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Types of Agreement in Grammar

Research project

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Abstract

This research is provided for Types of Agreement in Grammar which is an attempt to clarify agreement in grammar. Agreement in grammar means all elements of a sentence agree with each other considering noun, pronoun, verb, and antecedent.

This research contains three sections. The first section is only an introduction of Agreement in Grammar. The second section will be about the elements of sentences which are related to the research since the research is all about how to arrange sentences. The final section is about some Types of Agreement in Grammar.

Section One

1. Introduction

Without grammar, English and all other languages would not give the sufficient meaning which is needed to understand any statement that people express them. The basic structures and modifiers of a sentence are bound together by meaning, relationship words and word order. Agreement is the change of a structure's form because of the influence of another structure. In English nominal subjects influence the form finite verbs, (Hopper and Gale, 2010).

The verb agrees with its subject in number and person. The agreement applies whenever the verb displays distinctions in person and number. For all verbs other than be, the distinctions are found only in the present tense, where the third person singular has the -s form and the third person plural, (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2018).

Agreement is a syntactic relation, in a given construction, between words and phrases which are compatible as a result of inflections carried by at least one of them.

For instance, in a construction like: *these photos*, both *these* and *photos* are compatible because they are inflected as plural, (Matthews,2007)

Section Two

2 Elements of sentences

In this section the aim is to show some elements of sentences (nouns, verbs, subject, and pronouns). Explaining those mentioned above will make almost all types of agreement easy because they are totally relative to Agreement and makes the reader to understand the Agreement in Grammar in a simple way.

2.1 Subject

The subject of a clause or sentence is the noun (a person, place, or thing) that performs, controls, or is accountable for a verb. The *subject* in a sentence or clause is the person or thing doing, performing, or controlling the action of the verb. Every sentence requires a subject and a verb to be complete. Without a subject, we would have an action being done by no one or nothing—simply happening on its own, which cannot happen, (Herring, 2016). Only that which has the grammatical function of a noun can be the subject of a clause. This is because it is someone or something that is capable of performing or “controlling” the action of the verb.

This function can be performed by each of the following:

- nouns – *Computers* can process numbers very quickly.

- noun phrases – *A boy I know* owns a motorcycle.
- pronouns – *Someone* ate this cake!
- gerunds – *Swimming* is great exercise.
- gerund phrases – *Traveling the world* has been my lifelong dream.

As we can see in the above examples, the subject most typically occurs at or near the beginning of a clause, preceding the main verb that describes the action of the clause (known as the *finite verb*), (Herring, 2016).

2.2 Nouns

Nouns are words that indicate a person, place, or thing. There are many different kinds of nouns, and it's important to know the different ways each type can be used in a sentence. Below, the different categories of nouns are introduced, (Herring, 2016).

Countable and Uncountable Nouns

Countable nouns (also known as count nouns) are nouns that can be considered as individual, separable items, which means that they are counted with numbers. They can be used with the indefinite articles *a* and *an* (which signify a single person or thing) or with the plural form of the noun, (Herring, 2016).

Single Countable Nouns	Plural Countable Nouns
<i>a cup</i>	<i>two cups</i>
<i>an ambulance</i>	<i>several ambulances</i>
<i>a phone</i>	<i>10 phones</i>

Uncountable nouns cannot take an indefinite article (a/an), nor can they be made plural.

✓ Correct	✗ Incorrect
Would you like <i>tea</i> ?	Would you like <i>a tea</i> ?
Do you have any <i>information</i> ?	Do you have <i>an information</i> ?
We bought new camping <i>equipment</i> .	We bought new camping <i>equipments</i> .

Collective nouns

Collective nouns are nouns that refer to a collection or group of multiple people, animals, or things. However, even though collective nouns refer to multiple individuals, they still function as singular nouns in a sentence. This is because they still are technically referring to one thing: the group as a whole, (Herring, 2016).

Examples:

- The *flock* of birds flew south for the winter.
- The *organization* voted to revoke the rules that it had previously approved.
- The *set* of tablecloths had disappeared.

Nominalization (Creating Nouns)

Nominalization refers to the creation of a noun from verbs or adjectives.

