



### 7.18 Concord: Subject-Verb Concord

The most important type of concord in English is concord of number between subject and verb, as in:

1. The window **is** open. (Ssg+Vsg: concord in number)
2. The windows **are** open. (Spl+Vpl: concord in number)

N.B. A subject could be a clause which counts as singular, as in:

1. **How they got there** doesn't concern me.
2. **To treat them as hostages** is criminal.

A subject could be a prepositional phrase which counts as singular, as in:

3. **After the exams** is the time to relax.

On the other hand, nominal relative clauses may have plural as well as singular concord, as shown below:

4. **What were once human dwellings** are now nothing but piles of rubble.

N.B. Singular nouns ending with the -s of the plural inflection such as **measles, billiards, mathematics**, etc. require a verb in the singular or conversely plural nouns lacking the inflection like **cattle, people, clergy**, etc. require a verb in the plural, as in:

1. **Measles** is sometimes serious.
2. Our **people** are complaining.

Plural words and phrases count as singular if they are used as names, titles, quotations, etc. as in:

(A+c)



1. *Crime and Punishment* is perhaps the best-constructed of Dostoyevsky's novels.

2. 'The Cedars' has a huge garden.

3. 'Senior Citizens' means, in common parlance, people over sixty.

7.19 Notional concord, and proximity: 'Notional concord' is agreement of verb with subject according to the idea of number rather than the actual presence of the grammatical marker for that idea, as in:

1. The **government** have broken all their promises. [(BrE)=government is treated as plural].

N.B. The principle of '**proximity**' denotes agreement of the verb with whatever noun or pronoun closely precedes it, sometimes in preference to agreement with the headword of the subject, as we see in:

1. **No one** except his own supporters agree with him.

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

7.20 **Collective** nouns: In BrE, collective nouns, notionally plural but grammatically singular, obey notional concord in examples such as the following where AmE usually has the singular:

1. The **public** are tired of demonstrations. (BrE)

2. The **audience** were enjoying every minute of it. (BrE)

(E)

11/11/2021 \*

7.21 **Coordinated subject**: It consists of two or more noun phrases coordinated by **and**; thus, it is treated as plural, as in:

1. **Tom and Mary** are now ready.

2. **What I say and what I think** are my own affair.

**N.B.** A singular verb is used with conjoinings which represent a single entity:

1. **The hammer and sickle** was flying from a tall flag pole.

Conjoinings expressing a mutual relationship take a plural verb:

2. **Your problem and mine** are similar.

When two coordinated structures refer to the same thing, a singular verb is used:

1. **This temple of ugliness and memorial to Victorian bad taste** was erected at the Queen's express wish.

**N.B.** The following example is ambiguous and could have either a singular or plural verb according as the brother and editor are one person or two:

1. His younger brother and the subsequent editor of his collected papers **was/were** with him at his death-bed.

7.22 Note that a single noun head with coordinate modifiers may imply two separate sentences, with the result that a plural verb may follow a singular non-count noun subject quite legitimately, as illustrated below:

1. Good and bad taste **are** inculcated by example.

A similar collapsing of coordinate subjects into a single structure is observed when the subject is a clause:

2. What I say and think **are** no business of yours.

Notice that if the singular verb is used, the sentence would mean:

3. That which I say and think is no business of yours.

7.23 Concord involving **(either...or)** is illustrated as follows:

1. Either the Mayor or his deputy is bound to come.
2. Either the strikers or the bosses **have** misunderstood.
3. Either your eyesight or your **brakes** are at fault.

Notice that the verb agrees in number with the closest subject.

N.B. (1) The negative correlatives **neither...nor**, although disjunctive in meaning, behave in colloquial speech more like **and** than like **or** as regards concord:

1. Neither he nor his wife **have** arrived.

Yet, there is another form preferred by some:

2. Neither he nor his wife **has** arrived.

N.B. (2) Grammatical concord is usually obeyed for **more than**, as we see in:

1. **More than** a thousand inhabitants **have** signed the petition.
2. **More than** one person **has** protested against the proposal.

7.24 Indefinite expressions of amount: Another area of ambivalence is that of indefinite and negative expressions of amount, as in:

1. I've ordered the shrubs, but none (of them) **have/has** yet arrived.

Notice that grammatical concord would suggest that **none** is singular; but notional concord invites a plural verb. This means that **has** is more conventionally 'correct', but **have** is more idiomatic in speech.

These comments may be extended to **neither** and **either** as indefinite

pronouns:

1. I sent cards to Mavis and Margery but **neither**(of them) **has/have** replied; in fact, I doubt if **either**(of them)**is/are** coming.

N.B. If a prepositional phrase with a plural complement follows the indefinite construction, a plural verb is favoured not only because of notional concord but because of the proximity rule:

1...none of **them** are...

2...either of the **girls** are...

7.26 Concord of person: There is concord of person between subject and verb:

1. I **am** your friend. (=1<sup>st</sup> person singular concord)

2a. He **is** ready. } 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular concord

b. He **knows** you. } 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular concord

N.B. Following the principle of proximity, the last noun phrase of a coordinate subject determines the person of the verb; notice:

1. Neither you, nor I, nor **anyone** else **knows** the answer.

2. Either my wife or I **am** going.

A  
\*

11/11/2021

(C) 25/11/2021

**7.27 Subject-Complement Concord:** A subject agrees in number with its complement, as illustrated below:

1. **The child** was an angel.
2. **The children** were angels.

