

Explicit variable relations of the members of predicate groups (as exemplified by the either...or, neither...nor constructions in the modern English language)

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Abstract

This article studies the variability of the either...or/neither...nor syntactic structures, which manifest themselves in the alternative agreement of a predicate with homogeneous subjects connected with the either...or/neither...nor conjunctions. This research is topical since there are significant contradictions between normative grammatical rules and irregular usage. The article aims to define the extent of variation and influence of extratextual factors. One of the most important research results is determining the latest tendencies and preferences in the usage of the either...or/neither...nor syntactic structures in the modern English language.

Key words: agreement, variation, variability, syntactic variants, homogeneous subjects, the either...or.../neither...nor... conjunctions, usage, extratextual factors

1. Introduction

Although the problem of linguistic variation is among the best studied in modern linguistics, special functions of some syntactic variants due to the usage of any given modern language still have not been thoroughly analyzed. However, this information is vital for developing the system of syntactic variants of a particular language, defining the principles of their functioning, standard setting, elaborating practical matters, as well as teaching the English language.

The above-mentioned facts prove the applicability of this research. The article mostly **aims to** define the influence of extratextual factors on the special usage of syntactic variants for the agreement of a predicate with homogeneous subjects with the help of the *either...or/neither...nor* constructions and determine basic tendencies of their development in the English-speaking (British and American) linguoculture.

In order to achieve the above-referenced objective we have solved the following **tasks**:

- to study the agreement of a predicate with homogeneous subjects connected with the help of the *either...or/neither...nor* constructions;
- to define factors modifying a predicate;
- to determine the grammatical and stylistic aspects of these modifying factors;
- to define system properties for choosing a predicate form;
- to study the connection between grammatical and semantic characteristics of the members of predicate groups and the integrative process of this correlation rooting into the system of the English language;
- to define the influence extent of extratextual factors with regard to the psychological, physiological and social status of respondents;
- to analyze preferences in choosing a predicate form by speakers of the British and American variants of the English language;
- to consider syntactic variants of the agreement of a predicate with homogeneous subjects through the *either...or/neither...nor* constructions with regard to a gender-based factor.

2. Methods

2.1. Theoretical background

The research is based on the complex system of methods, including qualitative analysis, supervision, description, classification, generalization of the phenomena under survey, semantic, quantitative, lexical and structural analysis, component, distributive and functional analysis, as well as field observation and experimentation (polling and questionnaire) with a later linguistic interpretation of the resulting data.

According to a grammatical rule in the modern English language, the verb-predicate within the *either...or/neither...nor* construction agrees with the nearest subject in number and person: *Neither my father nor my friends are ready. Neither my friends nor my father is ready* (Weichman, 2002; Wilson, 1993; Oxford School Dictionary, 2005; Straus, 2006; Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1992; Wordsmith Dictionary).

However, the research has shown that this rule can be broken due to irregular usage. This fact causes a lot of problems for both non-native speakers studying English as a foreign language and native speakers.

Many famous dictionaries make this problem even worse since their entries on the *either... or/neither... nor* conjunctions do not provide any additional comments: *Neither Sue nor Colin were clever* (WordReference Forums; Dictionary.com; Fowler, 2009), *Neither his son nor his daughter were at the funeral* (Hewings, 2003), *Neither my father nor I were by nature inclined to faith in the unintelligible* (Longman Exams Dictionary, 2006; Macmillan English Dictionary, 2002; Oxford School Dictionary, 2005).

The agreement of a predicate with subjects expressed by two or more nouns (pronouns) also becomes quite challenging: *Neither John, nor Lisa, nor Mary is/are coming with us*. Some grammar handbooks and dictionaries say this construction should not be used because the *neither...nor* conjunction means "none, not a single," the same goes for the *either...or* conjunction with the meaning of "any, each" (Swan, 2001; Longman Word Wise Dictionary, 2001; Macmillan English Dictionary, 2002; The Times Guide to English Style and Usage; Wordsmith Dictionary).

Other dictionaries and grammar handbooks recommend avoiding the *either...or/neither...nor* construction for a subject so that there will be no tension between communicators (Wilson, 1993; Longman Exams Dictionary, 2006).

