# SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT AMONG THE ESSAYS OF GRADE 4 PUPILS OF TAPIKAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the grammar errors in the subject-verb agreement in the essays made by grade four pupils of Tapikan Elementary School. First, the errors were checked, tallied, and ranked according to how frequently it is seen in the essays. Finally, the researchers identified and classified the errors according to the 14 Grammar Rules in Subject - Verb Agreement. The findings showed that subject-verb agreement errors are evident in the essays of Grade 4 pupils. Rule No.1: Subject and verb did not agree in number has 31 occurrences of errors, Rule No. 11: The object of the prepositions like "some," "half," "none," or "all" did not agree with the form of the verb has one occurrence. Rule No. 13: Singular form of the verb was not applied in sentences with gerunds as subjects, and the plural form of the verb was not used when plural gerunds subjects are linked by "and" has three occurrences. However, the students followed the rest of the subject-verb agreement rules since no errors were found. Based on the result, the grade 4 pupils are confused about when to use the base form and the s form of the verb. First, they have not mastered the essential skill of forming a sentence. Second, they were unfamiliar with gerunds and their uses, and third, they did not know how to distinguish the object of the preposition in the sentence. Hence, they are unfamiliar with the correct verb usage in constructing a sentence with the object of the preposition.

Keyword: -corpus-based, grammar rules, grammar errors, subject-verb agreement, and verb form

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the essential skills English as second language learners must master because it is one of the ways to communicate with people. According to Hogue (1996:2) (as cited by Dinillah et al.,2018), it is an activity where someone explains something or shares information about something with people in writing. In giving information to other people, information should be clear and understandable to the recipient. Unfortunately, it is a complicated talent to hone for those learning English as their mother tongue and for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners (Nuruzzaman et al., 2018, as cited in Bacon, 2020). Of all the English language skills, students consider writing one of the most challenging skills to learn. One of the critical elements in writing is grammar skills; this is a crucial element that makes writing so complicated (Nuruzzaman et al., 2018). It is an essential factor that must be studied and observed by the students.

According to (Mahda, et al.,2016 as cited in Dinillah et al.,2018) grammar is the rule in a language where the form of words is changed and combining the words into sentences to deliver the meanings of a message. In other words, grammar is the way a language manipulates and combines words to form meanings. (Ur,2001:7, as cited in Burhanuddin 2015) stated that grammatical rule is crucial in mastering a language. Without learning the grammatical rules, words cannot be put together. Moreover, grammar has been a crucial part of teaching language, especially for English second language learners. (Carrol, 1969, as cited by Pandapatan 2020), noted that grammar instruction had been the most productive pedagogy for educators throughout the years in teaching language. This approach initially includes correcting errors, describing grammatical rules, and prompting students to translate text to their native language. Schenck (2017), as cited by Pandapatan (2020), students who learned in this manner could interpret and translate texts efficiently; however, they are deprived of oral and writing skills, which are necessary for communication in the target language, where errors in written and oral production come in.

Filipinos are known to be fluent English speakers since the current curriculumuses English as a medium of instruction. However, (Senobio, 2015, as cited in Cobaltica and Osabel, 2021) argued that few students lack speaking and writing skills though they have been using the language since primary. One factor contributing to this dilemma is their mediocrity in grammar. (Karim, Fathema, and Hakim, 2015, as cited in Cobaltica and Osabel, 2021) emphasized that grammar plays a significant role in the mastery of a particular language because it is the pattern that they must apply so that they can effectively and efficiently communicate what they want to say. Furthermore, (Wee, 2009, as cited in Cobaltica and Osabel, 2021) claimed that poor emphasis on grammar contributes to the poor language skills of the students. Grammar concerns the rules of structures essential in putting words together to create a paragraph and showing coherence and unity to create an effective essay. Subject-verb agreement is a fundamental lesson to learn in the English language. (Eastwood says as cited in Cobaltica and Osabel, 2021), subject-verb agreement is selecting the appropriate singular or plural verb that comes after the subject. Subject-verb agreement is like the backbone of grammar because it is the basis for how to compose sentences and ideas correctly. Also, subject-verb agreement is included in two of the five macro skills in English, writing and speaking. (Tafida and Okunade 2016 as cited in Cobaltica and Osabel 2021) concluded that subject-verb agreement is essential in language and communication; it shows how far and plunging the learner grasps the rules. It means the subject-verb agreement is one of the keys to mastering grammar and all English language skills.

The researchers proposed this study and are worthy of an in-depth investigation to reduce and break the chain of committing basic errors in grammar in elementary as early as possible. As mentioned by Basa 2017, in the Philippines, good English skills provide great opportunities as it is one of the qualifications in any occupation. In addition, excellent communication skills are considered one of the most significant contributing factors to success in a work setting. Furthermore, it is vital in the working process as one has to follow instructions carefully and give feedback or suggestions to do specific work.

