

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the data presented is based on the research method described in Chapter 3. The data is analysed by tabulating the errors based on a self-designed cloze test on subject-verb agreement errors of the Present Tense form. These errors are divided into five main categories which comprised the singular and plural subject.

4.0.1 Singular subject + *does* and Plural subject + *do*

4.0.2 Singular subject + *is*, Plural subject + *are* and Singular subject + *am*

4.0.3 Singular subject + *has* and Plural subject + *have*

4.0.4 Singular subject + *full verb* and Plural subject + *full verb*

4.0.5 Countable nouns + *auxiliary verb* and Uncountable nouns + *auxiliary verb*

#### **4.1 Distribution of subject-verb agreement errors**

A total of 50 copies of a self-designed cloze test based on subject-verb agreement items of the Present Tense form was administered to and collected from 50 Form 1 students of Sekolah Menengah Menjalara, Kepong, Kuala Lumpur. The responses of the cloze test were marked based on the British English usage. As suggested by Burt and Kiparsky, (1972) errors should be identified according to the TL. As stated in Chapter 3, the responses were marked either right or wrong as the cloze test questions were highly objective in nature. However, 14% of the questions with more than one acceptable answer were accepted and marked correct. The incorrect responses were coded according to the stipulated categories mentioned in Chapter 3. As the cloze test comprised 80 blanks, a sum of 4000 responses was obtained out of which 1546 (38.6%) were correctly used and the remaining 2454 (61.4%) were incorrectly used. The types of errors and the occurrences of errors for each question found in the cloze test are listed in Appendix C. The distribution of the subject-verb agreement errors is shown in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1** Distribution of Subject-verb agreement items

Subject-verb	Correct Usage	Incorrect Usage	Total usage	% correct	% Incorrect
1. Singular subject + <i>does</i> and Plural subject + <i>do</i>	194	606	800	24.3	75.7
2. Singular subject + <i>is/am</i> and Plural subject + <i>do</i>	470	380	850	55.3	44.7
3. Singular subject + <i>has</i> and Plural subject + <i>have</i>	283	567	850	33.3	66.7
4. Singular subject + <i>full verb</i> and Plural subject + <i>full verb</i>	179	521	700	25.6	74.4
5. Countable nouns + <i>auxiliary verb</i> and Uncountable nouns + <i>auxiliary verb</i>	420	380	800	52.5	47.5
Total	1546	2454	4000	38.6	61.4

Based on the above table, it can be seen that the *Singular subject + does* and the *Plural subject + do* category has the highest percentage of errors (75.7%), followed by 74.4% in the *Singular subject + full verb* and *Plural subject + full verb* category, 66.7% in the *Singular subject + has* and *Plural subject + have* category, 47.5% in the *Countable nouns + auxiliary verb* and *Uncountable nouns + auxiliary verb* category, and 44.7% in the *Singular subject + is/am* and *Plural subject + are* category. The discussion about the five broad categories will be in the following order:

Category 1: *Singular subject + does* and *Plural subject + do*

Category 2: *Singular subject + is*, *Plural subject + are* and *Singular subject + am*

Category 3: *Singular subject + has* and *Plural subject + have*

Category 4: *Singular subject + full verb* and *Plural subject + full verb*

Category 5 : *Countable nouns + auxiliary verb* and *Uncountable nouns + auxiliary verb*

Below is a discussion about the *Singular Subject + does* and *Plural subject + do* errors.

#### **4.1.1 “Singular subject + *does* and Plural subject + *do*” errors**

Under this category, the singular subject- verb agreement, *She/He/It + does* will be discussed first followed by the plural subject- verb agreement, *I/They/You/We + do* in the following sections:

4.1.1.1 “Singular subject *she + does*” errors

The errors made in connection with “Singular subject *she + does*” can be seen in table 4.2.

**Table 4.2** Distribution of “Singular subject *she + does*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
45	47	94	*She <u>do</u> not do aerobics twice a day. (does)
46	50	100	*She never <u>do</u> each session for more than one hour. (does)
48	37	74	*She <u>did</u> not drink coffee or tea. (does)

Based on table 4.2, the highest percentage of errors is found in Question 46 which is 100%, followed by 94% in Question 45 and 74% in Question 48. The most common error made by students for both Questions 45 and 46 is the use of *do* instead of *does*. In Question 46, the insertion of the adverb of frequency, *never* may have confused the students regarding the use of subject-verb agreement. However, even without the insertion of the adverb of frequency as in Question 45, students still used the incorrect form of subject-verb agreement. For Question 45, the cause of the error could be because students frequently hear the erroneous spoken form, “*She do...*” As stated in The Star, 28 February, 2000, in spoken contexts, nobody actually focuses on grammatical rules. Thus, the probable cause of error for both questions may be due to the imitation of the faulty models. Moreover, there is a possibility that learners may not have enough practice in the /s/ and /z/ form. Hence, they use the

singular form without the suffix /s/ and /z/ which being absent in Mandarin and Bahasa Melayu, does not seem significant to the learners.

The most common error committed by students for Question 48 is the incorrect use of *did* instead of *does*. This could probably be due to lack of attention as students may have overlooked the rubrics which required them to use the Present Tense.

#### 4.1.1.2 “Singular subject *he + does*” errors

The distribution of “Singular subject *he + does*” errors is shown in Table 4.3

**Table 4.3** Distribution of “Singular subject *he + does*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
25	37	74	*He sometimes <u>do</u> his homework at night. (does)
26	42	84	*He sometimes does his homework at night but he <u>is</u> not check his work. (does)
27	38	76	*He <u>is</u> not like to be told what to do. (does)

Based on table 4.3, the highest percentage of errors is found in Question 26 which is 84%, followed by 76% in Question 27 and 74% in Question 25. The most common error made by students for Questions 26 and 27 is the use of the BE verb, *is* in place of the auxiliary *does*. Students do not know how to use *does* and *is*. Question 26

involves a more complex expression which makes it more difficult for the student to decide whether the blank takes the singular auxiliary verb, *is*, *has* or *does*. Such errors may be due to the teaching methods employed, such as, drills. Students may have been exposed to drills such as “*He/she/it is*”. Hence, without thinking, they use the verb, *is* without considering the context of the sentence. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Stenson (1983 : 264) claims that learners fail to make “some secondary change which goes along with the transformation being drilled”. In short, the learners attend to the subject and verb and ignore the object of the sentence. The other likely cause is due to mechanical exercises and exercises based on substitution tables which prompt errors from the learners as they may have been conditioned to attend to the subject-verb agreement first, *He is* without considering the rest of the sentence.