2.2. Variation extent

The connection between a predicate and a subject in the English language is characterized by certain limitations due to the vague material expression of a person category and a predicate number. The variation assuming formal modifications of the grammatical models under survey is possible if the person category and the verb-predicate number are directly expressed (Pereverzeva, 2004).

The relevant material expression of a predicate number and person makes it possible to reduce the so-called "marked" subject groups to the following three examples when the final component of the group is expressed by a singular noun (pronoun): a) 1, 2 components – subjects in the singular number $S_{\text{sing}}S_{\text{sing}}$; b) 1 component – a subject in the plural number, 2 component – a subject in the singular number $S_{\text{pl}}S_{\text{sing}}$; c) 1, 2 (and more) components – subjects in the singular or plural number, the final component is a subject in the plural number $nS_{\text{pl}}(S_{\text{sing}})S_{\text{pl}}$ (with n denoting the number of components).

While taking into consideration internal conditions and analyzing the speech material, we have learnt that the usage of number and person categories can vary within the grammatical model under survey:

1) a simple predicate expressed by a finite verb in the active voice in *Present Indefinite, Present Continuous, Past Continuous, Present Perfect, Present Perfect Continuous*;

2) a simple predicate expressed by a verb in the passive voice in *Present Indefinite, Present Continuous, Present Perfect, Past Indefinite, Past Continuous*;

3) a compound nominal predicate expressed by the verb "to be" in *Present Indefinite, Past Indefinite* or any other verb serving as a linking verb (for example, *to appear, to keep, to look, to become, to grow, to get, to turn, to remain*) in *Present Indefinite* together with a nominal part;

4) different types of compound verbal predicates, for instance, a compound verbal predicate expressed by the combination of the verb "to be" in *Present Indefinite, Past Indefinite* or the verb "to have" in *Present Indefinite* and an infinitive; a compound verbal predicate expressed by the combination of the verb "to be" in *Present Indefinite, Past Indefinite* and an adjective (adverb) and an infinitive; a compound verbal predicate expressed by the combination of the verbs "to be able", "to be unable", "to be allowed", "to be willing", "to be going", "to be capable" in *Present Indefinite, Past Indefinite* and an infinitive (or a gerund); a compound verbal predicate expressed by the combination of the verbs "to say", "to think", "to state", "to report", "to announce", "to believe", "to expect", "to know", "to consider" in the passive voice *Present Indefinite, Past Indefinite* and an infinitive; a compound verbal predicate expressed by the combination of the verbs "to seem", "to want", "to wish", "to desire", "to like", "to hate", "to plan", "to begin", "to start", "to continue", "to fall" in *Present Indefinite* and an infinitive (or a gerund) (Smirnitsky, 1957).

The factors determining the choice of a predicate number (person) include the following noun-related characteristics: meaning, collectiveness, singularity – plurality, animateness – inanimateness, countability – uncountability, abstractness – concreteness, commonness – properness (Pereverzeva, 2004).

3. Results

The research has shown that semantic and grammatical features are not the factors that strictly determine the choice of a predicate form. They only outline the leading tendency in using predicates either in the singular or plural number. In colloquial speech, a plural predicate can be justified by the appropriate intonation. For instance, if the subject that is the closest to a predicate is followed by a long pause and the first component within the group of homogeneous subjects is expressed by a noun (pronoun) in plural, the predicate can be used in plural: *I think, the question is to make sure that people's lives are protected, – either their human rights, or their personal safety, are protected...* (American National Corpus). Plural predicates are often found in the sentences with both subjects placed into a single rhythm group: *They say that neither they nor their president, Dr. Barnard (ph), were ever censured by the AMA* (American National Corpus).

While studying the stylistic aspect of variation, we realized that the choice of a singular predicate for homogeneous subjects connected with the *either...or/neither...nor* construction amounts to 77% in the scientific style of the modern British English. The HSP_{sing} (homogenous subject predicate) model can be quite often and unsystematically found in the belles-lettres (65%) and journalistic style (69%). The conversational style is clearly opposed to the scientific style with regard to the frequency of the singular number (56% against 77%).

The use of the singular number amounts to 73%, and the frequency of the plural number is estimated to be 27% in the scientific style of the American English language. The corresponding rates for the use of the singular number stand for 53% and 54% in the belles-lettres and journalistic style. The conversational style of American English shows the highest degree of variability (the HSP_{sing} model is used

4% more often than the HSP_{pl} model). Thus, a singular predicate is preferably used with homogeneous subjects in the examples we have analyzed (Morozova, 2011a).

