

**STUDENTS' PROBLEM WITH SUBJECT VERB AGREEMENT IN PRESENT TENSE ;
A CASE STUDY IN ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT STUDENTS; EVEN
SEMESTER 2022/2023**



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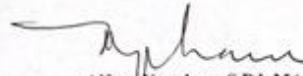

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BACKGROUND

English is official instructed language in Indonesia school as a foreign language after the regulation of Ministry of Education and Culture in 1967. As a consequence, Indonesian students learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Specifically in Papua, students' acquire Papuan Malay as the first language, Bahasa as their second one. As for English, it is considered as a foreign language.

English has four basic skills; they are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each skill plays important role in language learning. In learning a new language, writing is usually learned last because it is the most difficult skill to master; grammar mastery, reading skill and vocabulary building as strongly required to produce a good writing. According to Langan (2001) "writing is a skill that is not different from the skill of diving, driving and cooking", because it requires hard work and practice. Charles and Jackson (1961) say "writing is both science and art". Writing needs talent and effort, and the science mean that writing needs grammar and logic. However, the definition above makes the students think that writing is difficult; writing needs talent, effort, grammar and logic. Indeed, writing is the most difficult skill for student. It is because writing needs the process in which students have to learn words, phrase, and clauses and arrange them into a grammatically correct sentence (Mbau et al., 2014). Writing is important to learn, because through writing we can share our ideas, shape our thinking skill, and help us to keep our ideas and memories.

One of the common mistakes in standard written English is subject verb agreement. Marzuki and Zainal (2004) analyzed the errors of writing reports in an examination situation and found that the most frequent error was subject verb agreement with 95.5% occurrence. Although making subject verb agreement seems easy, there are certain errors that many students commit. Hudson (1998) mention the basic rule of subject verb agreement is that "a verb must agree in number and person with its subject". Singular subject needs singular verb; plural subject needs plural. This kind of errors are still EFL students' big issues.

Therefore, this research focuses on errors found in subject verb agreement Writing

II final test. The course was in even semester 2022/2023 taken by third semester students at English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education UNIPA. I choose students' writing final test because I want to see their ability writing as a product of their Writing class, especially their ability in composing sentence with correct subject verb agreement in Simple Present. This study also aim to evaluate students' strength and weakness before starting Writing III class as well as the writing class in general.

There are two reseach questions addressed here:

1. What kind of subject verb agreements error are produced by freshmen in writing I class in English Education Department?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Error

“Error is mistakes happened in the process of language learning and use, especially for foreign language learners” (Yang, 2010). Corder (1981) states that “error is both an ancient activity and at the same time a comparatively new one”. Brown (1987) defines “errors as those that are made by learners that can be observed, analyzed and classified to reveal their learning system”. It can be said error is an absolute process and inseparable part of language learning. Error can be seen as learning indicator to measure learner's ability in practicing the language that she or he learns. Therefore, it can be said that error produced is measurement to see the progress of the language learning.

Differences between Error and Mistake

According to Corder (1967) mistakes are similar to “slips of the tongue”. Learners can identify the mistake and correct the mistake if it is necessary. Brown (1994) states mistake

refer to “a failure to utilize a known systematic correctly”. Moreover, Norrish (1983) states mistakes are “inconsistent deviation”.

Error is “systematic” (Corder, 1967). It is likely to happen repeatedly and it is not recognized. On the other hand, Brown (1994) states error refers to “a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competences of the learners”. Moreover, Norrish (1983) states errors are “systematic deviation”. He also states that the learner of English as a second or foreign make an error systematically because the learner has not learnt the correct form. From those explanation above, we can say error is uncorrectable by the students themselves, and mistake is correctable by the students themselves.

Types of Error

Based on learning experience of a language learner, Trawinski (2005) defines types of error into three:

- a. Presystematic error: a random errors occurring when the learner does not know a particular rule. The example is “my brother have 4 books”. The correct rule should be “my brother has 4 books”.
- b. Systematic error: it signals that the learner has discovered a rule which is incorrect. The wrong example is “my sister do not come in family gathering”. The correct sentences should be “my sister does not come in family gathering”.
- c. Postsystematic error: it signals that the learner knows the correct rule but does not always follow it. The example is “I hungry.” The correct rule should be “I am hungry”.

In addition, Dulay (1982) in surface strategy taxonomy classified error into four types which are omission, addition, misformation and misordering. This paper will use this theory to see the mistakes found in students’ writing.

