

NOMINATIVE SENTENCES IN MODERN ENGLISH: DEFINITION, PREDICATIVITY AND COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS

Muzaffar Maxmudov

Scientific Supervisor, Senior teacher, Department of Foreign Language and Literature, University of Tashkent for Applied Sciences

Ulug'bekov Akmalbek

Student of group XT2201K01, Department of Foreign Language and Literature, University of Tashkent for Applied Sciences

Ithomova Sanobar

Student of group XT2201K01, Department of Foreign Language and Literature, University of Tashkent for Applied Sciences

Abstract. This article examines nominative sentences as independent one-member syntactic units in modern English. The paper discusses their grammatical status, communicative functions and the problem of predicativity in verbless constructions. Special attention is paid to the distinction between nominative sentences and elliptical structures, since nominative sentences are not incomplete variants of two-member sentences but self-sufficient units of communication. The article also analyzes the role of context, intonation and punctuation in creating predicative meaning. It is argued that nominative sentences are communicatively effective because they provide linguistic economy, sensory immediacy and strong emotional emphasis in literary, journalistic, conversational and advertising discourse.

Keywords: nominative sentence, one-member sentence, verbless sentence, predicativity, nominal construction, communicative function, intonation, context, English syntax, linguistic economy.

Introduction

The analysis of sentence form holds significant importance in contemporary English philology. Traditional grammar often prioritizes the two-part phrase including a subject and a predicate. Nonetheless, authentic language usage illustrates that communication extends beyond entire subject-predicate constructions. In literary works, headlines, ads, stage directions, and colloquial discourse, speakers frequently employ concise noun forms that convey a full thought without a finite verb.

The concept of nominative sentences in modern English is intricately linked to their structural, predicative, and communicative functions. According to recent analyses, a nominative sentence primarily serves a predicative function, acting as a minimal syntactic unit used in acts of speech communication [5]. This aligns with the understanding that such sentences are characterized by their predicativity, which is essential for conveying propositional content effectively [1]. Structurally, nominative sentences are often examined in relation to predicative constructions, which can be viewed as a type of sentence that encapsulates a predicative relationship, similar to subclause structures [2]. The structure and types of these constructions are crucial for understanding their communicative roles, as they facilitate the expression of states, actions, or qualities through the use of copulative verbs and other predicative elements [6]. For instance, the use of copulative verbs in English exemplifies how predicative functions are realized within nominative sentences, emphasizing their role in linking subjects with predicates that describe or identify them [6].

The nominative case itself, as discussed in the context of ergative and nominative distinctions, underpins the grammatical foundation of these sentences, ensuring that the subject remains the core element of predicative structures [3]. This nominative function is not only grammatical but also communicative, as it helps to establish the subject's role within the sentence, thereby facilitating clear and effective communication [4]. Furthermore, the communicative functions of nominative sentences extend beyond mere grammatical correctness. They serve as units of information that can be analyzed in terms of their pragmatic and semantic aspects, contributing to the overall informativeness and clarity of discourse [5]. The distinction between lexical and non-lexical prepositions, for example, highlights how nominative structures can vary in their referential and predicative character, affecting their communicative efficacy [9].

In addition, the analysis of complex sentence types, such as relative clauses and that-clauses, demonstrates how nominative sentences can fulfill various communicative functions, including providing additional information or clarifying propositional content [7][8]. These structures exemplify the versatility of nominative sentences in fulfilling different communicative roles within modern English. In summary, nominative sentences in modern English are defined by their predicative nature, structural features, and their vital role in communication. They function as minimal syntactic units that convey propositional content, with their grammatical form supporting their diverse communicative purposes [1][5][6]. Understanding these aspects is essential for a comprehensive grasp of how nominative sentences operate within the broader framework of English syntax and discourse. These constructs are typically referred to as nominative sentences. They are particularly significant as they demonstrate that a sentence cannot be solely characterized by the existence of a verbal predicate. A sentence is fundamentally a communication unit, and its completion relies on grammatical structure, content, context, and intonation. Nominative sentences provide a considerable challenge for English syntax and discourse analysis. This article aims to define the nominative sentence, elucidate its grammatical and communicative characteristics, and evaluate the expression of predicativity in verbless formulations. The significance of the issue pertains to the prevalent utilization of nominative sentences in contemporary English and their capacity to generate expressive, succinct, and emotionally impactful statements.

