

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 again LET'S ESCAPE!

While we are nearing the end of winter, some of us dream of escaping from the cold. We await the return of warm, sunny days. It seems like a perfect time to tackle an important use of the subjunctive mood. Recently, in THINK SPANISH, I have written articles about the use of subjunctive after indirect commands (*Insisto en que mis alumnos estudien mucho*) as well as after verbs that express emotion (*Me alegré de que Florida ganara otro campeonato de fútbol americano*).

This month, the idea is, in fact, a little easier. Here is the rule: Whenever a verb follows one of the following adverbial expressions, you MUST use the subjunctive. That's it! An easy way to remember these expressions is to memorize the word "ESCAPA"!

ESCAPA

<i>En caso de que</i>	In case
<i>Sin que</i>	Without
<i>Con tal de que</i>	Provided that
<i>Antes de que</i>	Before
<i>Para que</i>	In order that
<i>A menos que</i>	Unless

EXAMPLES: *En caso de que llegues temprano, empieza a preparar la cena.*
In case you arrive early, start preparing dinner.

Salí sin que Shakira me hablara.
I left without Shakira speaking to me.

Voy a contarles un cuento con tal que escuchen con atención.
I'm going to tell you all a story provided that you listen carefully.

Antes de que el partido comenzara, Emmy Lou Harris cantó el himno nacional.
Before the game started, Emma Lou Harris sang the national anthem.

"Trabajé mucho para que mis hijos pudieran tener una vida mejor", dijo el anciano.
"I worked hard so that my kids could have a better life," said the old man.

Voy a salir ahora mismo a menos que quieras ir conmigo al cine para ver Babel.
I'm going to leave right now unless you want to go to the movies with me to see *Babel*.

For those of you who love memorizing rules, this simple ESCAPA rule should keep you happy. Whenever you see one of these "ESCAPA" expressions lurking in a sentence, you will notice that the subjunctive – either a present or a past form – ALWAYS will follow it.

I know, however, there are at least a few of you out there who need to know WHY this is true. Fair enough. The idea in all of these ESCAPA expressions is that the action that follows is somehow indefinite, problematic, uncertain, or simply has not happened yet. It is this condition of uncertainty or incompleteness that calls for the subjunctive. Let's look at a few new sentences that utilize ESCAPA, and I'll show you what I mean.

EXAMPLES: *En caso de que **nieve** mañana, voy a esquiar.*

In case it snows tomorrow, I'm going skiing.

(**Analysis:** The snow tomorrow may or may not come ... the sentence expresses that uncertainty by its use of the subjunctive.)

*Antes de que Jennifer López **se casara** con Marc Anthony, había tenido muchos otros novios.*

Before J.Lo. married Marc Anthony, she had had many other boyfriends.

(**Analysis:** This sentence describes a moment BEFORE the wedding ... that is, at the time being described, Jennifer's wedding hadn't happened yet. Therefore, the verb "casarse" is the subjunctive ...the mood that expresses incompleteness or "unreality.")

*Con tal que Uds. no **griten**, podrán estudiar toda la tarde en la biblioteca.*

Provided that you all don't shout, you'll be able to study all afternoon in the library.

(**Analysis:** Here the speaker sets a condition: provided that the listeners don't scream, they will be able to do something. Their not screaming is theoretical; their screaming certainly hasn't happened yet, and it ideally will never happen! This "unreality," once again, requires the subjunctive.)

ONE FINAL THOUGHT: Did you notice that "que" is part of each of these ESCAPA expressions? That "que" signals a change of subject. If there is no "que," the verb following will be in the infinitive!

EXAMPLES: *Antes de **salir**, besé a mi abuela.*

Before leaving, I kissed my grandmother.

*Penélope Cruz salió sin **despedirse** de mí.*

Penélope Cruz left without saying goodbye to me.

PRUEBA DE REPASO

Complete these sentences by translating the words in parentheses.

- 1) Normalmente me gusta bailar con mi novia a menos que _____ muy cansados. (estar)
- 2) Te doy este dinero para que me _____ comprar un regalo muy bonito. (poder)
- 3) Te fuiste antes de que tu papá _____ contigo. (hablar)
- 4) En caso de que _____ mañana, nosotros vamos a esquiar. (nevar)
- 5) Con tal que mi equipo _____ ganando, jugaremos en los campeonatos este verano. (seguir)
- 6) Justin Timberlake se marchó sin que Cameron Díaz le _____ "adiós". (decir)
- 7) En caso de que tú _____ la tarea temprano, avísame; podemos ir al cine para ver *Dreamgirls* otra vez. (terminar)
- 8) Mi prima salió sin _____ de mí. (despedirse)
- 9) Mi contestador automático llegó por correo antes de que yo _____ una línea telefónica. (tener)
- 10) Antes de _____ a su casa, mi novio se compró una camisa nueva en Abercrombie & Fitch. (volver)