Considering the data gathered during the research, we have concluded that the scientific style of both British English and American English demonstrates the greatest stability in relation to the grammatical norm. The changing frequency of the HSP_{sing} model in the scientific style amounts to 95% – 77% in British English and 90% – 73% in American English. The highest frequency of this model in the scientific style can be explained by its functions and distinctive features. The features of the scientific style that define its syntax include the tendency to a formal agreement, accurate, concise expression of one's thought.

The HSP_{pl} model is less frequently seen in the journalistic style that is characterized by simple syntactic constructions and focus on readers (since its main functions are to inform and convince readers). The average frequency of the agreement in the singular number amounts to 72% in British English and 67% in American English.

If compared to the scientific style, the belles-lettres style characterized by imagery and strong stylistics tends to the meaning-based agreement. The research results have shown that the belles-lettres style uses a wide variety of syntactic models. The frequency of the HSP_{sing} model in the belles-lettres style amounts to 70% in British English and 63% in American English (Ivanova et al., 1981).

4. Discussion

4.1. Structural and grammatical factors of variability

Although there are certain grammatical rules, the agreement of a predicate and homogeneous subjects connected with the *either...or/neither...nor* conjunction does not imply exact grammatical parallelism (Troitsky, 1993).

The choice of a plural form to agree on a predicate with a group of subjects expressed by animate nouns is explained by the fact that these nouns can indicate more than one doer. The meaning of a plural predicate can characterize the doers' actions as a collective. The examples like *Neither the poster nor thee-mailer **have stepped forward to reveal** their identities, which is too bad because maybe they deserve each other* (American National Corpus) show that a plural predicate is justified by the semantics of the whole sentence, and cannot be considered as an irregularity.

As we have realized, the contingency of homogeneous subjects expressed by animate nouns and a predicate occurs in the sentences with a common verbal predicate expressed by a finite verb form. We have not proved that the voice of a verb-predicate has any influence on the choice of a number form.

If the predicative part of a nominal or compound verbal predicate is expressed by a mental verb or a verb of sensory perception, i.e., a verb-predicate does not express any action directly, it usually takes a singular form. For example *Others believe that you are Jewish if either your mother or father **is** Jewish, or you convert according to the Progressive tradition* (British National Corpus).

A singular predicate is often used when subjects are expressed by inanimate nouns: *It seems that neither temple nor town **was fortified**...* (British National Corpus).

If the choice of a plural predicate cannot be justified by the semantics of a sentence or some of its members, these examples are deemed to be irregularities: *Neither online storage nor encryption **are** foolproof, for instance* (British National Corpus).

Homogeneous subjects expressed by animate/inanimate nouns and connected with the *either...or/neither...nor* conjunction can influence the choice of a predicate more or less depending on the noun category: common or proper. If subjects

are expressed by words with individual lexical meaning, for example, proper nouns, the use of a plural predicate becomes not only frequent but also obligatory. *And neither McCain nor Obama promise a big tax windfall directly for her or her husband, Ty dePass, who's currently earning little as a freelance writer* (American National Corpus). The subjects expressed by common nouns are usually used with a singular predicate: *Neither nationality nor skin color makes a difference* (American National Corpus).

The choice of a singular or plural predicate can also be determined by subjects expressed by a concrete or abstract noun. The agreement between a plural predicate and a group of subjects expressed by concrete nouns is realized due to the fact that these nouns denote a doer or someone possessing a specific trait, and perfectly correspond with reality, i.e., they can be counted.

Homogeneous subjects expressed by abstract nouns are often used with a singular predicate: *...neither affluence nor femininity offers a defense against the toxicity of tobacco* (American National Corpus). These components of subject groups give a name to some fragments of our reality but do not denote their quantity; it means that a predicate also cannot be used in a plural form because such a characteristics in a given sentence is quite relative.

4.2. Influence of the number category of a noun on the choice of an agreement model

The use of a plural predicate with homogeneous subjects expressed by countable nouns can be justified by the semantics (stylistics) of a given sentence. If subjects are expressed by uncountable nouns or nouns which have only a singular form (*Singularia tantum*), a predicate is preferably used in the singular (Morozova, 2011a): *...but neither their bravery nor their fatalism has changed* (British National Corpus).

