

THE SUBJECT IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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Abstract:

The subject is a fundamental element in English sentences, providing clarity and structure. By understanding different types of subjects and their grammatical rules, learners can improve their writing and speaking skills. Mastering the subject-verb agreement ensures fluency and accuracy in communication.

Key words: subject and its types, sentence, noun, pronoun, noun phrase, verb, number, subject-verb agreement.

In English grammar, the subject is one of the most essential components of a sentence. It tells us who or what the sentence is about and usually performs the action of the verb, but sometimes, the sentence describes either the subject or an action done to it, and the subject of a sentence may be the person, place, concept or thing. To construct accurate and comprehensible sentences in English, it is essential to understand the different types of subjects, how they are expressed, and how to identify them within sentences. Understanding the subject is crucial for constructing grammatically correct sentences and improving communication skills. Moreover, each type of subject plays a different role in sentence construction and meaning. Proper subject-verb agreement makes sentences clear and grammatically correct. Every language is composed of words, phrases and clauses that help in the construction of sentences. However, when you start learning a new language, the first thing you will be learning is that a sentence contains a subject and a predicate. In this article, you will be introduced to what a subject is, its meaning and definition, how it is used and the points to be remembered when constructing sentences along with examples to help you understand clearly.

An article by Kerry Maxwell and Lindsay Clandfield on the sometimes complex issue of teaching subjects and objects in English: 'There are some verbs in English which describe an action or event involving only one person or thing. This person or thing is referred to as the subject, e.g.

Jamie arrived early.

A dreadful thing happened yesterday.'

The Definition of Subject

A noun phrase functioning as one of the main components of a clause, being the element about which the rest of the clause is predicated. A subject is the noun, pronoun, or noun phrase that governs the verb in a sentence. It typically appears before the verb and determines the verb's agreement in number (singular or plural). In grammar, we employ the word 'subject' to talk about the noun, noun or noun phrase that does the action of verb. In English, the subject is usually before the verb. In addition, subjects can be classified into different types based on their structure and function.

1. Simple subject

The simple subject is the main noun or pronoun that the sentence is about, without any modifiers. The simplest English sentences have only a subject and a verb. For example:

- Selena cooked. (Subject-Selena, verb-cooked. 'Selena' is a proper noun. 'Selena' is also the subject of the sentence, because Selena is the person who did the verb.)
- Justin runs. (Subject-Justin, verb-runs. 'Justin' is also a proper noun, and is also the subject of the sentence, because Justin is the person who did the verb.)

Here are a few examples. The subject is often a pronoun.

- She loves reading. (The subject is 'She')
- They play football. (The subject is 'They')

2. Complete Subject

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The complete subject includes the simple subject along with all its modifiers (adjectives, articles, or descriptive phrases.). For instance:

- The little boy is playing outside. (The little boy is the complete subject.)
- My best friend lives in London. (My best friend is the complete subject.)

3. Compound subject

A compound subject consists of two or more nouns or pronouns joined by conjunctions like 'and' or 'or'. Example:

- Tom and Jerry are popular cartoon characters.
- Neither the teacher nor the students were in the classroom.

4. Implied subject

In imperative sentences (compound or requests), the subject is often not directly stated but is understood to be 'you'.

Example:

- (You) Close the door.
- (You) Please, sit down.

Subject-verb agreement

The subject must agree with the verb in number and person. This agreement is the grammatical rule that the subject and verb in a sentence should use the same number, person, and gender. With the exception of the verb be, in English subject-verb agreement is about matching the number. Subject-verb agreement is essential for grammatical correctness in English. There are some basic rules of subject-verb agreement.

1. Singular subjects take singular verbs.
 - The boy plays soccer.
2. Plural subjects take plural verbs.
 - The boys play soccer.
3. Compound subjects joined by 'and' take a plural verb.
 - John and Mary are studying.
4. Singular subjects joined by 'or' or 'nor' take a singular verb.
 - Neither John nor Mary is coming.
5. When a compound subject contains both a singular and a plural noun or pronoun joined by 'or' or 'nor', the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is nearer the verb.
 - Either the teacher or the students are responsible.
 - Either the students or the teacher is responsible.

In conclusion, the subject is a fundamental component of English grammar, serving as the main element that performs the action or is described in a sentence. Understanding its various types-such as simple, compound, complete, and implied subjects-enhances clarity and accuracy in communication. Additionally, mastering subject-verb agreement ensures grammatical correctness, as the verb must always match the subject in number and form. By applying these rules correctly, learners can construct well-formed sentences, improving both written and spoken English. A strong grasp of the subject's role in grammar is essential for effective communication and linguistic proficiency.

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