

Horse or Mackerel?

Gender of Spanish nouns

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Illustrations by
Alison Litherland

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Lavengro Books

This book is published by
Lavengro Books
Gomis 43, 1-6
08023 Barcelona
Spain

<http://www.lavengrobooks.com>
books@lavengrobooks.com

Horse or Mackerel?

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ISBN: 978-84-09-00221-4

Depósito Legal B 6039-2018

This book is also available in a Kindle ebook edition.

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HOM 1.0.0 March 2018

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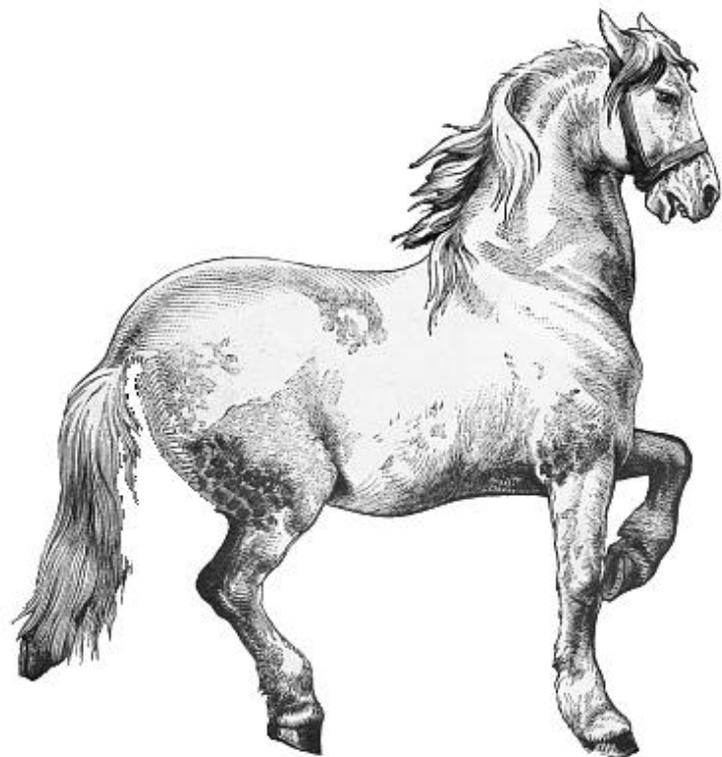
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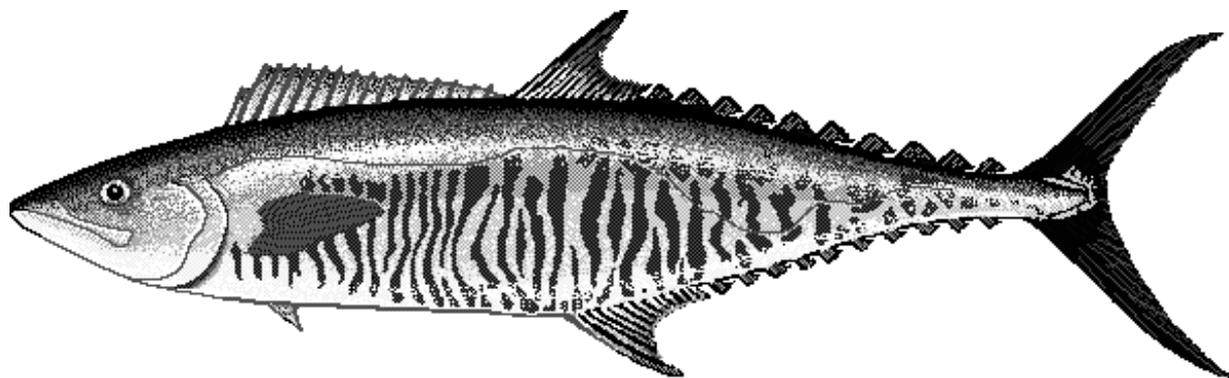
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caballo



caballa

Introduction

One great difficulty for people learning Spanish is the question of noun gender. It is easy enough to remember that masculine nouns end in *-o* and feminine ones have *-a*, but there are exceptions like masculine *día* and feminine *mano*, and there are nouns ending with other letters whose gender is not immediately obvious. As well as that, there are pairs of similar nouns such as *caballo* and *caballa* that have the totally different meanings of *horse* and *mackerel* respectively. The title of the book takes its name from this difference.

