

ERRORS ON SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT MADE BY THIRD SEMESTER STUDENTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM OF NIAS RAYA UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRAK

Subject and verb agreement is the grammatical rule that the subject and the verb used in a sentence match each other. The third semester students of English Language Education Study Program of Nias Raya University faced the problem in subject-verb agreement aspect. The objective of this research was investigating subject-verb agreement made by the third semester students of English Language Education of Nias Raya University with the number of students was 37 persons. The primary source of the data was the students' papers in writing sentences. The errors made were determined by the rule of subject-verb agreement (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002). The result of data analysis was the third semester students made the errors on subject-verb agreement used or linked by: *-number and person, -and, -or, -neither...nor, -preposition: with, as well as, -collective nouns, -indefinite pronouns, -quantity phrases, -singular nouns ending in -s, -relative pronoun: who, that, -pronoun: what, -introductory there, -citation and titles*. The result of this research is expected being significant for English lecturer to search for solution for this problem..

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1. INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign language is one of compulsory subjects for Indonesian high school students to learn. There are four English skills that need to be learnt by students in general: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Those skills are learnt and are expected to be mastered by students from many various materials disseminated. They are considered as the hard works for English teachers in Indonesia and there is needed a good cooperation between English teachers and students to conduct a convenient learning atmosphere during classroom interaction to achieve the learning objectives.

Speaking and writing as the productive skills, and as the ways of expressing ideas, thought, etc.

require a high mastery of grammar by students. A complete thought or idea is normally conveyed through combined words in a sentence or sentences grammatically. In other words, speaker or writer should convey thought or idea grammatically. According to Greenbaum and Nelson (2002:3) "Grammar deals with the rules of combining words into larger units. The largest unit that is described in grammar is normally the sentence". Furthermore, Sargeant (2007: 118) states "a sentence is group of words that expresses a complete thought". Thus, it can be inferred that units or words that forms a sentence must be complete and must agree or match each other. However, completing a good sentence structure as the way of delivering thought or idea is still hard task for

students. This case is found in students' works about subject-verb agreement. The agreed units in a sentence traditionally consist of two constituents: the subject, and the predicate. The predicate consists of verb and any other element of the sentence apart from the subject (Greenbaum and Nelson, 2002: 21). E.g. *the chef is a young man with broad experience of the world* (p.21). *The chef* is the subject, and *is a young man with broad experience of the world* is the predicate. *Many of us have protested* (p.24). *Many of us* is subject, and *have protested* is the verb. Each unit as displayed in the sentences above has function. They function as the subject and the predicate or the verb.

The subject of sentence as the doer of the action and the verb or the action done the doer must match each other. Sergeant (2007: 52) says "When you use a verb, you have to say who or what is doing the action. This 'who or what' is the subject of the verb. The subject and the verb match each other. You say that the subject and the verb agree when they match each other". In addition, normally the verb agrees with its subject in number and person. The agreement applies whenever the verb displays distinctions in person and number (Greenbaum and Nelson, 2002: 141). This is clear that the subject and the verb match each other in a sentence. Speaker or writer must notice the subject-verb agreement of the sentence constructed.

Subject-verb agreement was learnt the third semester students of English Language Education Study Program of Nias Raya University. However, there was a problem faced by the third semester students. They made the errors on subject-verb agreement. They were unable to match the subject and the verb of the sentence made. It was evidenced by the investigation conducted in their writing. There were found that the subject and the verb from the sentences built did not agree or did not match each other.

An analysis of the errors made by the third semester students must be conducted to investigate the problem occurred. The analysis of the error on subject-verb agreement is well done to reveal the facts about the common errors done about it. It is expected, then, this analysis is beneficial for English lecturer as the reference for teaching and learning process, and for the students as the reference for them also to improve their common errors on subject-verb agreement.

Based on the elaborated explanation above, the research was done about the errors on subject-verb agreement made by the third semester students of English language education study program of Nias Raya University. The objective of this research was to investigate the errors on subject-verb agreement made by the third semester students of English Language Education Study Program of Nias Raya University

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Research is a process of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue (Creswell and Guetterman, 2019: 3). The topic of this research was errors on subject-verb

agreement made by third semester students of English Language Education Study Program of Nias Raya University. Furthermore, Bryman and Bell (2019: 198) say "qualitative analysis uses mainly words and images as data rather than numbers". Therefore, this research was designed by using qualitative approach in which the data collected and analyzed were in forms of words.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the errors on subject-verb agreement made by third semester students of English Language Education Study Program. To achieve this goal, the researcher collected the students' writing of sentences, especially about subject-verb agreement. The total numbers of the third semester students was 37 persons. The researcher collected the data for three times to make sure data accuracy and the credibility of the study.

