

Hablando de gramática

por Señor Conner

Señor Conner is the author of the popular language series *BREAKING THE SPANISH BARRIER*. Each month he will feature a grammatical topic of interest to our readers. Do you have ideas of topics you would like to see covered? E-mail Señor Conner at: john@tobreak.com. You can also visit his website: www.tobreak.com.

THE SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD AFTER VERBS OF EMOTION

Well, it's been a while since we've done some work on the subjunctive. Even for those of you who are beginning your path to Spanish mastery, there is no harm in tackling this month's topic head-on. Before we get going, though, let's quickly look at the conjugations of three regular verbs in the subjunctive.

Hablar		Comer		Vivir	
hable	hablemos	coma	comamos	viva	vivamos
hables	habléis	comas	comáis	viva	viváis
hable	hablen	coma	coman	viva	vivan

The endings really are the “opposite” of what you might expect: –AR verbs use –ER and –IR endings, while –ER and –IR verbs use –AR endings. Don't be thrown off by the fact that the 1st person singular and 3rd person singular have the same endings! Context (or a subject pronoun) will make the meaning clear for you. Also, when some irregular verbs pop up in this article, know that many of them just build off the “yo” form of the present indicative (e.g., *tenga, tengas, tenga, etc.*). Another subjunctive article in a future edition of *Think Spanish* will highlight all of the irregular forms.

Now that the dry stuff is out of the way, let's focus on the heart of this month's topic – it really is quite fun! Here is the concept. In Spanish, when the beginning of the sentence – the 1st clause – expresses some emotion (fear, joy, happiness, surprise, sadness, etc.), the verb in the 2nd clause (i.e., the verb that follows the relative pronoun “*que*”) will be in the subjunctive. Let's immediately look at two examples so that you can see what I'm taking about.

Examples: Me alegro de que Barbara Streisand *cante* esta noche en Boston.

I'm glad that Barbara Streisand is singing tonight in Boston.

Nos sorprende que los Tigres de Detroit *jueguen* en la Serie Mundial este año.

It surprises us that the Detroit Tigers are playing in the World Series this year.

Both of these sentences begin with some emotion expressed. In the first sentence, I am telling the listener that I am happy! In the second sentence, we are telling the listeners that we are surprised. Each example, you will notice, also contains the word “*que*.” This fact is important! This “*que*” let's you know that a new subject is coming. Finally, in the dependent clause (after the word “*que*”), you see the subjunctive used: “*cante*” and “*jueguen*.”

This use of the subjunctive is not an easy one for English speakers to grasp right away. If the subjunctive had followed an indirect command, we, of course, would have expected the subjunctive (e.g., *Insisto en que mis hijos estudien*) because one can't be sure if the other person will follow the command (I don't know if my children are going to study or not!). The subjunctive beautifully expresses this uncertainty.

The use of the subjunctive with emotion is totally different because the things we are talking about in these sentences ARE certain. Then, why use the subjunctive? I like to think of it in this way: it's almost as if the emotion in the first clause were like lava from a volcano, or caramel sauce boiling in a pot, that suddenly FLOWS out over the rest of the sentence.

The “lava” or “caramel sauce” then **COVERS** the verb in the dependent clause. That verb wears the emotion on its sleeve, so to speak. This “goopy” emotion forever “taints” or “coats” or “covers” that dependent verb, which is now forever transformed into the subjunctive!

Let’s look at four more examples. Notice that it makes no difference whether the sentence is affirmative or negative.

Examples: Nos irrita que nadie *entienda* lo que hemos dicho.

It irritates us that no one understands what we have said.

No estoy triste de que Luis ya no *salga* con Myrka.

I’m not sad that Luis is no longer going out with with Myrka.

Sentimos que la temperatura de la Tierra *suba* un poco cada año.

We regret that the Earth’s temperature is going up a little each year.

Mi amiga se alegra de que Calista Flockhart y Sally Field *tengan* papeles importantes en el nuevo programa *Brothers & Sisters*.

My friend is happy that Calista Flockhart and Sally Field have important roles on the new show *Brothers & Sisters*.

Did you see the three key ingredients in each sentence?

- Verb of emotion in main clause
- “que”
- Subjunctive in the dependent clause

One final thought. If there is no “*que*,” there is no new clause. Therefore, you will not find the subjunctive, but rather an infinitive.

Examples: Me alegro de *bailar* contigo esta noche en la fiesta.

I’m glad to dance with you tonight at the party.

¡Nos irrita *perder* tanto tiempo esperando en esta cola!

It bothers us to waste so much time waiting in this line!

PRUEBA DE REPASO

Complete these sentences with the subjunctive, the indicative or an infinitive.

- 1) Nos molesta que ellos _____ tanto ruido en la biblioteca. (hacer)
- 2) ¿Te alegras de que Eva Longoria _____ esta noche a la fiesta para *Desperate Housewives*? (venir)
- 3) Mis padres saben que yo no _____ ir a la escuela mañana. (poder)
(Be careful here! Is there a verb of emotion? No! Therefore, don’t use the subjunctive!)
- 4) Sentimos que no _____ calor hoy, pero de todos modos vamos a la playa. (hacer)
- 5) No me molesta _____ el subjuntivo porque me encanta la gramática. (estudiar)
- 6) A mis amigos les sorprende que yo _____ con Belinda esta noche. (salir)
- 7) Me frustra que el cura no me _____ nunca. (hablar)
- 8) Es triste que tú no _____ boletos para ver *Mary Poppins* en Broadway. (tener)
- 9) El piloto se alegra mucho de que los pasajeros _____ ahora. (dormir)
- 10) Mis padres observan que tú no _____ bien vestido esta noche. (estar)