

Hablando de gramática

por Señor Conner

Señor Conner is the author of the popular language series *BREAKING THE SPANISH BARRIER*. Each month he will feature a grammatical topic of interest to our readers. Have ideas of topics you would like to see covered? E-mail Señor Conner at john@tobreak.com. You can also visit his website: www.tobreak.com.

The progressive tense

The progressive is the tense that gives extra emphasis to an act that is actually in progress – an event that is occurring at the exact moment that a speaker is describing. In English, we might say “I am eating now” rather than “I eat now” to emphasize the action in progress. In Spanish, the progressive can only be used to describe an event in the present or an event from the past.

EXAMPLES:

El teléfono está sonando ahora, pero no quiero contestarlo.

The phone is ringing now, but I don't want to answer it.

Mi novio estaba comiendo cuando llegué a su casa.

My boyfriend was eating when I arrived at his house.

How is the progressive tense formed?

This tense is normally formed with the present or imperfect of the verb “estar” (or “continuar” or “seguir”) and a present participle.

Form of “ <i>estar, continuar, seguir</i> ”			Present participle
estoy	estamos	+	hablando comiendo viviendo
estás	estáis		
está	están		
estaba	estábamos		
estabas	estabais		
estaba	estaban		

Do you remember how to form a present participle?

a) Delete the infinitive ending, then add “-ando” for –AR and “-iendo” for –ER and –IR verbs.

hablar	→	habl	+ ando =	hablando
comer	→	com	+ iendo =	comiendo
vivir	→	viv	+ iendo =	viviendo

b) –IR stem-changing verbs have a special vowel change in the present participle, the same letter that changed in the third person preterite forms.

dormir	→	<i>preterite</i> durmió	=	present participle durmiendo
morir	→	murió	=	muriendo
pedir	→	pidió	=	pidiendo
sentir	→	sintió	=	sintiendo

Speaking of Grammar

c) Some verbs have irregular present participles. In all of the following examples, you will notice the “i” → “y” in the present participle.

		<u>present participle</u>
caer	→	cayendo
construir	→	construyendo
creer	→	creyendo
destruir	→	destruyendo
huir	→	huyendo
ir	→	yendo
leer	→	leyendo
traer	→	trayendo

EXAMPLES:

Tony González está durmiendo ahorita porque mañana tiene un partido importante en Kansas City.
Tony González is sleeping now because he has an important game tomorrow in Kansas City.

“No estoy pidiéndote nada”, dijo Carolina Herrera, la diseñadora venezolana.
“I am not asking you for anything,” said Carolina Herrera, the Venezuelan designer.

Anoche estaba leyendo la nueva novela de Sandra Cisneros cuando me llamó mi amiga Conchita.
Last night I was reading the new Sandra Cisneros novel when my friend Conchita called me.

Please keep these three things in mind:

- 1) The progressive is a verbal tense. The ending of the present participle is always “o” – there is no feminine nor plural form (*“María está comienda” is incorrect! – The correct form is “*María está comiendo.*”)
- 2) In Spanish, the progressive can only describe an action occurring in the present or past tense. It cannot be used to talk about the future as we do in English. *“Shakira está cantando mañana en el concierto” is not correct. Instead, you must say: “*Shakira canta mañana ...*” or “*Shakira va a cantar (cantará) mañana...*”
- 3) Object pronouns can either be **attached** to the present participle **or put before** the form of “*estar*” (or “*continuar*” or “*seguir*”). If you attach the pronoun, you must remember to add an accent mark: “*Estoy cepillándome los dientes ahora.*”

PRUEBA DE REPASO

I) Change these verbs to the corresponding form of the progressive:

- | | |
|--------------|-------------|
| a) caminas → | d) comíamos |
| b) dormía → | e) vuelvo |
| c) piden → | f) leen |

II) Provide the correct form of the progressive tense in the sentences below:

- a) En este momento _____ muchísimo, y por eso, las calles están resbalosas. (nevar)
- b) Ahora nosotros _____ la dulce música de la flauta. (escuchar)
- c) Te aseguro que te _____ todo lo que recuerdo. (decir)
- d) Mi novio _____ las Olimpiadas en Turín anoche a las ocho cuando llegaron los pesados vecinos. (ver)
- e) Anoche yo _____ a las nueve cuando oí la terrible noticia. (vestirse)

Answers: I — a) estás caminando b) estaba durmiendo c) están pidiendo d) estábamos comiendo e) estoy volviendo
II — a) está nevando b) estamos escuchando c) estoy diciendo d) estaba viendo e) estaba visitando