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Analyzing the Errors Made by Advanced Student on (Subject-Verb) Concord at Misan University

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Abstract

In grammar, concord is a broad notion that applies primarily to two lexical groups - the nominal group (nouns and pronouns) and the verbal group. Thus talking of subject-verb concord and pronoun-antecedent concord. Subsumed under the subject-verb concord is the "notional concord" and "proximity concord". Concord means agreement. In English grammar, it is the agreement in number and person between a verb and its subject, and in number, person and gender and case between a pronoun with its antecedent. This study concerns subject-verb concord only, regardless of another grammatical concord like subject-object concord or subject-determiner concord. The aims of this study are to investigate the main problems faced by advanced students in subject-verb concord and to reduce the grammatical errors made by students in the area of subject-verb concord by enriching their grammatical knowledge concerning subject-verb concord.

The researcher selected 66 Iraqi EFL third-year students as a sample for the study and constructed a test comprising (20) items in order to achieve the study's objectives. The exam consists of multiple-

choice questions. The exam is used to assess a student's understanding of subject-verb concord. The findings of this study indicate that during the delivery of the exam, there is a variation in the production of the groups (pretest and posttest).

Key words: error analysis, advanced student, grammar, concord

تحليل الأخطاء التي يقع بها طلبة المراحل المتقدمة في جامعة ميسان

في المطابقة النحوية بين الفاعل والفعل

عماد جاسم محمد

كلية التربية الأساسية/ جامعة ميسان

المستخلص

نحوياً تعد المطابقة مفهوماً واسعاً ينطبق بشكل أساسي على مجموعتين معجميتين - المجموعة الاسمية (الأسماء والضمائر) والمجموعة الفعلية. وبالتالي فإننا نتحدث عن مطابقة الفاعل والفعل ومطابقة الضمير مع الاسم. ويندرج تحت مصطلح المطابقة بين الفاعل والفعل مفهومين "المطابقة النظرية" و "مطابقة التقارب". والمطابقة تعني الاتفاق. وفي نحو اللغة الإنكليزية تكون المطابقة في العدد والشخص بين الفعل وفاعله وفي العدد والشخص والجنس والحالة بين الضمير والاسم. تبحث هذه الدراسة في المطابقة بين الفاعل والفعل فقط، بغض النظر عن التوافق النحوي الآخر مثل توافق الفاعل والمفعول به أو توافق الفاعل والنعته. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقيق في المشكلات الرئيسية التي يواجهها طلبة المراحل المتقدمة في موضوع المطابقة بين الفاعل والفعل ولتقليل الأخطاء النحوية التي يقع بها الطلاب في موضوع المطابقة بين الفاعل والفعل من خلال إثراء معارفهم النحوية فيما يتعلق بمطابقة بين الفاعل والفعل.

وقد اختارت الباحثة 66 من طلاب السنة الثالثة الدارسين للغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية وأعد اختبارا مكونا من (20) فقرة لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة. يتكون الاختبار من أسئلة متعددة الخيارات. يستخدم الاختبار لتقييم فهم الطلبة لموضوع المطابقة بين الفاعل والفعل. تشير نتائج هذه الدراسة إلى أنه أثناء تقديم الاختبار، هناك تباين في درجات المجموعات في (الاختبار القبلي والبعدي).

1.1. The Aim of the Study

This study aims at:

1. enhancing advanced students' knowledge of subject-verb concord
2. investigating the main problems faced by advanced students in subject-verb concord.
3. reducing the grammatical errors made by students in the area of subject-verb concord by enriching their grammatical knowledge concerning subject-verb concord.

1.3. Limitations of the Study:

This study is limited to

1. concern subject-verb concord only, regardless of another grammatical concord like the subject-object concord or subject-determiner concord.
2. examine the advanced student's mastery of the subject-verb concord, regardless of students of other levels such as elementary, or intermediate levels.
3. A group of EFL Iraqi male and female students in their third year during the academic year 2020-2021.

1.4 Procedures

1. Examining some theoretical reviews about subject-verb concord and the basic rules of that domain.
2. Preparing a grammatical test containing specific items that require the student to determine the verb that agrees with the subject.
3. Checking the test in order to evaluate the student's mastery of subject-verb concord.

1.5. Definition of Basic Terms

1.5.1. Error Analysis

Crystal (1999) defines error analysis as a technique utilizing linguistic principles and procedures to recognize, categorize and interpret the unacceptable forms produced by foreign language learners. Based on this definition, it can be said that errors can reflect that the learner's mind has a sort of lack of information. On the other hand, mistakes are seen as a representation of the lack of that information employed.

1.5.2. Concord

Concord is defined in Robins (1964:249) as the case where two or more than two words must be on from the same words' classes and they should have a certain syntactic relationship.

