

Lesson Thirteen

What may have happened

Aims

The aims of this lesson are to enable you to learn about

- the Subjunctive Mood (what may happen...)
- Subjects and Objects in Sentences
- Active and Passive (to do and be done...)

Context

Most native English speakers use the subjunctive without being aware that they are doing so. In the next lesson we look at all the different kinds of verb.

The Subjunctive Mood

The *Subjunctive Mood* has all but disappeared from English, and where it is used will be most often in written language. To use it in conversation, more than in the examples given below, will be considered over-fussy in style.



Why the Subjunctive is used

The Subjunctive is used as is suggested by its name to describe moods, that is to say it is used where something is uncertain, wished for, or probable. In many European languages, for example Spanish and French, the Subjunctive is used a great deal, and in fact in Spanish particularly a knowledge of the *Subjunctive* is essential.

But in English though the *Subjunctive* was used a great deal in the past, nowadays it is hardly ever used. When it is used, it does not have a separate identity but borrows from existing forms. See the following **Examples** of the *Subjunctive* which are still used now but not very often

today.

Examples

a) If I **were** you, I would not go in there!

Here *were* is neither a *Past Tense* nor a *Plural*, as can be seen from the *if I* before it, and the Conditional verb in the Subordinate Clause (n.b. for more about *Subordinate Clauses*, see the previous Lesson)

This is our form of the Subjunctive, used to express **doubt** and **uncertainty**; i.e. there is no clear statement being made, but it is basically a **conditional** or **hypothetical** statement! (**what might happen if...**)

b) **Let** there **be** light

This Subjunctive has two parts, *let + be*; (**be** is the actual Subjunctive form, **let** forming the other half of what is in fact an **Indirect Command**) (See **Lesson Fourteen** on Different Types of Verbs with special reference to Commands...)

c) Long **live** the Queen:

live is again in the *Subjunctive* and is another Indirect Command: it is short for: **Let** the Queen **live** long

n.b. **Let** as in “**Let** there be light” can be replaced by **may**; (we saw **may** previously as a **modal verb** in the previous Lesson); you can also say equally “Long **may** the Queen live...”

The Form of the Subjunctive

This is very easy; in the Past Tense it is usually the same as the simple Past Tense; the exception is **were** as in: If I **were** you...

Example

If I **had** enough money, I would buy that house
If my friends **came**, they would be very welcome

The Present Subjunctive

This hardly exists except in such forms as: Long live the Queen

However by adding the modal form **may** a Present Subjunctive can be created:

E.g. It is possible he **may come**
I do hope you **may like** this

But as indicated, this is rather rare, and only used in literary contexts, not in every day conversation!

But on the whole apart from the above examples e.g. **long live the king, may and let + the verb**, you can say there is effectively no *Present Subjunctive* as a separate form in English. We have on the whole removed it as an unnecessary part of our language - unlike many other languages which still keep it.

May

Before we come to the First Activity, it would best to look at the *Auxiliary* or *Modal Verb* **may**; it has a number of meanings and uses:

a) To express doubt and is part of the *Present Subjunctive*.

Examples

It **may** rain today
They **may** not be the best team in the world

b) To express an **order** and is also part of the *Present Subjunctive*, but with a different meaning.

Examples

May you go!
Long **may** he stay with us!

Please note: God save the Queen = **May** God save the Queen!
Long live the Queen = **May** the Queen live long!

All these are forms of the *Subjunctive*, which while continuing always to express doubt or uncertainty, shows this in a number of ways, the **command** being one of them, which though not apparently doubtful, has in fact a certain amount of doubt. You can order someone to do something, but that does not guarantee the action will actually be done; an order is a desired action, not an action!... (See Lesson Fourteen for Commands)

These examples are quite old fashioned, and little used these days: even so it is useful to have a look at them in order to be aware of the various meanings of *may*. The final main use of *may* is the following: (looked at

earlier)

c) To express **permission** and is an alternative to can...

Examples

You **may** go!

They **may** come if they wish

Now we come to the first Activity which practises the use and recognition of the *Subjunctive* in English; as usual you have the Key after this Lesson.

Activity 1	Complete the following sentences with the appropriate form of the Subjunctive: there may be more than one answer!
	<p>a) We would go to Spain if we _____ enough money!</p> <p>b) Long _____ the President; _____ he govern us wisely!</p> <p>c) Let him _____! He's doing no harm!</p> <p>d) If he _____ me, he wouldn't let them speak to him like that!</p> <p>e) _____ you always think as I do! (Old Fashioned)</p> <p>f) You _____ come and see me whenever you like!</p> <p>g) The only thing we expect of you is that you _____ cooperative.</p> <p>h) I am not certain, but Mary _____ be here in the next quarter of an hour.</p>

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