Le Subjonctif

Duhn- duhn- DUHN!

You see it on the horizon, like a bat pouncing out of a creepy castle... it’s coming to get you, but no! No, no! It can’t be... can it? It is! It’s... *le Subjonctif*.

If the very sound of the ‘S’ word leaves you sweating like you’ve just watched Alfred Hitchcock’s ‘Psycho’... you are not alone. The very mention of it has driven some native speakers themselves round the bend- or so I’ve heard...

The subjunctive is a tense which is barely ever used in English... don’t let that put you off, though. Generally speaking, there are 3 basic cases in which it is necessary to use the subjunctive:

1. The likelihood of an event falls somewhere in between the ‘possible’ and the ‘unlikely’ category (‘probable’, however, becomes the indicative)

e.g. *Il est* ***possible*** *que tu* ***sois*** *une personne sympathique.*

*Il est* ***peu probable*** *que tu* ***puisses*** *finir tes examens.*

BUT

*Il est* ***probable*** *que tu* ***es*** *doué en musique.*

2. The speaker is expressing a personal feeling, that is, an emotion or a desire.

e.g. *Je* ***voudrais bien*** *que tu me* ***fasses*** *un resumé de ton exposé.*

*Je* ***crains*** *que Jordan* ***soit*** *déjà parti pour les vacances de Noël.*

***Il me semble*** *que tu* ***doives*** *sortir tes affaires.*

3. The event is uncertain because it is dependent on other events happening, it can’t be known, it is vague, or it is hypothetical.

***e.g. Si Giovanni part demain****, il va falloir que tu* ***prennes*** *sa voiture.*

*Il me semble que je* ***sache*** *quoi faire, mais* ***seulement si Carla dira la verité****.*

See, it’s not that terrible, is it? I suppose that, in order to keep the cold sweats at bay, you want to be reminded of some of the *conjugaisons*. Here are the basic rules (for regular verbs only!):

For the present subjunctive:

1. Take the present tense of the first person plural in the indicative form

2. Delete the ‘ent’ (e.g. dorment -> dorm)

3. Add on the following endings:

Je -> -e

Tu -> -es

Il/Elle -> -e

Nous -> -ions

Vous -> -iez

Ils/Elles -> -ent

Ta-da! Oh, what’s that I hear you say? You may want to use the past? Fear not, I am here to help you overcome this DOOM! The past has a pretty simple set of rules as well.

1. Remove the last letter from the first person singular in the simple past tense (indicative) e.g. vendis -> vendi

2. Add on whichever one of these corresponds:

Je -> -sse

Tu -> -sses

Il/Elle -> -t

Nous -> -ssions

Vous -> -ssiez

Ils/Elles -> -ssent

Once more: ta-da! There you are: you have perfectly formed the subjunctive. What’s that, I hear you say? You haven’t? Oh, go on then! Have a go yourself, friend!



Exercises

I. Complete the following sentences with the verb

which you consider to be appropriate (in the sub-

junctive or the indicative form):

1. Il est probable que tu \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(pouvoir) sortir.

2. Il est impossible que Marianne \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(pouvoir) gagner le concours.

3. Il est très peu probable que Diego \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (faire) ses devoirs.

4. Il n’y a aucune chance que Louise \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (savoir) compter jusqu’à 100.

5. Il est certain que je \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (pouvoir) monter ces escaliers.

II. As above.

1. J’aimerais bien que Matthew m’ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (embrasser) se soir.

2. Je ne veut pas que ma mère \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (savoir) que je ne lave pas mes vêtements.

3. Je suis convaincu que les étoiles \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (être) faites des diamants.

4. J’éspère que tu \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (être) en train de penser à moi.

III. Fill out the following phrases, using an enchanting blend of the subjunctive, and... your imagination, muhahaha.

1. Il me semble que \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

2. Max éspère que \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

3. Sylvie aimera tellement que \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

4. Pour moi, il est impossible que \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

5. J’ai vraiment peur que \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

6. Il me semble que tu \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

7. Carmen desire que \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

IV. Finally- some of these are right- and some of these are wrong- but can you tell which is which? Choose wisely! Your life may depend upon it.

1. Il est certain qu’il est en train de mentir. T F

2. Il est impossible que tu es gentil. T F

3. Je crains que tu puisses sortir. T F

4. Emma veut que tu saches qu’elle t’aime. T F

5. Ashni sait que tu sois malheureux. T F

6. Richard craint qu’il ne puisse pas finir l’année. T F

7. Il est impossible que je peux faire tout mon travail. T F

8. Il est peu probable que je sache te dire la verité. T F



YAY!!! YOU SURVIVED! WELL DONE, AND GOOD LUCK WITH THE EXAM!



Well done! All those dark castles and sweats ought to be gone now! Now, when you get to your exam, you will think of me!