

**Speaking Spanish with  
Miss Mason and François**

Volume 1

*A compilation of Gouin series*

Compiled by Allyson D. Adrian



Speaking Spanish with Miss Mason and François, Volume 1  
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# Meet Miss Mason and François

## Why are we studying Spanish this way?

If you are like me, you may wonder why we learn things in a particular way; certainly the methods in *Speaking Spanish with Miss Mason and François* are unique. I can best explain them to you by introducing you to Miss Mason and François. They lived in the days of Charles Dickens and Florence Nightingale—the latter half of the 1800s—but their ideas are amazingly fresh today and will help you learn Spanish.

Miss Charlotte Mason liked a good joke and being outside in the woods. People who met her say that she always made them feel better about themselves. She lived in Victorian England, but her ideas were not typical. For instance, many people believed poor children couldn't learn; she knew that wasn't true. Her own family had not been wealthy; the U.S. Civil War had been bad for her father's business. And her parents died by the time she was sixteen. She knew that even poor orphans could learn. She thought all children should read the best authors, hear great composers' music, observe the great artists' paintings, and spend time outside observing the many and varied works of the Creator. She also believed that every family should be able to connect with families from other countries by learning to speak several languages.

Though Miss Mason probably never met Monsieur François Gouin in person, his ideas inspired her. He was a Frenchman who tried unsuccessfully to learn German. He took classes, then he memorized words from a dictionary, but he still couldn't speak German. One day he asked German children to teach him how to say the steps to opening a door. He found that if he said the German sentences and acted them out, he could remember them! He was so excited that he created sets of sentences to describe everything he saw and did *in German*. Each set described a single activity: how to get water from the well, how to light a fire, how an acorn grows into a tree, and even how the shepherd walks by with his dogs.

François opened language schools where people learned languages using these sets, which he called "Gouin series." His students learned to think and speak about *all of life* in other languages. Miss Mason used his method and had such success that many students were soon learning more than three languages at a time—and they were only studying each one for a few minutes at a time two or three times a week.

Gouin saw that it is hard to remember lists, but easy to remember how *to do* things in a logical order. That is why we are not learning the lists of *things* in Spanish, but rather we are learning *how to do things* in Spanish. The first thing you learn in a Gouin series are the verbs. Miss Mason called verbs

the “king words.” Why? You cannot have a sentence without verbs. Repeat the verbs slowly until you know them, then learn the rest of the sentence. To speak Spanish with others, you need to know verbs.

I studied German when I was young. My mother used to tell me that I would know German when I could think it—or, better yet, dream in it. To help you think in Spanish, this book contains Gouin series about the everyday things you do. Most likely these are things you wouldn’t say in English, e.g., “I take a book, I open the book, I close the book.” But when you first learned to speak, you probably did narrate your actions, e.g., “I open the book! I’m reading it!” or “Watch me Mom! I kick the ball!” Narrating what you do creates new connections in your brain; when you narrate the Gouin series you are making connections *in Spanish*.

When you truly know something, you are able to remember it. Miss Mason knew that the best way for you to remember something was to narrate it back to someone—your teachers, mother, friends, etc. Something about hearing or reading and then telling it back helps your mind retain knowledge. Modern science shows that Miss Mason was right. We know now that we tend to remember only 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, and 30% of what we see. But if we both see and hear it, we remember 40%; if we discuss it, we remember 50% of it; if we teach it, we remember 90% of it. In a sense, narrating is teaching, because you are telling someone else “the story.”

Miss Mason knew, though, that we need good stories to narrate. You’ve probably read a fabulous book and told friends about it without having to refer to the book. Why? Good stories have a flow to them; they have a beginning, middle, and end or what we call a “narrative form.” Stories we can’t wait to tell, Miss Mason called “living” ones. Gouin series, too, take a narrative form; living series should be easy to narrate back in English. Be sure to learn each series in English and act it out. That way when you start learning the Spanish, you know what you are saying and your mind translates each action into Spanish. The English and Spanish words do not translate exactly, but the ideas do. The series teach the *idea* in Spanish of opening the door or packing your backpack, etc.

### **What can I do to learn Spanish well?**

You hold within you the power to learn Spanish well. Miss Mason believed that you learn what you pay attention to; neuroscientists agree with her. You don’t need to study Spanish for hours, but you do need to focus intensely. Fifteen minutes of intense focus serves you better than an hour of loose study.

Listen to the series to train your ear to hear the Spanish sounds and to know how to pronounce new words. Once you are familiar with a series, read it—you remember more of what you both hear and see. Writing out a series will help you remember even more.

Also, act out what you are saying. When you do so, you create more connections in the brain to help you remember the new phrases. It is tempting to

just say the series, but remember that little extra effort to act out the series helps you learn more quickly.

