

**THE MISUSE OF SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT IN
STUDENTS ESSAY WRITING: A CASE STUDY OF SOME
N.C.E. II STUDENTS OF ENGLISH AT ISAH KAITA COLLEGE
OF EDUCATION, DUTSIN-MA, KATSINA STATE**

BY

**SALISU BALA ABUBAKAR
SPS/10/MEN/00008**

JUNE 2014

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**SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE
STUDIES, BAYERO UNIVERSITY, KANO IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD
OF MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN ENGLISH (LANGUAGE)**

JUNE 2014

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this work is the product of my own research; undertaken under the supervision of Professor Aliyu Kamal and has not been presented and will not be presented with my consent else where for the award of a degree or certificate. All the sources have been duly acknowledge. Any error or omission is not intended, therefore, highly regretted.

SALISU BALA ABUBAKAR

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JUNE 2014

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that the research work for this dissertation and its subsequent preparation by Salisu Bala Abubakar (SPS/10/MEN/00008) were carried out under my Supervision.

Prof. Aliyu Kamal

(Supervisor)

Date

APPROVAL

This research work has been read and approved by the Department of English and Literary Studies, Bayero University, Kano as meeting the requirements for the **Master of Arts Degree in English (Language)** at Bayero University, Kano.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my grandfather Alhaji Abubakar Ayuba (Shugaba Bawa Danmusa) and my family members in general.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praises be to Allah (SWT) the lord of the world, the beneficent the merciful, who preserved our life, health, ability and made it possible for us to have reached this stage of our academic pursuit despite of all academic, economic and social challenges that have crossed our way on the process.

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ABSTRACT

Subject-verb agreement means agreement between the subject of the sentence and its verb. The verb has to agree with its subject in number-singular or plural. Number in English applies to nouns, pronoun and verbs. The research investigates the performance of NCE II Students of the Department of English, Isa Kaita College of Education Dutsinma Katsina State with regard to the rules of concord. It further uses the structural grammar theory in order to familiarize the students with the rules of agreement, raise questions and provide answers and expose them to identify the correct process of using concord in their writings. The methodology used is random sampling. Thus, a close test was administered to the thirty six (36) students selected. The findings show that most of the students lack the adequate knowledge of the rules of agreement; this re-affirmed the assertion that most of the students of the college misuse subject verbs agreement in their writings.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Subject verb agreement, otherwise known as concord of number, which means agreement between the subject of the sentence and its verb. The verb has to agree with its subject in numbers – singular or plural verb. Number in English applies to nouns, pronouns and verbs. For example, ‘the dog barks’. The singular verb ‘barks’ agrees with its singular subject ‘dog’ (Alobo, 2008). Again, concord or agreement is an agreement in gender, case, number or person between different words that share a reference. For example, if an expression contains a proper noun ‘Musa’ and somewhat later a pronoun ‘he’ and they agree in number, that is for both singular or plural and gender for both masculine or feminine (Lamidi, 2000).

Similarly, the notion of subject verb concord has been a major and strategic issue in the field of sentence structure. The term ‘subject’ is the part of a sentence or a clause that commonly indicates what is about, or who or what performs the action in a sentence (that is the agent). Therefore, the subject is typically a noun, noun phrase or a pronoun. In declarative sentence, the subject usually appears before the verb for instance, ‘door never smiles’. On the other hand, in interrogative sentence, the subject often follows the first part

of the verb; example ‘does door ever smiles?’ Therefore, going by what is obtainable in the above explanation of concord, speakers or writers of a language experienced concord as a set of rules to learn and follow. As speakers or listeners, we understand that concord assist us to establish a successful construction. Therefore, there must be a very clear agreement between a subject and its verb in a sentence that a verb must agree with its subject in number, gender and case. In other words, singular subjects followed by a singular verb, or plural subject followed by plural verbs.

Therefore, this particular research work is highly in need to investigate the performance of NCE II students of the English Department at Isah Kaita College of Education Dutsinma on the use of subject verb agreement in their continuous writings.

1.2. THE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Language is highly imperative in all aspects of our lives. Everyone has a specific idea about what a language is and how it should properly be used. Therefore, language has been defined by different linguists. Sapir (1921) defines language as ‘a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols’. The problem with this definition is that language does not

communicate only 'ideas', 'emotions' and 'desires', also some aspects of language are involuntary, like expression of pain, or surprise for instance.

On the other hand, Block and Trager (1942) define language as 'a system of producing vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates'. This definition is similar to Robbins (1985) who defines it as 'a symbol system based on pure constructions, infinitely extendable and modifiable according to the changing needs and condition of speakers'. Again, Fishman(1986) defines language as 'an index of culture it represents'. Similarly, Chomsky (1957) defines language as a particular set of sentences that can be generated from a particular set of rules.

Therefore, the arbitrary nature of language has been highlighted by the Swiss Linguist Ferdinand De Saussure (1857 - 1913), who maintains that no natural relationship exists between words and what they refer to, but that relationship is completely arbitrary and based entirely on human convention. On this view, language is a formal system of symbols governed by grammatical rules combining particular signs with particular meanings. The stress here, then, is on the fact that human languages can be described as closed structural systems consisting of rules that relate particular words to particular objects.

However, a different view of language sees it as a mental faculty that allows humans to undertake linguistic behavior that is to learn languages produce and understand utterances. This definition thus, stresses the universality of language to all human beings, as well as the biological basis of the human capacity for language as a unique development of the human brain. On this view, then language is largely innate. Language is processed in many different locations in the human brain. Human beings acquire language through social interactions in early childhood, and children generally speak fluently when they are around three years old. Therefore, the use of language has become deeply entrenched in human culture and apart from being used for communication. It also has social and cultural uses such as signifying group identity, social stratification and for social grooming and entertainment.

Human language is unique in comparison to other forms of communication, such as those used by the animals, because it allows human beings to produce an infinite set of elements, and the symbols and grammatical rules of any particular language are largely arbitrary, so that the system can only be acquired through social interaction.

1.3. THE AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The aims of this research work are to investigate the performance of NCE II students of English Language at Isah Kaita College Education Dutsin-ma Katsina State about the use of concord (subject-verb agreement) in their continuous writings.

1.4 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

1. It will familiarize the targeted students with the rules of concord (subject-verb agreement) as they were established by the experts in the English grammar.
2. This research work will find out the causes of violation of concord by the above mentioned students.
3. To expose the students to identify the correct process of using concord (subject-verb agreement) in their writings

1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The research work will help to find out areas that tend to pose difficulties to such students, with regard to the use of subject-verb agreement. It will also, assists the students to be aware about the rules of concord. Similarly, the research work assists the researcher to find out if NCE II students of English at

Isah Kaita College of Education Dutsinma Katsina State misuse subject verb agreement in their writings. It makes languages teachers to understand fully the learners' strength and weakness in the use of subject verb agreement, finally such type of research serves as a literature review for further researches in relation to the topic in question.

1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research work is typically restricted to the grammatical aspect of 'subject-verb agreement' in English. This work is limited to 200 level students of the Department of English and some of the same level from Islamic Studies and History departments, Isah Kaita College of Education, Dutsin-ma, Katsina State 2011/2012 Academic session.

1.7. THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

Subject-verb agreement is the view-point used in the interpretation of a sentence or a given expression. That is the verb must agree with its subject in person and in number. Therefore, the structural grammarians are of the view that, grammatical rules should be based on the analysis of the actual utterances of the native speakers. They refuted the prescription of grammatical rules on the basis of language universal.

This research work will explore on the structural grammarians point of view. They note that numerous constructions seem to consist of two parts which designate immediate constituents. The immediate constituents are customarily the subject and the predicate. To illustrate this, the structural

grammarians may use one of a number of diagrams like methods, some of which are very different from the diagrams used in traditional grammar. The main distinction, however, is that the structural grammarian does not change the word order primarily because it is the relationship between words (syntax) which is most important to them. This becomes clear if we analyze an example:

1. This thin boy with red hair could answer difficult question.

In such a situation the structural grammarians ask us first to mark pairs of words which we feel have the closest relationship. Our marking might then look like this: - The thin boy with red hair could answer difficult questions. Our next step would be to group these pairs of words according to clear relationship. Certainly we cannot group 'red hair' and 'could answer'. Therefore, our grouping must be like this: The thin boy with red hair could answer the difficult questions.

There is a definite break between 'hair' and 'could', but the groups 'the thin boy with red hair' (the subject) does have a definite relationship.

Therefore, according to the structural grammarians there must be a closest relationship and agreement between the subject and the verb in an expression.

Furthermore, the study of the selection and arrangement of sentence elements is relatively new in comparison to other language study. It developed in the early 20th century, particularly from 1930 to 1950. Linguists generally consider Ferdinand de Saussure as the father of the analysis. He believed that individual units within spoken and written communication were largely arbitrary, such as the same item having different titles under the different languages. His concept therefore was that the best way to study language was to look at its systematic structure, which was really the link between thoughts and sound.

Thus, this research work will focus on the opinion of the structural grammar. Structural grammar operates under the assumption that what is seen on the surface is also the straight forward meaning behind the words of a sentence. Everything is accepted literally and at face value and no attempt to identify implied meanings is made. The fact is that the choice and arrangement of sentence elements create absolute meaning make structural grammar a foundation for being understood. Once a person has the absolute meaning, he can look beyond it to imply meaning if decided.

Experts accept that the way to change what is communicated is to alter the elements and their arrangement in the sentence. They stress that proper sentence structure makes it possible to communicate without confusion and to conform to community norms. In this sense, structural grammar can be seen as a major tool for bringing and holding people together in the issue of communicative competence.

Again, those who are studying a second language also find the analysis of sentence construction very useful. They use it in a method called comparative analysis, in which they see how the elements and structure of the two languages are the same or different. It is important because a person sometimes has to abandon the engrained structural rules of his native language to properly employ the second language. In English for example, adjective precede the words they modify. In Hausa language adjectives normally come before and after the words they modified.

Therefore, this research work will work along with the assumptions of the structural linguistics to re-affirm and validate the concept of subject verb agreement in relation to sentence structure (Verghese, C. P., 1989).

The above mentioned rules of concord and other contributions made by different linguists with regard to the subject verb agreement were fully related to this research work. Concerning the researcher's argument in respect to the topic in question, the argument here is that most of such students were misusing the subject verb agreement in their essays. Therefore, how could such a situation been solved.

In the end, the input concerning the above mentioned argument is that, lecturers and teachers as a matter of facts should provide an avenue for teacher – learner interaction or conversation in a classroom situation. Again, such students must be engaged in drill exercises dealing with subject verb agreement. For example a group conversation among the students.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, the research work assesses the various contributions made by different linguists, scholars and researchers in respect to second language speakers' use of agreement in English and the constraints they encountered in the process of doing so. Subject-verb concord is particularly one of the most important grammatical units commonly used in order to produce the Standard English expression both written and spoken. Thus, it is highly imperative that second language speakers should know how to use it effectively and avoid grammatical mistakes.

