

How to Use POR and PARA in Spanish — ¿Lo hago por ti o para ti? — English translation

Recurso de apoyo opcional: la traducción completa del episodio al inglés, con el vocabulario y la gramática señalados dentro del texto.

Antes de leer esto en lugar del español...

Escucha primero el episodio sin traducción. Este documento es una red de seguridad, no un sustituto: úsalo para confirmar lo que ya entendiste, no para evitar el esfuerzo de entender.

PALABRA en terracota = vocabulario destacado · *frase* en cursiva subrayada = punto de gramática

INTRODUCTION (ENGLISH)

Hello... and welcome back to Poco a Poco Podcast.

This is the show where you learn real Spanish... slowly... story by story.

I'm Juan.

In our last episode... we talked about the first great trap of Spanish... ser and estar.

Well... today... we open the second great trap.

Two very small words... por... and para.

In English... both of them can mean... "for".

And that... my friends... is a problem.

So today I'm going to tell you about my German friend Lukas... and the three famous mistakes that explain everything.

The Spanish in this episode is slow and clear... level A2 to B1.

And after the story... I'll explain six useful expressions... and one simple image that fixes por and para forever.

Ready?

Empezamos.

CUERPO PRINCIPAL (ESPAÑOL → ENGLISH)

All right.

Today I want to introduce you to someone very important in my life.

His name is Lukas.

Lukas is German... from Munich.

I met him in England... **BACK IN MY UNIVERSITY DAYS.**

We were both foreign students.

I was there improving my English...

And Lukas... well... Lukas studied **A BIT OF EVERYTHING.**

Economics... history... and also... Spanish.

Yes... Lukas had started learning Spanish a few months earlier.

And do you know what he did?

He practised with me... every single day.

He was brave... very brave.

He spoke without fear... with mistakes, of course... but without fear.

And thanks to those mistakes... today's episode exists.

Because Lukas had an enemy.

Well... actually... two enemies.

Two very small words... but very dangerous ones.

Por... and para.

I'm going to tell you about his three most famous mistakes.

First story.

One weekend in October... Lukas moved flats.

A HOUSE MOVE... you know...

Boxes everywhere... **HEAVY FURNITURE**... and a very, very narrow staircase.

He asked me for help... and of course... I went to **LEND HIM A HAND**.

We spent all Saturday carrying boxes up.

All... day... Saturday.

At the end of the day... Lukas looked at me... tired but happy... and said...

"Juan... thank you PARA your help."

It **SOUNDED A LITTLE OFF**... but I understood him perfectly.

I smiled and said... almost, Lukas... almost.

In Spanish... we say thank you POR something.

Thank you for your help.

Thank you for coming.

Thank you for everything.

And why do we use por?

Because your help is the cause... the motive... the reason for my "thank you".

When we talk about the cause... we use por.

Lukas **JOTTED IT DOWN** on his phone... and we carried on with the boxes.

That night... we ordered a huge pizza.

I paid for the pizza... and he paid for the drinks.

A FAIR EXCHANGE... right?

Pizza for drinks.

Keep this idea too.

Second story.

A few months later... in February... my birthday arrived.

We had a small dinner at my student flat.

Pasta... music... friends from five countries.

I remember the smell of the tomato sauce... and the music being too loud.

And Lukas arrived with a package... wrapped in gift paper.

He handed it to me with a huge smile... and said...

"Juan... this is POR you."

And I thought... because of me?

Why?... What have I done?

Because listen carefully... "esto es por ti"... does exist in Spanish.

It's a correct sentence.

But it means something else.

It means... "this is happening because of you".

For example... "we're late because of you".

Oops.

Lukas didn't mean that... of course.

What Lukas meant was... "esto es PARA ti".

The gift has a destination... and the destination... is you.

The gift travels towards you.

Keep this idea... because it comes back later.

Inside the package... **BY THE WAY**... there was a book of short stories in Spanish.

WHAT A THOUGHTFUL GESTURE... right?

Third story.

The last one... and my favourite.

In spring... Lukas had to give a presentation in his Spanish class.

The topic was... his family.

He was nervous... he had practised all week.

And in front of the whole class... he said...

"My father works POR a German company."

The teacher smiled... and asked him...

"Does your father **WORK FOR FREE... IN PLACE OF THE COMPANY?**"

The whole class laughed... **WITH AFFECTION**, mind you... **WITH AFFECTION**.

Because "trabajar por alguien"... can mean exactly that...

Doing another person's work... in their place.

Lukas meant... "trabaja PARA una empresa".

The company receives his work.

Once again... the destination.

That afternoon... after class... Lukas was frustrated.

He **KEPT TURNING IT OVER IN HIS MIND**... again and again.

He told me... "Juan... it's impossible".

"I study the rules... I memorise the lists... and then I speak... and I **PUT MY FOOT IN IT**."