The research has proved that the number category of a noun (pronoun) that serves as a subject in a given sentence plays a key role in choosing the number form of a predicate. The noun with a clearly expressed plural form is characterized by certain semantic features that can influence the choice of a plural predicate, that is, it correlates with reality and denotes several specific objects: *Neither the investigators nor the patient, know if they're receiving it or not* (American National Corpus). In British English and its written form, in particular, the number of a predicate mainly agrees with the closest subject: *Neither the Sentencing Guideline Council's definitive guidelines ... nor attempted murder was directly analogous* (British National Corpus).

If subjects are expressed by both a plural noun and uncountable noun, a predicate agrees with a countable noun: *Neither the bags nor the merchandises he purchased were found at the couple's apartment* (American National Corpus).

4.3. Semantic and grammatical features of the agreement

The use of a plural predicate can be explained by specific relations among the members of a sentence and some irregularity in the agreement between a predicate and homogeneous subjects expressed by at least one collective noun. If some subject within a homogeneous group is expressed by a collective noun, a predicate is often used in a plural form regardless of the noun position. If a group of subjects is represented by a combination of a plural noun (pronoun) and a collective noun, a predicate is also used in a plural form.

The number of a predicate depends on the semantics of subjects. From a semantic perspective, collective nouns enable the meaning-based agreement. Since a collective noun in the singular can express a plurality, a plural predicate is able to realize a qualitative aspect of a predicative feature that is typical of any component within the above-mentioned plurality (expressed by collective nouns) and the second component within the *either...or/neither...nor* construction. This phenomenon applies

only to subjects expressed by animate nouns: *Shuttle commander Mark Polansky said neither he nor his crew were letting their guard down, despite the simple tasks...* (American National Corpus). The number of components expressed by nouns within the group of homogeneous subjects increases if this group includes a plural noun and a collective noun. In this case, the semantic and logical aspects prescribe to use a plural predicate: *I'm rather disappointed that neither the Conservatives nor the Labour Party are prepared to support a reasonable plan...* (British National Corpus).

In some cases, the meaning-based agreement is accompanied by form-related agreement: *Neither Current TV nor its team has commented* (British National Corpus).

4.4. Special aspects of the agreement between a predicate and homogeneous subjects partially expressed by nouns

The use of a plural predicate is also possible in another semantic-grammatical group. It applies to the agreement between a predicate and homogeneous subjects that include indefinite pronouns (*some, someone, somebody, any, anyone, anybody*): ... *and neither they nor anybody else have come close to recreating the cell from scratch* (American National Corpus), when objects are characterized through some objects belonging to a particular category. A plural predicate updates the semantic combination of equal communicative components and marks a joint action. The use of plural forms, which are more typical of the conversational style, does not exclude the use of singular forms in the following sentences we analyze: *Neither he nor anyone else knows who you are* (British National Corpus). An indefinite pronoun as the second component of a group of subjects denotes its lesser communicative significance and determines the use of a singular predicate. Thus, a singular predicate does not directly contradict the form of the nearest subject or the conjunction of equitable components.

The distributive relations between homogeneous subjects in the *either...or* construction with the nearest subject expressed by an indefinite pronoun determine the use of a singular predicate. Take a look at this sentence: *Whether the light cannon and the light cutters came from Fordall or Faitel, then their presence, and that of the rifles suggests that either the High Alector of Engineering or someone high in engineering was involved* (British National Corpus). There is only one subject, but a speaker has troubles marking it and uses several subjects at once, with each of them roughly determining the desired object. In this case, a predicate is always used in a singular form.

Plural forms of a predicate are fixed when it agrees with subjects expressed by a combination of a singular or plural noun (pronoun) and the third person singular pronoun. The lack of grammatical agreement in the examples under survey shows that a predicate agrees with a subject in accordance with the inner meaning, but not formal characteristics.

The lack of grammatical agreement can be seen in constructions with homogeneous subjects and a compound nominal predicate, with its nominal part expressed by a noun: *Though neither Shelley nor she are pagans, that's certain!* (American National Corpus). This type of sentence expresses a logical statement. Homogeneous subjects expressed by pronouns (or nouns denoting animate objects) correspond with real objects, and a predicate expresses their belonging to a particular class. Since a class is denoted by the plural form of *pagans*, the form of a predicate with its nominal part expressed by such a noun does not contradict this noun.

