

Tú o Usted

Cada frase del episodio en español, con su traducción al inglés justo debajo.

INTRODUCTION (ENGLISH)

Hey... welcome back to Poco a Poco Podcast.

Today I want to tell you a story about my friend Yuki.

Yuki is Japanese.

We met years ago... doing karate at university.

And last spring, he came to visit me here, in Valencia.

Yuki speaks some Spanish... not much, but he tries.

And he had one big problem.

In Japanese, when you talk to a stranger, you have to be very, very polite.

So Yuki wanted to be polite in Spanish too.

But being polite in Spanish... is not the same thing.

Today... when to say "tú" and when to say "usted".

And why my Japanese friend got it so wrong... so many times.

As always, slow Spanish, with English explanations at the end.

Let's go.

CUERPO (ESPAÑOL → ENGLISH)

Bueno... os cuento.

Okay... let me tell you.

Yuki llegó a Valencia un sábado por la mañana.

Yuki arrived in Valencia on a Saturday morning.

Fui a buscarlo al aeropuerto.

I went to pick him up at the airport.

Pero antes... os tengo que explicar una cosa sobre él.

But first... I have to explain something about him.

Yuki había estudiado español en una academia, en Japón.

Yuki had studied Spanish at a language school, in Japan.

Con un libro de texto.

With a textbook.

Y los libros de texto... casi siempre enseñan el usted primero.

And textbooks... almost always teach 'usted' first.

Dicen que el usted es más seguro.

They say 'usted' is safer.

Más educado.

More polite.

Así que Yuki llegó a España... hablando como un libro.

So Yuki arrived in Spain... talking like a book.

Y desde el primer momento... noté algo raro.

And from the very first moment... I noticed something odd.

Yuki hablaba con todo el mundo de usted.

Yuki spoke to everyone using 'usted'.

Con todo el mundo.

To everyone.

Al taxista, le dijo... "Buenos días, ¿podría usted llevarnos al centro, por favor?"

To the taxi driver, he said... 'Good morning, could you take us to the centre, please?'

Y además... hizo una pequeña inclinación con la cabeza.

And on top of that... he gave a little nod of the head.

Casi como un saludo japonés... pero sentado en el taxi.

Almost like a Japanese greeting... but sitting in the taxi.

El taxista lo miró por el espejo... y se echó a reír.

The taxi driver looked at him in the mirror... and burst out laughing.

No de mala manera, eh.

Not in a bad way, though.

Fue una risa simpática.

It was a friendly laugh.

Le dijo... "Pero hombre, no hace falta tanta ceremonia... tú tranquilo."

He told him... 'Come on, man, there's no need for so much ceremony... take it easy.'

Y Yuki se quedó confundido.

And Yuki was left confused.

Porque en japonés... esto no funciona así.

Because in Japanese... it doesn't work like this.

En japonés existe el keigo... el lenguaje formal.

In Japanese there's keigo... formal language.

Y con alguien que no conoces, el keigo no es opcional.

And with someone you don't know, keigo isn't optional.

Es obligatorio.

It's obligatory.

Cambian las palabras, cambian los verbos... cambia la frase entera.

The words change, the verbs change... the whole sentence changes.

Por ejemplo... el verbo cambia de forma.

For example... the verb changes form.

La palabra para "yo" muchas veces desaparece.

The word for 'I' often disappears.

Y todo se vuelve más largo... más suave... más indirecto.

And everything becomes longer... softer... more indirect.

Es un sistema precioso... pero muy complicado.

It's a beautiful system... but very complicated.

Y hay que aprenderlo desde pequeño.

And you have to learn it from a young age.

Si no usas keigo con un extraño, quedas fatal.

If you don't use keigo with a stranger, you come across really badly.

Así que, para Yuki... tratar de usted a todo el mundo era lo normal.

So, for Yuki... addressing everyone formally was the normal thing.

Era lo correcto.

It was the correct thing.

Era lo educado.

It was the polite thing.

Nadie le había explicado que en España... se puede ser educado... y cercano al mismo tiempo.

No one had explained to him that in Spain... you can be polite... and warm at the same time.

Pero en España... la cosa es distinta.

But in Spain... things are different.

En español también existe el usted.

In Spanish, 'usted' exists too.

Claro que existe.

Of course it exists.

Pero no se usa con todo el mundo.

But it isn't used with everyone.

En España, con la mayoría de la gente... nos tratamos de tú.

In Spain, with most people... we address each other as 'tú'.

Al taxista, al camarero, a una persona de tu edad por la calle...

The taxi driver, the waiter, a person your age in the street...

tú, tú, tú.

tú, tú, tú.

El usted lo guardamos para situaciones especiales.

We save 'usted' for special situations.

Para una persona mayor... para algo muy formal... para mostrar respeto o distancia.

For an older person... for something very formal... to show respect or distance.

Pensad un momento en el inglés.

Think for a moment about English.

En inglés no hay este problema.

In English there's no such problem.

Solo existe "you".

There's only 'you'.

Una palabra para todo el mundo.

One word for everyone.