When nouns are created from other parts of speech, it is usually through the use of *suffixes*. For example:

- My fiancée is an *actor*. (The verb act becomes the noun actor.)
- His *acceptance* of the position was received warmly. (The verb accept becomes the noun *acceptance*.)
- The *hardness* of diamond makes it a great material for cutting tools. (The adjective hard becomes the noun *hardness*.)

- This project will be fraught with *difficulty*. (The adjective difficult becomes the noun difficulty.), (Herring, 2016)

2.3 Verbs

There are two kinds of verbs: *lexical* and *auxiliary verbs*. *The lexical verb*, also called main verb, names the process taking place. It has the core ‘meaning’. It may occur in several forms: write(s), wrote, written, writing, and (to) write. For a simple sentence or a clause to be meaningful it must have a lexical verb, and if the verb phrase has more than one verb, it comes last.

- I was reading sport magazine
- Ahmed might get high marks in the swimming competition

Auxiliary verbs, also called helping verbs, are the verbs in front of the lexical verb that help indicate when the process takes place, will take place, or took place or how the whole process is looked upon by the speaker. Common helping verbs are *be, have, be able to, do, will, would, can, could, may, might* and so on.

He cannot do that alone

Jack is the first actor on the list.

(Verspoor & Sauter, 2000).

2.4 Pronouns

Pronouns are essentially special types of nouns and are the main word in a noun phrase or (more usually) the only word in a noun phrase, (Nelson & Greenbaum, 2018).

Personal pronouns

All personal pronouns have distinctions in person (first, second, third). Most also have distinctions in number (singular, plural) and in case (subjective, objective, genitive), (Nelson & Greenbaum, 2018).

	subjective case	objective case
first person		
Singular	<i>I</i>	<i>me</i>
Plural	<i>we</i>	<i>us</i>
Second person		
Singular/plural	<i>you</i>	<i>you</i>
Third person		
singular – masculine	<i>he</i>	<i>him</i>
singular – feminine	<i>she</i>	<i>her</i>
singular – non-personal	<i>it</i>	<i>it</i>
Plural	<i>they</i>	<i>them</i>

The subjective case applies when the pronouns are the subject of a finite clause:

For example: I know that *she* lives in Coventry and that *he* lives in Birmingham.

When the pronoun is not the subject of the clause, the objective case is used:

1. She knows *me* well.
2. He has told *her* about *me*.
3. You must go with *him*.

Reflexive pronouns

The reflexive pronouns parallel the personal and possessive pronouns in person and number but have no distinctions in case. There are separate forms for the second person singular (*yourself*) and plural (*yourselves*), whereas there is only one form of the second person for the personal pronoun *you* and the possessive pronoun *yours*, (Nelson & Greenbaum, 2018).

first person

Singular	<i>myself</i>
Plural	<i>ourselves</i>

second person

Singular	<i>yourself</i>
Plural	<i>yourselves</i>

third person

singular – masculine	<i>himself</i>
singular – feminine	<i>herself</i>
singular– non-personal	<i>itself</i>
Plural	<i>themselves</i>

The reflexive pronouns have two main uses:

1. They refer to the same person or thing as the subject:

- They behaved *themselves* for a change.
- You'll hurt *yourself*

2. They give emphasis to a noun phrase:

- She *herself* spoke to me
- He wrote to me *himself*.
- I appealed to the captain *himself*.

Interrogative Pronouns

The interrogative pronouns *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which*, *what* are some of the words that introduce questions. *Who*, *whom*, and *whose* indicate that the expected answer will be a person; *what* indicates that the answer will be something nonhuman; *which* may be used for either persons or things, (Hopper et al., 2010).

Who was the chairman?

Answer: John

What was he carrying?

Answer: a suitcase

Which of the girls was hurt?

Answer: Justine

Demonstrative Pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns are pronouns used to replace nouns or noun phrases in a sentence, representing that which is nearby or far away in space or time, (Herring, 2016).

Here is a complete list of demonstrative pronouns:

this	these	Such
that	Those	Neither

Functions of major demonstrative pronouns

The most common demonstrative pronouns are *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those*.