1. Omission

Omission is the absence of an item that must be present in a correct sentence. The example 'she tall', the sentence is incorrect, because the subject is not followed by the auxiliary verb 'is'. The correct sentence is 'she is tall'.

2. Addition is the opposite of omission. It is the presence of an item, which must not appear in correct sentences. The example is "It is have 4 bedroom". The correct sentence should be "It has 4 bedrooms".
3. Misformation is using the wrong form of a morpheme or structure. The example is "me hungry, give me that". The correct sentence should be "I am hungry, give me that".
4. Misordering. Misordering is wrong placement of a morpheme or a group of morpheme in the use of a language. The example in wrong sentence is "I always happy if come night". The correct sentence should be "I am always happy if the night comes".

Subject Verb Agreement in Present Tense

We use simple present tense when talking or expressing general truth or habitual actions. In Present Tense, especially in affirmative sentence, there are some issues that need to be paid attention to in dealing Subject Verb Agreements. They are nouns or subjective pronouns, the correct use of verb be (is, am, are) and action verbs (for example: go, have, drink, eat) as explained in the table below;

Pronoun	Verb -be	Example(s)
I	am	Example: I am a student.
You, They, We	are	You are a student. They are a student.
She, He, It	is	She is a student. It is a nice school.

According to Folse (2009, p. 102), there are three common mistakes that ELL do as explained below;

1. Use Verb + -s only when the subject is **he, she, or it** (i.e., third person singular).
2. Remember to change -y to -i and add -es. (We do not change -y to -i if a vowel precedes : day→days, boy →boys.) Remember to add -es **after o, sh, ch, and s**.
3. Do not use *be* with verb in simple present tense.

In addition, the other case of subject verb agreement is indefinite pronouns (Werner et al., 1996 b). Indefinite pronouns is not always indicate specific noun; some of them are consider singular, and some are plural. Indefinite pronouns, such as *anyone, everyone, someone, anything, nobody, anybody, no one, nothing, somebody no one, something, none and much*, are always singular and require singular verbs. However, indefinite pronouns such as *all* and *some*, are singular or plural depending on what they refer to.

Furthermore, some expressions in English is collocation or phrasal verb. Collocation or phrasal verbs are also called “two-word verbs or three-word verbs”(Folse, 2009). In this case, we cannot separate the word. The example from the phrasal verbs are *put out, throw up, look into, put off, take off, show up, put in, think over and find out*.

In other case, usually in standard sentences pattern, the nouns come before the verb, but in inverted sentences the verb come before the nouns. There are some indicators to the verb preceding its subject, such as *there and here*. “The verb in such construction is obviously *is* or *are*”(Berner, 2000).

Finally, a verb must agree with relative pronouns. Relative pronouns are “used to link two sentences that have the same noun or pronouns”(Ed Swick, 2005). There are some indicators to the relative pronouns *that, who, which, whose*. In relative pronouns, the noun in the beginning is called antecedent and the relative pronoun is in second place or the relative clauses.

METHODOLOGY

Research method used in this study is descriptive qualitative method. According to Selinger and Shohamy (1989) the descriptive qualitative research is “a type or category of research refers to investigation, which is utilized data research”. According to Sandolowski (2000) qualitative descriptive research, “should be seen as a categorical, as opposed to non-categorical, alternative for inquiry; is less interpretive than an “interpretive descriptive” approach, because it does not require the researcher to move as far from or into the data; and does not require a conceptual or highly abstract redering of the data”. The researcher used descriptive research because she/he wants to describe the errors in the students’ writing. Those errors described in this research are based on the result of the students’ writing.

The source of data in this research were the twenty-three students’ writing in Writing II final test. The assigned topics are their opinion on whether parents should reveal the truth to their adopted kid and whether national exam is necessary. Students randomly picked the topic they were most likely familiar with and were assigned to write an argumentative essay of 200-250 words length. The teacher announced the two topics a week before in order to give time for the students to prepare the arguments and ideas for the in-class writing test. They were supposed to finish their paper within 90 minutes.

After collecting students’ final test, the reseacher followed the procedures below to analyze the data:

1. List the errors in SVA found in each paper.
2. Group the errors according to Dulay’s type of erros which are ommission, addition, misinformation and misordering.
3. Label the errors from every group according to the grammatical area.
4. Analyze the finding and give further description about the possible causes and solutions.