Certainly, at the higher levels of learning, students in those levels are expected to construct and use the correct academic writing that can portray, present and defend an argument. Notwithstanding that many students of the English language of the higher levels are unskilled users of concord. Most of them usually find it difficult to use agreement correctly. Therefore, this research work will analyze subject verb agreement found in the essay writing of some of the NCE II students of Isah Kaita College of Education, Dutsin-ma.

2.2 SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

The subject must agree with its verb in number and person. For Modern English verbs usage, we are expected to note that a third person singular subject generally takes a special verb form ending in –s. the helping verb, ‘be’ *besides* distinguishes all the three persons in the present singular (I am, You are, She is) and the second person in the past, in a singular form (I was, You were, She was). Therefore, the pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number and person. If one speaks of a man named Sule in a clause and then in the next clause intends to refer to him with a pronoun, the pronoun must be masculine and singular (Alobo, 2008: 178).

Furthermore, the pronoun ‘that’ and ‘these’, when used objectively, must also agree in number with the noun they modify. For example, that man, this house, those houses. So, these pronouns are not gender based.

The first two modern English rules of concord are largely the same as old English, the third modern English rules are remnants of an old English rules, that is noun and all its modifiers (adjectives and pronouns used objectively) must agree in gender, case and number. All the three of these rules are little more complex in old English than in modern English. So, we need to pay attention to the rules of concord (Quirk, 1973:176).

Furthermore, according to (Sampson, 1980), a relationship of concord with respect to number between, for example, the words ‘boy’ and ‘talks’ in the sentence that ‘the boy talks like a robot’. This signifies that if one of these words is changed from singular to plural form, the other must equally be changed to correspond, or the result will be ungrammatical. English native speakers do not say ‘the boy talk like a robot or the boys talks like a robot’.

Again, Quirk and Greenbaun (1973) opine that concord of number that is between subject and verb is the most imperative type of concord in English. For example,

8. The car door is open (singular + singular).
9. The car doors are open (plural + plural).
10. The car door are open (singular + plural).
11. The car doors is open (plural + singular). (Quirk and Greenbaun, 1973).

Explanation on the above sentences; the first sentence says “that the car door is open” while the third sentence says “the car door are open” when we look at grammatical nature of the two sentences, we can understand that the first sentence is well constructed while the second sentence is ungrammatical in nature. By considering the rule which says “singular subject followed by a singular verb”. The singular subject ‘door’ agree with the singular verb ‘is’. While in the third sentence the singular subject ‘door’ do not agree with plural verb ‘are’ in number.

2.3. LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Language learning differs distinctively from language acquisition. Language learning is mostly associated with varieties of problems. It is understood that ‘becoming fluent and a perfect speaker in an L2 is not realistic’ (Damisa,1999). Furthermore, Swales, (1990) opines that in the ‘Twelve (12) principles or theoretical assumptions of second language acquisition’ that native language has an effect on learners. The mother tongue (MT) has both facilitating and interfering effect on production and comprehension of target language (TL). There are some problems associated with learning the second language discovered by different linguists. One of the difficulties is that of the strong influence of the L1 on the speaker. For example, in dealing with the phonological aspect, some elements of L1 are usually transferred to the L2. Therefore, the sounds /θ/ and /t/, /f/ and /p/, /v/ and /b/ are taken not distinctively in the Hausa language, thereby leading to the same pronunciation of the two phonemes and often the latter is replaced by the former, which in turn leads to change in meaning in English as the sounds are distinctive. Again, L2 learner’s problems could be found in the semantic and syntactic aspects. Some L2 structures or meaning are imitated directly from L1’s, which in turn leads to ungrammaticality. For example ‘ugly understanding’ this and other

examples of the same kinds are usually found in L2 learner's speech. L2 learning seems to be a difficult task to learners.

Therefore, learners who are learning English as an L2 encounter different difficulties in the process as a result of the following issues: mother tongue influence, lack of exposure to the target language, inadequate learning materials, lack of qualified teachers etc. Learning English is mandatory to the Nigerian students as it is the official language and also the *lingua franca* of the nation, as the language of instruction, media, commerce and other businesses.

The above reasons that made English a prestigious language in Nigeria and at international level have made it necessary for the second language learners to learn and master it efficiently for effective communication. However, the learners' capability to learn and speak fluent and construct a well-structured expression in the language for high level of intelligibility is defeated by the inability of the learners to make researches and failure to practice the language in speech. Learners tend to encounter problems or difficulties with so many areas as explained above among which are:

- Knowledge of concord
- Use of tenses

- Syntactic aspect which deals with the arrangement of words
- Phonological aspect that deals with the pronunciation of phonemes.

On the other hand, language acquisition is relatively easier as it is acquired naturally. Words of a language are acquired when they are used naturally and appropriately (Channel, 1988:84).

2.4. DEFINITION OF CONCORD

Concord or agreement is an agreement in gender, case, number or person between different words that share a reference. Concord: this denotes agreement according to Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2000 edition) meaning that, the fact of having the same number, case or phrase between words in phrases. The notion of subject verb concord has been a major and strategic issue in the field of sentence structure. The term 'subject' is the part of a sentence or a clause that commonly indicates what is about, or who or what performs the action in a sentence (that is the agent). Therefore, the subject is typically a noun, noun phrase or a pronoun. In declarative sentence, the

subject usually appears before the verb for instance, 'door never smiles'. On the other hand, in interrogative sentence, the subject often follows the first part of the verb; example 'does door ever smiles?' Therefore, going by what is obtainable in the above explanation of concord, speakers or writers of a language experienced concord as a set of rules to learn and follow. As speakers or listeners, we understand that concord assist us to establish a successful construction. Therefore, there must be a very clear agreement between a subject and its verb is a sentence that is a verb must agree with its subject in number, gender and case. In other words, singular subjects followed by a singular verb, or plural subject followed by plural verbs.

Certainly, concord or agreement has been defined by different grammarians; therefore, it refers to the agreement that exist between a subject and a verb, pronoun and its antecedents. It is a relationship between two elements, such that they match one another in terms of some grammatical features (Leech, 1992). The situation whereby plural subjects followed by plural verbs could be seen as: - We beat him to nonsense; they talk to us about the matter. On the other hand, singular subjects followed by singular verbs. He speaks fluently; the man runs away, Gali lives in the UK (Leech, 1992).

2.5. RULES GOVERNING SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Going by twenty rules of subject-verb agreement, an attempt has been made to objectify part of the English language form. Most of the concepts of subject-verb concord are straightforward, yet some aspects of singular and plural usage in English grammar are more complicated. Certainly, the twenty rules of subject-verb concord in the Standard English are:-

1. Subjects and verbs must agree in number. This is the corner-stone rule that forms the background of the concept. For example,
 12. ‘the boy laughs when he is happy’ and ‘the boys laugh when they are happy’.
2. Do not get confused by the words that come between the subject and verb, they do not affect the agreement. For example,
 13. the boy, who is dancing over there, is a very good boy.
3. Prepositional phrases between the subject and the verb usually do not affect agreement. For example,
 14. The colours of the rainbow are beautiful.
4. When the sentence starts with ‘there’ or ‘here’ the subject will always be placed after the verb, care needs to be taken to identify it correctly. For example,

15. 'There is a problem with the balance sheet' and 'here are the books you requested'.
5. Subjects do not always appear before verbs in questions, that is make sure you accurately identify the subject before deciding on the proper verb form to be used. For example
16. Does goat usually eat grass?'
6. If two subjects are joined by 'and' they typically require a plural verb form, example,
17. The boy and girl are running to catch the goat'.
7. The verb is singular if the two subjects are separated by 'and' refer to the same person or thing. Example,
18. Red beans and rice is my favorite dish'.
8. If one of the words each, every, **or no** comes before the subject, the verb is singular. For example
19. No smoking or drinking is allowed. Every man and woman is required to check in.

9. If the subjects are both singular and are connected by the words or, nor, neither/nor, either/or, and not only/but also the verb is singular. For example

20. Mary or Jummai is to blame for the accident.'

10. The only time when the subject of the preposition focus into the decision of plural or singular verb forms, is when noun and pronoun subjects like none, more, half, all etc are followed by a prepositional phrase. In such situation, the object of the preposition determines the form of the verb used. Example,

21. None of the chicken is gone.' 'All of the chickens have gone.'

11. The singular verb form is usually used for units of measurement. For example,

22. Four quart of oil was required to get the car running.

12. If one subject is singular and one is plural and the words are connected by the words or, nor, neither/nor, either/or and not only/but also, you use the verb form of the subject that is nearest to the verb.

23. Neither the Governor nor his aides were there when visitors arrived. Either the cat or the lion has escaped from the ZOO.

13.If the subjects are both plural and are connected by the words or, nor neither/nor, either/or, not only/but also, the verb to be used *is* plural.

24.Neither the dogs nor the goats were available at the farm.

14.Indefinite pronouns typically take singular verbs.

25. Everyone wants to be loved.'

15.Except for the pronouns (few, many, several, both, all, some), that always take the plural form.

26. Few were left alive after the flood.'

16.If two infinitives are separated by 'and' they take the plural form of the verb.

27. To drive and to watch require great skill.'

17.When gerunds are used as the subject of a sentence they take singular verb form, but when they are linked by 'and' they take the plural form.

Example,

28. Standing in the *winter* is a bad idea.' 'Swimming in an ocean and playing drums are his hobbies.'

18. Collective nouns like herd, senate, class, crowd etc usually take a singular verb form.

29. The senate is attacking the president on the issue of fuel subsidy.'

19. Titles of books, movies, novels etc are treated as singular, and take a singular verb form.

30. *The lord of the ring* is a very good film.

20. Final rule is that, remember, only the subject affects the verb. (Richard *et al* 1963).

2.6. PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH USING SUBJECT-VERB CONCORD

2.7. COLLECTIVE NOUNS:-

Collective nouns make one of the most difficult areas for ELS learners. (Ilse P. 2003), did a quantitative study on collective nouns in British English using the Collins Co build Corpus. He notes that some collective nouns like police only agree with plural verbs and others like Government, Crowd, can also agree with a singular verb. Ilse found, after attempting to classify many collective nouns, that collective nouns in general are used most often with a singular verb. The exceptions found in the Corpus included staff, crew, crowd.

Therefore, Ilse advises *students/learners* to use the singular form as a default, if they are not specifically sure of which to use. Collective nouns are found very difficult to assign rules to. Ilse opines that American English uses plural verbs even less than British English. Therefore, let us see the following examples.