For Question 25, the most common error shows the incorrect use of subject-verb agreement. The students used *do* instead of *does*. The appearance of the adverb of frequency “sometimes” after the subject of the sentence may pose more difficulty for the students. However, even without the insertion of the adverb of frequency as in Question 27, students still used the incorrect auxiliary verb. This error could be due to faulty models and the lack of practice in the /s/ and /z/ form.

4.1.1.3 “Singular subject *it + does*” errors

The distribution of “Singular subject *it + does*” errors is shown in Table 4.4

**Table 4.4**      Distribution of “Singular subject *it + does*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
59	39	78	*It <u>did</u> not drink milk. (does)
60	38	76	*Sometimes, it <u>did</u> not eat the food. (does)

Based on table 4.4, Questions 59 and 60 have almost the same percentages of errors which are 78% and 76% respectively. The most common error made by students for both questions is the use of the Past Tense, *did* instead of the Present Tense, *does*. This may be due to lack of attention.

The following section focuses on the “plural subject + *do*” errors:

#### 4.1.1.4 “Plural subject *I + do*” errors

The distribution of “Plural subject *I + do*” errors is illustrated in Table 4.5

**Table 4.5** Distribution of “Plural subject *I + do*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
6	18	36	*I <u>work</u> my homework every day. (do/finish)
8	42	84	*I often <u>writed</u> the simple tasks first. (do/write)

Based on table 4.5, Question 8 has a higher percentage of errors. The percentage of errors found in Question 8 is 84% compared to 36% in Question 6. In Question 8, the most common error was the use of the Past Tense, *writed* in place of the auxiliary *do*. The students may have overgeneralised the irregular Past Tense verb to the regular Past Tense verb instead of using the Present Tense verb, *write*. Thus, the error may be due to overgeneralisation whereby students overlooked exceptions and used rules where they were not applicable.

The most common error made by students for Question 6 is the incorrect choice of the verb. The students used *work* instead of *do* or *finish*. This error may be due to misanalysis. Students may have formulated a rule that “*work*” and “*homework*” are inter-related and the verb, *work* would be applicable. However, they may have overlooked the context of the sentence and hence, made the error.

#### 4.1.1.5 “Plural subject *they* + *do*” errors

The distribution of “Plural subject *they* + *do*” errors is shown in Table 4.6

**Table 4.6** Distribution of “Plural subject *they* + *do*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
16	34	68	*They <u>are</u> their work together. (do)
19	42	84	*They <u>are</u> things on their own. (do)

Based on table 4.6, the percentage of errors found in Question 19 is 84% compared to 68% in Question 16. The most common error made by students for both questions is the incorrect selection of the plural auxiliary verb. The students used *are* in place of *do*. The likely cause of such errors could be traced to the teaching method such as drills, mechanical exercises in concord and exercises based on substitution tables of which students may have been exposed to. Students may have focussed on the subject-verb agreement, *They are*, without considering the context of the sentence. This shows that students do not know which auxiliary to use.

#### 4.1.1.6 “Plural subject *you* + *do*” errors

The distribution of “Plural subject *you* + *do*” errors is demonstrated in Table 4.7

**Table 4.7** Distribution of “Plural subject *you* + *do*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
76	39	78	*You are patient for you <u>but</u> not do things hurriedly. (do)
77	24	48	*You usually <u>is</u> your work without complaints. (do/finish/complete)

Based on table 4.7, the percentage of errors found in Question 76 is 78% compared to 48% in Question 77. In Question 76, the most common error committed was the use of the conjunction, *but* instead of the auxiliary, *do*. The cause of the error may be due to misanalysis on the part of the learners. They have probably hypothesized that the first part of the sentence contains a positive meaning, *You are patient* and the second part which contains the negative, *not do things* should be joined by a conjunction, *but*. Thus, the learners may have misanalysed the TL.

The most common error made by students for Question 77 is the use of *is* in place of either *do*, *finish* or *complete*. The likely cause of the error is misanalysis. Learners may have hypothesized that since “*you*” is singular which is a false concept, therefore, the verb “*is*” should be selected.

4.1.1.7 “Plural subject *we + do*” errors

The distribution of “Plural subject *we + do*” errors is shown in Table 4.8

**Table 4.8** Distribution of “Plural subject *we + do*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
67	39	78	*We <u>are</u> our best to win the game. (do/try)
70	40	80	*We <u>are</u> things well for our own satisfaction. (do)

Based on table 4.8, Questions 70 and 67 have almost the same percentage of errors which are 80% and 78% respectively. The most common error made by students for both questions is the wrong selection of the plural verb. The students used *are* instead of *do* in Question 70. Similarly, students used *are* in place of *do* or *try* in Question 67. The cause of such errors for both questions may be due to drills, mechanical exercises and exercises based on substitution tables, whereby students may have focussed on the subject-verb agreement, *We are*, without looking at the context of the sentence.

The following section looks at the comparison of “ *Singular Subject + does*” and “ *Plural Subject + do*” errors as a whole. The distribution of these errors is shown in Table 4.9.

**Table 4.9**      Comparison of “Singular subject + *does* and Plural subject + *do*” errors

Subject-verb	Incorrect Usage	% Incorrect
Singular Subject + <i>does</i>	328	54.1%
Plural Subject + <i>do</i>	278	45.9%
Total	606	100%

Based on the above table, it can be noted that students make more errors in “Singular subject + *does*” which accounts for 54.1% of the errors compared to 45.9% in the “ Plural subject + *do*” errors. This is probably because students lack practice in the /s/ and /z/ form for the Third Person Singular verbs.

