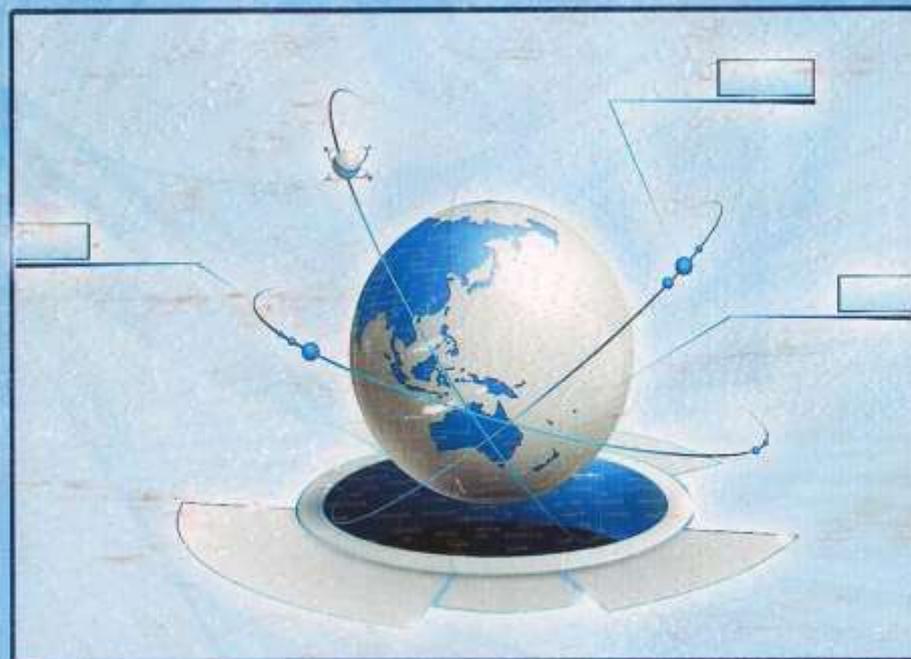


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SUBJECT IN CONTRASTIVE LINGUISTICS

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Classification of the subject There are some classifications given by different authors. For example, from the structural point of view and functional point of view

Classification of the subject from the structural point of view can be:

Simple, expressed by a word or a number of words in the nominal case, the combination of which represents one doer of the action.

No glass renders a man's form or likeness so true as his speech. (Ben Johnson, Timber). The proper force of words lies not in the words themselves, but in their application. (William Hazlitt, On Familiar Style). All things are admired either because they are new or because they are great. (Francis Bacon)

liven in his novels Hardy's pessimism is always a fighting pessimism (T.A.Jackson, Thomas Hardy).

What do you think the weather will be tomorrow?

Compound, expressed by two or more nouns that represent one and the same notion (or one and the same person). The great poet, essayist and philosopher died in 1882. (Emerson).

Coordinated or Homogeneous, that unites two or more different objects with the conjunction. Tom and Maggie are the principal characters in 'The Mill of the Floss'. (G. Elliot's novel).

Complex, expressed by a special construction, first of all, by a noun in the nominal case with an infinitive or with a participle:

He had been repotted to move house.

The rain could be heard rapping against the windows.

Double that is characteristic of the English folklore,

"Some suits, some suits," the sheriff he said, "Some suits I'll give to thee."

(Robin Hood Rescuing the Widow's Three Sons).

Classification of the Subject from functional point of view

The most typical semantic role of a subject is AGENTIVE; that is the animate being instigating or causing the happening denoted by the verb:

John opened the letter.

Apart from its agentive function, the subject frequently has an INSTRUMENTAL role; that is, it expresses the unwitting (generally inanimate) material cause of the event:

The avalanche destroyed several houses. With intransitive verbs, the subject also frequently has the AFFECTED role that is elsewhere typical of the object:

Jack fell down.

The pencil was lying on the table.

We may also extend this latter function to subjects of intensive verbs:

The pencil was on the table.

It is now possible to see a regular relation, in terms of clause function, between adjectives or intransitive verbs and the corresponding transitive verbs expressing CAUSATIVE meaning:

S affected Sagent/instr. Oaffected.

The door opened John/The key opened the door.

The flowers have died The frost has killed the flowers.

Saffected Sagent/instr Oaffected.

The road became narrower They narrowed the road.

I got angry His manner angered me Sagentive Sagentive Oaffected.

My dog was walking I was walking my dog

The subject may also have a recipient role with verbs such as have, own, possess, benefit (from), as is indicated by the following relation:

Mr. Smith has bought/given/sold his son a radio > So now his son has/owns/possesses the radio. The perceptual verbs see and hear also require a 'recipient' subject, in contrast to look at and listen to, which are agentive. The other perceptual verbs taste, smell, and feel have both an agentive meaning corresponding to look at and a recipient meaning corresponding to see:

Foolishly, he tasted the soup.

Foolishly, he tasted the pepper in the soup.

The adverb foolishly requires the agentive; hence, the second sentence, which can only be understood in a non-agentive manner, does not make sense.

Verbs indicating a mental state may also require a recipient subject:

I thought you were mistaken (cf It seemed to me...)

I liked the play (cf The play gave me pleasure)

Normally, recipient subjects go with stative verbs. Some of them (notably have and possess) have no passive form:

They have a beautiful house - A beautiful house is had by them

The subject may have the function of designating place or time:

This path is swarming with ants (= Ants are swarming all over this path).

The bus holds forty people (=Forty people can sit in the bus).

Unlike swarm, the verbs in such sentences do not normally admit the progressive (* The bus is holding...) or the passive (* Forty people are held .

Temporal subjects can usually be replaced by the empty it, the temporal expression becoming adjunct:

Tomorrow is my birthday (= It is my birthday tomorrow).

The winter of 1970 was exceptionally mild (= It was exceptionally mild in the winter of 1970).

Eventive subjects (with abstract noun heads designating arrangements and activities) differ from others in permitting intensive complementation with a time adverbial:

The concert is on Thursday (but * The concert hall is on Thursday).

Finally, a subject may lack semantic content altogether, and consist only of the meaningless 'prop' word it, used especially with climatic predications:

It's raining/snowing, etc. It's getting dark It's noisy in here.

Note: The 'prop' subject it as discussed here must be distinguished from the 'anticipatory' it of sentences like 'It was nice seeing you', where the 'prop' subject is a replacement for a postponed clausal subject (= Seeing you was nice).