31. Our school team has won all its games.

32. Our school team has won all their games. (*Kally D. 2004*)

The use of verb in a sentence depends on how the number of the noun is seen. Therefore, according to (Kelly, 2004), with above, he agrees with Ilse's findings and says that; 'our school team have won all their games' sound very ungrammatical. 'Team is a singular noun.'

2.8. THE COPULA "BE"

Although ELS students/learners are introduced to the copula be, the third person singular *inflection* and subject-verb agreement from the beginning of their study and would seemingly have more time to master usage, they can also cause some problems from the very beginning. Certainly, not all languages use a copula verb. Copula use can be compared and contrasted with verb use in concord. Before, discussing ELS student's/learner's acquisition however, we

will discuss English as an L1 acquisition by children and how they compare with L2 students/learners.

Learners face a lot of challenges at all levels dealing with subject-verb agreement, whether the difficulty deals with the copula or any other verb. Even then, mastery of subject-verb agreement, specifically the third person singular is not enough. There is ambiguity that teaches beyond this rule, confusing even native speakers. Furthermore, (Biber *et al*, 1989) give a rule for subject-verb agreement for all verbs other than to be. They say that in infinitive clauses “the verb phrase in a clause agrees with subject in terms of number and person (p. 232).”

The copula be however, as pointed out by (Celce-Murcia and *Larsen Freeman*, 1999), has “more distinct forms with respect to person, number and tense than any other verb in English (p. 59),” and can also be followed by an adjective phrase and adverbial prepositional phrases. So, the copula links any of these phrases to the subject and “reflects the person and number of subject.”

Focusing on the copula and the challenges learners face at all levels dealing with subject-verb agreement, being them L1 or L2 learners. One will come to find out that when native English children begin to learn their first language, the copula form is often marked and therefore often dropped (Celce-Murcia

and Larsen-Freeman, 1999). For instance, when asking children about their age, the response may be “I nine” instead of “I am nine.”

On the other hand, the use of copula verbs in English sentences construction is often misuse by many ELS students. Below are some of the examples of errors that could be found in some of ELS speakers’ speeches.

33. There are shade and.....

34. What are their functions.....?

Instead, they were used in singularity, which makes it ungrammatical

(Celce-Murcia and Larsen Freeman, 1999) brought out four different problems that ELS students face when learning subject-verb agreement with all verbs, *therefore:-*

- a) Omission of the third person singular inflection. For example, 35. shamsu live in London. They also ask teachers to beware in this case, as students may understand and write the copula but the copula appears absent in speech. When looking at this example, all that is missing is the final –s. this inflection could very well be there, but not heard, as some languages do not permit sound with the final –s.

b) Over-generalization of the inflection once learned. For instance, 36
.Johnson cans dance.

c) Over use of third person in any verb. For example: 37. I goes to Lagos.

d) Use of –s as plural marking. For example:

38. The girl goes to the movies often. Here the student sees the plural subject “girl” with an –s on the end and consequently adds an –s to the verb, in an attempt to make the verb plural.

The four problems above are usually issues for beginning level ELS students. Furthermore, (Celce-Marcia and Larsen Freeman, 1999) also provide thirteen rules for troublesome cases in subject-verb agreement and provide examples.

i. Collective nouns

RULE: They take either singular or plural depending on meaning. For example,

39. Our school team has won all its games.

40. Our school team have all their games.

ii. Some common and proper nouns ending in –s

RULES: always take singular verb inflection. For example,

41.No news is good news.

42.This series is very interesting.

43.Physics is a difficult subject.

iii. Titles of books, plays, operas films etc

RULES: Always take singular verb inflection. For example,

44.*Great Expectations* was written by Dickens.

45.*Joys of Motherhood* was written by Buche Amecheta.

iv. Nouns occurring in sets of two.

RULES; Singular with the noun pair. For example

46.A pair of shoes is on the table.

v. A number of and the number of.

RULE: A number of takes plural and the number of take singular. For example,

47.A number of pupils have walked out from the school in the morning.

48.The number of pupils in that school is 300.

vi. Fractions and percentages.

RULE: Singular when modifying a non-count noun and plural when modifying a plural noun; singular or plural when collective. For example,

49. Two thirds of the students are satisfied with the class.

50. One per cent of the population of Nigeria is/are Fulani(s),
(depending on meaning)

vii. Majority and minority.

RULE: Abstract meaning takes singular; specific meaning can take either. For example,

51. The great majority is helpless.

52. The great majority was/were determined to press its/their victory.

viii. Plural unit words

RULE: Singular with one entity, plural with more than one. For example,

53. Three million dollars is a lot of money.

54. Four dollars are on the table in the class.

ix. Arithmetical operations

RULE: Always singular. For example

55. Five minus three is two (equals two).

x. Quantifiers

RULE: Singular if noun is non-count, plural if noun is plural. For example,

56. A lot of publication was published about that incident.

57. A lot of students were present when it occurred.

xi. None, all, each and every.

RULE: Conflicting rules except for “none” referring to non-count noun.

For example,

58. None of the students has escaped.

xii. Relative-clause antecedents.

RULE: Again, controversial. For example,

59. Musa is one of the rare individuals, who have/has finished the M.A. early.

xiii. Clausal phrasal subjects:-

RULE: It is also controversial. For example

60. What they want is revolutions everywhere.

2.9. SAMPLE OF ERRORS

In this unit, the research attempts to identify some students' errors that could be found in the use of subject-verb agreement in relation to pronoun and its antecedents. Below are some of the sampled errors been consistently committed by ELS students, specifically for the targeted students?

2.10. SAMPLE ONE ERROR

61. Everybody has their failings.

62. Nobody in their sense would dream of doing it.

The correct form of the pronoun antecedents for the two sentences is "his".

Thus:

63. Everybody has his failings.

64. Nobody in his sense would dream of doing it.

From the above samples, students show incompetence in the use of the indefinite pronoun. This indicates that it resulted from lack of knowledge of

concord concerning the use of pronouns, such as “everybody, each, every, nobody, etc.” these pronouns must be followed by verbs, pronouns and adjectives in the singular forms.

2.11. THE SECOND SAMPLE ERRORS

Problem in using a relative pronoun with its antecedent. For example:

65. This is one of the best books that has ever lived.

66. He was one of the greatest philosophers that has ever lived.

Correct:

67. This is one of the best books that have ever lived.

68. He was one of the greatest philosophers that have ever lived.

Therefore, “that” in the above sentences is subject of “have been written” and ever “lived”. It is plural because as antecedents “books” and “philosophers” are plural.

Therefore, there are four tips to help you to apply the principle that a verb must agree in number with its subject.

- 1) Adds an –s to the verb if the subject is singular noun, a word that names one person, place or thing. For example:

69. Musa speaks fluently.

- 2) Add an –s to the verb if the subject is anyone of the third person singular pronoun. He, she, it, this, that. For example,

70. He drives gently.

71. She speaks convincingly.

72. This confuses me.

73. That takes the cake.

- 3) Do not add an –s to a verb, if the subject is the pronoun I, you, **are** we or they. For example:

74. I make my own rules.

75. We take pride in our work.

76. They talk much on the issue.

- 4) Do not add an –s to a verb, if two subjects are joined by and. For example:

77. Gaje and Umami often argue with each other.

78. Keen and Hook enjoy music.

(Parrot, 2000)

In the end, this chapter explains how different researchers and grammarians define, characterize and simplify the various features of subject-verb agreement into number, case, gender, person, collective and copula types. Again, they show some exceptional cases and relevant errors in the use of agreement by ELS students.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The method used in this research is a case study for which a collection of facts, opinions, and judgments relating to an actual condition in which the problem exists will be made and a decision taken. In respect to this research work, primary and secondary data collections will be carried out. In any research work data collection is an important aspect, because it is through that the necessary facts and vital information concerning the project were obtained to ensure the success and achievement of the work.

However, the researcher analyzes the types of data collection. These are;

- (i) Primary data
- (ii) Secondary data

3.2 PRIMARY DATA

This is an aspect of going to various fields in order to get information from people with regards to the topic, “A CASE STUDY OF ISAH KAITA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION DUTSINMA”. The population covers only 200 level students of the department of English and those of the same level from history and Islamic studies department whose age’s ranges from 21-25 yrs. They also comprise of males and females.

3.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Which aspect of subject – verb concord tend to pose difficulties to NCE II students?
2. Which aspects or parts of subject – verb concord are effectively used or not used by the NCE II students?
3. What is the level of the NCE II students’ mastery in subject - verb agreement?

A cloze test is designed to replace the above mentioned questions.

3.4. THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS USED

A close test is designed to have three (3) different parts, in which part 1.1 contained personal information of the respondent. Part (1.2) is designed with twenty two (22) questions to test the respondent level of mastery in the use of the topic in question, and identify the problematic areas. The last part of the

question paper is meant to identify the level of the respondent use of English Outside the school premises.

3.5. STUDENTS POPULATION

The total number of the registered NCE students is four thousand one hundred and sixty-seven (4167) in the college. The art based students constitute the total number of two thousand five hundred and two (2502). Therefore, the concern with regard to the respondents is a class which has the population of forty (40) students in the department of English. Furthermore, thirty six (36) students out of forty (40) sat for the test, and the analysis is conducted based on the thirty six students in that class, by considering the opinion of Morgan and Kreycie (1971), in respect to the sampling strategy.

3.6. SECONDARY DATA

This is the second type of data. It includes Information from written documents and consists of various textbooks, academic papers, internet sources and other relevant materials about the topic.

3.7. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

This deals with the method or approach employed to classify, present and interpret the data collected.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0. DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is designed to analyze the data obtained in the process of conducting this research work. In the case of this study, the speaker of 200 level students was the first respondent who distributed the thirty six (36) question papers to his course mate, in which their responses provide intellectual opportunity to obtain more information about the topic (Misuse of subject - verb agreement in English),for analysis, interpretation and conclusion.

Responses to the questions were presented in a tabular form separately. Out of a population of forty (40) students in a class, thirty six (36) question papers were distributed and successfully returned. That is to say thirty six (36) students sat for the test in a class of forty (40) students. Therefore, the analysis

and presentation will be based on the thirty six (36) answer sheets in accordance with the (Morgan and Kreycie, 1971) opinion with regard to the sampling strategy.

4.2. THE TABLES

1. The road closed

Options: (a) are (b) were (c) is

Responses		Percentage
Correct	27	75%
Incorrect	9	25%
Total	36	100%

The above table shows that twenty seven (27) respondents went for (c) is, which is the correct answer, while nine (9) respondents went for (a) are which is the wrong answer

2. We.....her mercilessly

Options: (a) beats (b) beat (c) beaten

Responses		Percentage
Correct	24	66.6%
Incorrect	11	30.5%
Undecided	1	2.7%
Total	36	100%

This implies that 66.7% of the respondents chose (b) beat which is the correct answer, 30.5% went for (a) beats and 2.7% were undecided.

