

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

## ¡Bravo! E-mail from our readers!

A number of interesting e-mails have come in recently from readers with questions and ideas. Here they are:

**Daniel wrote: I have noticed different endings of words “-ito, -illo, -ón, -ote,” etc., and I’d love to know if there are rules governing these endings. I’d love to feel confident enough to try some of these out myself. Help!**

Spanish suffixes is a great topic, one that I might never have thought to include in an article. Thanks for this terrific idea, Daniel! Knowing how suffixes are used can help your Spanish sound much more authentic. You can also understand native speakers better. Let me first offer a few general observations, and then let’s look at some examples.

Suffixes are commonly used to refer to the size of something. Suffixes can also be used to express a certain feeling that a speaker may have towards something; they help to convey an emotional message. Keep your eyes out for words that end in the following suffixes.

### MOST COMMON DIMINUTIVE SUFFIXES (-ito or -cito, -illo or -cillo, -ico, etc.)

<b>Examples:</b>	Juan (John)	→ <i>Juanito</i> (Johnny)
	casa (house)	→ <i>casita</i> (little house)
	ratón (mouse)	→ <i>ratoncito</i> (little mouse)
	cigarro (cigar)	→ <i>cigarrillo</i> (cigarette)
	ventana (window)	→ <i>ventanilla</i> (car or airplane or ticket window)
	zapato (shoe)	→ <i>zapatito</i> (little shoe)

Though these diminutive endings could imply smaller size, of course, but they could also just express affection. “*Juanito*,” for example, could be said to a seven-foot tall basketball player by his mother!

### SUFFIXES TO “MAKE THINGS (SEEM) BIGGER” (“-ón, -azo, -ote, -acho)

<b>Examples:</b>	<i>hombre</i> (man)	→ <i>hombión</i> (big man)
	<i>mujer</i> (woman)	→ <i>mujerona</i> (big woman)
	<i>caja</i> (box)	→ <i>cajón</i> (drawer)
	<i>dolor</i> (pain)	→ <i>dolorazo</i> (big pain. e.g., <i>dolorazo de cabeza</i> .. huge headache)
	<i>vaso</i> (glass)	→ <i>vasote</i> (big glass)
	<i>rico</i> (rich)	→ <i>ricacho, ricachón</i> (very rich)

### PEJORATIVE (CRITICAL) SUFFIXES (-aco, -ejo, -astro, -ucho)

<b>Examples:</b>	<i>pájaro</i> (bird)	→ <i>pajarraco</i> (ugly/scary bird)
	<i>libro</i> (book)	→ <i>librejo</i> (worthless book)
	<i>madre</i> (mother)	→ <i>madrastra</i> (step-mother)
	<i>padre</i> (father)	→ <i>padrastra</i> (step-father)
	<i>casa</i> (house)	→ <i>casucha</i> (run-down house)

**Ruth wrote: It is not usually pointed out that there are some verbs that are only conjugated in the third person singular. Think how encouraging it is to be able to eliminate many verb conjugations! I would love to see one of your interesting and unique explanations of this topic.**

(Before I try to tackle this topic, I need to say that Ruth is my most loyal e-mailer. She is a seventy-five year-old student of the Spanish language who is a founding member of an active Spanish Club. She told me once that: “I love to come across mysteries and pursue them until they are solved.” Well, Ruth, I will answer your question, drawing heavily on the great material that you sent along with your question. You are an inspiration to us all!)

There are indeed a number of verbs, Ruth, that are normally only conjugated in the third-person singular. They are seen, of course, in the infinitive form as well. These verbs are sometimes referred to as “defective verbs” or “impersonal verbs.” I guess they are defective because they don’t conjugate in every form (though I agree with Ruth – that makes them desirable!), and they are impersonal because there is no person who can be the subject of the verb. These words tend to describe occurrences in nature. Let’s look at the most common (all of which, with three exceptions, were provided by Ruth!)

<b>alborear</b> – to dawn	<b>granizar</b> – to hail
<b>amanecer</b> – to dawn	<b>helar</b> – to freeze
<b>anocheecer</b> – to become night	<b>llover</b> – to rain
<b>atardecer</b> – to get dark	<b>lloviznar</b> – to drizzle
<b>deshelar(se)</b> – to melt, to thaw	<b>nevar</b> – to snow
<b>diluviar</b> – to pour down rain	<b>relampaguear</b> – to lightning
<b>escarchar</b> – to frost	<b>tronar</b> – to thunder

#### Examples:

*Anochece a eso de las ocho.*

It gets dark at around eight o’clock.

*Granizó tanto anoche que no podía ver bien en el coche.*

It hailed so much last night that I couldn’t see well in the car.

*Como llovía mucho esta tarde, mi amiga no quiso salir conmigo para ver la nueva película de Harry Potter.*

Since it was raining so much this afternoon, my friend didn’t want to go out to see the new Harry Potter movie with me.

*Cuando relampaguea y truena mucho, mis hermanitos tienen miedo.*

When it there is a lot of lightning and thunder, my little brothers get scared.

## PRUEBA DE REPASO

Do your best to translate the following. Remember what you have learned about suffixes and “defective” verbs!

- 1) *un cafecito*
- 2) *un sillón*
- 3) *un perrazo*
- 4) *un arroyuelo*
- 5) *un hotelucho*
- 6) It’s snowing.
- 7) It’s pouring down rain.
- 8) It’s dawning.
- 9) It drizzled for three hours.
- 10) The snow melted quickly.

ANSWERS: 1) a little cup of coffee 2) a big armchair 3) a big dog 4) a small stream 5) a horrible hotel 6) Nieva. 7) Diluvia. 8) Amanece/Alborea. 9) Llovizna ( por) tres horas. 10) La nieve se deshelo rápidamente.