Past Participles: Both Verb and Adjective

In both Spanish and English, past participles can be used as parts of verbs (and not just for speaking about the past), and they can also be used to create adjectives.

The past participles in the two languages have similar origins, so they are not only similar in function, but also similar in the way they are formed. In English, the past participle for regular verbs is formed by adding "-ed" to the end. In Spanish, the past participle for regular verbs is formed by adding -ado to the stem of -ar verbs, or -ido to the stem of -er or -ir verbs.

To use a few examples of words that are similar in both languages:

- The past participle of "to select" is "selected," and the past participle of seleccionar is seleccionado.
- The past participle of "to exert" is "exerted"; the Spanish equivalents are ejercer and ejercido.
- And just as the past participle of "to comprehend" is "comprehended," the past participle of comprender is comprendido.

Both Spanish and English have numerous irregular past participles, especially of common verbs. In English, many, but far from all, end in "-en": broken, driven, given, seen. Others don't follow that pattern: made, hurt, heard, done. Among the common Spanish irregular participles are

- abierto ("opened," from abrir, "to open"),
- dicho ("said," from decir, "to say"),
- escrito ("written," from escribir, "to write"),
- hecho ("done" or "made," from hacer, "to make" or "to do"),
- puesto ("put," from poner, "to put") and
- visto ("seen," from ver, "to see").

Following are some of the ways past participles are used:

**Perfect tenses:** As a verb form, the most common use of the past participle in the two languages is to form what are known as the perfect tenses (they are called "perfect" because they refer to actions that have been or will be completed). In English, the perfect tenses are those formed by using a form of the auxiliary verb "to have" and following it with the past participle; in Spanish, they're formed by using a conjugated form of haber (again, haber and this usage of "to have" come from similar origins) and following it with the past participle.

- He ido. (I have gone.)
- Habrá salido. (He/she will have left.)
- Había estado enferma. (She had been sick.)
- Habría trabajado. (I would have worked.)
- He hablado. I have spoken.
- ¿Has comido? Have you eaten?
**Forming adjectives:** As in English, many past participles can be used as adjectives. As adjectives, they agree with the nouns they describe in both number and gender. Because of differences in which participles can be used as adjectives, the Spanish participles can't always be translated directly to English as an adjective.

- *Hay tres personas heridas.* (There are three wounded people.)
- *La oficina tiene dos puertas abiertas.* (The office has two open doors.)
- *Estamos cansados.* (We're tired.)
- *Compré la casa renovada.* (I bought the renovated house.)
- *Los viajeros llegados fueron al restaurante.* (The passengers who had arrived went to the restaurant.)
- *Estoy satisfecho.* I'm satisfied.
- *Los Estados Unidos.* The United States.
- *El hombre confundido.* The confused man.
- *Pollo frito.* Fried chicken.

In fact, while it often is awkward to do so, most verbs in either language can be converted to adjectives by using the past participle.

It also should be noted that in Spanish, many past participles can also be used as nouns, simply because adjectives can be freely used as nouns when the context makes their meaning clear. One sometimes seen in news stories is *los desaparacidos,* referring to those who have disappeared due to oppression. Frequently, adjectives used as nouns are translated using the English "one" as in *los escondidos,* the hidden ones, and *el colorado,* the colored one.

**Passive sentences:** Just as the passive voice in English can be formed by following "to be" with a past participle, the same can be done in Spanish by using a form of *ser* followed by the past participle. This construction should not be overused, as it is much less common in Spanish than in English, and it is even less common in speech than in writing. As the examples below show, the passive voice is a way of showing that a noun was acted upon without directly saying who or what performed the action.

In such sentences, the past participle functions like an adjective in that it agrees with the subject in both number and gender.

- *Fue descubierto.* (It was discovered.)
- *Fueron descubiertos.* (They were discovered.)
- *El libro será publicado.* (The book will be published.)
- *La canción será grabada.* (The song will be recorded.)
- *Los niños serán vistos.* (The children will be seen.)
- *Las niñas serán vistas.* (The girls will be seen.)
- *Los regalos fueron envueltos.* The gifts were wrapped.
- *Las computadoras fueron rotas.* The computers were broken.
- *Estoy cansada.* I am tired.