3. The Governor with his in the office.

Options:

(a)Is (b) are (c) were

Responses		Percentage
Correct	4	11.1%

Incorrect	31	83.3%
Undecided	1	5.5%
Total	36	100%

The table above indicates that four (4) respondents chose option (a) is which the correct one. Thirty (30) respondents chose ‘b’ are and (c) were which are all wrong. And two of them were undecided.

Therefore when we look at the responses in respect to question one to tree, we can understand that the majority of the respondents have violated the rules of agreement, that “Plural subjects followed by plural verbs and singular subjects followed by singular verbs “Leech (1992).

:4. The senatedoing.....best.

Options:

(a) Was.....their (b) are....their (c) is.....its

Responses		Percentage
Correct	4	11.1%
Incorrect	30	83.3%
Undecided	2	5.5%
Total	36	100%

From the above table four (4) respondents chose c, is....its which is the real answer. Thirty (30) respondents selected (a) was..... Their and (b) are.....their which are all wrong. And two (2) respondents were undecided.

4. Neither the Governor nor his Aids.....There when the visitors arrived.

Options:

(a) Were (b) was (c) is

Responses		Percentage
Correct	10	27.8%
Incorrect	26	72.2%
Undecided	0	0%
Total	36	100%

From the above table ten (10) respondents went for (a) were which is the correct answer. Twenty six (26) respondents chose (b) was and (c) is respectively which are the wrong answers.

6. None of them done the exercise.

Options:

(a) had (b) have (c) has

Responses		Percentage
Correct	14	38.9%
Incorrect	20	55.6%
Undecided	2	5.5%
Total	36	100%

From the above table fourteen (14) respondents went for (a) and (c) i.e. had and has respectively which are the correct answers. Twenty (20) chose (b) have, which is the wrong and the remaining two (2) been undecided.

7. My wife and the best friend attending our convocation.

Options:

(a) Is (b) has (c) are

Responses		Percentage
Correct	10	27.7%
Incorrect	26	72.3%
Undecided	1	%
Total	36	100%

This shows that ten (10) respondent's chose (a) is, which is the correct answer, while twenty six (26) respondents went for (b) and (c) which are the wrong answers. Finally, a respondent was undecided.

8. Water and saltthe ingredient to make a soup.

Options:

(a) are (b) is (c) were

Responses		Percentage
Correct	26	72.3%
Incorrect	10	27.7%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

In the table above, twenty six (26) respondents chose the correct answer (a) are, while the remaining ten (10) respondents chose the wrong answers (b) is and (c) were, respectively.

Thus, when we consider the responses of question four to question eight, such respondents really violated the rule of agreement that most of them do

not answered the questions correctly. It shows that such students were aware of the rule opined by Quirk and Greenbum (1973) that “concord of number is highly imperative in the construction of sentences”.

9. Studentmade a mistake.

Options:

(a) Had (b) has (c) have

Responses		Percentage
Correct	24	66.7%
Incorrect	13	33.3%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

This indicates that twenty four (24) respondents were correct by choosing the correct option (a) had and (b) has, because the statement can take both present participle and past participle forms. The remaining twelve (12) respondents chose the wrong option (c) have.

10. Eating and drinking prohibited in the mosque.

Options:

(a) Are (b) is (c) have been

Responses		Percentage
Correct	14	38.8%
Incorrect	22	61.2%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

This opines that only 38.8% of the respondents were correct by choosing option (b) is, and the majority that is 61.2% chose the wrong option (a) are and (c) have been.

11. Neither I nor you, nor anyone else..... the answer

Options:

(a) known (b) know (c) knows

Responses		Percentage
Correct	10	27.7%
Incorrect	26	72.3%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

The table above shows that majority of the respondents (26) chose the wrong options (a) known and (b) know, which the remaining ten (10) respondents chose the correct option (c) knows.

12. The headmaster as well as the provost Engaged in the business.

Options:

(a) were (b) was (c) are

Responses		Percentage
Correct	10	25%
Incorrect	26	75%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

This defines that majority of the respondents (i.e. 26) chose the wrong options (a) were and (c) are, then the remaining ten (10) respondents chose the correct option (b) was

13. Four quarter/litre of oil.....required to get the car running.

Options:

(a) are (b) is (c) were

Responses		Percentage
Correct	15	36.1%
Incorrect	21	63.9%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

The above table indicates that 36.1% of the respondents chose (b) is (the correct option) while 63.9% of the respondents chose the wrong ones that are (a) are and (c) were respectively.

Furthermore, in respect to question nine to thirteen, the responses showed much failure concerning the use of auxiliary verb.

Students of that level need to understand that modal auxiliaries can equally function like the main verb in a sentence, because they do support the main verb in an expression

According to (Leech, 1973) the correct use of modal verbs in sentences make the structure grammatical or ungrammatical.

14. Shehu and Musa The work together.

Options:

(a) do (b) does (c) doing

Responses		Percentage
Correct	13	36.1%
Incorrect	23	63.9%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

The above table shows that thirteen (13) respondents chose the correct option which is (a) do and the remaining twenty three (23) respondents chose the wrong option (b) does and (c) doing respectively.

15. The boy When he is happy.

Options:

(a) laugh (b) laughs (c) laughing

Responses		Percentage
Correct	7	14.4%
Incorrect	28	77.8%
Undecided	1	2.8%
Total	36	100%

The above table shows that seven (7) respondents chose that the correct option (b) laughs, while the 28 respondents chose the wrong options (a) laugh and (c) laughing, the remaining one (1) respondent was undecided.

16. Here the books you requested.

Options:

(a) is (b) are (c) was

Responses		Percentage
Correct	19	52.8%
Incorrect	17	47.2%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

The above table shows that 19 respondents chose the correct option which is (b) are and the remaining 17 respondents chose the wrong options (a) is and (was), respectively.

17. Red beans with riceMy favorite dish.

Options:

(a) is (b)are (c) were

Responses		Percentage
Correct	18	27.8%
Incorrect	26	72.2%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

The table above shows that ten (01) respondents chose the correct option (a) is while the remaining twenty six respondents chose the wrong options (b) are and (c) were respectively.

18. Mummy or Jummaito blame for the accident.

Options:

(a) are (b) is (c) were

Responses		Percentage
Correct	7	19.4%
Incorrect	29	80.6%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

The above table indicates that seven respondents chose the correct option (b) is, while the remaining twenty nine (29) chose the wrong option (a) are and (d) were.

19. Everybody to be loved.

Options:

(a) want (b) wants (c) wanted

Responses		Percentage
Correct	18	50%
Incorrect	17	47.2%
Undecided	1	2.8%
Total	36	100%

The above tables opine that eighteen (18) respondents chose the correct answer which is option (b) wants. Seventeen respondents chose the wrong answer, which are option (a) want and (c) wanted while a remaining respondent was undecided

20. None of the chicken.....gone

Options:

(a) is (b) was (c) are

Responses		Percentage
Correct	19	52.8%
Incorrect	17	47.2%
Undecided	0	0%
Total	36	100%

The above table shows that nineteen (19) respondents chose the correct option (b) was and (a) is, while the remaining seventeen respondents chose the wrong option (c) are

21. The senateattacking the president on the issue of fuel subsidy.

(a) is (b) are (c) were

Responses		Percentage
Correct	18	50%
Incorrect	18	50%
Undecided	0	0 %
Total	36	100%

The table above shows that half of the respondents chose the correct option (a) is and the remaining half went for the wrong option (b) are and (c) were respectively.

22. Swimming in an ocean and playing drumshis hobbies

Options:

(a) are (b) is (c) was

Responses		Percentage
Correct	18	50%
Incorrect	18	50%
Undecided	0	0 %
Total	36	100%

From the above table we can understand that eighteen respondents chose the correct option (a) are and the remaining eighteen (18) respondents chose the wrong answers (b) is and (c) was respectively.

Furthermore, the responses of question fourteen to twenty one showed that most of the respondents were really confused in choosing the correct answer. It

should be they were not aware about what a linguist by name lamidi (2000) “consider as an agreement in gender, case number or person between different words that share a reference. That is if an expression contains a proper noun and somewhat later a pronoun and they agree in number, that is for both singular and plural and gender for both masculine and feminine.

a. PERFORMANCE IN WRITTEN ESSAYS

The table below indicates the performance in (percentage) of the respondents found in some written essays in the second part of the test.

Responses		Percentage
Correct	15	41.7%
Incorrect	20	55.6%
Undecided	1	2.8%
Total	36	100%

From the above table, we can observe that fifteen (15) respondents performed thoroughly while twenty respondents showed total failure in their

use of concord. A respondent leave a space blank possibly because, he is afraid to be caught up short or do not want share what he knows with others.

DISCUSSION

From the above tables we can understand that the majority of the students, who sat for the test performed very badly, because of their ignorance of the rule of concord. Many linguists have been exploring the rules of agreement in English grammar.

Alobo (2008) opined that subject – verb agreement entails the agreement between the subject and the verb in a sentence. The verb has to agree with its subject in numbers, singular or plural verbs. If we look at question ten (10) of the test which says “Eating and drinking ...prohibited in the mosque” Options (a) are, (b) is, (c) have been. Twenty two respondents chose the wrong answers, while fourteen (14) respondents chose the correct option. Therefore, based on this findings, it is identified that various student have difficulty in using subject- verb concord, especially while dealing with the two subjects connected by “and”.

Again, many students try to pluralize “The verb” preceding the subject by “S” to it. For example, 59. weher mercilessly .Options (a) beats (b) beat (c) beaten. Thirty (30) respondents chose the wrong answer “beats” as in

the case of third person singular pronoun (she, he, and it). Four (4) respondents choose the correct options (b) beat, to show their knowledge of concord. The above rule was really opined by another linguist by name Leech (1971), that is the first, second and often plural subject must be followed by “normal root of a verb”

In relation to the above explanation, it is observed that many students have difficulty or rather have problem of using the rule of concord in the English language.

Again, many linguists like Quirk and Greenbum (1973), Leech (1992) and Channel (1988) opined that people begin to learn how to choose and arrange sentence elements extremely early in life. As babies, people learn how to make and express rudimentary needs and wants. This expands in to the entire words and finally people master the basis of sentences construction and learn how to use specific words in a particular fashion. According to them, the more sounds and words a child learns and the better he gets at putting them to gather, the more complex ideas he can convey.

Therefore those who are studying English as a second language find the analysis of sentence construction very useful. They use it in a method called comparative analysis, in which they see how the elements and structures of the

two languages are the same or different. It is important because someone has to abandon the engrained structural rules of his native language to properly employ the second language.

In English, for example, objects precede the words they modified; on the other word in French they generally follow the modified words.

Certainly, using the proper words but under the wrong arrangement is a sigh that someone is not a native speaker. So also, by considering the respondent's responses in relation to the topic in question, we are made to realize the fact that such students either they do not have the background knowledge of subject – verb agreement in the sentence construction since their early like or they were not clearly acquainted with the rules of agreement.

