University Students' Errors in Using Subject Verb Agreement in Writing

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Abstract

This research deals with the English Language students' errors while using subject-verb agreement. The   research is carried out to suggest some solutions to the problems that students of second year at the college of Education face in using subject-verb agreement. This research aims at finding out the errors committed by the learners in subject- verb agreement as well as analyzing these errors, and finding out the sources of those errors and taking pedagogical precautions towards them. In addition, the research aims at suggesting some solutions to overcome such problems. The data collected for this research from the answers to the test items answered by students by means of a test consists of three different parts. It contains twenty- one items and each part is composed of various items. The sample for the presents study is the second level students of B. Ed, Dept of English, Faculty of Education, Hajjah University and they were selected randomly, disregarding gender, rank and background of English. The results of this study showed that the learners mostly commit errors because of the intra-lingual errors. They sometimes commit errors because of the overgeneralization, faulty or limited experience. Sometimes they are caused by the interference of the learners ' mother tongue. To overcome those problems of committing errors the rules should be supported with   more examples. English teachers should focus on the different types of the subject, including subjects with conjunctions .The rules of subject –verb agreement should be practiced by the learners intensively by means of using different activities such as group work, pair work, role-play, self-study and practice   .

Abstract

This research deals with the English Language students' errors while using subject-verb agreement. The research is carried out to suggest some solutions to the problems that students of second year at the college of Education face in using subject-verb agreement. This research aims at finding out the errors committed by the learners in subject- verb agreement as well as analyzing these errors, and finding out the sources of those errors and taking pedagogical precautions towards them. In addition, the research aims at suggesting some solutions to overcome such problems. The data collected for this research from the answers to the test items answered by students by means of a test consists of three different parts. It contains twenty- one items and each part is composed of various items. The sample for the presents study is the second level students of B. Ed, Dept of English, Faculty of Education, Hajjah University and they were selected randomly, disregarding gender, rank and background of English. The results of this study showed that the learners mostly commit errors because of the intra-lingual errors. They sometimes commit errors because of the overgeneralization, faulty or limited experience. Sometimes they are caused by the interference of the learners ' mother tongue. To overcome those problems of committing errors the rules should be supported with more examples. English teachers should focus on the different types of the subject, including subjects with conjunctions .The rules of subject –verb agreement should be practiced by the learners intensively by means of using different activities such as group work, pair work, role-play, self-study and practice .

1 -Background of the Study

1.1 Introduction

For many years, there have been many studies in the process of the first language acquisition and second language learning. Findings about first language acquisition have been adapted to foreign language learning and it has been concluded that process works in a similar way. That children's learning their native mother tongues make plenty of mistakes is a natural part of language acquisition process. They lack great deal of information about subject-verb agreement. As they got feedback from adults, they learn how to produce grammatically and semantically acceptable sentences in their native language. What a foreign language learner does in operating on the target language is not different from that of a child acquiring his first language.

It is inevitable that all learners make mistakes and commit errors. They use subjects and verbs incorrectly. However, the process can be impeded through realizing the errors and operating on them according to the feedbacks given. The steps that learners follow get the researcher and language teachers realized that if the mistakes and errors of language learners in construction the new language system are analyzed carefully .the process of language acquisition shall be understood. The analysis of errors in subject-verb agreement thus has become a field of linguistics in that sense. The field of language

teaching benefit from the findings of linguistics in many cases including error analysis and subject-verb agreement. As indicated above, what a linguist looking for in understanding the language learning process contribute a lot to the questions of language teachers. Many teachers complain that their students are unable to use the linguistic forms that they are taught. Lengo (1995) states, "this

situation is due to the teachers false impression that output should be an authentic representation of input " the believe ignores the function of intake that the knowledge of language the students internalized . Intake may be different from the teachers' syllabus being subject to be internalized .

Error analysis enables teachers to find out the sources of errors and take pedagogical precautions towards them. Thus, the analysis of learner language has become an essential need to overcome some questions and propose solutions regarding different aspects.

This study focuses on the error analysis in subject-verb agreement and its contribution to English language teaching at both linguistic and methodological levels .

