

استخدام التوافق بين الفعل والفاعل في زمن المضارع والماضي البسيط في اللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلبة المرحلة الإعدادية بمنطقة الزاوية

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الملخص :

يتناول هذا البحث الصعوبات التي تواجه الطلاب عند استعمالهم للتوافق بين الفعل والفاعل في الزمن الحاضر البسيط والماضي البسيط في اللغة الإنجليزية. مجموع الطلبة الذين شاركوا (40) طالباً من المرحلة الإعدادية بالزاوية (المطرد) وكذلك (10) مدرسين يدرسون المرحلة الإعدادية في هذه المنطقة. واستعمل الباحث وسيلتين في هذه الدراسة هي اختبار للطلاب واستبانة للمدرسين الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية بمنطقة المطرد بالزاوية. استعمل الباحث طريقة Spear Brown لتحليل النتائج، ومن أهم النتائج التي توصل إليها الباحث هي أن الطلاب ليس لديهم معرفة كافية في التوافق بين الفعل والفاعل في الزمن الحاضر البسيط والماضي البسيط ومن الأخطاء هو أن الطلاب لا يستطيعون التمييز بين الفاعل المفرد وكذلك الجمع الشاذ مثل oxen , mice. وهناك خطأ آخر وهو أن الطلاب لا يستطيعون كذلك التمييز بين الجمع وكلمات تبدو أنها جمع لأنها تنتهي بحرف s مثل Maths + news والسبب الرئيسي من وراء هذه الأخطاء هو الخطأ اللغوي. أما بالنسبة لمدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية فإنهم يركزون على الكتاب المدرسي ويهملون الاستعمال الصحيح للفعل والفاعل للغة الإنجليزية. ولمواجهة هذه الصعوبات وضع الباحث بعض التوصيات ومنها حث المعلمين على عدم التركيز على الأعمال التحريرية وإهمال الأعمال الشفوية وذلك لتعزيز الفهم عند الطلاب في هذا المجال، وكذلك حث الباحث المعلمين على تهيئة الجو المناسب للطلاب وإعطائهم مجال أكبر للمناقشة عندما يواجهون صعوبات في التوافق بين الفعل والفاعل في اللغة الإنجليزية.



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**The Use of Subject-verb Agreement in Present and Past
Simple in English by Preparatory School Students in Zawia
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Abstract

This study investigate the use of subject-verb agreement in present and past simple in English by students.

The subjects of the study were forty preparatory school students in Zawia and it also included ten teachers who teach the preparatory phase in this area. The tools which were used, in this study were a written test for students and a questionnaire for teachers in Al-Moterd preparatory school in Zawia .

The researcher used Spearman Brown method with an expert analyzing the results.

The findings of the study proved:

- Students do not know exactly about subject-verb agreement in present and past tense.
- Students confused with singular subjects and irregular plural subjects such as oxen and mice.
- Students also confused with regular plural subjects and words that seem to be plural since they end with "s" such as maths and news.
- The interlingua error is the main factor in causing errors in subject-verb agreement in present and past simple.
- English teachers focus more on the content of textbook rather than the correct use of subject-verb agreement.

- It is recommended that teachers of English should focus both oral and written practice to reinforce students' knowledge of subject-verb agreement in English.
- It is also recommended that they should create atmosphere for students in order to make them feel free to ask when they face difficulties in subject-verb agreement.

1. Introduction

English is a language that is used widely all over the world. Libyan students learn English as a foreign language. As a result, English is difficult to learn due to big difference between Arabic and English language.

The difference between the native speakers and the target language creates learning problems (Al. Tae, 2005:37)

Subject-verb agreement simply means the subject and verb must agree in number. This means both need to be singular or both need to be plural.

1.1 Statement of the problem

As a teacher of English language for many years, the researcher has found out that preparatory school students in Al-Motred preparatory school make errors when they use subject-verb agreement in present and past tense, therefore, he will investigate these problems and the causes behind them.

