

Subject – Verb Concord in English

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Abstract

Subject-verb concord, is an important aspect of English grammar that concerns the proper matching of the subject and the verb in a sentence. It refers to the agreement between the number, person, and gender of the subject and the verb, which helps to ensure grammatical correctness and clarity in communication. This abstract will explore the rules of subject-verb concord in English, the challenges that learners face in mastering this aspect of grammar.

Keywords: Subject – Verb Concord

1. Introduction

In English, there are relationships between the elements of a sentence which can be defined in term of concord. Concord is "a term used in grammatical theory and description to refer to a formal relationship between elements, where by a form of one word requires a corresponding form of another. A singular subject co-occurs with the third person singular form of the verb in the present tense" (Crystal, 1985:64).

When writing and speaking in the present tenses, the subject and verb in a sentence need to be in the same form, or agree with each other and that's called subject verb agreement (SVA).

In English, subject-verb agreement is the correspondence of a verb with its subject in person (first, second or third) and number (singular or plural also called subject-verb concord).

Subjects and verbs have single and plural forms and it is important not to mix them up .All sentences need a subject and verb to be completed but if they don't match the sentence won't make a sense.

2. Statement of the problem

- Subject-verb concord remains a persistent problem for many language learners and even native speakers, resulting in unclear or confusing communication.
- Incorrect subject-verb agreement can occur due to a lack of understanding of the basic rules, confusion over complex sentence structures, or the influence of non-standard dialects

- This problem can negatively impact both written and spoken communication in academic, professional, and personal contexts, leading to misunderstandings, decreased fluency, and reduced credibility.

3. Aims

- To understand the basic rules of subject-verb concord in English grammar, including agreement in number, tense, and person.
- To recognize and correct common errors in subject-verb concord, such as using a singular verb with a plural subject or vice versa..
- To increase overall proficiency and fluency in written and spoken English through improved mastery of subject-verb concord.

4. Subject-verb concord in English

Subject-verb concord in English simply means the subject and verb must agree in number. This means both need to be singular or both need to be plural.

In English, there is number agreement between the subject and the verb; A singular subject takes a singular verb, a plural subject takes a plural verb. (Eckersley & Eckersley, 1980:31). It means that the V element in SVC is to comprise the form of the finite verb element that agrees with the subject in respect of number and person. (Quirk Greenbaum, 1973:176)

4.1. Principles Determining Subject-Verb Concord

In English, there are three principles concerning the SVC:

A) Grammatical

The basic rule about subject-verb agreement is quite simple. For a sentence to make sense, the verb has to agree with the subject in number. A singular verb is used for a singular noun/pronoun, while a plural verb is used for a plural noun/ pronoun.

1) William(singular noun)studies (singular verb) for an hour everyday. 2)

The boys (plural noun) study (plural verb) for an hour every day.

3) We (plural pronoun) try (plural verb) not to eat out too often.

(Eckersely & Eckersely, 1980:26)(Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973:176)

B) Notional

This second principle is related to the notional concord which is the agreement of the verb with subject according to the idea of number. It tackles nouns, like: team, family, government, etc.

For example:

4) The government has a meeting today.

5) The government have broken all their promises .(Internet 1)

C) Proximity

The principle of proximity means the number concord of the verb with subject closely preceding it. It means that if one subject is singular

and another is plural, the verb generally agrees with nearest subject. (Murphy, 1987: 166)

6) Either John or the students are here.

7) Neither they nor he is here. (Internet 2)

4.2 Forms of the Subject

In English, the subject is a constituent that can be realized in two forms only: singular and plural. However, some nouns are regularly plural in form but singular in meaning, like: news, some disease "diabetes", some game "billiards" some sciences "phonetics", some proper nouns "the United States".

8) Billiards is a difficult game.

