

The Noun: Case

Read the following sentence:

John broke the window.

The boy killed the spider.

In sentence 1, the noun John is the subject. It is the answer to the question 'Who broke the window?' 'The group of words 'broke the window' is the predicate. The predicate contains the verb broke.

What did John break? – the window. Window is the object which John broke. The noun window is therefore called the object.

In sentence 2, the noun boy is the subject. It is the answer to the question 'Who killed the spider'. The noun spider is the object. It is the answer to the question 'Whom/what did the boy kill?'

When a noun or pronoun is used as the subject of the verb it is said to be in the nominative case. When a noun or pronoun is used as the object of the verb, it is said to be in the nominative or accusative case.

Note that to find the nominative, put who? or what? before the verb.

To find the accusative, put whom? or what? before the verb and its subject.

A noun or pronoun which comes after a preposition is also said to be in the objective case.

The cat is on the roof.

Here the noun roof is in the accusative, governed by the preposition on.

Examine the following sentences.

John killed the spider.

The spider was killed by John.

You will have noticed that nouns in English have the same form for the nominative and the accusative. The nominative generally comes before the verb and the accusative generally comes after the verb.

Now read the following sentence:

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This is John's car.

John's car means the car belonging to John

Here the form of the noun John is changed to John's to show ownership or possession. The noun John's is therefore said to be in the possessive or genitive case.