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CONCORD BETWEEN SUBJECT AND VERBAL

1 Pets and fireworks

I (i) **am** glad that Taronga Zoo's and Sydney Wildlife animals (ii) **are** not affected by the firework displays on New Year's Eve. It's a pity our pets (iii) **do** not have the opportunity to get prepared for all the firework displays which (iv) **happen** all year round with no warnings. We (v) **know** to keep our pets in on New Year's and Queen's Birthday; as a wildlife carer with young animals in care, I (vi) **make** sure they (vii) **are** kept inside and in a darkened area so as not to get stressed, but I can't do much about fireworks that (viii) **go** off at private parties all year round. I would like to know who (ix) **gives** out permits for these private firework displays and why neighbours (x) **are** not given any warnings so as to prepare their pets.

- 2 Identify and correct any concord errors in the text below. Explain your corrections. (NB: not all the sentences contain errors!)

Everyone ~~know~~ **knows** that literary festivals are big business. The festival at Hay turns over £9m–£10m; Edinburgh ~~approach~~ **approaches** £2m; and, my favourite, Bath, £1.3m. But – and here's the catch – this quasi-literary bonanza ~~rely~~ **relies** on the goodwill of the authors who, in exchange for vital publicity, ~~appears~~ **appear** for nothing, as in “free” or “gratis”. Well, not quite. At Hay, the author ~~get~~ **gets** half a case of Spanish fizz and a red rose. It's hardly a living wage. Most people acknowledge that the creative artist must be

able to earn a living. But how on earth, in the age of “free content”, ~~are~~ *is* that “living” to be defined? Worse, where ~~are~~ *is* the money going to come from?

Explanation of corrections :

Everyone is an indefinite pronoun that counts as third person singular, so the verb should have the *s*-form.

Edinburgh is singular and third person.

This quasi-literary bonanza is singular and third person.

The subject of *appear* is *who*, a relative pronoun with a plural noun phrase, *the authors*, as antecedent.

The author is singular and third person.

The subject of the clause is that *living*, which is third person and singular.

Money is an uncountable noun that behaves as third person singular.

3 Explain the difference in form and meaning between the members of each pair.

a. 1 Gin and tonic is very expensive here.

2 Gin and tonic are very expensive here.

In sentence (a1) the verbal is realized by a singular verb phrase, so the subject is regarded as singular. This means that we are talking about *gin and tonic* as a drink. The verb gets the singular form because of notional concord. In sentence (a2) the verbal is realized by a plural verb phrase. This means that the two co-ordinated nouns in the subject noun phrase are seen as two entities, which means that *both* gin and tonic are expensive. That is, we are not talking about the drink, but its main ingredients.

b. 1 Entertaining people is more of a challenge.

2 Entertaining people are more of a challenge.

The visible difference between the sentences is the form of the verb, which is singular in sentence (b1) and plural in (b2). This means that the subjects must be interpreted differently. The singular form indicates that *entertaining people* in (b1) is a clause (equivalent to “to entertain people”), while in (b2), *entertaining people* refer to “people who are entertaining/funny”. The sentences can thus be paraphrased as *It is more of a challenge to entertain people* and *People who are funny represent a greater challenge*.

c. 1 The number of plants is growing fast.

2 A number of plants are growing fast.

The sentences differ as regards the definite vs. the indefinite article in the subject noun phrase and in the form of the verb. The singular form combined with the definite noun phrase in (c1) indicates that *The number* is what is growing fast, that is, we have more and more plants. In (c2), *a number of* means *many*. The plural form of the verb agrees with *plants*. So the sentence can be paraphrased as *Many plants are growing fast*.

d. 1 Their family are very musical.

2 Their family is very musical.

Family is a collective noun which can occur with either a singular or a plural verbal (especially in British English). When the plural form is used, as in (d1), the emphasis is on each individual family member; they are all musical. The singular form emphasizes the family as a whole without singling out any individual members. So the collective noun has distributive reading in (d1) and unit reading in (d2).

e. 1 All is quiet this morning.

2 All are quiet this morning.

The indefinite pronoun *all* can mean either *everything*, in which case it counts as third person singular, as in sentence (e1), or *everybody*, in which case it behaves as a plural subject, as in (e2). So the sentences mean, respectively, *Everything/Everybody is quiet*.

4 Read the following text and answer the questions below:

The ad that follows me

We all know *what's* at stake here. I'm not paranoid. A paranoid person *is* someone *who* *thinks* he's being followed. I KNOW I'm being followed.

The other day I visited a website to check out a piece of jewelry for my wife. I liked one particular product so I found my way to that link. But I wasn't really sure about it. So I didn't buy it. A couple of minutes later, I logged on to my Yahoo e-mail account. And there, on the right side of the screen, **was** a little advertisement for the product I had just visited. I am being followed by a piece of jewelry.

I'm told the company that **sells** the jewelry **doesn't** know my name. To them, I'm just a series of computer codes which **allow** a piece of software to follow me.

a. *That follows*: the *s*-form is used because the relative pronoun *that* has a singular antecedent. *What's*: *what* is a pronoun that behaves as third person singular. *Is*: the

subject is a *paranoid person*, which is singular. *Who thinks*: the relative pronoun *who* has a third person singular antecedent (*someone*).

- b. *Was* has been used because the head of the subject noun phrase (which comes after the verbal in this sentence) has singular form (*advertisement*).
- c. The plural verb forms *sell* and *don't* could have been used, at least in British English, because *company* can be a collective noun. If the plural form of the verbs had been used, this would have referred to the people who make up the company.
- d. The plural form *allow* has been used because the subject, *which*, is a relative pronoun with a plural noun phrase as its antecedent (*computer codes*).

5 Findings from the British National Corpus at <http://corpus.byu.edu/>:

- a. *Government is* is more common (1501 hits) than *government are* (444 hits). The two different verb forms can both be used because *government* is a collective noun. The use of a singular verb phrase gives the noun a unit reading, while the use of the plural gives it a distributive reading.
- b. There are 9 instances of *everybody have* in the corpus. In most cases *have* is the infinitive form, for example in *does everybody have...* In one case *have* is an imperative: *everybody (please) have a yawn*. This is probably also the case in *So everybody have document and hit shift F ten*.
- c. The search for *most of the * is* and *most of the * are* shows that the noun following *most of the* determines the form of the verb. *Most of the* + a singular noun combines with a singular verb phrase (e.g. *is*), and *most of the* + a plural noun combines with a plural verb phrase (e.g. *are*). An apparent exception seems to be *most of the time are*. But in each of these cases *most of the time* is an adverbial and not the subject of *are*. Another apparent exception is *most of the staff are*, but *staff* is a collective noun that tends to get distributive reading.
- d. The nouns occurring in the phrase *a million * is* are mostly units and measurements (*pounds, tonnes, ...*). The nouns occurring in the phrase *a million * are* have various references (e.g. *people, copies, children*). The “units and measurement” nouns thus indicate notional concord along the lines of *a sum of money, a distance...*, while *a million* in front of other types of plural nouns does not indicate any kind of unit reading.