



Analysis of the Subject-Verb Agreement Ability among Indonesian English Major Students as EFL Learners

Alican Mendez Pandapatan^{a*}

^aDalipuga National High School, Iligan City, Philippines Picardal Institute of Science and Technology, Iligan City, Philippines

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*Correspondence Address:

alican.pandapatan@deped.gov.ph

Abstract

Subject-verb agreement is relevant in determining one's grammatical ability. The study examines the 70 English major students of UNTIRTA through a questionnaire. They are in semester four or second-year students of the academic year 2019-2020. A percentage result per item has been the indicator of students' knowledge on the five categories namely; the basics, impersonal subjects, quantities, exceptions, and main and auxiliary verbs. The verification of the incorrect response is through the short-written production of students' composition. Not only nouns that used as subjects but also other parts of speech and unit blocks of syntax. It reveals that a lot of students commit mistakes in choosing the right verb that agrees to the subject. This finding implies interference of first language and second language as parcel in mastering the subject-verb agreement which results to struggle and confusion among the learners. Lack of emphasis on grammar practice in writing is also a reason in applying the rules especially the basics. Moreover, cultural difference is a barrier in interpreting the sentences wherein the learners' vocabulary is limited. Suggested instructional strategy is a regular practice of the rules in the form of drill.

INTRODUCTION

Grammar functions as a central component of language to administer the ruling and forming of words in the sentences. These rules refer to the grammatical structure in syntax (Kurniawan & Seprizanna, 2016). It is described as functional since it matches forms (vocabulary) to function and meaning in the context (Drowning & Locke, 2006; Rayevska, 2009). According to Dorn (2000), cited by Stapa and Izahar (2010), words and phrases are blocks to construct sentences with meaning that are essential to communicate thoughts. Sentence form is ultimately determined by the carried information of words. Such pieces of information can

be focused into two which are (1) syntactic category and (2) the number and type of elements (O'Grady, 2000). The complete expressed thought in a sentence wherefore is a function of grammar.

Grammar has been an important part of teaching language especially for non-native speakers. Carrol (1969), as cited by Schenck (2017), states that grammar instruction has been the most effective pedagogy for educators throughout the years in teaching language. The strategy initially includes correcting errors, describing grammatical rules, and prompting students to translate text to their native language. For Schecnk (2017), students learned from this way could easily interpret and translate texts; however, they are disadvantaged in oral and writing skills which are necessary for communication in the target language. This is where errors in written and oral production come in.

Errors in language usage always have been an issue in language pedagogy especially the grammar to intense community interest, media discussions, and English language enthusiasts. But with the introduction of the communicative language theory, perception of errors became part and parcel of second language acquisition (Stapa & Izahar, 2010). It pertains to a language that is not native to the learner. There is a discrepancy in two languages particularly when those compared languages belong to different language families (Al Noori, Al Shamar, Mohd Yasin, 2015). For instance, the case of Indonesian Language and English Language, its grammatical structure along with vocabularies do not employ the same rules.

The English language has words that do not have many different endings for number and gender compared to other languages. Nouns take *-s* to show plural form while for verbs the *-s* signifies singular in the present tense. Verb tenses and auxiliaries can be difficult for non-native speakers in using it (Eastwood, 2002). Oppositely, Indonesian Language does not use the same allomorph for noun and phoneme for verb but rather has its own. Hence, this has brought problems in learning.

In grammar, one of the most essential structure rules to learn is the subject and the predicate. The basic sentence requires at least a subject and a predicate to express an understandable idea in communication (Sutomo, 2010). According to Downing and Locke (2006), the subject is a syntactic function that is identified by position, concord, prenominalisation, and reflections in question tags while the

predicate determines the number and type of objects and complements in clause then identified by position and concord. Furthermore, the concord between the two divisions must agree. It is where the subject and the verb agreement take place its role in grammar.

Subject-verb agreement (SVA) is a central component of grammatical encoding. Thus, it is sensitive to grammatical and conceptual influences. The grammatical subject of a sentence agrees in the number with the main verb and the simple principle is singular subjects require singular verbs while plural subjects require plural verbs. So, this is the component of grammatical encoding (Veenstra, 2014). The subject-verb order is fixed otherwise there is a special reason for changing it. Usually, it is easy to determine if the subject is singular or plural however there are exemptions to note (Eastwood, 2002).

