



# Spanish Grammar in Context

THIRD EDITION

Juan Kattán-Ibarra and Angela Howkins

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‘This is a well-conceived edition, which covers important grammatical areas clearly and methodically, while engaging students with topics of interest to their studies. I recommend it highly.’

Ronan Fitzsimons, *Nottingham Trent University, UK*

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*Spanish Grammar in Context* provides an accessible and stimulating approach to learning grammar. Authentic texts are used to illustrate and explain the key areas of Spanish grammar, followed by a range of exercises to help students reinforce and test their understanding.

An answer key is also presented at the back of the book.

Features include:

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- Texts carefully selected to cover topical issues and themes relevant to contemporary Spain and Latin America
- Clear, user-friendly and comprehensive coverage of grammar, aided by a list of grammatical terms

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This third edition has been revised and updated throughout and offers new exercises and fresh texts.

*Spanish Grammar in Context* will be an essential resource for intermediate to advanced students of Spanish. It is suitable for both classroom use and independent study.

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**THIRD EDITION**

**JUAN KATTÁN-IBARRA AND ANGELA HOWKINS**

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## Preface

There comes a point in language study where an understanding of how a language functions is vital for progress to be made. *Spanish Grammar in Context* is designed to give students who are in the final years of school or the early stages of university study, and adult learners who are at an equivalent stage, an understanding of how Spanish functions in a practical and relevant way. More advanced students may also find the book both interesting and useful for review and revision purposes.

The starting point of each chapter is an authentic text in which a particular grammatical point is highlighted. This focuses the student's attention on this part of speech and how it functions in context. There then follows a clear and concise explanation of both form and usage, with examples from the text or from everyday language. Differences in usage between Peninsular and Latin American Spanish are noted. The subsequent exercises provide practice of the grammar points highlighted and explained in the text. Exercises vary from the practice of form and use within the context of a single sentence through gap-fill to more open-ended communicative types of exercises. Translation exercises are included, especially where usage differs considerably from English and so can cause problems for English speakers. Except for those exercises which are of a communicative nature, a key is provided for the exercises of each chapter, thus making the book ideal for self-study. In the classroom context, it can be used for the study of

grammar and/or of a topic area, as the texts chosen lend themselves to exploitation beyond the study of the grammar point in question.

The texts are taken from authentic sources from all over the Spanish-speaking world. They include excerpts from contemporary literature, and from newspaper and magazine articles, including ‘agony aunt’ letters, and have a richness and variety which make them intrinsically interesting to read. Some exercises relate to the topic of the text, others simply practise the particular grammatical point, the aim of all types being to help students to achieve a greater understanding of function and a greater confidence when using the language for their own communicative purposes.

The book is divided into two main parts: one which deals with aspects of the verb, and the other which deals with nouns, adjectives, pronouns, prepositions and all other parts of speech which go to make up a sentence. Chapters can be studied sequentially, or in random order, according to whichever grammar point the student wishes to study, thus making it a useful and handy reference/revision tool. However, chapters which deal with related grammar points are grouped together (for example, the present and imperfect subjunctive). As each text is taken from an authentic source, it naturally produces examples of grammar not explicitly studied in that particular chapter. These are indicated in the chapter under the heading “Other points to note in the text”, so that students may study the text beyond the confines of the grammatical point for which it has been chosen, or teachers may exploit it further in the classroom. The consolidation exercises found at the end of the book comprise six texts, three journalistic and three literary, each with questions which give students the opportunity to test their knowledge of grammar. A glossary of grammatical terms and a table of irregular verbs are also included to make the book as user-friendly as possible.

The book does not pretend to be exhaustive in its coverage but focuses on those areas of grammar which are important for effective communication. At all times grammar is presented not as an end in itself but as the necessary tool for effective communication. This approach encourages students not only to read for comprehension and pleasure, but also to have an awareness of how the language is used. By developing skills of observation and analysis in their studies, students will be able to enhance their productive skills and so reap the rewards that language study brings.

### **Note to the third edition**

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The format of the third edition of *Spanish Grammar in Context* remains the same as for the previous editions. However, additional texts have been included to give further illustration of specific points of grammar and some texts, which because of fast-moving technologies have become out-dated, have been replaced. The themes of the texts continue to be topical and relevant to students of Spanish. In certain chapters, exercises have been added. Students who are looking for more practice of specific grammar points are referred to the companion website at [www.routledge.com/cw/Kattan-Ibarra](http://www.routledge.com/cw/Kattan-Ibarra) where they will find exercises for all the chapters of the book except for **Chapter 30**, Word Order.

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## Glossary of grammatical terms

**Adjective** A word which provides more information about a noun: *His/her house is very **big*** Su casa es muy **grande**. *It's a **real** pity* Es una **verdadera** lástima.