Literature review

Nominative sentences in modern English can be understood through the lens of thethetic and categorial distinction, which was revisited by Sasse in 1987. This distinction highlights that categorial sentences contain a predication base about which some state of affairs is predicated, while thetic sentences are simple non-predicative assertions of states of affairs [10]. In this context, nominative sentences serve as a fundamental syntactic structure that marks the subject of a verb, aligning with the broader understanding of the nominative case in languages like Latin and Greek, where it indicates the subject of a transitive verb or the voluntary subject of an intransitive verb. Predicativity is a crucial aspect of understanding nominative sentences. According to Sasse, the difference in predicativity between thetic and categorial sentences is reflected in their syntactic behavior, discourse functions, and semantic domains [10]. In nominative sentences, the subject is often linked to a predicate that provides information about the subject, thus fulfilling a communicative function. This relationship is essential for establishing clarity in communication, as it allows speakers to convey specific meanings and intentions. The communicative functions of nominative sentences can be categorized into various roles that nouns fulfill in utterances. Jacob

(2003) suggests that the subject/nominative case serves a discourse function, acting as the topic of a sentence [12]. This aligns with the findings of Chen (1996), who identified that language functions, including expressive and referential roles, are integral to understanding how speakers use language to achieve their communicative intents [11]. Moreover, the communicative functions of nominative sentences extend to their use in different contexts, such as in the discourse of modern newspaper texts, where foreign words and terms are employed for various functions, including nominative and communicative purposes [13]. This highlights the dynamic nature of language and the importance of context in determining how nominative sentences are constructed and understood.

Materials and methods

The article is based on descriptive, analytical and comparative methods. The descriptive method is used to explain the structure and functions of nominative sentences. The analytical method helps to examine their semantic and communicative potential. The comparative approach is applied in order to distinguish nominative sentences from elliptical and two-member sentences. Theoretical views of English grammarians, including B.A. Ilyish and L.S. Barkhudarov, are also considered in relation to the problem of predicativity in one-member sentences.

A nominative sentence is a type of simple one-member sentence in which the principal part is expressed by a noun, a noun phrase or a noun-equivalent. The main member of such a sentence names an object, phenomenon, time, place or situation and at the same time presents it as existing in reality. For example, the sentence "Midnight." does not merely name a period of time; it also communicates the idea that it is midnight at the moment of speech or narration.

Results

It is important to distinguish nominative sentences from elliptical sentences. An elliptical sentence is usually a shortened form of a two-member sentence in which one of the elements is omitted but can easily be restored from the context. A nominative sentence, by contrast, is not a "broken" or incomplete sentence. It functions as an independent communicative unit and does not require a verb in order to be understood as complete.

The grammatical essence of nominative sentences lies in their one-member structure. The principal member combines two functions: naming and asserting existence. In this sense, the noun phrase receives a special syntactic status. It is no longer only a naming unit; it becomes a sentence that expresses a complete thought. This feature makes nominative sentences different from ordinary isolated words or dictionary entries.

The Problem of predicativity in verbless sentences

Predicativity is one of the central categories of the sentence. It connects the content of an utterance with reality and usually includes such meanings as time, modality and reference to the speech situation. In ordinary two-member sentences, predicativity is expressed through the finite verb. For instance, in the sentence "The sun is rising," the verb indicates tense, reality and grammatical agreement.

In nominative sentences, however, there is no finite verb. This creates a theoretical problem: how can a verbless construction be considered a complete sentence? The answer lies in the difference between morphological and semantic predicativity. Morphological predicativity is explicit and is expressed by verbal forms. Semantic predicativity is implicit and is created by the whole sentence, the communicative situation and the speaker's intention.

In a nominative sentence such as “Sunrise.” the categories of time and reality are not expressed morphologically, but they are understood from the context. The listener or reader interprets the utterance as referring to a real situation. Thus, predicativity is not the property of the verb alone; it is the property of the sentence as a whole. This idea is especially important for the analysis of one-member sentences.

Some linguists explain nominative sentences through the theory of the “zero copula” or “hidden predicate.” According to this view, a sentence such as “Night.” may be understood as the shortened form of “It is night.” However, this explanation is not always sufficient. If nominative sentences are treated only as reduced two-member sentences, their special expressive and communicative value is underestimated. A more convincing interpretation is that the noun itself carries the predicative load and functions as the center of the utterance.