Anyone who speaks or writes in English without errors in SVA is considered to have a good command in the language. However, this is a struggle among language learners. Nowadays, the problem in SVA among EFL speakers becomes usual across educational levels right from primary up to university. These errors seem to be normal as if people are either unaware of the rule or they see it as less important. Violation in grammatical rules means a problem in the good condition of language control (Tafida & Okunade, 2016). Verbs do agree with the subject and not the subject agrees to the verb in syntax.

Verb errors are commonly grammar mistakes committed by non-English speakers or EFL learners especially in writing. Grammatical errors occur due to cultural diversity, language habits, and educational background (Wang, Zhao & Shi, 2015). This is true to foreign language learners particularly at the university level. When writing an essay or any written production, committing errors in the verbs are observable.

Meanwhile in order to perform a language task, learners should master the grammatical structure needed. They must comprehend the rules to apply them in sentences such as SVA (Stapa & Izahar, 2010). On the other hand, the role of language teachers should be responsive to this matter to improve the quality of language acquisition of the students. They provide differentiated instructions to cater the lapses and alleviate the error production until none.

In teaching English language, it is important to gather data which depicts the problems in SVA faced by the learners. This is taken into account to determine

what actions should be done to address such issues in EFL. The teachers, who primarily give instructions, can decide what effective instructional strategies to be used to resolve the difficulties encountered by the learners. Furthermore, they can revise or innovate materials that are helpful in teaching and learning grammar (Stapa & Izahar, 2010). In learning SVA, Saliga (2018) suggests that it is essential to break down the steps. The provision of a variety of examples pertaining to the number of a person can clear out the confusion of the learners and avoid committing mistakes especially in simple sentences (Chele, 2015).

A reminder from Payne (2011) that English is not a list of rules to memorize but it is a dynamic, ever-changing, and complex to express the kinds of ideas human beings need to express through which understanding the various structures and patterns that the language made up is internalized. Hence, teachers should fully understand the goal is to make the learners realize that language is absorbed comprehensibly.

This perpetual problem regarding grammar motivates this study to see how far the teaching strategies equipped the learners and the language acquisition condition among non-native English speakers through an SVA test. By this way, teachers will aim to provide a relevant instruction for their learners to succeed in both oral and written production. Aside from that reason, the foremost objective of this study seeks to assess the ability of the English major students as EFL learners in the university by examining them through the concepts of the SVA. Their success in the writing as well as in oral communication is determined by their internalization of the grammar particularly in the SVA which is highly expected to be mastered and prerequisite not just in learning alone but mostly for the use of language. Kurniawan and Seprizana (2016) stressed that SVA is vital for English learners for them to construct a correct sentence. Without an ample idea of the use of the SVA rules, it leads to grammatical errors. The written production errors are evidences based on the lack of knowledge, don't have SVA rule in L1 and confusion of the learners to the target language (Nayan & Jussof, 2009; Jackson, Mormer & Brehm, 2018; Hoshino, Dussias, & Kroll; 2010). Hence, English major students should be able to be competent in language concepts, such as grammar, which will help them effectively in writing and oral arguments or compositions. Not only that, learners as well as teachers have to be aware of the SVA rules for them to teach it properly and correct mistakes by themselves. It

simply affects meaning and their understanding towards the language proper use. Additionally, in global setting, English is a universal language and is used for communication in different context e.g. medium for instruction in school, the mass media, business, and even politics and students should understand these areas for them to socially develop in using the language. It is not only a content to learn but a skill for both native and non-native speakers of English. So one of the indicators of good language command is grammar.

The intention of the researcher to conduct this SVA analysis is to answer these queries; what are the learners' struggle in determining the number (subject), what areas in SVA where students are lacking, what are the causes identified related to the findings of language researchers, how ready the students compose a grammatical written production, and what good strategy to be used in elevating the teaching-learning process. Thus, it underpins language topics and language pedagogy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Design

The study used the qualitative approach and the research design is descriptive. Qualitative approach describes, explains and interprets purposefully the collected data (Williams, 2007) and descriptive design relies on observation in collecting information. The process is to examine the situations to show what the norm is. Observation as research techniques (Marzano, Vegliante, & De Angelis, 2015) has many forms and one of these is distribution of questionnaire. He added that what most important in this type of design is to record or write the information to be analyzed (Walliman, 2011). In this research, questionnaire was used for gathering the data.

