

Analysis of a Foreign Language - Spanish

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Abstract

Spanish or Castilian is a Romance language that originated in the Iberian Peninsula (in what is now Spain) and today has over 480 million native speakers in Spain and the Americas. It is a global language and the world's second-most spoken native language, after Mandarin Chinese. Spanish is the official or national language in Spain, Equatorial Guinea, and 19 countries in the Americas. It is a part of the Ibero-Romance group of languages, which evolved from several dialects of Vulgar Latin in Iberia after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century.

In Spain and in some other parts of the Spanish-speaking world, Spanish is called not only Español (Spanish) but also castellano (Castilian), the language from the kingdom of Castile, contrasting it with other languages spoken in Spain such as Galician, Basque, Asturian, Catalan, Aragonese and Occitan. The term castellano (Castilian), comes from the Latin word *castellanus*, which means "from Castilla", the medieval kingdom located in the central part of the Iberian Peninsula, where this language originated.

Orthography

The Spanish language is written using the Spanish alphabet, which is the Latin script with one additional letter: ñ "ñ", for a total of 27 letters¹. Although the letters "k" and "w" are part of the alphabet, they appear only in loanwords such as karate, kilo, waterpolo and wolframio (tungsten).

A a	B b	C c	Ch ch	D d	E e	F f	G g	H h	I i	J j	K k	L l	Ll ll	M m
[a]	[b/β]	[θ/k]	[tʃ]	[d/ð]	[e]	[f]	[x/g/ɣ]	[-]	[i]	[x]	[k]	[l]	[ʎ/dʒ/j]	[m]
N n	Ñ ñ	O o	P p	Q q	R r	S s	T t	U u	V v	W w	X x	Y y	Z z	
[n]	[ɲ]	[o]	[p]	[k]	[r/ɾ]	[s]	[t]	[u]	[b/β]	[w/b/β]	[ks]	[i/j/dʒ]	[θ]	

The spelling is phonemic, especially in comparison to more opaque orthographies like English, having a relatively consistent mapping of graphemes to phonemes; in other words, the pronunciation of a given Spanish-language word can largely be predicted from its spelling and to a slightly lesser extent vice versa. Spanish orthography is such that the pronunciation of most words is unambiguous given their written form; the main exception is the letter ⟨x⟩, which usually represents /ks/ or /s/ but can also represent /x/ or /ʃ/, especially in proper nouns from times of Old Spanish, as in México or Pedro Ximénez (both /x/). These orthographic rules are like, but different from, those of other Romance languages of the Iberian Peninsula, such as Portuguese, Catalan and Galician. The converse does not always hold, i.e. for a given pronunciation there may be multiple possible spellings like English.

Notable features of Spanish punctuation include the lack of the serial comma and the inverted question and exclamation marks: ⟨¿⟩ ⟨¡⟩. Spanish uses capital letters much less often than

¹https://www.rae.es/sites/default/files/Principales_novedades_de_la_Ortografia_de_la_lengua_espanola.pdf

English; they are not used on adjectives derived from proper nouns (e.g. francés, español, israelí from Francia, España, and Israel, respectively) and book titles capitalize only the first word.

Phonology

Consonants

	Labial		Dental		Alveolar		Palatal		Velar	
Nasal		m				n		ɲ		
Stop	p	b	t	d			tʃ	j	k	g
Fricative	f	β	θ	ð	s		ʃ		x	
Lateral						l		ʎ		
Flap						ɾ				
Trill						r				

Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i		u
Mid	e		o
Open		a	

Each occurs in both stressed and unstressed syllables

Diphthongs: ai, au, ei, eu, oi

Morphology

Nominal

All nouns have to agree with their nouns in gender and number

Case

The case system of Latin has been completely lost except for pronouns which have subject, object, possessive and prepositional forms

Gender

Spanish has a two-gender system – masculine and feminine gender. Most nouns end in o or a. Nouns ending in o are masculine and those ending in a are feminine with a few exceptions (e.g. planeta [‘planet’] and día [‘day’] are masculine, mano [‘hand’] and foto [‘photo’] are feminine). Nouns that have other endings may be either masculine or feminine:

1. (m) puente (‘bridge’), (m) cine (‘movie theater’), (f) fuente (‘spring’), (f) carne (‘meat’)
2. (m) ataúd (‘coffin’), (m) alud (‘avalanche’), (f) pared (‘wall’), (f) ciudad (‘city’)
3. (m) papel (‘paper’), (m) mantel (‘tablecloth’), (f) cárcel (‘jail’), (f) miel (‘honey’)
4. (m) doctor (‘doctor’), (f) flor (‘flower’); (m) arroz (‘rice’), (f) voz (‘voice’)

Number

Spanish has singular and plural forms only. Plurality is usually marked by adding -s or -es to the singular. Some nouns have only a singular form, others only a plural one, and still others have identical singular and plural forms.