Finally, challenge yourself. After learning two or three series, create and act out new ones using the phrases you know. Use phrases from series in conversation. Sit with a friend and talk about what you do: “What do you do in the afternoon?” “I read an interesting book” or “I go visit a friend.” You need not include every sentence from the series, but use a few or even simply use the title, e.g., “What do you do?” “I play with a ball.” When you can talk about what happened yesterday, tell stories to each other: “Did I tell you what my dog did yesterday? First, he barked at himself in the mirror. Then he . . .” Telling stories helps you remember the Spanish sentences that much more—and it is fun.

### **Why Miss Mason and François Gouin?**

If you use Gouin series, do you need to know Miss Mason? If you use Gouin series without Miss Mason’s methods and motives, your practice may look very different. For instance, you might try to study Spanish for hours. Miss Mason taught that you can focus best in short lessons: 20 minutes for younger students and 40 minutes for older ones. Modern scientists who study the brain using CAT scans say she was right. In fact, we now know that even in a 40 minute class, you remember more if there are two 20 minute activities. Studying something for hours does not mean that you learn more.

Without knowing Miss Mason you might assume you should memorize lists of Gouin series. But Miss Mason said not all series are living series to all students, so you won’t remember every series you study; and you don’t have to stick with a series until you know it. Instead, focus on what you know; you may forget a few series, but you will remember many others.

Finally, Miss Mason wanted you and your family to learn languages so that you could be ambassadors for your country. That doesn’t mean you have to travel. You can speak Spanish with your Ecuadoran neighbors or with Mexicans in Mexico City—but in both cases you represent your nation in their eyes. She wanted you to discuss good literature, poetry, politics, current events, and even matters of faith—to do much more than pay for a taxi or check into a hotel room. She wanted you to use your language ability to connect with others—to serve them and your country. Miss Mason had great confidence in our ability to learn. If you are studying more than one language at school or at home, you should know that Miss Mason thought it was possible to do so. She often said that we need a feast for the mind; I hope the Gouin series in this book provide part of that feast.

Buen Viaje!

Allyson D. Adrian AKA "Dr. A"

# How to use this volume

Perhaps the most important thing I can tell you is that this volume is meant to take you two to three years to work through. I recommend learning a new series every one to two weeks, depending on the length of the series. I wouldn't linger over a single series any longer than two weeks even if you don't know it perfectly; nor would I learn more than one series in a week. You are most likely to persevere if you go at a moderate rate.

I designed this volume so that most of the series build on each other. If you begin with series one, then you will already know several of the verbs in series two. New verbs are introduced in each series; by working through the volume, you learn gradually without being overwhelmed. And since the series build, learning a new one can actually help reinforce the one you just studied.

It is possible to learn the series out of order. If the beginning series are too easy, jump to the middle and challenge yourself. (Consider though that I have learned new expressions in these early series, even when I had studied the language at the college level.) Even in the middle, if you learn several series in proximity to each other, they will build on each other. What matters most is that you follow *the method* for learning Gouin series—not that you follow my ordering of them.

## How to Approach a Lesson

I designed this book to help you follow Miss Mason's method. Look at a series. Each of the four columns represents a step in the process. The first column contains the entire English series. That is the first thing to learn. You can probably do that in a single ten minute session, but if you need more than one session, take it. *It is vital to know the English by heart before going further.* Acting it out as you say it helps you remember the series.

In the second column, you see the English verbs. The second step is to say and act out the verbs. When you can do so from memory, it is time to go to the facing page which contains the Spanish.

The first column on the Spanish page contains the Spanish verbs. If you are using this volume with a teacher, the **student** should say the first English verb in the series, then the teacher should introduce the first Spanish verb, and the student should repeat it. If you are using the volume at home, say the first English verb, then listen to the Spanish verb on the audio. Repeat the Spanish verb slowly three times. Work your way through the lists of English and Spanish verbs in the series, occasionally going back to see if you can say all the Spanish verbs so far. Be sure to act them out as you say them. Acting out is essential to this method.

Try saying the Spanish verbs from memory. When you can do that, you are ready to move to the fourth column, which contains the entire series. Learn



the sentences one part at a time. Sometimes you can do this very quickly—on the same day that you learn the series in English. Sometimes, though, it may take two or even three days to learn the entire series. That is okay; you are learning.

Under each series is a response box. These are comments a teacher can say to the student(s) to develop an ear for questions and feedback. Many of the response boxes contain two columns: one addressed to a single student and a second addressed to many students. I arranged it this way because Spanish uses different words for “you” based on whether you are speaking to one person or to many. The verb also changes. In English I could simply say “Repeat after me”—and that would be appropriate if I were speaking to one student or to ten students. In Spanish, though, I would need to say “Escúchame” to one student and “Escúchenme” to ten students. Teachers should feel free to address comments and questions to one student or to the whole class. If you are learning alone at home, take an extra minute and say the responses and answer the questions.