Therefore, this study aimed to identify the grammatical errors of Grade 4 Pupils of Tapikan Elementary School specifically, the errors in subject-verb agreement among the essays of the respondents, how errors are classified, and identify the most common errors by the respondents.

#### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

The researchers aimed to find out the errors used in Subject-Verb Agreement among the essays of Grade 4 Pupils of Tapikan Elementary School, specifically it seeks to answer the following:

- 1. What errors in the subject-verb agreement are evident in the essays of Grade 4 pupils?
- 2. How are these errors on the subject-verb agreement classified?

#### 1.2 Theoretical Framework

The subject-verb agreement is crucial in writing. Without adequate rules of agreement between subject and verb, written ideas will be difficult to convey and, therefore, will deteriorate the value of the writing itself. Any mistakes regarding the subject-verb agreement will change the meaning of the sentence. This study will be based on the Theory of McCray Hill (1987) that subject-verb agreement is the rule of grammar that states that singular

subjects must agree with singular verbs and plural or compound subjects must agree with plural verbs. A singular subject results in the singular verb ending -s, e.g. he/she writes, the dog barks, while a plural subject results in no added ending, e.g. we/they write, the dogs bark. The verb in a sentence must agree with the subjects and not with any other word that is placed between them.

## 1.3 Significance of the Study

The results of this study would be of value and use to all grammar and language teachers. It can be utilized as a basis for identifying the problems of the teachers in teaching grammar and language. The findings of this study will also enable the teachers to assess their own deficiencies in teaching grammar and language. As a result, they will be able to find effective means of improving their teaching strategies in order to acquire rich opportunities for professional development in accordance with the best standards of good teaching and common sense. Furthermore, the results could serve as a fundamental point for school administrators and heads of the English Language department in providing training programs in teaching grammar and language, seminar workshops, and other activities that can be provided to attain professional growth to be able to carry out contents through methods that can be a great help to the students. Finally, the school administrators and the heads of the English language department may use information from this study to assess the existing policies and formulate new ones for the implementation of effective Grammar and Language programs.

#### 1.4. Review of Related Literature

Writing skills is one of the most vital parts of English language learning, especially at the elementary level. According to Aplus Blog (2020), "Learning how to write is not just about developing writing skills. It is also a way of training the mind to think." Writers need to build and express ideas with clear sentences and coherent paragraphs. The key to expressing ideas is proper grammar. Following the correct grammar rules makes a writing piece clearer and more readable. In grammar, one of the essential structure rules to learn is the subject and verb agreement. People who speak or write without committing subject-verb agreement errors are considered to have a good command of the English language. However, English as a second language learners tends to make errors in terms of these grammatical rules. According to Nayan, (2009), students tend to make errors in the general rule of subject-verb agreement. Many students struggle with subject-verb rules in their writing even though they have been learning English for many years. Subject-verb agreement errors are observable when writing an essay or any written production.

Dulay et al. (1982) stated that errors are the flawed side of learner speech and writing. According to (Corder 1967, as cited in Nayan 2009), an error refers to a systematic deviation made by learners who have not yet mastered the rules of L2. A learner cannot self-correct an error because it is a product reflective of his or her current stage of L2 development or underlying competence. To perform a language task such as writing, learners should master the grammatical structure needed. The teachers can regularly give activities that will improve students' knowledge of the subject-verb agreement. Teachers must be responsive to this matter to improve the quality of students' language acquisition and must use and follow correctly the 14 Rules of Subject - Verb Agreement.

According to grammar.yourdictionary.com, here are the 14 Rules of Subject-Verb Agreement: Rule No.1: Subject and verb must agree in number, Rule No. 2: Subject and verb must agree with each other even if there are subordinate and prepositional phrases that come between, Rule No. 3: Subjects must be placed after the verb if sentences start with "there" or "here," Rule No.4:Subjects come after the verb in questions, Rule No. 5: Plural form of the verb is applied in the sentence when two subjects are joined by "and," Rule No. 6: Singular verb form is applied in sentences with two subjects separated by "and," Rule No.7:Singular verb is applied in sentences with "each," "every," or "no", that comes before the subject, Rule No.8:Singular verb must be used in sentences even when subjects are both singular and are joined by conjunctions "or," "nor," "neither/nor," "either/or," "not only/but also." Plural verb form is not applied even when both subjects are plural and are connected by the words "or", "nor" "neither/nor", "either/or", "not only/but also applied when both subjects are plural and are connected by words "or", "nor", "neither/no", "either/or", "not only/but also", Rule No.9:The verb form of the subject that is nearest the verb, when one is singular and the other is plural, must be applied in the sentence, Rule No.10: Singular verb form must be applied in sentences with units of measurement and time as its subject, Rule No.11: If the object of the preposition is a noun and pronoun subject like, "some", "half", "none", "more ",or "all",

