

Notes in Spanish Q & A Special!

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A Notes In Spanish Special!

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1. The Transcript

Q—When you abbreviate things in Spanish, like "Estados Unidos", why do you use "EEUU" instead of just "EU"?

A—The reason is both words, "Estados" and "Unidos," are plural. You'll also see "FFCC" for "ferrocarriles" (railways). But you wouldn't use these in spoken Spanish. In English, we sometimes use "pp" for *pages*.

Q—Escuchar es la cosa más difícil para mí cuando estudio Español. ¿Tienen algunas estrategias o sugerencias?

A—You should listen to a lot of Spanish — TV, radio, audiobooks, podcasts. It should be interesting or you won't be motivated. Find something that fits your interests and don't be afraid to listen multiple times!

Q—Cuando uno comete un error vergonzoso en español, y te das cuenta de lo que has hecho, ¿cuál es la mejor manera de pedir disculpas?

A—¡Uy! ¡Me he equivocado! — Oops! I've made a mistake!

Correct yourself if you realise, and you can use the phrase above. If not, don't worry, just move along and you'll correct it in the future. Even if it's embarrassing at the time, you'll laugh about it later. Spaniards are generally easygoing about this kind of thing.

Equivocarse — To make a mistake.

Q—What would you consider to be the most useful phrases that a visitor to Spain should know when needing to get someone's attention in the street, in a restaurant, etc.?

A—In the street:

Perdona, se te han caído las llaves — Excuse me, you've dropped your keys

Perdona, ¿me puedes ayudar un momento? — Can you help me?

Perdona, ¿puedes decirme cómo llegar a ... ? — Can you tell me how to get to ... ?

Use "perdone" for old people, it's more formal.

In a restaurant:

Perdone, ¿me puede traer la carta de los postres? — Excuse me, can you bring me the dessert menu?

Oiga / Oye — The latter can be a bit rude, but the former is another respectful way to get someone's attention.

In a shop when you don't need assistance and they ask, "¿Te puedo ayudar?" (Can I help you?):

No gracias, estoy mirando / estoy echando un vistazo — I'm just looking.

Q—How do we move on from thinking in our own language first (English in my case) and translating in our head before speaking, which takes forever and ends up in staggered Spanish, to being able to listen, decipher and answer in Spanish smoothly?

A—It just happens after a while. If you want to accelerate the process, immerse yourself in as much Spanish as possible: intercambios (online or in person), TV in Spanish, do a course in a Spanish-speaking country, radio programs. Even just try thinking to yourself in Spanish!

Q—I heard the expression “Están haciendo cola.” Is “making coke” a slang expression or have I misunderstood?

A—Están haciendo cola — They are queuing / standing in line. (Yes, you misunderstood!)

Q—How can I prolong a conversation in Spanish? Whenever I am in Spain I say: “Estoy aprendiendo español; ¿puedo hablar por favor en español con usted / contigo?”. Because their English is usually better than my Spanish, the conversation almost invariably reverts to English because their instinct is to move the conversation on quickly. I don't want to waste their time or offend them (or beg!) by saying, ¿podemos hablar en español? but I really want to speak in Spanish when I am in Spain and I struggle to make it happen.

A—They won't be offended by you saying “¿podemos hablar en español?” but they are probably just desperate to practice their English with you. You could let them practice their English for a bit and then try switching to Spanish. Maybe the best way to avoid this would be to get an intercambio. And you can also just keep speaking in Spanish, even if they speak to you in English.

Tengo ganas de practicar — I really want to practice.

Me gustaría hablar en español si no te importa — I'd like to speak in Spanish if you don't mind.

Toma y daca — Give and take.

Q—¿Qué significa “tener una chinita en el zapato”?

A—To have a pebble/tiny stone in your shoe.

Q—For people with limited time to study Spanish, do you think it is better to concentrate on building your vocabulary rather than on getting the grammar accurate in terms of being able to get your message across when in a Spanish-speaking country? In other words, how tolerant are the Spanish of grammatical mistakes?

A—You should always have a balance of vocabulary and grammar. When Ben was first in Spain, he focused on fluency when he was in the street but was taking a Spanish class at the same time. If you want to get your message across, vocabulary and expressions are most important. Go for fluency and let the accuracy catch up as quickly as you can.

Q—What is the best way to learn the subjunctive without any stress?

A—Get a hold of the NIS Super Subjunctive Rule Book! It has the 12 most important rules of the subjunctive and is a 21-page pdf. When you sign up for our newsletter, you should get access to the report. If you're

already signed up, you can put your email address in the box and it should also take you to the page where you can download the rule book.

<http://www.notesinspanish.com/gold.html>

Q—For those of us who learned Latin American Spanish, what does "vale" mean? Or, what doesn't it mean? How can we use it?

A—It means "OK"/"That's OK" and we use it as much as you use "OK" in English.

Q—What does the expression "aquí hay gato encerrado" mean and when do you use it?

A—It means there is a trick, this can't be possible — when things are too good to be true (offers from shops, etc.).

(Cierra la puerta...) ...Que se escapa el gato — Close the door, all the heat's going to escape.

Había cuatro gatos — There were very few people (e.g. at the restaurant).

Q—What should I say if I see a good-looking Spanish girl that is the same age as me (14)?

A—You can say, "Guapa!" In the past, you could say "tía buena," but it's not so common anymore.

Q—How long do you have to have been going out with somebody for before you start saying "te amo" rather than "te quiero"?

A—They mean the same thing (one is not stronger than the other), but in Spanish from Spain people don't really say "te amo," it's seen as a bit affected. But in other countries they use "te amo" - it's a cultural thing. Just make sure you mean it when you say it!

Te quiero — I love you.

Q—We all like to have a good time - whether we are at a party or in a language class - but I have a hard time expressing this in Spanish. I know we don't say "tener un buen tiempo" but that, instead, the phrase "pasarlo bien" is often used. However, I always mix it up, saying things like "lo pasaste bien la fiesta?" which I'm pretty sure is wrong. I bet there's other interesting ways to express this in Spanish, too. Please help! All I want is to "have a good time" in Spanish!

A—¿Lo pasaste bien en la fiesta? — Did you have a good time at the party?

Pasarlo genial — Have a good time.

Me lo pasé genial ayer en la fiesta — I had a great time at the party yesterday.

Pásatelo bien en la comida — Have a great time at lunch.

Disfruta — Enjoy.

- **Ben and Marina, Notes in Spanish**

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