The Subjunctive

The subjunctive is an important difference between Spanish and English and particular care must be taken in order to use it correctly. It is generally described as a "mood" and not a tense. This does not necessarily help the learner. However, this helps us to understand that in certain instances the use of the subjunctive gives some idea as to the feelings of the speaker regarding a subject. Nevertheless, there are many instances where the subjunctive must be used and you have to learn all of these. As the subjunctive has practically disappeared from English we cannot rely on our own intuition as to when the subjunctive may be used. Basically, you have to sit down and learn it.

Formation of the Subjunctive

Take the first person singular of the present tense, remove the "o" and add the appropriate endings depending on whether it is an -ar verb or an -er/-ir verb. That's all there is to it.

- **-ar**
  - comprar
  - compras
  - compramos
  - comprén

- **-er**
  - beber
  - bebas
  - bebamos
  - bebáis
  - beban

- **-ir**
  - recibir
  - recibas
  - recibamos
  - recibáis
  - reciban

The above verbs are in the present subjunctive. The first thing to notice about them is the endings. It is almost as if the verbs in the present subjunctive have a sudden identity crisis: -ar verbs use the endings of -er verbs and -er and -ir verbs use the endings of -ar verbs.

Formation exercise

Work out the "I" form of the present subjunctive for these verbs. Firstly work out the first person of the present tense and then work out the subjunctive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>First person of the present tense</th>
<th>First person of the present subjunctive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>abrir</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>bailar</td>
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<tr>
<td>caer</td>
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<td>salir</td>
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<tr>
<td>leer</td>
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<tr>
<td>poder</td>
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<tr>
<td>traer</td>
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<tr>
<td>aparecer</td>
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<tr>
<td>volver</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NB** Note that verbs such as llegar add a "u" to keep the sound, e.g. llegue.

Of course, as you would expect, some verbs are beyond all help and are completely irregular. Here are some of the most frequent ones:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb</th>
<th>subjunctive form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ir</td>
<td>voy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saber</td>
<td>sé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>estar</td>
<td>estoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dar</td>
<td>doy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ser</td>
<td>soy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>haber</td>
<td>he</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**N. Jones**
The Subjunctive

The subjunctive after verbs of wanting and requesting

Can you see what these sentences have in common?

¿Quieres que yo te lave esto?
Quieres que me ayudes

You probably saw that they are all about wanting other people to do things. This is a useful way of asking people whether they want things done and of getting people to do things without being too blunt.

Now look at these examples and say what happens to the second verb in each sentence:

Quiero que tú veas la ciudad.
¿Quiero que veas la ciudad?
I want you to see the town.
¿Quiero que limpies tus zapatos?
I want you to clean your shoes.
¿Queremos que hablas español?
We want you to speak Spanish.

As you can see, each of the second verbs has que in front and is in the present subjunctive.

Exercise 1

Express your wishes by changing these statements of what a friend has not done into statements of what you wish your friend would do. Write down the new statements, for example:

No has visitado Sitges.
¿Quiero que visites Sitges?
No has visto la catedral.
¿Quiero que veas la catedral?

1. No has hablado español.
2. No has visitado mi país.
3. No has comido turrón.
4. No has subido a la cumbre.
5. No has visto los cuadros.
6. No has escrito a tus padres.
7. No has bebido horchata.

Exercise 2

Show that you can express wishes about other people by changing these statements of what people must do into statements of what you wish they would do. Write down the new statements, for example:

Creo que él tiene que lavar el coche.
¿Quiero que el lave el coche?
Nos parece que el tendero tiene que cambiar la camiseta.
¿Queremos que el tendero cambie la camiseta?

1. Me parece que él tiene que hacer sus excusas.
2. Creo que usted tiene que devolver mi dinero.
3. Nos parece que nuestro profesor tiene que hablar más despacio.
4. Creemos que los chicos tienen que encontrarnos a las seis.
5. El opina que nosotros tenemos que hablar español.
6. El cree que yo tengo que escribirle primero.
7. Ellos creen que nosotros tenemos que contestar cuanto antes.
8. A ti te parece que yo tengo que volver antes de medianoche.

The following expressions of good wishes are really the second halves of longer sentences. Can you guess what the longer sentences were?

¡ Que lo pases bien !
Have a good time
¡ Que te diviertas !
Enjoy yourself !

The original sentences were:

Quiero que lo pases bien.
Quiero que te diviertas.

This manner of giving good wishes is extremely common in Spanish.

Exercise 3

Now you can write what these sentences mean, and what the original sentences were:

1. ¡ Que aproveches tu estancia en España !
2. ¡ Que tengas buena suerte !
3. ¡ Que todo te vaya bien !
4. ¡ Que tengas buen viaje !
5. ¡ Que nos veamos el año que viene !
6. ¡ Que Dios nos ayude !
The Subjunctive

Subjunctive after verbs of emotion
You have to use the subjunctive after verbs of emotion when you have a change of subject:

Siento llegar tan tarde  I’m sorry to arrive so late
Espero salir este fin de semana  I hope to go out this weekend
(there is no change of subject here, so no subjunctive needed)

Siento que lleguemos tan tarde  I’m sorry that we are arriving so late
Espero que salgan este fin de semana  I hope that they go out this weekend
(change of subject, therefore subjunctive needed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sentir que</td>
<td>to be sorry that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>esperar que</td>
<td>to hope that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alegrarse de que</td>
<td>to be happy that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entristecer que</td>
<td>to sadden that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enojarse de que</td>
<td>to get angry that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tener miedo de que</td>
<td>to be afraid that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>temer que</td>
<td>to fear that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avergonzarse de que</td>
<td>to be ashamed that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>estar contento de que</td>
<td>to be happy that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>estar triste de que</td>
<td>to be sad that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dar pena que</td>
<td>to upset that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exercise
Translate the following into Spanish:

1. I am sorry that you cannot come to the wedding.
2. I am sorry that I cannot come to the wedding.
3. We are afraid that she may be ill.
4. I hope that he is happy.
5. It annoys me that she has failed the exam.
6. I hope that I will be happy.
7. I find it sad that she cannot speak to me.
8. It shames me that I do not understand.
9. It upsets her that her dog has died.
10. We are happy that you can come to New York with us.
The Subjunctive

Subjunctive after statements of command or influence

If you wish to express a command or influence over another person or group of people in Spanish the subjunctive is required in the second verb after "que". Verbs of influence or command are those which involve wanting, ordering, advising prohibiting, allowing, causing or avoiding. Remember that the command or influence must be over a different person or group of people, otherwise the infinitive is used.

e.g. El médico me aconseja que me acueste temprano.
Quiero acostarme temprano.

Examples of verbs of influence or command are:

- mandar
- ordenar
- rogar
- hacer
- impedir
- prohibir
- permitir
- consentir
- aconsejar
- dejar
- evitar
- decir
- recomendar

Some examples of impersonal statements of command / influence are:

- Hace falta que
- Es preciso que
- Importa que

Some examples of the use of the subjunctive after statements of command or influence are:

Te aconsejo que lo hagas.
I advise you to do it.

Mi madre siempre me dice que vuelva a casa temprano.
My mother always tells me to go to come home early.

Exercise
Translate the following into Spanish:

1. I forbid you to go out.
2. She makes us work hard.
3. They are requesting us to enter the building quietly.
4. My parents allow me to go out at the weekend.
5. It is essential that you tell the truth.
The Subjunctive
The subjunctive after impersonal expressions of evaluation or judgement

You must always use the subjunctive in this instance. "Evaluation" or "judgement" covers a vast range of possibilities including regret, pleasure, displeasure and surprise. However, it is important to differentiate between value judgements and statements of fact such as "es verdad que", "es obvio que" etc. which do not require a subjunctive. Some examples of expressions of evaluation or judgement are:

Me molesta que
Me sorprende que
Me alegra que
Me importa un bledo que
Me irrita que
Es natural que
¡Qué pena que ...
Es una vergüenza que
Es necesario que
Basta que
Es una lástima que
Es una casualidad que
¡Qué rabia que ...
Ya es hora que
Me parece mal que
Me parece bien
Es justo que

It annoys me that
It surprises me that
It pleases me that
I couldn't care less whether
It irritates me that
It's only natural that
It's such a pain that
It's a shame that
It's necessary that
It's enough for you to
It's a shame that
It's pure chance that
What a nuisance
It's about time that
I disapprove of
I approve of
It's only right that

Exceptions (which do not require the subjunctive)

Menos mal que
Es mejor que

It's just as well that
It's best that

Exercise
Translate the following into Spanish

1. It annoys me that they are unable to come to Spain with us.
2. It's pure chance that I am here.
3. It's time that you face up to reality.
4. I couldn't care less whether you telephone him.
5. Thank heavens you're safe !
6. It's such a nuisance that we have to arrive so early.
7. It annoys me that they are so apathetic.
8. It's only natural that she should want to be with her family at Christmas.

N. Jones
The Subjunctive

Subjunctive after verbs of knowing, perceiving, stating or communicating when used negatively + verbs of doubt

Following verbs or expressions that express ignorance or doubt the subjunctive is required.

- Digo que es así I say that it is so
- No digo que sea así I don't say that it is so
- Creo que él le conoce I think he knows him
- No creo que él le conozca I don't think he knows him
- Dudo que sea verdad I doubt that it is true

Here is a list of common expressions that introduce an aspect of ignorance or doubt to the sentence, and therefore trigger the use of the subjunctive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dudar que ...</td>
<td>to doubt that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>es dudoso que ...</td>
<td>it is doubtful that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>es improbable que ...</td>
<td>it's unlikely that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>es incierto que ...</td>
<td>it's uncertain that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>es posible que ...</td>
<td>it's possible that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no creer que ...</td>
<td>not to believe that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no estar convencido de que ...</td>
<td>to not be convinced that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no estar seguro de que ...</td>
<td>to not be sure that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puede ser que ...</td>
<td>it may be that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negar que ...</td>
<td>to deny that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no es verdad que ...</td>
<td>it's not true that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no es cierto que ...</td>
<td>it's not certain that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no imaginarse que ...</td>
<td>to not imagine that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>temer que ...</td>
<td>to suspect that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no parecer que ...</td>
<td>to not seem that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no pensar que ...</td>
<td>to not think that ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Translate the following sentences into Spanish:

1. I see you have had your hair cut.
2. I can't see (i.e. don't believe) you've had your hair cut.
3. I don't believe it's true.
4. This doesn't mean that the Government is going to lower taxes.
5. Apart from watching TV I can't see that there is anything to do.
6. She doubts that they know the truth.

Important

The expressions tal vez and quizás mean “perhaps” + may be followed by the subjunctive. Notice that these expressions do not require the “que” construction that is normally used in the subjunctive.

- Tal vez tú tengas la gripe.
- Quizás los estudiantes lleguen a tiempo.