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Error Analysis Concerning Subject-Verb Concord in English: A Study

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Abstract:

Language is a matter of acquisition by following the natural way of learning things. The human natural way of acquiring any language goes through the process viz. L-S-R-W. While acquiring ESL, scores of students encounter problems and commit errors in syntax, viz., in productive skills. The Study aims to investigate the errors committed by undergraduate students in the North Maharashtra region. The researcher employs descriptive and analytical methods in qualitative research for the Study. The data was collected from non-test instrument sources on the sample of select informants, i.e., questionnaires. In conclusion, the deductive approach and prescriptive and descriptive grammar practice have significantly raised students' consciousness and language acquisition, viz. L1.

Keywords: Errors analysis, subject-verb concord, productive skills, written errors, linguistics, etc.

Introduction:

Language is a medium of expressing feelings, ideas, thoughts, attitudes, etc., with linguistic symbols (words). Human communication is, thus, carried out verbally and non-verbally. Man is attached to the world socially, culturally, and politically with varied purposes using a universal language, i.e., English. It is spoken almost in all parts of the world and is referred to as a 'world language,' the lingua franca of the modern age. It turns out to be a common and needful language owing to industrialization and globalization. It is also known as a linking language. It does not mean that any other language is less important. It is used as L2 in India. Considering its significance and need, the former education minister of Maharashtra, Ramkrishna More, introduced the English language as a compulsory subject at the primary level with effect in 2000 (TOI, April 12, 2000). Though it is a compulsory subject to be taught at the primary level, students face ample problems in spoken and written English

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due to some grounds such as regional language, surrounding area, family background, the unhealthy mentality of students and teachers, use of outdated approaches and perspective towards teaching-learning process, etc.

Need and significance of the Study:

Correct English in spoken and written form is essential for good academic achievements, desired result, lasting in the age of competition, getting update knowledge, tourism, business, professional competence etc. The Study has theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the Study administers special information about the problems of subject-verb concord in written English. Practically, the Study suggests some fruitful solutions and remedies to overcome the problem.

Limitation of the Study:

The Study focused on only the problem of subject-verb concord in written English among undergraduate students in humanities whose special subject is not English.

Objectives:

The Study has some objectives. They are as follows:

1. To study the problem of subject-verb concord in written English among undergraduate students in humanities whose special subject is not English.
2. To investigate the causes of errors in subject-verb concord in written skill of English
3. To suggest some viewable solutions and remedies for the problem.

5. Speech and Writing:

Today, written English is as important as spoken English. Since it enhances grammatical competency, boosts confidence, academic and professional achievement, and the ability to handle national and international affairs profusely in learners. Both skills are significant for the betterment of students.

For spoken expressions, we use spoken language, which is made up of speech sounds, i.e., forty-four. On the other hand, writing is in the form of script, which is made up of letters (Kulkarni 22). The latter one is kept as proof for ages. Structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure considered 'speech as superior' while post-structuralist Jacques Derrida asserted that 'writing is superior' since words are coded in the memory of the child. In Brandt's words (2009), "writing is a way of expressing independence. It can be a more visible way of showing individuality, identity or hostility" (Young 9). He stressed 'Individuality and Identity' more. Writing effective and accurate English conveys a lot more than speech. Mere acquiring global knowledge in terms of English would not do. One should apply the same in black and white properly and accurately for effective implications.

English as a second language (ESL):

The acquisition of an unknown language, i.e., ESL, significantly enriches an individual's reasoning capacity, knowledge, sensitivity, activity, socio-cultural and educational bondage profusely. Moreover, Ferdinand De Saussure (2015), the founder of modern linguistics and semiology, distinguished between 'langue' and 'parole' (Abrams and Harpham 195). Language refers to the rules of sign systems and language structures, i.e., grammar. The parole denotes the articulation of the signs, viz., speech or writing. The earlier is the 'system,' and the latter is the 'use of the system.'   Human communication employs

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written or spoken symbols, including gestures. The written form of language utilizes characters to construct words, forming the vocabulary of a given language. Language exhibits regional variations, and individuals may encounter challenges when acquiring a second language (L2), manifesting errors in both spoken and written grammatically. Rajender Pondra (2016) stated that when we try to learn a new language, our brain/mind automatically tries to apply the first language experience by looking for familiar cues. The transferability of knowledge, skills, and strategies across languages depends closely on how the two written languages work (23-24).