1.2 Background of the problem

Subject –verb agreement is an important topic in English language learning/ teaching process. Until late sixties, the prominent theory regarding the issue of second language was behavioristic – which suggested that learning was largely a question of acquiring a set of new language habits. Therefore, errors in subject-verb agreement were considered as being the result of the persistence of the existence of mother tongue habits in the new language. Consequently, this idea made the researchers of applied linguistics devote their studies largely to the comparison of the native and the target languages in order to make predictions and explanations about errors. However, errors that were not explained in this way were underestimated. As a result, all errors what ever there origins were dealt with same technique of further drilling and exercise .

1.3 Aims of the study

The present research is carried out to suggest some solutions to the problems that students of second year at the college of Education, face in subject-verb agreement. This research aims at:

☐   Finding out the errors committed by the learners in subject- verb agreement.

☐   Analyzing such errors, and finding out the sources of those errors and taking pedagogical precautions towards them.

☐   Suggesting some solutions to overcome such problems .

1.4 The Scope of the study

The present study focuses on subject-verb agreement in English Language. It will study and analyze the errors committed by level two students of English Department, Hajjah University in subject verb agreement; it will also suggest some solutions and suggestions to overcome this problem .

1.5 .The Significance of the study

The present study is conducted taking into consideration the problems of second year English students with subject-verb agreement. The main purpose of the study is to help those students to develop their competence in English and choose suitable verb with each subject. What intensifies the need for such a study is that they are going to be teachers of English at schools, so they are supposed to get rid of subject verb agreement errors. The present study will also help to improve the learning / teaching process at the department of English as well as the schools of this area .

2-Related Studies

2-1 Review of Literature

Error Analysis, offered as an alternative to contrastive analysis, has its value in the classroom research. Whereas contrastive analysis, which may be least predictive at the syntactic level and at early stages of language learning (Brown. Igga: zia)   allows for prediction of the difficulties involved in acquiring a second language (Richards 1974 :172; error analysis emphasizing " the significance of error in learners' inter-language system" (Brown 1994:204)may be carried out directly for pedagogic purposes (Ellis 1995:51 and Richards Etal .1993:127.)

The investigation of error can be at the same time diagnostic and prognostic. It is diagnostic because it can tell us the learners' state of language (Coder ,1967) at a given point during the learning process , and prognostic because it can tell course organizers to reorient language learning materials on the basis of the learners' current problems .

        The term inter-language introduced by Selinker is conceptualized as " a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target language (Brown 1994:203).Nemser (1974 :55) referred to it as the approximate system , and Coder (1994:160-162) presented the notion of the diagnostic dialect.

Brown (1994) and Ellis (1995) gave a detailed account of and exemplified   model for error analysis offered by Coder (19979), Ellis (1997) and Hubbards(1996:135-191),on the other hand ,gave practical advice and provided clear examples of how to identify and analyze learners' error

2.2 STEPS OF ERROR ANALYSIS

The initial step requires the selection of a corpus of language followed by the identification of errors by making a distinction between an error and mistake (i.e. caused by lake of attention, carelessness or some aspects of performance

The errors are, then classified as overt and covert errors (Brown 1994:208).The next step of giving a grammatical analysis of each error, demands an explanation of different types of errors that correspond to different processes .

Selinker (1974:35) reported five such processes central of second language learning:" language transfer, transfer of training strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication, and over generalization TL (target language) linguistic material." In literature , the studies related to the process of language transfer , and over generalization have received considerable attention .For instance , Swan and Smith (1995: ix) gave detailed account of errors made by speakers of nineteen different LI backgrounds in relation to their native languages and on their associated difficulties.

Work on over- generalization errors , on the other hand , viewed as excessive application of the generalization strategies with L2 by a learner in producing his / her language , is reported by Richards (1974) , Tain (1974) and Taylor (1975) .

2.3 Error Identification

At the preliminary stage, written samples from literature were utilized to become familiar with the process of analyzing the errors through the available suggestions (Willis 1997: 74, Ellis 1997-b:16 ; and Hubbards etal1996 : 135- 141), followed by focusing on the written sample of this study. In order to make sure that the sample contained mainly errors, each student was asked to review correct error and subsequently have his/her written work checked by a partner. The sentences were then examined to see whether they were overtly and / or covertly idiosyncratic, the former being identified by comparing the students sentences with those of the reconstructed target –language ones .

