Differences between PARA and POR in similar syntax*

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Abstract

Explains the subtle differences in meaning between the Spanish prepositions por and para when they are used in similar syntactic situations.

Both *para* and *por* may be followed by an infinitive and used to denote the end for which an action is intended, but with the following distinctions:

- *Para* is used when the result of the action is certain, or we express our conviction of success. It means "in order to", "with the intention of".
- *Por* expresses an effort in the direction indicated, and means "for the sake of". It leaves the result undecided, or conveys the idea that we cannot or will not express a conviction of success.

Example 1
Voy á Nueva York ***para*** *ver el puente de Brooklin.* I am going to New York to see the Brooklyn Bridge.

Example 2
Ando ***por*** *ver si puedo dormir.* I walk to see if I can sleep.

Example 3
Iré á España ***para*** *aprender el idioma.* I will go to Spain to learn the language.

Example 4
Iré á Washington ***por*** *hablar al presidente.* I will go to Washington and try to talk with the president.

Example 5
Ofrecen dinero ***por*** *entrar.* They offer money to get in.

Example 6
Dan dinero ***para*** *entrar.* They give money to get in (they pay an entrance fee).

Example 7
Estudio ***por*** *aprender.* I study [hard] to learn.

Example 8
Es preciso estudiar ***para*** *aprender.* It is necessary to study in order to learn.

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Example 9
Trabajo ***por*** *ganar la vida.* I endeavor to earn my living.

Example 10
Necesito trabajar ***para*** *ganar la vida.* I need to work to earn my living.

After *estar*, if a person is subject, *por* indicates inclination, and *para* immediate futurity; *por* moreover leaves the carrying-out of the inclination uncertain, *para* implies that is going to occur:

Example 11
Estoy ***por*** *salir.* I am inclined to go out.

Example 12
Estoy ***para*** *salir.* I am on the point of going out.

Example 13
Estoy ***por*** *creer que es guasa.* I am inclined to think it is a hoax.

Example 14
Estaba ***para*** *entrar cuando le llamé.* He was about to go in when I called him.

But if a thing be the subject, *por* denotes that the action is yet to be performed, and *para* that it is to be immediately performed:

Example 15
La discusión está ***por*** *concluir.* The discussion is as yet unfinished.

Example 16
La discusión está ***para*** *concluir.* The discussion is about to come to a close.

Example 17
Está ***para*** *llover.* It is going to rain.