

Preterite and Imperfect

1. Introduction

Hello there. My name is Darren Churn. I am a Lead Tutor here at UNT's Learning Center. Today I am going to be covering the important concepts of the preterite and imperfect tenses. Let's begin.

2. New Tenses

The first tense learned in Spanish is the present. The present tense, like it sounds covers actions that happen in the present such as: "I talk, you walk, he runs, we dance, and they sleep." As you know, we use a large variety of tenses in English and the same thing occurs in Spanish. Today we will be discussing some past tenses and their uses. First, we will cover the preterite tense.

3. Preterite

The preterite tense is a commonly used tense that describe actions that happened in the past. To get in the mindset, here are some examples of English sentences: "I walked to school. You ate my lunch. He changed his look. We danced. They called." Just as we did for regular present tense verbs, we are going to cover each ending separately, starting with AR verbs.

a. Ar

The endings for AR verbs in the preterite tense are "é, aste, ó, amos, and aron." These endings are added to the end of regular verbs the same way they would be done in the present tense. If we take hablar, we would drop the ar then for the yo form add "é" to form hablé, tú "aste" to form hablaste, él/ella/usted "ó" to form habló, nosotros add "amos" to form hablamos, and ellos/ellas/ustedes "aron" to form hablaron. Here are some example sentences with ar verbs in the preterite: "Hablé con mi madre. Nadaron en la piscina."

b. IR/ER

The endings in the preterite for IR and ER are exactly the same. The endings for ER and IR look somewhat similar to the endings for AR as well, except there are some small differences. The endings are "í, iste, ío, imos, and ieron."

4. Irregular Preterite

a. Old stem changers

Stem changers in the preterite work differently than in the present tense. In the present tense, any stem changing verb was altered in all forms except for the nosotros. In the preterite tense, there are no stems changed for AR and ER verbs. For IR verbs, the stem is changed only in the él/ella/usted form and the ellos/ellas/ustedes form. If we remember our common categories of stem changers we have o->ue, e->ie, and e->i. In the preterite, o->ue will only change from o->u. And e->ie will only change from e->i. Here are some examples below: "dormir: dormí, dormiste, durmí, dormimos, durmieron."

b. New Stem changing Irregulars

In the preterite, there are some stem changers that change more than just the vowel in the middle. The first category we will talk about are “U” changers. Let’s look at tener. If tener were a regular ER verb we would simply get “ten-” plus all of the endings. But tener is yet again an irregular. The stem changes to “tuv-” then we get the following endings: “e, iste, o, imos, ieron.” Another category of irregular stem changers is the “I” group. There are two main examples of this which are hacer and querer. For these verbs, we get the new stems of “hic-” and “quis-”. These verbs will have the same endings as the u group. The last group of irregular stem changers is “J”. Let’s look at the verb decir. This verb changes to “dij-” with all of the same endings as the previous two categories except the ellos/ellas/ustedes form is now “eron” instead of “ieron.”

Let’s look at each of these groups side by side with some examples. Our first example comes from the “U” group and is tener. Tener is conjugated in the preterite as “tuve, tuviste, tuvo, tuvimos, tuvieron”. Our next example is querer which falls under the “I” group. Remember: The “I” group and the “U” group have the same exact endings. This creates the conjugations of “quise, quisiste, quiso, quisimos, and quisieron”. Our last example is decir. As part of the “J” group, the ellos/ellas/ustedes form drops the “i”. We get the conjugations “dije, dijiste, dijo, dijimos, and dijieron”.

c. Car, gar, zar

In the preterite tense, we now have an “é” at the end of yo form AR verbs. In order to keep the correct sound of the consonants in certain verbs, the yo form is altered. There are three types of irregular AR verbs. They are verbs that end in car, gar, and zar. An example of a car verb is tocar. In order to keep the hard k sound, the ending changes from “c” to “qué”. Only in the yo form we have a changer that is “toqué”. The rest will be regularly conjugated using the preterite ar endings. An example of gar is pagar. In order to keep the g sounds, the ending in the yo form forms “pagué”. For zar, we can look at almorzar. The yo form of this verb is “almorcé.” Yet again, the rest of the conjugations of this verb are conjugated regularly.

