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Explanations

Word Choice and different meanings/Expressions

1. que –eso (confusing “that”)

- que without an accent means “that”. The word “eso” also means “that”, however “eso” is used when pointing something out like “I want that”. In contrast, “que” is a connector that goes in the middle of a phrase such as “penguins are animals that are cute”. Does that make sense? 😊

2. por vs. porque

- porque means “because”. Por means “because of”. When writing a sentence like “Because of the storm, there was no school” many students accidentally use “porque de” in a literal attempt to say “because of”. Instead the correct way to say would simply be “por la tormenta...”

3. También vs. Tampoco

- También and Tampoco are words used to agree with someone. También is a Positive Word that means “also” and Tampoco is a negative word that means “neither/either”. If someone likes pizza, you can say “yo también”. If someone says they Don’t like pizza, you could say “yo tampoco” to agree that you don’t like it either/neither.

4. así vs. así que

- Así means “like so” or “like this/that”. Así que means “so”, “so that” or “therefore” and is a connector that shows the reason. If you say “Do it like this” or “I want some ice cream like that”, you would say “hazlo así” or “quiero helado así”. To use así que you would need a phrase that said: I went to bed early so I woke up early. Me acosté temprano, así que me levanté temprano. The most common mistake is for someone to try to say I went to the mall, so I bought a shirt and only put in “así” instead of “así que”.

5. Después vs. Después de vs. Después de que

- Use después when ending a thought with “later” or “afterwards, such as “I want to go later”.
- Use “después de” when following the “after” with a noun or an infinitive verb, such as “After the game, we will eat”. (después del partido, comeremos). Or “after going, we’ll celebrate” (después de ir, celebraremos).
- Use “después de que” when followed by a **conjugated** verb (even if there is a subject that comes before the conjugated verb). For example: After you finish, call me. (Después de que termines, llámame), or “I’ll eat after Mom makes dinner” (Comeré, después de que mama haga la cena).

6. “Al + infinitive verb” – “upon verbing”

- Using the word “AL” + an infinitive verb creates the phrase “upon verbing”. For example: “Al ver el coche, lo compré.” means “upon seeing the car, I bought it”. Another example would be “Al beber el café se puso feliz”-Upon/on drinking the coffee, he became happy. Students often miss this one b/c they think that you **MUST** have an “ando” or “iendo” to create “ING” which is often true but not always.

7. conmigo and contigo vs. con mi, con tú (special words)

- The phrase “with me” and “with you” have special words (conmigo) and (contigo). All of the rest are just normal. Con él = with him, con nosotros = with us, etc. There is no such thing as “con yo” or “con mi”

Explanations

8. Gracias por + infinitive (even when it comes later in the sentence) Gracias por

- Gracias is always followed by “por”, not “para”. Both por and para mean “for” but only one is correct in this situation. The same applies to apologies. “Lo siento por...”.

9. Using Google translate incorrectly.

- Lower level students will often rely on google translate and type something in to simply copy down the first result. This often produces terrible results. It is much better to use a website like “wordreference.com” that is an online dictionary instead of a translator. It will give you parts of speech and lots of options to help you choose the correct word. There are also many Use Forums at wordreference that let you ask native speakers what the best way to say a particular phrase may be. When you get a suggestion for the word you are looking for it is a great idea to translate it backwards from Spanish to English as well and see if it translates back correctly or it is a different meaning.

10. tocar vs. tomar

- tocar is to touch or “to play an instrument”. Tomar is to “drink” or to take.

11. a/en the correct word for “to” and “at”

- “en” means, “in, at, and on”. Many students like to use “a” for “at”, but this is 99% of the time a mistake unless talking about TIME. If you say the game is “at 5”, then it is correct to say “el partido es a las 5”, but too often students use “a” to try to mean “at” when not talking about time such as “I saw you at the beach”. They will incorrectly write. “Yo te vi a la playa” when it should be “yo te vi en la playa”. If in doubt, use “en”.
- Recap: “a” 99% of the time means “to”. And “en” 99% of the time means “in, at, on”.