When a predicate agrees with homogeneous subjects expressed by the combination of a singular and plural noun and the first person singular pronoun (*I*), there is formal leveling of other options. For instance, if a predicate agreed with the nearest subject is simple and expressed by a verb in *Present Indefinite*, *Present*

Perfect, Present Perfect Continuous: Neither my husband nor I like rock music, Neither my brother nor I have got a proper education or a compound nominal with any linking verb except for "to be": *Neither she nor I look ill*, or a compound verbal: *Neither he nor I want to help you*. This tendency also applies to components without a morphological marker of the number. It is impossible to determine the grammatical number of a predicate in these examples.

4.5. The highest variability

The highest variability is seen in the agreement between a group of the subjects under survey and a simple predicate expressed by a finite verb form in the active voice in *Present Continuous, Past Continuous: Neither my husband nor I am/are talking about this now*; a simple predicate expressed by a verb in the passive voice in *Present Indefinite, Present Continuous, Past Indefinite, Past Continuous: Either she or I was/were suited to this role*; a compound nominal predicate expressed by the verb "to be" in *Present Indefinite, Past Indefinite* accompanied by a nominal part: *Neither they nor I was/were present on Sunday*; a compound verbal predicate expressed by the verb "to be" in *Present Indefinite, Past Indefinite* accompanied by an infinitive, adjective (adverb): *Neither Freddy nor I was/were to be seen anywhere, I doubt that either he or I was/were happy to see the exposé*; a compound verbal predicate expressed by the verbs "to be able", "to be unable", "to be allowed", "to be willing", "to be going", "to be capable" in *Present Indefinite, Past Indefinite* accompanied by an infinitive (or a gerund): *Neither Watney nor I am/are able to get on the score sheet*. This tendency is connected not only with the type of a predicate, but also with the pronoun "I" inserted into the group of subjects and its position in a sentence (Morozova, 2011b).

When a plural predicate is used in a sentence, none of the subjects can be agreed with it on its own. For example: *Neither the baby nor I were in great danger ...* (British National Corpus). *Neither Dianne nor I are advocating trying to pass this legislation right now...* (American National Corpus). *...and with a bit more marital togetherness than either my wife or I were fully comfortable with* (American National Corpus). This fact shows that homogeneous members accompanied by the *neither ...nor* conjunction are closely connected. In this case, a predicate characterizes an action as a joint effort and state as some feature typical of all the objects.

The grammatical number of the predicate is deduced from the number of the closest subject in the following sentence: *... neither you nor I am happy* (British National Corpus). This agreement model is seldom used and is considered to be weird by some native speakers.

Sometimes it is impossible to speak about various agreement models in accordance with the grammatical number. The grammatical number of the predicate corresponds with the number of each subject but technically agrees with the nearest one: *...but neither my father nor I am willing to explain any of it to Yasser, not at that point* (American National Corpus). In our opinion, the use of a singular predicate aims to characterize an action as equal for each separate doer, and the choice of the "am" form is merely conventional.

The agreement between a predicate and multicomponent homogeneous subjects gives preference to a plural form: *... neither Andrew Flintoff, nor Sir Alex Ferguson, nor Dame Kelly Holmes are setting the pace* (American National Corpus). The structural factor, i.e., the number of subjects, can influence the choice of a predicate, but its influence is limited. Grammatical and semantic features, as well as relations between members of a predicative group, still play a bigger role in choosing the number of a predicate.

4.6. Experimental data

4.6.1. Experiment methods

Taking into consideration that the agreement between a predicate and a subject can be stylistically justified, we have analyzed the variation of syntactic structures with *either...or/neither...nor* in different texts and examined declarative sentences which belong to the scientific, belles-lettres, journalistic and conversational style (Morozova, 2011a).

In this article, we describe the agreement models for a predicate and a group of homogeneous subjects with the *either...or/neither...nor* construction as follows HSP_{sing} and HSP_{pl} , with HS denoting a group of homogeneous subjects with $S_{sing}S_{sing}$; $S_{pl}S_{sing}$; $nS_{sing}(S_{pl}) S_{sing}$. It is supposed that the choice between two form of predicates P_{sing} and P_{pl} depends on the agreement model: $P_{sing} \leftarrow$ the agreement with the last component of HS groups, $P_{pl} \leftarrow$, the agreement with all the components of a group.

