

INFLUENCE OF L1 WHILE LEARNING SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Farooq Ahmed*

Lecturer at Department of English Mirpur University of Science and Technology
farooq.eng@must.edu.pk

Saba Iram

M.Phil. linguistics Department of English Foundation University Rawalpindi
sabairum79@gmail.com

Saba Chaman

Lecturer at Department of English Mirpur University of Science and Technology
saba.eng@must.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The study aims at investigating the poverty of subject verb agreement of Gujari learners of English at primary level. According to the term subject-verb agreement in English that verb should agree with the noun or pronoun. It is either singular or plural, the verb changes accordingly. In other words, the SVA can be defined as the change of verb according to the subject's number and person. The study focusses upon the influence of the first language while constructing the English sentences. It investigated the Gujari speakers of English learners at district Kotli at primary level how their writing is packed with already learned languages. The study used the Brown (1994) model to classify the errors. The model categories the errors such as addition, substitution, wrong selection, omission. Learners writing sample were collected to classify the errors. It was found that adding the helping verb or main verb where it is not required in English. Similarly, they omit the verb despite its requisition likewise they substitute it according to the drive of their already learned languages. they were also found committing errors in the use of pronouns that automatically impact the subject-verb agreement.

Keywords: Subject Verb Agreement, Errors, Gujari Learners, First Language Influence.

1. INTRODUCTION

The primary rule that governs subject-verb agreement in English is that the verb agree with the noun or pronoun. The verb changes depending on whether it is singular or plural. In other words, the SVA is the change of verb depending on the number and person of the subject. The verb takes the morpheme -s in the present tense when the subject is in the third person singular: "The dog needs a walk" (Hudaib, A. Z. (2022)). If the subject is plural or in the first/second person singular, the verb is followed in plural without any additional morphemes: "The dogs need a walk," or "I/You need a walk." However, some verbs do not simply accept the morpheme -s in the singular form The same is true for auxiliary verbs. Be, do, and have are the three primary auxiliary verbs (Estling Vannestål, M. 2007).). Depending on whether the subject is singular or plural, these verbs take on entirely different forms. For example, the verb "be" has three forms: I am (first person singular); he/she/it is (third person singular); and you/we/they are (second/third person singular/plural). In the past tense, the verb "be" has different forms depending on the subject, as shown in the following example: "I was at home, while you were grocery shopping and they were at the gym." Looking at these examples, the grammatical rules appear to be fairly simple to apply.

The problem is that even if the rule is learned by heart, that does not guarantee that it will be used correctly in language production. While writing correctly, it is important to remember that the head noun must be chosen correctly and must agree with the corresponding verb, which can be singular or plural. However, Eberhard (1999) defined this agreement in an intriguing way by including the order involved in phrase structures. According to SVO, there is an abstract relationship between grammatical

* Corresponding Author

constituents that agree on correct and meaningful construction. In English, a finite verb corresponds to a number with the highest noun in a hierarchical phrase-structure representation of the clauses. Such an understanding presumes that there may be complexities in SVA construction that appear to be related to the identification of the head noun. This identification occurs in a clause with a number of noun phrases or in a noun phrase with a large number of nouns. The previous research suggests two issues; the first is that when the head noun in a subject phrase contains one grammatical number and another conceptual number, the errors appear to be increased due to a distributive effect, such as the portrait on the cards, where the singular noun portrait can be conceptually taken as a plural noun because the same portrait appears to be on man cards. It means that a grammatically singular noun has been divided on a plural noun, making it conceptually plural.

Second, there appears to be an increased risk of mispronouncing the verb if the subject noun phrase is followed by a postmodifier, such as a prepositional phrase that also includes a noun, especially if the number of the head noun and the local noun(s) differs. This is commonly known as attraction (Bock and Miller 1991). The general idea behind attraction is that the local noun, i.e. the noun closest to the verb, defines the number of the verb, which leads to an error when the number of the head noun and the number of the local noun differ, as in example (2): (2) Bowls in the cabinet In example (2), the postmodifying prepositional phrase begins with the plural head noun the bowls and ends with a local singular noun, the cabinet. In the case of an attraction error, a singular verb would have been chosen because the local noun was singular. Aside from such complexities, an expanding body of knowledge assumed that the first language influences second language learning. Nassaji and Karim (2013). Because the existing pool of knowledge from previously acquired languages influences the learning of a new language.