12. “Veces” vs. “tiempo”

- The word “vez” or “veces” means “TIME” in English. The word “tiempo” means “TIME” as well. Therefore, when students want to say “TIME”, they don’t always know which one to choose.
- Use “Una Vez” or “Unas/Muchas Veces” when you are saying “many times”, “the first time”, “there was one time” or any other situation where you could substitute the word “Occurrence” or “occasion”.
- Use “tiempo” when you are saying “I don’t have time” where time is the thing that ticks by on clocks.
- p.s. don’t forget that the word “tiempo” in spanish can also refer to the weather? ¿Cómo está el tiempo? is a question about the weather outside.

13. Another and “~~un otro~~”

- The word “another” is one word in English. It is not “an other”. Many times students know the word “other” in spanish as “otro” but they can’t remember the word “another” so they make up “un otro” and hope that it means “another”. Instead just remember that “otro” in spanish is both “other” and “another”. There is no 2nd word. Please don’t add an extra “un” in the front.

Explanations

Grammar

1. Lo and La as “it”. Only as Direct Object-never as Subject

- When people say “IT” in Spanish, it is crucial to decide if you are using it as a Subject (that is doing the verb) or a direct or indirect object that is receiving the action of the verb. If it is a SUBJECT, then there is NO way to say “IT” and you simply omit the word and go on with your verb. For example, “It rained for 2 hours” is “llovió por 2 horas” and there is NO word for “it”. On the other hand if you have “it” as a direct object like “I saw **it** in the store”, the translation will use “Lo/La” depending on the gender of the word. “Yo **lo** vi en la tienda”.

2. Swimming is lots of fun! (not using divertido when diversión is needed)

- Tons of students in Spanish 2 learn that the word “fun” is “divertido” and sometimes that is correct. If I say “The class is fun”, I am using “fun” as an adjective b/c it describes the class and so it is correct to say “divertido/a”. However when we say “I like to have fun” or “swimming is lots of fun”, we are using “fun” as a noun and you must use the noun form of the word which is “diversión”. (Me gusta tener diversión) or (El nadar es mucha diversión). If you don’t like remembering that, then just remember to always change your sentence to be an adjective. (El nadar es muy divertido)—that made it an adj. again.

3. Using nouns and adjectives and verbs in a mixed up way:

- This is a continuation of #2 but simply is applied now to all words and not just the word “fun”. If I ask you to define the word “Limpieza” which means “cleanliness”, you cannot simply write: Es cuando una persona limpieza su coche sucio. This person has just said: It is when a person cleanliness his/her dirty car. The person is not paying attention to what part of speech he/she has just used and has used a noun instead using the verb “limpia”.

4. Ending clauses/sentences in Prepositions (to, at, in, on, towards, etc.) instead of “en la cual”, “a los cuales”, por la cual, etc.

- There are many “little” words in English that many times show “position”. These words are called “PREPOSITIONS”. Some of these are “in, at, on, to, towards, through, for, under, about, etc.” We often get a bit lazy in English and say a sentence that “ENDS” in a preposition. For example: That is the book that I want to look at; or Mike is the person that I was talking about; or even, This is the door that I need you to go through. Technically, even in English we aren’t supposed to end phrases with prepositions. Instead we would need to re-write them to say “This is the book at which I would like you to look” or “Mike is the person about which/whom I was talking” or “This is the door through which I need you to go”. (I know it sounds a bit weird) All of those have moved the preposition to the middle of the sentence and are now using the word “which”. In Spanish we will do the same but use our little preposition followed by the words “el/la cual”.
 - Esta es la ventana por la cual necesitas ir.
 - Mike es la persona sobre la cual platicaba.
 - Esa es la casa a la cual voy.

5. Subjunctive replacing the future tense Espero que tenga tiempo vs. Espero que tendré tiempo.

- When you have an opening trigger such as “I hope” combined with the future tense as your second verb, you do NOT need the 2nd verb to be in the formal “future tense”. Instead, you should write the 2nd verb in the present subjunctive which will be understood as the “future tense”. For example: To say: “I hope that Jill will come”, you don’t say “Espero que Jill vendrá”. Instead, it will be: “Espero que Jill venga”.