Approach in Teaching Grammar:

English grammar plays a vital role in the age of competitive examinations and handling different human spheres like business, media, and research despite spoken English. It is the soul of any language. One must have a good grip on the grammar of a foreign language. Most students are afraid of English grammar due to internal and imposed fear factors. There are two ways that teachers tend to teach grammar: deductively and inductively. Both deductive and inductive teaching have their different rules for teaching grammar. Teachers use the approach according to the nature of the language being taught and the preferences of the teachers and students. The deductive approach is more teacher-centered learning (rule-driven), and the inductive approach is student-centered (rule discovery).

In the words of Tom McArthur (1996), "Grammar is the systematic study and description of a language, a group of either of languages or language in general in terms of either syntax and morphology alone or these together with aspects of phonology, orthography (treats of letters and the mode of combining them into words), semantics, pragmatics (conditional terms and close to sentence and utterance) and word- formation" (409).

Grammar can be classified as descriptive and prescriptive in the view of Tom McArthur. The earlier one presents an accurate description of the rules for actual usage. It, however, describes forms and rules of native speakers use. The latter prescribes certain rules for usage and others. It is evaluative and traditional (409).

Error Analysis:

What is an error?

In linguistics, according to J. Richard et al. (2002), 'an error is the use of a word, speech act or grammatical items in such a way that it seems imperfect…' (184). Noam Chomsky (1965) explained 'competence' (the speaker's knowledge of his language) and 'performance' (the actual use of language in concrete situations) on which the identification of mistakes and errors will be possible (4). In other words, errors are thought of as incomplete learning.

Historical Context:

Error analysis in SLA was founded in 1960s by Corder and colleagues. Errors may also be classified according to the level of language viz. phonological, vocabulary or lexical and syntactic errors. Error analysis can deal with the production of the learner (speaking and writing) and not with the reception of the learner (listening and reading). It sounds closely related to the Study of error treatment.

SLA:

In second language acquisition, error analysis studies the types and causes of language

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errors, which are categorized as follows:

- Modality (level of proficiency in the language skills, i.e., LSRW)
- Linguistic levels (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary style)
- Form (omission, insertion, substitution)
- Type (systematic errors in competence vs. occasional errors in performance)
- Cause (interference and interlanguage)
- Norm vs. System (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Error_analysis_(linguistics).

Types of Errors:

Errors have been classified by J. Richard et al. (2002) into two categories: Interlingual Error and Intralingual Error. Interlingual error (mother-tongue influence) is caused by interference with the native language, viz. L1. As the learner uses linguistic knowledge of L1, it leads to making errors. For instance, a Marathi sentence can be written in the correct sentence order in English. Intralingual error is an error that takes place because of a particular misuse of a particular rule of the target language' such as false analogy and misanalysis (learners form a wrong hypothesis).

Causes of Errors:

There are some causes of errors, which are stated below:

Overgeneralizations:

Such a type of cause of error is known as incomplete rule application or under generalization. Since the learners do not follow all the L1 rules. This type of error occurs when regular and irregular verbs and plural forms are used, viz. 'Tooths' is used for 'teeth' and 'went' for 'went.'

Simplifications:

The learner produces simpler linguistic forms than those found in L1 and attempts to be linguistically creative and produce their own poetic sentences. For instance, omission of silent letters (no for now, but for doubt, wait for weight, etc.).

Induced Error/ Transfer of Training:

It occurs at the time of misleading and incomplete teaching examples. J. Richard et al. (2002) give an example in this regard when the teacher says- 'I am looking at the box', students may misunderstand that 'at' means 'under' and make another example as – 'the cat is at the table' instead of 'the cat is under the table'.

Errors of Avoidance:

Such type of error occurs when the learner fails to apply certain target language rules considered to be too difficult.

The concept of Subject-Verb concord:

The students are confused when applying subject-verb agreement rules and lack knowledge of the rules of the L1. Subject-verb concord is nothing but the 'correspondence of a verb with its subject in person and number' (Suryo and Yustisia 106). In other words, they both must be either singular or plural, respectively. The subject contains nouns and pronouns. Plural doers usually end in an's', but plural verbs do not be so. For instance -

The boy (singular subject) reads (singular verb) many suspense stories.