The Participants

The students as participants of this study are semester four or second year English Major Students of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University (UNTIRTA) of the academic year 2019-2020. These students are under the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education. There are three sections for the semester four students and seventy people participated in the study. Of which twenty are males and fifty are females ranging from the age nineteen to twenty-two. Additionally, these people are all English second language (L2) learners wherein there is none of them use the

English language as a first language (L1). Most of them speak Bahasa Indonesia and followed by Sundanese Language and Javanese Language.

The Instrument

The instrument used in this study is an e-questionnaire. The e-questionnaire is derived from the University of British Columbia Course Materials (Gerst & Paralejo, 2011) in English for university students combined with Oxford Guide in English Grammar (Eastwood, 2002). This was made to ensure the quality of the sentences made by the experts of the language comply with the validity, reliability, and accuracy. With the help of one of the professors of the students, the students answered the e-questionnaire through a given link. Instructions are in English because they are English major students.

The e-questionnaire is divided into two parts. First, the selection of the correct verb that agrees to the subject. There are thirty sentences in the first part which is subdivided into five categories namely; the basics, impersonal subjects, quantities, exceptions, and main verbs and its auxiliary. Second, a one-paragraph composition is given that requires five to fifteen sentences only to see if there is a reflection of errors committed to the first part. The actual average written productions are only five sentences per student. Each student had different topics depending on their day of birth. The day one to ten had to write about Stay at Home, Stay Away from the Covid 19. For the day eleven to twenty had to write about Frontliners, the Modern Heroes of Today. Lastly, day twenty-one to thirty-one had to write about Online Class together with Our Teachers.

The automated responses were analyzed through describing the number of students who got the correct and wrong answers per item. And to clarify this, their compositions served as evidence which turned related to previous researches.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Discussion

In this section is the presentation of the data, interpretation, and analysis. The categories mentioned in the first part of the questionnaire are presented separately. The sentences presented show two choices given and the correct answer is being highlighted. The verb errors, the second part, are also presented separately. Interpretation and analysis of findings of the data follow.

Table 1. Subject-Verb Agreement: The Basics

The Basics	Percent of students who got the correct answer	Percent of students who got it incorrect answer
Sentences		
1. The book my parents gave me (a. was , b. were) interesting.	87.1%	12.9%
2. Phil and Janice (a. have , b. has) invited us round.	70 %	30%
3. The book or the pens (a. is, b. are) in the drawer.	77.1%	22.9%
4. The grass (a. is , b. are) getting long.	87.1%	12.9%
5. The Rose and Crown (a. is , b. are) that old pub by the river.	27.1%	72.9%
6. George, together with some of his friends, (a. is , b. are) buying a race-horse.	31.4%	68.6%

The table 1 shows the basic principle in subject-verb agreement rules. The first column contains the sentences, while the second and third columns contain the percentages of correct and incorrect responses respectively.

The first sentence has a simple rule wherein the singular subject needs a singular verb. *The book* is the subject not *the parents* as a subject. The second sentence has two subjects who are *Phil and Janice* conjoined by *and* therefore requires a plural verb because it refers two-separate person. The third sentence has two subjects conjoined by *or* but the rule states that the nearest subject is where the verb agrees so the subject is *the pens*. The fourth sentence has a simple subject which is *the grass*. The students might think that *grass* is plural but it is singular. The fifth sentence is similar to the second sentence but it has a different condition. Not all conjoined by *and* will automatically plural. This case would be different because *the Rose and Crown* refers to the name of a pub and is a single entity therefore requires a singular verb. The context clue can be used. The sixth sentence has one subject who is *George* but with a phrase *together with some of his friends*. The students fail to recognize that the phrase extension does not affect the number of the subject and so does the verb. Therefore, *George* as a singular subject must have a singular verb.