FINDINGS

Based on the research findings, it is observed that many students have difficulty in using subject – verb agreement, especially while dealing with “single and plural verbs” concord associated with linking expressions” such as “with,” “as well as” etc, as well as between two subjects connected by “and.” Element of failure is also shown while dealing with plural subject as majority of the students try to pluralized “the verb” preceding the subject by adding an “s” to it. This was drawn from the analysis of the responses made which

showed the correct answers only to come from the simple agreement type that deals with singular subject preceded by singular verb and the third person singular subject followed by the base form of a verb with an “s” that is an inflectional morpheme. First second and often plural subject. Followed by the nominal root of a verb

Specifically, these are drawn for the fact that tables (3), (4), (5),and (6) had shown students incompetence in using subject – verb agreement that deals with auxiliary cases, so also with liking expressing like “with”, as it is clearly indicated that only 11.1 %.11.1%, 10.8% and 38.9% of the respondents got the correct answers in the four tables respectively. Again, the students revealed inadequate knowledge of subject – verb agreement in respect with two subject separated by “and” but referred to the same person or thing. Table seven (7) showed only 2.7.7% were correct.

Similarly, the students proved to be incompetent by failing to choose the correct answer tables (1), (2) and (13) were designed to test their level of mastery or knowledge in terms of concord that deals with plural subjects to be followed by plural verbs. Only 66.6% and 36.1% choose the correct options, the rest of the respondents were failed to do so.

On the other hand, tables (11), (12) and (18) of the test indicated students' much failure in using the subject – verb agreement dealing with correlative conjunctions like neither nor, as well as, or e.t.c, as to the fact that, there are 72.3%, 75% and 80.6% of the wrong responses to such questions respectively.

However, tables (1), (8) (16) of the same test showed proper and effective use of agreement dealing with singular subjects, especially “ third person” with the verb in its simple present tense with regards to the above questions the majority of the respondents choose the correct options. Again, with regard to the two subject connected by a conjunction “and” that is on table (22) the responses are equal.

So, in the general perspective, it is clearly shown that majority of the students learning English as a second language at Isah Kaita College of Education, Dutsin-ma encounter difficulties in using subject – verb agreement as to the fact that table (15) of the test reveals that majority (77.8%) usually and most of the times do encounter problems in the use of the topic in question. That in only 14.4% had no problem with it.

Therefore, the above proved students' shallow knowledge or experience of the aspect, data had been obtained from their responses on the causes and solution of the topic in question. Thus, the analysis of tables above revealed the

facts that, lack of practice of the aspects are the major causes, and lack of qualified teachers of grammar. Besides, the solutions to the problems are to engage in practice and making researches.

Finally, based on the responses of the data analyzed in respect with the research questions, it had indicated that most of the targeted students have inadequate knowledge of the rule of concord or agreement. This is justified as to the fact that, there are more incorrect responses than the correct ones with a wider gap of responses. It is clearly indicated that, the difference between the two is very wide.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This chapter is designed to contain the summary of the previous chapters, findings and recommendations, as well as the general conclusion in respect to the topic in question.

5.1 SUMMARY.

This research work titled “The Misuse of subject verb agreement in the English in student’s continuous writing” is chosen to examine the areas that tend to pose difficulties in L2 learners’ essays. Agreement is one of the most controversial aspects of grammar, therefore, it’s often been ignored by many ESL Learners. The research attempted to study the level of mastery and difficulty in the use of “subject – verb concord” of the 200 level students of the Department of English language, Isah Kaita Collage of Education, Dutsinma, Katsina state and some of the same level from history and Islamic studies Departments, as the case study, with the population of about forty (40) students in which only thirty six (36) were chosen as a sample.

A lot had been reviewed in the course of this research on the views of several scholars in relation to the topic in question. This research work had

used an approved research method in which data had been obtained from various respondents which provide significant information in the formulated cloze test. The responses were also for data analysis and interpretations using percentages and tables with subsequent explanations.

5.2. CONCLUSION

Subject-verb agreement is relatively successful unit of English grammar that attempts to explain the relationship that exist between the subject of a sentence (the doer of an action) and the verb of that same sentence (the action itself). Therefore, many linguists are of the view that a sentence is appear to be meaningful if such a sentence contains agreement. That is singular subject vs singular verb and plural subject vs plural verb. The research explored to investigate the performance of NCE II students of English at Isah Kaita College of Education Dutsinma, Katsina State on the use of subject verb agreement in their essay writings. In the process of doing so, a lot of works related to the unit were consulted, data were analyzed in a tabular form and the findings re-affirmed the assertion that most of the NCE II students of English Language at the above mentioned college were violating the rule.

Furthermore, thirty six students were selected randomly to participate in the conduct of the research work. So, the general overview of the research

works. So, the general overview of the research opined the fact that NCE II student of English Language of Isah Kaita College of Education Dutsin-ma, Katsina State were having a very little or no knowledge of using concord in their essay writings. It occurred as a result of the poor background knowledge of concord, lack of poor extension reading by the students and poor communicative competence among the students.

To put an end to this research work, the grammatical aspect of “Concord” should be taught extensively right from the secondary school level. Lecturers should as a matter of fact provide an avenue for teacher – learner interaction and conversation in the classroom situation, which will enable them to detect learners’ difficulties in the use of subject verb agreement.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This research work is restricted only on the subject verb agreement particularly concord of numbers, that is singular subject and singular verb, plural subjects and plural verbs respectively. Therefore, another aspect or unit of agreement in the English grammar like the agreement between collective nouns and irregular verbs in an expression is a unit that needs further investigation.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Subject verb agreement, otherwise known as concord of number, which means agreement between the subject of the sentence and its verb. The verb has to agree with its subject in numbers – singular or plural verb. Number in English applies to nouns, pronouns and verbs. For example, ‘the dog barks’. The singular verb ‘barks’ agrees with its singular subject ‘dog’ (Alobo, 2008). Again, concord or agreement is an agreement in gender, case, number or person between different words that share a reference. For example, if an expression contains a proper noun ‘Musa’ and somewhat later a pronoun ‘he’ and they agree in number, that is for both singular or plural and gender for both masculine or feminine (Lamidi, 2000).

Similarly, the notion of subject verb concord has been a major and strategic issue in the field of sentence structure. The term ‘subject’ is the part of a sentence or a clause that commonly indicates what is about, or who or what performs the action in a sentence (that is the agent). Therefore, the subject is typically a noun, noun phrase or a pronoun. In declarative sentence, the subject usually appears before the verb for instance, ‘door never smiles’. On the other hand, in interrogative sentence, the subject often follows the first part

of the verb; example ‘does door ever smiles?’ Therefore, going by what is obtainable in the above explanation of concord, speakers or writers of a language experienced concord as a set of rules to learn and follow. As speakers or listeners, we understand that concord assist us to establish a successful construction. Therefore, there must be a very clear agreement between a subject and its verb in a sentence that a verb must agree with its subject in number, gender and case. In other words, singular subjects followed by a singular verb, or plural subject followed by plural verbs.

Therefore, this particular research work is highly in need to investigate the performance of NCE II students of the English Department at Isah Kaita College of Education Dutsinma on the use of subject verb agreement in their continuous writings.

1.2. THE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Language is highly imperative in all aspects of our lives. Everyone has a specific idea about what a language is and how it should properly be used. Therefore, language has been defined by different linguists. Sapir (1921) defines language as ‘a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols’. The problem with this definition is that language does not

communicate only 'ideas', 'emotions' and 'desires', also some aspects of language are involuntary, like expression of pain, or surprise for instance.

On the other hand, Block and Trager (1942) define language as 'a system of producing vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates'. This definition is similar to Robbins (1985) who defines it as 'a symbol system based on pure constructions, infinitely extendable and modifiable according to the changing needs and condition of speakers'. Again, Fishman(1986) defines language as 'an index of culture it represents'. Similarly, Chomsky (1957) defines language as a particular set of sentences that can be generated from a particular set of rules.

Therefore, the arbitrary nature of language has been highlighted by the Swiss Linguist Ferdinand De Saussure (1857 - 1913), who maintains that no natural relationship exists between words and what they refer to, but that relationship is completely arbitrary and based entirely on human convention. On this view, language is a formal system of symbols governed by grammatical rules combining particular signs with particular meanings. The stress here, then, is on the fact that human languages can be described as closed structural systems consisting of rules that relate particular words to particular objects.

However, a different view of language sees it as a mental faculty that allows humans to undertake linguistic behavior that is to learn languages produce and understand utterances. This definition thus, stresses the universality of language to all human beings, as well as the biological basis of the human capacity for language as a unique development of the human brain. On this view, then language is largely innate. Language is processed in many different locations in the human brain. Human beings acquire language through social interactions in early childhood, and children generally speak fluently when they are around three years old. Therefore, the use of language has become deeply entrenched in human culture and apart from being used for communication. It also has social and cultural uses such as signifying group identity, social stratification and for social grooming and entertainment.

Human language is unique in comparison to other forms of communication, such as those used by the animals, because it allows human beings to produce an infinite set of elements, and the symbols and grammatical rules of any particular language are largely arbitrary, so that the system can only be acquired through social interaction.

1.3. THE AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The aims of this research work are to investigate the performance of NCE II students of English Language at Isah Kaita College Education Dutsin-ma Katsina State about the use of concord (subject-verb agreement) in their continuous writings.

1.4 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

4. It will familiarize the targeted students with the rules of concord (subject-verb agreement) as they were established by the experts in the English grammar.
5. This research work will find out the causes of violation of concord by the above mentioned students.
6. To expose the students to identify the correct process of using concord (subject-verb agreement) in their writings

1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The research work will help to find out areas that tend to pose difficulties to such students, with regard to the use of subject-verb agreement. It will also, assists the students to be aware about the rules of concord. Similarly, the research work assists the researcher to find out if NCE II students of English at

Isah Kaita College of Education Dutsinma Katsina State misuse subject verb agreement in their writings. It makes languages teachers to understand fully the learners' strength and weakness in the use of subject verb agreement, finally such type of research serves as a literature review for further researches in relation to the topic in question.

1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research work is typically restricted to the grammatical aspect of 'subject-verb agreement' in English. This work is limited to 200 level students of the Department of English and some of the same level from Islamic Studies and History departments, Isah Kaita College of Education, Dutsin-ma, Katsina State 2011/2012 Academic session.

1.7. THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

Subject-verb agreement is the view-point used in the interpretation of a sentence or a given expression. That is the verb must agree with its subject in person and in number. Therefore, the structural grammarians are of the view that, grammatical rules should be based on the analysis of the actual utterances of the native speakers. They refuted the prescription of grammatical rules on the basis of language universal.