d. Unaccented Verbs

Our last category of irregulars is what I like to call unaccented verbs. These verbs are separated into their own category because they are simply, different. Our first two verbs that are actually conjugated the same way are ser and ir. Both of these verbs are conjugated the same way in the preterite despite having different meanings. The conjugations are fui, fuiste, fue, fuimos, and fueron. Our other two verbs are conjugated as if they are IR verbs but do not have accents. Ver conjugates to vi, viste, vio, vimos, and vieron. And dar, despite ending in AR, also ends as if it were an IR verb. It becomes di, diste, dio, dimos, and dieron.

5. Imperfect

Now we are going to go over the imperfect. Without going too in depth into when we use the imperfect, the basic idea is that it is used for the past tense for things that were continuous or

reoccurring. Let's look at the conjugations. Similar to the preterite, the verbs ending in ER and IR are conjugated the same way. For AR verbs, we use the following endings. Yo, aba. Tú, abas. Él/ella/usted, aba, nosotros/as, ábamos. and ellos/ellas/ustedes, aban. It is important to note that there is an accent in the nosotros form. Now let's move to the ER/IR conjugations. Now we have Yo, ía. Tú, ías. Él/ella/usted, ía. Nosotros/as, íamos. And ellos/ellas/ustedes, ían. All of these forms have accents on the "í" but share the same vowel sound of "a" at the end as the AR.

6. Irregular Imperfect

Fortunately, there are no stem changers in the imperfect. In fact, there are only 3 main irregulars. Ser, ver, and ir. The conjugations for ser are era, eras, era, éramos, eran. The conjugations for ver are veía, veías, veía, veíamos, veían. And ir are iba, ibas, iba, íbamos, and iban.

7. Preterite vs Imperfect

Now to talk about the differences between preterite and imperfect. Both of these tenses are used to describe past events, but they are each used in specific situations. The preterite tense is used to describe past completed actions. Generally this means shorter events. An example of this is "I played in a baseball game." This would translate to "Jugué en un partido de béisbol". This sentence uses the preterite because the game had a beginning and an end in the past. The imperfect is used to describe past continuous or habitual actions. If I said "I played baseball when I was a kid." I would translate this to "Jugaba béisbol cuando era niño." Let's look at this timeline. This line is time with the end points as the present. If we were to graph the events that would be described using the preterite. They would be placed like this. All of the points are distinct, completed events. If we graph the imperfect it would be more fluid and look like this. The imperfect is continuous in the past.

8. Review

Now with all of the information you have heard today, here is a short review of important things we covered.

The preterite is used to describe past, completed actions. The regular endings for AR verbs are "é, aste, ó, amos, and aron." ER and IR verbs end the same way with "í, iste, ió, imos, and ieron." We have 4 main groups of irregular verbs in the preterite as well.

We have our old/vowel stem changers that now only effect IR verbs with O-U or E-I and only in the third person singular and plural forms. We have our new stem changers that are separated into the U group, I group, and the J group. We have car, gar, and zar which are AR verbs that change the yo form only. And we have our unaccented irregulars which are ser, dar, and ver.

The imperfect is used to describe past continuous or habitual actions. The AR endings are aba, abas, aba, ábamos, and aban. Both the ER and IR endings are ía, ías, ía, íamos, and ían.

And lastly, the main thing to remember is that the preterite is used to describe more exact moments in the past and the imperfect describes something that was continuous for a longer period of time.

9. Closing

Thank you for watching and I hope this helped you get a better idea of the key concepts of Preterite and Imperfect. Feel free to check out some of our other resources here at the Learning Center located in Sage Hall room 170.