



A University Grammar of English

Lecture No. 6

Semantic Roles of the Indirect Object

The most typical role of the indirect object is that of the *Recipient Participant*; i.e. an animate participant being passively implicated by the happening or state:

- I found *you* a place.
- She sent *me* a bouquet of flowers.

Semantic Roles of the Indirect Object

The indirect object occasionally takes an **AFFECTED** role with a few of the verbs that combine with an eventive object. The most common verb in the latter construction is *give*:

- She gave **me** a push. *['She pushed me.']*
- Judith paid **me** a visit. *['Judith visited me.']*
- I should give **the car** a wash. *['I should wash the car.']*

The indirect object has the same role as the affected direct object in the paraphrases.

Concord

CONCORD (also termed 'agreement') can be defined as the relationship between two grammatical units such that one of them displays a particular feature (*e.g.* plurality) that accords with a displayed (or semantically implicit) feature in the other.

Subject-verb concord

The most important type of concord in English is concord of 3rd person number between subject and verb. The normally observed rule is very simple:

- **A singular subject requires a singular verb:**
 - My daughter *watches* television after supper. [singular subject + singular verb]
- **A plural subject requires a plural verb:**
 - My daughters *watch* television after supper. [plural subject + plural verb]

Subject-verb concord

- When the subject is realized by a noun phrase, the phrase counts as singular if its head is singular:
 - The *change* in the Iraqi economy is most obvious in investment.
- When the subject is realized by a noun phrase, the phrase counts as plural if its head is plural:
 - The *changes* in the Iraqi economy are most obvious in investment.
- When the subject is realized by a clause, finite or nonfinite, the clause counts as singular:
 - To treat them as slaves *is* inhuman.
 - That you answer all my questions *pleases* me.

Subject-verb concord

- Prepositional phrases and adverbs functioning as subject count as singular:
 - In the evenings *is* best for me.
 - After the storm *comes* the calm.
 - Now *is* the time.
- Nominal relative clauses may have plural as well as singular concord:
 - What ideas he has *are* his wife's.
 - Whatever book a *Times* reviewer praises *sells* well.
 - What counts most *is* quality.

Subject-verb concord

- *Rule: A subject which is not clearly semantically plural requires a singular verb*

This rule explains why clausal and adverbial subjects require singular verbs. It also explains the tendency in informal speech for *is/was* to follow the non-referential subject, *there* in existential sentences:

- There is thousands of displaced people in Basrah.
- There is hundreds of car bomb casualties every day.

Subject-verb concord

- Invariable singular nouns ending in –s take a singular verb. These nouns fall into the following classes:
 - *News*: The news is bad today.
 - *Some diseases*: measles, German measles, mumps, rickets, shingles.
 - Mumps is a viral disease.
 - *Subject names ending in –ics*: linguistics, mathematics, phonetics, statistics.
 - *Some games*: billiards, bowls, darts, dominoes, draughts, checkers, fives, ninepins
 - *Some proper nouns*: Algiers, Athens, Marseilles, Naples

Subject-verb concord

- **Plural nouns lacking the inflection take plural verbs:**
 - Our people are hopeless.
 - Cattle are the most common type of large domesticated animals.
 - Clergy are formal leaders in certain religions.
- **Plural phrases (including coordinate phrases) count as singular if they are used as names, titles, quotations:**
 - War and Peace is a fascinating novel.
 - The Three Bears is a well-known nursery story.

Principles of concord

- The rule that the verb matches its subject in number may be called the principle of **GRAMMATICAL CONCORD**. Difficulties over concord arise through occasional conflict between this and two other principles: the principle of **NOTIONAL CONCORD** and the principle of **PROXIMITY**.

Notional concord is agreement of verb with subject according to the notion of number rather than with the actual presence of the grammatical marker for that notion. In British English, for example, collective nouns such as **government** are often treated as notionally plural:

- The government **have** broken all **their** promises.

In this example, the plural notion is signaled not only by the plural verb **have**, but also by the pronoun **their**.

Principles of concord

- **The principle of proximity**, also termed 'attraction', denotes agreement of the verb with a closely preceding noun phrase in preference to agreement with the head of the noun phrase that functions as subject:
- Not only the director but also the teachers *want* one week less of classes.

The preceding plural noun (*teachers*) has influenced the choice of the plural verb *want*, although the subject *Not only the director* is grammatically singular, since the head *the director* is singular.

Collective nouns and notional concord

- Collective nouns, notionally plural but grammatically singular, obey the principle of notional concord. In BrE the verb may be either singular or plural:
 - The audience *were* enjoying every minute of the match. [1]
 - The public *are* tired of the government's empty promises. [2]
 - Germany *have* won the world cup. [3]
 - Our Planning Committee *have* considered your request. [4]

Collective nouns and notional concord

- The choice between singular or plural verbs depends, in BrE, on whether the group is being considered as a single undivided body, or as a collection of individuals. Thus, in BrE, plural is more likely in [I] than singular, because attention is directed at the individual reactions of members of the audience.

On the other hand, the singular is more likely in these sentences:

- The audience *was* enormous.
- The public *consists* of you and me.
- The crowd *has* been dispersed.