The next section focuses on “*Singular subject + is, Plural subject + are and Singular subject + am*” errors

4.1.2 “Singular subject + *is*, Plural subject + *are* and Singular subject + *am*” errors

The singular subject, *She/He/It + is*, the plural subject, *They/ We/ You + are* and the singular subject, *I + am* errors will be examined more closely in the following order:

4.1. 2.1 “Singular subject *she + is*” errors

The “Singular subject *she + is*” errors is illustrated in Table 5.0

**Table 5.0** Distribution of “Singular subject *she + is*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
39	9	18	*She <u>very</u> tall and slim. (is)
47	29	58	*She <u>very</u> serious about her health. (is)
51	26	52	*She <u>more</u> interested in having a bird as a pet. (is)

Based on table 5.0, the highest percentage of errors is found in Question 47 which is 58% followed by 52% in Question 51 and 18% in Question 39. Students who made the error did not know how to use the auxiliary *BE*, that is, the auxiliary *BE* is used

before an adjective or adjectival phrase. A common error was made by using *very* instead of *is* in Questions 39 and 47, and *more* in place of *is* in Question 51. The probable cause of these errors in the three questions is probably due to negative transfer of the Mandarin and Bahasa Melayu structures. This can be demonstrated by comparing the Mandarin, Bahasa Melayu and Tamil structures with the English structure for Question 39.

Mandarin:	tā $\Phi$ hěn gāo gēn sōu.
Bahasa Melayu:	Dia $\Phi$ sangat tinggi dan kursus.
English:	*She ^ very tall and slim. (is)
Tamil :	அவள் மிகவும் உயரமாகவும் மெலிந்தும் காணப்படுகிறாள்.

As seen above, in Mandarin and Bahasa Melayu, the verb *BE* has no overt manifestation. In the English sentence, the omission of the verb, *is* shows negative transfer from Mandarin and Bahasa Melayu. However, there is no evidence of negative transfer from the Tamil structure as the verb in the Tamil language system occurs at the end of the sentence.

Similarly, Question 47 reveals evidence of negative transfer from the Mandarin and Bahasa Melayu structures which are reflected in the omission of the *BE* verb, *is* in English. However, there is no evidence of negative transfer from the Tamil structure as the verb appears at the end of the sentence and not after the subject which is the first word in the sentence.

Mandarin : tā ħ hěn zhūzhōng tā de jiàn kāng

Bahasa Melayu: Dia ħ sangat mengambil berat tentang kesihatannya.

English : \*She ^ very serious about her health (is)

Tamil: அவர் தான்

உடனடி நிகழ்வு

கவனம் ஸ்ரதாபுடன்

தொன்கிறார் .

Further evidence of negative transfer from the Mandarin and Bahasa Melayu structures is seen in Question 51.

Mandarin:	ta $\phi$ bijiao xǐ huan yǎng niǎo.
Bahasa Melayu:	Dia $\phi$ lebih berminat membela burung.
English :	*She ^ more interested in having a bird as a pet. (is)
Tamil:	அவள் பறவையைத் தன் வளர்ப்புப் பிராணியாக கொள்வதற்கு அதிக ஆசைப்படுகிறாள்.

Baskaran (1987) observed that in Bahasa Malaysia the verb “to be” has no overt manifestation. Likewise, it can be noted in Mandarin that the verb *BE* does not manifest itself overtly. Nevertheless, it can be noted that there is no evidence of negative transfer from the the Tamil structure to English since the verb in the Tamil sentence occurs at the end of the sentence while the subject is the first word in the sentence.

Based on the above analysis, it can be gathered that the probable cause of error for the three questions could be due to negative transfer from the Mandarin and Bahasa Melayu structures to English, whilst it can be seen that there is no evidence of negative transfer from the Tamil structure to English.

4.1.2.2 “Singular subject *he + is*” errors

The “Singular subject *he + is*” errors is presented in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1** Distribution of “Singular subject *he + is*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
28	18	36	*He <u>was</u> the best student in Mathematics. (is)
29	21	42	*He <u>was</u> very interested in becoming an engineer. (is)
33	28	56	*He <u>was</u> very fond of them. (is)

Based on table 5.1, the highest percentage of errors is found in Question 33 which is 56% followed by 42% in Question 29 and 36% in Question 28. The most common error made by students for the three questions is the use of *was* instead of *is*. In terms of agreement, the students have used the correct subject-verb agreement. However, in the context of the question, this is an error as students are required to use the Present Tense instead of the Past Tense. The probable cause of these errors for the above questions may be due to lack of attention. Students may have overlooked the rubrics that required the Present Tense to be used.

#### 4.1.2.3 “Singular subject *it + is*” errors

The distribution of “Singular subject *it + is*” errors is presented in Table 5.2

**Table 5.2** Distribution of “Singular subject *it + is*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
53	12	24	*It <u>was</u> a tame bird. (is)
55	28	56	*It <u>was</u> called Soft Toys. (is)
61	36	72	*It does not eat the food even when it <u>very</u> hungry. (is)

Based on table 5.2, the highest percentage of errors is found in Question 61 which is 72%, followed by 56% in Question 55 and 24% in Question 53. The highest number of errors is committed in Question 61, whereby the most common error is the use of the qualifier *very* in place of *is*. Here again, as in 4.1.2.1, students do not know that the *BE* verb is used before an adjective.

The most common error made by students for Questions 53 and 55 is the use of *was* instead of *is*. Although the subject-verb agreement is correct here, in terms of tense, it is incorrect because the students are supposed to have used the Present Tense instead of the Past Tense. The cause of error may be due to lack of attention whereby students may have overlooked the rubrics that required the Present Tense.

4.1.2.4 “Plural subject *they + are*” errors

The distribution of “Plural subject *they + are*” errors is shown in Table 5.3.