1.2 Objective of the study

- To find out how students in third-year preparatory school in Al-Motred preparatory school use the subject-verb agreement in present and past simple.
- To discover the factors behind the errors made by preparatory school students.



- To investigate how teachers explain the subject-verb agreement in present and past simple.

1.3 Questions of the study

The study tries to find answers to the following questions.

- What are the errors made by preparatory school students in using the subject-verb agreement in present and past simple?
- What are the factors behind these errors?
- To what extent do teachers of English give attention to the importance of subject-verb agreement?

1.4 Significance of the study

This paper is important in field of teaching and learning English because it deals the subject-verb agreement. It will discover the difficulties of using the subject-verb agreement in present and past simple by second language learners. Hence, they will know the subject-verb agreement in present and past simple and irregular forms. It will also help teachers how to choose principle methods in teaching English.

2- Literature review

2.1 present simple tense

2.1.1 Form

The present simple tense is formed as follows with the first, second and third person plural, we use the base form of the verb.

e.g. I eat we eat
you eat you eat
..... they eat

With the third person singular we use the base + s (the –s form of the verb)

e.g. he eats she eats it eats

2.1.2 Uses

1- we use the present simple tense to talk about habits, events or actions that occur frequently.

e.g. I get up at six every day

He always eats lunch at home.

They usually come to class late.

2- we use the present simple tense to express opinions or general happenings

e.g. I think this tense is simple

We go to the beach in summer .

3- We use this tense to express facts whether these facts are scientific or in general .

e.g. Salt dissolves in water

The Earth revolves the sun

(Shawish and Grenat, 2008:120,121)

2.2 past simple

2.2.1 I form

Past simple is formed by suing the past form of the verb. The same form of the verb is used with all persons regardless of their number.

e.g. I / we/ you/ he / she / it drank milk last night

2.2.2 Use

It is used for actions which started and finished in the past. The past time markers are yesterday, last week / last month / last year/ ago.

e.g. I went to the Cinema last night

we moved to our new house a month ago.

(MacfarLane, 1995: 18)

2.3 Agreement



2.3.1 Subjects

The subject of a sentence is usually the first noun phrase or pronoun identifying who or what is performing an action expressed by the verb (1). It can identify who or What is experiencing something.(2) It can also be the focus of a description (i.e. who or what the complement is linked to) (3).

1. Tony lost his keys. - The dog ate my homework. - You are working too hard these days.

2. The children heard a loud noise. - The audience enjoyed the concert. - Meg doesn't like coffee.

3. Lions are large and powerful. - Her new classmates seem friendly. - Your hair looks great.

We usually put the subject before the verb except in questions (4) and sentences using inversion (5).

4. Where has she been? - Does this bus go to the university? - Isn't Oslo in southern Norway?

5. In front of us and blocking the way stood a large dog. Never had I seen such a fierce animal.

The subject can also be a gerund (6), an infinitive (7) or a clause (8).

6. Reading comics is her favourite thing. - Studying always makes me sleepy.

7- lust to complete the classes has become my new goal. - To go without you wouldn't be any fun.

8- That Labour would win the election was never in doubt. -

What he said wasn't very polite.

(Yule, 2006: 4)

2.3.2 Subject – verb agreement

Subject-verb agreement means choosing the correct singular or plural verb after the subject.

The shop opens at nine. The shops open at nine.

2.3.2.1 Singular and plural verbs

1. In the third person there is sometimes agreement between the subject and the first (or only) word of a finite verb phrase.

The house is empty. The houses are empty.

Here we use *is* with a singular subject and *are* with a plural.

An uncountable noun takes a singular verb.

The grass is getting long.

2. With a present-tense verb there is agreement.

The window is broken. The windows are broken.

The office has a phone. The offices have phones.

The garden looks nice. The gardens look nice.

3. With a past-tense verb there is agreement only with *be*.

The window was broken. The windows were broken.

