idiom el modismo

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’. Echar de menos ‘to miss (someone/something)’ must be learned separately: its meaning has no relation to echar ‘to throw’, de ‘of’ and menos ‘less’.

imperative el imperativo

a MOOD of the VERB used to give commands or instructions or to make requests. See Chapter 21.

imperfect tense el pretérito imperfecto

an important TENSE form of Spanish verbs that refers to actions or states that are viewed as going on at the time, e.g. hablaba, comías, eran, etc. See 17.5 for definition.

impersonal se se impersonal

see SE IMPERSONAL.

impersonal sentences las oraciones impersonales.

see 32.1 and 32.4.

indefinite article el artículo indefinido

see ARTICLE.

indefinite pronoun el pronombre indefinido

see PRONOUN.

indicative (el) indicativo

the verb forms used to state facts or beliefs: ‘the earth is round’/la tierra es redonda; ‘I think Anne is away’/creo que Ana está fuera: see Chapter 17.
indirect object *el complemento indirecto*

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 *Miguel le dio mil euros* ‘Miguel gave him/her/you 1000 euros’ *le* receives the money and is therefore the indirect object. In Spanish, but not in English, indirect objects can lose as well as gain: *me robaron mil euros* = ‘they stole 1,000 euros off/from me’, but *me dieron mil euros* ‘they gave 1,000 euros to me’. See Chapters 14 and 15 for details.

indirect question *la pregunta indirecta, la oración interrogativa indirecta*

a question reported in INDIRECT SPEECH. ‘When did you arrive?’/¿cuándo llegaste? is a direct question, ‘I wonder when you arrived?’/me preguntó cuándo llegaste is an indirect question. So is ‘I don’t know how to do it’/no sé cómo hacerlo (the direct question is: ‘how do I do it?’/¿cómo lo hago?). Another definition: a sentence which has a SUBORDINATE CLAUSE beginning with an INTERROGATIVE word like cómo, cuál, cuándo, dónde, qué, quién.

indirect speech *el discurso indirecto*

see REPORTED SPEECH

infinitive *el infinitivo*

a NON-FINITE form of a verb which, in Spanish, always ends in -ar, -er, -ir or -ír. See Chapter 22.

interrogative (el) *interrogativo*

*question* words like ‘when?’, ‘where?’, ‘who?’, ‘which?’, ‘what?’, ‘how?’, cómo, cuál, cuándo, dónde, qué, quién, used to ask questions. In Spanish interrogative or question words are written with an accent.

intransitive verb *el verbo intransitivo*

a VERB is intransitive if it cannot have a DIRECT OBJECT: ‘I come’/vengo is classified as intransitive since one cannot ‘come’ something or someone.

irregular verb *el verbo irregular*

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.

masculine *masculino*

one of the two GENDERS into which Spanish NOUNS are divided. Defined at 2.2.1.

mass noun *el sustantivo no contable*

*monosyllable* a word consisting of only one syllable. ‘dog’, ‘house’, ‘yes’, sí, fui, dio are all monosyllabic words. ‘Porpoise’, casa, perro, etc. have more than one syllable and are therefore polysyllabic.

mood *el modo*

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 mood’, but the grammatical term derives from a Latin word meaning ‘mode’.

neuter *neutro*

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.

nominalizer (el) *nominalizador*

See Chapter 40 for definition.
Glossary of grammatical terms

**non-dynamic**
see DYNAMIC.

**non-finite verb form**
*las formas no finitas del verbo*
see FINITE VERB

**non-restrictive**
*no restrictivo*
see RESTRICTIVE.

**noun**
el sustantivo
a type of word which refers to a person, animal, plant, lifeless object, place or abstraction: ‘man’, ‘student’, ‘dog’, ‘oak-tree’, *libro*, *Nueva York*, *justicia*, *felicidad* are all nouns. In Spanish, nouns have either masculine or feminine GENDER.

**noun phrase**
*la frase nominal*
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.

**number**
el número
the grammatical distinction between SINGULAR and PLURAL.

**object pronouns**
*(los pronombres de complemento directo e indirecto)*
used in this book to refer to the Spanish pronouns *me/te/lo/la/les/nos/os/los/las* and *les*.

**open conditions**
*las oraciones condicionales reales*
defined at 29.2.

**ordinal number**
elos numerales ordinales
a form of a numeral used as an ADJECTIVE to indicate the place something occupies in a series: ‘my first kiss’, ‘*mi primer beso*’, ‘the sixth chapter’, ‘*el sexto capítulo*’.