**Table 5.3**      Distribution of “Plural subject *they + are*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
12	6	12	No common error (They <u>are</u> friendly.)
14	11	22	*They <u>were</u> also smart. (are)

Based on table 5.3, the percentage of errors found in Question 14 is 22%, compared to 12% in Question 12. There is no common error in Question 12 as the occurrence of each incorrect response occurred only once. The common error made by students for Question 14 is the use of *were* instead of *are*. Since both Questions 12 and 14 contain the same grammatical structure and require the plural auxiliary verb, *are* and the fact that Question 12, *They are friendly* is well answered, the common error made can be a mistake or slip and may be due to lack of attention.

4.1.2.5 “Plural subject *we + are*” errors

The distribution of “Plural subject *we + are*” errors is illustrated in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4**                      Distribution of “Plural subject *we + are*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
65	17	34	*We <u>was</u> very interested in becoming netball champions. (are)
68	21	42	*We <u>is</u> sure to win if we try hard. (are)

Based on table 5.4, the percentage of errors found in Question 68 is 42% compared to 34% in Question 65. The most common error made by students for both questions is the incorrect use of subject-verb agreement. In Question 65, the students used *was* instead of *are* whereas, in Question 68, the students used *is* in place of *are*. The probable cause of the error could be ignorance of grammar rules. Students who committed the error were probably ignorant of the fact that a plural subject should be followed by a plural verb. Hence, the error.

#### 4.1.2.6 “Plural subject *you + are*” errors

The distribution of “Plural subject *you + are*” errors is seen in Table 5.5

**Table 5.5** Distribution of “Plural subject *you + are*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
73	27	54	*You <u>is</u> precious... (are)
75	33	66	*You <u>is</u> patient... (are)

Based on table 5.5, the percentage of errors found in Question 75 is 66% compared to 54% in Question 73. The most common error made by students for both questions is the incorrect use of subject-verb agreement. The students used *is* instead of *are*. The probable cause of error for both questions could be ignorance of L2 rules whereby students were not aware of the fact that a plural subject, *You* should take a plural verb, *are*.

4.1.2.7 “Singular subject *I + am*” errors

The distribution of the “Singular subject *I + am*” errors is demonstrated in Table 5.6.

**Table 5.6** “Singular subject *I + am*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
2	9	18	*I <u>was</u> 13 years old. (am)
4	39	78	*I <u>was</u> in Form I. (am)

Based on table 5.6, the percentage of errors found in Question 4 is 78% compared to 18% in Question 2. A much higher percentage of error was committed in Question 4. The most common error made by students for both questions is the incorrect selection of the Present Tense First Person singular verb. The students used *was* in place of *am*. In both instances, the probable cause of error could be due to lack of attention as the students may have overlooked the rubrics that required the use of the Present Tense.

The following section looks at the comparison of “*Singular subject + is*”, “*Plural Subject + are*” and “*Singular Subject + am*” errors as a whole. The distribution of these errors is seen in Table 5.7.

**Table 5.7** Comparison of “Singular subject + *is*, Plural subject + *are* and singular subject + *am*” errors

Subject-verb	Incorrect usage	% Incorrect
Singular subject + <i>is</i>	207	54.5
Plural subject + <i>are</i>	125	32.9
Singular subject + <i>am</i>	48	12.6
Total	380	100

Based on the above table, it can be noted that students make more errors in “*Singular subject + is*” as there are 54.5% incorrect responses compared to 32.9% for “*Plural subject + are*” responses and 12.6% for “*Singular subject + am*” answers. It can be gathered that “*Singular subject + is*” items pose more difficulty to the students probably because students tend to use the Past Tense, *was* instead of the Present Tense, *is*. The cause of such errors can be attributed to lack of attention of the correct tense to use. In other instances, in the “*Singular subject she + is*” error category, students tend to omit the singular verb, *is* when the verb is followed by an adjective. By using the qualifier, *very*, in place of the verb, *is*, the errors made by the students probably indicate negative transfer from Mandarin and Bahasa Melayu.

As for the “*Plural subject + are*” error category, the cause of such errors is probably due to ignorance of L2 rules whereby students used the singular auxiliary verb, *is* and *was* instead of the plural auxiliary verb, *are*.

In the “Singular subject + *am*” error category, the probable cause of error could be due to lack of attention as students used the singular Past Tense, *was*, in place of the singular verb, *am*. Students may have overlooked the rubrics that required the Present Tense to be used.

The next section will look at the “Singular subject + *has* and Plural subject + *have*” errors.

#### **4.1.3 “Singular subject + *has* and Plural subject + *have*” errors.**

The singular subject- verb agreement errors, *She/He/It + has* will be discussed first followed by the plural subject- verb agreement errors, *They /We/You/I + have*.

4.1.3.1 “Singular subject *she + has*” errors

The distribution of “Singular subject *she + has*” errors is shown in Table 5.8.

**Table 5.8**      Distribution of “Singular subject *she + has*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
40	26	52	She <u>have</u> short hair. (has)
49	40	80	She <u>drink</u> a hot drink. (has/takes/drinks)
52	27	54	She <u>have</u> one in her house. (has/keeps)

Based on table 5.8, the highest percentage of errors is found in Question 49 which is 80% followed by 54% in Question 52 and 52% in Question 40. The most common error made by students for the above three questions is the incorrect use of subject-verb agreement.

For Question 49, the students used *drink* in place of *has* or *takes* or *drinks*. Students have left out the ‘s’ in *drink* to indicate singularity. This could be because students lack practice in the /s/ form for the Third Person Singular.

For Questions 40 and 52, the students used *have* instead of *has*. The probable cause of this error may be because students are not aware of the fact that *has* is used with a *singular subject*.

#### 4.1.3.2 “Singular subject *he + has*” errors

The distribution of the “Singular subject *he + has*” errors is indicated in Table 5.9.

