

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.

It's all relative – some of my favorite pronouns!

This month we will look at relative pronouns. This is another term that I really didn't understand fully until I began teaching. A relative pronoun is simply a word or group of words that connects a dependent clause to a subject found at the beginning of a sentence. A relative pronoun, then, "relates" these two parts of a sentence, linking some action in the second part of the sentence to the subject at the beginning.

Let's look over the three big categories of "relative pronouns":

1) QUE

The word "que," by far, is the most common relative pronoun. It is the true work horse of relative pronouns. It could mean "who," "whom," "that," or "which."

EXAMPLES: *El libro que quiero leer este verano se llama Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows.*
The book that I want to read this summer is called *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

El cantante puertorriqueño que ganó un Grammy este año se llama Gilberto Santa Rosa.
The Puerto Rican singer who won a Grammy this year is named Gilberto Santa Rosa.

La mecedora que tengo en la sala era de mi bisabuela.
The rocking chair which (that) I have in the living room was my great-grandmother's.

2) QUIEN, QUIENES

The words "quien" and "quienes" only refer to people and mean "who" or "whom." These words are found in the following situations:

a) after the prepositions: "a," "con," "de," "en" (Remember the word CONDENA!)

EXAMPLES: *Las cantantes a quienes me refiero son las Dixie Chicks.*
The singers to whom I am referring are the Dixie Chicks.

La persona con quien sueño de sol a sol eres tú.
The person whom I dream about night and day is you.

El político de quien hablo se llama Barack Obama.
The politician of whom I'm speaking is named Barack Obama.

La persona en quien pienso ahora es mi prima, Marisela.
The person I'm thinking about now is my cousin, Marisela.

b) after a comma in a clause that offers non-essential information

EXAMPLES: *Mi amigo, quien tiene el pelo rubio, acaba de robar el banco.*
My friend, who (by the way) is blond, just robbed the bank.

Note: If there were no comma here, you would use a "que." The meaning would be different: i.e., *Mi amigo que tiene el pelo rubio acaba de robar el banco*. My friend who is blond just robbed the bank. This sentence helps to identify **which** friend just robbed the bank: my blond friend, not my red-headed friend, etc.

3) EL QUE, LA QUE, LOS QUE, LAS QUE (EL CUAL, LA CUAL, LOS CUALES, LAS CUALES), LO QUE, LO CUAL

These longer relative pronouns can also mean “who,” “whom,” “that” or “which.” They are used in the following situations:

- a) When following these prepositions: (*cerca de, delante de, detrás de, entre, para, por, sin, sobre*)

EXAMPLES: *Las casas **entre las cuales (las que)** hay un pino enorme pertenecen a mis primos.*
The houses between which there is an enormous pine tree belong to my cousins.

*La única cosa **sin la cual (la que)** no puedo vivir es mi teléfono celular.*
The only thing without which I couldn't live is my cell phone.

- b) When there are two antecedents (two different nouns in the main clause) and you want to refer back to the FIRST of those mentioned.

EXAMPLES: *Los novios de Belinda, **los cuales** están en la playa ahora, no se conocen el uno al otro.*
Belinda's boyfriends, the ones who are on the beach now, don't know each other.

*La amiga de Roberto, **la cual (la que)** es rubia, nunca me dice nada.*
Robert's friend, the one who is blonde, never says anything to me.

- c) The neuter forms “lo que” and “lo cual” refer back to an idea or concept.

EXAMPLE: *Mis padres me dijeron que íbamos a Hawaii en la primavera, **lo cual** me hace muy feliz.*
My parents told me that we were going to Hawaii this spring, which makes me very happy.

PRUEBA DE REPASO

Supply the correct relative pronoun in the spaces below:

- a) El pájaro _____ canta tanto en la mañana vive en ese árbol alto.
- b) Los primos de Cristina, _____ es rubia, siempre juegan al golf conmigo.
- c) El cantante con _____ siempre sueño es Juanes.
- d) Los hombres para _____ yo trabajo son muy tacaños.
- e) El apartamento en _____ vivo está cerca del parque.
- f) Está nevando muy fuerte ahora, _____ me pone muy nerviosa.
- g) Me gustaría comprar esas casas delante de _____ hay un lago bonito.
- h) Los candidatos a _____ me estoy refiriendo son Hillary Clinton y Mitt Romney.
- i) Los nietos del Sr. Sánchez, _____ viven en San Diego, nos van a visitar en el verano.
- j) La chica _____ cantó con Justin Timberlake durante los Grammys está muy contenta.