

# 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](mailto:john@tobreak.com). You can also visit his website: [www.tobreak.com](http://www.tobreak.com).

## The personal “a”

When the direct object in Spanish is a noun (or a pronoun) that refers to a **specific** (known) person, one must place an “a” between the verb and that object. This practice may seem a little strange, as there is nothing equivalent in the English language. Let’s look at a few examples right away of this personal “a.”

**Examples:** *Veo a Gael García Bernal; está hablando con Jennifer López.*  
I see Gael García Bernal; he is talking now with Jennifer López.

*Anoche conocí a Sila María Calderón, la ex gobernadora de Puerto Rico.*  
Last night I met Sila María Calderón, the ex-governor of Puerto Rico.

*Quiero a Lucía.*  
I love Lucy.

*Invitamos a muchos chicos de mi clase a la fiesta de Año Nuevo.*  
We invited many kids in my class to the New Year’s party.

What is the theory behind this personal “a”? I’ve always explained to students that this personal “a” cushions the direct object from the force of the verb. It’s as if this “a” were like a giant spring, softening the “hit” the direct object takes from the verb. Of course, if the direct object is an thing – a pillow, or chair, or car – it can take the force of the verb with no problem – a personal “a” is not needed!

**Examples:** *Compré una almohada en Target.*  
I bought a pillow at Target.

*Estamos poniendo las sillas enfrente de la chimenea.*  
We are putting the chairs in front of the chimney.

There are a few additional things to keep in mind. After the verb “*tener*,” one normally would not use a personal “a.” “*Tener*” is an exception!

**Examples:** *“Tengo tres primas que viven en Bogotá”, comentó Shakira.*  
“I have three cousins who live in Bogota,” commented Shakira.

*Mi hermano menor tiene dos hijos preciosos.*  
My little brother has two adorable children.

## Speaking of Grammar

A personal “*a*” is also not used if the direct object doesn’t refer to a specific (or known) person.

**Examples:** *Busco una secretaria que hable francés e italiano.*  
I’m looking for a secretary who speaks French and Italian.

*“Necesitamos un entrenador nuevo porque siempre perdemos”, dijo el atleta frustrado de Toronto.*  
“We need a new coach because we always lose,” said the frustrated athlete from Toronto.

Finally, don’t be shocked if you see a personal “*a*” used before a noun that refers to someone’s pet! The personal “*a*” shows the affection that the speaker feels for that special animal.

**Examples:** *Amamos a Bowser, nuestro viejo pastor alemán.*  
We love Bowser, our old German shepherd.

*¿Has visto a Silvestre, nuestro gatito? ¿Dónde estará?*  
Have you seen Silvestre, our little cat? I wonder where he is.

## PRUEBA DE REPASO

Fill in the blanks with a personal “*a*,” if necessary!

- a) Mis amigos creen que estoy loco, pero estoy segura de que vi \_\_\_\_\_ Kelly Ripa con Mark Consuelos en la calle.
- b) Tenemos \_\_\_\_\_ dos vecinos extraños que duermen de sol a sol.
- c) Anoche conocimos \_\_\_\_\_ Miguel Tejada, el extraordinario beisbolista.
- d) Alex Rodríguez intentó golpear \_\_\_\_\_ Jason Varitek.
- e) Esta tarde tengo que lavar \_\_\_\_\_ Fido, el perrito de mi jefe.
- f) Desde mi balcón puedo ver \_\_\_\_\_ el Volga, el río más largo de Europa.
- g) Necesito \_\_\_\_\_ una novia que me comprenda.
- h) Por la mañana siempre hago \_\_\_\_\_ café con leche.
- i) Esta mañana he visto \_\_\_\_\_ Laura Bush, la esposa del presidente, en la tele.
- j) Quiero mucho \_\_\_\_\_ mi profesor de español. ¡Es tan inteligente y tan guapo!