

Lesson 12 Part 1



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It Wasn't Easy Being a Millonario



I always thought that it would be nice to be a **millonario** and to have so much money that it would not even fit into **mi** wallet. Be careful about what you wish for, because it just might come true. **Mi oportunidad** came **en** 1977 when I was 20 years old. I was **en** an **exótico** country, **Argentina**. I would have even been a **multimillonario** had I arrived a couple of weeks earlier.



Let me **explicar**. **Argentina** had been **en** the midst of a **terrible** monetary **crisis** of **inflación** for several years. **Precios** were rising over 100% each year. The **inflación** was so bad, that people **literalmente** would spend almost all of their paychecks the **día** that they **recibieron** them because **precios** would rise **drasticamente** on most items before the next paycheck came. Here are some **ejemplos** of what was happening to the **precios durante** the 22 months that I was **en Argentina**. “Facturas” (little bread rolls cost 10 **Argentinos pesos** when I arrived, and 110 **pesos** when I left. “Un **litro** sachet de leche” (**litro** bag of milk) cost 30 **pesos** when I arrived and 270 **pesos** when I left.

Precios on everything soared. Every week, everything was a little more expensive than the week before. With this **tipo** of **inflación**, saving any money was really foolish, because each week the money would purchase less than it would have the week before.



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In the first week of January **en** 1977, the **Argentino** **gobierno decidió** that it needed to do something. The **precios** had climbed so high, that it was very awkward to deal with the money. Even small items would cost thousands of **pesos** because of the **inflación** over several years. For **ejemplo**, a candy bar might cost 850 pesos and a **kilo** of meat might cost 22,400 **pesos**. The **números** were too big. The **gobierno** picked a **día** the first **parte** of January, 1977 and said that two **ceros** would be cut off of every **número** dealing with money. If you had 1000 **pesos en** the **banco**, the next **día** you would have 10 **pesos**. If you had 40,000 **pesos en** the **banco**, the next **día** you would have 400. If the **kilo** of meat was 22,400 **pesos**, the next **día** it was 224 **pesos**. I hope you get the **idea**. It was even kind of confusing when you were there.

1000 pesos = 10

40,000 Pesos = 400

I arrived **en Argentina** two weeks after this **económica poliza** had taken place. It was **posible** with any item that I wanted to purchase that I would be given two **diferentes precios dependiendo** on who I was talking to. One **persona** might tell **me** that the **precio** of an item was 6 **Nuevos Pesos** and another might tell me 600 **Viejos pesos**. Both **precios** equaled the same thing. But for a **gringo** that was struggling with the **lenguaje** and struggling with the exchange rate, it was pretty **frustrando** at times to figure out what the **precio** really was. To **mi** knowledge, I never paid 100 times more for an **objeto** than what was owed but it might have been **posible**.

6 Nuevos
Pesos ?

Or

600
Viejos
Pesos?



With the **inflación**, I was actually a **millonario en Argentinos pesos**. That didn't really make **me** feel very **rico**. There were 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 25, 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000, 5000, and 10,000 **Nuevos pesos billetes**. Each **billete** had a **diferente color**. It was like **usando** Monopoly money. In speech, each **billete** was called either by the **número** written on the **billete** o it was called by the same **número** with 2 more **ceros** added on. For **ejemplo**, the 10,000 **Nuevos Pesos billete** was also called a **Millón billete**. It was brown **en color**. So, if I had that 10,000 **peso billete**, many **personas** would say that I had a 1,000,000 **peso billete** and that I was a **Millonario**. I remember the first 10,000 **peso o millón billete** that I got. It was brown **en color**. We (**gringos**) had given it the **nombre** of a “**chocolate** bar: because it was brown and because it was sweet to have one. I was proud of the fact that I was a **millonario** even though it was only worth \$114 US. Because of that pride, I didn't spend it but kept it **en mi** wallet as long as I could. That **eventualmente** led **me** to an embarrassing **experiencia**.



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One **día**, I needed to get to a meeting in a hurry. I opened **mi** wallet to see what money I had, and the only thing left was **mi Millón billete**. I knew that I was **en** trouble because none of the stores were yet open and I needed to get change. I needed to take a **bus**. The **bus** fare was 60 **pesos**. All I had was the 10,000 **pesos billete**. I went to the **bus** stop. I waved the **bus** down. I climbed up on the **bus**. I **timidamente** handed the driver **mi** 10,000 **billete**. He looked at the **billete**. Then he looked at **me**. He told **me** that he could not **aceptar** the **billete** because it was too large. He told me to get off the **bus** and to not come back until I had got some **apropiado** change. I argued with him that it was very **importante** for **me** to go. I told him that I was sorry that I had **no planeado** ahead. I **expliqué** that I had an **importante** meeting to get to. He relented and allowed **me** on the **bus**. He told **me** that he didn't think that he had enough change. He reached into his money bag and started counting out change. I could tell that he was a little upset. He counted out change in 10,20,25,50,100, and 500 **denominaciones**. It **literalmente** took him almost 5 **minutos** to **contar** out the change. I realized, somewhat **arrepentido**, that what I had done to him was something like purchasing something for 50 **centavos** with a \$100 **billete en** the **Estados Unidos** where all the change would to come back **en** nickels, dimes, quarters and a few dollar bills thrown in.