El cólera is a disease and *la cólera* is anger. *Cuna* is a cradle and *cuña* is a wedge, *Dónde* is a question word and *donde* is a conjunction. Such differences too are covered here.

This book offers a comprehensive guide to the various problems surrounding noun gender in Spanish. I recognise that some words listed here are unusual, and that in some cases gender can be variable. Any constructive feedback will be welcome on HOM@lavengrobooks.com.

The English definitions included here are for guidance and informative purposes. This book should not be used as a substitute for a dictionary.

I am pleased once again to have illustrations for this book by Alison Litherland. Her art can be seen on www.alisonlitherland.com. I am grateful to my wife Jane Harvey, who read the manuscript and made a number of valuable suggestions.

This book is also available in a Kindle ebook edition.

About Peter Harvey



I have spent many happy years teaching English. I have worked in Germany, Zambia and Saudi Arabia, but I have spent most of my life teaching adults in Spain.

While living in Spain I have become aware of the difficulties facing learners of Spanish. This book is intended to help in the field of noun gender.

For further information go to <http://www.lavengrobooks.com>.

1. General comments on noun gender

- Nouns that describe people's jobs or roles do not vary according to the sex of the person concerned but their gender changes accordingly, e.g. *taxista, mártir, profeta violinista; atleta; aristócrata, pirata*. This includes present participles e.g. *el/la estudiante* although *la presidenta* is also found. Many of these words have obvious English cognate forms. These words are not listed here.
- Nouns describing jobs that with masculine *-or* have feminine *-ora*: *profesor, profesora*.
- The DLE (formerly DRAE) accepts *la médica* for a female doctor.
- The DLE accepts forms ending with *-ologa* e.g. *cardióloga*.
- *La jefa* and *la presidenta* are more common than *la jefe* and *la presidente* but *la juez* is more common than *la jueza* (Google Ngram, June 2017). All the forms with *-a* are accepted by the DLE.
- Angela Merkel is *la canciller alemana* because *cancillera* means a drainage ditch in Salamanca (DLE: 1. f. Sal. *Cuneta o canal de desagüe en las lindes de las tierras labrantías*.)
- *Modisto* is widely used for a fashion designer, though the Diccionario panhispánico de dudas prefers *modista*.
- The names of the letters are feminine: *la be, la ere* etc.

Continued...

2. Separation by -o or -a

In this list, words with *-o* are masculine and those with *-a* are feminine. This list includes fruit trees (masculine) and fruit (feminine).

aceituno: olive tree

acero: steel

acto: act

almendro: almond tree

alto: halt

anillo: ring

ánimo: spirit; mood

arado: plough

arco: bow

aro: hoop

arribo: arrival (literary)

arrobo: bliss (literary)

aceituna: olive

acera: pavement

acta: minutes (of a meeting)

almendra: almond

alta: discharge from hospital; registration

anilla: curtain ring; ring pull

ánima: soul (literary)

arada: ploughing; ploughed land

arca: chest

ara: altar (*en aras de* = for the sake of)

arriba: up

arroba: @ symbol

Continued...

3. Irregular -o or -a

Masculine nouns ending with -a.

Complete list of examples...

Feminine nouns ending with -o:

Complete list of examples...

