

JOHN LIKES APPLES

This “John Likes Apples” example shows why word-for-word translation doesn’t really work. English and Spanish organize meaning differently, so if we try to match each word one by one, the sentence feels awkward or even wrong. Instead of chasing individual words, we focus on the whole idea and let Spanish express that idea in its own natural way.

1. John sees the apples.

Juan ve las manzanas.

2. John picks the apples.

Juan recoge las manzanas.

3. John washes the apples.

Juan lava las manzanas.

4. John prepares the apples.

Juan prepara las manzanas.

So far, as shown in #s 1-4, word-for-word translation works. Then we get to:

5. John likes the apples.

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5. John likes the apples.

A Juan le gustan las manzanas.

(To John, the apples are pleasing)

In English, John is the subject. In Spanish, las manzanas are the subject. Spanish grammar treats the apples as the thing(s) causing the feeling -- **The apples please John.**

Spanish puts the pieces in a different sequence

Spanish flips the subject, changes the order, treats liking as something that happens to you, and connects the whole sentence through agreement.

So this tells us that word-for-word translation only works when English and Spanish organize meaning the same way — but when the meaning shifts (as with feelings, reactions, and mental events), Spanish uses a completely different structure, and we have to follow the Spanish idea, not the English words.

Other verbs that use this structure:

- **gustar** — to be pleasing to
- **encantar** — to be delightful to
- **interesar** — to be interesting to
- **molestar** — to be bothersome to
- **fascinar** — to be fascinating to
- **importar** — to matter to

Examples:

encantar — *to be delightful to*

A Juan le encanta el café. *The coffee delights John.*

interesar — *to be interesting to*

A Juan le interesa la historia. *History interests John.*

molestar — *to be bothersome to*

A Juan le molesta el ruido. *The noise bothers John.*

fascinar — *to be fascinating to*

A Juan le fascinan los pájaros. *Birds fascinate John.*

importar — *to matter to*

A Juan le importa su familia. *His family matters to John.*