After data collection, the researcher analyzed and made interpretation of data finding. Bogdan and Biklen (2007: 159) state "analysis involves working with the data, organizing them, breaking them down into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns." Therefore, there were some steps of data analysis conducted in this research: (1) the researcher read and determined the errors made on subject-verb agreement by underlining or circling them, (2) the researcher organized and synthesized the errors made, (3) the researcher searched for the patterns of error made based on the general rules (Greenbaum and Nelson's theory, 2002), (4) the researcher displayed the data finding of the errors on subject-verb agreement made into table, (5) the researcher interpreted the data finding.

3. RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data analysis, there were found the errors on subject-verb agreement made by the third semester students of English Language Education Study Program of Nias Raya University. The errors were found in twelve rules of subject-verb agreement (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002: 141-152) with 2115 sentence errors from 4070 sentences made as displayed in the following table:

Number of Errors on Subject-Verb Agreement Made by the Third Semester Students of English Language Education Study Program of Nias Raya Univeristy

No	Type of Rule	Number of Sentence Error	
1	Subject-verb agreement in <i>number</i> and <i>person</i>	Number	88
		Person	91
2	Subject-verb agreement linked by <i>-and</i>	And	87
3	Subject-verb agreement linked by <i>-or, -either ... or, -neither ... nor</i>	Or	101
		Either ... or	107
		Neither ... nor	121
4	Subject-verb agreement linked by <i>preposition: with, as well as, in addition to, after</i>	With	96
		As well as	89
		In addition to	111
		After	88
5	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>collective nouns</i>	Collective noun	101

6	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>indefinite pronouns</i>	Indefinite pronoun	99
7	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>quantity phrases</i>	Quantity phrases	116
8	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>singular nouns ending in -s</i>	Singular nouns ending in -s	91
9	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>relative pronouns: which, who, that.</i>	Which	95
		Who	86
		That	78
10	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>pronoun: what</i>	What	98
11	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>introductory: there</i>	There is	103
		There are	107
12	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>citations and titles</i>	Citations	83
		Titles	79
Total			2115

Here were some errors on subject-verb agreement in writing sentences made by the third semester students of English Language Education Study Program of Nias Raya University as displayed in the following table:

Errors on Subject-Verb Agreement Made by the Third Semester students of English Language Education Study Program of Nias Raya University

No	Type of Rule	Error on Subject-Verb Agreement	Correction on Subject-Verb Agreement
1	Subject-verb agreement in <i>number and person</i>	Mr. Robert <i>distribute</i> the paper test to us.	Mr. Robert <i>distributes</i> the paper test to us.
		The balls <i>is</i> being sold out.	The balls <i>are</i> being sold out.
2	Subject-verb agreement linked by <i>-and</i>	Both Russian army and Ukrainian army <i>attacks</i> each other.	Both Russian army and Ukrainian army <i>attack</i> each other.
		Widya, Winda, and Windi <i>is</i> at the same semester.	Widya, Winda, and Windi <i>are</i> at the same semester.
3	Subject-verb agreement linked by <i>-or, -either ... or, -neither ... nor</i>	No food or drink are provided by the committee.	No food or drink <i>is</i> provided by the committee.
		Neither your brother nor your sister <i>were</i> welcomed in this party.	Neither your brother nor your sister <i>was</i> welcomed in this party.
4	Subject-verb agreement linked by <i>preposition: with, as well as, in addition to, after</i>	My father, together with my uncles, <i>are</i> going to the beach.	My father, together with my uncles, <i>is</i> going to the beach.
		The leader, as well as the members, <i>are</i> practicing.	The leader, as well as the members, <i>is</i> practicing.
5	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>collective nouns</i>	The audience <i>were</i> not looking at the speaker.	The audience <i>was</i> not looking at the speaker.
		The information <i>were</i> obtained from believable person.	The information <i>was</i> obtained from believable person.
6	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>indefinite pronouns</i>	Someone <i>have</i> borrowed my pen and my notebook.	Someone <i>has</i> borrowed my pen and my notebook.
		None of the student <i>were</i> present today.	None of the student <i>was</i> present today.