**participle**
el participio
a NON-FINITE form of the VERB. Spanish has a PAST PARTICIPLE, e.g. *hablado* and an ADJECTIVAL PARTICIPLE, e.g. *saliente*, *pertene-ciente*. See Chapter 23.

**participle clause**
*la construcción absoluta*
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 *llegados a Madrid se alojaron en un buen hotel* ‘having arrived in Madrid they stayed in a good hotel’.

**partitive**
*partitivo*
see GENERIC.

**passive**
*la pasiva*
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 *ser* – *la casa fue construida* – defined at 32.2; (2) the PASSIVE WITH ESTAR – see the next item; (3) passive *se* – *la casa se construyó* – 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. *se identificó a tres personas* ‘three persons were identified’. See 32.5.

**passive with estar**
*la pasiva resultativa or la pasiva de resultado*
a passive construction formed with *estar* and a participle, e.g. *el ladrón estaba detenido* ‘the thief was under arrest’. It focuses on the result of an action whereas the passive with *ser* focuses on the action itself. See 32.2.5 for details.
past participle el participio pasado

a NON-FINITE form of the VERB typically ending in -ado, -ido or, occasionally, -to or -so, e.g. hablado, vivido, comido, vuelto, abierto, impreso.

past tense el tiempo pretérito

in Spanish, any TENSE that refers to the past, e.g. PRETERITE, IMPERFECT, PERFECT, or PLUPERFECT, as opposed to PRESENT or FUTURE tenses. Pretérito simply means ‘past’ in Spanish, and not just ‘preterite’.

pejorative suffix el sufijo despectivo

a suffix like -ajo, -ucho that expresses distaste or revulsion, as in un hotelucho ‘a doss-house’/’dingy hotel’. See 43.4. English does not have pejorative suffixes.

perfect tense el pretérito perfecto compuesto

a COMPOUND TENSE of the verb, e.g. he dicho ‘I have said’, hemos contestado ‘we have answered’. It is called ‘present perfect’ in some grammar books since the AUXILIARY verb haber is in the present tense.

person la persona

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)/ustedes; and the third person, i.e. the persons or things that we are talking about: ‘he’/she’/’it’/’they’, él/ella/ellas/ello.

personal a

defined at 22.1.

personal pronoun el pronombre personal

see PRONOUN.

phrase la frase

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.

pluperfect tense el pretérito pluscuamperfecto

a COMPOUND TENSE, e.g. habíamos visto ‘we had seen’, defined at 18.3.

plural (el) plural

a grammatical term indicating more than one person or thing. ‘dog’ is a SINGULAR noun, ‘dogs’ is a plural noun. Blancos ‘white’ is a masculine plural form of the adjective blanco.

possessive adjective or pronoun los adjetivos o pronombres posesivos

a word that indicates the identity of the possessor, e.g. ‘my’/ ‘your’/’his’, mi/tu/su, ‘mine’/’hers’/mío/suyo, etc. See Chapter 9.

predicate el predicado

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. Miguel es amigo de Pedro ‘Miguel is a friend of Pedro’.

prefix el prefijo

letters added to the beginning of the root form of a word so as to alter or add meaning, e.g. ‘preconception’, ‘replace’, descubrir ‘to discover’, rehuir ‘to shun’/’to avoid’

preposition la preposición

a word or phrase used before a noun or pronoun to relate it grammatically to another word or phrase: ‘the dog’s sleeping on the bed’, fuimos a Caracas, ‘I came back with her’/volví con ella, etc. See Chapter 38 for details.
present participle
in Spanish studies, a rather inaccurate alternative name for the ADJECTIVAL PARTICIPLE, e.g. preocupante ‘worrying’, convincente ‘convincing’.

present tense el tiempo presente de indicativo
the simple present TENSE, e.g. hablo, comes, son, that indicates – among other things – that an action is occurring now. See 14.3.

preterite tense (American spelling ‘preterit’) el pretérito perfecto simple
a TENSE of Spanish verbs that indicates actions or events in the past that are viewed as completed at the time, e.g. habló, hice, supieron. See 17.4.

pronominal verb el verbo pronominal
any Spanish verb which is conjugated with an object pronoun of the same person as the verb’s subject. e.g. lavarse, me voy, te dormiste, se salió. Many grammars call these ‘reflexive verbs’, a term that we reject for the reasons given at 30.1.1.

pronoun el pronombre
a word that replaces a NOUN PHRASE already mentioned, or about to be mentioned, in a sentence: ‘John came in and he said to me’, ¿conoces a alguien que pueda ayudarme? Personal pronouns refer to known people or things: ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘you’, it’, etc. Indefinite pronouns refer to unidentified persons or things: ‘someone’, ‘anyone’, ‘something’, algo, alguien, etc.