For the first four sentences, most of the students identified the subjects and its number and few are unable to get the right subject. To Hoshino, Dussias, & Kroll (2010) this is called confusion of the referent where those few students are unsure of how many subject (sentence 2 and 3), the number of the noun (O'Grady, 2000) (sentence 4) and which one is the right referent (sentence 1). However, there is a big twist for the the last two sentences. Observe that the manner of interpreting the

sentence 2 was applied by the students to sentence 5 which means they are fixed to the former rule (Stapa & Izahar, 2010). To Wang, Zhao & Shi, (2015), this might be classified as part of cultural background due to the name of the pub which is unfamiliar to the participants. Sentence 6 was failed to internalized by the students that the only referent (Hoshino, Dussias, & Kroll;2010) is the noun regardless of the following phrase extension. The basics category has shown that items 1,2,3, and 4 are easy to be distinguished by the students but not items 5 and 6.

Table 2. Subject-Verb Agreement: Impersonal Subjects

Impersonal Subjects	Percent of students who got the correct answer	Percent of students who got it incorrect answer
Sentences		
1. There (a. is, b. are) the office supplies that you needed.	50%	50%
2. There (a. is, b. are) almost three million people living in the lower Mainland.	84.3%	15.7%
3. It (a. is, b. are) not uncommon for people to feel depressed during winter.	95.7%	4.3%
4. Here (a. is, b. are) my final term paper.	94.3%	5.7%
5. Which of these shoes (a. goes, b. go) best with my trousers?	48.6% (goes) 51.4% (go) 100%	0%
6. Through the trees (a. is, b. are) the quickest way.	48.6%	51.4%

The table 2 shows the principle of the impersonal subject in subject-verb agreement rules. The first column contains the sentences, while the second and third columns contain the percentages of correct and incorrect responses respectively.

In the position of the subject, one can find *it*, *there* and others. These are called impersonal subjects where there are no natural subjects. Usually, *it* takes singular verbs while others depend on the following number in the predicate position. (Gerst & Paralejo, 2011). *There* and *here* subjects are determined using the inverted structure of the sentence. This means that the subject after the verb must put in its original subject position. This applies to items 1, 2, and 4. In the first sentence, the subject to consider is the *office supplies*, it is plural therefore the verb is plural. These students forgot that the referral subject is after the verb. The second sentence, *three million people* is the subject which needs a plural verb. The third sentence is easy because *it* always takes a singular verb. Since the answer here is obvious, the students who mistakenly chose the incorrect verb are not aware of the condition of the subject. The fourth sentence has a subject *term paper* which is

singular therefore requires a singular verb. In the fifth sentence, this case is exceptional because it matters to the intention or the speaker meant by. Both options are correct and everyone is correct in this item. The sixth sentence has a phrase in the subject position. According to the rule (Eastwood, 2002), a phrase or a clause takes singular verbs. The subject is *through the trees* that express an idea and a phrase therefore it needs a singular verb. This shows that the students see the entity of trees as many rather than the thought which is a part of a phrase.

The sentences which identified its proper subject by the students are comprehended well where the rules for these impersonal pronouns remembered and applied (Stapa & Izahar, 2010) in contrary to have confusion of the referent subject (Hoshino, Dussias & Kroll, 2010) and unawareness of the rule (Tafida & Okunade, 2016). For the sentence 1 and 6, students seem a bit confused to the number of subject (Hoshino, Dussias & Kroll, 2010; O'Grady, 2000). Herein the impersonal pronoun of subject-verb agreement, items 2, 3, 4 and 5 are the easiest while 1 and 6 are confusing to some. The item would still be easy but it will depend on the thought (conceptual meaning) that the speaker meant by (Hoshino, Dussias & Kroll, 2010).

Table 3. Subject-Verb Agreement: Quantities

Quantities	Percent of students who got the correct answer	Percent of students who got it incorrect answer
Sentences		
1. A lot of the clothing that students wear (a. is , b. are) not appropriate for class.	37.1%	62.9%
2. Five thousand km (a. is , b. are) the approximate distance.	67.1%	32.9%
3. What percentage of people in the world (a. is, b. are) illiterate?	54.3%	45.7%
4. (a. Do, b. Does) all the homework have to be finished by tomorrow?	55.7%	44.3%
5. Every one of the computers in this room (a. has , b. have) some kind of virus.	65.7%	34.3%
6. Bread and butter (a. was , b. were) all we had.	18.6%	81.4%

The table 3 shows the quantities/entity principle in subject-verb agreement rules. The first column contains the sentences, while the second and third columns contain the percentages of correct and incorrect responses respectively.