1. casa (‘house’) → casas (‘houses’)
2. techo (‘roof’) → techos (‘roofs’)
3. pared (‘wall’) → paredes (‘walls’)
4. esquí (‘ski’) → esquíes (‘skis’)
5. sed (‘thirst’) → no plural form
6. no singular form → honorarios (‘fee’)
7. virus (‘virus’) → virus (‘viruses’)

Pronouns

There are 5 types of pronouns in Spanish: personal, demonstrative, interrogative, relative, indefinite and reflexive.

Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns are inflected for case (subject, object, possessive, prepositional), gender (except 1s, 2s) and number. The prepositional forms are used with a variety of prepositions in order to mark several other syntactical functions.

Number case	Subject	Object	Possessive	Prepositional
1s	yo	me	mío/mía	mí
2s	tú	te	tuyo/tuya	tí
3s	él/ella	le/lo/la	suyo/suya	sí
1p	nosotros/nostras	nos	nuestro/nuestra	--
2p	vosotros/vosotras	os	vuestro/vuestra	--
3p	ellos/ellas	les/los/las	suyos/suyas	sí

Demonstrative pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns distinguish three degrees (proximal, intermediate and distal) and are inflected for gender (masculine, neuter, feminine) and number. They can function also as demonstrative adjectives, except neuter pronouns.

Interrogative pronouns

The interrogative pronouns are:

1. *¿quién?* (sg.)/*¿quiénes?* (pl.) are used to ask about a person and, thus, they are equivalent to ‘who?’
2. *¿qué?* is used to ask about a thing and is equivalent to ‘what?’. It is invariable.
3. *¿cuál?* (sg.)/*¿cuáles?* (pl.) are employed to specify one or more people or things from a definite set; they are equivalent to ‘which?’
4. *¿cuánto* (masc. sg.)/?*¿cuánta* (fem. sg.)/?*¿cuántos* (masc. pl.)/?*¿cuántas* (fem. pl.)? are used to specify an amount or number, and are equivalent to ‘how much?’ or ‘how many?’

Relative pronouns

Relative pronouns are: quien (sg)/quienes (pl) ['who'], que ['that'], cual (sg)/cuales (pl) ['which'], cuyo (sg)/cuyos (pl) ['whose'], donde ['where']. They are similar to the interrogatives but without accent.

Indefinite pronouns

Indefinite pronouns are varied. They can function also as adjectives and are inflected for person and number. They include: uno ('one'), alguno ('someone, something'), ninguno ('no one'), mucho ('much'), todo ('all'), otro ('another'), etc.

Reflexive pronouns

Reflexive pronouns are identical to object pronouns, except in the 3rd person:

number/person	Pronoun	number/person	Pronoun
1s	me	1p	nos
2s	te	2p	os
3s	se	3p	se

Articles

Spanish has indefinite and definite articles which distinguish gender and number.

Indefinite: un (m.s), una (f.s), unos (m.p), unas (f.p). Definite: el (m.s), la (f.s), los (m.p), las (f.p).

Verbal

In contrast with the nominal system, the verbal system of Spanish is highly inflected.

There are also many irregular verbs. Spanish has two words for the verb 'to be'. Ser is usually equivalent to the copula, denoting an inherent quality, while estar refers to a resultant state.

Person and Number

Spanish has first person, second person and third person as well as singular and plural inflections.

Tense

present, preterite (simple past), imperfect preterite, future and conditional are the basic tenses. Each has a compound tense formed with the auxiliary verb 'haber' + the past participle: perfect preterite, anterior preterite, pluperfect, future perfect and conditional perfect. The conjugation of the verb *estudiar* ('to study') is:

	Present	Preterite	Imperfect	Conditional	Future
1s	estudio	estudié	estudiaba	estudiaría	estudiaré
2s	estudias	estudiaste	estudiabas	estudiarías	estudiarás
3s	estudia	estudió	estudiaba	estudiaría	estudiará
1p	estudiamos	estudiamos	estudiábamos	estudiaríamos	estudiaremos
2p	estudiáis	estudiasteis	estudiabais	estudiaríais	estudiaréis
3p	estudian	estudiaron	estudiaban	estudiarían	estudiarán

In the perfect tense, it is:

