

7. Expression of grammatical relations

Constituent order is the main formal indicator of grammatical relations. As discussed in section 4, English employs a strongly nominative/accusative system for organizing grammatical relations in that in pragmatically neutral clauses, both A and P precede the main verb, while P, if present, follows.

English is also a strongly "subject-oriented" language. This observation is supported by the following facts:

1. Practically all independent clauses must have an overt subject. Regular exceptions include imperatives (section 14) and "same-subject" coordinate clauses (section 16). Certain other exceptions occur in oral, informal speech.

2. Pragmatic notions such as "discourse topic" or "focus" are independent of the subject category. In other words, there is no person, animacy or topicality hierarchy which dictates which participant in a multi-participant clause must be expressed as the grammatical subject, though there are statistical tendencies.

In this section we will discuss two areas, in addition to constituent order, by which English organizes grammatical relations. These are 1) case marking of pronouns and 2) verb agreement.

7.1. Case marking - pronouns

Since word order is the primary means by which English distinguishes A and P, there is no case marking of full NPs in the A and P roles. However, there is a contrast between nominative (NOM) and non-nominative (NN) case in pronouns (in addition to the genitive sets discussed in section 3.3.2):

(64) a. **I** fell
1SG:NOM caer:PAS
'Me cayí.'

b. ***Me** fell
1SG:NN caer:PAS

(65) a. **I** saw **him**
1SG:NOM ver:PAS 3SG:M:NN
'Yo ví a él.'

b. **He** saw **me**.
3SG:M:NOM ver:PAS 1SG:NN
'El me vió.'

(66) a. ***Me** saw **he**.
1SG:NN ver:PAS 3SG:M:NOM

b. ***Him** saw **I**
3SG:M:NN ver:PAS 1SG:NOM

A chart of all the personal pronouns can be found in section 3.1.2.

7.2. Verb agreement

Though English is primarily an isolating language, there is a rudimentary system of non-anaphoric verb agreement. Regular verbs in the present tense with a third person singular subject take an inflectional suffix *-s*:

- (67) a. I walk.
1SG caminar
'Yo camino.'
- b. The creature walk-*s*.
DEF animal caminar-3SG
'El animal camina.'

The auxiliary verbs *can*, *may*, *will* and a few others do not take this *-s*:

- (68) a. I/He can swim.
1SG/3SG:M poder nadar
'Yo puedo/el puede nadar.'
- b. The creature may swim.
DEF animal quizás nadar
'El animal quizás nada.'

The verb *be*, 'ser/estar', has an irregular but richer agreement paradigm (see section 5 for a complete chart):

- (69) a. I am . . .
1SG ser:1SG
'Yo soy . . . '
- b. The creature is . . .
DEF animal ser:3SG
'El animal es . . . '
- b. You are . . .
2 ser:2
'Tu eres . . . ' / 'Uds. son . . . '
- d. We are . . .
1PL ser:PL
'Nosotros somos . . . '