Explanations

6. Invisible “para” -in order to

- When you say “I study to get good grades” or “I called to talk” you are really saying “I study [in order to] get good grades”, or “I called [in order to] talk”. Some students see the English “to get” and just write “Yo estudio **sacar** buenas notas” or “Yo llamé hablar” thinking that the infinitive is providing the “to”. However in Spanish if you can replace “to” with “in order to” and still have it make sense, then you should use “para” instead of just using an infinitive. So the phrase would be “yo llamé **para** hablar” or “Yo estudio **para** sacar buenas notas”

7. Using “past participles” as adjectives. Está vestido, or estoy frustrado.

- A past participle is the “ado/ido” form of a verb. You can create an adjective out of many (not all) verbs by putting the verb in it’s “ado”/”ido” form and having it follow “estar”. For example. Estoy frustrado means that I am frustrated. Frustrated is an adjective and came from the verb frustrar. Same thing with “José está vestido”. That means José is dressed which is describing the noun and thus an adj. This does NOT work for every verb. Careful for some of the irregular “participles like abierto, dicho, hecho, puesto, escrito.....”

8. Bien vs. Buena, vs. bueno vs. Buen.

- Buena and Bueno are adjectives and used when describing a noun. Una película Buena o un carro Bueno.
- Buen is also an adjective but ONLY used when you want to put it in FRONT of a SINGULAR/MALE NOUN. For example, Hoy es un buen día (yes, día is male) or Esto es un buen libro.
- Bien is used when you just saying “good” but not actually using it as an adj. If someone says “¿Cómo estás?” You may respond “Bien” b/c you didn’t mention a noun-you just replied with 1 word.

9. Subjunctive carrying across multiple verbs.

- If I say: I hope you find a car soon and that it is fast, I will need to use the subjunctive b/c of the trigger “I hope” and the change in subject “you”. Most students recognize that in Spanish we will say “Espero que **encuentres**” using the Present Subjunctive in the 2nd clause. However if we keep looking at the rest of the sentence we still have the words “is fast” and “IS” is a verb here. Many students fail to put this verb “IS” in the subjunctive and they write: Espero que encuentres un coche pronto y que **es** rápido. However if we look carefully, the person is still hoping that the car “be” fast and so the trigger or “hope” is still applied to this second verb of “is” and the correct phrase would be: Espero que encuentres un coche pronto y que **SEA** rápido. In other words, The “I hope” is applying to both verbs.

10. Present Indicative vs. Present Subjunctive (Possible If clauses vs. False if clauses)

- There are two types of If clauses, those that the speaker thinks might be possible and those that the speaker really thinks are hypothetical or not a reality. Here are two examples. #1) If I have time, I’ll call you and #2) If I were tired, I’d take a nap. In the first sentence there is a possibility that the person will actually have time so in Spanish the verb “tener” will be in normal present tense and not use subjunctive. “Si **tengo** tiempo, te llamaré” (notice this 2nd verb is also in the future). In the 2nd sentence, the phrase “If I were tired” is actually stating the opposite (that the speaker isn’t tired) and therefore this is a totally hypothetical or non-real situation. This phrase will need to use the subjunctive and notice that the 2nd verb will be in the conditional. Si **estuviera** cansado, me dormiría.
- In summary, use the subjunctive with hypothetical “If clauses” and don’t use the subjunctive when it is possible or factual.

Explanations

11. Needing to use the present perfect subjunctive.

- Imagine that you ask your dad to go somewhere and your dad says “I hope you **finished** your homework”. Many beginner students translate this as “Espero que terminar la tarea” b/c they don’t know what to do with the “finished” and so they ignore the conjugation completely. A little bit more advanced students often translate this as “Espero que terminaste la tarea” thinking that the verb “finished” needs to be preterit. However, since there is a trigger verb of “I hope”, the present subjunctive will be required. Therefore those who understand the subjunctive many times change it to the present subjunctive “Espero que **termines** la tarea”. However, that phrase translated back to English means “I hope that you finish the homework” and it loses the idea of the past. So.....In order to say this correctly, you really need to say “I hope that you **have finished** your homework” (which is grammatically correct in English as well) and so the Spanish will be: “Espero que **HAYAS TERMINADO** la tarea.”

