

Language Awareness for Key Stage 3

14: Agreement and Finiteness

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

- 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 drives	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 am	We are	I was	We were
2	You are	You are	You were	You were
3	He/she/it is	They are	He/she/it was	They were

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

John wanted me to sing	I wanted John to sing
Mary let me sing	I let Mary sing
John left me fallen	I left John fallen
Mary heard me singing	I heard Mary singing
My singing annoyed John	John's 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)
- 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