The boys (plural subject) read (plural verb) many suspense stories.

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Rohan (singular subject) is (singular verb) asleep.

Rohan and his friends (plural subject) are (plural verb) asleep.

Thus, there should be concord or agreement with *be, have, and a present- simple verb,* respectively. Subject-verb concord in simple present, the singular subject (he, she, it) takes a verb in -s, -es, or is as derivations, suffixes, and apostrophes. *To do* form in simple present viz. do or does is used as an auxiliary for all of the subjects in negative or question sentences. For example-

Sunil **works** in an office.

Mohan's dad, Anil, **is** retired.

Meena is **Raju's** wife.

Suraj **does not** study in time.

Does Suraj study on time?

Likewise, subject-verb concord of simple past is in the nominal form. For instance-

I was **happy** yesterday.

We were **late** for the period.

Besides it, the past form or V2 is added generally "ed" as a regular form at the end of the verb in simple past devoid of the barrier of singularity and plurality. For instance-

Radha and Sunita played badminton in the morning.

The subject-verb agreement in written and spoken English is followed in accordance with tenses, person and number respectively. The concept of subject-verb concord is a basic principle of English language grammar.

In addition to the above things, students commit errors in the understanding of nouns and pronouns (long order of noun phrases, vague pronouns reference viz. distributive pronouns like each, some, all, either, neither, none, etc., indefinite pronouns like one, something, anyone, everyone, anything, much, nothing, anybody, somebody, someone, many, each, no one, etc.) and usages of the proper verb (to be, to do, to have, regular and irregular verbs, lexical verbs) forms and modal auxiliary. Indefinite pronouns are singular and take either 'is' or 'was 'as a verb. Some sentences following subject-verb concord in written English can be stated as below to avoid errors and mistakes:

Is there anybody inside the room?

Fifty rupees is not a large amount.

My friends and my uncle were present at the birthday party.

News is a singular word.

The poet and dramatist was dead.

All the world is a stage….

Linguistics is the scientific Study of human language.

Either my sister or my parents are coming to the college to meet the principal.

Some solutions and remedies:

All these examples denote how to follow subject-verb concord in written English. In addition to this, one should keep on reading newspapers, watching BBC TV news in English, English telephone communication, participating in grammar tests and competitions, and referring to useful grammar books viz. Advanced English Grammar by Martin Hewings, Correcting Errors in English by Meera Shenai, A Practical English Grammar by A. J.

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Thomson and A. V. Martinet, English Usage by Harkishan Tulsiani, Correction of Errors in English: A Training Course for the Teachers of English as a Second Language by Krushna Chandra Mishra, Spoken English, and Advanced Grammar by Kamala Negi and Sushila Chavan, etc. Ph. D. Theses like Errors in the Uses of English Tenses by the Undergraduate Students of North Maharashtra: An Analytical Study by Dr. Dhiraj Vaishnav, Improve Your Written English by Marion Field, Common Errors in English by M. Thomas, A Study on Analysis of English Grammatical Errors Faced by Higher Secondary Students in Coimbatore by Solomon Dharmapaul, etc., English movies having displayed sub-title at the bottom of the screen, practice, writing an article or a story or a daily routine in the diary, etc. to overcome the problem for good.

Conclusion:

Where there is a problem, there must be a solution. Keep in mind that one should face and overcome the problem of being an optimist. For this, constant learning spirit, enthusiasm, curiosity, a healthy mind, etc., are needed to improve the present state. Graduate students are expected to be competent writers. It can be concluded that error analysis, meaning, types, the problem, and solutions over the subject-verb concord would be helpful to improve the state of the students. Scores of students get frustrated due to the insufficient knowledge and practice of L1. In this case, they should get puzzled and run away from it. Their progress remains at a standstill. The skill acquisition of ESL in terms of writing would provide a number of opportunities for learners to last in the age of information and technology. The Study will be helpful to an extent. The deductive approach and grammar practice turned out to be significant in raising students' consciousness. Besides, both prescriptive and descriptive grammar turns out essential for language acquisition, viz. L1.

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