Their functions are explained in the following table:

Demonstrative Pronoun	Singular/Plural	Nearby/Far Away
This	Singular	Nearby
That	Singular	Far away
These	Plural	Nearby
Those	Plural	Far away

Each of the four major demonstrative pronouns describes something that is either singular or plural and either near or not near to the speaker, (Herring, 2016).

Examples:

- “*This* isn’t mine.” (Singular, nearby)
- “Give me *that*.” (Singular, not near)

- “*These* are really gross.” (Plural, nearby)
- “I forgot to bring *those*.” (Plural, not near)

Relative Pronouns

Hopper et al. (2010) point out that when a sentence is embedded inside another sentence to function as a relative clause, a relative pronoun replaces the repeated noun in order to make the new sentence grammatically correct.

- Tom Hanks, *who* is the greatest actor, should win the Oscar.
- The tools, *which* he bought yesterday, were specked with rust.

Section Three

3 Types of Agreement

3.1 Subject -verb agreement

Because uncountable nouns cannot be plural, it is very important to use the correct subject-verb agreement. Subject-verb agreement refers to using certain conjugations of verbs with singular vs. plural subjects. This happens most noticeably with the verb to be, which becomes *is* or *was* with singular subject nouns and *are* or *were* with plural subjects. Because uncountable nouns are grammatically singular, they must take singular forms of their verbs, (Herring, 2016).

examples:

1. ✘ “The *furnitures* in my living room *are* old.” (incorrect)

2. ✗ “The *furnitures* in my living room *is* old.” (incorrect)
3. ✓ “The *furniture* in my living room *is* old.” (correct)
4. ✗ “Their *behaviors are* not good.” (incorrect)
5. ✓ “Their *behavior is* not good.” (correct)
6. ✗ “The *news are* good.” (incorrect)
7. ✓ “The *news is* good.” (correct)

3.2 quantifiers agreement with uncountable nouns

certain quantifiers can only be used with uncountable nouns, while others can only modify countable nouns.

Too – Too Much – Too Many

We use “too + adjective” to mean “beyond what is needed or desirable,” as in, “It is too big.” Too much, on the other hand, is used to modify uncountable nouns, while too many is used with countable nouns—they are not used with adjectives. For example, the following sentences would both be incorrect, (Herring, 2016).

- ✗ “It is *too much big*.”
- ✗ “It is *too many big*.”

One particular source of confusion that can arise here is the fact that much can be used as an adverb before too to give it emphasis, as in:

- “It is *much too big*.”

Too much cannot be used with a countable noun, nor too many with an uncountable noun.

1. ✘ “I have *too much pieces of furniture.*” (incorrect)
2. ✔ “I have *too many pieces of furniture.*” (correct)
3. ✘ “I have *too many furniture.*” (incorrect)
4. ✔ “I have *too much furniture.*” (correct)

Fewer vs. Less

The conventional rule regarding less vs. fewer is that fewer is used with countable nouns and less with uncountable nouns, (Herring, 2016).

For example:

- A) ✘ “I have *less friends* than Jill has.” (incorrect)
- B) ✔ “I have *fewer friends* than Jill has.” (correct)
- C) ✘ “I have *fewer money* than he has.” (incorrect)
- D) ✔ “I have *less money* than he has.” (correct)

The rule carries over when we add words to an uncountable noun to make a countable phrase. This distinction is seen in the following examples:

1. I want *less toast.* (Toast is uncountable)
2. I want *fewer pieces of toast.* (pieces of toast is countable)
3. “There is *less water* in the jug.” (water is uncountable)
4. “There are *fewer cups of water* in the jug.” (cups of water is countable)

Measurements of distance, time, and amount

measurements of distance, time, or amount for nouns that we would normally consider countable (and thus plural) end up taking singular verbs. Likewise, these terms also take the word *less*, most often in the construction *less than*, (Herring, 2016). Examples:

1. “\$20,000 *is less than* we expected to pay.”
2. “We walked *less than 50 miles* to get here.”
3. “We have *less than two hours* to finish this project.”
4. “I weigh *20 pounds less than* I used to.”

Less cannot be used before these kinds of nouns:

- ✗ “We have *less \$20,000*.” (incorrect)
- ✗ “I ran *less 10 miles*.” (incorrect)

Less is also used with countable nouns in the construction *one less _____*, as in:

- “That is *one less problem* to worry about.”

