(Also called “El Pretérito Imperfecto del Subjuntivo”)

The **imperfect subjunctive** is used to talk about **hypothetical, uncertain, or emotional actions in the past** — or to express **“if” situations** that are not real.

It’s the **past form of the subjunctive mood**, used when the **main clause is in the past** or **the situation is contrary to reality**.

1) Review: What Is the Subjunctive?

The **subjunctive mood** expresses **wishes, emotions, doubts, recommendations, and uncertainty**, not facts.

Mood	Example	Meaning
Indicative	*Sé que él viene.*	I know he’s coming. (certain)
Subjunctive	*Dudo que él venga.*	I doubt he’s coming. (uncertain)
Imperfect Subjunctive	*Dudaba que él viniera.*	I doubted he was coming. (uncertain in the past)

The **imperfect subjunctive** simply moves the same *subjunctive meaning* into the **past time frame**.

2) When to Use the Imperfect Subjunctive

Use the **imperfect subjunctive** when the verb in the **main clause** is in the **past tense** (preterite, imperfect, conditional, or pluperfect), and you need the **subjunctive** in the dependent clause.

Formula:

Main clause (past tense) + que + dependent clause (imperfect subjunctive)

Examples:

- *Quería que tú vinieras.* → I wanted you to come.
- *Esperábamos que ellos llegaran temprano.* → We were hoping they’d arrive early.

- *Dudaba que ella tuviera dinero.* → I doubted she had money.
- *Fue triste que no pudieras venir.* → It was sad that you couldn’t come.

3) How to Form the Imperfect Subjunctive

The formation is **different** from other tenses — but follows a clear pattern:

Steps to Form:

1Take the **ellos/ellas/ustedes** form of the **preterite tense**.
2Remove the **-ron** ending.
3Add the **imperfect subjunctive endings**.

Endings (Same for -AR, -ER, and -IR verbs)

Person	Ending
yo	**-ra**
tú	**-ras**
él/ella/Ud.	**-ra**
nosotros	**-ramos**
vosotros	**-rais**
ellos/ellas/Uds.	**-ran**

(There’s also a less common “-se” set of endings: -se, -ses, -se, -semos, -seis, -sen — used mostly in literature or Spain.)

4) Regular Verb Conjugations

-AR Example: hablar

Preterite “ellos” form: **hablaron → habl-**

Subject	Form
yo	hablara
tú	hablaras
él/ella/Ud.	hablara

nosotros	habláramos
vosotros	hablarais
ellos/ellas/Uds.	hablaran

Yo quería que tú hablaras conmigo. → I wanted you to talk with me.

-ER Example: comer

Preterite “ellos” form: **comieron → comi-**

Subject	**Form**
yo	comiera
tú	comieras
él/ella/Ud.	comiera
nosotros	comiéramos
vosotros	comierais
ellos/ellas/Uds.	comieran

Era bueno que comiéramos juntos. → It was good that we ate together.

-IR Example: vivir

Preterite “ellos” form: **vivieron → vivi-**

Subject	**Form**
yo	viviera
tú	vivieras
él/ella/Ud.	viviera
nosotros	viviéramos
vosotros	vivierais
ellos/ellas/Uds.	vivieran

Dudaba que ellos vivieran cerca. → I doubted they lived nearby.

5) Irregular Stems

Irregular verbs in the **preterite** keep their irregular stems in the **imperfect subjunctive** — you just remove "-ron" and add the endings.

Infinitive	Preterite "ellos"	Stem	Example
decir	dijeron	dij-	*dijera, dijeras, dijéramos*
estar	estuvieron	estuv-	*estuviera, estuviéramos*
tener	tuvieron	tuvier-	*tuviera, tuviéramos*
hacer	hicieron	hic-	*hiciera, hiciéramos*
poder	pudieron	pudier-	*pudiera, pudiéramos*
poner	pusieron	pusier-	*pusiera, pusiéramos*
querer	quisieron	quisier-	*quisiera, quisiéramos*
saber	supieron	supier-	*supiera, supiéramos*
venir	vinieron	vinier-	*viniera, viniéramos*
traer	trajeron	traj-	*trajera, trajéramos*
dar	dieron	die-	*diera, diéramos*
ir / ser	fueron	fuer-	*fuera, fuéramos*
haber	hubieron	hubier-	*hubiera, hubiéramos*

Examples:

- *Quería que hicieras la tarea.* → I wanted you to do the homework.
- *Era necesario que estuviéramos allí.* → It was necessary for us to be there.
- *No creían que él viniera.* → They didn't think he came.