**Table 5.9** Distribution of “Singular subject *he + has*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
23	31	62	*He <u>is</u> high cheek bones. (has)
24	40	80	*He <u>is</u> freckles on his cheeks. (has)
30	29	58	*He <u>have</u> two cats and two dogs. (has)

Based on table 5.9, the highest percentage of errors is found in Question 24 which is 80% followed by 62% in Question 23 and 58% in Question 30. The most common error made by students for Questions 23 and 24 is the incorrect selection of the auxiliary verb. For both questions, students used *is* instead of *has*. The students who committed the error do not know that the auxiliary *has* is used to show possession and *is* is used before an adjective. The cause of such errors could be the use of drills, mechanical exercises in concord and exercises based on substitution tables whereby students focussed on the subject-verb agreement, *He is*, without considering the context of the sentence.

For Question 30, the students used *have* in place of *has*. This could be because students are ignorant of the fact that a singular pronoun, *he* is followed by *has* and not *have*.

#### 4.1.3.3 “Singular subject *it + has*” errors

The distribution of “Singular subject *it + has*” errors is described in Table 6.0

**Table 6.0** Distribution of “Singular subject *it + has*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
54	40	80	*It <u>is</u> an unusual name. (has)
56	34	68	*It <u>have</u> two bright eyes. (has)
57	29	58	*It <u>have</u> two black wings. (has)

Based on table 6.0, the highest percentage of errors is found in Question 54 which is 80% followed by 68% in Question 56 and 58% in Question 57. The most common error made by students for Question 54 is the incorrect selection of the auxiliary verb. The students used *is* in place of *has*. This could be because students probably thought that the subject, *It* referred to the bird's name. In this particular context, *It* refers to the bird and shows possession and not to the bird's name. The cause of the error could be the use of drills, mechanical exercises in concord and exercises based on substitution tables which may cause students to adopt a certain pattern such as *It is* without giving thought to the context.

The most common errors made by students for Questions 56 and 57 is the incorrect use of subject-verb agreement. The students used *have* instead of *has*. The likely cause of error may be due to ignorance of the use of *has* to indicate singularity.

**4.1.3.4 “Plural subject *they* + *have*” errors**

The distribution of “Plural subject *they* + *have*” errors is shown in Table 6.1.

**Table 6.1**      Distribution of “Plural subject *they* + *have*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
17	39	78	*Moreover, they <u>make</u> a lot of things in common. (have)
18	38	76	*They <u>are</u> nice things to say to each other. (have)

Based on table 6.1, Questions 17 and 18 have almost the same percentage of errors which are 78% and 76% respectively. The most common error for Question 17 is the incorrect selection of the plural verb. The students used *make* instead of *have*. This error is probably due to misanalysis. Students have answered the first part of the sentence correctly, *Moreover, they make a lot of things*, but they may have ignored the remaining part of the sentence, *in common*. Hence, students have formed the wrong concept of the meaning of the sentence by not having looked at the context.

The most common error made by students for Question 18 is the incorrect selection of the plural verb. The students used *are* instead of *have*. This could be because students may have regarded ‘*They*’ as things. In this particular context, ‘*They*’ refers to Tom and Aina and not things. The error is probably due to drills, mechanical exercises in concord and exercises based on substitution tables which may have caused students to disregard the contextual clues.

#### 4.1.3.5 “Plural subject *we + have*” errors

The distribution of “Plural subject *we + have*” errors is shown in Table 6.2

**Table 6.2** Distribution of “Plural subject *we + have*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
66	31	62	*We usually <u>playing</u> a match with our friends. (have/play)
71	30	60	*We never <u>see</u> matches during the rainy season. (have)

Based on table 6.2, Questions 66 and 71 have almost the same percentage of errors which are 62% and 60% respectively. The most common error made by students for Question 66 is the incorrect use of the verb. The students used *playing* in place of *have* or *play*. This could be because the students generalised the idea that the act of

playing a match suggests a continuous or progressive action. Hence, the students selected the -ing form, *playing* instead of the base form, *play*.

The most common error made by students for Question 71 is the incorrect choice of the verb. The students used *see* instead of *have*. This is because students may have used the near equivalent of *see* for *watch*. Whether *see* or *watch* is used, the term is not relevant to the context. What is implied in the context is that the students do not have matches during the rainy season. The error may be due to misanalysis as a result of making the wrong hypothesis about the context.

**4.1.3.6 “Plural subject *you + have*” errors**

The distribution of “Plural subject *you + have*” errors is shown in Table 6.3.

**Table 6.3** Distribution of “Plural subject *you + have*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
74	29	58	*You <u>is</u> a lot of talents. (have)
78	42	84	*You <u>are</u> doubts about yourself. (have)

Based on table 6.3, the percentage of errors found in Question 74 is 58% compared to 84% in Question 78. The most common error made by students for Question 78 is the incorrect choice of the plural verb. The students used *are* instead of *have*. Students do not know the usage of *have*. This could be because students may have

been exposed to the use of drills, mechanical exercises and exercises based on substitution tables in the course of teaching. Probably, students may have looked at the subject-verb agreement and ignored the context of the sentence.

The most common error made by students for Question 74 is the incorrect use of verb. The students used *is* instead of *have*. The likely cause of such error is ignorance of L2 rules, that is, a plural subject must have a plural verb.

#### 4.1.3.7 “Plural subject *I + have*” errors

The distribution of “Plural subject *I + have*” errors is seen in Table 6.4.

**Table 6.4** Distribution of “Plural subject *I + have*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
7	38	76	I always <u>do</u> a lot of homework to complete. (have)
9	24	48	When I <u>was</u> enough time I usually help my mother in the kitchen. (have)

Based on table 6.4, the percentage of errors found in Question 7 is 76% compared to 48% in Question 9. The most common error made by students for Question 7 is the incorrect selection of the plural verb. The students used *do* instead of *have*. The likely cause of error is misanalysis. The learners may have attended to the first part

of the sentence, *I always do a lot of homework*, correctly but have ignored the second part of the sentence, *to complete*.