Older students (eleven and up) and adults should copy a series after learning it. You may be tempted to skip copywork and rush to a new series; however, copying the series helps you remember it. This method emphasizes oral learning, so train the ear first; but once you know the series, take time to write it.

At the bottom of some pages you will find recitations, conversations, exercises, or grammar. (The grammar is not meant to substitute for a grammar book, but it does allow you to approach grammar intuitively from the series.) These are optional activities to engage the mind as you learn Spanish. Miss Mason said that a change was as good as a rest, and these are a few ways in which you can change your lesson routines. I did not include songs in the book, but I urge you to learn three or four Spanish songs each year. They are a delightful way to increase your fluency.

We are not engaging in a one to one translation of words; we are, though, translating ideas. Spanish may employ entirely different verbs than we would use to convey an idea in English. So recognize when the verbs don’t correspond exactly and think to yourself, “Ah, that is the verb used to convey this idea in Spanish. Isn’t that interesting?”

Because we are translating ideas, the volume works for those who want to learn English, too. Spanish speakers should start with the series in Spanish, then say the verbs in the Spanish column, and move to the left to see the corresponding verbs in English, and finally learn the entire English series.

# I open the book

I take the book.  
I open the book.  
I close the book.

*take*  
*open*  
*close*

Variations:

I take the notebook. I open the notebook.  
I close the notebook.  
I take the wallet. I open the wallet.  
I close the wallet.

<b>Responses:</b>	<i>To the student:</i>	<i>Watch me!</i> <i>What are you opening?</i> <i>What are you closing?</i> <i>What are you doing?</i>
	<i>To the students:</i>	<i>Watch me!</i> <i>What are you opening?</i> <i>What are you closing?</i> <i>What are you doing?</i>

# Abro el libro

*tomo* Tomo el libro.  
*abro* Abro el libro.  
*cierro* Cierro el libro.

Variaciones:  
Tomo el cuaderno. Abro el cuaderno.  
Cierro el cuaderno.  
Tomo la billetera. Abro la billetera.  
Cierro la billetera.

<b>Respuestas:</b>	<i>Al estudiante:</i>	<i>¡Mírame!</i> <i>¿Qué estás abriendo?</i> <i>¿Qué estás cerrando?</i> <i>¿Qué estás haciendo?</i>
	<i>A los estudiantes:</i>	<i>¡Mírenme!</i> <i>¿Qué están abriendo?</i> <i>¿Qué están cerrando?</i> <i>¿Qué están haciendo?</i>

# I put three pencils in the pencil case

I open the pencil case.	<i>open</i>
I take a pencil.	<i>take</i>
I put the pencil in the pencil case.	<i>put</i>
I take two pencils.	<i>take</i>
I put the pencils in the pencil case.	<i>put</i>
I close the pencil case.	<i>close</i>

## Variations:

- I open the pencil bag, etc.
- I open the box, etc.
- I open the backpack, etc.

<b>Responses:</b>	<i>To the student:</i>	<i>Pay attention. Look at the pencil case. Look at a pencil. What do you do first? And after, what do you do?</i>
	<i>To the students:</i>	<i>Pay attention. Look at the pencil case. Look at a pencil. What do you do first? And after, what do you do?</i>

## Exercise

I count to ten	<b>I count:</b>	<b>I indicate</b> the order:
	one	first
	two	second
	three	third
	four	fourth
	five	fifth
	six	sixth
	seven	seventh
	eight	eighth
	nine	ninth
	ten	tenth

# Pongo tres lápices en la caja de lápices

<i>abro</i>	Abro la caja de lápices.
<i>tomo</i>	Tomo un lápiz.
<i>pongo</i>	Pongo el lápiz en la caja de lápices.
<i>tomo</i>	Tomo dos lápices.
<i>pongo</i>	Pongo los lápices en la caja de lápices.
<i>cierro</i>	Cierro la caja de lápices.

Variaciones:

Abro la cartuchera, . . .

Abro el estuche, . . .

Abro la mochila, . . .

<b>Respuestas:</b>	<i>Al estudiante:</i>	<i>Presta atención. Mira la caja de lápices. Mira el lápiz. ¿Qué haces primero? Y después, ¿qué haces?</i>
	<i>A los estudiantes:</i>	<i>Presten atención. Miren la caja de lápices. Miren el lápiz. ¿Qué hacen primero? Y después, ¿qué hacen?</i>

## Ejercicio

Cuento hasta diez	Yo <b>cuento</b> :	Yo <b>indico</b> el orden:
	uno, una	primero, primera
	dos	segundo, segunda
	tres	tercero, tercera
	cuatro	cuarto, cuarta
	cinco	quinto, quinta
	seis	sexto, sexta
	siete	séptimo, séptima
	ocho	octavo, octava
	nueve	noveno, novena
	diez	décimo, décima