

Lesson 3

Chalker, Chapter 10 – The simple sentence

Exercises 99, 100

Subject –Verb CONCORD (agreement)

- the most important kind of SV concord is **concord of 3rd person number** between S and V
- the number of a noun phrase depends on the number of **its head** = the **head word** in a noun phrase normally decides on the number of the V:

The change in male attitudes is most obvious in industry.

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- **clauses, PPs and adverbs** functioning as S count as **singular** for number concord:

***How old he is** doesn't concern me. **In the mornings** is best for me. **Slowly** does it!*

Grammatical x Notional Concord:

Grammatical concord is agreement according to syntactic relation between words and phrases, by means of inflections carried by at least one of them (e.g. *those* and *boys* in the noun phrase *those boys* are compatible, because both are inflected as plural; or the agreement between a subject and its verb, e.g. *My friend is nice. My friends are nice.* – a singular subject requires a verb in singular, and vice versa).

Notional concord is agreement according to **the idea of number** rather than the presence of the grammatical marker of that idea, e.g. **collective nouns**:

*The government **have** broken all the promises.*

*The audience **were** enjoying the whole match.* = collection of individuals

X

(The audience was enormous. = a single undivided body / unit) = grammatical concord

In AmE grammatically singular collective nouns are generally treated as singular, especially when they refer to governments and sport teams.

In both BrE and AmE, **plural pronouns** are often used to refer to singular collective nouns even when the verb is singular, eg:

*The committee **has** not yet decided how **they** should react to the letter.*

Various exceptions:

- *means, series, species, works, barracks, ...* both singular and plural: *one means is, three means are...*
- *neither, none, either, each, any + of + plural noun/pronoun* – they are normally followed by a singular verb in BrE in a formal style. Plural verbs are common in informal BrE and in AmE.
None of my children has/have blonde hair. If any of them gets/get hungry, ...
- *a/the majority of, a number of, a lot of, plenty of, all of, some of + plural noun* we usually use a plural verb. BUT if we say **the number of**, we use a singular verb – it has got a different meaning (*a number of* = několik X *the number of* = počet), e.g. *A number of friends are coming tomorrow. The number of books in the library has risen.*
- after *per cent (percent) + singular noun* we use a singular verb:
10 percent of the forest is... BUT: where we can use *of + plural noun* we use a plural verb: *...about 50 per cent of the houses need...*
- *football teams: England have/(has) lost their football match last Saturday.* – we often use a plural verb after the name of a sports team or a company. A singular verb is also possible but perhaps less usual.
- *the police, cattle, people, vermin, the clergy*: always a plural verb, e.g. *The police **are** investigating a murder.*
- *news, billiards, bowls, darts, dominoes, Athens, Brussels, Napels*: always a singular verb
- *sum of money, period of time, a distance*: singular verb: *Six miles is a long way to walk.*
- *nouns ending in -ics* usually take singular verb: *athletics, aerobics, mathematics* BUT: e.g. *Her politics are rather conservative. ...*
- *collective nouns*: both singular and plural: sg = whole unit x pl = collection of individuals (see above)

Principle of Proximity

- *either – or , neither – nor*: when conjoins differ in number, the **PRINCIPLE OF PROXIMITY** is applied, i.e., the number of the second conjoin determines the number of the verb, as in:

*Either your brakes or your **eyesight is** at fault. X Either your eyesight or your brakes **are** ...*

In general, principle of proximity denotes agreement of the verb with a noun or pronoun that closely precedes it in preference to agreement with the head of the noun phrase:

*No one except his own **supporters** agree with him.* (no one = head word = singular, BUT: the verb is in plural because it corresponds with the noun *supporters* which immediately precedes it and which is in plural)

*One in **ten** take drugs.*

- this occurs mainly in an unplanned discourse

- according to Chalker and Weiner, it can be called **proximity agreement** (or **proximity concord**) and is regarded as a minor type of agreement (1998: 18). They define it as “the agreement of the verb with a closely preceding noun instead of the noun head that actually functions as subject of the sentence in question” (ibid.). Further, they claim that “such agreement may be marginally acceptable when it supports notional concord, but is generally considered ungrammatical” (ibid.).

Further ambiguous cases:

- subject NPs may be linked by **quasi-coordinators**, i.e. prepositions (such as *along with, rather than, and as well as*) that are semantically similar to coordinators.