In order to determine the relevance of a stylistic factor and choose the number of a predicate in the structures of modern English, we have studied the frequency of the HSP_{sing} and HSP_{pl} agreement models in the scientific, belles-lettres, journalistic and conversational style. The modern conversational style was of particular interest for our research. While examining various agreement models, we have also tried to take into account the form of speech (Dubovsky, 2011).

Structural and semantic features of speech on the syntactic level represent one of the areas where extratextual factors become quite significant. In order to learn what subject-predicate agreement models with the *either...or/neither...nor* conjunction are frequently used by modern English speakers, we have conducted a special study, which is based on complex experimental methods and aims to reveal the dependence of norm-related syntactical options from national, territorial, age, gender and professional characteristics of speakers.

Our respondents were native speakers of British and American English, whose total number amounted to 94 people, with 44 British speakers (24 men and 20 women) and 50 American speakers (24 men and 26 women).

The experiment was carried out in different age groups: young – 20-35 years, middle-age – 35-50 years, senior – 50 years and older.

Taking into consideration a social and professional status of respondents, we have divided them into the following three groups: 1) people with a received or future degree in the humanities; 2) people with a received or future degree in applied science and technology; 3) people with a general certificate of secondary education without a degree.

The experimental methods included two stages combining the written and oral questionnaires.

4.6.2. Experiment results

The data we gathered have confirmed our hypothesis that the distribution of syntactic options among naive native English speakers depends on the national, territorial, age, gender and professional characteristics of these speakers. In most cases, social and physiological differences correspond with quantitative differences in the distribution of variants. Thus, different characteristics (age, occupation, gender, national and territorial characteristics of the respondents) are not equally responsible for this distribution.

The quantitative distribution of syntactic variants depends on the social and professional status of the respondents, and this kind of distribution is among the most obvious ones. The HSP_{pl} model is the most recurrent type of agreement among native speakers with secondary education and no degree, the minimum use of this model is recorded from the respondents with a degree in the humanities. These results can be explained by the fact that language skills of people working in production, trade,

service sector are more influenced by forms of spoken language; groups with a higher verbal culture tend to follow traditional grammar rules.

The preferences of agreement models of humanitarian respondents have quite a contrast nature. The prevailing use of singular forms in the agreement of a predicate in the *either...or/neither...nor* construction is typical of people with a degree in the humanities since their communicative skills have established linguistic features. However, the experiment results have showed that people with a degree in the humanities differ from all other professional groups, and in some cases, these differences occur inconsistently.

The speech behavior of people educated in the sphere of the humanities is characterized by two opposite tendencies: to preserve traditional agreement models and to use different agreement models in the structures under consideration.

In general, the socio-professional conditionality of syntactic preferences of our experimental groups is rather insignificant. The data gained from the experiment indicate that socially related language differences in the modern society are not so significant and tend to decrease further. This process is connected with social processes: vertical mobility, social mixing, and access to education.

The experiment data we have gathered show that of the recurrence of the HSP_{pl} model partially depends on the age factor. The frequency of a plural predicate in the combination with homogeneous subjects connected with the *either...or / neither...nor* conjunction increases from seniors to youngsters. The lowest rate is recorded in the senior group of British English speakers (15%), while the highest index can be seen in the young group of American English speakers (50%).

This tendency can be explained by the fact that seniors are more conservative in choosing language means, and their communicative skills are mostly influenced by established grammatical rules. As our research has shown, this group of respondents is highly dissatisfied with grammatical variants. Their main argument is to preserve traditional grammar. Youngsters who are mostly represented by students are also influenced by the written language, but they mostly use a plural predicate in the structures we analyze since the syntactic norm has become more flexible. This fact can also be explained by weak knowledge of English syntactic means and low language competence of the young generation.

The qualitative distribution of syntactic variants mostly depends on national and territorial differences of speakers. The maximum recurrence of the HSP_{pl} model is recorded for British English speakers – 45%, with a minimum rate of 15%. American English speakers belonging to the young group have chosen a plural predicate in 50% of the sentences we gave them; the minimum rate for this group is 20%.