and are followed by a prepositional phrase, then the object of the preposition determines the verb, Rule No. 12: Sentences with singular pronoun as subject must use singular verbs, however, if the subject is pronoun, ""few," "many," "several," and "both", these always take the plural form of the verb, Rule No.13: Singular form of the verb must be applied in a sentence if its subject is a gerund, and plural form of the verb must be used when gerund is plural in form also, and Rule No.14: Singular form of the verb must be followed in sentences with collective nouns as subjects. Furthermore, as stated by Stapa and Izahar (2010), errors are commonly made by humans in learning a language, especially a foreign language. Moreover, it was also mentioned in their study that, according to Ellis (1997:35), "Errors reflect gaps in a learner's knowledge; they occur because the learner does not know what is correct." Some researchers have further studied these grammatical structure errors in written work, as cited by Saadiyah and Kaladevi (2009). Khan (2005), in research, carried out among 30 Form Five students, found that most of the students are weak in grammar.

#### 2. METHODS

Research methodology presents various methodologies that were used in data gathering and analysis, which are relevant to this study. In this chapter, explanations of research design and approach, data collection, and methods used during data collection are provided.

#### 2.1 Research Design

This study aimed to identify the errors used in subject-verb agreement among the essays of Grade 4 pupils of Tapikan Elementary School. This study is a corpus-based study and it employed a theory termed as Error Analysis which is developed from S.P.Corder's theoretical framework. According to 3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies Vol 16(1), specifically in the study, Analysis of errors in subject-verb agreement among Malaysian ESL learners of Stapa and Izahar (2010), Coder (1967) states that Error Analysis assumes that learners make major elements in the feedback system of language teaching and learning process. The process strictly follows Corder's Error Analysis procedure (Corder 1974, as cited by Surina, 2002:72-73); i. A corpus of language is selected.

- ii. As stated by Stapa and Izahar (2010), the errors in the corpus are identified. Corder (1971) points out the need to distinguish "lapses" (i.e., deviant sentences that are the result of processing limitations rather than a lack of competence). He also points out that the sentences can be "overtly idiosyncratic" (i.e., they are ill-formed in terms of target language rules) and "covertly idiosyncratic" (i.e., sentences that are superficially ungrammatical).
- iii. The errors are classified. This involves assigning a grammatical description to each error.
- iv. The errors are explained. At this stage, an attempt is made to identify the psycholinguistic cause of the errors.
- v. The errors are evaluated. This stage involves assessing the seriousness of each error in order to take principled teaching decisions.

The five steps of Corder's Error Analysis Procedures were the basis where respondents' samples were analyzed and errors were placed according to their categories, related to the classes of subject-verb agreement.

# 2.2 Corpus of the Study

The corpus of the study consists of the essays of selected Grade 4 pupils of Tapikan Elementary School, which were analyzed to find out the most common errors in subject-verb agreement according to the 14 Grammar Rules.

#### 2.3 Data Gathering Procedure

Upon choosing the problem of this study, the researchers randomly chose the respondents, the members of the grade 4 class of Tapikan Elementary School to write an essay, and the essay served as the corpus of the study.

After the gathering of the essays, the researchers corrected and tallied the errors made by the respondents according to the 14 Grammar Rules.

#### 2.4 Statistical Tool Analysis

This study utilized descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics used frequency count, percentage, and ranks. Frequency count was used to determining how many times a respondent did not apply the grammar rule in the essay. The percentage was used in order to determine the proportion of the responses to the total number of subjects that participated in the study. The percentage was derived by determining the proportion of part to the whole divided by 100. Rank was used to determine the standing of the responses of the respondents based on the 14 Grammar Rules. Rank can be determined through the number of frequency counts arranged in order.

#### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Richard Nordquist (2020), a grammatical error is a term used in prescriptive grammar to describe incorrect, unconventional, or controversial usage, such as a misplaced modifier or an inappropriate verb tense. It is also called a usage error. Grammatical errors are usually distinguished from factual errors, logical fallacies, misspellings, typographical errors, and faulty punctuation. According to Theodora Alexopoulou (2020), grammatical errors arise because learners have difficulty processing L2 forms which do not have easily identifiable meaning. The results of this study have shown that the grade four students made different errors in their essays. Table 1 below shows 31 occurrences regarding Rule No.1, which states that Subject and Verb did not agree in number. Rule No. 13 states that the singular form of the verb was not applied in sentences with gerunds as subjects, and the plural form of the verb was not used when plural gerund subjects are linked by "and" shows three occurrences. Rule No.11, states that the object of the prepositions like "some," half, "none," or "all" does not agree with the form of the verb found in one occurrence. The students followed most of the rules of the subject-verb agreement since no errors regarding those rules were recorded

Table- 1: Subject-verb agreement: Rules and Errors

Student No.	Rule	Rule 2	Rule 3	Rule 4	Rule 5	Rule 6	Rule 7	Rule 8	Rule 9	Rule 10	Rule 11	Rule 12	Rule 13	Rule 14
Student No.1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student No.2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student No. 3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student No. 4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Student No.5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Student No.6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student No.7	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student No. 8	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Student No. 9	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student No. 10	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student No.11	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student No.12	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	31	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0

Table 2 below shows the evident errors from the most to the least prevalent. The first column contains the grammar rule errors committed by the students; the second column contains the number of error occurrences, followed by the third and fourth columns with the percentage and rank.

First in rank was Rule No. 1, which states subject and verb agreement did not agree in number and had 31 occurrences, which was 88.57% of the given population. Second in rank was Rule No. 13, which states singular form of the verb was not applied in sentences with gerunds as subjects, and the plural form of the verb was not used when plural gerunds subjects are linked by "and" had three occurrences, had 8.56% of the given population. Third in rank was Rule No. 11, which states that the object of the prepositions like "some," half, "none," or "all" did not agree with the form of the verb has one occurrence, which was 2.86% of the population

Rule 1 has the most prevalent errors with 31 error occurrences, followed by Rule 13 with three error occurrences, and the least prevalent error is Rule 11 with only one error occurrence. The students' essays appeared to have no errors regarding the rest of the rules.

According to Yustisia (2018), students find it challenging to use subject-verb agreement because they do not understand the rules in using subject-verb agreement and lack the memorizing formula. In addition, Sutumo (2011) stated that the students still need more instruction and practice using subject-verb agreement in their writings.

As stated by Stapa and Izahar (2010), errors are commonly made by humans in learning a language, especially a foreign language. Moreover, it was also mentioned in their study that, according to Ellis (1997:35), "Errors reflect gaps in a learner's knowledge; they occur because the learner does not know what is correct." Some researchers have further studied these grammatical structure errors in written work, as cited by Saadiyah and Kaladevi (2009). In addition, Khan (2005), in research carried out among 30 Form Five students, found that most students are weak in grammar.

Number of Error Rules Percentage Rank Occurrences 1<sup>ST</sup> 1. Subject should agree with the 31 88.57% verb in number. 3 Singular form of the verb is 8.56% 2nd used when the subject is a gerund. However, when they are linked by 'and', use the plural form of the verb. 11. The correct form of the verb 1 2.86% 3rd depends on the object of the preposition.

Table -2: Subject- Verb Agreement: Error Classification

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Given the findings mentioned above, the following conclusions were drawn:

- 1. The grade 4 pupils are confused about when to use the base form and the s form of the verb. They did not master the basic skills of forming a sentence.
- 2. The grade 4 pupils are also unfamiliar with gerunds and their uses.
- 3. The grade 4 pupils also did not know how to distinguish the object of the preposition in the sentence.

According to https://penandthepad.com, in every child's education comes the moment when *verbs* are defined as action words. That is a relatively easy concept to master, but using singular versus plural verbs and correct subject-verb agreement are more abstract and require more detailed explanations. Without detailed explanations from the teacher about the Rules in Subject - Verb Agreement, it can lead to student confusion, and this confusion will lead to errors. Harmer (2007) stated that "errors are part of the learner's interlanguage, that is the version of the language which a learner has at any stage of development. It is continually reshaped as he or she aims toward complete mastery, so it is a natural process of language learning that students make an error when writing in English. Likewise, Ellis (1197) stated that it is crucial to identify the errors because it helps a teacher deal with those errors with the students.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of conclusions derived from the findings of the study, the following recommendations were advised:

- 1. Language teachers, especially on the primary grades, must focus on teaching the basics of grammar properly.
- 2. The use of the proper English grammar in the primary grades must be practiced consistently.
- 3. Language teachers must attend various seminars and workshops, in order to master their communication and teaching skills in teaching grammar.
- 4. Pupils must be motivated properly by the teachers in order to use the correct grammar in their writing activities, especially in an ESL classroom.

It is evident that the grade 4 students still do not have complete mastery of subject-verb agreement. Therefore, remedial actions should be taken in order to help them produce a good piece of written work. Teachers should employ a direct approach in teaching these students and at the same time, organize activities related to subject-verb agreement. Hopefully, the students can improve their writing and function well in English.

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