2.4 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE FIELD OF ERROR ANALYSIS

Until late sixties, the prominent theory regarding the issue of second language learning was behaviorism. Therefore, errors were considered as being the result of persistence of existing mother tongue habits in the new language. Consequently, this idea made the researchers of applied linguistics devote their studies largely to the comparison of the native and the target languages in order to make prediction and explanations about errors. However, errors that were not explained in this way were underestimated. As a result , all errors whatever their origins were deal with the same technique of further drilling and exercise.

Error analysis is a branch of applied linguistics emerged in the sixties to demonstrate that leaner errors were not only because of the learners native language, but also they

reflected some universal learning strategies., As a reaction to contrastive analysis theory , which considered language transfer as the basic process of second language learning as what behaviouristic theory suggested .Error analysis , on the other hand ,deals with the learners' performance in terms of the cognitive process they make use of in recognizing or coding the input they receive from the target language . Therefore, a primary focus of error analysis is on evidence that learners errors provide with an understanding of the underlining process of second language acquisition. At this point , Keshavarz (1997) suggests that the field of error analysis can be divided into two branches : (i)theoretical ,and (ii)applied .

Theoretical analysis of errors, as mentioned before, primarily concerns with the process and strategies of language learning and its similarities with first language acquisition. On the other hands, it tries to investigate what is going on the minds of language learners. Secondly, it tries to decode the strategies of learners such as overgeneralization and simplification, and thirdly, to go to conclusion that regards the universals of language learning process there is internal syllabus for learning a second language. Applied error analysis, on the other hands, concerns organizing remedial courses, and devising appropriate materials and teaching strategies based on findings of theoretical analysis.

2.5 THE DIFFERNCES BETWEEN ERROR AND MISTAKE

The distinction between an error and a mistake is necessary to go over the definition of the two different phenomena. According to Applied Linguistics and dictionary of language teaching (1992) a learner makes a mistake when writing or speaking because of lack of attention ,fatigue ,carelessness ,or some other aspects of performance . Mistakes can be self-corrected when linguistic item in away that a fluent or native speaker of the language regards it as showing faulty or incomplete learning. In other words, it occurs because the learner does not know what is correct, and thus it can not be self- corrected.

To distinguish between an error and a mistake, Ellis (1997) suggests two ways. The first one is to check the consistency of learner's performance. If he some times uses the correct form and some times the wrong one, it is a mistake. However, if he always uses it incorrectly, it is then an error. The second one is to ask the learner to try to correct his own deviant utterance.

2.6 Theoretical Background Error Analysis

Analyzing error made by language learners systematically, make it possible to determine areas that need reinforcement in teaching (Coder. 1974) .Error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors that learners made. The consist of a comparison between the error made in the target language (TL) and that TL itself .Pit Coder is the "father "of error analysis (The EA with the new look) . It was with his

article entitled "The significance of learner's errors."(1961) that EA took a new turn .Errors used to be "flaws" that needed to be eradicated .Coder presented a completely different point of view. He contended that those errors are important in and of themselves."errors are indispensable ; since the making of errors can be regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn .In 1994, Gass & seliker defined the errors as "red flags" that provided evidence of the learner's knowledge of the second language . researchers are interested in errors because they are believed to contain valuable information on   the strategies that people use to acquire a language) Richards, 1974; Tylor , 1975 ; Oulay and Burt,1974). Moreover ,according to Richards and Sampson (1974, p 15), " At the level of the pragmatic classroom experience errors analysis will continue to provide one means by which the teacher assesses learning and teaching and determined priorities for future effect. " According to Coder(1974), error analysis has two objects . One theoretical and another applied. The theoretical object service to know what and how a learner learns when he studies a second language.

2.7 Source of Errors

As there are many descriptions for different kinds of errors, it is inevitable to move further and ask for the source of errors. It has been indicated in the first part of the study that errors were assumed as being the only result of interference of the first language habits to the learning of the second language. However, with the field of error analysis, it has been understood that the nature of errors implicated the existence of other reasons for error to occur. .Then the source of errors can be categorized within two domains: (i) inter-lingual transfer, and (ii) intra-lingual transfer .

