



Teaching of Grammar as a Means of Enhancing Language Use: An Appraisal of the Verb and the Complex Subject Relationship

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Abstract

This study presents a descriptive analysis of the structural/grammatical relationship that exists between the Verb and the Complex Subject. Data were sourced from related studies and from the observation of oral conversation of individuals. Data analysis reveals that the complex subject is composed of the external noun which is either a word or a group of words with a string of modifiers consisting of different word classes including an internal noun. The analysis further reveals that the number of the external noun is the determinant for the number of agreement for the verb and not the number of the internal noun.

Keywords: concordance; verb; subject; complex-subject

1. INTRODUCTION

Grammar has been defined as “the set of structural rules that governs the composition of sentences, phrases and words in any given natural language” (Chomsky, 1965). In recent linguistics studies, grammar has come to be used to designate a set of rules, which when strictly adhered to, will produce the possible correct sentences in a language (Radford, 2003). Basically, the grammar of every language emphasizes on the quality of the spoken or written form of a language that an individual uses with regard to the accepted standard of correctness. Although, every speaker of a language is born with the cognitive ability to discern the set of rules that are contained in the language of his community, such a speaker however, must be adequately exposed to such rules before he can adequately comprehend them (Evans & Green, 2006). Based on the analogy of correctness, it is logical therefore, to conclude that the rules we have in grammar are limited and constructing an appreciable expression depends largely on one’s ability to know the rules (Leech & Svartvik, 2002). This study seeks to appraise grammar and to particularly focus on the

verb and the complex subject relationship and discuss how its teaching can enhance language use.

2. AGREEMENT/CONCORD

Generally, the structural relationship that exists between grammatical elements is what concord underscores. This relationship can be the correspondence of the number, case, gender or person of one word with that of another word, especially within the same sentence (Marcus & Pam, 2016). The main verb and the subject of the sentence are by rule expected to relate in number in order for the sentence to be grammatical. Thus: if the number of the verb is singular, the subject of the sentence takes a singular number to establish a relationship with the verb. On the contrary, if the number of the verb is plural, it requires a plural subject to agree with.

3. THE VERB & NUMBER IN THE VERB

The verb is a word that is used to show that an action is taking place or to indicate the existence of a state or condition of a being. It is the part of the sentence that makes a statement about the subject. As a part of speech, the verb is the major/compulsory element in the sentence as the completeness in the meaning of any sentence is embedded in the verb (Marcus & Pam, 2016). Verbs in English Language, like other languages, have the tendency of exhibiting a variation in number as they can either be singular or plural. The singular form of verbs in English are derived by inserting the segment **-s** at the end of the main verb while the plural form does not have any attached element. This derivation has been schematized as follows:

Table 1

Main Verb	Singular Form	Plural Form
X	+s	-s

Source: Field Survey 2017

Form the above schema, if the main verb is X its singular number will be X+s (Xs) while its plural number will be X-s (X). We have generated the following examples to justify Table 1 as tabulated in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Main Verb	Singular Form (+S)	Plural Form (-S)
Do	Does	Do
Come	Comes	Come
Like	Likes	Like
Catch	Catches	Catch

Source: Field Survey 2017

4. THE SUBJECT AND NUMBER IN THE SUBJECT

The subject is the grammatical performer of actions. It is the part of a sentence or utterance usually a noun, noun phrase, noun clause or the equivalent of nouns that the rest of the sentence asserts something about and that agrees with the verb. The subject is that person, place or thing that the sentence overtly or covertly talks about. The subject

can either be simple (consisting of just a single word like 'objective'), compound (consisting of a group of words like 'the objective') or complex (consisting of a noun and its string of modifiers like 'the objectives of organizations').

Nouns in English Language show a variation in number to mark plurality. Thus, the plural of the regular form of nouns in English is derived by adding the marker -s, -es, -ies, to the ending of the noun while the irregular plural form requires a modification of a vowel alphabet (Eastman, 2009). This derivation has been schematized as follows:

Table 3

Subject	Singular Form (regular)	Plural Form (regular)
X	-s	+s (-s, -es, or -ies)
Subject	Singular Form (irregular)	Plural Form (irregular)
X	a,o	e,i

Source: Field Survey 2017

Form the above schema, if the subject is X its singular number will be X-s (X) while its plural number will be X+s (Xs). We have generated the following examples to justify Table 3 as tabulated in Table 4 below:

Table 4

Subject	Singular Form (-S)	Plural Form (+S)
Car	Car	Cars
House	House	Houses
Trophy	Trophy	Trophies
Man	Man	Men
Mouse	Mouse	Mice

Source: Field Survey 2017

5. THE VERB AND THE SUBJECT RELATIONSHIP

The subject and verb in a sentence must agree in number for the sentence to be grammatical. To establish agreement, most verbs change only in form in the present tense. Thus, when the number of the subject is singular, it requires a singular verb to be in agreement. A plural verb on the other hand must agree with a plural subject as depicted in the following examples:

- a) The *trader sells* fake items.
- b) The *traders sell* fake items.