The most common error made by students for Question 9 is the incorrect selection of the verb. The students used *was* instead of *have*. The likely cause of the error could be misanalysis. The students may have looked at the subject, *I* and the verb, *was* but have not considered the rest of the sentence. Hence, the misanalysis for the two questions arose probably because students did not look at the context of the sentence. The following section looks at the comparison of “Singular *subject + has*” and “Plural *subject + have*” errors. The distribution of the total sum of these errors is shown in Table 6.5

**Table 6.5**      Comparison of “Singular subject + *has* and Plural subject + *have*” errors

Subject-verb	Incorrect usage	% Incorrect
Singular subject + <i>has</i>	296	53.1
Plural subject + <i>have</i>	261	46.9
Total	557	100

Based on the above table, it can be observed that students tend to make more errors and thus, face more difficulty in the “Singular *subject + has*” category which accounts for 53.1 % of the errors compared to the “Plural *subject + have*” section which makes up 46.9% of the errors. The main causes of the “Singular *subject +*

*has*” error category are probably because students are ignorant of the fact that the *singular pronoun* is followed by *has* and that the auxiliary *has* is used to show possession. As for the “*Plural subject + have*” error category, the main causes of error could be due to students making the wrong analysis as a result of not considering the context and students’ ignorance of the usage of the auxiliary verb, *have*.

The following section focuses on “Singular subject + *full verb* and Plural subject + *full verb*” errors.

#### **4.1.4 “Singular Subject + *full verb* and Plural subject + *full verb*” errors**

The singular subject - verb agreement, *She/He/It + full verb* errors will be discussed first followed by the plural subject-verb agreement, *I/They/You/We + full verb* errors.

4.1.4.1 “Singular subject *she* + *full verb*” errors

The distribution of “Singular subject *she* + *full verb*” errors is indicated in Table 6.6

**Table 6.6** Distribution of “Singular subject *she* + *full verb*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
43	45	90	*She <u>is</u> good care of her health. (takes)
50	42	84	*She takes a hot drink before she <u>go</u> to bed at ten o'clock every night. (goes)

Based on table 6.6, the percentage of errors found in Question 43 is 90% compared to 84% in Question 50. The most common error made by the students for Question 43 is the incorrect selection of the singular verb. The students used *is* in place of *takes*. This could be because students may have been exposed to drills, mechanical exercises in concord and exercises based on substitution tables which enabled them to focus on the subject and verb, *She is* but caused them to place less emphasis on the context of the sentence.

The most common error made by students for Question 50 is the incorrect use of subject-verb agreement. The students used *go* instead of *goes*. This could be because students lack practice in the /s/ and /z/ form.

#### 4.1.4.2 “Singular subject *he* + *full verb*” errors

The distribution of “Singular subject *he* + *full verb*” errors is seen in Table 6.7

**Table 6.7** Distribution of “Singular subject *he* + *full verb*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
34	46	92	*He often <u>help</u> them a bath on Sundays. (gives)
35	49	98	*He sometimes <u>give</u> the dogs with egg yolk. (feeds)

Based on table 6.7, the percentage of errors found in Question 34 is 92% compared to 98% in Question 35. The most common error made by students for both questions is the incorrect selection of the main verb. For Question 34, the students used *help* instead of *gives*. This could be because students have looked at the subject and verb, “*He often help(s)*” but have ignored the rest of the sentence which provides the context to a more accurate answer.

As for Question 35, the students used the plural verb, *give* instead of the singular verb, *feeds*. This could be because learners have probably attended to the subject and verb of the sentence, “*He sometimes give(s) the dogs*” without considering the meaning of the rest of the sentence, “*with egg yolk*”. The adverbs of frequency, *often* in Question 34 and *sometimes* in Question 35 may have caused more difficulty to the

students. However, this hypothesis is not conclusive since students still made errors in subject-verb agreement even without the insertion of the adverb of frequency. Hence, the most common error made by students for both questions could be due to misanalysis.

#### 4.1.4.3 “Singular subject *it* + *full verb*” errors

The distribution of “Singular subject *it* + *full verb*” errors is seen in Table 6.8.

**Table 6.8** Distribution of “Singular subject *it* + *full verb*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
62	42	84	*It <u>is</u> from branch to branch. (flies)
63	48	96	*It flies from branch to branch and sometimes it <u>is</u> from the branch. (falls)

Based on table 6.8, the percentage of errors found in question 62 is 84% compared to 96% in Question 63. The most common error made by students for both questions is the incorrect choice of the singular verb. For Question 62, the students used *is* instead of *flies*. For Question 63, the students used *is* in place of *falls*. These errors could probably be due to the use of drills, mechanical exercises in concord and exercises based on substitution tables in teaching, whereby attention is given to the subject-verb agreement, *It is* and the rest of the sentence is ignored.

#### 4.1.4.4 “Plural subject *I* + full verb” errors

The distribution of “Plural subject *I* + full verb” errors is shown in Table 6.9

**Table 6.9** Distribution of “Plural subject *I* + full verb” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
3	14	28	*I <u>lives</u> at No. 2, Jalan Jaya. (live)
10	21	42	*I usually <u>helps</u> my mother. (help)

Based on table 6.9, the percentage of errors found in Question 3 is 28% compared to 42% in Question 10. The most common error made by students for Questions 3 and 10 is the incorrect use of subject-verb agreement. For Question 3, the students used *lives* instead of *live*. For Question 10, the students used *helps* instead of *help*. The probable cause of error for these two questions may be due to overgeneralisation whereby students may have overgeneralised *I* to be a singular subject which requires a singular verb. However, *I* is a plural subject which is in agreement with a plural verb. Hence, learners have made the wrong generalisation.

4.1.4.5 “Plural subject *they* + *full verb*” errors

The distribution of “Plural subject *they* + *full verb*” errors is demonstrated in Table 7.0

**Table 7.0** Distribution of “Plural subject *they* + *full verb*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
13	29	58	*They always <u>read</u> very hard. (work/study)
15	25	50	*They always <u>do</u> a lot of noise in class. (make)

Based on table7.0, the percentage of errors found in Question 13 is 58% compared to 50% in Question 15. The most common error made by students for Questions 13 and 15 is the incorrect selection of the main verb. For Question 13, students used *read* instead of *work* or *study*. For Question 15, students used *do* instead of *make*. The probable cause of these errors is probably due to learners using the near-equivalent L2 known as approximation (James, 1998). As mentioned earlier, approximation is a form of Interlanguage. In Question 13, learners use the near-equivalent “*read*” for “*study*” and in Question 15, “*make*” for “*do*”. Hence, the distortion in meaning.