1.1 Background of the Current Research

Being an educational practitioner, it is perceived that educational institutes and teachers encounter difficulties while teaching English and polishing linguistic competency among learners at the primary level. There is a good number of private schools that catches the attention of the population by alluring a well-known phrase “English medium”, but the results are dissatisfied. As we all know that primary education has prime importance for career development. Soundness in primary education strengthens the personality and academic career of learners. Unfortunately, the situation in Pakistan is worsened particularly regarding the English language. Learners commit multifarious errors in all four discreet skills; reading, writing, listening, and speaking. It is irrefutable fact that these four skills are evenly important, but in our education setup and examinational need writing skill pertains paramount importance because our examination system is based on writing skills. As the examination system is a single skill handled, errors in writing are mainly discussed. Viewing such phenomenon, the existing study is initiated to highlight types, nature, and frequency of errors caused by first language influence on learners’ writing at the primary level, specifically, errors in subject-verb agreement.

1.2 Problem identification

English as a second language is studied in all institutions of AJ&K. It is widely accepted truth that learning a second language is a hard and time taking process. Linguistic competency demands exposure to all required skills (listening, speaking reading, and writing). Learners should have acquired internationally accepted English as compared to the regional variety which is full of errors and stuffed with local linguistic structure Brown (2000). Observation, students’ results, and reports from monitoring officers manifest that the standard of English is getting worse, especially in writing, and the influence of L1s is more visible in it too as writing is considered the only medium of conveying thought.

Kotli, the district of AJ&K is a target area of the research comprised of urban and rural areas with a populace of 840000 total literacy rate of the district is 59%. There are varieties of primary schools some of them are English medium and many of them are Urdu medium. In their daily writing errors are common that prompt the researcher to conduct a study to know the influence of the first language and the frequency of errors. The study aims at knowing the poor structure of English subject-verb agreement due to the mechanism of the first language.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

English is a dominant language across the world that motivates every individual to learn it, and everyone tries to lean it. Different strategies are used to learn English and to meet this growing need. However, by 1970, no approach was coined that addressed the errors of learners. Then it was Pit (1970) who gave

the concept of developmental errors which was considered to facilitate the learners in acquiring the second language (SL). It helps to determine the progress of learning of English language. Earlier, in this paper, background of the study, problem under discussion, this section explains the sub-areas of that are involved in the learning of SL in general and writing in a particular sense.

While discussing the errors which has got significant importance in SL, it was Lott (1983) who describes that interference can be easily discovered if errors are occurring because of already learned languages. Ellis (1997) explains that influence occurs due to the learners first language while learning of English. Selinker, (1972), Seligar, (1988) and Ellis, (1997) talked about interim rules that are usually assumed by the SL learners. According to them these are self-generated rules by the SL learners. In these rules the difference between error and mistake gets significance importance as Elis (1997) draws the line between error and mistake, he is of the view that errors occur due to lack of knowledge while mistakes occur due to the learner's fault, it can occur because of lack of attention or any other external factors other than lack of knowledge. Consequently, mistakes are self-corrected and errors are not. Errors are not self-recognized and tend to occur repeatedly until attention from language experts are not paid (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

There are several models which discussed the similarities and differences in the processes of first and second language learnings ((Krashen, 1981& White, 2014, Gass). While learning the first language, there is no available mechanism that influence however, while learning second language, already learned language, learners' experiences and many others factors are available to the learners. An emerging study that assumes influence of already learned languages affects the all the aspects of second language (written and oral production). Sometimes already learned languages facilitate the new learning but many a time it inhibits it. Moreover, the influence of native languages is observed to be influenced by the typological distance between the languages involved as well as many other interacting nonstructural, extra-linguistic factors, i.e., different social and psychological conditions. Ellis (1997) and Kilborn (1994) McLaughlin, (1990) the interdependence between first and second language is present since L1 provides leverage of exposure, strategies and metacognitive skills that learners of second language applies and generalize on additional language.

Apart from this the transfer is also a psychological term which is used to test a phenomenon where already learned event influence the acquiring of new or additional event. The term affects in two ways positive and negative. Positive transfer stand for the term when already learned language facilitate the learning of additional language while on the other hand negative transfer means already learned languages inhibit the learning of new language. similarly, language transfer shows a phenomenon where skill learned in one language transfer to learning of additional language. According to Gass and Selinker (1994) discovered transfer of Spanish when it facilitates the reading skills of English. Robert Lado (1957) suggested than every individual has desire to transfer forms and meaning what they have acquired in their first language as a native speaker to any additional language and its culture. According to Corder (1981) mother tongue exercises more influence as compared to simply influence.