Si quieres ser educado en inglés, cambias el tono... dices "sir", dices "could you"...

If you want to be polite in English, you change the tone... you say 'sir', you say 'could you'...

pero la palabra no cambia.

but the word doesn't change.

En inglés, la cortesía está en cómo lo dices... no en qué palabra usas.

In English, politeness is in how you say it... not in which word you use.

Fijaos qué curioso.

Notice how curious that is.

El japonés lo dice con la gramática.

Japanese says it with grammar.

El inglés lo dice con el tono.

English says it with tone.

Y el español... lo dice con una sola palabra.

And Spanish... says it with a single word.

Tres idiomas, tres maneras de ser educado.

Three languages, three ways of being polite.

Y ninguna es mejor que otra.

And none is better than another.

Solo son diferentes.

They're just different.

Cada idioma tiene su propia lógica... y su propia manera de mostrar respeto.

Each language has its own logic... and its own way of showing respect.

Bueno... sigo con la historia.

Okay... I'll carry on with the story.

Después del aeropuerto, fuimos a desayunar.

After the airport, we went to have breakfast.

Una cafetería normal, de barrio.

A normal, neighbourhood café.

Yuki quería un café con leche.

Yuki wanted a café con leche.

Y cuando llegó el camarero... Yuki se puso muy recto.

And when the waiter came... Yuki sat up very straight.

Muy serio.

Very serious.

Preparado para hablar de usted otra vez.

Ready to speak formally again.

Pero el camarero, antes de nada, le soltó... "¡Hola! ¿Qué te pongo?"

But the waiter, before anything else, came out with... 'Hi! What can I get you?'

Te.

'Te.' — the informal 'you'.

"¿Qué te pongo?"

'What can I get you?' — informally.

Y Yuki... se quedó de piedra.

And Yuki... froze.

Se giró hacia mí y me preguntó, en voz baja... "¿Por qué me habla así?"

He turned to me and asked, in a low voice... 'Why is he talking to me like that?'

"¿He hecho algo mal?"

'Have I done something wrong?'

Yuki estaba preocupado de verdad.

Yuki was genuinely worried.

Pensaba que el camarero estaba enfadado con él.

He thought the waiter was angry with him.

Cuando, en realidad... era justo al contrario.

When, in reality... it was exactly the opposite.

Y yo me reí.

And I laughed.

Le dije... "No, no, Yuki... no has hecho nada mal."

I told him... 'No, no, Yuki... you haven't done anything wrong.'

"Es que aquí funciona al revés."

'It's just that here it works the other way around.'

En Japón, tratar de tú a alguien que no conoces puede sonar brusco.

In Japan, addressing someone you don't know as 'tú' can sound abrupt.

Demasiado directo.

Too direct.

Pero en España... el tú no es de mala educación.

But in Spain... 'tú' isn't rude.

Todo lo contrario.

Quite the opposite.

El tú es cercano.

'Tú' is warm.

El tú dice... "estamos al mismo nivel, relájate, somos personas normales hablando."

'Tú' says... 'we're on the same level, relax, we're just normal people talking.'

Cuando un camarero te trata de tú... no te está faltando al respeto.

When a waiter addresses you as 'tú'... he isn't disrespecting you.

Te está tratando como a uno más.

He's treating you as one of the group.

Y eso, en España, es algo bueno.

And that, in Spain, is a good thing.

Es una manera de abrir la puerta... en vez de cerrarla.

It's a way of opening the door... instead of closing it.

Yuki se quedó pensando.

Yuki was left thinking.

Y me dijo una cosa muy bonita.

And he said a very lovely thing to me.

Me dijo... "Entonces... en España, la confianza se regala rápido."

He said... 'So... in Spain, closeness is given away quickly.'

Y sí.

And yes.

Es una buena manera de decirlo.

It's a good way of putting it.

Después del desayuno, dimos un paseo por el centro.

After breakfast, we took a walk through the centre.

Y Yuki lo estaba probando todo.

And Yuki was trying it all out.

Tuteaba a la chica de una tienda de recuerdos.

He used 'tú' with the girl at a souvenir shop.

Tuteaba a un señor que nos hizo una foto.

He used 'tú' with a man who took a photo of us.

Estaba muy orgulloso de su nuevo "tú".

He was very proud of his new 'tú'.

Aunque, una vez... se pasó un poco.

Although, once... he took it a bit too far.

Tuteó a un policía que estaba en la esquina.

He used 'tú' with a police officer standing on the corner.

El policía no dijo nada.

The officer didn't say anything.

Pero le puso una cara... de "a mí no, jovencito".

But he gave him a look... that said 'not with me, young man'.

Pero claro... todavía le quedaba una lección.

But of course... he still had one lesson left.

Pero ojo... no penséis que el usted ha desaparecido.

But careful... don't think that 'usted' has disappeared.

No.

No.

Esa misma tarde, subimos a mi casa.

That same afternoon, we went up to my flat.

Y en el ascensor... nos encontramos con mi vecina.

And in the lift... we ran into my neighbour.

Una señora mayor, doña Amparo.

An elderly lady, doña Amparo.

