

# The Last Steps to Being Bilingual

So, your English is getting better every year and now you think you're almost completely bilingual? Well, congratulations. That's like *felicitaciones*, but I don't have to tell *you* that!

What I do have to share with you are the hardest parts of English for Spanish speakers to remember, which due to their difficulty, are often the last steps to master in order to be truly bilingual. I consider a truly bilingual person someone who can speak *and* write formally in both languages. You are almost there! Please use this sheet to aid you as you complete your journey.

## **Step #1 With present tense statements, He, She, and It = S**

English speakers don't write Carol give or the computer show. They always write Carol **gives** and the computers **shows**. This is because present tense sentences with single subjects (things that would be he, she, and it) ALWAYS need a verb with S.

The **He, She, and It = S** rule isn't just limited to present tense statements though. When a man named Bob moves from our city, we always say Bob **has** gone, never Bob have gone. If we want to talk about where he used to live on our street, we talk about where his house **was**, not where his house were. If someone wants to clarify, they say Bob **does** not live here anymore, not Bob don't live here anymore. So, **was, does, and has (s words!)** also connect to he, she, and it.

## **Step #2 There, Their, and They're**

Yes, all three of these words sound exactly the same, but they have very distinct meanings.

They're = They are (easiest one, because it is clearly a contraction) or **Son/estan** in Spanish

Ex. They're the best team, because they practice so much.

Ex. If you are looking for your papers, they're on my desk. (same w/ you're)

Their = possession/ownership, use whenever you think of the plural **Su/Sus**

Ex. What did your sisters do with their backpacks?

Ex. Their class did not have homework tonight.

There = location (**ahí**) or existence (**hay/había/hubo/habría**)

Ex. The dog is over there near her puppies.

Ex. There are too many people in this room.

Ex. There would be more food if everyone had given me money.

### **Step #3 The following words aren't words.**

Some non-words are very easy for Spanish speakers to try to integrate into their English. Here are some of the most common.

**Mines** is not a correct translation of **mios**. No matter how many things you are talking about, it is still mine. Ex. Those five pieces of candy are mine.

**Childrens/Mens** is rarely ever used. Ex. We raised three children. Ex. Our two boys grew up to become respectful men.

**Hes** is not the *su* for guys. *Su mochila* is never *Hes* backpack. It's his! When you make this mistake, you are spelling in Spanish when you need to spell in English.

### **Step #4 Es no es is**

It is incorrect to think of **Es/Esta** as exactly like the English *is*. This is because English much more often requires the subject pronouns *he, she, and it* before the verb *is*. Imagine you are talking to a friend in Spanish and say "*Es un placer tener amigas como Uds.*"

Then a friend who hasn't spoken Spanish in a while asks you to translate into English, and you say, "Is a pleasure having friends like all of you." The problem with this as an English sentence is that we need to see a subject, so there must be an *it* before your *is*. Our little verb (*is*) looks so much like your little verb (*es*) that it actually makes it harder. Just remember when proof-reading your work, whenever you see an *is*, and you don't see a subject very close by it, you need to add *he, she, or it*.

### **Step #5 Every They Needs its Y.**

This one is fairly self-explanatory. When a Spanish speaker writes fast, they write *the* when they mean **ellos/ellas**. This is simply because with Spanish pronunciation, *the* sounds like *they*.

### **Step #6 Adjectives before Nouns**

Almost always, we talk about the tall boy, the green shirt, and the beautiful girl. While in Spanish, you talk about *el chico alto, la camisa verde, y la chica bonita*. If you are tired or stressed or just writing for a long period, it's hard to keep your brain from drifting back to this.

### **Step #7 This/These/That/Those**

This is one of the harder concepts for students in the US in their high school Spanish courses. We do a rhyme to help them: *This* and *these* both have T's. *That* and *those* don't. So, whenever you are trying to decide which to use, remember *This* and *These* come from Spanish words with T's or *esta/estas/este/estos*.

### **Step #8 Don't let lazy American pronunciation throw you off.**

Our slang has led us to shorten the ends of words (many Spanish speaking places do it too!) Therefore, a student in public school or at the grocery store will hear: When are they *gettin* here? When are you *gonna* leave? I *don* wanna leave yet. Yes, we say them this way without a good G or T on the end, but you must write *getting, going, and don't want to*.

### **Step #9 Where, Wear, and Were**

Remember, *where* is ***donde***. A frustrated person might say, "Where the heck are we?" Remember the H from heck to help you always put it in, if it helps. *Wear* sounds the same but means *llevar*.

*Were* is the past tense of am/is/are. It's the one that rhymes with *fur*.

Buena Suerte,

Matthew Morris

ESOL Teacher

Henry County Schools