

# Grammar Basics for Foreign-Language Students

This handout gives an overview of the parts of speech of a language with examples in English, Spanish, and French

## Nouns

-A noun names a person, place, thing, animal, or abstract idea.

Types of nouns include proper nouns (Bolivia) or common nouns (a country), and abstract nouns (justice) or concrete nouns (a judge).

Nouns have a variety of functions in a sentence. They can be the

**Subject::**           The professor arrived.  
                          El profesor llegó.  
                          Le professeur est arrivé.

The subject, *the professor*, carries out the action of the verb.

**Direct object:**       I bought the book.  
                          Yo compré el libro.  
                          J'ai acheté le livre.

The direct object, *the book*, receives the action of the verb directly.

**Indirect object:**    I gave the book to the professor.  
                          Yo le di el libro a la profesora.  
                          J'ai parlé au professeur.

*The professor* is the object of the preposition "to". "To" + a person is an indirect object.

**Object of a preposition:** I left the class with the professor.  
                                  Salí de la clase con el profesor.  
                                  J'ai quitté la classe avec le professeur.

The professor is the object of the preposition "with".

-Nouns in many languages have **number** (singular or plural) and **gender** (masculine or feminine). In English, gender is less important although there are some cases where it is expressed. For example: an actor / an actress. In Spanish and French, each noun is masculine or feminine and it is important to learn the gender when you learn a vocabulary word. Examples:

un hombre	un homme
una mujer	une femme
un libro	un livre
una casa	une maison

## Pronouns

-Pronouns are words that replace or stand in for nouns. They have the same grammatical functions as the nouns they replace in a sentence: subject / direct object / indirect object / object of a preposition.

Look at the 3 nouns in this sentence:

*Mary* gives the *book* to the *child*.

Subject = Mary (she carries out the action of the verb).

Direct object = the book (it receives the action of the verb directly).

Indirect object = the child (something is given to the child).

Now look at the same sentence with 3 pronouns to replace the nouns:

*She* gives *it* to *him* (or to *her*).

-In Spanish and French, pronouns have the same gender (masculine / feminine) and number (singular / plural) as the nouns. Here are some examples of kinds of pronouns:

**Subject Pronouns:** I, you, he, she, we, you, they  
**yo, tú, Ud. el, ella, nosotros, Uds. (vosotros) ,  
ellos, ellas**  
(Spanish often drops out the subject pronoun;  
French never does).  
**je, tu, il, elle, nous, vous, ils, elles**

**Direct objects or indirect objects:** These have different positions in Spanish and French, often going in front of the verb. Learning these requires some attention and practice.

Spanish: María le da el libro a Juan. Ella se lo da.

French: Marie donne le livre à Jean. ... Elle le lui donne.

**Objects of prepositions:** These are pronouns that replace a noun that follows and is the object of a preposition.

English: I bring something for the *students*.

> I bring something for *them*.

Spanish: Traigo algo para les *estudiantes*.

> Traigo algo para *ellos*.

French: J'apporte quelque chose pour les *étudiants*.

> J'apporte quelque chose pour *eux*.

## Articles

Articles are sometimes called noun markers because they accompany nouns.

**Definite articles** indicate that a noun is a particular one:

the professor / el profesor / le professeur  
**the el, la, los, las le, la, l', les**

**Indefinite articles** indicate that a noun is not a particular one:

a professor / uno profesor / un professeur  
**a, an un, una, unos, unas un, une, des**

**Partitive articles** are used with mass nouns to indicate a non-specific amount:

some beans / unos frijoles / des haricots  
**unos, unas du, de la, de l', des**

-Spanish and English often omit this article; French never does.

-The number and gender of the noun determine the article to use.

## Adjectives

Adjectives are words that describe or modify a person or thing. Again, in Spanish and French, the gender of the noun determines the form of the adjective. We say that the adjective agrees with the noun it modifies. It is a bit simpler in English.

a good student / un buen estudiante / un bon étudiant

the boring professors / los profesores aburridos / les professeurs ennuyeux

Position of the adjective sometimes changes, and you will learn some comparative forms of adjectives as well, as in rich / richer / richest.