2.8Inter-lingual Transfer

Inter-lingual transfer   is a significant source for language learners. Dictionary of language teaching and Applied linguistic (1992) defines inter-lingual errors as being the result of language transfer , which is caused by the learners first language . However, this should not be confused with the behaviourstic approach of language transfer . Errors analysis does not regard them as the persistence of old habits, but rather as signs that the learner is internalizing and investigating the system of the new language.

Inter-lingual errors may occur at different levels such as transfer of phonological , morphological , grammatical lexica- semantic elements of the native language into the target language.

2.9Error Correction and Error Analysis

At the beginning of the study , the question "Why students make mistakes or commit errors?" was held.

Now, some other questions rise : How should teachers correct students ? What kind of feedback should they give? Does each error need to treated ? Error analysis has an

important role in finding the answers to these questions . In general the teachers' job is to point out when something has gone wrong and see whether the student can correct him self , then ,to find out if what the student says or writes is just a mistake , or it is global or local .However, the technique of correction is not simply presenting the data repeatedly and going through the same set pf drills and simply exercises to produce the state of 0ver learning , on the contrary , it requires that the teacher understands the source of errors so that he can provide appropriate remedy , which will resolve the learners problems and allow him to discover the relevant roles . thus , the source of the error is an important clue for the teacher to decode on the sort of treatment .Harmer(1998) suggests three steps to be followed by the teacher when errors occur. The teacher listens to the students   then identifies the problem and puts it right in the most efficient way .Coder(1973) sates that knowledge of being wrong is only a starting point .Skill in correction seems to be lie in determining the necessary data to present to the learner and what statements descriptive or comparative to make about it .Since no teacher has time to deal with all the errors of the students , a hierarchy should be established for the correction of the errors according to nature and significance of errors in such a hierarchy.

2.10 Intra-lingual Transfer and Developmental Errors

Interferences from the students own language is not the only reason for committing errors. As Ellis (1997) states , some errors seem to be universal , reflecting learners ,attempts to make the task of learning and using the target language simpler use of past tense " suffix – ed " for all verbs is an example of simplification and overgeneralization .These errors are common in the speech of second language learners , irrespective of their mother tongue.

Intra-lingual errors result from faulty or partial learning of the target language rather than language transfer. They may be caused by the influence of one target language item upon another; for example, learners attempt to use two tense markers at the same time in one sentence because they have not mastered the language yet. When they say "He is comes here" it is because the singularity of the third person requires "is" in present tense .

In short, intra-lingual errors occur because of learners' attempt to build up concepts and hypotheses about the target language from their limited experience with it. Learners may commit errors due to this reason in many ways as in the following examples :

(i)   He made me to smile.

(ii)   I want leaning English.

(iii)   The meat smells freshly.

(iv)   Doctors always give us good advices.

(v)   I do not know why did he go .

2.11 SOURCES OF ERRORS

In 1972 , Selinker (Richers ,1974, p.37) reported five sources of errors :

(i)   Language transfer.

(ii)   Transfer of training.

(iii)   Strategies of second language learning.

(iv)   Strategies of second language communication.

(v)   Overgeneralization of the linguistic material.

Coder, In1974 , (Allen , Coder p.130) identified three sources of errors : language transfer , overgeneralization or analogy , methods or materials used in teaching (teaching –induced errors) in the paper titled " The study of learner English" that Richards and Simpson wrote in 1974 , they exposed seven sources of errors:

(i)   Language transfer, to which one third of the deviant sentences from second language learners could be attributed (Geoge 1971).

(ii)   Intra-lingual interference : In 1970 ; Richards exposed four types and causes for intra-lingual errors :

a-   Overgeneralization (p.174): it is associated with redundancy reduction. It covers instances where the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structures in the target language. It may be the result of learner reducing his linguistic burden .

b-   Ignorance of rule restriction s: i.e. applying rules to contexts to which they do not apply.

c-   Incomplete application of rules.

d-   Semantic errors such as building false concepts / systems   i.e. faulty comprehension of distinction in the TL.