Further, he suggests that several studies regarding errors were aiming at and examining the performance of the learners in a formal setting and reached the conclusion that error which stems from first language are greater in frequency as well as number. So, such discussion creates significant importance for applied linguistics. Owing to such a great significance a new term of contrastive analysis emerged according to Rustipa, K. (2011)the contrastive analysis of many studies suggested that mother tongue inhibits, make slow or difficult to acquire the target language. Presently, interference is regarded as some structures of the additional language are incorrect according to the syntactical argument of the target language and it happens due to the influence of the mother tongue. Corder (1981) also says that sometimes mother tongue plays a facilitator rule, however, when learners could not communicate in the target language to share their need or unable to write properly, the learners tend to depend on the first language get help. In this case the structure of the first language or already learned languages influence to form the structure of the target language.

However, researchers concerning to the field of SLA give worth to learner's errors and take them as the natural process which is involved in SLA (Harmer, 2007). As it was supported by Ellis (1997) that errors generally indicate gaps in learner's knowledge and they happen because the SLA learners fall short to know what is proper or correct in particular situation. Taking into account this perspective, several studies were conducted to had more analysis of the errors in broader sense and grammatical errors especially. For example, Khan (2005) conducted a study to know the errors in written production

of 30 students and found that several errors were due to the imperfection application of grammatical rules. In addition to his work Azimah (2005) also studied the learner's errors applying the error analysis approach and discovered that learners of SL did grammatical errors in academic writing and similarly, Vahdatinejad (2008) also assumed that learners of second language committed grammatical tenses errors and choice of verbs. Current study also makes an attempt to know the range of errors caused by already learned languages particularly in subject -verb agreement.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The current research paper used the mixed method of research for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. Since, it is a very useful method to study a complex phenomenon as it offers multiple tools to address the problem (Bryman, A. 2012). The current research will progress using the following research questions

3.1 Research Questions

The main objective of the study is to highlight the interference of L1 grammar on the writing of L2 at primary level in district Kotli (AJ&K) However, I envisage the following research questions for this study:

1. What is the error frequency of Gujarati speaking of English learners in their writing?
2. How much do already learned languages influence the learning of subject-verb agreement of English?

3.2 Population

The sample of this study contains the writing samples of 9 to 11 years students from 5 different boys' primary schools of District Kotli (AJ&K). These schools are strategically located in urban as well as in rural area. Like other areas of the Pakistan rural and urban area of Kotli (AJ&K) can also be differentiated with regards to educational facilities, academic access, and economic background and learning teaching environments. 100 students of 5 primary schools were given tests and later on their written work is examined. It was random sampling. The sample is based on those students who speak Gujarati as their first language and Urdu as a second language. Students use English and Urdu interchangeably during teaching learning, but Urdu dominates being a language of instructions in the classroom.

3.3 Instrument

The instruments used in current study are questionnaires comprised of test which includes MCQs, and fill in the blanks, 100 students of class 4th and 5th of five primary schools from urban area of District Kotli were given a questionnaire which encompassing use of, subject verb agreement, and an essay on "My best teacher" were also given to know how much does the first language influence learners writing.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

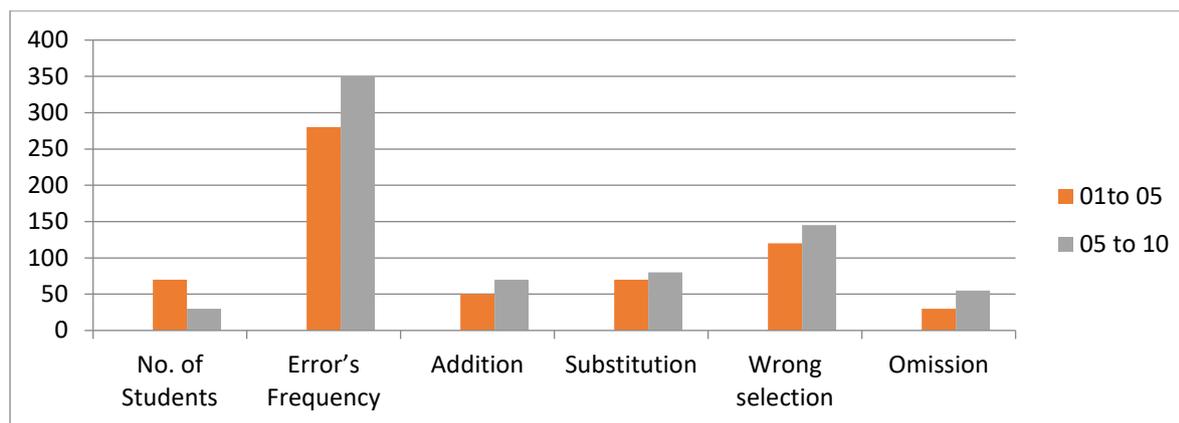
A questionnaire of 15 statements comprised of subject verb agreement was given to 100 students. Collected data was large in numbers. For the sake of convenience and effective analysis, collected data was further categorized into two sub-categories, which is tabulated below;