4.1.4.6 “Plural subject *you* + *full verb*” errors

The distribution of “Plural subject *you* + *full verb*” errors is presented in Table 7.1

**Table 7.1** Distribution of “Plural subject *you* + *full verb*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
79	37	54	*You never <u>stand</u> up. (give)
80	45	90	*You <u>are</u> on trying. (keep/go)

Based on table 7.1, the percentage of errors found in Question 79 is 54% compared to 90% in Question 80. The most common error made by students for Questions 79 and 80 is the incorrect selection of the main verb. For Question 79, the students used *stand* instead of *give*. The probable cause of error may be due to drills whereby students are regularly exposed to these words, *stand up* which may result in the mechanical use of the phrasal verb and ignoring the context.

For Question 80, the students used *are* in place of *keep* or *go*. This could be due to drills, mechanical exercises and exercises based on substitution tables whereby students may have automatically used *You are* without studying the context.

4.1.4.7 “Plural subject *we* + *full verb*” errors

The distribution of “Plural subject *we* + *full verb*” errors is shown in Table 7.2.

**Table 7.2**      Distribution of “Plural subject *we* + *full verb*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
69	42	84	*We are sure to win if we <u>are</u> hard. (try/work/practise)
72	46	72	*We never hold matches during the rainy season but we often <u>call</u> our coach to teach us some skills. (ask/request)

Based on table7.2, the percentage of errors found in Question 69 is 84% compared to 72% in Question 72. The most common error made by students for Questions 69 and 72 is the incorrect choice of the main verb. For Question 69, the students used *are* instead of *try* or *work* or *practise*. This could be because students attempted to match the subject, *we* with the plural verb, *are* without considering the context of the sentence. The cause of error may be due to the use of drills, mechanical exercises in concord and exercises based on substitution tables in teaching.

As for Question 72, the students used *call* in place of *ask* or *request*. This could be because students employed the near-equivalent of L2, *call* for *ask* or *request* which is inappropriate in the sociolinguistic sense in the L2. Thus, the cause of error may

be due to the use of approximation whereby students use the near-equivalent L2, *call* for *ask* or *request*.

The following section looks at the comparison of *Singular subject + full verb* and *Plural subject + full verb* errors. The distribution of these errors is shown in Table 7.3.

**Table 7.3** Comparison of “Singular Subject + *full verb* and Plural subject + *full verb*” errors

Subject-verb	Incorrect usage	% Incorrect
Singular subject + <i>full verb</i>	272	52.2
Plural subject + <i>full verb</i>	249	47.8
Total	521	100

Based on the above table, it can be observed that students make more errors in the “*Singular subject + full verb*” items which account for 52.2% of the errors compared to 47.8 % in the “*Plural subject + full verb*” items. The main causes of errors in the “*Singular subject + verb*” error category are probably caused by students using the incorrect full verb as a result of not looking at the context of the sentence and not paying heed to the use of suffix “*s*” for singular verbs. Similarly, the main causes of errors in the “*Plural subject + verb*” error category are caused by students using the incorrect full verb and using the auxiliary verb when a full verb is required.

The following section looks at “*Countable nouns + auxiliary verb and Uncountable nouns + auxiliary verb*” errors.

**4.1.5 “Countable nouns + auxiliary verb and Uncountable nouns + auxiliary verb” errors**

The subject- verb agreement, *Countable nouns + auxiliary verb* and *Uncountable nouns + auxiliary verb* errors will be dealt with in the following order:

**4.1.5.1 “Countable nouns + auxiliary verb” errors**

The distribution of the “*Countable nouns + auxiliary verb*” errors is illustrated in Table 7.4.

**Table 7.4**      Distribution of “*Countable nouns + auxiliary verb*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
1	-	-	-
20	12	24	*Physically, Tom <u>are</u> short and thin. (is)
38	14	28	*Aina <u>are</u> different from Tom physically. (is)
11	26	52	*Tom and Aina <u>is</u> in my class. (are)
31	32	64	*The cats <u>is</u> tame. (are)
32	27	54	*The dogs <u>is</u> fierce. (are)
58	37	74	*The wings <u>is</u> strong. (are)
36	43	86	*The dogs <u>is</u> happy to see the food. (are)

Based on table 7.4, the highest percentage of errors is found in Question 36 which is 86% followed by 74% in Question 58, 64% in Question 31, 54 % in Question 32, 52% in Question 11, 28% in Question 38 and 24% in Question 20. Question 1 has been well answered as there are no incorrect responses. Probably, students are well versed and familiar with the regular use of this subject-verb agreement structure: “*My name is*”.

The most common error made by students for Questions 20 and 38 is the incorrect use of subject-verb agreement. The students used *are* instead of *is*. This could be because students may be ignorant of L2 rules. The singular subjects, *Tom* in Question 20 and *Aina* in Question 38 are singular countable nouns. Hence, the singular countable noun should be followed by a singular verb, *is*.

The most common error made by students for Question 11 is the incorrect use of subject-verb agreement. The students used *is* instead of *are* for the plural subject, *Tom and Aina*. This could be because students may be ignorant of L2 rules whereby two countable nouns joined by a conjunction, *and* become a plural subject and thus, adopts a plural verb, *are*.

Questions 31, 32, 36 and 58 will be looked at as a whole because the countable subject-verb agreement structures are similar. The most common error made by students for the four questions is the incorrect use of subject-verb agreement. The students used *are* instead of *is*. This could be because students may be ignorant of L2

rules whereby the plural countable nouns, ‘*cats*’, ‘*dogs*’ and ‘*wings*’ should be followed by the plural verb *are*.