6) Uses of the Imperfect Subjunctive

A. To express past wishes, emotions, doubts, or recommendations

Trigger Verb	Example	Translation
querer	*Quería que tú vinieras.*	I wanted you to come.
esperar	*Esperaba que ellos llegaran.*	I was hoping they'd arrive.
dudar	*Dudaba que él tuviera dinero.*	I doubted he had money.

recomendar	*Nos recomendaron que fuéramos al médico.*	They recommended that we go to the doctor.

B. After “si” (if) clauses for hypotheticals

Structure:
Si + imperfect subjunctive → conditional

Examples:

- *Si tuviera dinero, viajaría por el mundo.* → If I had money, I would travel the world.
- *Si pudiera, te ayudaría.* → If I could, I would help you.
- *Si supieras la verdad, no dirías eso.* → If you knew the truth, you wouldn’t say that.

The imperfect subjunctive expresses the **unreal condition**, and the **conditional** expresses the **imagined result**.

C. After past expressions of emotion, doubt, influence, or necessity

Examples:

- *Fue una lástima que no pudieras venir.* → It was a shame you couldn’t come.
- *Tenía miedo de que se perdieran.* → I was afraid they might get lost.
- *Era importante que estudiáramos.* → It was important that we studied.

D. To express politeness or soft requests (especially with “querer,” “poder,” “deber”)

Examples:

- *Quisiera una mesa para dos, por favor.* → I would like a table for two, please.
- *Pudiera hablar con el director?* → Could I speak with the principal?
- *Debieras estudiar más.* → You ought to study more.

This use overlaps with the **conditional** for polite or hypothetical tone.

7) Accent Reminder: Nosotros Form

All **nosotros** forms in the imperfect subjunctive carry an **accent mark** on the vowel before the -ramos ending:

- habláramos
- comiéramos
- viviéramos
- tuviéramos
- dijéramos

Esperábamos que llegáramos a tiempo. → We were hoping we'd arrive on time.

8) Practice: Fill in the Blanks

Conjugate the verbs in parentheses in the **imperfect subjunctive**.

1. Quería que tú _____ (venir) conmigo.
2. No creían que nosotros _____ (tener) razón.
3. Era importante que ella _____ (estudiar).
4. Si yo _____ (poder), iría contigo.
5. Esperábamos que ustedes _____ (llegar) temprano.
6. Fue una lástima que no _____ (haber) más tiempo.

Answers:

1. vinieras
2. tuviéramos
3. estudiara
4. pudiera
5. llegaran
6. hubiera

9) Practice: Translate

1. I wanted you to do it.
2. We hoped they would arrive early.
3. If I were rich, I would buy a house.

4. It was necessary that you studied.
5. I didn’t think they came.

Answers:

1. Quería que lo hicieras.
2. Esperábamos que llegaran temprano.
3. Si fuera rico, compraría una casa.
4. Era necesario que estudiaras.
5. No creía que vinieran.

10) Common Pitfalls & Fixes

Wrong	Correct	Why
Quería que tú vienes.	*Quería que tú vinieras.*	Past trigger → imperfect subjunctive.
Si tengo dinero, viajaría.	*Si tuviera dinero, viajaría.*	Hypothetical → imperfect subjunctive.
Espero que fuiste.	*Esperaba que fueras.*	Past hope → imperfect subjunctive.
Si sería rico, compraría un coche.	*Si fuera rico, compraría un coche.*	“If” clause always subjunctive, not conditional.

11) Quick Summary Chart

Concept	Formula / Use	Example
Formation	Ellos preterite – “ron” + ra endings	*hablaron → hablara*
Endings	-ra, -ras, -ra, -ramos, -rais, -ran	*comiera, viviéramos*
Main clause in past	+ que + imperfect subjunctive	*Quería que vinieras.*
Hypothetical si clause	*Si + imperfect subjunctive → conditional*	*Si tuviera dinero, viajaría.*
Politeness	with *querer, poder, deber*	*Quisiera un café.*
Nosotros form	accent before “-ramos”	*estuviéramos*

Why the Imperfect Subjunctive Matters

The **imperfect subjunctive**:

- Allows you to express **past uncertainty, emotion, or desire**
- Enables you to use **“if” clauses** and **hypothetical speech** naturally
- Connects directly with the **conditional tense**
- Appears frequently in **stories, news, and polite requests**

It’s a key structure for advanced communication — turning simple ideas into **sophisticated, realistic Spanish**.

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