

CHAPTER - III

Subject – Verb Agreement

1. Grandmother *was* praying and telling her beads.
2. The sparrows *were* not chirping.

In 1 the verb is “was praying”. But in 2 the verb is “were ... chirping”. Why is it so ?

In an English sentence verb must agree with its subject in number and person. Its form depends on whether the subject is singular or plural in number. It also depends on whether the subject is the first, second or third person. Keeping the subject-verb agreement in view, we choose the correct verb form after the subject. Note the agreement between the subjects and verbs in the following sentences :

Subject	Verb	Parts of the predicate other than the verb
I	am	in the school hall. grass.
We / You / They / The students	are	
He / She / It / Gopal / Rani / The teacher	is	
The teacher and the students	are	
The cow	eats	
Cows, goats and sheep	eat	

If we change the sentences into the past tense, the verbs will be *was* (in place of *am* and *is*), *were* (in place of *are*) and *ate* (in place of *eats* and *eat*).

1. (a) Verbs used after an introductory *there* have to agree with the noun (the real subject) coming after them.

There is / was a book on the desk.

There are / were four books on the desk.

- (b) When *It* is used in the normal subject position to make a statement about time, distance or weather, the verb is always singular, i.e. *is* or *was*.

It is / was ten past twelve.

It is / was two miles to the beach.

It is / was raining heavily.

2. When a plural number applies to distance, time, weights, or amounts of money, and represents a single figure or quantity, it is treated as singular and it takes a singular verb;

Fifty kilometres is not a long distance in these days of rapid travel.

Sixty years is a long time.

Two kilos of tea costs six hundred rupees.

Five rupees is not a big sum.

3. (a) If two nouns joined by *and* are regarded as *a single object or notion*, the verb is singular; as,

Bread and butter *is* my favorite breakfast.

Truth and honesty *is* the best policy.

Curry and rice *was* his favourite food.

- (b) In other cases two singular or plural subjects joined by *and* make the total subject plural which takes a plural verb.

Gopal and his sister have come.

Two boys and three girls have written their essays.

4. (a) A collective noun in the singular may take the verb in the singular if the speaker thinks of the thing as a singular whole. If individual members of the collective noun are considered, the collective noun can take a plural verb. Mark the following sentences :

The jury (i.e. the members of the jury) were divided in their opinions.

The jury (i.e., as one body) has selected its chairman.

The committee was unanimous on this issue. (single unit)

The committee were divided on this issue. (Individual members)

(b) Some nouns like *police, people, poultry, cattle* etc. usually take plural verbs.

The police have not made any arrests.

The people of India are concerned about their spiritual welfare.

The poultry have been fed.

The cattle are grazing in the field.

5. The nouns *clothing, food, furniture, stationery, cutlery, crockery, jewellery* and *scenery* usually take singular verbs :

His *clothing* is very attractive.

Food is necessary for living.

The *furniture* needs to be repaired.

Stationery is sold in this shop.

Activity - 1

1. Choose the correct verbs given in brackets and rewrite the sentences :

(a) There (is / are) plenty of job opportunities for the people of this region.

(b) There (was / were) plenty of room for improvement in her work.

(c) Two plus two (is / are) four.

(d) Two twos (is / are) four.

(e) seventy kilometres (are / is) a long distance.

(f) Fish and chips (is / are) not so expensive as chicken curry and rice.

(g) A crowd (has / have) gathered in the street.

(h) The assembly (was / were) divided on this issue.

(i) The police (is / are) chasing the burglar.

(j) Her clothing (is / are) waterproof.

6. If a clause separates the subject from the verb, it is necessary to remember the actual subject-word, and to make the verb agree with it.

All the books which have been placed on that table are mine.

The radio which you gave my children works perfectly.

7. (a) If a subject begins with *either of*, *neither of*, or *none of* followed by a plural noun or pronoun, the verb is usually singular :

Either of the boys has got a prize.

Neither of them has come.

None of the students has arrived yet.

[Use of plural verbs in these cases is considered informal and such verbs are sometimes used in conversational English.]

- (b) *Each of*, *one of* etc. usually take singular verbs :

Each of the students was given a prize.

One of the girls was able to answer the question correctly.

- (c) If *no* or *some* is followed by a singular noun, it takes a singular verb. If it is followed by a plural noun, it takes a plural verb :

No child has done his homework.

No children have done their homework.

Some water is left in the pot.

Some girls have gone on a picnic.

- (d) When *and* connects two titles or designations of the same person, the verb is singular. If the persons referred to are different, the verb is plural.

The Vice-President of India and Chairman of Rajya Sabha has given his consent to the bill.

The Vice-President of India and the Chancellor of the University were invited to the convocation.

[To indicate that the persons talked about are two separate individuals, we use the definite article *the* before each person as in the second example above.]

- 8, If the subject begins with a fraction, the verb agrees with the noun that follows the fraction.