2.Theoretical Background

2.1.Subject-verb concord

Concord of number is shown in English nouns and verbs in phrases of the form *man eats* and *men eat*, in which both the noun and the verb must be singular or plural. In English, *I, you, we, and they* are followed by *eat; he, she, and it* (like other singular nouns and nominal groups) are

followed by *eats*; and with one verb, to be, *I, you, and he, she, it* is differentiated by three-fold verbal concord: *I am, you are, he is*.

In grammar, concord is a broad notion that applies primarily to two lexical groups – the nominal group (nouns and pronouns) and the verbal group. We thus talk of subject-verb concord and pronoun-antecedent concord. Subsumed under the subject-verb concord is the “notional concord” and “proximity concord”. Concord means agreement. In English grammar, it is the agreement in number and person between a verb and its subject, and in number, person and gender and case between a pronoun with its antecedent. At this juncture, a very cursory glance at the three grammatical categories that concord drags along – number, person, gender and case– will help in this study. Grammatical number expresses count distinctions. In English, the number categories are singular and plural. Person, in grammar, is the grammatical reference to participants in an event. Generally, the distinction is made to show the speaker, the addressee and other participants in the event. So, we talk of the first person (*we, me, us*), the second person (*you*) and the third person (*he, she, it, they, him, her, them*). Grammatical gender is a system in which the noun is made to correspond with the natural gender. In grammar, case denotes the flections of a noun's grammatical function in a sentence. The subjective case is for a noun that acts as the subject of a verb, the objective case is for a noun that acts as the object of a verb, and the possessive case is for a noun that shows possession.

Subject-verb concord constitutes one of the major grammatical problems that our advanced students face as second language learners. So, we are going to exhibit all the explanations concerning subject-verb concord as well as the basic rules that govern this domain . Then, to assess their knowledge of subject-verb concord and explore the main issues that our students encounter, we tested a group of advanced students.

The primary function for sentence agreement is usually simple. Simply put, there must be a numerical agreement between the subject and its verb. The term "number" may refer to either the single or plural form of the word.

- There is just one person (*I*), location (*shore*), object (*chair*), or concept in the single topic (*hope*).
- The plural subject means that there are more than one person (*they*), place (*shores*), thing (*chairs*), or idea (*hopes*).

1. Singular and plural nouns

It has well known that in order to form plural nouns in English we need to add either *s* or *es* – into the word's singular form. To illustrate, *price - prices; dish - dishes; inch - inches*. However, this role is not applicable in all cases, there are nouns such as *mouse* have irregular plurals, *mice*. In order to identify the irregular nouns plural forms, we can use the dictionary.

2. Singular and plural pronouns

Interestingly, there are plural and singular forms for the pronouns too. For example, the pronouns ‘*she*’, ‘*he*’, ‘*it*’ is considered to be singular pronouns while having ‘*we*’,

'they' are plural forms, the pronoun (you) is seen as both singular or plural.

3. Singular and plural verbs

Plural and singular verbs may be employed with nouns like most of them, the public, and today's youth: *Today's youth knows many IT skills and they are (are) good at making money.* These nouns do not have plural forms (*not youth*).

Plural verbs with nouns such as *military, cattle, people, police, and vermin: the world is overcrowded.* These terms don't have a plural form; instead, nouns such as people are used to refer to 'national populations': *The people of America speak a dialect of English that is not standard.*

First and second person : (*I, we, you*) start

Singular third person : (*he, she*) starts

Plural first, second, third person : (*we, you, they*) start

Subject-verb agreement, particularly in the present tense, is famously difficult to establish as shown in the examples above (Rozakis.2003:162). The subjects may identify the concord of number and person, according to Downing and Locke (2006:44). Concord can only be found in verb forms that include inflectional contrast:

Assistant manager (she/he) has bought a new car.

The buyers /I/you/we/they have checked the clothes.

Where is my cellphone ? Where are my cellphones?

Some verbs, such as 'had,' don't seem to have a number or person contrast:

The money had all been lent.

In such situations, the paradigmatic contrast may be used, as it has done in the past (the money has all been lent).

When the Subject is realized by a collective noun, concord depends

The committee is sitting late .(seen as a whole)

The committee decided to offer prizes in order to get additional funding. (seen as a group of people).

Number, person, and gender are determined by the Subject Complement, as well as reflexive pronouns at Cs, Oi, and Od:

Ahmed and Basim are my cousins.

He cut himself (Od) while slicing meat.