Grammatical concord requires **a singular verb** if the **first NP is singular**:

*The **captain**, as well as the other players, **was** tired.*

- if **an adverbial** is present in the **second NP**, the construction is considered **parenthetical**, and grammatical concord requires the verb to agree in number with **the first NP**:

*The **ambassador** – *and perhaps his wife too* – **is** likely to be present.*

- when **or** is used for coordinative **apposition**, grammatical concord requires the verb to agree in number with **the first appositive**:

***Gobbledygook**, or the circumlocutions of bureaucratic language, **is** intentionally difficult to understand.*

*The **circumlocutions** of bureaucratic language, or **gobbledygook**, **are** intentionally difficult to understand.*

- the pronouns **either** and **neither** generally take a singular V:

*The two guests have arrived, and **either** / but **neither is** welcome.*

- with **none**, the **plural** verb is more frequently used than the singular, because of notional concord, even without the effect of the proximity principle:

***None** (of the books) **are** being placed on the shelves today.*

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exercise 101

QUESTION TAGS

- *I am late, **aren't I?***

- after IMPERATIVES **won't you** is often used to invite people to do things (especially in BrE) and **will, would, can, can't, could you** to tell or ask people to do things:

*Take a piece of cake, **won't you**. Open the window, **would/will/can/can't/could you**.*

- after the NEGATIVE IMPERATIVE, we use **will you?:**

*Don't forget, **will you?***

- *let's ..., **shall we?***

- words negative in form and meaning: **no, none, nothing, nobody** require positive question tags:

*Nobody phoned, **did they?** Nothing can happen, **can it?***

- words negative in meaning but not in form: **seldom, hardly, rarely, barely, little, ...** also require positive question tags:

*There's little we can do about it, **is there?***

X

(- 'same – way' question tags: non-negative question tags are quite common after affirmative sentences; used as responses to something that has already been said, like 'attention signals'; this question tag typically has a rising tone:

So you're getting married, are you? Oh, you've had an accident, have you?)

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exercise 103

EMPHASIZING NEGATION

- after **here** and **there** and adverb particles such as **back, down, off, up, ...** there is an INVERSION; this is common with verbs of motion: **come** and **go:**

Here comes a taxi! Down came the rain and up went the umbrellas.

!!!BUT: inversion does not occur when **the S is a pronoun:**

Here it comes. There she goes. Up it went. Here you are. There she is.

- after **adverbials of place** with verbs of position (*live, lie, sit, stand*) or motion (*come, go, rise*), there is an INVERSION (the S must be a noun):

At the top of the hill stood the tiny chapel. In the fields of poppies lay the dying soldiers.

!!!BUT: inversion does not occur when **the S is a pronoun:**

At the top of the hill it stood out against the sky.

- INVERSION after **negative adverbs:** this INVERSION has to be done by means of **auxiliary verbs** (*be, do, have, can, must, ...*) + **S (subject)** + the rest of the sentence. This kind of inversion (**subject-operator inversion**), which may be used for particular emphasis, is typical of formal rhetoric and formal writing. It occurs in the following:

1) negative or near-negative adverbs (*never, rarely, seldom*), or adverbs having a negative effect (*little, on no account*):

*Never / Seldom **has there been** so much protest against the Bomb.*

*Little **does he realize** how important this meeting is.*

*On no account **must you accept** any money if he offers it.*

2) combinations with *only* (eg *only after, only then*):

*Only then **did I realize** how much I loved him.*

3) *so + adj + (that), such + (that)*:

So sudden was the attack (that) we had no time to escape.

Such was his strength that he could bend iron bars.

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exercise 104

NONASSERTIVE WORDS

- typically occur in **questions** and **negative statements** (but also in conditional clauses, comparative clauses, putative should- clauses, ...)

- clause negation is typically followed by one or more of these items; they can be determiners, pronouns, adverbs:

*He **doesn't ever** visit us. He **doesn't have any** money. He is **not** at school **any longer**.*

*I **don't** like her **much**. I **don't** like her **either**. They **won't** finish it **at all**.*

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exercise 105

SCOPE OF NEGATION

= stretch of language over which the negative item has a semantic influence

- normally extends from the negative item itself to the end of the clause

References:

Chalker, S. (1998) *A Student's English Grammar Workbook*. Essex: London.

Chalker, S. and E. Weiner (1998) *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Greenbaum, S. and R. Quirk (1990) *A Student's Grammar of the English Language*. Essex: Longman.