The subject for the first sentence is *the clothing*. The students might think that the subject is *students* in that phrase. Remember, the subject is the main focus and not the added phrase. In the second sentence, the rule states that any

measurement or amount of money as the subject takes singular verbs. In this case the distance number (*five thousand km*) serves the subject. The third sentence talks about the *percentage* which is singular but when there is an *of phrase*, the verb agrees to the subject inside that phrase. So, the subject is the *people* therefore takes a plural verb. In the fourth sentence the subject refers to *the homework* and not to the word *all*. This singular subject takes a singular verb unless there is an *of phrase* wherein the verb depends on. There might be confusion also in this case where students would probably think that the word *all* signifies pluralism instead of being one count. The fifth sentence has an indefinite pronoun as a subject and the rule for this is all singular indefinite pronouns take singular verbs. *Every one* takes a singular verb. The students might think that *computers* are the subject. In the sixth sentence, this complicates the analysis of how many the subjects are there. In the rule, if two things are seen or expressed as one then it is singular in form even if it is conjoined by *and*. Only a few students realized this. Failure to analyze the context of these two words taken as one shows cultural disorientation. The bread and the butter in meals are not eaten separately but a combination for western culture. Though this concept is not new to the students however it is not a regular part of their meals.

As mentioned above, there is a confusion of the subject (Hoshino, Dussias & Kroll, 2010) for sentence 1 and a cultural unawareness (Wang, Zhao and Shi, 2015) and the number as exemptions to the basic rule (O'Grady, 2000; Eastwood, 2002) for sentence 6. Meanwhile for other sentences, half of the students had difficulty. For quantities, the percentage per item implies that almost half of the students more or less have difficulty in this area most especially in the item 1 and 6.

Table 4. Subject-Verb Agreement: Exceptions

Exceptions	Percent of students who got the correct answer	Percent of students who got it incorrect answer
Sentences		
1. Most Japanese (a. commutes, b. commute) to their places of work.	37.1%	62.9%
2. Physics (a. tries , b. try) to understand the mysteries of the physical world.	60%	40%
3. The police (a. has, b. have) arrived at the crime scene.	24.3%	75.7%
4. The Netherlands (a. is , b. are) located in the north west of Europe.	81.4%	18.6%
5. The poor (a. is, b. are) helped by government programs.	34.3%	65.7%
6. Gymnastics (a. looks , b. look) difficult, and it is.	68.6%	31.4%

The table 4 shows the principle of the exception in subject-verb agreement rules. The first column contains the sentences, while the second and third columns contain the percentages of correct and incorrect responses respectively.

The first sentence refers to the rule that citizens of countries must have a plural form of the verb. The subject in the sentence is *Japanese* which mentioned a-must-be plural therefore requires a plural verb. There is another exemption for this if this term used as an adjective for a noun then it can take singular verb such as Indonesian man or Japanese man. The second sentence refers to the nouns or special nouns which have plural form but singular in meaning. The subject in the second sentence is *physics* which is singular in meaning, therefore takes a singular verb. The third sentence belongs to the ruling for collective nouns which takes singular verbs however there are also some considered to be plural or both. Since most collective nouns treated as singular, here are some examples which can be treated plural exclusively; people, police, men, women, and children. *The police* are the subject in the sentence and included in the collective noun that has plural meaning which should have a plural verb. The fourth sentence is related to the second sentence because names of nations, countries that end with *-s* (Philippines) or countries comprise two words conjoined by *and* (Bosnia and Herzegovina) has a singular meaning which requires singular verbs. So, *Netherlands* is singular. The fifth sentence has the rule in SVA pertains to the use of adjectives as a subject is treated to be plural and requires a plural verb. This is somewhat similar to the first sentence. The subject is *the poor* which means plural verb should be used. The sixth sentence has plural in form but singular in meaning type of SVA rule. The subject is *gymnastics* which refers to a certain field. This case is related to the second sentence.