reciprocal recíproco
one possible meaning of plural PRONOMINAL VERBS, i.e. when the subjects perform an action on or for one another as in se quieren (el uno al otro) ‘they love one another’. See 30.3.

reflexive reflexivo
used in this book to refer to one possible meaning of a Spanish PRONOMINAL VERB, i.e. when the subject performs an action upon or for himself/herself, as in ‘I wash myself’/me lavo. See 30.2.

relational adjective el adjetivo relacional
a type of Spanish ADJECTIVE that typically replaces a phrase consisting of de + a noun, e.g. problemas estudiantiles for problemas de los estudiantes ‘student problems’, industria petrolera for industria del petróleo ‘oil industry’. See 5.11 for details. Adjectives that merely describe qualities (the majority), like hombre inteligente, pájaro blanco, are ‘descriptive’ adjectives or adjetivos calificativos.

relative clause la cláusula relativa
a SUBORDINATE CLAUSE that modifies a noun or pronoun used earlier in a sentence, e.g. ‘the house that Jack built’, el amigo con el que fui al cine ‘the friend I went to the cinema with’. All Spanish relative clauses must be introduced by a RELATIVE PRONOUN. See Chapter 39.

relative pronoun el pronombre relativo
defined at 39.1.

remote conditions la condición improbable o irreal
defined at 29.3.

reported speech el discurso indirecto
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.
restrictive restrictivo 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 ‘Spanish fruit’, ‘houses that have red roofs’. Non-restrictive adjectives and clauses do not create a subset, as in ‘the holy Bible’, ‘the galaxies that fill the universe’; see 39.1.2 for details.

se de matización defined at 30.5.

se impersonal a name for the Spanish pronoun se when it has the same meaning as the French word on, German man, English ‘people’/’one’, as in se entra por aquí ‘one goes in this way’, se come demasiado ‘people eat too much’. It must be distinguished from SE PASIVO.

se pasivo see PASSIVE.

semivowel la semivocal in Spanish these are y or i when they are pronounced like the y in yo, and u when it is pronounced [w], as in bueno. The semivowels in the following words are in bold: viene, Italia, dio, viuda, hay, buye, Uruguay, tuerca, etc.

sentence la oración the longest unit of grammar, ending with a full stop in writing. It must have at least one main CLAUSE, e.g. Miguel compró un coche, and the main clause(s) can have one or more dependent SUBORDINATE CLAUSES: Miguel compró un coche que tiene cuatro puertas. ‘Fantastic party last night!’ is not a sentence but a phrase since it has no FINITE VERB. See also PHRASE.

singular singular a grammatical term referring to one person or thing. See also PLURAL.

stress el acento tónico 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 ‘comfortable’, verdad. The position of the stress can affect meaning in both Spanish and English, compare ‘a rebel’ and ‘they rebel’, or hablo and habló.

subject el sujeto the person or thing that performs the action of a verb, as in ‘Mike slammed the door’, ‘Jill’s 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 ‘Robert is blond’, ‘bread can go stale’, Maria parece contenta.

subjunctive mood el modo subjuntivo 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.

subordinate clause la cláusula subordinada 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 when they are fresh’. A sentence consisting of a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses is traditionally called a ‘complex’ sentence, una oración compuesta or una oración compleja. Spanish subordinate clauses often – but by no means always – require subjunctive verbs. See Chapter 20.
subordinator el nexo
subordinante

a word or phrase that introduces a SUBORDINATE CLAUSE, e.g. te lo diré cuando llegues ‘I’ll tell you when you arrive’, Alfredo me dijo que se sentía mejor ‘Alfredo told me that he felt better’, no sé dónde están ‘I don’t know where they are’, los puse ahí para que los vieras/ vieses ‘I put them there so that you would see them’.

suffix el sufijo

letter(s) added to the end of the root form of a word so as to alter or add meaning, e.g. ‘socialism’, ‘artist’, ‘deepen’, contestación ‘answer’, impermeable ‘waterproof’.

superlative el superlativo

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 tallest’ / él es el más alto, ‘the least expensive’ / el menos caro.

tense el tiempo (verbal)

da 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.

tilde (fem.)

any written accent in Spanish, i.e. the acute accents in áéíóú, the sign over an ñ or the dieresis (two dots) over a û as in desagüe. In everyday speech the word el acento is often used for the acute accent over vowels like á, é, í, etc., but la tilde is the usual word in grammar books.

topic el tema

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. ‘Peter won the lottery’. But it could be a DIRECT OBJECT, e.g. ‘pork I’m not eating, so there!’, or some other word or phrase, as in ‘as for cricket, it’s a game I don’t really understand’. See 42.9.1.