This research work will explore on the structural grammarians point of view. They note that numerous constructions seem to consist of two parts which designate immediate constituents. The immediate constituents are customarily the subject and the predicate. To illustrate this, the structural

grammarians may use one of a number of diagrams like methods, some of which are very different from the diagrams used in traditional grammar. The main distinction, however, is that the structural grammarian does not change the word order primarily because it is the relationship between words (syntax) which is most important to them. This becomes clear if we analyze an example:

2. This thin boy with red hair could answer difficult question.

In such a situation the structural grammarians ask us first to mark pairs of words which we feel have the closest relationship. Our marking might then look like this: - The thin boy with red hair could answer difficult questions. Our next step would be to group these pairs of words according to clear relationship. Certainly we cannot group 'red hair' and 'could answer'. Therefore, our grouping must be like this: The thin boy with red hair could answer the difficult questions.

There is a definite break between 'hair' and 'could', but the groups 'the thin boy with red hair' (the subject) does have a definite relationship.

Therefore, according to the structural grammarians there must be a closest relationship and agreement between the subject and the verb in an expression.

Furthermore, the study of the selection and arrangement of sentence elements is relatively new in comparison to other language study. It developed in the early 20th century, particularly from 1930 to 1950. Linguists generally consider Ferdinand de Saussure as the father of the analysis. He believed that individual units within spoken and written communication were largely arbitrary, such as the same item having different titles under the different languages. His concept therefore was that the best way to study language was to look at its systematic structure, which was really the link between thoughts and sound.

Thus, this research work will focus on the opinion of the structural grammar. Structural grammar operates under the assumption that what is seen on the surface is also the straight forward meaning behind the words of a sentence. Everything is accepted literally and at face value and no attempt to identify implied meanings is made. The fact is that the choice and arrangement of sentence elements create absolute meaning make structural grammar a foundation for being understood. Once a person has the absolute meaning, he can look beyond it to imply meaning if decided.

Experts accept that the way to change what is communicated is to alter the elements and their arrangement in the sentence. They stress that proper sentence structure makes it possible to communicate without confusion and to conform to community norms. In this sense, structural grammar can be seen as a major tool for bringing and holding people together in the issue of communicative competence.

Again, those who are studying a second language also find the analysis of sentence construction very useful. They use it in a method called comparative analysis, in which they see how the elements and structure of the two languages are the same or different. It is important because a person sometimes has to abandon the engrained structural rules of his native language to properly employ the second language. In English for example, adjective precede the words they modify. In Hausa language adjectives normally come before and after the words they modified.

Therefore, this research work will work along with the assumptions of the structural linguistics to re-affirm and validate the concept of subject verb agreement in relation to sentence structure (Verghese, C. P., 1989).

The above mentioned rules of concord and other contributions made by different linguists with regard to the subject verb agreement were fully related to this research work. Concerning the researcher's argument in respect to the topic in question, the argument here is that most of such students were misusing the subject verb agreement in their essays. Therefore, how could such a situation been solved.

In the end, the input concerning the above mentioned argument is that, lecturers and teachers as a matter of facts should provide an avenue for teacher – learner interaction or conversation in a classroom situation. Again, such students must be engaged in drill exercises dealing with subject verb agreement. For example a group conversation among the students.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, the research work assesses the various contributions made by different linguists, scholars and researchers in respect to second language speakers' use of agreement in English and the constraints they encountered in the process of doing so. Subject-verb concord is particularly one of the most important grammatical units commonly used in order to produce the Standard English expression both written and spoken. Thus, it is highly imperative that second language speakers should know how to use it effectively and avoid grammatical mistakes.

Certainly, at the higher levels of learning, students in those levels are expected to construct and use the correct academic writing that can portray, present and defend an argument. Notwithstanding that many students of the English language of the higher levels are unskilled users of concord. Most of them usually find it difficult to use agreement correctly. Therefore, this research work will analyze subject verb agreement found in the essay writing of some of the NCE II students of Isah Kaita College of Education, Dutsin-ma.

2.2 SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

The subject must agree with its verb in number and person. For Modern English verbs usage, we are expected to note that a third person singular subject generally takes a special verb form ending in –s. the helping verb, ‘be’ *besides* distinguishes all the three persons in the present singular (I am, You are, She is) and the second person in the past, in a singular form (I was, You were, She was). Therefore, the pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number and person. If one speaks of a man named Sule in a clause and then in the next clause intends to refer to him with a pronoun, the pronoun must be masculine and singular (Alobo, 2008: 178).

Furthermore, the pronoun ‘that’ and ‘these’, when used objectively, must also agree in number with the noun they modify. For example, that man, this house, those houses. So, these pronouns are not gender based.

The first two modern English rules of concord are largely the same as old English, the third modern English rules are remnants of an old English rules, that is noun and all its modifiers (adjectives and pronouns used objectively) must agree in gender, case and number. All the three of these rules are little more complex in old English than in modern English. So, we need to pay attention to the rules of concord (Quirk, 1973:176).

Furthermore, according to (Sampson, 1980), a relationship of concord with respect to number between, for example, the words ‘boy’ and ‘talks’ in the sentence that ‘the boy talks like a robot’. This signifies that if one of these words is changed from singular to plural form, the other must equally be changed to correspond, or the result will be ungrammatical. English native speakers do not say ‘the boy talk like a robot or the boys talks like a robot’.

Again, Quirk and Greenbaun (1973) opine that concord of number that is between subject and verb is the most imperative type of concord in English. For example,

12. The car door is open (singular + singular).

13. The car doors are open (plural + plural).

14. The car door are open (singular + plural).

15. The car doors is open (plural + singular). (Quirk and Greenbaun, 1973).

Explanation on the above sentences; the first sentence says “that the car door is open” while the third sentence says “the car door are open” when we look at grammatical nature of the two sentences, we can understand that the first sentence is well constructed while the second sentence is ungrammatical in nature. By considering the rule which says “singular subject followed by a singular verb”. The singular subject ‘door’ agree with the singular verb ‘is’. While in the third sentence the singular subject ‘door’ do not agree with plural verb ‘are’ in number.

2.3. LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Language learning differs distinctively from language acquisition. Language learning is mostly associated with varieties of problems. It is understood that ‘becoming fluent and a perfect speaker in an L2 is not realistic’ (Damisa,1999). Furthermore, Swales, (1990) opines that in the ‘Twelve (12) principles or theoretical assumptions of second language acquisition’ that native language has an effect on learners. The mother tongue (MT) has both facilitating and interfering effect on production and comprehension of target language (TL). There are some problems associated with learning the second language discovered by different linguists. One of the difficulties is that of the strong influence of the L1 on the speaker. For example, in dealing with the phonological aspect, some elements of L1 are usually transferred to the L2. Therefore, the sounds /θ/ and /t/, /f/ and /p/, /v/ and /b/ are taken not distinctively in the Hausa language, thereby leading to the same pronunciation of the two phonemes and often the latter is replaced by the former, which in turn leads to change in meaning in English as the sounds are distinctive. Again, L2 learner’s problems could be found in the semantic and syntactic aspects. Some L2 structures or meaning are imitated directly from L1’s, which in turn leads to ungrammaticality. For example ‘ugly understanding’ this and other

examples of the same kinds are usually found in L2 learner's speech. L2 learning seems to be a difficult task to learners.

Therefore, learners who are learning English as an L2 encounter different difficulties in the process as a result of the following issues: mother tongue influence, lack of exposure to the target language, inadequate learning materials, lack of qualified teachers etc. Learning English is mandatory to the Nigerian students as it is the official language and also the *lingua franca* of the nation, as the language of instruction, media, commerce and other businesses.

The above reasons that made English a prestigious language in Nigeria and at international level have made it necessary for the second language learners to learn and master it efficiently for effective communication. However, the learners' capability to learn and speak fluent and construct a well-structured expression in the language for high level of intelligibility is defeated by the inability of the learners to make researches and failure to practice the language in speech. Learners tend to encounter problems or difficulties with so many areas as explained above among which are:

- Knowledge of concord
- Use of tenses

- Syntactic aspect which deals with the arrangement of words
- Phonological aspect that deals with the pronunciation of phonemes.

On the other hand, language acquisition is relatively easier as it is acquired naturally. Words of a language are acquired when they are used naturally and appropriately (Channel, 1988:84).

2.4. DEFINITION OF CONCORD

Concord or agreement is an agreement in gender, case, number or person between different words that share a reference. Concord: this denotes agreement according to Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2000 edition) meaning that, the fact of having the same number, case or phrase between words in phrases. The notion of subject verb concord has been a major and strategic issue in the field of sentence structure. The term 'subject' is the part of a sentence or a clause that commonly indicates what is about, or who or what performs the action in a sentence (that is the agent). Therefore, the subject is typically a noun, noun phrase or a pronoun. In declarative sentence, the

subject usually appears before the verb for instance, 'door never smiles'. On the other hand, in interrogative sentence, the subject often follows the first part of the verb; example 'does door ever smiles?' Therefore, going by what is obtainable in the above explanation of concord, speakers or writers of a language experienced concord as a set of rules to learn and follow. As speakers or listeners, we understand that concord assist us to establish a successful construction. Therefore, there must be a very clear agreement between a subject and its verb is a sentence that is a verb must agree with its subject in number, gender and case. In other words, singular subjects followed by a singular verb, or plural subject followed by plural verbs.

Certainly, concord or agreement has been defined by different grammarians; therefore, it refers to the agreement that exist between a subject and a verb, pronoun and its antecedents. It is a relationship between two elements, such that they match one another in terms of some grammatical features (Leech, 1992). The situation whereby plural subjects followed by plural verbs could be seen as: - We beat him to nonsense; they talk to us about the matter. On the other hand, singular subjects followed by singular verbs. He speaks fluently; the man runs away, Gali lives in the UK (Leech, 1992).

2.5. RULES GOVERNING SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Going by twenty rules of subject-verb agreement, an attempt has been made to objectify part of the English language form. Most of the concepts of subject-verb concord are straightforward, yet some aspects of singular and plural usage in English grammar are more complicated. Certainly, the twenty rules of subject-verb concord in the Standard English are:-

21. Subjects and verbs must agree in number. This is the corner-stone rule that forms the background of the concept. For example,

12. ‘the boy laughs when he is happy’ and ‘the boys laugh when they are happy’.

22. Do not get confused by the words that come between the subject and verb, they do not affect the agreement. For example,

13. the boy, who is dancing over there, is a very good boy.

23. Prepositional phrases between the subject and the verb usually do not affect agreement. For example,

14. The colours of the rainbow are beautiful.

24. When the sentence starts with ‘there’ or ‘here’ the subject will always be placed after the verb, care needs to be taken to identify it correctly. For example,

15. 'There is a problem with the balance sheet' and 'here are the books you requested'.

