

“Why is I treated as a plural subject?”

<https://www.quora.com/Why-is-I-treated-as-plural-subject>

What a question?! Let me quickly correct your grammar so that your request can make sense to you too. “Why am I treated as a plural subject?”

Listen, verbs have a ‘number’, ‘tense’, and ‘person’.

When we talk about singular and plural, we are talking about what grammarians call number, but the assumption that “go” is a plural form is not entirely correct. In addition to the number, verb forms can also encode **tense** and **person**.

English has different types of pronouns.

To summarise, the first-person singular pronouns are the forms of “I,” including “me,” “my,” “mine,” and “myself.”

First-person plural pronouns are forms of “we.”

Second-person pronouns are the forms of “you.” In present-day English, we don’t distinguish between singular and plural for second-person pronouns, except for the singular form “yourself” and plural “yourselves.” “You” can refer to one person (“you get the passenger seat”) or many people (“would you please form a line in front of the counter?”).

Third-person singular pronouns are the forms of “he,” “she,” and “it.”

Third-person plural pronouns are the forms of “they.”

How can one verb tell us all these formats?

Now let’s look at the verb “go” and how it can give information about all three of these configurations: number, tense, and person. In the form “goes,” the “-s” ending tells us not only that it’s in the present tense, but also that its subject is third person singular: “he,” or “she,” or maybe “Squiggly.” So the answer to why the singular verb “goes” doesn’t agree with the singular subject “I” is that “goes” is also the third person, while “I” is the first person. They don’t match.

Syncretism gives us the “Everything Else” verb tense.

If “goes” is the third-person singular present tense form, then what form is just “go”? The short answer is that it’s the “everything else” forms for the present tense. Traditional grammar books will often list this same form five times, for first- and second-person singular, and for first-, second-, and third-person plural. However, from a learning perspective, it’s easier just to think of “go” as a form that can take on whatever combination of person and number you need in the present tense, *other than* third-person singular.

The technical term for this kind of situation, in which one-word form can fill more than one function, is **syncretism** and English has a lot of it. In fact, we’ve already run across another example of it, with the second-person pronouns, where “you” can be either singular or plural.

In older stages of English, there were different pronouns for second-person singular and plural. The second-person singular pronouns were forms of “thou,” and “you” was used for the plural. But these days, “thou” isn’t used in everyday English, and instead, “you” serves as both a singular and a plural second-person pronoun.

More syncretism: “You” Can be the subject or the object

In fact, “you” is even more syncretic than that, because it can act as either a subject or an object. For comparison, the first-person singular pronoun is “I” as a subject, and “me” as an object. Likewise, the first-person plural pronoun is “we” as a subject, and “us” as an object.

Okay, I suppose you are now even more confused. At least you know that to ‘plural’ the ‘I’ is not incorrect.