7	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>quantity phrases</i>	Five years <i>seem</i> too long for you to finish your study.	Five years <i>seems</i> too long for you to finish your study.
		Some of books related <i>is</i> available in the library.	Some of books related <i>are</i> available in the library.
8	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>singular nouns ending in -s</i>	Mathematics <i>are</i> difficult subject.	Mathematics <i>is</i> difficult subject.
		Economics <i>were</i> my favorite subject at school.	Economics <i>was</i> my favorite subject at school.
9	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>relative pronouns: which, who, that.</i>	The students who <i>tells</i> me the story did not attend the class yesterday.	The students who <i>told</i> me the story did not attend the class yesterday.
		You need special supervisor that <i>control</i> your work.	You need special supervisor that <i>controls</i> your work.
10	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>pronoun: what</i>	What they claim <i>don't</i> take my right.	What they claim <i>doesn't</i> take my right.
		What colors they asked <i>was</i> white and blue.	What colors they asked <i>were</i> white and blue.
11	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>introductory: there</i>	There <i>was</i> fifteen students who participated in this competition.	There <i>were</i> fifteen students who participated in this competition.
		There <i>were</i> no information received.	There <i>was</i> no information received.
12	Subject-verb agreement that used <i>citations and titles</i>	'The battle between Russia and Ukraine' <i>are</i> the hot topic in every media.	'The battle between Russia and Ukraine' <i>is</i> the hot topic in every media.
		Snow White and the Huntsman <i>were</i> the movie watched by much kid.	Snow White and the Huntsman <i>was</i> the movie watched by much kid.

a. Subject-verb agreement in *number and person*

The error was made by the students on subject-verb agreement in number and person in the sentences constructed.

S1: Mr. Robert *distribute* the paper test to us.

The sentence above showed that the verb '*distribute*' did not agree with the subject '*Mr. Robert*'. The verb '*distribute*' must be added *-s* in the end of the verb. It might become '*distributes*'. It was because the sentence was in the form of simple present tense, and the subject was the third singular person. So, the correct sentence should be '*Mr. Robert distributes the paper to us*'.

S2: The balls *is* being sold out.

The sentence above showed disagreement between *-be 'is'* and the subject '*the balls*'. The subject '*the balls*' was plural. Hence, the form of *-be* used also must be plural '*are*'. So, the correct sentence should be '*The balls are being sold out*'.

b. Subject-verb agreement linked by *-and*

The error was made by the students on subject-verb agreement that linked by *-and* in the sentences constructed.

S3: Both Russian army and Ukrainian army *attacks* each other.

The sentence above showed disagreement between the subject 'both Russian army and Ukrainian army' and the verb 'attacks'. The subject was plural that linked by *-and*. Hence, definitely it affected the correct form of verb used. It might be 'attack'. So, the correct sentence should be 'Both Russian army and Ukrainian army attack each other'.
S4: Widya, Winda, and Winda *is* at the same semester.

The sentence above showed disagreement between the subject 'Widya, Winda, and Winda' and the form of *-be 'is'* used. The subject linked by *-and* was plural. Hence, it affected *-be* used. *-Be* used must be plural 'are'. So, the correct one should be 'Widya, Winda, Winda *are* at the same semester'.

c. Subject-verb agreement linked by *-or, -either ... or, -neither ... nor*

The error was made by the students on subject-verb agreement that linked by *-or, -either ... or, -neither ... nor*, in the sentences constructed.

S5: No food or drink *are* provided by the committee.

The sentence above showed disagreement between the subject 'no food or drink' and the form *-be 'are'* used. The subject used was singular. Hence, the form of *-be* used also must be singular 'is'. Therefore, the correct sentence should be 'No food or drink *is* provided by the committee'.

S6: Neither your brother nor your sister *were* welcomed in this party.

The sentence above showed that *-be 'were'* did not agree with the subject 'neither your brother nor your sister'. The subject was singular. Hence the form of *-be* used definitely must be singular 'was' in the passive voice above. So, the correct sentence should be 'neither your brother nor your sister *was* welcomed in this party'.

d. Subject-verb agreement linked by preposition: *with, as well as, in addition to, after*

The error was made by the students on subject-verb agreement that linked by preposition: *with, as well as, in addition to, after*, in the sentences constructed.

S7: My father, together with my uncles, *are* going to the beach.

The sentence above showed disagreement that linked by *-with* between the subject 'my father, together with my uncles' and the form of *-be 'are'*. The subject was singular, even though there was plural noun phrase that linked by preposition *-with*. Hence, the form of *-be* used must be singular 'is'. Therefore, the correct sentence should be 'My father, together with my uncles, *is* going to the beach'.

S8: The leader, as well as the members, *are* practicing.

The sentence above showed disagreement linked *-as well as* between the form *-be 'are'* used and the subject 'the leader, as well as the members'. The subject was singular because the main noun phrase was singular 'the leader', even though it was followed by other noun phrase 'the members' that linked by *-as well as*. Hence, the form of *-be* used must be singular

'is'. Therefore, the correct sentence should be 'The leader, as well as the members' *is* practicing'.

e. Subject-verb agreement that used *collective nouns*

The error was made by the students on subject-verb agreement that used collective noun in the sentences constructed.

