

Subject-Verb Agreement

C'est moi qui l'ai fait !
It's me who did it!

LESSON

What is it?

In English as in French, verbs agree with the subject of the sentence in person and number. However, in this lesson we will look at some non-straightforward cases.

What is it like in English?

Two singular subjects linked by "neither... nor", "either... or" or "or" take a singular verb in English:

Her brother or her sister is going to arrive soon. → *Son frère ou sa sœur va/vont bientôt arriver.*

Whereas in English you require a singular verb, you can have either a singular or plural verb in French.

What is it like in French?

1. Verb agreement with several subjects connected by *et*:

a. 1st person pronouns (*moi/nous*) → *nous*:

Marise, Aïcha et moi faisons du sport ensemble. → Marise, Aïcha and I are exercising together.

Lui et nous sommes très différents. → He and us are very different.

b. 2nd person pronouns (*toi/vous*) → *vous*:

Vous et Marise faites du sport ensemble ? → Do you and Marise exercise together?

Toi et lui êtes très différents. → You and him are very different.

c. 3rd person pronouns (*il(s)/elle(s)*) → *ils/elles*:

Marise et Louise font du sport ensemble. → Marise and Louise are exercising together.

Elle et lui sont très différents. → Her and him are very different.

2. Verb agreement with relative pronoun *qui*:

The verb agrees with the subject which precedes *qui*:

C'est nous qui avons raison. → We are right.

C'est moi qui ai fait cette erreur. → I made this mistake.

Ce sont les décisions qui ont été approuvées. → These decisions have been approved.

3. Verb agreement with *ni... ni, soit... soit* and *ou*:

a. If both subjects are in the third person singular, the verb can be in the plural or singular depending on the emphasis given (exclusion, opposition, or togetherness).

Ni le président ni le Premier ministre ne sera/seront là.

→ Neither the President nor the Prime Minister will be attending.

La colère ou la culpabilité peut/peuvent mener à la dépression.

→ Anger or guilt can lead to depression.

Soit mon chef soit ma collègue vous répondra/répondront.

→ Either my boss or my colleague will reply to you.

- b.** If one of the subjects is in the singular and the other in the plural, the verb is in the plural.
Ni ses parents ni sa sœur n'étaient présents. → Neither her parents nor her sister were present.
Soit lui soit ses parents viendront. → Either him or his parents will come.

4. Verb agreement with collective nouns:

- a.** The verb is generally in the singular in French while it can be in the singular or plural in English depending on the writer's intent.
L'équipe est arrivée. → The team has/have arrived.
La foule crie. → The crowd is/are shouting.
Watch out! *Tout le monde* takes a singular verb:
Tout le monde est venu à mon anniversaire. → Everyone came to my birthday party.
- b.** When the collective noun has a plural complement or is followed by a plural noun, it can be in the plural or remain in the singular if the meaning emphasizes the individual over the group.
Un comité de chercheurs s'est / se sont réuni(s). → A research committee met.
- c.** However, if the collective noun is preceded by a definite article, a demonstrative or a possessive, the verb remains in the singular.
L'équipe des champions a descendu les Champs-Élysées.
 → The team of champions walked down the Champs-Élysées.
Son groupe d'étudiants a du succès.
 → Her group of students is/are successful.

EXERCISES

1 Find the correct match.

- | | | |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| a. Elle et moi... | • | |
| b. Ta mère et toi... | • | |
| c. Vos parents et vos beaux-parents... | • | • 1. ... feront du vélo ce samedi. |
| d. Karim et Anne-Julie... | • | |
| e. Vous et lui... | • | • 2. ... voyagerons en Australie. |
| f. Toi et moi... | • | |
| g. Le groupe A et le groupe B... | • | • 3. ... louerez un gîte. |
| h. Ton frère et ta sœur... | • | |
| i. Le chef de la publicité et moi... | • | |

2 Conjugate the verb in the correct form.

- a.** Hier, ta mère et moi [aller - passé composé] à la réunion des parents.
b. C'est toi qui [prendre - passé composé] mon téléphone ?
c. Toi et lui [être - indicatif présent] vraiment différents !
d. Ni vous ni eux ne [vouloir - indicatif présent] ce résultat.
e. C'est soit lui, soit vous qui [obtenir - futur simple] cette promotion.
f. Un jury de lecteurs [élire - passé composé] l'auteur de l'année.

- g. La bande des musiciens du lycée [commencer - passé composé] à jouer.
- h. Tout le monde [pouvoir - indicatif présent] participer à ce concours.
- i. Est-ce que c’est la ministre ou sa déléguée qui [venir - indicatif présent] nous rendre visite ?

3 Translate the following sentences into French.

- a. Her family are staying in Marrakech.
→
- b. The specialists’ committee met yesterday.
→
- c. Neither he nor me will come.
→
- d. A herd of sheep were running in all directions.
→
- e. A crowd of people were waiting for the train.
→
- f. My friend and I would like to thank you.
→
- g. It’s me who is on call tonight.
→
- h. Everybody can sing!
→
- i. Is it you or her who did this?
→

4 Free Writing: Write a short paragraph on the topic “le changement climatique” or any other topical issue close to your heart, starting with a situation analysis and making recommendations. Use the expressions : *ni... ni, soit... soit, ou, et*, etc.

Example: Où nous en sommes avec le changement climatique : *ni le gouvernement, ni l’industrie...*

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