  Intra-lingual / developmental errors: those due to the language being learned (TL), independent of the native language. According to Richards (1970), they are " items produced by the learner which reflected not the structure of the mother tongue , but generalization   based on partial exposure to the target language .The learner , in this case , tries to "derive the rules behind the data to which he / she has been exposed , and may develop hypothesis that correspond neither to the mother tongue nor the target language " (Richards , 1970, p.6) .

2.12 MODELS FOR ERROR ANALYSIS

Coder (1967 and 1974) identified model for error analysis, which included three stages:

(1) -Data collection: recognition of idiosyncrcy .

(2) -Description, accounting for idiosyncratic dialect.

(3) -Explanation (the ultimate object of error analysis) Brown (1994, pp.207, zu) and Ellis (1995;pp 51,52)

On this model. Ellis (1997,pp15 – 20) and Hubbard Etal. (1996,pp.155-141) gave practical advice and provided clear examples of how to identify and analyze learners 'errors . The initial step requires the selection of a corpus of language followed by the identification of errors. Priority should be given to errors that may effect communication and cause misunderstanding. If a teacher knows about all these items, he can direct himself accordingly. For example, Brown (2000) suggests that local errors as in the following example usually need not be corrected as the message is clear and correction might interrupt a learner in the flow of productive communication : I gave she a present. On the other hand, global errors need to be treated on some way since the message is not comprehended clearly. Dady my car happy tomorrow buy.   Errors in pluralization use of articles tenses   etc. are less important than errors regarding word order, the choice of the placement and appropriate connectors in terms of comprehensibility of the sentences. Therefore, it is implied that priority in error correction should be given to global errors in order to develop the students' communication skills .The knowledge of error analysis enables the teacher to monitor the students' errors in this frame and take precautions where needed . Different kinds of tasks may require a different treatment. The reaction of the teacher towards errors and the type of feedback to be given is usually determined by the position of the error in the objective of the task. Oral works are a crucial point in terms of corrections and feed back time. For oral works , it is usually recommended that students who makes mistakes during fluent speech should not be interrupted , but be reminded of the mistakes and talk about the reasons . The type of feedback – form or content should be decided on according to the goal of the study   .

If the goal is to make the students practice a certain grammatical point, it may be necessary to give a form feedback. Or else, if a pronunciation item is being practiced, the teacher should correct the related mistakes without interrupting the speaker (UV, 1996). For correcting written works, it is accepted that the teacher should not correct the student's mistakes directly, but instead, should put marks indicating there is some thing wrong with that sentence, word or punctuation. There are symbols   to show the kind of mistake that teachers use .For example, it is better to write "SP" for spelling mistake near the wrong word, to write "RW" for wrong word. The errors are then classified. The next step, after giving   a grammatical analysis of each error demands on explanation of different types of errors. Moreover, Gass& Selinker(1994,p67) identified six steps

followed in conducting on error analysis . Collecting data identify errors, classifying errors, quantifying errors, analyzing source of error, and remediating for error .

3- Methods of Data Analysis

3.1 Introduction

The present part describes the methodology employed in carrying out the present research. The study is analytical in nature. It follows the procedure of error analysis, "Namely" data collection, analysis and discussion of errors. This part begins with a brief description of research type, tool of data collection, and data analysis.

3.2 General description of research   method

In the present research , analytical and empirical ways are used to ensure validity and   reliability   of data collection . A corpus of language is provided from (Ellis 1995) a sample of students' answers to a ready- made test which contain twenty – three items of different kinds of nouns . The nouns chosen are irregular plurals, plurals treated as singular, some other items such as indefinite pronouns, fractions. These answers are analyzed in three parts .Errors are discussed and grouped under each source of errors i.e. inter-lingual , intra-lingual, then , a group of suggested strategies to deal with these errors is given to teachers.

3.1 Data   Collection

The data collected for this research is the answers to the test items answered by students by means of a test that is described bellow.

3.1.2 The test:

The test consists of three different parts. It contains twenty- one items and each part is composed of various items .

The first part consists of thirteen items that asks the students to choose the suitable subject form for the verb. The second part consists of three items that asked students to spot the mistakes.

