

Piece #6
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LESSON FOCUS: A AND THE OBJECT

As you read through Spanish, you will see the little word *a* used in many ways. One way that is particularly important to understand is as an *animate object marker*.

About English

English, because it is a creole, has a relatively fixed word order. Fundamentally, in active sentences, we know who did what to whom by following the word order and position around the verb:

EXAMPLE: The men taught the children.

We look at a verb (taught) and then we look to the left of the verb to find the subject/agent – the one who DOES the verb. Then we look to the right of the verb to find the object.

If we switch the subject and object around, we have a completely different idea:

EXAMPLE: The children taught the men.

About Spanish

Spanish is unencumbered by any such rigid word order. The subject can (and often does) appear after the verb – right along with the object. Where would we be in English with a sentence such as:

EXAMPLE: Taught the men the children.

Who did what to whom? But Spanish has no such difficulty. To resolve any possible confusion, the human object of the verb is identified with the word **a**.

EXAMPLE: Enseñaron los hombres a los niños. (Los niños has the *a* in front of it, so it is the object, and los hombres is the subject). The men taught the children.

Enseñaron a los hombres los niños. (Los hombres has the *a* in front of it, so it is the object, and los niños is the subject). The children taught the men.