With other verbs, there is only one past form.

The office(s) had lots of phones. The garden(s) looked nice.

2.3.2.2 Singular and plural subjects

It is usually easy to decide if a subject is singular or plural, but there are some points to note.

1. TWO or more phrases linked by *and* take a plural verb.

Jamie and Emma go sailing at weekends.

Both the kitchen and the dining-room face due west.

Wheat and maize are exported.

But when the two together express something that we see as a single thing, then we use a singular verb.

Bread and butter was all we had.



2. When two phrases are linked by or, the verb usually agrees with the nearest.

Either Thursday or Friday is OK.

Either my sister or the neighbours are looking after the dog.

3 A phrase of measurement takes a singular verb.

Ten miles is too far to walk. Thirty pounds seems a reasonable price.

Here we are talking about the amount as a whole - a distance of ten miles, a sum of thirty pounds, not the individual miles or pounds.

Titles and names also take a singular verb when they refer to one thing.

'Star Wars' was a very successful film.

The Rose and Crown is that old pub by the river.

4. A phrase with as well as or with does not make the subject plural.

George, together with some of his friends, is buying a race-horse.

A phrase with and in brackets does not normally make the subject plural.

The kitchen (and of course the dining-room) faces due west.

After not only...but also, the verb agrees with the nearest phrase.

Not only George but also his friends are buying the horse.

NOTE

A phrase in apposition does not make the subject plural.

George, my neighbour, often goes to the races.

5. If a phrase comes after the noun, the verb agrees with the first noun.

The house between the two bungalows is empty.

6. A phrase or clause as subject takes a singular verb.

Through the trees is the quickest way.

Opening my presents was exciting.

7. Even if the subject comes after the verb, the verb agrees with the subject.

A great attraction are the antique shops in the old part of the town.

Here a great attraction is the complement. It describes the subject, the antique shops.

2.3.2.3 One of, a number of, every, there etc

1. After a subject with one of, we use a singular verb.

One of these letters is for you.

2 When a plural noun follows number of, majority of or a lot of, we normally use a plural verb.

A large number of letters were received.

The majority of people have complained.

A lot of people have complained.

Here a number of etc expresses a quantity.

NOTE

a. When number means 'figure', it agrees with the verb.

The number of letters we receive is increasing.

b. Amount agrees with the verb.

A large amount of money was collected. Large amounts of money were collected.

c. After a fraction, the verb agrees with the following noun, e.g. potato, plants.

Three quarters (of a potato) is water.

Almost half (the plants) were killed.

3. We use a singular verb after a subject with every and each and compounds with every, some, any and no.



Every pupil has to take a test.

Each day was the same as the one before.

Everyone has to take a test.

Someone was waiting at the door.

Nothing ever happens in this place.

But all and some with a plural noun take a plural verb.

All the pupils have to take a test.

Some people were waiting at the door.

NOTE

When each follows a plural subject, the verb is plural.

The pupils each have to take a test.

We use a singular verb after who or what.

*Who knows the answer? - *We all do.**

*What's happened? - *Several things.**

After what/which + noun, the verb agrees with the noun.

What/Which day is convenient? What/Which days are convenient?

NOTE

A verb after which is singular or plural depending on how many we are talking about.

*Which (of these sweaters) goes best with my trousers? -*This one, I think.**

*Which (of these shoes) go best with my trousers? -*These, I think.**

After none of/neither of/either of/any of+ plural noun phrase, we can use either a singular or plural verb.

None (of the pupils) has/have failed the test.

I don't know if either (of these batteries) is/are any good.

The plural verb is more informal.

NOTE

After no, we can use either the singular or the plural.

No pupil has failed / No pupils have failed the test.

After there, the verb agrees with its complement.

There was an accident. There were some accidents.

NOTE

In informal English we sometimes use there's before a plural.

There's some friends of yours outside.