Tiene ochenta y muchos años.

She's well into her eighties.

Y es mi vecina de toda la vida.

And she's been my neighbour my whole life.

Y aquí... yo la trato de usted.

And here... I address her as 'usted'.

Siempre.

Always.

Le dije... "Buenas tardes, doña Amparo, ¿cómo está usted?"

I said... 'Good afternoon, doña Amparo, how are you?'

Tratarla de usted es una forma de decir... "la respeto".

Addressing her as 'usted' is a way of saying... 'I respect you.'

No es distancia fría.

It isn't cold distance.

Es respeto con cariño.

It's respect with affection.

Y Yuki lo notó enseguida.

And Yuki noticed it right away.

Me miró como diciendo... "¡Ah! ¡Ahora sí!"

He looked at me as if to say... 'Ah! Now, yes!'

Por fin, un usted.

Finally, an 'usted'.

Yuki estaba feliz.

Yuki was happy.

Volvía a pisar terreno conocido.

He was back on familiar ground.

Y me preguntó, luego, ya en casa... "¿Y cómo sabes cuándo usar uno u otro?"

And he asked me, later, once we were home... 'So how do you know when to use one or the other?'

Buena pregunta.

Good question.

Le expliqué mi regla, que es muy sencilla.

I explained my rule, which is very simple.

Por defecto... tú.

By default... 'tú'.

En España, empieza por tú casi siempre.

In Spain, start with 'tú' almost always.

Pero si la persona es mayor... o es una situación muy formal... o quieres mostrar respeto y distancia... usa usted.

But if the person is older... or it's a very formal situation... or you want to show respect and distance... use 'usted'.

Y si tienes dudas con una persona mayor... empieza por usted.

And if you're unsure with an older person... start with 'usted'.

Si te dice "puedes tutearme"... entonces cambias a tú.

If they tell you 'you can use tú with me'... then you switch to 'tú'.

Es más fácil bajar de usted a tú... que subir de tú a usted.

It's easier to come down from 'usted' to 'tú'... than to go up from 'tú' to 'usted'.

Yuki asintió.

Yuki nodded.

Y me dijo, riéndose... "En Japón esto me llevó veinte años."

And he said, laughing... 'In Japan this took me twenty years.'

"Aquí me lo has explicado en una tarde."

'Here you've explained it to me in one afternoon.'

Bueno... no es tan fácil, claro.

Well... it isn't that easy, of course.

Pero la idea general, sí.

But the general idea, yes.

Y al final del día... Yuki ya tuteaba al camarero de la cena.

And by the end of the day... Yuki was already using 'tú' with the dinner waiter.

Con una sonrisa.

With a smile.

Y trataba de usted a doña Amparo cuando la volvimos a ver.

And he addressed doña Amparo as 'usted' when we saw her again.

Lo había captado.

He'd got it.

Bueno... casi.

Well... almost.

En la cena, sin querer, trató de usted al camarero otra vez.

At dinner, without meaning to, he addressed the waiter as 'usted' again.

Y el camarero le dijo... "Tú tranquilo... aquí somos todos amigos."

And the waiter told him... 'Take it easy... here we're all friends.'

Y nos reímos los tres.

And the three of us laughed.

CLOSING — VOCABULARY & GRAMMAR (ENGLISH)

Okay... let's look at some of the language from the story.

First word... "tutear".

"Tutear" is a verb that means... to speak to someone using "tú".

English has no verb for this... so we'd need a whole phrase, like "to speak to someone informally".

In Spanish, it's one single word... tutear.

"Nos tuteamos" means... we speak to each other with "tú".

The opposite is "tratar de usted"... to address someone formally.

"A mi jefe lo trato de usted" means... I address my boss formally.

Notice we say tratar de usted... with the little word "de".

Next word... "la confianza".

"Confianza" looks like the English word "confidence"... and sometimes it does mean that.

But here it means something closer to... closeness, trust, familiarity.

When you have "confianza" with someone, you can relax... you can use "tú"... you can joke.

That's why Yuki said... "la confianza se regala rápido."

And the last word... "cercano".

Literally, "cercano" means "close"... in distance.

But with people, "cercano" means warm, approachable, easy to talk to.

In Spain, being "cercano" is a compliment.

Now, a quick grammar point... the verbs "tutear" and "tratar de usted".

These two verbs describe the act of choosing tú or usted.

"¿Nos tuteamos?" is a magic little question.

It means... "shall we switch to tú?"

You can say it to move from formal to informal... politely.

"Prefiero tratarle de usted" means... "I prefer to address you formally."

And here are a few safe formulas for strangers, using usted.

"Disculpe, ¿sabe dónde está...?"

"¿Me puede ayudar?"

"¿Le importa si...?"

Notice these use the usted forms... sabe, puede, importa.

My tip... in Spain, start with tú with people your own age.

And use usted with older people, or in formal places.

If in doubt with someone older... start with usted, and come down to tú later.

Okay... that's it for today.

Poco a poco... you'll start to feel when to use each one.

Nos vemos en el próximo episodio.

¡Hasta pronto!