Brown's (1994), model is used to know the frequency of errors and level of first languages influence is also discussed; In the following table, the errors occurred in subject-verb agreement are categorized by using the Brown model of error analysis. Two categories were made such as errors 01 to 05 and second is 05 and more but less than 10 for the smooth analysis.

Table 01.

Categories	No. of Students	Error's Frequency	Addition	Substitution	Wrong selection	Omission
01 to 05	70	280	50	70	120	30
05 to 10	30	350	70	80	145	55

The table shows that in category 01 to 05, there 70 students containing the error frequency 280 which is further divided into errors of addition (50), substitution (70), wrong selection (120), omission (30). In the second category total number of the students were 30. Errors frequency was 350 which is further categorized as addition (70), substitution (80), wrong selection (145), and omission (55). The following bar-chart also present the results of the students' errors



Bar-chart 01

It is observed that Gojri and Urdu both influence the sentence structure of English students while translating sentences into English and filling the given blanks. i.e.

Table 02

Gojri	Urdu	English
Aysha gae uth hy.	Aysha chali gae	Aysha has gone
Bijli gae uth.	Bijli chali gae	Electricity has gone
Hunn Ali hn	Mein Ali hn	I am Ali
Hunn Kotli hn	Men Kotli hn	I am Kotli
Agr wo aa gho te hn jaon go	Agr wo ay gat u men jao ga	If he will come then I will go
Tehn jo keh kiyo hy?	Ap ne kia kiya?	What you did?
Hnw noo waldain ghi izzat kri chayeti hy	Humny waldain ki izzat krni chaye	We should respect our parents
Hnw noo mehnat krni chayeti hy	Humny Mehnat krni chaye.	We should work hard.

Sentences, which are written in the table indicates that head parameter of Gojri and Urdu is almost same. Learners while learning Urdu don't feel much difficulties but translating in English they commit errors. Students attempt to translate the sentences by using L1s structure and influence of L1's grammar is quite visible. For example, electricity and Aysha both have gone instead of electricity outage or power cut off. In Gojri and Urdu word gae is used regardless it's animate or inanimate but in English different words are employed for them.

In the use of Modal verb, Gojri and Urdu both use chaye whether it is obligatory action or definite action. English has different word like "should, ought, must", but influence of L1s grammar force learners to translate every sentence according to the grammar which they have already mastered. Furthermore, learners are given the essay of my best teacher, and their construction is as under: I have many teachers but Mr. Rashid is my most best teacher. They comes to school every day. Their method of teaching is very good. They never punishes us. They says their prayers regularly.

It is observed that learners learn at home and even in schools different words for respectable persons and elders and different for younger that are same for plurals and in English same construction is applied whether someone is respectable or elder. Pronoun he is used but in Gojri and Urdu "tanw and aap" are used. Thus, this plural construction is translated in English "they" so they were found using they wherever, pronoun he is required for teacher but for respect Gujari learners use they which is a direct translation of aap.

CONCLUSION

The influence of the first language on learning English as a foreign language is a very significant area of investigation. It influences the different areas of the target language, but the agreement of subject and verb is a very demanding area to be investigated because learners at an earlier stage of learning rely increasingly on already learned languages' mechanism while writing English sentences.

It can be concluded that Gujarati speakers of English learners are found making different errors in subject-verb agreements. They were found adding the helping verb or main verb where it is not required in English. Similarly, they omit the verb despite its requisition likewise they substitute it according to the drive of their already learned languages. They were also found committing errors in the use of pronouns that automatically impact the subject-verb agreement. Learners used "they" where third person singular was required only to show the level of respect.

The results of the study show that L1 influences the agreement mechanism of learning English as a foreign language. Finally, I argue that this kind of research is ongoing and therefore no definite conclusions can be made because teaching and learning are both complex processes. While the results of the present study have given the notion as to what types of errors are made by Gujarati learners of English at the primary level, the findings can only be considered as suggestive.

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