

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. Do you 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.

MORE LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

Happy Thanksgiving to everyone! I am so thankful to the many folks who have sent in questions during these past months. I have also appreciated hearing your suggestions and kind words. Keep them coming, *¡por favor!*

Gerald wrote:

I subscribe to *Think Spanish Magazine*, and I welcome your tips and advice on Spanish grammar. I was wondering if you could provide some insight into the use of “*lo*” and “*le*” and how they differ. I seem to have trouble with these.

Thanks so much for this great question. This topic is one that has vexed many a student of Spanish. It doesn't seem fair that words that are so tiny can create such big problems! Let's just start off by looking at a bunch of sentences where “*lo*” and “*le*” are abundant. After each sentence, I'll offer a comment or two.

Examples: *¿El libro nuevo libro de Harry Potter? – **Lo** leí anoche.*
The new Harry Potter book? – I read it last night.

⇒ The most common use of “*lo*” is seen in this sentence. It is a masculine, direct object pronoun, taking the place of a singular, masculine noun. “*Lo*” stands in for “*el nuevo libro*.”

***Le** escribí una carta a mi amigo Luis.*
I wrote a letter to my friend, Luis.

⇒ “*Le*” is used in most parts of the Spanish-speaking world as a masculine (and feminine!) indirect object pronoun. In this sentence, “*le*” means “to him,” but it could mean “to her” (e.g., *Le escribí una carta a Luisa*). “*Le*” certainly seems redundant to English speakers, who find it strange to have both “*le*” AND “*a Luis*” or “*a Luisa*” in a sentence. “*Le*” simply announces the indirect object pronoun, and “*a Luis*” or “*a Luisa*” clarifies it.

*¿Eres actriz? – Sí, **lo** soy.*
Are you an actress? – Yes, I am.

⇒ “*Lo*” is also used to take the place of an entire idea. In this sentence, “**lo**” stands for the idea of “being an actress.”

*¿**Le** diste el regalo a María Celeste? – No, no se **lo** di.*
Did you give the present to María Celeste? – No, I didn't give it to her.

⇒ The first sentence offers another example of “*le*” as an indirect object pronoun. “*Le*” is the indirect object pronoun and “*a María Celeste*” clarifies to whom that “*le*” refers. In the second sentence, the direct object pronoun “*lo*” STANDS for “*el regalo*.”

*Por favor, no **le** digas nada a mi papá. Si él supiera que yo fui al concierto de Thalía, me mataría.*
Please, don't say anything to my dad. If he knew that I went to the Thalía concert, he would kill me.

⇒ Here the indirect object pronoun “*le*” stands for “to him.”

*Ernesto, voy a robar el banco. – Ramón, por favor, no **lo** hagas.*
Ernesto, I'm going to rob the bank. – Ramón, please, don't do it!

⇒ The direct object pronoun “*lo*” here stands for the idea of robbing a bank.

There is one final piece of advice, Gerald. The above explanations hold true in most countries. When in Spain, however, be aware that things can be a little different.

Some people choose to use “*le*” as a singular masculine (*but never feminine*) DIRECT object!

Example: ¿*El acueducto?* – *Le vi al entrar en la ciudad de Segovia.*
The aqueduct? – I saw it upon entering Segovia.

⇒ In most countries, the second sentence would read: “**Lo** vi al entrar en la ciudad de Segovia.”

Jan had this question:

What is the story with words that end in “-ista”? Should these words be masculine or feminine? Does it matter if they are nouns or adjectives? When I see the words “*el dentista*,” something seems wrong to me. Am I right?

Sorry, Jan, you are wrong. “*El dentista*” is perfectly correct! But, so is “*la dentista*.” You see, words that end in –ista are quite wonderful. They can be either masculine or feminine. “*El socialista*” would refer to a man, and “*la socialista*” to a woman. When you have adjectives that end with –ista (e.g., *pesimista*, *optimista*, etc.), you make them plural by adding an “s,” but you never mess with the “a” ending (e.g., *un hombre optimista*, *una mujer optimista*, *unos hombres optimistas*, *unas mujeres optimistas*).

Examples: *El famoso dentista, Dr. Sacamuelas, es superoptimista.*
The famous dentist, Dr. Sacamuelas, is very optimistic.

La bellísima artista, Thalía, nunca devolvió mis llamadas.
The super-beautiful artist, Thalía, never returned my calls.

PRUEBA DE REPASO

In these sentences, choose “lo” or “le.”

- 1) Oiga, señor. ¿Es Ud. policía? –No, no _____ soy.
- 2) _____ envié una tarjeta postal a mi nieta.
- 3) Por favor, diga _____ “hola” de mi parte a su amigo Rafael Nadal.
- 4) ¿El nuevo diente de oro de mi abuelo? Creo que él _____ compró en Internet.
- 5) Pero, mamá, todos mis amigos toman drogas. – Pues, Juanito, ¡tú no _____ hagas nunca!
- 6) María cuenta muchos chismes. No _____ digas nada a ella a menos que quieras que todo el mundo _____ sepa.
- 7) “_____ bueno, si breve, dos veces bueno”. (Gracián)

In these final three sentences, provide either the missing article (*el, la*) or the proper form of the adjective in parentheses.

- 8) ¡Qué interesante! Todos _____ dentistas reunidas aquí se llaman Ana.
- 9) Muchos de _____ socialistas de este pueblo participan activamente en la vida política.
- 10) Mis amigos _____ creen que los Red Sox no van a ganar otro campeonato en los próximos cincuenta años. (pesimista)