## Verbs

Verbs are the action or state of being words, and they must be there to form a complete sentence. They change tense to talk about the present, past, and future. They change moods to give commands and talk about hypothetical conditions. They are an important part of any language. When you learn a verb in a new language, you learn to conjugate it. The subjects of a verb are designated as 6 forms in the following way:

Singular 1<sup>st</sup> person: = I / yo / je  
2<sup>nd</sup> person = you / tú / usted  
3<sup>rd</sup> person = he or she / él or ella / il or elle

Plural 1<sup>st</sup> person = we / nosotros / nous  
2<sup>nd</sup> person = you / Ustedes. (vosotros) / vous  
3<sup>rd</sup> person = they / ellos or ellas / ils or elles

Here is an example of a conjugation of a verb in the present tense in English / Spanish / French. You will conjugate or practice writing new verbs in a similar way by giving the 6 forms.

English	Spanish	French
I go	(yo) voy	je vais
you go	(tu) vas / (Ud.) va	tu vas
he / she goes	(el / ella) va	il / elle va
we go	(nosotros) vamos	nous allons
you go	(Uds.) van (vosotros) vais	vous allez
they go	(ellos) van	ils / elles vont

Here are some examples of different tenses / moods:

### Past:

I went	yo fui	je suis allé
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### Future

you will go	tú irás	tu iras
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### Conditional

he would go	él iría	il irait
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### Command

Go!	Ve, No vayas (tú) / Vayan (Uds) No vaya (Ud.)	Va ! / Allez!
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## Adverbs

As the term suggests, adverbs often accompany verbs to tell how, where, or when something is done. Many English adverbs end in -ly.

Here are some examples: slowly, seriously, fortunately, frankly.

Here they are used with a verb: He speaks slowly. We were speaking seriously. You spoke frankly.

In Spanish, the usual ending is -mente.

Exps: Él habla lentamente. Nosotros estábamos hablando seriamente.  
Tú hablaste francamente.

In French, the ending is -ment which is usually added to a feminine adjective: lentement, serieusement, heureusement, franchement.

Exps: Il parle lentement. Nous parlions sérieusement.  
Tu as parlé franchement.

-Of course there are other adverbs that do not have these ending, for example temporal expressions such as these:

today	hoy	aujourd'hui
now	ahora	maintenant
already	ya	déjà
always	siempre	toujours

-Besides accompanying verbs, adverbs can modify an adjective or another adverb. Here are some examples.

She speaks very well. This sentence has an adverb, *very*, modifying another adverb, *well*.

Spanish: Ella habla muy bien.

French: Elle parle très bien.

She is very intelligent. This sentence has an adverb, *very*, modifying an adjective, *intelligent*.

Spanish: Ella es muy inteligente.

French: Elle est très intelligente.

## Prepositions

Prepositions are words that describe or state a relationship between words. They are used with nouns (or pronouns) to form prepositional phrases, and they are very idiomatic so they present a challenge to language learners.

Here are some common examples:

English	Spanish	French
on	en	sur
under	bajo	sous
in	en	dans, en
between	entre	entre
after	después	après

Exp: The book is on the table.

The prepositional phrase, *on the table*, takes on a modifying role, locating something in space.

Prepositional phrases can locate something in time or space; they tell when, where, or under what conditions something happened.

Exp: The professor was in a bad mood.

El profesor estaba de mal humor.

Le professeur était de mauvaise humeur.

## Conjunctions

Conjunctions connect words, clauses, or phrases. These are usually not difficult words to use correctly, although Romance languages have some added complexity in that some conjunctions introduce a subjunctive or otherwise alter a sentence.

Here are some common examples:

English	Spanish	French
and	y	et
but	pero	mais
or	o	ou
because	porque	parce que
so	entonces / para que	donc / pour que