



A University Grammar of English

Lecture No. 8

Concord of Person

In addition to 3rd person number concord with the subject, the verb in the present tense may have person concord with the subject - 1st and 3rd person concord with BE and only 3rd person concord with other verbs :

- I am your teacher. [1st Person singular concord]
- He is your friend. [3rd Person singular concord]
- He knows you well. [3rd Person singular concord]

Concord of Person

A coordinated subject with “*and*” as coordinator requires a plural verb. Person concord does not apply, since there are no person distinctions in the plural:

- You and I know the answer.
- She and I are in charge.

Concord of Person

If the coordinator is *or, either . . . or, or neither . . . nor*, in accordance with the principle of proximity the last noun phrase determines the person of the verb:

- **Neither you, nor I, nor anyone else knows the answer.**
- **Either my wife or I am going.**

Because of the awkwardness of this choice, a speaker may avoid it by using a modal auxiliary which is invariable for person (e.g.: **Either my wife or I will be going**) or by postposing the last noun phrase (e.g.: **Either my wife is going or I am**).

In relative clauses and cleft sentences, a relative pronoun subject is usually followed by a verb in agreement with its antecedent:

- It is I who am to blame.
- It is Kay who is in command.
- It is they who are complaining.

But 3rd person concord prevails in informal English where the objective case pronoun *me* is used:

- It's me who's to blame.

Similarly, 3rd person singular may be used in informal English in these constructions when the pronoun *you* has singular reference:

- It's you who's to blame.

Cleft Sentence

Cleft Sentence is special construction which gives both *thematic and focal prominence to a particular element of the clause*. It is so called because it divides a single clause into two separate sections, each with its own verb. Most cleft sentences begin with the pronoun "It" followed by the verb "be", which in turn is followed by the element on which the focus falls.

Cleft Sentence

From a single clause such as "*John wore his best suit to the dance last night*", it is possible to derive four cleft sentences, each highlighting a particular element of the clause:

- **S as Focus:**
- It was JOHN who wore his best suit to the DANCE last night.
- **Od as Focus:**
- It was his best SUIT (that) John wore to the DANCE last night.
- **A time as Focus:**
- It was last NIGHT (that) John wore his best suit to the DANCE.
- **A place as Focus:**
- It was to the DANCE that John wore his best suit last night.

Other types of concord

Subject-complement and object complement concord

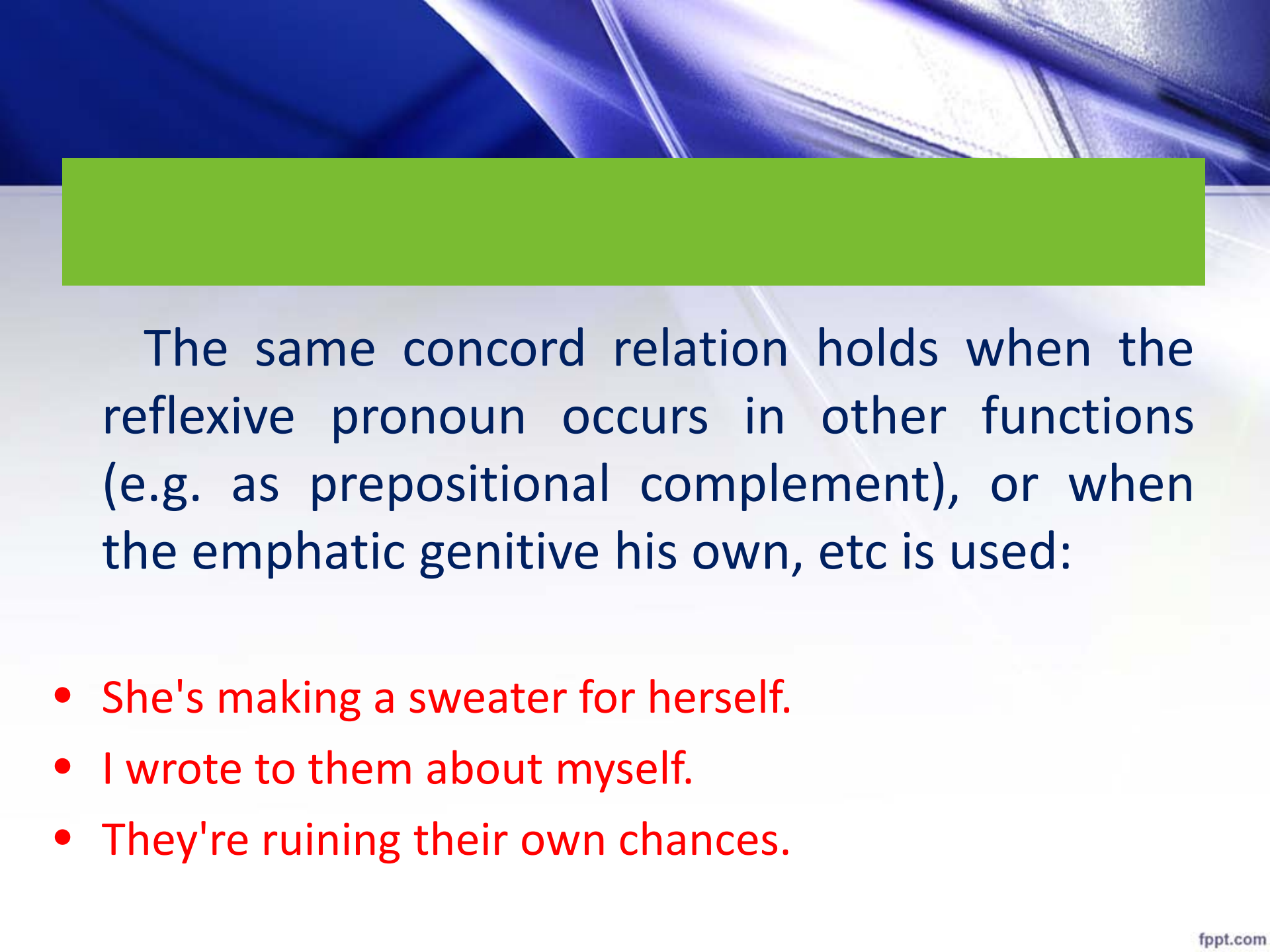
Between subject and subject complement and between direct object and object complement, there is usually concord of number (but not of person):

