



How did los aritculos (articles) form in Spanish?

Many students are probably aware that Spanish is one of the languages descended from Latin. If you've studied Latin, you may also be aware of the fact that Latin didn't use articles. It seems like it was able to get by fine with declension and the use of demonstratives. So how is it the case that Spanish came to develop articles when its mother language (Latin) didn't have them?

In order to answer this question, we need to keep in mind that Latin was the original language used in the early history of people in the Iberian Peninsula. While the conquest of the Moors is not relevant to this question, the emergence of Castilian, which came to replace Latin following it is. Castilian was initially just a regional dialect in the north, but became important as the standard dialect as a result of "being in the right place at the right time" following the Moors being pushed out of the Iberian Peninsula.

Among one of the important changes from Latin to Castilian that took place was the creation of articles from a certain adjective. If you look at a couple of declensions of the adjective "ille", meaning this, in Latin, you may notice a few declensions look similar.

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Nominative singular	ille	illa	illud
Accusative plural	illos	illas	illa

As you can see, most of the endings for this adjective correspond roughly to the modern articles (la, los, las). These endings formed the basis for the articles el, la, los, and las. Early Castilian essentially took ille (meaning this), and through linguistic change, Ille had become so commonly used in the Latin spoken in Spain that it eventually lost its meaning of "that" and became a more general article without as much specification. This is the basic answer: articles evolved in Spanish as a better use of Latin demonstratives. How exactly this is better is still being researched.

We can also see that Latin actually had three genders, and in the process of forming the Castilian dialect, the neuter gender was lost. So, the neutral form of the nominative singular, illud, also eventually became the source for the general "lo", which is often used as an article without an antecedent. This also explains why modern Spanish only has two articles, though exactly why this is will be examined in later articles.

Similarly, the indefinite articles developed from the Latin accusative forms for unus, but that usage was a bit more in line with Latin originally. We see that articles evolved as a response to more complicated usage in Latin though, so it could be worse!

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