

Grammar: Independent subjunctives

Overview

There are four uses of the subjunctive which are not covered on other pages. These are the:

- jussive
- potential
- deliberative
- optative

For information on the form and conjugation of subjunctive verbs, see the pages on:

- Active verbs
- Passive verbs
- The irregular verb *esse*
- Irregular verbs
- Deponent verbs

The jussive subjunctive

The word 'jussive' comes from the verb *iubeo* - 'I order'. The jussive subjunctive is used to express an order.

This is useful because imperatives only function in the second person, so cannot be used to command people in the first or third person, a point explained in more detail in the pages on commands.

In English, a jussive subjunctive is translated as: 'Let **x** happen ...!'

'Let us pray' (1st person)

which in Latin would be:

precemur (using the deponent, 1st conjugation verb, precor)

or

'Let them eat cake' (3rd person)

which in Latin would be:

offam edant

The negative is expressed using *ne* (but note there is no *ut* for the positive).

ne templum oppugnent

Let them not attack the temple

The potential subjunctive

The subjunctive can be used to express the hypothetical possibility of something happening.

'Pigs might fly'

which in Latin would be:

sues volent

There is a clear link between this independent use of the subjunctive and the subjunctive as used in conditionals.

The deliberative subjunctive

The subjunctive can be used with interrogatives to ask a question, more specifically a rhetorical question or a deliberation about a course of action.

'What should I do?'

which in Latin would be:

quid faciam?

They are marked by the presence of an interrogative word, and will be most often found at points of high emotion and tension in a text. As a deliberation to oneself, they are often found in the first person.

quo eam?

Where should I go?

quando discedam?

When should I leave?

The negative is expressed using *non*.

quid non dicam?

What should I not say?

The optative subjunctive

The word optative comes from the verb *opto* - 'I desire' and is a way of expressing wishes. The optative meaning of the subjunctive uses the word *utinam* plus the subjunctive.

It is most simply translated as 'Would that ...'.

'Would that I could be rich'(I wish I could be rich)

which in Latin would be:

utinam divitiis sim!

Different tenses can be expressed. Note, however, that wishes concerning a desire for some state of affairs to exist in the present are expressed using the *imperfect* subjunctive, and that wishes regarding the past are expressed in the *pluperfect*

(in fact, just as they are in English, as the examples below illustrate).

I wish I were in Rome now (but I'm not ...)

which in Latin would be:

utinam Romae essem!

I wish I had done that

which in Latin would be:

utinam id facerem!