

## SEMINAR 5 – THE SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD; THE PASSIVE VOICE

### The subjunctive

- is a special kind of present tense with no –s in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person sg
- in the other persons the form is identical with the indicative (e.g. It is essential that they come.)
- is used in a **formal style**, especially in **American English** after words which express the idea that something is important or desirable, e.g.
  - a) **verbs** – suggest, recommend, ask, insist, request, demand
  - b) **nouns** (that clauses) – advice, decision, requirement
  - c) **adjectives** (that clauses) – *it is ... that+subj* - vital, essential, urgent, important, necessary, desirable, imperative (=urgent)
- the same forms are used in present and past
- **negative** is formed **without do**

e.g. It's essential that every child have the same educational opportunities.

We felt it was important that James write to Uncle Arthur as soon as possible.

Our advice is that the company invest in new equipment.

The judge recommended that Simon remain in prison for at least 3 years.

I insist that we not reconsider the Council's decision.

We consider it desirable that he not leave.

### The verb be

- the subjunctive form is “**be**” in all persons
- another subj. form is “**were**” used mainly in *if clauses* in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person; this is the **past subjunctive** – it is hypothetical in meaning ( also used in *concessive clauses* and after *wish* and *suppose*).

**Note:** in informal style “*were*” is often replaced by “*was*”

e.g. It is important that Helen be present when we sign the contract.

The Director asked that he be allowed to advertise for more staff.

If I were you I would stop smoking.

I wish it were Saturday.

Just suppose everyone were to act like you.

## The subjunctive in fixed phrases

The subjunctive survives in some fixed expressions and phrases:

God save the Queen!

God bless you.

Long live the bride and groom!

Be that as it may.....

Heaven forbid that.....

He's a sort of adopted uncle, as it were.

If we have to pay £ 2,000, then so be it.

Suffice it to say that.....

## Alternatives

In British English the subjunctive is unusual, alternatives are:

- a) should + infinitive
- b) the indicative (i.e. ordinary present and past tenses)

e.g. It is essential that every child *should have* the same educational opportunities. (or *has..*)

We felt it was important that James *should write* to Uncle Arthur. (or that James *wrote...*)

*Other example of the subjunctive – underline the subjunctive:*

It is advisable that discipline not be enforced too strictly.

The committee has proposed that the plan be submitted to the local branches.

It is vital that an agreement be reached.

Even if the patient be cured, the disease leaves permanent traces in this organism.

He insists that all numerical data be checked.

It is necessary that everybody be present.

She insists that he accompany her.

It's high time he were taught a lesson.

*Rephrase the sentences using “should” or indicative instead of the subjunctive*

## The passive voice

- **active voice** – we say what people and things do
- **passive voice** – we say what happens to people and things
- the distinction between the **passive and active voice** applies only to **transitive verbs**, but not all, there are some transitive stative verbs which are not used in the passive (e.g. *fit, have, lack, suit, resemble*) and some prepositional verbs (e.g. Everybody *agreed with* me.)

### Change from active to passive:

- a) the active subject, if retained, becomes the passive agent  
e.g. *The butler* murdered the detective. → The detective was murdered *by the butler*.
  - b) The active object becomes the passive subject.  
e.g. My grandfather built *this house*. → *This house* was built by my grandfather.
  - c) the preposition “by” is inserted before the agent (if mentioned), when we talk about instrument, we use “with” – e.g. He was shot by the policeman with a rifle.
- the agent is an optional element and is commonly omitted
  - the agent can be the person or thing that does the action or that causes what happens  
e.g. I was shocked by his attitude.

### Note:

- get (+ past participle) is frequently used with the passive meaning in informal English, it often has a reflexive meaning - get caught, get dressed, get run over, get killed, get invited, get drowned  
e.g. My watch got broken while I was playing with the children.  
He got caught by the police driving at 120 mph.  
I never get invited to parties.  
!! This form is not used about longer, more deliberate or planned actions!
- as mentioned above, some stative transitive verbs occur only in the active  
e.g. They have a nice house. He lacks confidence.

- in the “**statal passive**” the –ed form **refers to a state** resulting from an action  
e.g. The building is demolished. (a copular verb + adjective complement)

Such sentences in the past tense can be ambiguous (= have two meanings)

- e.g. Her arm was broken.    a) dynamic passive – Someone broke her arm. = action  
  b) statal passive – Her arm was in a state of fracture.

*Notice the difference between:*

- a) I was worried by mosquitoes all night.  
b) I was worried about you all night.

### **Uses of the passive**

- 1) the identity of the agent of the action is not known  
e.g. The room was decorated a few months ago.
- 2) the speakers (or writers) want to avoid identifying the agent because they do not want to assign or accept responsibility  
e.g. My letter has not yet been answered.
- 3) there is no reason to mention the agent – the identification is not important or it is obvious from the context  
e.g. Many more illnesses can be cured now than in the past.
- 4) in scientific and technical writing to avoid the constant repetition of the subject “I” or “we”
- 5) to put emphasis on the agent of the action
- 6) to avoid what would otherwise be a long subject  
e.g. I was annoyed by Mary wanting to tell everybody what to do.
- 7) to retain the same subject throughout a long sentence

### **Other notes on the passive**

- if a verb has two objects, both can become the subject of passive verb  
e.g. She gave her sister the car. → a) Her sister was given the car. (*more common*)  
  b) The car was given to her sister.

The choice depends on what has been said before or what needs to be put last in the sentence.

- passive structures are often possible after *it+ a clause*  
 e.g. It was thought that she was a spy.  
 It was felt that he was the right man for the job.
  
- passive structure + the infinitive  
 e.g. I was asked to send a stamped addressed envelope.  
 He is believed to be dangerous.  
 We were told not to come back.  
 The company is said to be in trouble.  
 Mary is said to be some kind of secret agent.  
 He was seen to come. (!careful – in the active - They saw him come.)  
 He was made to tell them everything. (!careful – in the active – They made him  
 tell them .....)
  
- like, enjoy, remember + ing  
 e.g. Most people don't like being criticized.
  
- some verbs can be used both transitively and intransitively, e.g. *open* – notice the possible difference between the active and passive sentence:  
 e.g. The door opened.  
 The door was opened.
  
- some active verbs have a passive meaning  
 e.g. The wine is selling quickly.  
 The book reads well.  
 These clothes wash well.