12. Passive voice vs. active voice

- We use passive voice in English and Spanish all the time. Active voice puts the focus on the subject of a sentence whereas Passive voice puts the focus on the direct object of a sentence instead of the subject. Here is an example.
 1. Active Voice: Red pandas eat berries.
 2. Passive Voice: Berries are eaten by Red pandas. (see how the direct object of the previous sentence (berries) is now in the front and the red pandas that were the subject are now de-emphasized at the end of the sentence.
- Passive voice verbs are constructed by using “ser + a participle (ado/ido/irregulars). Moras **son comidos** por pandas.

13. personal “A”

- When a direct object is a “person/animal” it will always have an “a” in front. For example, “I saw the ball” and “I kissed Lucy” will be slightly different. “I saw the ball” will not get an “A” b/c ball is not a person. (Yo vi el balón) but “I kissed Lucy” gets an “a” b/c Lucy is a person. (yo besé **a** Lucy)

14. Correct order with Possessives and adjectives. They all require backwards setups.

- “Elizabeth’s shoes” is possessive (as you can see by the apostrophe s). This in Spanish must be “the shoes of Elizabeth” since there is no “apostrophe s” in Spanish.
- Red Pandas is “pandas reds” b/c adjectives usually come after the nouns they modify. (los osos pandas rojos)
- “The baby boomer generation”: “baby boomer is the adjective here and must be flipped. La generación de los baby boomers.
- “My whinnie the poo box” is another example where “whinnie the poo” is an adjective b/c it describes what kind of box you have and so you should reverse it: (Mi caja de Whinnie the Poo).

15. Para que, antes de que, después de que–triggering automatic subjunctive

- Certain phrases like “para que”, “antes de que”, and “después de que” will automatically trigger a subjunctive verb afterwards. For example: I’ll bring pizza so that there is enough food: Yo traeré pizza para que haya pizza suficiente. Example 2: Before you come, go to the store. “antes de que vengas, ve a la tienda”.

Explanations

16. caminando es bueno vs. El caminar es bueno

- Students know that “ando” and “iendo” are a form of creating “ING” and in the sentence above, the writing is trying to say “walking is fun”. What many students don’t realize is that “ando” and “iendo” are used after a form of “estar” to bring you into the moment like “I’m sleeping-Estoy durmiendo” or “She was playing-Ella estaba jugando”. Those phrases make us feel like we are there in the moment. However “walking is fun” is not using “Walking” as a verb. Instead it is a noun and in that case we will use the pattern “the + infinitive” to make the noun and sometimes just the infinitive without the “the”. So, “Caminar es divertido” means walking is fun.

17. Singular subjects connected with “o” requires a singular verb.

- When you have 2 SINGULAR subjects that are connected with “or”, the following verb will be singular. For example, “When the dog or the cat eats the food”....should be: “Cuando el perro o la gata come la comida” and not “comen”----since you used “o” but singular objects, the verb must be singular.

18. If I had Money vs. If I were to have money

- Many people in English say “If I had money” or “If I had homework, ...” or “If I had a million dollars, I’d buy you a coat”. Even though it sounds normal, is technically incorrect and if we don’t change them, when translated we would be tempted to write “Si yo tuve” using the preterit of “tener” b/c “**had**” after all sounds like it is in the past tense. The truth is that we are saying “If **I were to** have money” or “If **I were to have** homework”, etc. This construction in Spanish requires the Imperfect Subjunctive (similar to grammar error #10) “Si tuviera dinero”, “Si tuviera tarea”..