S9: The audience *were* not looking at the speaker.

The sentence above showed that the subject 'the audience' did not agree with the form of *-be 'were'*. The subject 'the audience' was known as the members of group as a unit. Hence, the form of *-be* used must be 'was'. Therefore, the correct sentence should be 'The audience *was* not looking at the speaker'.

S10: The information *were* obtained from believable person.

The sentence above also showed disagreement between the subject 'the information' and the form of *-be 'were'* used. The subject 'the information' was known uncountable noun, also a group of thing. Hence, the form of *-be* that matched was '*-was*'. Therefore, the correct sentence should be 'The information *was* obtained from believable person'.

f. Subject-verb agreement that used *indefinite pronouns*

The error was made by the students on subject-verb agreement that used indefinite pronoun in the sentences constructed.

S11: Someone *have* borrowed my pen and my notebook.

The sentence above showed that the form of *-be* used for present perfect 'have' did not agree with the subject 'someone'. The subject 'someone' was singular anyway. Hence, the correct form of *-be* used must be 'has'. Therefore, the correct sentence should be 'Someone *has* borrowed my pen and my notebook'.

S12: None of the student *were* present today.

The sentence above also showed disagreement between the subject 'none of the student' and the form of *-be* used 'were'. The subject 'none of the student' was indefinite pronoun. Hence, it must take singular *-be 'was'*. Therefore, the correct sentence should be 'None of the student *was* present today'.

g. Subject-verb agreement that used *quantity phrases*

The error was made by the students on subject-verb agreement that used quantity phrases in the sentences constructed.

S13: Five years *seem* too long for you to finish your study.

The sentence above showed that the verb 'seem' and the subject 'five years' did not match each other. The subject 'five years' was plural phrase of quantity viewed as a unit. Hence, it must take singular verb 'seems' with *-s* in the end of verb. Therefore, the correct sentence should be 'Five years *seems* too long for you to finish your study'.

S14: Some of books related *is* available in the library.

The sentence above displayed that the subject 'some of the book related' and form of *-be* used 'is'

did not match each other. The subject was plural in this case. Hence, it must take singular form of –be ‘is’. Therefore, the correct sentence should be ‘Some of the books related are available in the library’.

h. Subject-verb agreement that used *singular nouns* ending –s

The error was made by the students on subject-verb agreement that used *singular nouns* ending –s, in the sentences constructed.

S15: Mathematics *are* difficult subject.

The sentence above showed that –be used ‘*are*’ did not agree with the subject ‘*Mathematics*’. The word ‘*Mathematics*’ referred to the field of study. In addition, it was singular. Hence, the correct form of –be used must be ‘*is*’. Therefore, the correct sentence should be ‘*Mathematics is difficult subject*’.

S16: Economics *were* my favorite subject at school.

The sentence above also showed the same error on disagreement between the form of –be used ‘*were*’ and the subject ‘*Economics*’. The word ‘*Economics*’ referred to the field of study. In addition, it was singular. Hence, it must take singular form of –be used ‘*was*’. Therefore, the correct sentence should be ‘*Economics was my favorite subject at school*’.

i. Subject-verb agreement that used relative pronouns: *which, who, that*

The error was made by the students on subject-verb agreement that used relative pronouns: *which, who, and that*, in the sentences constructed.

S17: The students who *tells* me the story did not attend the class yesterday.

The sentence above showed disagreement between the verb ‘*tells*’ and the subject ‘*the students*’ that used relative pronoun –*who* after it. The subject ‘*the students*’ was plural. In addition, the tense of whole sentence was past form. Hence, the correct verb used must be ‘*told*’. Therefore, the correct sentence should be ‘*The students who told me the story did not attend the class yesterday*’.

S18: You need special supervisor that *control* your work.

The sentence above displayed disagreement between the verb ‘*control*’ and the subject ‘*supervisor*’ that used pronoun –*that* that linked both clauses. The subject was singular. Hence, the correct verb used must be ‘*controls*’. Therefore, the correct sentence should be ‘*You need special supervisor that controls your work*’.

j. Subject-verb agreement that used pronoun: *what*

The error was made by the students on subject-verb agreement that used pronoun –*what*, in the sentences constructed.

S19: What they claim *don’t* take my right.

The sentence above displayed disagreement between the verb ‘*don’t*’ and the subject ‘*what they need*’. The subject used pronoun –*what* that referred to one thing only, and definitely it was singular. Hence, the correct form of verb used must be ‘*doesn’t*’. Therefore, the correct sentence should be ‘*What they claim doesn’t take my right*’.