And so... I looked for a simpler way to explain it.

I said... Lukas... forget the lists.

Think of two images.

Para... is an arrow.

The arrow points forward.

It points to a destination.

To a goal.

To the person who receives something.

Or to **A DEADLINE**.

This gift is for you.

I'm studying for the exam.

The train leaves for London.

THE HOMEWORK is due for Friday.

And por... por is the road.

The road behind you... or all around you.

It's the cause.

The motive.

The exchange.

The means.

Thank you for your help.

I'm learning Spanish out of love for Spain.

I'll swap you **MY SANDWICH** for your chocolate.

We talk on the phone.

We walk through the park.

One more thing about por.

We also use it with the parts of the day.

In the morning... in the afternoon... at night.

Do you see it?

The arrow looks towards the future.

The road explains the why... and the how.

Ah... and an extra gift.

There are expressions that always go with por.

Por favor... por fin... por supuesto... por ejemplo — please... at last... of course... for example.

Don't analyse them... memorise them like music.

And others always go with para.

Para siempre... para nada... para variar — forever... not at all... for a change.

Little gifts from the language... ready to use.

Lukas went quiet for a moment.

He looked at his coffee.

And then he said... very slowly...

"Para is the arrow... por is the road."

And I promise you one thing.

From that day on... he almost never mixed them up again.

Almost... never.

And now... one more trick... this one is for you.

The magic questions.

¿Por qué?... asks about the cause.

Why are you learning Spanish?

Because I love how it sounds.

¿Para qué?... asks about the goal.

What are you learning Spanish for?

To travel... to talk to people... to live in Spain one day.

The cause looks back.

The goal looks ahead.

Shall we play for a moment?

I'm going to say some incomplete sentences.

And you choose... por... or para?

Sentence one.

This coffee is... you.

Have you got it?

Para ti... the coffee travels towards you... it's meant for you.

Sentence two.

Thank you... the invitation.

Think about it...

Por la invitación... the invitation is the cause.

Sentence three.

Tomorrow I'm leaving... Valencia.

Arrow... or road?

Salgo para Valencia... Valencia is the destination... the arrow.

Although careful... if you travel "por Valencia"... you travel through the region.

You see?... the road... once again.

And one extra sentence... the hard one.

I'll swap my bicycle... your guitar.

What do you choose?

Por tu guitarra... it's an exchange... one thing for another.

Let's review the three mistakes... very quickly.

Gracias POR tu ayuda... the cause.

Esto es PARA ti... the destination.

Trabaja PARA una empresa... the company receives his work.

Three mistakes... one single idea.

The arrow for the destination... the road for the cause.

Today... many years later... Lukas speaks **BEAUTIFUL SPANISH**.

And sometimes... when we **MAKE A TOAST**... he says to me...

"Juan... I learned Spanish because of you... and this toast is for you."

Por ti... because you were the cause... the motive.

Para ti... because you are the destination.

Both sentences are correct.

And both of them... make me smile.

CLOSING — VOCABULARY & GRAMMAR (ENGLISH)

And that... was the story of Lukas... his arrow... and his road.

Now... let's look at six expressions from today's episode.

Number one... **UNA MUDANZA**.

A house move.

The verb is mudarse... to move house.

Careful... in Spanish, "mover" is for objects... not for homes.

Number two... **ECHAR UNA MANO**.

Literally... "to throw a hand".

It means... to help someone... to lend a hand.

Number three... **QUÉ DETALLE**.

"Un detalle" is not only a detail.

It's also a small, thoughtful gesture... or a little gift.

When someone surprises you with something kind... you say... "¡Qué detalle!"

Number four... **METER LA PATA**.

Literally... "to put the paw in".

It means to put your foot in it... to make an embarrassing mistake.

Number five... **SONAR RARO**.

To sound strange... to sound a little off.

It's what natives feel when the grammar is wrong... but the message is clear.

And number six... **DARLE VUELTAS A ALGO.**

Literally... "to give turns to something".

It means to think about something again and again... to overthink it.

Now... the grammar.

Last episode... we met the first great binary trap of Spanish... ser versus estar.

Today's trap is the second one... por versus para.

Don't memorise twenty rules.

Keep two images.

PARA is the arrow... it points forward... to a destination, a goal, a recipient, or a deadline.

POR is the road... it explains the reason, the exchange, the means... the way through.

Here's your rhyme for the week...

"PARA is the arrow... the goal, the plan... POR is the road... the reason it began."

In the episode description... you'll find five free study guides.

The vocabulary guide has twenty expressions from this story... with examples and full explanations.

There's also the transcript... the grammar guide... the translation... and the phrase-by-phrase guide.

Your homework this week is simple.

Thank someone POR something... and give something PARA someone.

Thank you for listening... and for learning with me.

See you in the next episode.

Poco a poco... se llega lejos.

Hasta pronto.