

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT GRAMMATICAL ERRORS AND PUNCTUATION ERRORS IN SUBMISSIONS OF MALE UAE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Dr. Ghadah Al Murshidi

College of Education, Curriculum and Instruction

ABSTRACT: *English is a wide spread language across the world and is being taught commonly in many countries. Therefore, many EFL learners commit grammatical and punctuation errors repeatedly, and in this study it is attempted to analyze frequent grammatical error which is the subject-verb agreement and some punctuation errors. Such errors occur systematically, as observed in a total sample of 15 male students from different colleges in the United Arab Emirates University; the sample was asked to write a brief autobiography which was later on analyzed by the grammar being revised and the punctuation.*

KEYWORDS: Male UAE University students, subject-verb agreement, grammatical errors, Punctuation errors

INTRODUCTION

Considering English as a foreign language, many students in the UAE University face difficulties in following proper grammar and punctuation, especially when it comes to writing. Students seem to lack basic knowledge of elementary principles of English grammar and punctuation, majorly affected by their mother language, Arabic. Subject-verb agreement is a basic principle of the English language grammar, it simply denotes that a singular subject needs a singular verb and a plural subject needs a plural verb. According to Corder (as cited in Hourani, 2008), when students commit such errors it is thought that either the students have major misunderstandings of the concept or they had been taught by the method of rote memorization rather than practicing. In addition, one of the most common errors in English grammar is punctuation errors. Punctuation is considered as some specific marks which are used to separate sentences and clauses, and to clarify meanings. Errors could be overusing, misusing, or disusing some of these marks.

METHODOLOGY

A random sample which consisted of 15 male students from different colleges in the UAE University, were asked to write brief autobiographies. The written pieces were revised to identify all grammatical errors that appear to happen spontaneously in their writings. Then, one grammatical error has been chosen, which subject-verb agreement is and percentage of its repetition amongst the sample was calculated. Also, some punctuation errors are identified and analyzed in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Subject-verb agreement errors

Some errors that were observed as well would include the misuse of articles, punctuation errors, auxiliaries, misspelling, syntax and verb tenses and forms. It was observed that subject-verb agreement was one of the most frequent grammatical errors with a repetition percentage of 60% among the students, nine students out of the whole sample.

Consistent with the results, it was figured out that it is more frequent for the Singular verb not to agree with the plural subject. In this section of the study, some examples of subject-verb agreement grammatical error are mentioned below.

- Plural verb doesn't agree with singular subject
 - My family consist... (consists)
 - My mother work... (works)
 - He also love... (loves)
 - My brother like... (likes)

- Singular verb doesn't agree with plural subject
 - My grades was... (were)
 - My days was... (were)
 - My favorite hobbies is... (are)
 - My abilities.. has... (have)
 - friends was.. (were)
 - Sports takes... (take)
 - .. games that seems.. (seem)

As Selinker (as cited in Horani, 2008) stated, there are five possible reasons for error as mentioned below:

- Language transfer
- Transfer of training
- Strategies of second language learning
- Strategies of second language communication
- Overgeneralization of TL linguistic material

One example that can be caused as a result of overgeneralization would be “sports takes..”. As seen, students confuse the plural (s) and third person (s), so they generalize that any subject that ends with (s), its verb should end in (s) as well.

Another reason that may be the cause for an error such as “my days was..” to occur rapidly would be ineffective teaching strategies of English as a foreign language. Students would understand rules but lack the ability of correctly applying them, and that's due to that students were taught by the rote memorization method.

Moreover, most students tend to use the singular form of auxiliaries because they can't distinguish between the singular and plural forms of the verbs. Familiarly, the singular form is what dominates their minds, considering it suitable to be applied in all ways.

Punctuation errors

Punctuation Error	Repetition of error	Percentage of error
Capitalization	49	36.56%
Comma	47	35.07%
Period	30	22.38%
Semicolon	5	3.73%
Quotations	3	2.23%
Total	134	100%

Punctuation errors are considered as one of the most common errors in English grammar. The results of this study show that a total of 134 punctuation errors were captured. The table below shows the collected data.

Obviously, the most occurring error in punctuation happens to be in capitalization. Originally, one should capitalize the first word in the beginning of every new sentence, proper nouns, titles and acronyms. However, in the sample of 15 autobiographies, capitalization errors occurred 49 times with a frequency percentage of 36.56%.

It's been noticed that most of the students either unnecessarily capitalize words in the middle of the sentences, or forget to capitalize the first word of new sentences. Such errors could be because in Arabic, there's no such thing as capitalization, so students confuse when and what to capitalize.

Being repeated 47 times with a frequency percentage of 35.07%, second on the list of the most frequent punctuation errors is the misuse of commas. Most of the students have been noticed to either put commas in wrong places, or forgetting to use commas which results in quite long run-on sentences. Such errors could be the result of a misconception of the usage of commas.

Another end-of-sentence punctuation mark that has a high percentage of error of 22.38% and repetition frequency of 30 times is errors in periods. Periods, or full stops, are commonly used to end a declarative sentence or statement. In the analyzed sample, students obviously confuse the use of periods and commas. Last on the list are punctuation errors involving semicolons and quotation marks, with frequency percentages of 3.73% and 2.23%. It's been noticed that these two punctuation marks are rarely used, and if used, they're misused. Reasons why such errors would occur could be that students misunderstand the purposes of these marks, or use them in wrong places.

CONCLUSION

English teachers should be aware when teaching Arabic natives English as a foreign language. Grammatical errors causes vary but subject-verb agreement is mostly a result of a misconception in students' minds. This misconception is caused from vague ways of teaching, being affected by the mother tongue, and lack practice. In addition, teaching punctuation rules for students should be signified to avoid its errors initially.

REFERENCE

Awad, A. (2012). the most common punctuation errors made by the English and TEFL majors at An-Najah National University. *Najah Univ. J. Res. (Humanities)*, 26(1). Retrieved from: <http://scholar.najah.edu/>

Hourani, T. M. Y. (2008). *An Analysis of the Common Grammatical Errors in the English Writing made by 3rd Secondary Male Students in the Eastern Coast of the UAE* (Doctoral dissertation, British University in Dubai).