DISCUSSION

All of four types of errors are found in students' writing. They are omission, addition, misinformation and misordering. In the next discussion, these errors are presented along with the grammar issues found in each type of error. In general, the finding can be concluded as follow;

No	Type of Error	Grammar issues	Total
1.	Ommision	Missing verb	29
		Missing subject	6
		Absence of s-es	25
2.	Additon	Double verbs	14
		Unnecessary –s/-es	3
3.	Misinformation	Incorrect verbs	23
		Inccorrect pronouns as subject	7
4.	Misordering	Words with similar meaning	2
		Parralel sentence	1

a. Omission

In omission, there are three issues which are mostly found; missing verbs (29 cases), missing subject (6 cases) and absence of s/es in verb (25 cases).

1. Missing verbs

No	Grammar Issues
1.	We or someone _____ doing...
2.	It _____ so important for student.
3.	Because the materials of final exam that had been studied from first meeting to last meeting _____.
4.	If the final exam _____ only to know student's ability it is not efective way.
5.	It can make students study hard and _____ up at midnight.
6.	.....when I _____ in elementary school.
7/8.	A paper test _____ not have a meaning if it _____ not suppor with good practice and attitude.
9.	After their parents _____ giving an affection.
10.	They can or can not _____ on the subject...
11.	...final exam _____ only a test...
12.	I _____ successful

13.	I _____ considered failed.
14.	It _____ because final exam is only repeating the material.
15.	It _____ because final exam can be used.....
16.	Desi _____ shocked to hear all the explanation.
17.	The parents _____ often difficult how to tell their adopted children.
18.	....that _____ do* by a teacher.
19.	I _____ really proud....
20.	..... until she or he _____ adult....
21.	It _____ used by the teacher.
22.	So the teacher _____ success in teaching and learning.
23.	The students _____ motivated to work hard.
24.	They can _____ dissapointed..
25.	It might _____ that they....
26/27.	This mitos* _____ just for couple that _____ waiting....
28	...., final exam _____ just a part of wasting out time and material.
29.	Since they _____ married.

In missing verb section, mostly the missing verb happens in *verb -be* areas. There are 13 errors in 'is', 4 errors in 'am' and 6 errors in 'are'. Apart from that, one error takes place in forming passive voice as can be seen in data number 24 and one error in auxiliary verb 'does'; this happens when the student tried to make a negative sentence.

The issues of missing verb is of the most familiar issues found in EFL students. The absence of verb *be-* in their L1's can be said and the most influencing factor contributed to this problem. Most EFL students are having a hard time to grab the concept of verb *-be* in a sentence as they usually start to learn the language by translating word by word from their L1 to English. Besides, the fact that they are not often exposed with the authentic language learning situation make this awkwardness keeps on happening.

2. Missing subjects

No	Grammar Issues
1.	Certainly, _____ have to study hard.
2.	If you are as adoptive parents _____ should oblige to do it.
3.	.... but _____ also have own identity culture and background.
4.	In teaching activity _____ should final with a result.
5.	In this case, _____ had been happened in university.
6.	It means that _____ can help....

For missing subject, there are only 6 errors found. While it can be assumed as a good news that students are almost completely aware of the function of subject as the head of the sentence, the fact that this type of error is still found is worrisome. Students still face difficulties to put a subject correctly in compound and complex sentence. This mostly happened unintentionally because this was in-class writing test and the students did not have time to proofread their draft before submitting. As for the teacher's evaluation, this also shows the strong need to strengthen students' self-review ability.

3. Absence of s/es

No	Grammar Issues
1.	The final exam also give a experience.
2.	When a student follow the final exam....
3.	A family is.....that consist of both....
4.	The school try to made essay rule.
5.	Every humans.... want a child
6.	My father also start to speak up
7.	He tell we have to speak about the serious problem.
8.	The adopted child identify with their adopted parents
9.	Teacher or lecture know more the knowledge of students.
10.	Someone who want to *got a baby
11.	She share her many way to be a good mother.
12.	She tell about....
13.	.....a questionnaire that relate

14.	Final exam make
15.	Besides, the teacher know the ability of all students
16/17.	It make them stress and give up
18.	.....a law that guide us...
19.	Someone come to you..
20.	He also think
21.	He score from graduate students....
22.	Mrs. S love her step son...
23.	Someone ask to *____ my aunt about....
24.	My aunt take care....
25.	Soffie understand and ____not problem

It is almost a no-surprise finding that students seem to struggle in using correct form of verb in affirmative sentence when the subject is third person singular (pronoun she, he and it). Students are also often mistaken the -s particle in verb that defines affirmative sentence in Simple Present and the –s particle that function plural form. The other reason is because when the subject is not the actual third person singular pronouns, some of them were having a hard time to convert the subject into its pronoun form, for example, “**final exam make**...”. From their final test, I come to see that it easier for student to include the –s after verb after third person singular rather than the actual noun agents/things; there are relatively small amount of mistakes found when the language is started with **she, he** or **it**.

b. Addition

For addition section, the errors found are double verb (14 cases) and adding unnecessary -s/-es (3 cases). Surprisingly, there is no error occurred in subject area such as double subjects.

