

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.

Letters from our Readers

Thanks to so many of you who have recently sent in great topics for articles recently. A special thanks to Ruth, who wrote in a few issues back, whom I mistakenly called “Lucy” in these pages in the January issue. She was quite gracious in forgiving my editorial gaffe. In any case, the following letter is definitely from “Martin.”

Martin wrote: How about a lesson regarding when to omit the definite article in the *Think Spanish* grammar section? This is a source of confusion and no teacher has been able to adequately explain it to me.

This topic is a very good one. First things first. There are four definite articles in Spanish: el, la, los, and las, which all correspond to the English definite article “the.” Now, in order to understand when definite articles are NOT used, we need to do a quick review of when they ARE needed.

WHEN DEFINITE ARTICLES ARE COMMONLY USED

1) **To identify a specific noun**

*Voy a comprar **el** perro que veo en **el** escaparate.*

I'm going to buy the dog that I see in the store window.

2) **Before days of the week (except after *ser*), seasons, and modified periods of time**

***El** lunes voy a ver la nueva película *Goodnight*, and *Good Luck* porque no pude verla **la** semana pasada.*

On Monday I'm going to see the new movie *Good Night*, and *Good Luck* because I couldn't see it last week.

3) **With titles of respect (*señor, señora, señorita, doctor, etc.*)**

***La** señorita Torres me invitó a una exposición de arte.*

Miss Torres invited me to an art exhibition.

4) **When speaking in general terms or with abstract nouns**

***El** amor es algo muy necesario en **la** vida.*

Love is what is needed in life.

5) **With the names of languages (except when directly following *hablar, entender, escribir, estudiar, leer* and *saber*)**

***El** portugués y **el** español tienen mucho en común.*

Portuguese and Spanish have a lot in common.

6) **With body parts or articles of clothing, especially after reflexive verbs**

*Me lavo **las** manos y me pongo **los** guantes cuando hace frío.*

I wash my hands and put on my gloves when it is cold.

7) **With words that indicate weight, rate or measure**

*Los tomates cuestan tres dólares **la** libra.*

The tomatoes cost three dollar per pound.

8) **With an infinitive to form a noun**

***El** ladrar de mi perro me vuelve loco a veces.*

My dog's barking drives me crazy at times.

***El** gritar en una biblioteca no es una buena idea.*

Shouting in a library is not a good idea.

9) **To tell time**

*Son **las** diez y media y voy a pedir otra pizza.*

It's ten-thirty and I'm going to order another pizza.

Now we are ready to focus directly on Martin's question!

WHEN DEFINITE ARTICLES ARE COMMONLY NOT USED

1) **Before days of the week after the verb *ser***

Hoy es lunes, mi día de la semana favorito.

Today is Monday, my favorite day of the week.

2) **With a title of respect when you are speaking directly to someone**

Buenos días, Sr. Torres. ¿Cómo le va?

Good morning, Mr. Torres. How's it going?

3) **Before the names of languages when directly following *hablar, enseñar, entender, escribir, estudiar, leer, saber***

Shakira habla español, pero aquí nadie entiende español.

Shakira speaks Spanish, but no one here understands Spanish.

4) **Usually after *de* and *en* with seasons or names of languages**

Tengo una clase de chino esta tarde.

I have a Chinese class this afternoon.

Nunca hago mucho trabajo en (el) verano porque prefiero ir a la playa.

I never do a lot of work in the summer because I prefer to go to the beach.

Prefiero hablar en coreano.

I prefer to speak in Korean.

5) **Before a number after the name of royalty or of a pope**

Carlos V es mi rey favorito y Juan Pablo II es mi papa favorito.

Charles the Fifth is my favorite king, and John Paul the Second is my favorite pope.

6) **When used in "apposition"** (a fancy word that means a noun or noun phrase placed with another and used as an explanatory equivalent)

Caracas, capital de Venezuela, tiene muchos museos impresionantes.

Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, has many impressive museums.

Sandra Bullock, actriz de Crash, también actuó en Speed.

Sandra Bullock, the actress in Crash, also acted in Speed.

PRUEBA DE REPASO

Write the appropriate definite article, if necessary:

- _____ Sra. Rodríguez acaba de llegar.
- Buenos días, _____ doctor Jekyll. ¿Cómo está Ud.?
- Ayer compramos huevos en una granja a \$2.50 _____ docena.
- No hablo bien _____ español, pero hablo _____ italiano perfectamente.
- Felipe _____ II fue un rey de mucha importancia.
- Joaquim Phoenix, _____ estrella de Walk the Line, me llamó por teléfono anoche.
- _____ viernes tengo un examen, pero como hoy es _____ miércoles todavía me quedan dos días para estudiar.
- "Prefiero cantar en _____ español", les dijo el cantante Cabas a todos sus admiradores.
- "Lo importante es no perder _____ fe", comentó Enrique al final de la película El Norte.

Answers: a) La b) leave blank c) la d) el, leave blank e) leave blank f) leave blank g) El, leave blank h) leave blank i) la