**Adverb** A word used to provide more information about a verb, an adjective or another adverb: *He/she treated me **badly*** Me trató **duramente**. *It was **extremely** difficult* Fue **extremadamente** difícil. *They behaved **incredibly** well* Se comportaron **increíblemente** bien.

**Article** There are two types of articles: **definite** and **indefinite**. Definite articles in Spanish are **el, la, los, las** *the* in English. Indefinite articles are **un, una** *a, an* in English: **the** boy **el** chico; **a** magazine **una** revista.

**Clause** A group of words within a sentence which has its own verb. A **main clause** functions on its own; a **subordinate clause** is dependent on another clause. In *I'll tell her when she arrives* Se lo diré cuando llegue, '*I'll tell her*' '*Se lo diré*', the main clause, can function on its own; '*when she arrives*' '*cuando llegue*', the subordinate clause, is dependent on the main clause.

**Conjunction** A word like *and* **y**, *or* **o**, *but* **pero**, which joins words or groups of words.

**Definite article** See **Article**.

**Demonstrative** Words like **este, esta** *this*, **esos, esas** *those*, are called demonstratives: **this** book **este** libro; **those** ideas **esas** ideas.

**Direct object** See **Object**.

**Finite verb** A verb form such as the one in *They work hard* **Trabajan mucho**, is said to be **finite** because it indicates **tense**, **person** and **number**. Gerunds, infinitives and past participles are non-finite verb forms.

**Gender** In Spanish, all nouns are either masculine or feminine. For example, **el** colegio **the school**, is masculine, while **la** universidad **the university**, is feminine. Nouns referring to male people are masculine and those referring to female people are feminine.

**Gerund** Refers to the forms of the verb ending in **-ando** and **-iendo**, e.g. **hablando**, **comiendo**, **viviendo**. Some of its uses correspond to those of the verb form ending in **-ing** in English, e.g. *She is eating* Está **comiendo**.

**Imperative** See **Mood**.

**Indefinite article** See **Article**.

**Indicative** See **Mood**.

**Indirect object** See **Object**.

**Infinitive** The basic form of the verb, as found in the dictionary. In Spanish, infinitives end in **-ar**, **-er** and **-ir**, e.g. **hablar** *to speak*, **comer** *to eat*, **vivir** *to live*.

**Irregular verb** A verb which does not behave according to a set pattern.

**Modal verb** An auxiliary verb which is used with another verb to convey a certain mood or intention, e.g. *We must do it* **Debemos** hacerlo (obligation); *We can't help you* No **podemos** ayudarte (possibility). Among modal verbs in Spanish we find **poder** *to be able to*, **can**, **deber** *must*, **tener que** *to have to*.

**Mood** Refers to the forms verbs can take depending on how these are used. There are three moods of the verb: **indicative**, normally associated with statements of fact, e.g. *They are coming tomorrow* **Vienen** mañana; **imperative**, used for

commands, directions and instructions, e.g. **Come here!** ¡Ven aquí!; and **subjunctive**, normally associated with doubt, possibility, wishes, etc., e.g. *I don't think they'll come* No creo que **vengan**. See **Subjunctive mood**.

**Noun** A word like *table* **mesa**, *cat* **gato**, *kindness* **bondad**.

**Number** Used to indicate whether something is **singular** or **plural**, e.g. *the hotel* **el hotel** is singular, *the hotels* **los hoteles** is plural.

**Object** In the sentence *I gave him the keys* **Le di las llaves**, the phrase **the keys**, which undergoes the action of the verb in a direct way, is said to be the direct object, while **him**, the recipient of the giving, is the indirect object. An object can be a noun or noun phrase, e.g. *the keys*, or a pronoun, e.g. *him*.

**Passive and active** A sentence such as *The police caught the thief* **La policía atrapó al ladrón**, containing a subject (*the police*) carrying out the action expressed by the verb, is said to be an **active** sentence. In *The thief was caught by the police* **El ladrón fue atrapado por la policía**, the object of the active sentence (*the thief*), undergoing the action expressed by the verb, becomes the subject, and the agent carrying out the action (*the police*) is introduced by the preposition *by*, **por** in Spanish. This type of sentence is called **passive**.

**Personal pronoun** As the name suggests, personal pronouns refer to persons, e.g. *I* **yo**, *he* **él**, *she* **ella**, *we* **nosotros**, *him* **lo**, **le**, *us* **nos**. See **Pronoun**.

**Possessive** A word like *my* **mi**, *mine* **mío**, *her* **su**, *hers* **suyo**.

**Preposition** A word such as *to* **a**, *in* **en**, *between* **entre**, which provides information such as direction, location, time.