S20: What colors they asked *was* white and blue.

The sentence above showed that the form of –be used ‘*was*’ and the subject ‘*what colors*’. The subject used pronoun –*what* that referred to more than one thing, and it was also emphasized by inflection –s in the end of word ‘*colors*’ after pronoun –*what*. Hence, the correct form of –be used must be ‘*were*’. Therefore, the correct sentence should be ‘*What colors they asked were white and blue*’.

k. Subject-verb agreement that used introductory: *there*

The error was made by the students on subject-verb agreement that used introductory –*there*, in the sentences constructed.

S21: There *was* fifteen students who participated in this competition.

The sentence above showed that the form of –be used ‘*was*’ after introductory –*there* did not agree with the subject ‘*fifteen students*’ which followed the verb. The subject ‘*fifteen students*’ was plural. Hence, the correct form of –be must be ‘*were*’. Therefore, the correct sentence should be ‘*There were fifteen students who participated in this competition*’.

S22: There *were* no information received.

The sentence above showed disagreement between form of –be used ‘*were*’ and the subject ‘*no information*’ which followed the verb. The subject was singular. Hence, the correct form of –be used must be ‘*was*’. Therefore, the correct sentence should be ‘*There was no information received*’.

l. Subject-verb agreement that used citations and titles

The error was made by the students on subject-verb agreement that used citations and titles in the sentences constructed.

S23: ‘The battle between Russia and Ukraine’ *are* the hot topic in every media.

The sentence above displayed disagreement between the form of –be ‘*are*’ used and the subject ‘*The battle between Russian and Ukraine*’. The subject ‘*The battle between Russian and Ukraine*’ was citation. It was evidenced by the single quotation mark. Hence, the correct of –be used must be ‘*is*’. Therefore, the correct sentence should be ‘*The battle between Russia and Ukraine is the hot topic in every media*’.

S24: Snow White and the Huntsman *were* the movie watched by much kid.

The sentence above displayed that the form of –be ‘*were*’ used did not agree with the subject ‘*Snow White and Huntsman*’. The subject was the title of movie. In addition, it was singular. Hence, the correct of –be used must be ‘*was*’. Therefore, the correct sentence should be ‘*Snow White and Huntsman was the movie watched by much kid*’.

Data analysis showed that averagely students still made the errors on subject-verb agreement in making sentences. It was evidenced from the total of errors made by the students. There were found 2115

errors on subject-verb agreement obtained from students' work sheets. There were found that:

1. The students were still confused to distinguish words which categorized as plural form and singular form which functioned as subject of sentence so they could match it with the verb.
2. The students were still confused to distinguish the use of simple present tense, particularly the use of pronoun as the third singular person functioned as the subject of the sentence.
3. The students were still confused to distinguish words which included uncountable noun as collective noun as the subject of the sentence.
4. The students were still confused to distinguish indefinite pronouns as plural or singular as the subject of the sentence.
5. The students were still confused to distinguish the use of coordinator *-and*, and relative pronoun *-which*, *-who-*, *-that*, and *-what* which functioned as the subject of sentence that linked with other constituents.
6. The students were still confused to distinguish the use of introductory *-there* when the subject was plural or singular that followed the verb.
7. The students were still confused to distinguish quantity phrases which could function as plural as a unit and singular.
8. The students were still confused to distinguish words which functioned as singular noun ending *-s*.
9. The students were still confused to distinguish the use of citations and titles when each consisted of plural phrases which functioned as the subject of the sentence.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

a. Conclusion

This research dealt with the errors on subject-verb agreement made by the students in writing of sentences. Data analysis showed that the students made errors on subject-verb agreement in twelve rules: -number and person, -and, -or, -neither...nor, -preposition: with, as well as, -collective nouns, -indefinite pronouns, -quantity phrases, -singular nouns ending in *-s*, -relative pronoun: who, that, -pronoun: what, -introductory there, -citation and titles. There were 2115 errors on subject-verb agreement. This number indicated that most of students still faced constraints on the agreement between subject and verb in a sentence. The constraints mostly were found in distinguishing word or phrase that could possibly function as singular noun or plural noun as the subject of the sentence.

b. Suggestion

The finding of this research showed that the students made the errors on subject-verb agreement. Therefore, it is suggested, particularly to the English lecturer and the students. It is suggested to notice the constraints in understanding the distinction between words as plural or words as singular, and the effect of

the words to agree with verb. Furthermore, it is suggested as well to the students to learn and practice much more materials related to get a deep and clear understanding.

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