19. Este-Esta-(Esto) and Ese-Esa-(Eso)

- This is a complex subject so we will tackle it slowly. Let’s begin with only looking at the ones with “T”’s. Este-esta-(esto). These words mean “this” and sometimes “This one”.
- Este is the male demonstrative adjective that we use when we say “this car”. (este coche). It is an adjective b/c it tells us which car and it is demonstrative b/c we are pointing to something and demonstrating which car we are talking about.
- Esta is the female demonstrative adjective that we use when we say “this person” (esta persona).
- If you do NOT include the noun after the word “este” or “esta”, then it is no longer an adjective and instead it becomes a Demonstrative Pronoun and will be interpreted as “THIS ONE”. You will still be referring to an unspoken object and you should pick the correct gender. For example if someone says “I like that bike” and you say “yes, but this one is blue and nicer”, you would say “sí, pero esta es azul y mejor” (notice I picked the feminine form to go with bicycle).
 - Este es mío: This one is mine (maybe referring to a book)
 - Esta es tuya: This one is yours (maybe referring to a shirt)
- Esto: The word “esto” is always a demonstrative pronoun and will not be used as an adjective. It will NOT be found in front of a noun (esto coche, or esto camisa)-ugg. Instead “esto” simply means “THIS” and is used when you want to say something like “This is nice” or “This is difficult” and not actually mention the noun. If you were to mention a noun after it, (like “this car”), then you wouldn’t not be allowed to use the word “esto” and would instead have to switch back to one of the adjectives.
- ESE-ESA-(ESO) These words mean “THAT” and work identically to the este-esta-(esto) words.
 - Esa persona (that person)
 - Ese hombre (that man)
 - Esa es bonita (that one) is pretty (referring to something female).
 - Ese es increíble (that one) is incredible (referring to something male).
 - Eso es aceptable. (That) is acceptable. (not mentioning the noun).

Explanations

20. Using an infinitive or a past tense verb when a participle should be use.

- This one is a bit tricky. Imagine you write “The door is painted” in English. Some early learners simply look at the “ED” on the end of “paint” and think that any word ending in “ED” must be a past tense verb and they put it into the preterit. “La puerta está pintó”. Some will just hope that the infinitive will be good enough and write “La puerta está pintar”. Both of these are of course wrong and you must use the “ado/ido” form of the verb (the participle) to make the adjective of painted. (La puerta está pintada). This goes along with grammar error #7.

Male and Female confusions

1. El tema and El problema (ending in ma) Male.

- Words ending in “ma” are generally considered male. (confusing b/c if you only look at the last letter you would only see an “a” and think it was female.
 - El idioma, el tema, el problema, etc. This does not apply when referring to a human being who is obviously male or female such as the word “mamá” which refers to your mother.

2. “agua” being female.

- The word “agua” is female. However, when singular it is hard to pronounce “La agua” quickly and smoothly b/c of the double “aa”. Therefore we say “el agua” when singular. When it is plural, then we go back to feminine b/c las aguas does roll off the tongue nicely with the “s” at the end of “las”. So you will hear: “Necesitamos agua limpia” or “mucha agua corre por las calles”.

3. La parte (is female) exception to rule

- The word “parte” ends in an “e” but is female. It is an exception to the general rule of noun gender [words that end in L, O, N, E, R are usually male]. La primera parte del libro era mi favorita.

English Interference/Spelling

1. Double Letters

- English has many more letters doubled than Spanish. (ESPECIALLY CONSONANTS) For example: aardvark, lobby, access, ladder, feet, off, egg, withheld, radii, trekking, chill, swimmer, thinner, boot, propped, error, essay, letter, vacuum, savvy, jazz
- Spanish on the other hand has relatively few double letters and when there is a double letter, there is a definite pronunciation reason for that spelling.
 - Consonants include only: cc, ll, rr, and nn
 - acción, lluvia, correr, innumerable
 - vowels are more common and include: ee, oo, aa,
 - leer, contrataque, cooperación,

2. “tion” turns to “ción” include accent and is FEMALE

- Any word ending in “tion” in english will end in “ción” in Spanish. Plain and simple.
 - action: acción, animation: animación, attention: atención. They are also ALL female.

Explanations

3. All words that are used as questions will have an accent

□ ¿quién? ¿cuándo? ¿qué? ¿cuál? ¿cómo? ¿por qué? ¿dónde? ¿cuántos?