1. Double Verbs

No	Grammar Issues
1.	A teacher will be think ...
2.	It is purpose to test students’s memory
3.	It is be better if...

4.	If the parents were really look to care them.
5.	They will be ask their parents
6.	A parents must be tell them...
7.	Most of parents are keep it as a secret...
8.	It will be hurt them..
9.	Although the result... are variate
10.	When the examination day will be happen ..
11.	Because it is give a result
12.	It is usually happen in the married couple...
13.	.....there is still have a leakage..
14.	but _____ also have own identity culture and background

Students are carelessly use double verb in the sentence because their uncertainty of the grammar pattern required. As a result, they tend to use the verbs and the auxilliary altogether. As known, Bahasa does not have verb **-be** (is, am, are, was, were, been) for affirmative sentence, except when it is functioned to give definition or in Bahasa is translated as '**adalah**'. This specific Bahasa word has been used as a matched concept of verb *be-* for EFL learners in Indonesia.

Moreover, data number 14 looks interesting. The student use two verbs with similar meaning; *have* and *own*. I come up with 2 theories about this; (1), the student does not know that these two words represent the same meaning, (2) the student was meaning to put an possessive adjective between the verbs to form a meaningful sentence such as "**have her own** identity and backgroud". However, seeing from the rest of the sentence that perfectly makes sence, I can make an assumption that this student has actually been already familiar with some common English expressions but lacking in writing experience.

2. Adding unnecessary -s/-es

No	Grammar Issues
1.	.....their teachers or lecturers teaches from the beginning
2.	When they feels alone.
3.	It will seems bored when...

This error group is rather unique because, normally, the common errors found are those with missing *-s/-es* after present verb. For error number 1, I assume that the student was influenced by the plural subject “*teachers and lecturers*” which come with *-s* particle at the end. It can also be said that the student has not fully understood the form of verbs in simple present tense because the same student made several other errors in missing *-s/-es*. I believe this is closely related to the form of subject in the sentence, as I mentioned above; if the subject is with *-s/plural*, he will simply added *-s/-es* after the verb, and vice versa.

The other two errors are simply the lack of understanding of present tense’s concept. For data number 2, he might have wrongly understood that every verb in present tense sentence has to be ended with *-s/-es* that he overgeneralized the verb in simple present sentences. He simply added *-s/es* in all the sentences. In data number 3, the issues is rather serious because he used *-s/-es* with auxiliary verb *will*.

c. Misinformation.

The type of errors found for misinformation section is mostly incorrect form of verbs in a sentence (23 cases) and incorrect form of noun and demonstrative pronoun that function as subject of a sentence (7 cases);

1. Incorrect Verb

No	Grammar Issues
1.	She/he have succeeded...
2.	She have a straight hair
3.	Parents was afraid...
4.	....although the result.... are variate
5.	....the subject he been give ...
6.	They was studying.
7.	The government and many schools have been look for...
8.	It can training the ability of student....
9.	The parents has a part of problem.
10.	Every school....that are in education world...
11.	If we has biological child...
12.	So they can runaway from their responsibility.

13.	.....students who is sick.
14.	Usually final exam are written test.
15.	In this case, _____ had been happened in university.
16.	The act of..... are a bad way.
17.	Final exam have a benefit.
18.	The benefit to students are
19.	Final exam .....also have benefit to students and teacher.
20.	....her sister that have five children.
21.	Final exam have a weakness.
22.	All of them is not the same with their parents.
23.	Adopted is take a baby...
24.	...it _____ not suppor with good practice and attitude.

There are 3 kind of errors found with the use of *have/has*. 8 errors found is about the use of *have/has* as a verb; they use *have/has*; students use *have* with single person singular and vice versa. 1 error found because the student failed to form a sentence with past perfect tense by adding *been* between *had* and the past participle, creating a semantically awkward sentence (see number 15). The similar case happens in number 7, meaning to make an affirmative sentence in perfect present tense, the student added 'been' which makes the sentence becomes incorrect.

