

The Imperfect Subjunctive Mood

The Imperfect Subjunctive works like Present Subjunctive in its structure, which consists of a main clause, the word "que" (that), and a dependent clause. Let's examine each these in more detail.

The main clause is a statement that expresses a certain wish, emotion, impersonal observation, recommendation, doubt, denial, or speculation. Review the explanation of the WEIRDO acronym in your Present Subjunctive notes for examples.

The dependent clause contains a verb that is conjugated in a way that reflects uncertainty of outcome. In the Present Subjunctive, opposite endings are used to achieve this effect. For example:

Yo recomiendo que usted pida la langosta.
I recommend that you order the lobster.

El guía sugiere que no entremos la cueva.
The guide suggests that we don't enter the cave.

Notice that "pida" (from the infinitive pedir) in the first sentence has an -a rather than -e ending. Notice also that "entremos" (from the infinitive entrar) has an -e rather than -a ending.

IMPORTANT

Imperfect Subjunctive conjugation is different in this respect. Start with the plural third person, drop the regular ending, then switch it with:

imperfect subjunctive endings		Hablar = to talk	
-ra	-ramos	hablara	habláramos
-ras	-rais	hablaras	hablarais
-ra	-ran	hablara	hablaran

So, as you see above-right, if the verb needed were HABLAR, we would start with "hablaron", drop "-ron" and replace it with "-ran" which renders the Imperfect Subjunctive form "hablaran".

Note: there is only one set of endings used for AR, ER or IR verbs and the vowel preceding the nosotros ending always has an accent mark, since an extra syllable is present.

Now let's look at a few examples and see how they affect meaning.

Yo no quería que Bob pasara la línea roja.
I didn't want that Bob pass the red line.

La mesera recomendó que pidéramos la langosta.
The waitress recommended that we order the lobster.

Here are a few more examples drawing upon the WEIRDO acronym for main clauses. Note that the Imperfect Subjunctive is used whenever the main clause uses a verb in the past or conditional tenses.

Siempre esperábamos que tuvieras la casa de tus sueños.
We always hoped that you had the house of your dreams.

Me alegré que vosotros vinierais a la reunión de familia.
I was glad that you guys came to the family reunion.

Fue malo que tú llegaras en ese momento.
It was bad that you arrived at that moment.

Los miembros recomendaron que entráramos por la puerta al lado.
The members recommended that we enter by the side door.

Roberta dudaba que yo pudiera comer el burrito entero.
Roberta doubted that I could eat the entire burrito.

Ojalá todos sobrevivieran el terremoto.
Let's hope everyone survived the earthquake.

The Imperfect Subjunctive is also handy for hypotheticals like these:

Si fuera rico, tendría un coche deportivo.
If I was rich, I would have a sports car.

Si tuviera más pelo, Reynaldo sería guapo.
If he had more hair, Reynaldo would be handsome.

Quiz

Translate the following sentences.

1. I wanted her to write me every day.
2. He wasn't happy that you came with Juan.
3. It's good that y'all went together.
4. Is it possible that the butler did it?
5. All winter, we wished that it snowed.
6. It was interesting that the kids never drank coffee.
7. I couldn't believe that the dog ran so fast.
8. They insisted that we tell them a story.

Answers

1. Yo quería que ella me escribiera todos los días.
2. No estuve contento que tú vinieras con Juan.
3. Es bueno que vosotros fuerais juntos.
4. ¿Es posible que el mayordomo lo hiciera?
5. Todo el invierno, deseábamos que nevara.
6. Era interesante que los niños nunca bebieran café.
7. Yo no pude creer que el perro corriera tan rápido.
8. Ellos insistieron en que les contáramos una historia.