

Subject Pronouns

A verb is an action word.

run	sit
eat	sink
swim	study

The main form of a verb is called the infinitive. In English, infinitives include the word "to."

to run	to sit
to eat	to sink
to swim	to study

The infinitive is the pure form of a verb. The infinitive is like a lump of clay that can be molded to match the subject of the sentence it is used in:

I speak
you speak
he/she speaks

we speak
you-all* speak

they speak

NOTE: *The above forms are called conjugations of the infinitive to speak.*

Regarding the form "you-all"—this usage is not considered to be standard English. In standard English, the same word is used for both the singular you and the plural you. That is, each of the following is correct:

You have a tail light out, ma'am.
You (kids) have soccer practice at four.

In the first sentence, "you" refers to the singular "ma'am." In the second sentence, "you" refers to the plural "kids." To avoid confusion between you (singular) and you (plural), we will employ the non-standard English usage "you-all" to indicate you (plural). This will be very beneficial to y'all, particularly at the beginning of your studies.

The words "I" "you" "he" "she" "we" "you-all" and "they" are called subject pronouns. Spanish has corresponding subject pronouns. Here's a list of the English subject pronouns and their Spanish equivalents:

yo	.....	I
usted	.....	you
él	.....	he
ella	.....	she
nosotros	.....	we
ustedes	.....	you-all
ellos	.....	they

Spanish subject pronouns are both similar to and different from their English counterparts. Let's examine some of the differences. Look more closely at the English word "you." You have just seen that this can be translated into Spanish as "usted." But there is also a second way it can be translated. There are two ways the English word "you" can be expressed in Spanish:

usted you
tú..... you

Spanish has a formal and an informal form of the word "you." "Usted" is more formal and is generally used to express respect. "Tú" is more familiar and is used among friends, coworkers, relatives, or when addressing a child.

Speaking to your boss: usted
Speaking to your daughter:..... tú
Speaking to your teacher: usted
Speaking to your friend:..... tú

usted you formal
tú..... you informal (familiar)

This same distinction with regard to degree of formality occurs in the plural form as well. When referring to "you-all," there are two choices in Spanish:

ustedes you-all formal
vosotros you-all familiar

Once again, the difference lies in the degree of formality conveyed by the speaker. However, the vosotros form is used primarily in Spain. Throughout Latin America, "ustedes" is generally used in both formal and informal situations to refer to "you-all."

Speaking to a group of children
(in Spain): vosotros

Speaking to a group of children
(in Latin America): ustedes

Speaking to a group of strangers
(in Spain): ustedes

Speaking to a group of strangers
(in Latin America): ustedes

NOTE: *usted* can be abbreviated *Ud.* or *Vd.* ; *ustedes* can be abbreviated *Uds.* or *Vds.*

In many ways, Spanish is more gender-specific than English. We find evidence of this in the subject pronouns. First, look at the word "nosotros." This means "we" in the sense of a group containing at least one male. If the group contains only females, the word "nosotras" is used. So, in Spanish, there are two ways to say "we":

nosotros..... we (masculine or mixed group)
nosotras..... we (feminine)

This same idea applies to the English word “they”:

ellos they (masculine or mixed group)
ellas they (feminine)

This same idea also applies to the “vosotros” form:

vosotros you-all familiar (masculine or mixed group)
vosotras you-all familiar (feminine)

NOTE: These forms are used primarily in Spain, not Latin America.

Finally, don’t get confused over the difference between talking to a group or talking about a group. Consider the following statement, which could have been made by your Spanish teacher, while standing before the class:

“You-all need to study your Spanish. Those students in the other class don’t need to study Spanish. They are studying French. You-all can practice Spanish in Spain. They can practice French in France.”

The teacher is talking to the Spanish students and about the French students.

TALKING TO A GROUP, USE “YOU-ALL”:

ustedes
vosotros
vosotras

TALKING ABOUT A GROUP, USE “THEY”:

ellos
ellas

Here’s the complete list of Spanish subject pronouns:

SINGULAR

yo I
tú..... you (familiar)
él he
ella..... she
usted you (formal)

PLURAL

nosotros..... we (masculine or mixed gender)
nosotras..... we (feminine)
vosotros you-all (familiar, Spain, masculine or mixed gender)
vosotras you-all (familiar, Spain, feminine)
ellos they (masculine or mixed gender)
ellas they (feminine)
ustedes you-all (formal in Spain, formal and familiar in Latin America)