Fewer can also be used (albeit less commonly), but the construction usually changes to *one _____ fewer*, as in:

- “That is *one problem fewer* to worry about.”

3.3 Agreement of Pronoun and Antecedent

A pronoun is a word that sometimes lacks specific meaning. Most pronouns depend on another structure for their meaning. The antecedent controls the pronoun as regards number, person, and gender. Some of the pronouns that are

controlled by their antecedents are the personal, demonstrative, and relative pronouns.

Selection of the Correct Pronoun Based on the Number of the antecedent

Collective nouns can be singular or plural depending on whether the collective or the several individuals involved are emphasized. The following pronoun will be singular or plural accordingly.

- The staff expressed *its* confidence in *its* medical director. [the staff acted collectively]
- The staff have been airing *their* grievances publicly. [Individual staff members had been complaining.]
- The committee submits *its* report annually.

(2) *Indefinite pronouns* are usually *singular* but can be *plural* depending on whether a *quantity* or *individual* units are emphasized.

The following pronoun will be singular or plural accordingly.

- Some of the cereal has kept *its* freshness, but some of the apples have worms in *their* cores. [The cereal is in quantity, the apples in individual units.]
- *Neither* idea had any point to it.
- *Each* of the sofas has lost its castors.

- *Everybody* raised his or her voice in song. [Occasionally the plural sense is so strong that some writers are tempted to use a plural pronoun. [Everybody grabbed their *coats* and *ran* is incorrect.], (Hopper et al., 2010).

Selection of the Correct Pronoun Based on the Person and Gender of the Antecedent

As nearly all noun and pronoun antecedents are third person, there is seldom any problem in selecting the correct pronoun to follow them. *Miss Riggs said that she would accept the chairmanship*, (Herring,2016)

Traditionally, masculine pronouns have been used to refer to abstract, singular nouns like *mayor, judge, professor, doctor, senator, employer, person, and reader*:

- A judge must use *his* discretion in such a matter.
- A writer has to use *his* full energy on *his* writing.

3.4 Noun-Determiner Agreement

Common nouns in English participate in three types of agreement. First, they are involved in determiner-noun agreement. All countable nouns are used either as singular or plural. When they combine with a determiner, there must be an agreement relationship between the two, (Kim & Sells, 2008).

examples:

- a. this book/that book.
- *This books/*that books/these books/those books.
- *Few dog/few dogs

3.5 Agreement of Singular Nouns ending in –s

Nouns ending in -ics are singular when they refer to a field of study, for example economics, linguistics, mathematics, physics, and statistics.

Examples

- Statistics *is* one of the options in the degree course.
- Economics *was* my favorite subject at school.

Some of these nouns are often used in a different sense and may then be plural:

- Your statistics *are* inaccurate.
- The acoustics in this hall *have* been improved.

Names of diseases that end in -s are generally treated as singular, for example AIDS, measles, mumps:

- AIDS *is* caused by the HIV virus.

Names of games that end in -s are singular, for example billiards, darts, draughts, dominoes:

Dominoes *is* the only game I play at home.

Individual pieces have singular and plural forms:

- You've dropped a *domino* on the floor.
- The *dominoes* are on the floor. (Nelson & Greenbaum, 2018).

3.6 Citation and titles Agreement

Citations and titles always take a singular verb, even though they may consist of plural phrases:

- ‘Children’ is an irregular plural.
- Reservoir Dogs is a very violent film.
- Oscar and Lucinda was written by Peter Carey. (Nelson & Greenbaum, 2018).

Conclusion

The main point of this research is to have a clear understanding of types of agreement and to realize the elements of sentences which is the core of English Grammar because students face difficulties if they do not know what the elements of sentences are and how they are organized. There are different types of agreement in English grammar. The most important types are 6 types which are mentioned in the research, they are Subject-verb agreement, Quantifiers agreement with uncountable nouns, Agreement of Pronoun and Antecedent, Noun-Determiner Agreement, Agreement of Singular Nouns ending in –s and Citation and titles Agreement. All these types of agreement are important for students to understand. because analyzing sentences is one of the difficulties that students face so that they can write sentences grammatically with correct agreement between the elements of the sentence.

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