Another error found was the issues with subject verb agreement with verb *be-* as can be seen from data number..... the main caused of this errors is simply that they have problems justifying which verb to use when the subject is after preposition and adjective clause markers..

From data number 24, the student attempted to make passive sentence. It seems to me that she already understand the concept of passive sentence that the idea of her sentence was actually understood.

The problem was she did not arrange the sentence in correct passive structure; there is no verb *be-* and past participle. Therefore, her sentence is incorrect.

From data number 12, student failed to use correct form of verb ‘run’; he used ‘runaway’ which is a noun. It is interesting though because other than the error in choosing verb, the other element of the sentence is correct. Therefore I assume that the student was trying to use phrasal verb ‘*run away*’ but making error by putting the two words together as a word. He might have seen the word ‘*runaway*’ somewhere that he mistaken the word with the phrasal verb he was meaning to use.

2. Incorrect Noun/Pronoun as Subject

No	Errors
1.	Adopted is take a baby....
2.	Her cried.
3.	Teach is activity that...
4.	That are good and bad....
5.	There are controversy
6.	There are some couple
7.	So many child or kid birth in the world without.....

From 7 data of incorrect nouns subject found, there are 4 errors in 2 groups of words functioned as noun; gerund, pronouns (subjective and demonstrative) and 3 errors in forming plural forms. Data number 1 and 3 are supposed to be in gerund form as they are verbs that take a function as the subject of the sentence. Therefore, the correct form of the two verbs must be ‘*adopting*’ and ‘*teaching*’. Data number 2 and 4 are about misuse of pronouns. Number 2 is supposed to be ‘*she*’ and not ‘*her*’ and number 4 is supposed to be ‘*those*’ instead of ‘*that*’ because the pronoun was describing more than one qualities. Number 5, 6 and 7 are issues with plural form. For data number 5 and 6 are the form of inverted sentence. Students are familiar with this form of English sentence but rarely understand that this is called inverted. They might presume that the initial words ‘there are’ are the subject of the sentence so they do not pay attention to the noun after; little did they know that the noun after is actually the real subject, and they are in wrong form of plural! The last error is the plural of ‘*child*’ (*children*) and ‘*kid*’ (*kids*). Although they were exposed by this simple words quite often in regular basis, the fact that the error still happened is an evaluation for me as the teacher.

d. Misordering

There are 3 errors found in misordering section that will be presented in this paper. As students were asked to compose their writing mostly in simple sentences, problems with misordering were not as many as anticipated. However, there was one student, Lisa (name is pseudonym) whose writing was quite problematic. She has serious issues in all areas of writing starting from grammar, ideas to organization. I would like to discuss about her writing later in this paper. The errors found are as follow;

No	Errors
1.	In teaching activity, _____ should final with a result.
2.	So many child or kid birth in the world without.....
3.	Soffie understand and..... _____ not problem...

There are 3 misordering errors found; two of them are sentences with missing subject. We can see from the data above that they do not only miss the subject as main element of a sentence but also have a problem with vocabulary. Data number 1 and 2 have problem with the word choice. I take the example from data number 1, after the auxiliary *should*, he was trying to say *should end*, but he wrote *should final* instead. This type of mistake happens when the student knows two words in English with similar meaning in your L1 so when they have to use the word in their sentence, they will use the first word that pop up their head. In this case, the vocabulary building exercise in part of speech is very important to avoid this type of error.

As for data number 3, this is a parallel sentence. The student missed not only the auxiliary verb for the negative statement but also use the word 'problem' as the verb. His original idea was "*Soffie.... does not have problem..*" but he dropped auxiliary '*does*' and verb '*have*', making the sentence incorrect. However, the attempt to make a parallel sentence needs to be appreciated. The teacher needs to give more practice with parallelism in order to make their writing less dull in grammar.

CONCLUSION

From the study I have conducted, I can see that many of the students are still struggling with their writing. Other than subject verb agreement in present tense which is the highlight of this study, students also have a hard time with the ideas, organization, vocabulary and especially grammar. There are some students who show good progress during the semester as they can avoid basic grammatical and vocabulary problems as well as manage to arrange a good organization in their writing. So although most of them are still using simple and compound sentences, the idea goes smoothly throughout the paper.

As the main grammar issues found is in missing verb and the absence of *-s/-es*, the teacher needs to give the students more exercise in those two areas. The teacher also needs to anticipate the similar case that might happen in the next Writing II by the following year. Strengthen students' mastery in subject verb agreement is very crucial to help them to be independent writer in the future.

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