The sentence 1,3 and 5 are obviously difficult. The probable thinking of the students is that the addition of *-s* to make it plural applies; for example, Indonesian becomes Indonesians in sentence 1 which is an exemption (Eastwood,2002). The vocabulary of the students regarding these few exceptions marks the lack of lexical stock in English (O'Grady, 2000). In sentence 3 they probably think that a police as they usually used in daily communication refers to one person but the correct form should be a policeman to mean a single person. This shows misuse of the word. The students who committed mistakes in this might be confused about the presence of *-s* and therefore has difficulty (Eastwood, 2002). However,

sentence 2,4 & 6 are known to the students its meaning (Drowning & Locke, 2006; Rayevska, 2009). The results show poor recognition on the ruling singular form but requires plural verb which is in item 1, 3 and 5 while it is a different case to the ruling plural in form but singular in meaning, requires singular verb which evident in item 2, 4 and 6.

Table 5. Subject-Verb Agreement: Main Verbs and Auxiliary Verbs

Main verbs and Auxiliary verbs	Percent of students who got the correct answer	Percent of students who got it incorrect answer
Sentences		
1. Jay, did he (a. does, b. do) your assignment while riding the bus?	45.7%	54.3%
2. Had he (a. meet, b. met) Cristina before he came to Canada?	75.7%	24.3%
3. Chen did not (a. goes, b. go) to the party yesterday.	58.6%	41.4%
4. They (a. has, b. have) been debating this topic for ten minutes now.	92.9%	7.1%
5. The United Nations (a. has , b. have) reacted angrily.	75.7%	24.3%
6. I (a. was , b. were) looking for some scissors yesterday.	98.6%	1.4%

The table 5 shows the main verbs and auxiliary verbs principle in subject-verb agreement rules. The first column contains the sentences, while the second and third columns contain the percentages of correct and incorrect responses respectively.

In the first sentence, the subject is the pronoun *he* and not the noun *Jay*. The subject takes a singular verb but the verb has an auxiliary verb *did* then the rule states that the main verb takes its base form so the answer is *do*. The second sentence is a question. It has a subject pronoun *he* and uses the auxiliary verb *had*. Since it is past perfect tense, the rule to take count is the form of the main verb. The rule state that the auxiliary *had* makes the main verb form to its past participle. The third sentence has the auxiliary verb *did* similar to the first sentence but this time it is in negative form. The rule says when an auxiliary verb *did* is in negative form, it does not affect the form of the main verb therefore it takes the base form. The fourth sentence has the case of present perfect progressive. The auxiliary verb agrees to the number of the subject which is the pronoun *they*. So, the verb is plural. The fifth sentence has the same ruling and the subject is singular so the auxiliary verb must be singular. The sixth sentence is very common when *I* as a subject would take the singular past form of the verb *be*.

Few students might confuse with the function of auxiliary *did* and *had* but the

majority had got the correct form of the verb needed (sentence 1, 2 and 3). For the sentence 4,5 and 6 majority of them able to realize the rule. This is in contrast with the claim of Eastwood (2002) about non-native speakers of English that there is a difficulty of usage in verbs and its auxiliaries.

Table 6. Classified Subject-Verb Agreement Violations in Written Production

SVA Violation	Occurrence	Example	
		Verb Error Form	Correct Form
Inappropriate verb	30	The lecturer give us the material.	The lecturer gives us the material.
Misspelled verb	2	the lecturer that still teachs us	the lecturer that still teaches us
Doubled verb	5	I prefer go to the offline class	I prefer to go to the offline class
Lacking of main verb	5	Many people yelling in social media	Many people are yelling in social media
Disappeared verb	3	its been a half year	It has been a half year It's been a half year

The table 6 shows the subject-verb agreement violations in the written production of the students.

Majority committed mistakes on using the inappropriate verb in concord to the subjects while there are minimal mistakes in the misspelled verb, doubled verb, lacking of main verb and disappeared verb. This indicates that the students have not fully comprehend the SVA rules in applying it as seen in their written production as result of less practice in using the rules (Stapa and Izahar, 2010). There is also a problem in identifying the number and type of elements in the subject (O'Grady, 2000) as grammatical encoding (Veenstra, 2014) and as part of their interpretation on the function and meaning of context (Drowning & Locke, 2006; Rayevska, 2009) in the syntax.