transitive verb el verbo transitorio

a VERB is transitive if it can have a DIRECT OBJECT: ‘I broke a glass’, Ángel la admiraba ‘Angel admired her’. See also INTRANSITIVE VERB.

triphthong el triptongo

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: evacuáis, construyáis, cambiéis, buéy. See also SYLLABLE, DIPHTHONG.

unfulfilled conditions la (oración) condicional imposible o contrafactual

defined at 29.4.

verb el verbo

a type of word which refers to an action, event, process or state: ‘to repair’, ‘to shine’, ‘to go’, ‘to be’, comer, brillar, estar, ser.
| **verb phrase** _la frase_ | 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_. |
The following general works are useful for serious students of Spanish.


—— *Gramática descriptiva de la lengua española*, ed. I. Bosque Muñoz and V. Demonte Barreto, 3 vols (Madrid: Espasa, 1999). A collection of articles by more than 70 authors. The most comprehensive descriptive grammar available, but strictly for expert linguists. The bibliography is extensive.


—— *Esbozo de una nueva gramática de la lengua española* (Madrid: Espasa, 1973). Largely superseded by the NGLE and GDLE.

—— *Ortografía de la lengua española* (Madrid: Espasa 2010)

Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, *Diccionario de americanismos*. Online version http://lema.rae.es/damer. Its more than 70,000 entries demonstrate the international diversity of Spanish.


Seco, M., *Diccionario de dudas y dificultades de la lengua española*, 10a edición revisada y puesta al día, (Madrid: Espasa, 1998). An eminently sensible guide to good usage that only rarely disagrees with the Academy’s recommendations.
An excellent, up-to-date monolingual dictionary.

The following works are mentioned in the text:


DeMello, G. His numerous publications, based on analyses of the Corpus of Educated Spoken Spanish from 11 cities, are especially useful in determining the geographical range of certain constructions in spontaneous speech. A list of his books and articles is available at https://clas.uiowa.edu/dwllc/spanish-portuguese/people/george-demello.


Gili y Gaya, S., *Curso superior de sintaxis española*, 8ª edición (Barcelona: Bibliograf, 1958; often reprinted).


Kany, C.E., *Sintaxis hispanoamericana* (Madrid: Gredos, 1970, several reprints); English original published by the University of Chicago (1945). A valuable guide to the variety of Latin-American syntax. It does not reliably mark register, so many examples may be sub-standard even on their own territory.


Sources of examples

Many of the examples are modified versions of extracts from printed or spoken sources; these are not attributed. Poetry and poetic prose have been excluded. The following authors and publications are quoted:

**Argentina:** SA Selva Amada, JA Jorge Asís, JLB Jorge Luis Borges, JC Julio Cortázar, Diario La Provincia, Gente, Lugcos, EL Enrique Lynch, La Nación, CP Claudia Piñeiro, MP Manuel Puig, Río Negro, ES Ernesto Sábato, MSQ María Sáenz Quesada. **Bolivia:** La Prensa, La Razón. **Chile:** IA, Isabel Allende, RB Roberto Bolaño, La Cuarta, JD José Donoso, La Época, ¿Qué pasa?, LS Luis Sepúlveda, Tenfield Digital, SV Sergio Vodanovic. **Colombia:** MBDB Mario Bahamón Dussán, GGM Gabriel García Márquez, El Heraldo, Monumental, Mujer a Mujer, Promocomercio, LR Laura Restrepo, Terra, El Tiempo. **Costa Rica:** La Nación. **Cuba:** RA Reinaldo Arenas, AA Antón Arrufat, GCI Guillermo Cabrera Infante, AC Alejo Carpentier, FC Fidel Castro, Cuba Internacional, Granma, PJG Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, LO Luis Ortega, LO Lisandro Otero, VdeC Vindicación de Cuba (the transcript of a show trial). **Dominican Republic:** Hora. **Ecuador:** El Comercio, Hoy. **El Salvador:** La Prensa, Vértice. **Guatemala:** Prensa Libre. **Honduras:** La Prensa. **Mexico:** JA José Agustín, JJA Juan José Arreola, NC Nellie Campobello, MC Mario Cantú, AC Alberto Chimal, El Economista, DES Daniel Espartaco Sánchez, BE Bernardo Esquinca, LE Laura Esquivel, Excélsior, CF Carlos Fuentes, SG Sergio Galindo, AH Anabel Hernández, JH Julián Herbert, Historia general de México (Erika Velásquez García et al.), JI Jorge Ibargüengoitía, Informador,
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