 The third part consists of five items, which asked students to fill the blank with the best verb suitable for the subject. The test is piloted to students from level two, and they are given time to fill the blanks with correct form of verb.

3.2.2   Sample And Sample Sellection

The sample for the presents study is the second level students of B. Ed, Dept of English, Faculty of Education, Hajjah University .

The subjects are selected randomly, disregarding gender , rank and background in English . The subjects have studied English grammar, part of speech, of sentence etc. The sample is felt sufficient for the study, because certain types of errors recur in every student's answer .

3.3Data Presentation And Analysis

The data is presented by means of tables and charts. Table no. (1) represents the frequency and rate of correct and incorrect answers . Table no.(2) provides a description of how errors occur and the type of noun in which students committed errors.

The errors are categorized and described according to the relevance of the nature of error. (Inter-lingual , intra-lingual). The rate and frequency of each type of error is given against each one.   A brief linguistic comment on each sentence is given. Discussions of error explanations is also given under each sentence based on positive and negative transfer.

3.4 Validation

The test has been taken from   English grammar and   usage by Dr.Thakur (p 13). The test has been selected from the area in which students may commit many errors in using subject verb agreement. The items were selected taking in account the areas or the nouns such as plural, singular, countable, uncountable, collective noun and mass nouns. The test was practiced on students of level two,   distributed to both boys and girls so that valid and reliable results are insured   .

4-Data Analysis And Discussion In the present part of this research, the data is analyzed and discussed .It starts with an analysis of errors made by the students' .Then, the errors are classified, described and interpreted. Tables and samples of students' errors are commented on. This part ends with extensive discussion of the results and implications of the study on teaching subject- verb agreement in English .

Results of The test

The total number of the answers is 1503. The number of errors was 913 . The table below shows the frequency and percentage of errors committed by students in each item of the test.

Item	Word	Frequency	Rate	Frequency	Rate
1	A number of	30	60	20	40
2	Number of	38	75	12	25
3	Not the vice chancellor	11	22	39	78
4	The register	15	30	35	70
5	Each	27	55	23	45
6	Six weeks	29	57	21	43
7	A group of	32	64	18	36
8	A pair of	15	30	35	70
9	A lot of	15	30	35	70
10	All	30	60	20	40
11	His family	10	20	40	80
12	Every	35	70	15	30
13	His participation	20	40	30	60
14	Each of	25	50	25	50
15	Everyone	40	80	10	20
16	The wages	25	50	25	50
17	No one	10	20	40	80
18	The committee	10	20	40	80
19	Neither of	23	45	27	55
20	Rice & Fish	15	25	35	75
21	Mathematics	5	10	45	90

Data Analysis and Discussion:

Part (1)

The results presented in the previous part will be discussed here clearly and in detailed.

To begin with, the item " a number of students(is/are) hardworking" has got 65% of the incorrect answers . Comparing this item with the other items, it has got one of the highest percentage. Many   learners have committed errors here in this item. The learners are confused with the appropriate use of the verb that is suitable for the subject of the sentence. This is may be because of the use of the article " a". The students believe that the use of the article" a "should take   a singular verb and since the word number is singular it should take singular form, is and not are. In addition, this is may be because of the limited knowledge about subject –verb agreement. The students may not know the rules of subject – verb agreement   that is why the learners are not able to answer it correctly. In addition, the partial learning is one of the reasons behind committing such error.

In the second item of the test which is " number of the students (is /are) lazy" . The percentage of the incorrect answers in this example is 70%. This shows that the learners are confused with the use of "is/are". They may think that "are" is the correct one .The students think that the word" number" should take a plural form. Limited application of the rules may be the main reason behind committing such error, this is, why the learners have committed an error here in this item. In addition, the limited exercises given by teachers are one of the reasons behind committing such errors .

With reference to the third item of the test which is "not the vice chancellor, but the students (was/were) happy" we note that the majority of learners answered it correctly . It has got the percentage of 75%. and only 25% of the sample have answered it incorrectly. This shows that the learners have got a bit confused because of the existence of two nouns in the subject which are connected by conjunction" not – but". So the learners have chosen "was" because they may think that the subject is "the vice chancellor" . This maybe why they have made an error here in this item.