En Argentina, they really didn't use coins very **mucho** at that time; only **papel**. The **tiempo** it took for him to **contar** out the change was **realmente** quite **inconveniente** for him and everyone else riding on the **bus**. All the **tiempo** he was **contando** out change, I could hear him muttering to himself. I couldn't **comprender** all the words that he was saying. I had been in **Argentina** for less than a month and I was still struggling with speaking and understanding **español**. I did **comprender** enough of his mutterings to **descifrar** “**Gringo estúpido, norteamericano.**”

He handed **me** two huge fistfuls of **billetes**. With one hand I kind of wadded up some **billetes** trying to keep them from falling and to also hold open **mi** billfold. With **mi** other free hand, I tried to stuff a **porción** of the **billetes** inside the wallet. The **billetes literalmente** would **no** fit. I had too much money. (If such a thing **es realmente posible.**)



The **bus** driver must have been mad because of the **inconveniencia** and that I had **probablemente** put him behind schedule on his **ruta**. He slammed the **bus** into gear and took off as **rapidamente** as he could. That caused a **problema** to **me** as I was fumbling around with **mis multi-coloridos tesoros**. I was so busy trying to fit the **billetes** into **mi** wallet that I was not hanging on to anything when he took off. I had been facing the driver. Now I was thrown backwards because of the sudden **aceleración** of the **bus**. I didn't want to fall down, so I tried to run backwards in order to regain my **balanza**. That worked fine for about two steps; until I reached the seat **en frente**. There was a big lady in a green flower dress sitting at that seat. Without **me** wanting it to, the heel of **mi** foot came down hard on the instep of her foot. At that **punto** I **completamente** lost **mi balanza** and ended up falling backwards on top of her. I was **en** her lap. I **inmediatamente** tried to get up and **probablemente** elbowed her **en** the **proceso**. Mi mind was racing. **En mi** embarrassment, I was trying to remember how to say “excuse me” **en español**. **Finalmente** a word that I recognized as “excuse me!” popped into **mi** mind. As I got up, I **humildemente** said, “Con **permiso!**”



Once again, I heard the words “**Gringo**”, “**estupido**”, and “**norteamericano**”.

These words were much louder than the **bus** driver’s words had been. It was **probablemente** a blessing **en** disguise that I could **no comprendí** the **resto** of the words coming **rápidas** and **furiosas** from her mouth. But by the **tono** of her **voz** and the look on her face, I knew that they were not meant to be very flattering.

I walked down to the last seat on the **bus** and tried to hide myself from the shame that I felt and the stares of several **otros**.



After sitting there for a few **segundos** I was able to regain some of **mi** composure. Suddenly, the light bulb of **recognición** came on **en mi** mind. I now remembered that there were 3 ways to say excuse **me en español**.

“**Perdóneme**” means excuse **me**, pardon me, I need to be forgiven. I have done something wrong. “**Discúlpeme**” means excuse **me**, I’ve done something wrong. I need to be forgiven. “**Con permiso**” also means excuse me. But in this case, the **persona** hasn’t done anything wrong. It means that the **persona** is asking your **permiso** to get up from the table or to get by you when you are in the way. **En** this **situación**, “**Perdóneme**” would have been a good choice.

“**Discúlpeme**” would also have been a good choice. “**Con permiso**” was the wrong choice. **Desafortunadamente**, it was the only choice that I had remembered **en** the **tenso momento** of truth. “**Con permiso**” made **me** sound like I was unrepentant. It made me sound like I was rude, a little snobbish. It made me sound like I was being a disrespectful smart alec. It made me sound like I had been asking her **permiso** to stomp on the top of her foot and lay on her lap like it was a **normal, respectable** thing to do.

I **decidí** right then that it wasn’t easy being a **millonario** and that having a lot of money doesn’t necessarily make you **popular** with everyone else.



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Act. 1: Questions for **comprensión**:

1. What was the **normal** annual **porcentaje** of the **inflación en Argentina en** the 1970s?
2. Why would most **personas** spend most of their paychecks as soon as they received it instead of saving for **futuro** needs?
3. What was the currency or money called **en Argentina en** 1976?
4. Why was it really **difícil** for the **autor** to understand the **precios** of items **en** 1976?
5. How much was a 1,000,000 (Argentine money) worth **en US Dólares en** 1976?
6. How old was the **autor** when he became a **millionario**?

Reading Comprehension

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Comprehension Questions

TO BE CONTINUED

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7. Why was the **bus chauffer** upset with the **autor**?
8. Why wasn't the **autor** holding on to something when the **bus** took off?
9. What are 3 words **en español** that can mean “excuse me” **en inglés**?
10. Why was the big lady **en** the green dress angry with the **autor**? (2 **razones**)
11. Why was the word that the **autor usado** for “excuse me” **inapropiado en** this **situación**?
12. Why do you think the **autor tituló** the anecdote “It Wasn't Easy Being a Millionaire”?
13. What was the exchange rate for \$1.00 US in Argentine **Pesos en** 1976?

