

Piece #3
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LESSON FOCUS: THE PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE

ABOUT ENGLISH

English has a subjunctive mood (way of expressing the verb). It is important to distinguish between the *form* and the *function* of the subjunctive.

In English, the *function* of the subjunctive is to express an idea about the future in an adverbial clause (not the main clause of the sentence). HOWEVER, the *form* of the subjunctive is the simple present tense.

EXAMPLE: When he arrives, he will tell us the news.

Technically, *arrives* is the English subjunctive. We are expressing a future idea (the arrival is clearly in the future), but it is formed by using a present tense verb form.

ABOUT SPANISH

Spanish also has a subjunctive. Spanish subjunctive appears in both adverb clauses and noun clauses (the use of the subjunctive is very rare in English noun clauses). The happy news is that it rarely appears in academic writing -- but it is worth noting.

The *form* of the subjunctive is different in Spanish. There are also different tenses in the Spanish subjunctive. The present subjunctive is the most important and it has the *function* of expressing the future. Again, pay most attention to the third-person forms:

Hable/hablen; means: he/she/it will speak/ they will speak;
translates as he/she/it speaks/ they speak

Coma/coman; means: he/she/it will eat/ they will eat; translates
as he/she/it eats/ they eat

Gruña/gruñan; means: he/she/it will grunt/ they will grunt;
translates as he/she/it grunts/ they grunt

The present subjunctive of SER and ESTAR are also worth noting. Again, concentrate on the third person forms: sea/sean; esté /estén.

Note how the present subjunctive translates:

INDICATIVE (THE 'NORMAL' VERB FORM): Mis estudiantes están felices. (My students are happy).

SUBJUNCTIVE PRESENT: Cuando ellos estén en la cocina, voy a apagar las luces. (When they are in the kitchen, I am going to turn off the lights).

In most cases, the indicative and the subjunctive present, the verb translates the same way. Occasionally, the subjunctive can translate as the future.