	Present	Preterite	Past	Conditional	Future
1s	he estudiado	hube estudiado	había estudiado	habría estudiado	habré estudiado
2s	has estudiado	hubiste estudiado	habías estudiado	habrías estudiado	habrás estudiado
3s	ha estudiado	hubo estudiado	había estudiado	habría estudiado	habrá estudiado
1p	hemos estudiado	hubimos estudiado	habíamos estudiado	habríamos estudiado	habremos estudiado
2p	habéis estudiado	hubisteis estudiado	habíais estudiado	habríais estudiado	habréis estudiado
3p	han estudiado	hubieron estudiado	habían estudiado	habrían estudiado	habrán estudiado

Aspect

A verb is marked for perfective and imperfective aspect

Mood

indicative (all tenses), subjunctive (present, imperfect preterite, future and their compound tenses [made with 'haber'+ the past participle]), imperative (present). The conjugation of the verb '*estudiar*' in the subjunctive and imperative is:

Subjunctive	Present	Imperfect	Imperfect 2	Future
1s	estudie	estudiara	estudiase	estudiare
2s	estudies	estudiaras	estudiasas	estudiaras
3s	estudie	estudiara	estudiase	estudiare
1p	estudiemos	estudiáramos	estudiásemos	estudiáremos
2p	estudiéis	estudiarais	estudiaseis	estudiareis
3p	estudien	estudiaran	estudiasen	estudiaren

Perfect Subjunctive	Present	Past	Future
1s	haya estudiado	hubiera estudiado	hubiere estudiado
2s	hayas estudiado	hubieras estudiado	hubieres estudiado
3s	haya estudiado	hubiera estudiado	hubiere estudiado
1p	hayamos estudiado	hubiéramos estudiado	hubiéremos estudiado
2p	hayáis estudiado	hubierais estudiado	hubiereis estudiado
3p	hayan estudiado	hubieran estudiado	hubieren estudiado

Imperative	Affirmative	Negative
1s	-	-
2s	estudia	no estudies
3s	estudie	no estudie
1p	estudiemos	no estudiemos
2p	estudiad	no estudiéis
3p	estudien	no estudien

Voice

Spanish has 3 voices: active, passive and reflexive. The passive voice is formed with the auxiliary verb *ser* ('to be') + past participle; the agent is introduced by the preposition *por* ('by').

El hombre fue encontrado por la policía

the man was found by the police

Non-finite Forms

infinitive, compound infinitive, gerund, compound gerund, past participle.

Examples:

- infinitive: *estudiar*

- compound infinitive: haber estudiado
- gerund: estudiando
- compound gerund: habiendo estudiado
- past participle: estudiado

The infinitive is used with modal verbs or to express purpose accompanied with the preposition para ('for'). The gerund is always dependent on another verb and it expresses an action simultaneous to that of the main verb; the compound gerund indicates that an action happened before that of the main verb. The past participle has a passive sense and it behaves both as adjective and verb.

Syntax

Spanish is mainly a Subject-Verb-Object-Complement language. Subject pronouns may be dropped. Some sentences have no subject at all (e.g. nieva todos los días ['it snows everyday']). It uses prepositions to establish syntactical relations.

Most adjectives and genitives, as well as relative clauses, follow their head noun; adverbs follow the verb they modify. Adjectives and articles agree with their nouns in gender and number, and the verb agrees with the subject in person and number. For example:

La casa vieja ¹ de la esquina ² que demolieron ayer ³ engalanaba ⁴ el barrio ⁵.

the house old of the corner that (they) demolished yesterday adorned the quarter

1. Subject
2. Genitive
3. Relative clause
4. Main verb (imperfect preterite 3s)
5. Direct object

Here, the main verb agrees with the subject while the subject of the relative clause ('ellos') has been dropped. Definite articles (la, el) precede their nouns (casa, esquina, barrio) agreeing with them in gender and number. The adjective (vieja) follows its noun (casa) agreeing with it in gender and number (feminine singular). The genitive is marked by the preposition de ('of') while the relative clause is introduced by the relative pronoun que ('that').

Colour Terms

Español	English	Colour
Dorado	Gold	
Plateado	Silver	
Bronce	Bronze	
Anaranjado	Orange	
Gris	Grey	
Rosado	Pink	
Morado	Purple	
Café	Brown	
Azul	Blue	
Amarillo	Yellow	
Verde	Green	

Rojo	Red
Negro	Black
Blanco	White



Kinship Terms

Español	English
padre/madre	father/mother
hijo/hija	son/daughter
esposos/esposas	husband/wife
hermano/hermana	brother/sister
sobrino/sobrina	nephew/niece
abuelo/abuela	grandfather/grandmother
nieto/nieta	grandson/granddaughter
tío/tía	uncle/aunt
suegro/suegra	father-in-law/mother-in-law
cuñado/cuñada	brother-in-law/sister-in-law
tío político/tía política	uncle-in-law (aunt's husband)/aunt-in-law (uncle's wife)

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