2.3.2.4 Nouns with a plural form

1 Plural noun - plural verb

a. Some nouns are always plural.

The goods were found to be defective. NOT a good

My belongings have been destroyed in a fire. NOT my belonging

Nouns always plural are belongings, clothes, congratulations, earnings, goods, odds (= probability), outskirts, particulars (= details), premises (=building), remains, riches, surroundings, thanks, troops (= soldiers), tropics.

NOTE For pair nouns, e.g. glasses, trousers.

b. Compare these nouns.

Plural only

hurt my arm(s) and leg(s)

arms (= weapons)

an old custom

go through customs

manner (= way)

manners (= polite

behaviour)

the content of the message

the contents of the **box**

a saving of £5

all my savings

do some damage to the car

pay damages

feel pain(s) in my **back**

take pains (= care)

2. Plural form - singular verb

The news isn't very good, I'm afraid.



Gymnastics looks difficult, and it is.

Nouns like this are news; some words for subjects of study: mathematics, statistics, physics, politics, economics; some sports: athletics, gymnastics, bowls; some games: billiards, darts, dominoes, draughts; and some illnesses: measles, mumps, shingles.

NOTE

Some of these nouns can have normal singular and plural forms when they mean physical things.

Tom laid a domino on the table.

These statistics are rather complicated. (= these figures)

Politics takes a plural verb when it means someone's views.

His politics are very left-wing. (= his political opinions)

3. Nouns with the same singular and plural form

A chemical works causes a lot of pollution.

Chemical works cause a lot of pollution.

Works can mean 'a factory' or 'factories'. When it is plural we use a plural verb.

Nouns like this are barracks, crossroads, headquarters, means, series, species, works.

NOTE

Works, headquarters and barracks can sometimes be plural when they refer to one building or one group of buildings.

These chemical works here cause a lot of pollution.

2.3.2.5 Pair nouns

1. We use a pair noun for something made of two identical parts.
glasses/spectacles , trousers , scissors

2. A pair noun is plural in form and takes a plural verb.

These trousers need cleaning. Your new glasses are very nice.

I'm looking for some scissors. Those tights are cheap.

We cannot use a or numbers, NOT a trouser and NOT two trousers

NOTE

Some pair nouns can be singular before another noun: a trouser leg, a pyjama jacket.

But: my glasses case.

3. We can use pair(s) of.

This pair of trousers needs cleaning.

How have three pairs of scissors managed to disappear?

Some pair nouns are: binoculars, glasses, jeans, pants, pincers, pliers, pajamas, scales (for weighing), scissors, shorts, spectacles, tights, trousers, tweezers.

NOTE

a. Three of these nouns can be singular with a different meaning: a glass of water, a spectacle (= a wonderful sight), a scale of five kilometers to the centimeter.

b. Most words for clothes above the waist are not pair nouns, e.g. shirt, pullover, suit, coat.

c. We can also use pair(s) of with socks, shoes, boots, trainers etc. These nouns can be singular: a shoe.

2.3.2.6 Group nouns

1. Group nouns (sometimes called 'collective nouns') refer to a group of people, e.g. family, team, crowd. After a singular group noun, the verb can often be either singular or plural.

The crowd was/were in a cheerful mood.

There is little difference in meaning. The choice depends on whether we see the crowd as a whole or as a number of individuals.



NOTE

a. In the USA a group noun usually takes a singular verb. •
304(1)

b. A group noun can be plural.

The two teams know each other well.

c. A phrase with of can follow the noun, e.g. a crowd of people, a team of no-hopers.

2. With a singular verb we use it, its and which/that. With a plural verb we use they, their and who/that.

The government wants to improve its image.

The government want to improve their image.

The crowd which has gathered here is in a cheerful mood.

The crowd who have gathered here are in a cheerful mood.

3. We use the singular to talk about the whole group. For example, we might refer to the group's size or make-up, or how it compares with others.

The class consists of twelve girls and fourteen boys.

