

The Subjunctive

A. The subjunctive in relative clauses when the antecedent is not yet known or experienced.

Spanish uses the subjunctive in such cases to express a nuance which English usually ignores. Compare "los que digan eso" (if anyone does) and "los que dicen eso" "the people who say that" (and they exist). The difference in Spanish is striking. Contrast:

Prefiero un coche que tenga cuatro puertas

I prefer a car with four doors (i.e. any car)

Prefiero ese coche que tiene cuatro puertas

I prefer that car with four doors.

Busco un médico que sepa acupuntura

I'm looking for a doctor (i.e. any) who knows acupuncture

Conozco a un médico que sabe acupuntura

I know a doctor who knows acupuncture

B. Subjunctive in relative clauses when the existence of the antecedent is denied

If the antecedent does not exist, the verb in the relative clause [i.e. the part of the sentence following "que"] is in the subjunctive.

No hay nadie que sepa tocar la guitarra como él

There is no-one who can play the guitar like he can

Nada hay en él que pueda ofender directamente al Gobierno

There's nothing in it that could directly offend the Government

Exercise

Translate the following sentences into Spanish:

1. I am looking for a house with four bedrooms.
2. I am looking for a cat that is called Tabby.
3. There is no-one who can understand her.