The role of context, intonation and punctuation

Context plays an essential role in the interpretation of nominative sentences. Since there is no verb to show tense directly, the temporal meaning of a nominative sentence is usually determined by the surrounding text or by the speech situation. In a literary passage such as “He opened the door. Darkness. Dust. Silence.” the nominative sentences receive their temporal orientation from the preceding verbal sentence. The reader understands that darkness, dust and silence belong to the scene described in the past.

In oral speech, intonation performs an important grammatical and communicative function. A falling tone may turn a noun into a statement of fact: “Rain.” A rising tone may turn the same word into a question: “Rain?” A strong exclamatory tone may express surprise, irritation or joy: “Rain!” Thus, intonation can serve as a functional equivalent of grammatical predication.

In written discourse, punctuation partly replaces intonation. A full stop, question mark or exclamation mark signals the communicative status of the construction. The punctuation mark informs the reader that the nominal unit should be interpreted not as a fragment but as a complete sentence. Therefore, punctuation is not only a mechanical writing convention; in nominative sentences it becomes an important structural and semantic marker.

Communicative functions of nominative sentences

From a communicative point of view, nominative sentences perform several important functions in English discourse. Their first and most basic function is existential. They name an object, phenomenon or situation and assert its presence. This function is common in descriptions of settings, stage directions and introductory passages of literary texts: “A cold morning. Snow. Silence.” Such sentences help the reader immediately imagine the scene.

The second function is communicative economy. Modern communication often requires brevity and concentration of meaning. Nominative sentences allow the speaker or writer to express much information in a very compact form. This feature explains their frequent use in newspaper headlines, advertising slogans and digital communication. For example, the headline “New Crisis in Europe” is shorter and more dynamic than a full verbal sentence.

The third function is sensory immediacy. Because nominative sentences do not describe an action developing in time, they create a static and vivid image. They work like verbal photographs. A sequence of nominative sentences can produce a cinematic effect, focusing the reader’s attention on separate details of a scene: “A narrow street. Empty windows. A distant voice.”

The fourth function is emotional and evaluative emphasis. By isolating a single noun or noun phrase, the speaker directs attention to the emotional weight of the word. Utterances such as "Success!", "Disaster!" or "A miracle!" are short, but they carry strong expressive meaning. This makes nominative sentences especially useful in literary style, public speech and everyday emotional communication.

Finally, nominative sentences may perform a text-forming function. They can organize descriptive passages, create rhythm and intensify the expressive structure of the text. In fiction, such sentences often slow down narration and invite the reader to focus on atmosphere, objects and psychological impressions rather than on actions.

Discussion

The analysis shows that nominative sentences should not be evaluated according to the standards of ordinary two-member sentences only. If they are judged merely by the absence of a verb, they appear incomplete. However, from the communicative point of view, they are complete and effective. Their completeness is achieved through context, intonation, punctuation and semantic density.

Nominative sentences also demonstrate the flexibility of English syntax. They prove that the sentence is not only a grammatical structure but also a unit of communication. In actual speech and writing, speakers choose nominative constructions when they need to present an image directly, emphasize a concept or create emotional tension. Therefore, nominative sentences have both grammatical and stylistic significance.

The use of nominative sentences is particularly effective in literary discourse. Writers employ them to create atmosphere, describe scenery, show psychological states and increase the expressiveness of narration. In journalism and advertising, they serve the purpose of brevity and impact. In oral speech, they help speakers react quickly to situations and express immediate perception or emotion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, nominative sentences are independent one-member syntactic units that play an important role in modern English. Their main structural feature is the absence of a finite verb, but this absence does not make them incomplete. On the contrary, nominative sentences possess a specific form of implicit predicativity that is realized through the noun phrase, context, intonation and punctuation.

The communicative value of nominative sentences lies in their ability to name, assert and evoke reality in a concise form. They provide linguistic economy, create vivid images, express emotional evaluation and contribute to the stylistic organization of discourse. For this reason, nominative sentences should be regarded not as marginal fragments, but as a meaningful and functional type of English sentence.

Further study of nominative sentences may focus on their use in literary texts, newspaper headlines, advertisements and spoken communication. Such research can deepen our understanding of English sentence structure and the relationship between grammar, meaning and communicative intention.

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