- My child is an angel.
- I consider my child an angel.
- My children are angels.
- I consider my children angels.

Subject- Object Concord

Concord of number, person, and gender is necessary between subject on the one hand, and object or complement on the other hand, if the second element is a reflexive pronoun.

- He injured himself in both legs.
- She bought herself a raincoat.
- I haven't been myself for weeks. ['I haven't felt well.']
- They found themselves a new apartment.



The same concord relation holds when the reflexive pronoun occurs in other functions (e.g. as prepositional complement), or when the emphatic genitive his own, etc is used:

- She's making a sweater for herself.
- I wrote to them about myself.
- They're ruining their own chances.

Pronoun Concord

The agreement between a pronoun and its antecedent should probably be considered coreference rather than grammatical concord. Personal and possessive pronouns in the 1st and 3rd persons agree with their antecedents in number. Those in the 3rd person singular (he, she, it) also agree with their antecedents in gender:

- Tom hurt his foot.
- Beatrice knows that she is late.
- The books were too heavy, so I left them.

Pronoun Concord

The violation of concord in the case of nonreflexive pronouns does not lead (as it does in the case of reflexive pronouns) to an unacceptable sentence, but to a different interpretation. Compare the following pair of sentences:

- John searched his room.
- John searched her room.

Pronoun Concord

The pronoun *they* is commonly used as a 3rd person singular pronoun that is neutral between masculine and feminine. It is a convenient means of avoiding the dilemma of whether to use the *he* or *she* form. At one time restricted to informal usage, it is now increasingly accepted even in formal usage, especially in AmE. Many prefer to seek gender impartiality by using a plural form where possible in reference to the indefinite pronouns *everyone, everybody, someone, somebody, anyone, anybody, no one, nobody*:

- *Everyone* thinks *they* have the answer.
- Has *anybody* brought *their* camera?
- *No one* could have blamed *themselves* for that.

Pronoun Concord

The use of the plural pronouns *they*, *their*, *themselves* in the above sentences is frowned upon in formal English, where the tendency to use the masculine pronouns when the sex of the antecedent is not determined. The formal equivalents of the above sentences are therefore:

- Everyone thinks he has the answer.
- Has anybody brought his camera?
- No one could have blamed himself for that.

Pronoun Concord

A similar use of the plural occurs with coordinate subjects referring to both sexes, as in: *Either he or she is going to have to change **their** attitude*, and with a singular noun phrase subject having a personal noun of indeterminate gender as head, as in: *Every student has to hand in **their** paper today*.