According to Fromkin *et al* (2017:107), the verb agrees with the word to its left in person and number. However, in situations like (the man we met at the party next door looks sort of attractive), regardless of the number of syllables between the head noun and the verb, the verb (seem) must agree with the head of the subject NP, guy. Furthermore, the way words interact with one another is not restricted to a set of numbers. That is, whether or whether they are single or plural.

2.1.2 . Notional concord ,and proximity

Concord is hindered by two factors: 'notional concord,' which is a verb-subject agreement based on the number concept

rather than the existence of grammatical signals to the idea.

The function of 'proximity' implies that the verb agrees with either a pronoun or a noun that comes before it, occasionally overriding an agreement with the subject's head word (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1976:176).

2.1.3.Coordinated subject

A difference between appositional and non-appositional coordination must be made. We cover instances that may be regarded as an inferred reduction of two clauses under non-appositional coordination. There is a plural verb in these:

Sarah and Layla are now ready (Sarah is now ready and Layla is now ready).

A singular verb is used with conjoining which denote a single entity :

The hammer and sickle was flying from a tall flag pole.

Even though they can only be regarded as reductions of clauses in this manner, conjoinings that indicate a reciprocal connection may also accept a plural verb:

Your shirt and mine are similar (your shirt is similar to mine and my shirt is similar to yours).

However, no such reduction is feasible with the less frequent appositional coordination, since the coordinated structures relate to the same object. As a result, a single verb is employed:

The temple of ugliness and memorial to Victorian bad taste was erected at the Queen's express wish.

Both of the first noun phrases in this paragraph relate to the same item. However, since the brother and editor are one person or two, the following example is unclear and may use either a single or plural verb:

His younger sister and the subsequent editor of his collected papers was/were with him at his death-bed

(Quirk and Greenbaum,1976: 177).

2.1.4.Collective Nouns

Collective nouns, which are conceptually multiple but grammatically single, follow notional concord in situations like these:

The public are tired of protests.

The audience were enjoying this new movie .

Despite the fact that singular or plural verbs tend to be less or more integrating into contexts, the choice will still depend on whether the group is seen as singular or plural. Therefore, the plural is seen more than singular due to the concentration that is given members' individual reactions. In phrases like the crowd was huge, the single must be used in contrast to the plural (ibid).

Alexander (1990:36) explains that terms like family or government are called collective nouns due to their indication of the group because singular or plural verbs along with nouns can be used also such as

jury, committee, family, company and government :

I was home while the family was (were) on holiday?

In addition, such types of words own regular plurals :

Many families are in need of help.

With nouns like most of them, *the public, and today's youth*, plural and singular verbs may be used:

The public need (needs) to know how they are (are) ruled.

There are no plural versions for these nouns (not public). Plural verbs with nouns such as *military, cattle, people, police, and vermin*: the world is overcrowded. Instead of having a regular plural form, nouns like people indicate 'national populations': the people of America speak non-standard English.

2.1. 5.Plural form Nouns Take Singular or Plural Verbs

Ceramics, enterics, psychophysics, and combinatorics are examples of words that finish in -ics. *Physics*, which uses a single verb, is not a popular school subject. If their allusions were academic topics, such as Phonetics is a branch of linguistics, then acoustics, phonetics, economics, and statistics might all be regarded a single verb. They only use the plural verb when a specific definite reference is present. For instance, *Her statistics are suspect*. Nouns like *crossroads, kennels, species series, headquarters, and works* are singular when referring to a single thing: moth species are

rare. They use the plural form if they are denoting a large number of species: There are thousands of species. (Alexander, 1990:36).

2.1. 6. Plural form Nouns Take Plural Verbs

Shirts, motorcycles, kittens, and trousers are examples of such nouns that only acquire a plural form when preceded by a plural verb: my trousers are tone. Such nouns may be combined with a pair of (two) pairs, for example:

My mother received two sets of pants and a pair of shoes the other day.

Belongings, brains (intellect), clothing, congrats, wages, commodities, etiquette, stairs: were those garments expensive? (Ibid:37)

2.1.7.Indefinite Pronouns

Singularity applies to all indefinite pronouns ending in -body. The phrases "*someone,*" "*nobody,*" and "*anyone*" are examples of such words. Indefinite pronouns with a one-letter ending are singular, whereas indefinite pronouns with a two-letter ending are multiple. *Everyone, someone, and anybody* is involved in these kinds. Furthermore, indefinite pronouns such as many, both, others, few, and many others are considered to be plural in all cases. Any, all, most, more, none, and some are indeterminate pronouns that may be single or plural depending on how they are used. Take a look at the following samples to see what I mean:

One of the kids is swimming.

As noted above , *one* which is a singular subject demanded *is* which is a singular verb.

Both of the kids are swimming.

Both which is a plural subject requires the plural verb '*are*'.

All of the beef stew was consumed.