As it is shown in table "1",most of the learners have answered the fourth item , which is the registrar , but not the finance   officer (was / were) unhappy about the delay in payment "   correctly. 30 of the learners have answered it incorrectly. This maybe because of the lack of   knowledge about the use of conjunctions "but not" which connected the second noun of the subject with the main subject" the registrar ."

The results also show that the item " Each faculty member as well as most of the students (were/ was) of the view that there should be many more new courses " , has got only 45% in the correct answer . Here the respondents   (may) think that the subject of the verb is "each faculty member" and neglect   or ignore the second subject" most of the

students "the reason beyond that may be the lack of knowledge about the use of conjunction" as well as ". They do not realize that the two nouns mentioned above are regarded the subject of the verb. They think that the subject of the verb is just "Each faculty member " , so that they have committed a serious error in this item.

According to the   item " six weeks in summer (are/is) the normal vocation period in colleges and universities " , 43% of the respondents have answered it correctly . The other 57% 0f the learners have answered incorrectly .They may think that the subject of the verb is the word " summer " that made them choose " is" . They may not be familiar with the use of sentences like this one containing adverbial phrase .

The item " A group of people(were/was) shouting slogans in front of the principles house " has got the percentage of only 36% .Most of the respondents about 64% have answered it incorrectly . This may be because of the use of the word " group" with the subject . They think that the word "group" refers to singular nouns that has made them use the verb" was" instead of "were" they are not aware of the fact that the word "group" is regarded as plural noun that why they   have committed serious errors in this item .

The results in table(1) shows that the item " A pair of trousers (is/are) torn " has got 70% of the correct answers ;and about 30% of respondents have made wrong answers . This may be because of the word "trousers". This word is a plural one , however , when joined or connected with the phrase " A pair of " it is considered or regarded as singular one . As a result, the learners think that the word "trousers" is the subject and not the whole noun phrase as a subject that have made them commit an error here in this item. Another reason may be because of the interference of their mother tongue.

Besides, the results in table (1) reveals that the item " a lot of people(prefer/ prefers) coffee to tea." has got 70%   only 30% who have made wrong answers . The respondents believe that the subject "a lot of people" is a singular one. They are not aware of the use of " a lot of   people" i.e. lack of knowledge, they might forget such use .

In the item (no.10) which is " all works and no play (make/makes) John a dull boy." About 40% of the respondents have got correct answers and the other 60% have failed to answer the item correctly .They were in a puzzle situation. They think that the two nouns "works and play " as a subject. They do not pay their attention to the words " all and no..". Some other may think that the word "all" refers to plural noun that made them choose the verb " make " instead of" makes"; about 80% of respondents have answered the item " his family (was/were) very rich" correctly . The other 20%   have answered   incorrectly. They think that the word "family" is regarded as a number of people, and not as one thing, so they use the plural form .But the word " family" in this sentence is approximately as a singular noun . Moreover, in the item " our team(consists/ consist) of twelve players " , the respondents are put in the same trap. The word "team"

seems to be singular when it is regarded as one thing; however, when we consider it as a number of people it is regarded as plural noun and used with plural verb .

As it is also shown in table (1) , the results reveals that only 30% of the respondents have answers the item " every man and woman working in those colleges (was/were) requested to attend the meeting " correctly . The reason is that they are not aware of the rules of using the pronoun " every " .they lack the knowledge of its usage .They might forget the rules of using the pronoun " every."

Eventually, in the item " his participation during the last three weeks (has / have) annoyed every one " . 60% of the respondents have answered it correctly. The subject here in this item seems to be long that what has made them confused about the subject. They may think that the phrase "three weeks" is the subject, which is a plural noun, but the right subject is the phrase " his participation" only . As a result, the participants were not able to distinguish the true subject from the adverbial phrase because of the length of the phrase in the place of the subject   .