The relationship between the subject and verb in (a) and (b) above is basically established by number as the singular subject *trader* agrees with the singular verb *sells* while the plural subject *traders* also agrees with the plural *sell*.

- Compound subjects joined by "And"

Usually, when two or more countable subjects are connected by **and**, the verb to be used must be plural in number. However, when the parts of the compound subject are actually parts of one unit or when they refer to the same person or thing, the subject is considered singular. Thus:

Peter and Jane like reading late.

Rice and beans is my favourite food. [Compound subject is one unit]

➤ Compound subjects joined by *or* or *nor*

Use a singular verb with a subject with two or more elements connected by *or* or *nor*. But if the subject includes both singular and plural nouns, always make the verb agree with the subject nearer to the verb. For example:

Either *the king* or *his servant* *signs* the letter. (singular subjects take singular verb)

Neither the student nor the *teachers* *are* interested. (singular and plural subjects: verb agrees with *teachers* nearer to it)

Neither the teachers nor the *student* *is* interested. (plural and singular subjects: verb agrees with *student* nearer to it)

➤ Titles

Use a singular verb to agree with a title in number even if the subject within the title is plural. Titles are always considered singular. Thus:

Tales By Moonlight is an interesting television series.

The Musings of a Hero is a collection of thoughts on Sen. Gyang Nyam Shom Pwajok.

Also use a singular verb with a singular subject followed by a phrase that begins with *together with*, *along with*, *as well as*, *in addition to*, or *plus*. For example:

Amina together with her children *is* going for pilgrimage.

The coach along with the 22 players *has* been rewarded for winning the trophy.

➤ Collective Nouns as Subjects

If a subject is a collective noun treated as a unit, use a singular verb with it. If the individual action of the noun's components is emphasized, however, use a plural verb instead.

➤ Indefinite Pronouns as Subjects

Whenever indefinite pronouns like *each*, *either*, *everything*, *someone*, *anybody*, *another* etc. are used as subjects, they require a singular verb to agree with them. But pronouns like *both*, *few*, *many*, *others*, and *several* require a plural verb while *all*, *any*, *some*, *more*, *most*, and *none* may need a singular or a plural verb, depending on the context in which they are used.

Each of you *is* to answer five questions.

Both of you *are* to answer five questions.

➤ Frequently Confused Singular and Plural Forms

Certain nouns have their ending with the -s plural maker and appear to be plural only in form but singular in effect. Such words require singular verbs to agree with in number as in the following:

The news is quite strange to me.

Measles is a killer disease in Africa.

In addition, there are nouns that are plural in form and also in effect. These nouns are referred to as plural nouns as they are never used for singular effect. Such nouns require a plural verb to agree with in number.

Her *earnings* have increased tremendously.

The *minutes* were read to members.

6. THE VERB AND THE COMPLEX SUBJECT RELATIONSHIP

For a sentence that has a complex subject to be grammatical, it must be in agreement with the verb. This has been discussed and exemplified in (2) and (5) above with subjects with simple and compound structures. However, the structure of the complex subject is always a phrase or clause that consists of an external noun and an internal noun that is embedded in a string of modifiers that is attached to it. Since the verb only agrees with just a noun, it is always confusing to state whether the verb agrees with the external noun or the internal noun especially where the nouns differ in number. Within the units of grammar, Oyeleye, 2009, affirmed that external nouns have the status of either a noun phrase or a noun clause while the internal nouns that are embedded in the string of modifiers assume the adjectival functions either as phrases or clauses depending on the absence or presence of the verbal element. Since we argued earlier in (3) above that subjects are basically nouns that verbs talk about and external nouns are subjects that verbs talk about, it is logical to conclude that verbs take their agreement with external nouns and not internal nouns. These we have exemplified in the following sentences:

External Noun	Modifiers	Internal Noun	Verb	
1. <i>One</i> / singular	of the	/students	/is/ singular	involved in the crime.

External Noun	Modifiers	Internal Noun	Verb	
2. <i>The allowance</i> / singular	for the Examination Committee	/members	/was/ singular	paid late.

External Noun	Modifiers	Internal Noun	Verb	
3. <i>The allowances</i> / plural	for the Examination Committee	/members	/were/ plural	paid late.

External Noun	Modifiers	Internal Noun	Verb	
4. <i>Swimming</i> / singular	in the	/rivers	/is/ singular	dangerous.

In the sentences presented in 1 to 4 above, the complex subject in each is shown to compose of both an external noun and an internal noun that are intervened by a string of modifiers. The examples clearly justify the claim that the verb agrees with the external noun (which is the subject of the sentence) in number and not the internal noun (which is only part of the modifiers).

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