In the above example, *all* is used to denote a single unit. As a consequence, the singular verb *was* is required.

Many of the guests are sick of Ahmed's endless chatter.

The subject *many* which is a plural needs the verb "*are*" which is also a plural (Rozaklis , 2003:68).

2.1. 8. Distinct Problems in Agreement

Agreement rules tend to be very direct, however, some issues still appear. The following two problems are regarded as the most difficult: difficult-to-find topics and intervening phrases.

1. Identify hard-to-find subjects

Certain topics are more difficult to locate than others. In certain respects, the kinds of subjects that come before the verb may be difficult. However, as the following examples demonstrate, a subject must agree in number with its verb.

In the closet are two new dresses.

The word *dresses* which is a plural has an agreement with the plural verb *are*.

There were still half a dozen bikes in the store, too.

There is a plural subject which is *dozen* and it attempts to require the plural verb *were*.

2. Ignore intervening phrases

With not taking into consideration the phrases and words that take place in between the subject and verb. These phrases and words are not affected by the subject-verb agreement.

The shortest river in the world is the Roe River.

The singular subject *river* is in agreement with "*is*" which is the singular verb. The phrase " in the world" which is considered to be intervening prepositional should be neglected.

The head of the cooks stands at the door of the kitchen.

The single subject *head* and the singular verb *stands* in agreement. The prepositional phrase *of the cooks* s in between is ignored. (Ibid:69)

3. Methodology

3.1. Experimental Design

The pretest-posttest control group design as indicated has been utilized in order to accomplish the study's goals (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. The Experimental Design

Control	Pretest	Intervention	Posttest

Group			

3.2. Population and Sample

The study's population is made up of all third-year students of the Department of English, College of Education, University of Misan in the academic year 2018-2019. There are 168 male and female students. The sample is made up of sixty-six students who were chosen randomly. Forty students were assigned for the control group, and twenty-six students for the pilot study.

3.3. Test

The researcher has constructed a twenty-multiple choice item test to collect data in this study.

3.3.1 Validity

If the items seem to measure what they are intended to measure, they are face-valid (Ebel, 1972:78). To ensure that the exam's face validity and substance are correct, it was presented to a jury of ten individuals who were requested to agree, modify, or add any new facts to the test.

3.3.2 Reliability

The consistency of assessment findings from one measurement to the next is referred to as reliability (Grolund, 1976:102). The Pearson Correlation Coefficient formula is used to evaluate if the current study's test is trustworthy or not. The reliability coefficient for the two tests seemed to be (0.84), indicating that the tests were reliable in measurement.

3.4. Pilot Administration

A pilot test with a sample of (26) students was performed. The pilot test involves testing out the test content on a group that is comparable to the one for whom the test is being developed (Harris, 1969:25). This test was given to the pilot sample.

3.4 Scoring Scheme

The scoring scheme is based on right answer receives (five) points, while the wrong answer receives zero point. The items that the participants have left blank have likewise been given a zero score since they indicate that the subjects have failed to respond.

3.6 Test Administration

By the end of the experiment, the researcher administered the posttest on 7/2/2018. The test was corrected by the researcher himself.

3.7 Statistical Tools

SPSS package has been utilized to process the collected data statistically.

4. Findings

4.1. The Post-test Scores

The findings of this study indicate that throughout the delivery of the exam, there is a variation in group production (Pretest and Posttest). The table (2) below illustrates this.

Table.4.1. The Mean of Pre-test and Post-test

Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre	40	45.32	18.98	3.0
Post	40	63.87	14.60	2.31

At the degree of freedom of (39) and a threshold of significance of 0.05, the observed T is greater than the tabulated T ($27.65 > 15.09$). As a result, the alternative hypothesis (H_0) is accepted, whereas the null hypothesis (H_a) is dismissed. It indicates that "using the technique to prevent Advanced Students' Errors in Subject –Verb Concord has no meaningful impact."

Table.4.2. T-test Statistics

Test	t	df	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
Pre	15.09	3	45.3250	39.252	51.397
	7	9	0	4	6
Pos	27.65	3	63.8750	59.202	68.547
t	1	9	0	6	4

4.2. Conclusions

It is concluded that:

1. Teaching Subject –Verb Concord by ordinary method is less effective.
2. Using strategy in teaching Subject-Verb Concord has many benefits; it allows the learners to be more acquainted with learning.

4.3. Recommendations

1. The EFL teachers should reduce the errors made by advanced students in subject-verb concord.
2. It is recommended that the learners use various strategies in order to minimize the errors in subject-verb concord, and thus they will be able to recognize them easily.
3. When implementing a new approach, the teacher should thoroughly prepare himself or herself as well as the content in order to engage pupils in learning.

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