The union is the biggest in the country.

The plural is more likely when we talk about people's thoughts or feelings.

The class don't/doesn't understand what the teacher is saying.

The union are/is delighted with their/its pay rise.

4. Some group nouns are:

army	company	group	population
association	council	jury	press
audience	crew	majority	public
board	crowd	management	school
choir	enemy	military	society (=
club)			

class	family	minority	staff
club	firm	navy	team
college	gang	orchestra	union
committee	government	(political) party	university
community			

NOTE Military, press and public do not have a plural form. NOT the publics

5. The names of institutions, companies and teams are also group nouns, e.g. Parliament, the United Nations, The Post Office, the BBC, Selfridge's, Rank Xerox, Manchester United, England (= the England team).

Safeway sells/sell organic vegetables.

Brazil is/are expected to win.

NOTE

The United States usually takes a singular verb.

The United States has reacted angrily.

6. These nouns have a plural meaning and take a plural verb: police, people, livestock (= farm animals), cattle (= cows), poultry (= hens).

The police are questioning a man.

Some cattle have got out into the road.

NOTE

a. For details about people, • 296(1) Note b.

b. When poultry means meat, it is uncountable.

Poultry has gone up in price.

2.3.2.7 Number in the subject and object

There is sometimes a problem about number with an object.

Compare these sentences.

The schools have a careers adviser.



(A number of schools share the same adviser).

The schools have careers advisers.

(Each school has one or more advisers).

When a number of people each have one thing, then the object is usually plural.

We put on our coats. They all nodded their heads in agreement.

But we use the singular after a subject with each or every.

Each town has its own mayor.

(Eeastwood, 1994)

3. Methodology

This paper used descriptive method to investigate and handle these problems. The researcher chooses the questionnaire which is considered to be a reliable and valid way of collecting data. The researcher also conducted a test for the students that is based on multiple choice questions in order to investigate the main problem face by preparatory school students in using subject-verb agreement in present and past simple.

3.1 Sample of the study

The participants of the study are the third-year of preparatory phase in Al Al-Motred preparatory school in Zawia. The second type of participants are teachers of English language. The sample investigated in this study compsed of 40 students and 10 teachers.

3.2 Instruments of the study

The researcher used two main instruments of data collection. The first tool was a test was given to the students to investigate the difficulties encountered by the students in using subject-verb agreement in present and past simple, the test contains multiple

choice questions. The second instrument was a questionnaire conducted with teachers of English.

4. Data analysis and discussion results

In analyzing data, the researcher explains the statistical approach, he applied for the data analysis of the tools of the present study.

4.1 Students' test

1- The man to the farm every week.

Table 4.1: Results of items

option	Percent	frequency
goes	7.5%	3
go	25%	10
going	5%	2
went	62.5%	25
total	100%	40

In this item, only three participant 7.5% could answer correctly. Twenty-five students (62.5%) chose "went". Ten students (25%) have chosen "go" . two testees (5%) chose "going".

It is clear, that the participants do not know exactly about the subject-verb agreement in present and past simple. They also confused between present and past tense.

2- Akram and Sami good friends.

Table 4.1: Results of items

option	percent	frequency
be	2.5%	1
am	5%	2
is	47.5%	19
are	45%	18
total	100%	40



In this result, nineteen participants (47.5%) could not answer correctly by choosing "is". Eighteen students (45%) were able to get the right answer. Two students (5%) chose "am" and only one student (2.5%) chose "be"

3- Hanathe zoo last week.

Table 4.3: Results of item 3

option	percent	frequency
is	37.5%	15
are	15%	6
was	30%	12
were	17.5%	7
total	100%	40

As can be seen in this table, fifteen participants (37.5%) failed to give the right answer by choosing "is". Twelve testees (12%) were able to get the correct answer. Six students (15%) chose "are" and 7 students (7.5%) chose were.

4- the mice in the store last night.