9) Statistics is offered every year at the college. (Eckersly, 1980:37; Internet 3)

Countable nouns are variable, occurring with either singular or plural forms (boy, boys) or have invariable plural (cattle). (Quirk, 1973:80)

Some nouns can be singular and plural according to the context, like: "stone", "paper", glass, etc. (Murphy, 1987:138)

Singular invariable nouns are non-countable nouns (John), some nouns ending in -s (dominoes), and abstract adjectival heads (the true), personal adjectival heads (the old) and the adjective of nationality (the French). On the other hand, variable nouns comprise regular plurals (book), and all forms of irregular plural: (thesis, theses, sheep) (Quirk, 1973:69-81, Internet 4)

4.3 Other forms of Subject Verb Concord.

In addition to its simple form of a subject and its position at the beginning of a sentence, the subject can take other forms and positions:

4.3.1 Clausal and Prepositional S.

Clause subject and Prepositional phrases as subject typically refer to time or to space.

10) How he goes there doesn't concern me.

11) To treat me like that is usual.

12) At six o'clock is very good. (internet 1)

4.3.2 Inverted S.

Subject-verb inversion in English is a type of inversion where the subject and verb (or chain of verbs, verb catena) switch their canonical order of appearance, so that the subject follows the verb(s),

13) The girls waiting near the gate are my friends. 14) Around the corner and to the right is my house. (internet 4)

Usually, the subject taken the first position in a sentence, but there are many cases where the subject is inverted. In what follows, there are three cases of inversion:

A. Inverted Subject with questions, like

15) What in the world are the children trying to do?

(Phillips,2001:251)

B. Inverted Subject with negative expressions that come initially:

16) Hardly ever does he takes him off. (Phillips,2001:239; Internet 4)

C. Inverted Subject is required after place expressions of the beginning of a sentence, when the place expressions is necessary to complete the meaning of the sentence:

17) Around the school and to the right is Layla's house. (Internet 3)

4.3.3 Indefinite Expression Pronouns.

Indefinite pronouns do not refer to a specific person, place, or thing. In English, there is a particular group of indefinite pronouns formed with a quantifier or distributive proceeded by any, some, every and no. Some take the plural: (all, both, many), and other take the singular form: (anyone, everybody...) others take either singular or plural like: (some, any) depending on the object of the sentence.

18) All are here.

19) everybody was asked to be quiet.

20) some of the debates are still outstanding.

21) some of the debt has been paid off. (internet 2)

4.3.4 Amount and Measurement Expressions.

The amount and measurement expressions are plural in form but singular in meaning:

22) Twenty years is a long time

The use of definite and indefinite articles affects the verb choice:

23) A number of students are waiting here.

24) The number of students is waiting here

4.3.5 Coordinated S.

Noun phrase coordinated by 'and' requires plural agreement. However, when they represent one unit they need a singular verb:

25) John and Ali are here.

26) Law and order is important. (Quirk; internet 3)

When the coordinated elements have the same reference, a singular verb is required, where as a plural verb is used with coordinated elements of different references:

27) My friend and colleague has published a new book.

28) My friend and colleague have published a new book

(Eckersley X Eck.....1980:32)

In the simple sentence, the subject as well as other constituents can be compound:

29) What I think and do are difficult.

30) Ali goes to the library and studies every day. (Internet 1)

A singular and plural verb can be used with the collections of literary works: stories, novels, poem, etc. Whereas, a singular verb is required with the titles of the works with "and":

31) The Canterbury Tales exist in many manuscripts.

32) The Old Man and The Sea is a good novel. (Quirk, 1973:176)

5. Conclusion

Subject-verb concord is a crucial aspect of English grammar that ensures clear and effective communication. The correct use of subject-verb agreement is essential in conveying the intended meaning of a sentence, and it is important to understand the basic rules and common errors that can arise when using it.

Native and non-native speakers alike can benefit from targeted study and practice of subject-verb concord, in order to improve their proficiency in written and spoken English. With a good understanding of subject-verb agreement, speakers and writers can convey their ideas more clearly and effectively, which can enhance their credibility and professionalism in both personal and professional settings.

In conclusion, mastering subject-verb concord is an essential skill for anyone seeking to communicate effectively in English. By adhering to the rules of subject-verb agreement and avoiding common errors, speakers and writers can convey their intended meaning with confidence and clarity, and enhance their proficiency in the language.

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