Part Two

This part is devoted to discuss the results of table "2".They will be described clearly and respectively. Firstly, in the item "each of these substances is found in India" , only 50% of the participants have answered it correctly . The rest of the learners were not able to recognize that the sentence was in the correct form ; this may be because they think that the subject is plural as they were deceived by the word " substances " . They do not realize that the pronoun " each" takes singular verb . Similarly, in this item "every one of the prisons are full"   only20% of the respondents have answered it correctly. The majority   were unable to spot the mistake from the sentence. They believe that the subject is in plural form. They do not think that the pronoun "every" takes singular verb . These errors can be resulted as a result of the intra-lingual   overgeneralization.   In relation with the third item in the table (2) which is " the wages of sin are death" , about 50% of the participants have answered it correctly . And about 50% of the participants have answered it incorrectly . This may be because they are confused by the plural form" waves" these errors can be caused by intra-lingual overgeneralization .

Part Three

In this part the results of the "filling in the blank" questions will be analyzed in details. According to the first item "no one of the boys –very intelligent 20% of the respondents have answered it incorrectly. Here in this item , it seems that the learners were puzzled as a result to the use of the plural noun " the boys " . They think that it is the subject of the sentence, so they over-generalized the plural rule that it takes the plural verb. Another reason is that they lack the knowledge of using the pronoun" no one " . So that they have chosen the verb " are" mostly. In the second item " the committee –

divided in their opinion in this point" , about 80% of the respondents have answered it correctly . only20% of them have committed an error here. They may think that the collective noun "committee" is regarded and treated as a plural noun. Thus, they have chosen the plural verb to fill in the blank. About 55% of the respondents have answered the item " neither of the two experiments -relevant to the topic of grammar correctly . And only 45% of them have answered it incorrectly. The cause may be because of the use of the conjunction" neither of" . They draw much more attention to the noun " two experiments" and think that it is the subject of the sentence that what has confused them and made them commit an error here.

In the item "rice and fish- the most popular mail in Yemen. 75% of the participants have answered it correctly; and only about 250% of them have made an error here in this item. This may be because they do not realize that there are two separate subjects connected with the linking word "and". As a result, they treated as a single subject and not as a plural subject. Finally, the results in table (iii) shows that about 90% of the sample have answered the item " mathematics- the queen of all science" correctly . And only 10% have answered it incorrectly. This may be because of the intra-lingual overgeneralization. They believe that the noun " mathematics" is a plural noun . They do not know that it is singular noun because they were derived by the suffix " –s". This is what has made them commit errors here   .

The Conclusion

The total percentage of the incorrect answers committed by the students in this study is 60 % and the percentage of the correct ones given by the students is 40 %. As it was shown in chapter (ii), the second language learners commit errors because of many reasons; these reasons i.e. sources are mainly classified into two main categories. These sources are inter-lingual and intra-lingual. The first occurs as a result to the interferences from the students own language. Whereas, the second type of errors occurs because of the overgeneralization, faulty or partial learning or limited experiences   .

The results of this study showed that the learners mostly commit errors because of the second source which is the intra-lingual errors. They sometimes commit errors as a result of the overgeneralization, faulty or limited experience   as in the items no.(3,4,5,6,7,8,9) here errors are caused because of overgeneralization or intra-lingual. Sometimes they are caused by the interference of the learners ' mother tongue and in item no.(1,2,11,12,) these errors are caused due to intra-lingual errors.

Recommendations

☐   In the light of the finding and conclusions of the present study, some tentative recommendations can be made. They are presented in relation to there implications for the teaching of English in the Yemeni universities .

☐   In order to overcome the problems of committing errors in subject – verb agreement, the rules should be supported with   more examples .

☐   English teachers should focus on the different types of the subject, including subjects with conjunctions e.g. Rice and fish   prepositional phrase two- third of oranges, and so on .

☐   The rules of subject –verb agreement   should be practiced by the learners intensively   by means of using different activities such as group work, pair work, role-play etc. So as to help them internalize the rules.

Many sentences with different types of subjects should be given for the students as a homework with many choices of verb form, asking them to choose the suitable form of verb in order to practice the rules.

5.3Suggestions for Further Research

1- Comparative study of subject-verb agreement in Arabic and English Languages .

2-The differences of practicing prepositional phrases , conjunctions , fractions   and conjunctions on learners' use of subject –verb agreement .

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