Two-thirds of the acid has evaporated.

Two-thirds of the apples are rotten.

9. (a) If the subject begins with *a good deal of*, *a great deal of*, *a lot of*, *plenty of*, *most of*, *some of* etc. the verb agrees with the noun that follows such phrases :

A lot of people were present at the meeting.

A lot of money was spent on buying clothes for the marriage ceremony.

Some of the students were intelligent.

Some of the music was excellent.

- (b) Phrases beginning with 'a congregation of', 'a crowd of', 'a flock of', 'a group of', 'a herd of', and 'a regiment of', usually take a singular verb in spite of the fact that the noun after 'of' is plural.

A crowd of people was shouting slogans.

A herd of elephants was seen in the jungle.

A group of smugglers was arrested yesterday.

- (c) *A number of* followed by a plural noun takes a plural verb. But *the number of* in a similar situation takes a singular verb as the real subject is *the number* :

A number of children are suffering from cold.

The number of the sick children is increasing.

10. Statistics, Mathematics, Physics, Economics, News, Measles, Mumps, Advice, Information, Jewellery, Scenery etc. are uncountable nouns. They take singular verbs :

Physics is my favourite subject.

Measles is an infectious disease.

The news was bad.

No information is available now.

Activity - 2

2. Fill in the blanks with appropriate auxiliary verbs.

- (a) Either of the boys _____ won a medal.
- (b) Neither of those officers _____ efficient.
- (c) One of his friends _____ able to speak English fluently.
- (d) Some honey _____ left in the pot.
- (e) The governor and chancellor of the university _____ been invited to this function.
- (f) Three-fourths of the crop _____ damaged by the flood.
- (g) A great deal of money _____ spent for his mother's treatment.
- (h) A whole regiment of volunteers _____ working here.
- (i) The number of scholarships _____ increased this year.
- (j) These days mumps _____ not at all difficult to cure.

11. If the subject of a sentence is a clause, the verb is singular :

That she is alive *is* good news.

What he does these days *does* not concern me.

12. (a) If two words are linked in the subject with the help of connectives like *with, as well as, in addition to, together with* etc., the verb agrees with the first word.

The teacher with all her students has come.

Rabi as well as his friends is responsible for the loss.

Population growth in addition to many other problems has badly affected India's growth.

This new fact together with the other pieces of evidence, proves the prisoner's innocence.

- (b) When the words in the subject are connected by “*not only ... but also*”, or, “*neither ...nor*” or “*either ... or*” and they differ in number and person, the verb agrees with the nearer subject.

Not only the boy but also his friends are equally guilty.

The boy or his friends have to repair the broken window.

Neither the old man nor his sons are prepared to sell their old house.

Either you or he has created this problem.

13. Some nouns are made up of two similar parts in a pair like scissors, trousers, spectacles (glasses), etc. These words are treated as plural subjects and they require plural verbs, but a pair of scissors, a pair of shoes, a pair of trousers etc, take a singular verb.

The scissors are old.

My trousers have been cleaned.

A pair of shoes was lying in the corner.

14. When an adjective is used as a noun representing a class, it takes a plural verb :

The rich have a lot of responsibility towards the poor.

The blind need escorts to cross a road.

15. When the plural noun is a proper name for some single object or for some collective unit, it requires a singular verb, as,

Gulliver’s Travels was written by Jonathan Swift.

The **United States** is a powerful country.

16. The verb in a relative clause is singular or plural depending on the number and person of the antecedent of the relative pronoun :

It is you who have wronged me.

It is he who has torn my book.

Activity - 3

3. Rewrite the sentences choosing the correct alternative given in brackets :

- (a) What he says about me (do / does) not affect me.
- (b) Ram as well as his friends (like / likes) to play football.
- (c) Neither rose nor jasmine (was / were) available in the market.
- (d) A pair of spectacles (were / was) lying on the bed.
- (e) The rich (lives / live) in affluence.
- (f) *The Canterbury Tales* (was / were) written by Chaucer.
- (g) Six weeks (are / is) a long vacation for students.
- (h) Your trousers (is / are) torn.
- (i) I am young and strong, (amn't / aren't) ?
- (j) It is you who (has / have) insulted me.

4. Choose the correct expression from the brackets and rewrite the sentences :

- (a) There (is / are) people waiting to see you.
- (b) Ours (is / are) a great nation, (isn't it / aren't they) ?
- (c) The police (has / have) a difficult job.
- (d) A lot of cattle (was / were) grazing in the field.
- (e) The youth (is / are) not so sincere.
- (f) The youth (was / were) more serious than his uncle.
- (g) Ill news (travel / travels) fast.
- (h) Mumps (is / are) very unpleasant.
- (i) Bacteria of the harmful kind (cause / causes) diseases.
- (j) There (is / are) a pair of spectacles on that shelf.

