

Title:

Learning Spanish Grammar Online and the Preterite Tense

Word Count:

657

Summary:

The preterite tense is another topic that seems to confuse English speakers of Spanish. English speakers learning Spanish have a tendency to confuse the preterite with the imperfect and vice versa. Both tenses describe actions that took place in the past.

Keywords:

Learning Spanish Like Crazy

Article Body:

The Preterite Tense

The preterite tense is another topic that seems to confuse English speakers of Spanish. English speakers learning Spanish have a tendency to confuse the preterite with the imperfect and vice versa. Both tenses describe actions that took place in the past. But I think English speakers just learning Spanish have a tendency to confuse the two because in English in certain instances we sometimes use the same form of a verb to describe an action that took place in the past. But in Spanish, in the same instance, you cannot use both the preterite or the imperfect. Only one would be correct.

For example, in English , we can use the past tense of the verb "to go" (i.e. "went") to describe two different actions that took place in the past.

1. I went to the shopping mall three times.

2. When I was young, I went to the shopping mall.

(Note: In English, for number "2" you could also say "When I was young, I used

to go to the shopping mall.)

Both sentences use the same verb "went" to describe the action that took place in the past. But in Spanish, you cannot use the same verb tense. In the first sentence, you must use the preterite of "ir" (fui), and the imperfect verb tense (iba) in the latter.

Yo fui al almacén tres veces.

Cuando yo era joven, yo iba al almacén.

We will cover the "imperfect" verb tense in greater detail in a future lesson. But for now, think of the "imperfect" as a verb tense used to describe "how things used to be" or to describe an action that was continuous or habitual in the past.

The preterite verb tense is generally used to tell what happened (1) during a fixed period of time (either stated or implied), (2) a specific number of times, (3) or during an enclosed period of time. Here are some examples.

(1) During a fixed period of time:

Ayer compré un martillo.

Yesterday, I bought a hammer.

(2) A specific number of times (either state or implied)

Él perdió mi destornillador dos veces.

He lost my screwdriver two times.

I went to the hardware store.

Yo fui a la ferretería.

(It is implied that you went to the hardware store one time).

(3) During an enclosed period of time.

You hammered the nail for an hour.

Tú martillaste el clavo por una hora.

The following are some regular verbs in the preterite tense.

“AR” Verbs (hablar)

Yo	hablé
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Tú	hablaste
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Él/ella/usted	habló
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Nosotros/nosotras	hablamos
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Ellos/ellas/ustedes hablaron

"ER" Verbs (beber)

Yo bebí

Tú bebiste

Él/ella/usted bebió

Nosotros/nosotras bebimos

Ellos/ellas/ustedes bebieron

"IR" Verbs Vivir

Yo viví

Tú viviste

Él/ella/usted vivió

Nosotros/nosotras vivimos

Ellos/ellas/ustedes vivieron

Here are some examples.

1. Last week you bought a saw.

La semana pasada, tú compraste una sierra.

2. Yesterday, the man needed a hammer.

Ayer, el hombre necesitó un martillo.

3. They used the rake nine times.

Ellos usaron el rastrillo nueve veces.

4. The brother-in-law put the leaves in the bag.

El cuñado metió las hojas en la bolsa.

5. This morning the women sewed the clothes.

Esta mañana las mujeres cosieron la ropa.

6. Last night, I covered the dessert.

Anoche yo cubrí el postre.

Now let's try some on your own. The answers follow.

1. The son-in law ate shrimp two times.

2. Today they decided to tell the truth.

3. Did you use the hoe in the yard today? (Familiar)

4. The daughter-in-law turned on the oven a two o'clock.

5. Last summer, the soldiers marched in the parade.

6. He suffered a lot in the war this year.

Answers:

1. El yerno comió camarones dos veces.
2. Hoy ellos decidieron a decir la verdad.
3. ?Usaste tu el azadon en el jardin hoy?
4. La nuera encendió el horno a las dos.
5. El verano pasado los soldados marcharon en el desfile.
6. El sufrió mucho en la guerra este ano.