

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.

I said: "No!"

Oftentimes, speakers will answer a question negatively, or they will simply make a statement that is negative. They might be expressing that they just don't do something, they never go somewhere, they have nothing, they have no time, or that they are neither happy nor sad. In these sentences, you will usually see one of these words used:

no	–	no, not
nadie	–	no one
ni, ni	–	neither, nor
nunca	–	never
nada	–	nothing
ninguno/a	–	none, no

Examples: *¿Vas al concierto de Shakira y Juanes? – No, no voy.*
Are you going to the Shakira and Juanes concert? – No, I'm not going.

Nadie quiere ayudarme con la tarea.
No one wants to help me with the homework.

Ni Manny Ramírez ni Curt Schilling jugaron en el All-Star 2006 en Pittsburgh.
Neither Manny Ramirez nor Curt Schilling placed in the 2006 All-Star Game in Pittsburgh.

¿Escuchas la música de Paulina Rubio? – No, nunca la escucho.
Do you listen to the music of Paulina Rubio? – No, I never listen to it.

¿Queda algo en el refrigerador? – No, no queda nada.
Is there something left in the refrigerator? – No, there is nothing left.

¿Tienes alguna amiga en esta clase? – No, por desgracia, no tengo ninguna.
Do you have any friend in this class? – No, unfortunately, I have none.

There are some key differences between Spanish and English when using negative words. There are also a few little details that you should be sure to master. Here are four things to keep in mind while speaking negatively with style (and grammatical accuracy!)

1) Once a negative indicator is placed before the verb, words that follow must take a negative form wherever possible.

Example: *¿Tienes algo en el bolsillo? – No, no tengo nada.*
Do you have something in your pocket? – No, I don't have anything.

Note: It is NOT possible to substitute "algo" for "nada" in the answer to the question above as we would in English. Double negatives are the rule in Spanish!

Speaking of Grammar

2) It is also NOT possible to have a negative word following a verb if there is no negative indicator before the verb.

Example: **Hay nadie en el parque.* (This sentence is wrong! It must read instead:
No hay nadie en el parque.)
There is no one in the park.

3) When using the words “*ni, ni*” in a sentence to mean “neither, nor,” be aware that in Spanish, the verb following will be plural, yet it almost always is singular in English.

Example: *Ni Ronaldo ni Beckham van a jugar mucho fútbol este otoño.*
Neither Ronaldo nor Beckham is going to play a lot of soccer this fall.

However, there is one case when “*ni, ni*” could use a singular verb in Spanish. When it is clear that only one person could do that specific action, use the singular.

Example: *Ni Kerry ni Cheney será el próximo presidente de los Estados Unidos.*
Neither Kerry nor Cheney will be the next president of the United States.

Note: Do you see? Both of these men could not simultaneously be the next president of the United States. Therefore, you choose a singular verb!

4) In Spanish, one would rarely make a negative word plural. Consider the case of “*ninguno/a*” which means “none”:

Example: *¿Tienes secretos para mí? – No, no tengo ninguno.*
Do you have secrets for me? – No, I don’t have any.

Note: You would not use “*ningunos*” in the answer here. It is simply illogical to have a plural form of “nothing.” (For those of you who love exceptions to rules, it is possible to find a plural of “*ninguno*” used if the noun it describes is only used in the plural! For example: I have no scissors = *No tengo ningunas tijeras.*)

PRUEBA DE REPASO

In sentences (a-g), fill in the blanks with the correct negative word, choosing among the following words: nada, nadie, ni, ninguna, no, nunca. In sentences (h-i), you will have to decide if the verb should be singular or plural.

- ¿Tienes algo para mí? – No, no tengo _____.
- _____ creyó lo que hizo Zidane en la final de la Copa Mundial.
- _____ Thalía _____ Alejandro Sanz pudieron asistir a mi cumpleaños este año.
- ¿Fuiste anoche con tus amigos a ver Los piratas del Caribe II? – No, no voy _____ al cine.
- ¿Tienes muchas horas libres en una semana típica? – No, no tengo _____.
- ¿Hay alguien en nuestro barrio que sepa bailar bien el tango? – No, no hay _____.
- ¿Conoces una actriz famosa? _____, _____ conozco a _____ actriz.
- Ni mi madre ni mi abuela _____ a visitarme al hospital. (venir)
- Ni Francia ni Alemania _____ la Copa Mundial de fútbol este año. (ganar)

ANSWERS: a) nada b) Nadie c) Ni, ni d) nunca e) ninguna f) nadie g) No, no, ninguna h) vienen (han venido, etc.) i) ganó (¡ *only one country could win it!*)