Based on the above analysis, it can be observed that “Countable Nouns + verb” errors are frequently made by students and the main cause of such errors is ignorance of L2 rules.

**4.1.5.2 “Uncountable nouns + auxiliary verb” errors**

The distribution of “Uncountable nouns + auxiliary verb” errors is shown in Table 7.5, Table 7.6 and Table 7.7.

**Table 7.5** Distribution of “Uncountable nouns + auxiliary verb” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
5	12	24	*Mathematics <u>are</u> my favourite subject. (is)
64	22	44	*Sports <u>are</u> my favourite activity. (is)

Based on table 7.5, the percentage of errors found in Question 5 is 24% compared to 44% in Question 64. The most common error made by students for both questions is the incorrect use of subject-verb agreement. For Questions 5 and 64, the students used *are* in place of *is*. This could be because students may be ignorant of rule restrictions, whereby the subjects, “*Mathematics*” and “*Sports*” though plural in appearance, are uncountable and singular in grammatical function and thus, should

adopt a singular verb. Perhaps, students may be confused between singular and plural subjects.

**Table 7.6** Distribution of “Uncountable nouns + *auxiliary verb*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
21	23	46	*His hair <u>are</u> brown. (is)
41	14	28	*Her hair <u>are</u> black and curly. (is)
22	34	68	*His hair is brown but his skin <u>are</u> fair. (is)
42	32	64	*Her hair is black and curly but her skin <u>are</u> fair. (is)

Based on table 7.6, the highest percentage of errors is found in Question 22 which is 68% followed by 64% in Question 42, 46% in Question 21 and 28% in Question 41.

The most common error made by students for the four questions is the incorrect use of subject-verb agreement. For the four questions, the students used *are* in place of *is*. Such errors arise probably because students are ignorant of L2 rules whereby uncountable subjects, such as, *hair* or *skin* should be followed by a singular verb, *is*.

**TABLE 7.7**     Distribution of “Uncountable nouns + *auxiliary verb*” errors

Question no.	No. of errors	% of errors	The most common error
37	27	54	*The food <u>are</u> usually under the table. (is)
44	25	50	*She takes good care of her health because health <u>are</u> more important than wealth. (is)

Based on table 7.7, the percentage of errors found in Question 44 is 50% compared to 54% in Question 37. The most common error made by students for both questions is the incorrect use of subject-verb agreement. For both questions, the students used *are* instead of *is*. This could be because students may be ignorant of L2 rules, whereby uncountable nouns, such as, *food* or *health* should be followed by a singular verb, *is*.

From the above analysis, it can be noted that “Uncountable nouns + *auxiliary verb*” errors are common and the predominant cause of error is ignorance of grammatical rules within the L2 language system.

The following section looks at the comparison of “*Countable nouns + auxiliary verb and Uncountable nouns + auxiliary verb*” errors. It is shown in Table 7.8.

**Table 7.8**      Comparison of “*Countable nouns + auxiliary verb and Uncountable nouns + auxiliary verb*” errors

Subject-verb	Incorrect usage	% incorrect
Countable nouns + <i>auxiliary verb</i>	191	50.3
Uncountable nouns + <i>auxiliary verb</i>	189	49.7
Total	380	100

Based on the above table, it can be noted that both “*Countable nouns + auxiliary verb*” and “*Uncountable nouns + auxiliary verb*” errors display almost the same quantity of errors which amounts to 50.3% and 49.7 % respectively. It can be gathered that both categories of errors are equally difficult for the students, the main reason being that students are ignorant of the grammatical rule in L2 and confused between singular and plural subjects as exceptions to rules exist in the L2 system.

**4.2 Conclusion**

The data gathered revealed the distribution of the subject-verb agreement errors of the Present Tense form based on a self-designed framework within the context of a cloze test. The distribution of these errors were divided into five main categories which comprised the Singular subject and Plural subject aspects:

1. *Singular subject + does and Plural subject + do*
2. *Singular subject + is/am and Plural subject + are*
3. *Singular subject + has and Plural subject + have*
4. *Singular subject + full verb and Plural subject + full verb*
5. *Countable nouns + auxiliary verb and Uncountable nouns + auxiliary verb*

The errors in each question for every category were tabulated accounting for the total number of errors and percentage of errors. The most common error for each question was decided based on the error with the highest frequency count and the probable cause of error stated. On the whole, out of a total of 80 questions, there were 32 Singular pronouns, 32 Plural pronouns, 8 Singular countable nouns and 8 Plural uncountable nouns. This shows that there is an equal balance between the singular and plural subjects being tested.

The distribution of subject-verb agreement errors of the Present Tense into sub-categories revealed the following findings as seen in Table 7.9.

**Table 7.9**      Distribution of “Subject-verb agreement of the Present Tense” errors

Subject + verb	No. of errors	% of errors
Singular subject + <i>does</i>	328	54.1
Singular subject + <i>is</i>	207	54.5
Singular subject + <i>has</i>	296	53.1
Singular subject + <i>full verb</i>	272	52.2
Countable nouns + <i>auxiliary verb</i>	191	50.3

Based on table 7.9, it can be noted that most of the subject-verb agreement errors belong to the *singular subject + singular verb* categories. For the “*Singular subject + does*” errors, students apparently lack practice in the /z/ form for the Third Person Singular. It can be observed that students often use the plural verb, *have* in the “*Singular subject + has*” and omit the suffix “s” in the “*Singular subject + full verb*” errors. The use of drills and mechanical exercises also contribute to the causes of errors in the “*Singular subject + full verb*” category as students tend to ignore the context. The main causes of error for the “*Singular subject + is*” category are due to lack of attention and negative transfer from the Mandarin and Bahasa Melayu structures. It can be seen from the data on the “*Countable noun + auxiliary verb*” errors, that students are ignorant of grammatical rules and restrictions of rules in the L2 system. Based on the data gathered and the causes stated above, it can be concluded that most of the subject-verb agreement errors probably stem from intralingual sources.