4. Words with -o/-a and -e or -i

In this list, words with -o are masculine and those with -a are feminine unless otherwise stated.

baba: dribble; slobber

babi (m): bib; smock

balda: shelf

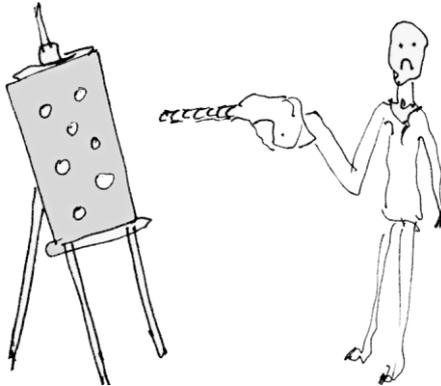
balde (m): bucket

bata: dressing gown; white coat (doctor etc.)

bate (m): bat

borda: gunwale

borde (m): edge



brocha: paint brush

broche (m): drill bit

Continued...

5. Homonyms with different genders

Words referring to people, e.g. *batería*, are shown as masculine to indicate the difference in usage. They are feminine when they refer to women.

Arte is usually masculine in singular and feminine in plural: *arte abstracto, culinario; bellas artes*. Consult a dictionary for individual cases.

Artes de pesca (fishing nets etc.) is feminine.

masculine

batería: drummer

cabeza: head (male leader)

caché: cachet

cámara: cameraman

capital: capital (finance)

cólera: cholera

coma: coma

feminine

batería: battery

cabeza: head (part of body)

caché: cache memory

cámara: chamber

capital: capital (city)

cólera: anger

coma: comma

Continued...

6. Last letters

This article lists nouns ending with *-d*, *-e* and *-z*, then those that end with other letters.

Nouns ending with -d

Complete list of examples...

Nouns ending with -e

Most nouns that end with *-e* are masculine.

Complete list of examples...

These feminine nouns end with *-e*:

Complete list of examples...

Nouns ending with -z

Complete list of examples...

Nouns ending with letters other than -d, -e or -z

Complete list of examples...

7. Words easily confused

águila: eagle

alicate: pliers

anguila: eel



bala: bullet

balsa: raft

bombón: chocolate sweet; stunner (good-looking person)

anguila: eel

alcayata: hook

angula: elver

baca: roof rack

vaca: cow

bola: ball

bolso: handbag

bolsa: bag; stock exchange

bombona: gas bottle

Continued...

8. Words differentiated by accents

aun: even

como: as (conjunction & preposition)

continuo/a: adjective

cual: which (conjunction)

aún: still; even (with comparatives)

cómo: how (adverb)

continúo/a, continuó: verb forms

cuál: which (adverb)

Continued...

Other books by Peter Harvey

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for non-native speakers

... an entertaining and illuminating read ... shows a high awareness of learners' needs – it is clearly written by someone with solid classroom experience ... The grammar sections are a strong area of the book ... The information provided [on pronunciation] is accurate and relevant ... the cultural information as a whole is well-presented, colourful and accurate ... [it offers] clear and useful directions for learners.

Modern English Teacher

Every English fact at your fingertips ... a more than handy reference tool for all involved in imparting linguistic knowledge on a regular basis. In the author's alphabetically arranged detailed content one can only admire the spirit of Dr Johnson ... it will help out when dealing with potentially awkward customers, or those keen to try out a new teacher.

ELGazette

When you start reading it, you are reminded of Modern English Usage by Fowler; however, in this case Peter Harvey is dealing with the reality of the foreign learner and what that learner wants to know ... A Guide to English Language Usage is a good reference book for all of us who are teaching and for advanced students as well. It is worth having in our libraries ... It is very practical, having been written by a teacher who knows his trade, and is highly recommendable.

TESOL Spain Newsletter

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Dr Brian Mott
Department of English and German Philology
Barcelona University

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TESOL Spain

While [this book] is clearly aimed at the Spanish-speaking learner of English it is also valuable for the teacher of English working in a Spanish-speaking environment ... [it highlights] many of the false friends which exist ... Translations show the learner what words do, and, equally importantly, do not mean ... with a wealth of real-life examples which are sometimes humorous, the book is very readable ... There is certainly a gap in the market for such a book ... of all the many English language books I have on my bookshelf, this is the only one that has a long waiting list of Spanish-speaking friends wanting to borrow it.

Modern English Teacher