**Pronoun** A word that stands in place of a noun or noun phrase which has already been mentioned, e.g. *My brother is a teacher. He is a teacher.* *Mi hermano es profesor. Él es profesor.* *This hotel is much better. This one is much better.* *Este hotel es*

mucho mejor. **Este** es mucho mejor. *My bedroom is small. Hers is big.* Mi habitación es pequeña. **La suya** es grande.

**Reflexive pronoun** A word such as *myself* **me**; *yourself* **te, se**; *ourselves* **nos**.

**Reflexive verb** When the subject and the object of a verb are one and the same, the verb is said to be reflexive, e.g. *I hurt myself* **Me herí**. *We hid ourselves* **Nos ocultamos**.

**Relative clause** A group of words which refers back to something previously mentioned in the sentence, a noun or a pronoun, known as the **antecedent**. See also **Relative pronoun**.

**Relative pronoun** A word like **que** *who, whom, that, which*, **el/la cual** *that, whom, which*, **cuyo** *whose*, which introduces a relative clause. See **Relative clause**.

**Subject** In a sentence such as *My wife prepared a delicious meal* **Mi mujer** preparó una comida deliciosa, **my wife**, the person performing the action denoted by the verb, is the subject of the sentence. A subject can be a single word or a group of words.

**Subjunctive mood** The subjunctive mood is used very rarely in modern English, but there are remnants of it in sentences such as the following: *I insist that he come* Insisto que **venga**. *I wish he were here* Ojalá **estuviera** aquí. Spanish uses the subjunctive much more frequently than English.

**Subordinate clause** See **Clause**.

**Tense** Changes in the verb which indicate aspects of time are referred to as tenses, for example, present tense, future tense, preterite tense. In *He works in a bank* **Trabaja** en un banco, the verb is in the present tense. In *He worked there for a long time* **Trabajó** allí durante mucho tiempo, the verb is in the preterite tense.

**Verb** A verb is a word such as *to speak* **hablar**, *to exist* **existir**, *to feel* **sentir**, which can denote actions, states, sensations, etc.

Part One:  
The verb

# 1 | The present tense

## Text

In an interview published after his death, the Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño (1953–2003) talked about his life in Blanes, in Catalonia, Spain. Read the interview for understanding first, then read it again and see how the present tense has been used.



### Roberto Bolaño: inédito y final

- *Descríbame un día normal.*
- **Es** facilísimo. **Me levanto** a las siete de la mañana con un frío de perros. Yo **vivo** en una casa y mi mujer en [5] otra, como a 10 metros de la mía, en otro edificio, pero en la misma calle.
- ¿**Viven** separados?
- **Vivimos** cada uno en nuestra casa y **estamos** mucho mejor así. **Llevamos** [10] 17 años juntos, y lo **recomiendo** vivamente, porque mi mujer **es** básicamente mi amiga. Entonces **hay** un respeto por las libertades del otro, absoluto. Bueno, **me levanto** a [15] las siete de la mañana. Mi casa **es** una especie de covacha espartana. Lo primero que **hago** es encender el ordenador, luego **me dirijo** a la cocina, **pongo** agua a calentar, luego [20] **voy** al baño. Después **voy** a la cocina y **me hago** una infusión de manzanilla, **vuelvo** al ordenador y **me pongo** a trabajar en el acto, inmediatamente. **Son** como las 7.10 [25] y de

ahí **trabajo** hasta las 10.00 de la mañana, 10.30 a lo más, que **es** cuando **voy** al correo, **veo** mi apartado, **veo** si hay cartas, **compro** el periódico, **vuelvo** a casa e **intento** [30] trabajar un poco más. A las 11.10 u 11.20 **vuelvo** a salir y **me voy** a buscar a mi hijo al colegio, que **sale** a las 12.00. Siempre **soy** el primero en llegar. **Hay** una plaza al lado del [35] colegio y **aprovecho** para leer el periódico, algún libro. Mi hijo **sale** a las 12.00 y **volvemos** a casa, esta vez a la casa de mi mujer. Le **hago** la comida al niño, **me hago** la comida [40] a mí mismo y **estamos** hasta las 3.00 de la tarde. Entonces lo **vuelvo** a dejar al colegio, al turno de tarde, y generalmente **espero** a mi mujer en la misma plaza del colegio. Mi [45] mujer **sale** a las 3.00 de trabajar y **nos volvemos** juntos a casa. Todo esto teniendo en cuenta que **vivo** en un pueblo pequeño, Blanes, a una hora y cuarto de Barcelona. **Es** un [50] pueblo costero, un balneario, pequeñito. Bueno, con mi mujer **nos volvemos** caminando, conversando, a veces **nos metemos** en un bar a comer un bocadillo o a tomar algo. [55] Ella **se va** a su casa, yo **me voy** a la mía. Si **estoy** en pleno trabajo de escritura **duermo** una siesta y cuando **me despierto, sigo** escribiendo. Mi hijo **sale** a las 5.00 [60] de clases, lo **va** a buscar mi mujer, y a eso de las 6.00 **voy** a casa de mi mujer, **estamos** juntos, **hacemos** la cena, luego tal vez **salimos**, pero generalmente **alquilamos** un video. [65] **Nos cuesta** mucho ir al cine. Sólo **vemos** películas infantiles en el cine, pero películas de adultos pocas veces, porque con quién **dejamos** al niño. **Volvemos** a casa después de [70] alquilar un video y dar una vuelta por Blanes. **Hacemos** la cena, **vemos** el video, el niño **se acuesta . . .**