25. Subjects do not always appear before verbs in questions, that is make sure you accurately identify the subject before deciding on the proper verb form to be used. For example

16. Does goat usually eat grass?'

26. If two subjects are joined by 'and' they typically require a plural verb form, example,

17. The boy and girl are running to catch the goat'.

27. The verb is singular if the two subjects are separated by 'and' refer to the same person or thing. Example,

18. Red beans and rice is my favorite dish'.

28. If one of the words each, every, **or no** comes before the subject, the verb is singular. For example

19. No smoking or drinking is allowed. Every man and woman is required to check in.

29.If the subjects are both singular and are connected by the words or, nor, neither/nor, either/or, and not only/but also the verb is singular. For example

20. Mary or Jummai is to blame for the accident.’

30.The only time when the subject of the preposition focus into the decision of plural or singular verb forms, is when noun and pronoun subjects like none, more, half, all etc are followed by a prepositional phrase. In such situation, the object of the preposition determines the form of the verb used. Example,

21. None of the chicken is gone.’ ‘All of the chickens have gone.’

31.The singular verb form is usually used for units of measurement. For example,

22. Four quart of oil was required to get the car running.

32.If one subject is singular and one is plural and the words are connected by the words or, nor, neither/nor, either/or and not only/but also, you use the verb form of the subject that is nearest to the verb.

23. Neither the Governor nor his aides were there when visitors arrived. Either the cat or the lion has escaped from the ZOO.

33.If the subjects are both plural and are connected by the words or, nor neither/nor, either/or, not only/but also, the verb to be used *is* plural.

24.Neither the dogs nor the goats were available at the farm.

34.Indefinite pronouns typically take singular verbs.

25. Everyone wants to be loved.'

35.Except for the pronouns (few, many, several, both, all, some), that always take the plural form.

26. Few were left alive after the flood.'

36.If two infinitives are separated by 'and' they take the plural form of the verb.

27. To drive and to watch require great skill.'

37.When gerunds are used as the subject of a sentence they take singular verb form, but when they are linked by 'and' they take the plural form.

Example,

28. Standing in the *winter* is a bad idea.' 'Swimming in an ocean and playing drums are his hobbies.'

38. Collective nouns like herd, senate, class, crowd etc usually take a singular verb form.

29. The senate is attacking the president on the issue of fuel subsidy.’

39. Titles of books, movies, novels etc are treated as singular, and take a singular verb form.

30. *The lord of the ring* is a very good film.

40. Final rule is that, remember, only the subject affects the verb. (Richard *et al* 1963).

2.6. PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH USING SUBJECT-VERB CONCORD

2.7. COLLECTIVE NOUNS:-

Collective nouns make one of the most difficult areas for ELS learners. (Ilse P. 2003), did a quantitative study on collective nouns in British English using the Collins Co build Corpus. He notes that some collective nouns like police only agree with plural verbs and others like Government, Crowd, can also agree with a singular verb. Ilse found, after attempting to classify many collective nouns, that collective nouns in general are used most often with a singular verb. The exceptions found in the Corpus included staff, crew, crowd.

Therefore, Ilse advises *students/learners* to use the singular form as a default, if they are not specifically sure of which to use. Collective nouns are found very difficult to assign rules to. Ilse opines that American English uses plural verbs even less than British English. Therefore, let us see the following examples.

35. Our school team has won all its games.

36. Our school team has won all their games. (*Kally D. 2004*)

The use of verb in a sentence depends on how the number of the noun is seen. Therefore, according to (Kelly, 2004), with above, he agrees with Ilse's findings and says that; 'our school team have won all their games' sound very ungrammatical. 'Team is a singular noun.'

2.8. THE COPULA "BE"

Although ELS students/learners are introduced to the copula be, the third person singular *inflection* and subject-verb agreement from the beginning of their study and would seemingly have more time to master usage, they can also cause some problems from the very beginning. Certainly, not all languages use a copula verb. Copula use can be compared and contrasted with verb use in concord. Before, discussing ELS student's/learner's acquisition however, we

will discuss English as an L1 acquisition by children and how they compare with L2 students/learners.

Learners face a lot of challenges at all levels dealing with subject-verb agreement, whether the difficulty deals with the copula or any other verb. Even then, mastery of subject-verb agreement, specifically the third person singular is not enough. There is ambiguity that teaches beyond this rule, confusing even native speakers. Furthermore, (Biber *et al*, 1989) give a rule for subject-verb agreement for all verbs other than to be. They say that in infinitive clauses “the verb phrase in a clause agrees with subject in terms of number and person (p. 232).”

The copula *be* however, as pointed out by (Celce-Murcia and *Larsen Freeman*, 1999), has “more distinct forms with respect to person, number and tense than any other verb in English (p. 59),” and can also be followed by an adjective phrase and adverbial prepositional phrases. So, the copula links any of these phrases to the subject and “reflects the person and number of subject.”

Focusing on the copula and the challenges learners face at all levels dealing with subject-verb agreement, being them L1 or L2 learners. One will come to find out that when native English children begin to learn their first language, the copula form is often marked and therefore often dropped (Celce-Murcia

and Larsen-Freeman, 1999). For instance, when asking children about their age, the response may be “I nine” instead of “I am nine.”

On the other hand, the use of copula verbs in English sentences construction is often misuse by many ELS students. Below are some of the examples of errors that could be found in some of ELS speakers’ speeches.

37. There are shade and.....

38. What are their functions.....?

Instead, they were used in singularity, which makes it ungrammatical

(Celce-Murcia and Larsen Freeman, 1999) brought out four different problems that ELS students face when learning subject-verb agreement with all verbs, *therefore:-*

- e) Omission of the third person singular inflection. For example, 35. shamsu live in London. They also ask teachers to beware in this case, as students may understand and write the copula but the copula appears absent in speech. When looking at this example, all that is missing is the final –s. this inflection could very well be there, but not heard, as some languages do not permit sound with the final –s.

f) Over-generalization of the inflection once learned. For instance, 36
.Johnson cans dance.

g) Over use of third person in any verb. For example: 37. I goes to Lagos.

h) Use of –s as plural marking. For example:

79. The girl goes to the movies often. Here the student sees the plural subject “girl” with an –s on the end and consequently adds an –s to the verb, in an attempt to make the verb plural.

The four problems above are usually issues for beginning level ELS students. Furthermore, (Celce-Marcia and Larsen Freeman, 1999) also provide thirteen rules for troublesome cases in subject-verb agreement and provide examples.

xiv. Collective nouns

RULE: They take either singular or plural depending on meaning. For example,

80. Our school team has won all its games.

81. Our school team have all their games.

xv. Some common and proper nouns ending in –s

RULES: always take singular verb inflection. For example,

82.No news is good news.

83.This series is very interesting.

84.Physics is a difficult subject.

xvi. Titles of books, plays, operas films etc

RULES: Always take singular verb inflection. For example,

85.*Great Expectations* was written by Dickens.

86.*Joys of Motherhood* was written by Buche Amecheta.

xvii. Nouns occurring in sets of two.

RULES; Singular with the noun pair. For example

87.A pair of shoes is on the table.

xviii. A number of and the number of.

RULE: A number of takes plural and the number of take singular. For example,

88.A number of pupils have walked out from the school in the morning.

89.The number of pupils in that school is 300.

xix. Fractions and percentages.

RULE: Singular when modifying a non-count noun and plural when modifying a plural noun; singular or plural when collective. For example,

90. Two thirds of the students are satisfied with the class.

91. One per cent of the population of Nigeria is/are Fulani(s),
(depending on meaning)

xx. Majority and minority.

RULE: Abstract meaning takes singular; specific meaning can take either. For example,

92. The great majority is helpless.

93. The great majority was/were determined to press its/their victory.

xxi. Plural unit words

RULE: Singular with one entity, plural with more than one. For example,

94. Three million dollars is a lot of money.

95. Four dollars are on the table in the class.

xxii. Arithmetical operations

RULE: Always singular. For example

96. Five minus three is two (equals two).

xxiii. Quantifiers

RULE: Singular if noun is non-count, plural if noun is plural. For example,

97. A lot of publication was published about that incident.

98. A lot of students were present when it occurred.

xxiv. None, all, each and every.

RULE: Conflicting rules except for “none” referring to non-count noun.

For example,

99. None of the students has escaped.

xxv. Relative-clause antecedents.

RULE: Again, controversial. For example,

100. Musa is one of the rare individuals, who have/has finished the M.A. early.

xxvi. Clausal phrasal subjects:-

RULE: It is also controversial. For example

101. What they want is revolutions everywhere.

2.9. SAMPLE OF ERRORS

In this unit, the research attempts to identify some students' errors that could be found in the use of subject-verb agreement in relation to pronoun and its antecedents. Below are some of the sampled errors been consistently committed by ELS students, specifically for the targeted students?

2.10. SAMPLE ONE ERROR

102. Everybody has their failings.

103. Nobody in their sense would dream of doing it.

The correct form of the pronoun antecedents for the two sentences is "his".

Thus:

104. Everybody has his failings.

105. Nobody in his sense would dream of doing it.

From the above samples, students show incompetence in the use of the indefinite pronoun. This indicates that it resulted from lack of knowledge of

concord concerning the use of pronouns, such as “everybody, each, every, nobody, etc.” these pronouns must be followed by verbs, pronouns and adjectives in the singular forms.

2.11. THE SECOND SAMPLE ERRORS

Problem in using a relative pronoun with its antecedent. For example:

106. This is one of the best books that has ever lived.

107. He was one of the greatest philosophers that has ever lived.

Correct:

108. This is one of the best books that have ever lived.

109. He was one of the greatest philosophers that have ever lived.

Therefore, “that” in the above sentences is subject of “have been written” and ever “lived”. It is plural because as antecedents “books” and “philosophers” are plural.

Therefore, there are four tips to help you to apply the principle that a verb must agree in number with its subject.

5) Adds an –s to the verb if the subject is singular noun, a word that names one person, place or thing. For example:

110. Musa speaks fluently.

6) Add an –s to the verb if the subject is anyone of the third person singular pronoun. He, she, it, this, that. For example,

111. He drives gently.

112. She speaks convincingly.

113. This confuses me.

114. That takes the cake.

7) Do not add an –s to a verb, if the subject is the pronoun I, you, **are** we or they. For example:

115. I make my own rules.

116. We take pride in our work.

117. They talk much on the issue.

8) Do not add an –s to a verb, if two subjects are joined by and. For example:

118. Gaje and Ummi often argue with each other.

119. Keen and Hook enjoy music.

(Parrot, 2000)

In the end, this chapter explains how different researchers and grammarians define, characterize and simplify the various features of subject-verb agreement into number, case, gender, person, collective and copula types. Again, they show some exceptional cases and relevant errors in the use of agreement by ELS students.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The method used in this research is a case study for which a collection of facts, opinions, and judgments relating to an actual condition in which the problem exists will be made and a decision taken. In respect to this research work, primary and secondary data collections will be carried out. In any research work data collection is an important aspect, because it is through that the necessary facts and vital information concerning the project were obtained to ensure the success and achievement of the work.