This situation is explained by the fact that the language preferences of British speakers are more traditional and conservative. American English is much more prone to innovation and variation due to external factors.

Although modern grammar rules are unified and obligatory for all the native English speakers, British and American English speakers follow them in different ways. In general, this tendency does not contradict the literary English language. The compatibility of extratextual variants cannot be called into question; it is connected with the dynamic character of existing norms and evolutionary processes in the modern literary language.

Since it is quite difficult to determine gender-based factors for choosing a predicate form to be used with homogeneous subjects, we have tried to highlight basic preferences in the usage of our respondents.

When comparing female and male speech, we have found some gender-based differences and realized that female speech is more harmonious. Women tend to choose the singular number to agree on a predicate with homogeneous subjects, i.e., they avoid any syntactic conflicts. Furthermore, women like to express their thoughts in codified forms.

Male speech is characterized by a meaning-based agreement. Men are more impulsive and straightforward in choosing expressive means, and they tend to break grammatical rules in order to succeed in communication and reach a pragmatic goal. Men are more likely to use new words, structures, and variants. This fact explains why the men participating in our experiment have given preferences to a plural predicate.

5. Conclusion

The results achieved during this research enable us to draw some conclusions, reveal leading tendencies in the modern usage of the syntactic variants under survey and pinpoint directions the English language is moving regarding the HSP agreement models.

Thus, the syntactic variation of these structures is possible only in certain conditions; the variation degree grows higher when the language system imposes limitations. The syntactic variants under survey form a variation pair for a certain type, voice, and tense of a verb-predicate and several variation pairs for the whole grammatical category of a verb-predicate. These variation pairs are inner-paradigmatical, but they are only partially and asymmetrically represented in the grammatical category of a verb-predicate due to the specific features which create the syntactic variability we study, i.e., residual and abridged person and number forms that do not form any system.

Although there are certain grammar rules in English to agree on a predicate with the nearest homogeneous subject within the *either...or/neither...nor* construction, which are supported by most English linguists, these norms are quite far from the language used in reality. The recurrence of agreement models is so high that they can be even included in the modern usage.

The system of the English language has its preconditions for developing and using various agreement models. When a predicate agrees with members within the *either...or/neither...nor* conjunction, the variation is possible due to a different interpretation of their relations where the above-mentioned conjunctions are semantic actualisators of coordinating constructions.

Considering linguistic significance, i.e., the number of relevant social features and their influence, we should mention that agreement model for a predicate and homogeneous subjects within the *either...or/neither...nor* do not belong to automated communicative skills. The existing syntactic variation results from contradictions between real forms and grammatical traditions.

The influence of semantic and grammatical factor on the choice of predicate forms is determined from a stylistic point of view and implies the use of several agreement models. The degree of freedom in choosing an alternate predicate form increases as follows: scientific < journalistic < belles-lettres < conversational styles. An additional factor in choosing a plural predicate for homogeneous subjects within the *either...or/neither...nor* construction is the form of communication. The maximum degree of freedom in choosing an alternate predicate form is recorded in the oral conversational style.

Extratextual factors determine the special functions of variants. Social and professional features have the greatest power and the widest range: the distribution of syntactic variants is mostly determined by social and professional differences of native English speakers. National, territorial and age differences come in second, while gender-based differences come in third.

This syntactic phenomenon has no established territorial borders; they are vague and indistinct. The system of syntactic agreement models for homogeneous subjects within the *either...or/neither...nor* conjunction in the modern English

language is characterized by minor local and national differences. In general, we have recorded the leading tendency to use a plural predicate in American English.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned tendencies, we can refer to the grammatical democratization of the usage of the *either...or/neither...nor* constructions. The tendency to use plural predicates is clearly manifested in contexts with the highest variability, i.e., where the language system enables several factors giving a right to choose. There is a good reason to believe that the usage of this structure will continue its current developing and the agreement models with plural predicates will spread. Moreover, the *neither...nor* constructions will be used more frequently as their logical and semantic relations differ from those of the *either...or* constructions.

However, this research is quite limited, and we cannot set exact variation borders of this phenomenon. This fact proves the need for further studies in this sphere. We still have not agreed on the norm status of these variants, which is of great importance for those who study and teach English as a foreign language.

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