**N.B.** Notice the exceptions in these examples:

3. **What we need most** is books.
4. **They** turned traitor.
5. **They** became traitors.
6. **Good manners** are a rarity these days.

**N.B.** We sometimes find the verb in agreement with the complement, as in:

1. **What we need most** are books.
2. **Good manners** is a rarity these days.

Such sentences are probably ascribable to the workings of notional concord.

**7.28 Subject-Object Concord:** The subject agrees in number with its reflexive-pronoun object, as we see in these example sentences:

1. **He** injured **himself** in the leg.
2. **You** should give **yourself** another chance.

**N.B.** The same concord relation holds when the reflexive pronoun occurs in other functions, i.e. as **prepositional complement**, or when the reflexive genitive **his own**, etc is used:

1. **She's** making a sweater for **herself**.

2. **They're** ruining **their own** chances.

**N.B.** In BrE, collective noun subjects permit plural concord, as in:

1. **The navy** congratulated **themselves** on the victory.

7.29 Pronoun Concord: Personal pronouns in the 3rd person agree with their antecedents both in number and in gender, as we see in:

1. **John** hurt **his** foot.

2. **Beatrice** hurt **her** foot.

3. **John and Beatrice** hurt **their** feet.

4. **The climbers** hurt **their** feet.

7.30 Indefinite pronouns and concord: Notice that English has no sex-neutral 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular pronoun, and so the plural pronoun **they** is often used informally, in defiance of number concord, as a substitute for the indefinite pronouns **everyone**, **everybody**, **someone**, **somebody**, **anyone**, **anybody**, **no one**, **nobody**, etc., as shown below:

1. **Everyone** thinks **they** have the answer. (informal)

2. Has **anybody** brought **their** camera? (informal)

3. **No one** could have blamed **themselves** for that. (informal)

**N.B.** In formal English, the tendency is to use **he** as the 'unmarked' form when the sex of the antecedent is not determined. Therefore, the formal equivalent of (1) above is:

1. **Everyone** thinks **he** has the answer. (formal)

(E)

18/11/2021



**N.B.** There is a pedantic alternative where a conjoining of both masculine and feminine pronouns is used, as exemplified below:

1. **Every student** has to make up **his or her** own mind. (pedantic)

**7.31 The Vocative:** A vocative is a nominal element added to a sentence or clause optionally, denoting the one or more people to whom it is addressed, and signalling the fact that it is addressed to them, as in:

1. **John**, I want you. (voc S V Od)

2. It's a lovely day, **Mrs Johnson**. (S V Cs voc)

3. You, **my friend**, will have to work harder. (S voc V A)

Notice that the vocative could occur initially, medially, or finally.

Moreover, the most characteristic intonations are: fall-rise for an initial vocative; rise for a medial or final vocative.

**7.32 Forms of a vocative:** A vocative may be:

1. A single name with or without title: John, Mrs Johnson, Dr Smith

2. The personal pronoun **you**, as in:

a. Behave yourself, **you**.

It could be an indefinite pronoun, as in:

b. Get me a pen, **somebody**.

3. Standard appellatives like:



a. Family relationships :mother ,father ,uncle ;mom(my)(AmE) ,  
mum(my)(BrE),dad(dy),auntie

b. Endearments:(my)darling/dear/honey(AmE)/love

c. Titles of respect: Sir, madam, My Lord, Your Excellency, Your Majesty,  
ladies and gentlemen

d. Markers of profession or status: doctor; Mr/Madam Chairman; Mr  
President; (Mr)Prime Minister; Father(for priest); Bishop

4. A nominal clause, as in:

a. **Whoever said that**, come out here.

5. Items under (1), (2), or (3) above with the addition of modifiers or  
appositive elements of various kinds:

a. **My dear Mrs Johnson**; young John

b. **You with the red hair**; **you over there** (impolite); **you boys**;  
**you (young) fellows**; **you guys** (AmE)

c. **Old man/fellow** (familiar); **young man/woman**

**N.B.** The function of a vocative in English is to seek the attention of the  
person addressed; it is also used to express the attitude of the speaker  
towards the addressee.

**7.33 Negation:** The negation of a simple sentence is accompanied by inserting **not/n't** between the operator and the predication:

- 1a. The attempt has succeeded.
- b. The attempt has **not** succeeded.
- 2a. We may win the match.
- b. We may **not** win the match.
- 3a. He is coming.
- b. He **isn't** coming.
- 4a. We have been defeated.
- b. We have **not** been defeated.

Notice that there is an item in the positive sentences that can serve as operator, but when this is not so, the auxiliary **do** is introduced and this, like modal auxiliaries, is followed by the bare infinitive, as we see in:

- 1a. She sees me every week.
- b. She **doesn't** see me every week.
- 2a. They understood the problem.
- b. They **did not** understand the problem.

**7.35 Non-assertive forms:** All the sentences marked (b) contain a non-assertive form:

- 1a. We've had **some** (lunch).
- b. We haven't had **any** lunch.