

# Language Awareness for Key Stage 3

## 13: Agreement and Finiteness

Key Terms	Optional Terms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement</li> <li>• Person</li> <li>• Number</li> <li>• Finite</li> <li>• Non-Finite</li> <li>• Infinitive</li> <li>• Gerund</li> <li>• Participle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conjugation</li> </ul>

- Introduction: Agreement and Finiteness
  - Today we will look at agreement between verbs and their subjects and objects
  - We will see how languages can use agreement to reduce the need for pronouns
  - We will also look at verb forms without agreement, which are non-finite
  - Non-finite forms include infinitives, gerunds and participles
- Agreement
  - You can see what agreement is by looking at sentences like these
    - John drives
    - Mary drives
    - John and Mary drive
  - In these sentences, the *-s* on the end of *drives* is an example of verbal agreement
  - In English, as in most Indo-European languages, verbs change form to agree with the subject in person and number
  - Most English verbs, such as *drive*, only have a few forms

Person	Present		Past	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1	I drive	We drive	I drove	We drove
2	You drive	You drive	You drove	You drove
3	He/she/it <b>drives</b>	They drive	He/she/it drove	They drove

- However, the verb *be* has more forms than most

Person	Present		Past	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1	I <b>am</b>	We <b>are</b>	I was	We <b>were</b>
2	You <b>are</b>	You <b>are</b>	You <b>were</b>	You <b>were</b>
3	He/she/it <b>is</b>	They <b>are</b>	He/she/it was	They <b>were</b>

- In some languages, such as Spanish, more forms of the verb are distinct

Person	Present		Past	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1	Yo conduzco	Nosotros conducimos	Yo conduje	Nosotros condujimos
2	Tú conduces	Vosotros conducís	Tû condujiste	Vosotros condujisteis
3	Él/ella conduce	Ellos/ellas conducieron	Él/ella condujo	Ellos/ellas condujeron

- The set of a verb's different forms is called its conjugation
- Because Spanish verbs have so many distinct forms, you don't actually need subject pronouns like *I* or *we* in Spanish
- To say 'I drive', you can simply say *Conduzco*.
- This isn't possible in English
- Even with a form like *am*, which always has the same subject (*I*), you need to put the subject in
  - ~~Am here~~
  - I am here
- There are some languages, such as Chinese, where verbs don't show any agreement at all
- In these languages, as in English, you need the subject to know who is performing an action
  - Wǒ kāichē  
'I drive'
  - Tā kāichē  
'He drives'
- This is a very important distinction among the languages of the world
- Languages can be divided into two groups according to whether they need to have **subjects** expressed or not
  - **I** drive (English)
  - **Wǒ** kāichē (Chinese)
  - **Je** conduis (French)
  - **Ich** fahre (German)
  - Conduzco (Spanish)
  - Hodēgō (Greek)
  - Guido (Italian)
  - Prowadzę (Polish)
- Even in languages like Spanish and Greek, there is a sense in which the subject is still there, even if we can't see it
- The subject is what determines the form of the verb
- The subject also determines the meaning
  - All of these sentences say something about a specific person
  - They can all be used to answer a question like *Who drives?*
- All sentences in all languages have a subject
- In some languages, the form of the verb depends not only on the subject but on the object
- Irish used to be like this, over a thousand years ago
  - Atamhí  
'You see me'
  - Atamchiat  
'They see me'
  - Atací  
'You see her'
  - Ataciat  
'They see her'

- However, Modern Irish doesn't do this anymore
  - Feiceann tú mé  
'You see me'
  - Feiceann siad mé  
'They see me'
  - Feiceann tú sí  
'You see her'
  - Feiceann siad sí  
'They see her'

**Activity 1:**

In groups, take some time to think of any other languages that you might know. What sort of agreement do these languages have? Do verbs change their form for subjects, objects, or neither? Do they agree with anything other than person and number (e.g. gender)?

Language	Agreement	Agrees with
<i>English</i>	<i>subject</i>	<i>person, number</i>

- Finiteness
  - Even in a language like English or Spanish, there are some verb forms that never agree with their **subject**

John wanted <b>me</b> to sing	I wanted <b>John</b> to sing
Mary let <b>me</b> sing	I let <b>Mary</b> sing
John left <b>me</b> fallen	I left <b>John</b> fallen
Mary heard <b>me</b> singing	I heard <b>Mary</b> singing
<b>My</b> singing annoyed John	<b>John's</b> singing annoyed me

- Forms that agree with the subject are called finite
- Forms that never agree with the subject are called non-finite
- Non-finite forms in English include:
  - Infinitives — (to) sing
  - Present and past participles — singing, sung/fallen
  - Gerunds — singing
- In English, gerunds and present participles look just the same
- However, a participle is a type of adjective, while a gerund is a type of noun
- Non-finite forms never change to show the person or number of subjects or objects
- They also have no tense or mood
  - I want to sing
  - ~~I wanted to sang~~
- However, they can have aspect
  - I want to be singing

- Note that the difference between ‘present’ and ‘past’ participles is not really tense, in the sense of telling you whether something is in the present or in the past
  - Yesterday I heard Mary singing
  - Tomorrow John will be gone
- Instead, what they express is relative location in time
  - Mary’s singing was at the same time as my hearing
  - John’s going is before some point in time tomorrow
- Phrases with non-finite verbs often correspond to whole sentences with finite verbs
- Using non-finite forms lets you embed one sentence in another
  - Mary went to the party → I wanted [Mary to go to the party]
  - John smokes → [John’s smoking] annoys me
  - This is the case → [This being the case], I left
- Infinitives in English are often marked with a separate word, *to*
  - I wanted to sing
- However, sometimes infinitives appear without the *to*
  - Mary let me sing
- In other languages, infinitives are often a single word, which may have a special marker such as a different ending
  - singen (German)
  - canere (Latin)
  - aeídein (Greek)
  - gaitum (Sanskrit)

**Activity 2:**

Infinitives in Portuguese have some unusual properties. In groups, take some time and have a look at the sentences below.

- Os homens olhavam sem perceber isso  
‘The men stared without realising it’
- Os homens olhavam sem perceberem isso  
‘The men stared without their realising it’
- Os homens olhavam sem percebermos isso  
‘The men stared without our realising it’

What do you think is going on here?

Notes

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- Conclusion
  - Today we have seen that finite verb forms agree with their subjects, and sometimes their objects
  - We have seen that in many languages, agreement lets you do without pronouns
  - We have looked at non-finite verb forms, such as infinitives, participles, and gerunds, which do not agree in this way
  - We have seen how non-finite forms give you a way of embedding one sentence inside another
  - The exact shape of non-finite forms can differ from one language to another