Diario *La Tercera*, Chile

## The present tense

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### **1** Usage

The present tense is used:

- a To refer to an action or a state of affairs which is valid in the present.

**Vivimos** cada uno en nuestra casa. (línea 8) *We each live in our own house.*

**Estamos** mucho mejor así. (l. 9) *We are much better like this.*

See also **llevamos** (l. 9), **son** (l. 24), **vivo** (l. 47), **estoy** (l. 56), **nos cuesta** (l. 65).

- b To refer to something which is generally true or universal.

**Hay** una plaza al lado del colegio. (l. 34–35) *There's a square by the school.*

**Es** un pueblo costero. (l. 49–50) *It's a coastal town.*

- c To refer to habitual actions.

**Me levanto** a las siete de la mañana. (l. 2–3) *I get up at 7.00 in the morning.*

Lo primero que **hago** es encender el ordenador. (l. 17–18) *The first thing I do is turn the computer on.*

**Me dirijo** a la cocina. (l. 18–19) *I go to the kitchen.*

There are a number of other examples of this use in the text. Consider for instance **pongo** (l. 19), **voy** (l. 20), **hago** (l. 21), **vuelvo** (l. 22), **me voy** (l. 31), **sale** (l. 36), **volvemos** (l. 37), **nos metemos** (l. 53), **hacemos** (l. 62), **alquilamos** (l. 64).

Habitual actions may also be expressed with the modal auxiliary verb **soler** 'to be accustomed to' followed by the infinitive:

**Suelo** acostarme temprano. *I usually go to bed early.*  
No **suele** llegar tarde. *He/she doesn't normally arrive late.*

A less frequent construction with the same meaning is that with **acostumbrar (a)** 'to be accustomed to' with the infinitive:

Los sábados **acostumbran (a)** quedarse en casa. *On Saturdays they usually stay at home.*

**d** To refer to a timeless fact or situation.

Mi mujer **es** básicamente mi amiga. (l. 11–12) *My wife is basically my friend.*

**Hay** un respeto por las libertades del otro. (l. 13–14) *There's respect for the other's freedom.*

**e** To refer to actions taking place at the moment of speaking.

El niño **duerme**. (for 'Está durmiendo') *The child is sleeping.*  
¿Qué **haces**? (for ¿Qué estás haciendo?) *What are you doing?*

**f** To express ability.

**Toca** el piano. *He/she plays the piano.*  
**Nadas** muy bien. *You swim very well.*

**g** To refer to the future, especially to pre-arranged events and, generally, with verbs of movement.

En mayo **se elige** un nuevo presidente. *A new president will be elected in May.*

Mañana **llega** Antonio. *Antonio is arriving tomorrow.*

**h** To refer to the past (historic present).

La guerra **termina** en 1939. *The war ended in 1939.*  
Miguel de Cervantes **nace** en Alcalá de Henares en  
1547. *Miguel de Cervantes was born in Alcalá de Henares in  
1547.*

i To refer to an action or state which began in the past and is still in progress.

**Llevamos** 17 años juntos. (l. 9–10) *We've been together for 17 years.*

Hace cinco años que **viven** allí. *They've been living there for five years.*

j As an imperative, especially in directions and instructions.

En la esquina **doblas** a la derecha. *You turn right at the corner.*  
Si me llama Elena le **dices** que regreso pronto. *If Elena phones tell her I'll be back soon.*

k In requests, translating *will* in English.

¿Me **pasas** el pan? *Will you pass the bread?*

¿Nos **ayuda**, por favor? *Will you help us, please?*

## **2** Formation

### **Regular verbs**

Spanish verbs fall into three categories according to the ending of the infinitive (the base or dictionary form of the verb): **-ar**, **-er** and **-ir**. Most verbs are 'regular', that is, they follow a fixed pattern in their conjugation. To form the present tense, remove the **-ar**, **-er** or **-ir** of the infinitive and add the endings for the present tense:

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tomar

comer

vivir

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