Table 4.4: Results of item 4

Option	percent	frequency
was	7.5%	3
Were	10%	4
is	75%	30
Are	7.5%	3
Total	100%	40

In this table, thirty participants (75%) could not give the correct answer by choosing "is". Four testees (10%) chose "were" which

was the correct answer. Three students (7.5%) have chosen "was". Three students (7.5%) chose "are".

It is obvious that the majority of students confused with singular subjects and irregular plural subjects.

5- Maths difficult subject.

Table 4.5: Results of item 5

option	percent	frequency
be	5%	2
am	10%	4
is	7.5%	3
are	77.5%	31
total	100%	40

In this table, thirty-one testees (77.5%) were not able to choose the right answer by choosing the word "are". Two participants (5%) have chosen "am". Three students (7.5%) succeeded in choosing the correct answer.

It is clear, that the participants face difficult in using subject-verb agreement in present and past simple especially in irregular forms.

6- The oxen very fat.

Table 4.6: Results of item 6

option	percent	frequency
be	7.5%	3
am	7.5%	3
is	67.5%	27
are	17.5%	7
total	100%	40



As can be seen in this table, twenty-seven testees (67.5%) did not succeed to give the correct answer. Only three students (7.5%) could answer correctly. Two students (5%) chose "be" and four participants have chosen "am".

According to the answers, the students did not give the correct answer because they confused between regular plural subjects and words that seem to be plural because they end with "s".

7- The boys often late.

Table 4.7: Results of item7

Option	percent	frequency
were	17.5%	7
are	25%	10
is	17.5%	7
Was	40%	16
Total	100%	40

In this table, sixteen students (40%) did not answer correctly by choosing "was". Ten students (25%) chose the correct answer. Seven participants (17.5%) chose "were" and seven participants (17.5%) chose "is".

8- The women in the factory two days ago.

Table 4.3: Results of items

option	percent	frequency
were	15%	6
are	12.5%	5
is	12.5%	5
was	60%	24
total	100%	40

In this item, twenty-four participants (60%) could not to answer correctly by choosing the word "was". Only six students (15%) could answer correctly. Five students (12.5%) chose the word "is". Five testees (12.5%) have chosen "are".

This again supports the researcher idea that the students confused the singular subjects with irregular plural subjects.

4.2 Teachers' questionnaire

The researcher conducted questionnaire for teachers of English language who teach the preparatory phase. Ten teaches participated in this questionnaires.

Most of the questions were answered clearly because each teacher knew the goals of the study which related to the use of subject-verb agreement in present and past simple by preparatory school students in Zawia .

The teachers questionnaire showed that the majority of teachers assured that students face difficulties in using subject-verb agreement in present and past tense.

Six of teachers said that they focus on the content of text-book rather than the correct use of subject-verb agreement because they do not have enough time. They also said that they do not explain the rules in details. Four teachers said that they do not focus on the irregular forms of grammatical rules

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the obstacles encountered by the students in using subject-verb agreement in present and past tense.



The study used descriptive method that consisted of two main instruments in obtaining the results.

The findings of the study as follows :

- The students face difficulties in using subject-verb agreement in present and past tense in English .
- Students confused with singular subjects and irregular plural subjects such as oxen, mice, and women .
- Students also confused with regular plural subjects and words that seem to be plural because they end with "s" such as maths and news.
- The Interlingua error is the main factor in causing errors in subject-verb agreement in present and past simple.
- English teachers focus more on the content of textbook rather than the correct use of subject-verb agreement.
- Teachers do not explain the rules of subject-verb agreement in details; consequently, they teach what they know and omit what they do not know.

Recommendations:

- Teachers of English at preparatory phase should focus both oral and written practice to reinforce students knowledge of subject-verb agreement in present and past simple.
- Teachers of English at preparatory phase should create atmosphere for students in order to make them free to ask when they face difficulties in subject-verb agreement.
- Teachers should give students more practice in using subject-verb agreement.

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