

AN INVESTIGATION OF SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT ERRORS IN  
THE INTERLANGUAGE OF ESL LEARNERS

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## ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan menyelidik kesilapan 'subject-verb agreement' di dalam 'interlanguage' pelajar yang belajar Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua di sebuah sekolah menengah di Kuala Lumpur. Berdasarkan sebuah ujian 'cloze' yang direka sendiri, jumlah kesilapan yang diperolehi ialah 2,454 (61.4%). Kesilapan tersebut di kumpulkan kepada lima kategori utama yang terdiri daripada 'singular/plural subject-verb agreement'. Daripada kesilapan dan peratus kesilapan, kesilapan yang paling kerap dikenalpasti dan punca kesilapan diterangkan. Kesilapan di dalam setiap kategori kecil yang terkandung di dalam kategori utama dibandingkan untuk menentukan bahagian mana di antara 'singular/plural subject-verb agreement' yang menimbulkan masalah kepada pelajar. Peratus kesilapan yang terdapat di kategori 'subject + auxiliary does/do' ialah 24.7%, kategori 'subject + auxiliary has/have', 23.1 % and kategori subject + full verb', 21.2%. Kategori 'countable nouns/uncountable nouns + verb' dan kategori 'subject + auxiliary verb is/are/am' menunjukkan peratus kesilapan yang sama (15.5%). Sebab-sebab kesilapan mungkin berlaku adalah pemindahan daripada bahasa ibunda, kaedah mengajar, bahan-bahan pengajaran dan strategi pembelajaran. Pada umumnya, kesilapan 'singular-verb agreement' menimbulkan lebih banyak masalah kepada pelajar dan sebab-sebab kesilapan berpunca khususnya daripada kesilapan 'intralingual'.

## ABSTRACT

This study seeks to investigate the subject-verb agreement errors in the interlanguage of ESL learners of a secondary school in Kuala Lumpur. Using a self-designed cloze test, a total of 2,454 errors (61.4%) was elicited and categorised into five main categories of singular/plural subject-verb agreement. From the errors and percentage of errors obtained, the most common error was identified and the cause of errors explained. The sub-categories in each main category of errors were compared to determine which area of the singular/plural subject-verb agreement posed more difficulty to the learners. The subject + auxiliary *does/do* category accounted for the highest percentage of errors (24.7%), followed by the subject + auxiliary *has/have* category (23.1%) and subject + *full verb* category (21.2%). The countable nouns/uncountable nouns + *verb* and subject + auxiliary verb *is/are/am* categories showed the same percentage of errors (15.5%). The probable causes of errors were negative transfer from the L1 (Mandarin and Bahasa Melayu), teaching methods, materials used and learner strategies. In sum, the singular subject-verb agreement errors posed more difficulty to the learners and the causes of errors were mainly intralingual in nature.

*Dedicated*  
*To*  
*My Late Father*

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## NOTATIONS

ESL English as a second language

LI First Language

L2 Second Language

IL Interlanguage

FL Foreign Language

TL Target Language

CA Contrastive Analysis

EA Error Analysis

MT Mother-tongue

Q Question number

% Percentage

The asterik \* and \_\_\_\_\_ signal error

The symbol  $\Phi$  indicates no overt manifestation

Bracketing conventions: (    ) indicates well-formedness

**Bold** indicates key concepts.

*Italic* type is used for emphasis and examples.