Findings

These mistakes support the idea that the results shown in the table 1 to 5 imply the weak ability of the students in written production and employing the SVA rules. Quite a number of the participants do not identify the number of the subject (e.g. conjoined by and/or, grass) and the referent (main subject). This is the case shown in the table 1 in the basics. It also found out that simple subject for impersonal subjects (table 2) is what students able to distinguish easily though the number who still identified the right verbs are not overwhelming. For quantities (table 3), confusion on the subjects' number if taken as one or separately had been the difficulty of the students. The vocabulary of the students also tested in the

exceptions (table 4) where the words that like singular forms require a plural verb or plural forms require a singular verb. The rules for exceptions are evidently unfamiliar to most of them. For table 5, the problem encountered by the students is the governing agreement between the main verb and the auxiliaries. The SVA violations and its occurrences support the dilemma based on the results shown in the preceding tables.

The anticipation of satisfactory language proficiency on SVA as one of the valuable features of English grammar is strongly reflected here. Students with high proficiency in the L2 observe the rules in SVA and even identify the grammatical and conceptual number (Hoshino, Dussias & Kroll, 2010; Jackson, Mormer, & Brehm, 2018) however majority of them unable to remember the rules and it means they have less than the expected proficiency. This practically implies that the tertiary students encounter problems in general rule than the sub-rules. This is because they do not have a subject-verb agreement in their L1 and another reason is the lack of time concentrating on their grammar to improve writing (Nayan & Jussof, 2009; Sutomo, 2010). The study also revealed that the majority of students commit errors especially in SVA of number followed by SVA of person. Most of the sentences were simple which verb errors committed (Chele, 2015). It also showed that students prefer not to use complex sub-rules of SVA (Stapa & Izahar, 2010) which showed in the percentages of correct responses. Moreover, the SVA errors of the students in surface taxonomy perspective are misformation (lacking and disappeared verbs), omission (misspelled verb), and addition (doubled verb) while in the linguistic categorization perspective are the presence of two verbs, the disappearance of needed verb and the nouns used as subjects do not match with verb used. The classified error for their composition is local errors because it does not hinder the communication (Nurjana, 2017).

Additionally, inter-lingual transfer or so-called interference from L1 to L2 affects much the cognitive process of the students. Since Indonesian Language (as spoken language by all participants) doesn't have concord compare to English Language then it is a hindrance in the language acquisition of the learners particularly on SVA. Another factor of error is misleading context of learning because when learning the English language, it should not be memorized its grammar as Payne (2011) stated but comprehensibly internalized the context. Their fixed interpretation of the rules limits them to fully understand that there are

considerations to note given the grammatical and conceptual number (Hoshino, Dussias & Kroll, 2010). Communication strategies are also factor in committing errors because the learning style of the students need more innovative and adhering instructional techniques to facilitate their pick up on the language and its usage. Henceforth, it is evident that there are difficulties in using correct patterns of SVA in the writing of the students (Nurjana, 2017). Cultural diversity, language habits, and educational background are also linguistic hindrance of harnessing the grammatical ability of the EFL learners (Wang, Zhao & Shi, 2015). Due to cultural attachment to the English which does not share many features in Indonesian context, this became a gap. The use of both languages does not express the same way. Lastly, the educational background matters because frequent exposure to English especially at the formative years of studying help in smooth acquisition of the language.

CONCLUSION

The study exposed the status of grammatical ability of the second-year students particularly on subject-verb agreement is not ample to produce a well-written output. Their readiness to write communicative and academic texts needs more progress as English major students particularly in writing academic text. The basics of the rules are easy and it must not be disregarded in the content of text and meaning. Students have to exert time and effort in improving their grammatical ability in English language. There is still a strong attachment based on the doubling of main verbs, eliminated verbs, singular use of verbs, lacking of auxiliary verbs, and the tense. Moreover, the cultural orientation defies the acquisition of a second language.

Improving the quality of learning and their ability to produce an error-free written output, the students together with their teachers should have drill on grammar. The drill helps in the establishment of conscious usage of grammar specifically concord that affects meaning and communication. Teacher must prepare the necessary tool for the drill and record progress to identify which area on SVA should focus on. On the other hand, students need to extend self-reading in preparations to any grammar drill. Their improvement would not go far unless alternatives such as reading paired with it.

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