However, the researcher analyzes the types of data collection. These are;

- (iii) Primary data
- (iv) Secondary data

3.2 PRIMARY DATA

This is an aspect of going to various fields in order to get information from people with regards to the topic, “A CASE STUDY OF ISAH KAITA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION DUTSINMA”. The population covers only 200 level students of the department of English and those of the same level from history and Islamic studies department whose age’s ranges from 21-25 yrs. They also comprise of males and females.

6.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

4. Which aspect of subject – verb concord tend to pose difficulties to NCE II students?
5. Which aspects or parts of subject – verb concord are effectively used or not used by the NCE II students?
6. What is the level of the NCE II students’ mastery in subject - verb agreement?

A cloze test is designed to replace the above mentioned questions.

3.4. THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS USED

A close test is designed to have three (3) different parts, in which part 1.1 contained personal information of the respondent. Part (1.2) is designed with twenty two (22) questions to test the respondent level of mastery in the use of the topic in question, and identify the problematic areas. The last part of the

question paper is meant to identify the level of the respondent use of English Outside the school premises.

4.5. STUDENTS POPULATION

The total number of the registered NCE students is four thousand one hundred and sixty-seven (4167) in the college. The art based students constitute the total number of two thousand five hundred and two (2502). Therefore, the concern with regard to the respondents is a class which has the population of forty (40) students in the department of English. Furthermore, thirty six (36) students out of forty (40) sat for the test, and the analysis is conducted based on the thirty six students in that class, by considering the opinion of Morgan and Kreycie (1971), in respect to the sampling strategy.

4.6. SECONDARY DATA

This is the second type of data. It includes Information from written documents and consists of various textbooks, academic papers, internet sources and other relevant materials about the topic.

4.7. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

This deals with the method or approach employed to classify, present and interpret the data collected.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0. DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is designed to analyze the data obtained in the process of conducting this research work. In the case of this study, the speaker of 200 level students was the first respondent who distributed the thirty six (36) question papers to his course mate, in which their responses provide intellectual opportunity to obtain more information about the topic (Misuse of subject - verb agreement in English),for analysis, interpretation and conclusion.

Responses to the questions were presented in a tabular form separately. Out of a population of forty (40) students in a class, thirty six (36) question papers were distributed and successfully returned. That is to say thirty six (36) students sat for the test in a class of forty (40) students. Therefore, the analysis

and presentation will be based on the thirty six (36) answer sheets in accordance with the (Morgan and Kreycie, 1971) opinion with regard to the sampling strategy.

4.2. THE TABLES

1. The road closed

Options: (a) are (b) were (c) is

Responses		Percentage
Correct	27	75%
Incorrect	9	25%
Total	36	100%

The above table shows that twenty seven (27) respondents went for (c) is, which is the correct answer, while nine (9) respondents went for (a) are which is the wrong answer

2. We.....her mercilessly

Options: (a) beats (b) beat (c) beaten

Responses		Percentage
Correct	24	66.6%
Incorrect	11	30.5%
Undecided	1	2.7%
Total	36	100%

This implies that 66.7% of the respondents chose (b) beat which is the correct answer, 30.5% went for (a) beats and 2.7% were undecided.

3. The Governor with his in the office.

Options:

(b)Is (b) are (c) were

Responses		Percentage
Correct	4	11.1%

Incorrect	31	83.3%
Undecided	1	5.5%
Total	36	100%

The table above indicates that four (4) respondents chose option (a) is which the correct one. Thirty (30) respondents chose ‘b’ are and (c) were which are all wrong. And two of them were undecided.

Therefore when we look at the responses in respect to question one to tree, we can understand that the majority of the respondents have violated the rules of agreement, that “Plural subjects followed by plural verbs and singular subjects followed by singular verbs “Leech (1992).

:4. The senatedoing.....best.

Options:

(b) Was.....their (b) are....their (c) is.....its

Responses		Percentage
Correct	4	11.1%
Incorrect	30	83.3%
Undecided	2	5.5%
Total	36	100%

From the above table four (4) respondents chose c, is....its which is the real answer. Thirty (30) respondents selected (a) was..... Their and (b) are.....their which are all wrong. And two (2) respondents were undecided.

5. Neither the Governor nor his Aids.....There when the visitors arrived.

Options:

(b) Were (b) was (c) is

Responses		Percentage
Correct	10	27.8%
Incorrect	26	72.2%
Undecided	0	0%
Total	36	100%

From the above table ten (10) respondents went for (a) were which is the correct answer. Twenty six (26) respondents chose (b) was and (c) is respectively which are the wrong answers.

6. None of them done the exercise.

Options:

(b) had (b) have (c) has

Responses		Percentage
Correct	14	38.9%
Incorrect	20	55.6%
Undecided	2	5.5%
Total	36	100%

From the above table fourteen (14) respondents went for (a) and (c) i.e. had and has respectively which are the correct answers. Twenty (20) chose (b) have, which is the wrong and the remaining two (2) been undecided.

7. My wife and the best friend attending our convocation.

Options:

(b) Is (b) has (c) are

Responses		Percentage
Correct	10	27.7%
Incorrect	26	72.3%
Undecided	1	%
Total	36	100%

This shows that ten (10) respondent's chose (a) is, which is the correct answer, while twenty six (26) respondents went for (b) and (c) which are the wrong answers. Finally, a respondent was undecided.

8. Water and saltthe ingredient to make a soup.

Options:

(b)are (b) is (c) were

Responses		Percentage
Correct	26	72.3%
Incorrect	10	27.7%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

In the table above, twenty six (26) respondents chose the correct answer (a) are, while the remaining ten (10) respondents chose the wrong answers (b) is and (c) were, respectively.

Thus, when we consider the responses of question four to question eight, such respondents really violated the rule of agreement that most of them do

not answered the questions correctly. It shows that such students were aware of the rule opined by Quirk and Greenbum (1973) that “concord of number is highly imperative in the construction of sentences”.

9. Studentmade a mistake.

Options:

(b) Had (b) has (c) have

Responses		Percentage
Correct	24	66.7%
Incorrect	13	33.3%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

This indicates that twenty four (24) respondents were correct by choosing the correct option (a) had and (b) has, because the statement can take both present participle and past participle forms. The remaining twelve (12) respondents chose the wrong option (c) have.

10. Eating and drinking prohibited in the mosque.

Options:

(b) Are (b) is (c) have been

Responses		Percentage
Correct	14	38.8%
Incorrect	22	61.2%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

This opines that only 38.8% of the respondents were correct by choosing option (b) is, and the majority that is 61.2% chose the wrong option (a) are and (c) have been.

11. Neither I nor you, nor anyone else..... the answer

Options:

(b) known (b) know (c) knows

Responses		Percentage
Correct	10	27.7%
Incorrect	26	72.3%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

The table above shows that majority of the respondents (26) chose the wrong options (a) known and (b) know, which the remaining ten (10) respondents chose the correct option (c) knows.

12. The headmaster as well as the provost Engaged in the business.

Options:

(b) were (b) was (c) are

Responses		Percentage
Correct	10	25%
Incorrect	26	75%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

This defines that majority of the respondents (i.e. 26) chose the wrong options (a) were and (c) are, then the remaining ten (10) respondents chose the correct option (b) was

13. Four quarter/litre of oil.....required to get the car running.

Options:

(b)are (b) is (c) were

Responses		Percentage
Correct	15	36.1%
Incorrect	21	63.9%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

The above table indicates that 41.6% of the respondents chose (b) is (the correct option) while 58.4% of the respondents chose the wrong ones that are (a) are and (c) were respectively.

Furthermore, in respect to question mine to thirteen, the responses showed much failure concerning the use of auxiliary verb.

Students of that level need to understand that modal auxiliaries can equally function like the main verb in a sentence, because they do support the main verb in an expression

According to (Leech, 1973) the correct use of modal verbs in sentences make the structure grammatical or ungrammatical.

14. Shehu and Musa The work together.

Options:

(b) do (b) does (c) doing

Responses		Percentage
Correct	13	36.1%
Incorrect	23	63.9%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

The above table shows that thirteen (13) respondents chose the correct option which is (a) do and the remaining twenty three (23) respondents chose the wrong option (b) does and (c) doing respectively.

15. The boy When he is happy.

Options:

(b) laugh (b) laughs (c) laughing

Responses		Percentage
Correct	7	14.4%
Incorrect	28	77.8%
Undecided	1	2.8%
Total	36	100%

The above table shows that seven (7) respondents chose that the correct option (b) laughs, while the 28 respondents chose the wrong options (a) laugh and (c) laughing, the remaining one (1) respondent was undecided.

16. Here the books you requested.

Options:

(b) is (b) are (c) was

Responses		Percentage
Correct	19	52.8%
Incorrect	17	47.2%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

The above table shows that 19 respondents chose the correct option which is (b) are and the remaining 17 respondents chose the wrong options (a) is and (was), respectively.

17. Red beans with riceMy favorite dish.

Options:

(b) is (b) are (c) were

Responses		Percentage
Correct	18	27.8%
Incorrect	26	72.2%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

The table above shows that ten (01) respondents chose the correct option (a) is while the remaining twenty six respondents chose the wrong options (b) are and (c) were respectively.

18. Mummy or Jummaito blame for the accident.

Options:

(b) are (b) is (c) were

Responses		Percentage
Correct	7	19.4%
Incorrect	29	80.6%
Undecided	0	0
Total	36	100%

The above table indicates that seven respondents chose the correct option (b) is, while the remaining twenty nine (29) chose the wrong option (a) are and (d) were.

19. Everybody to be loved.

Options:

(b) want (b) wants (c) wanted

Responses		Percentage
Correct	18	50%
Incorrect	17	47.2%
Undecided	1	2.8%
Total	36	100%

The above tables opine that eighteen (18) respondents chose the correct answer which is option (b) wants. Seventeen respondents chose the wrong answer, which are option (a) want and (c) wanted while a remaining respondent was undecided

20. None of the chicken.....gone

Options:

(b) is (b) was (c) are

Responses		Percentage
Correct	19	52.8%
Incorrect	17	47.2%
Undecided	0	0%
Total	36	100%

The above table shows that nineteen (19) respondents chose the correct option (b) was and (a) is, while the remaining seventeen respondents chose the wrong option (c) are

21. The senateattacking the president on the issue of fuel subsidy.

(b) is (b) are (c) were

Responses		Percentage
Correct	18	50%
Incorrect	18	50%
Undecided	0	0 %
Total	36	100%

The table above shows that half of the respondents chose the correct option (a) is and the remaining half went for the wrong option (b) are and (c) were respectively.

22. Swimming in an ocean and playing drumshis hobbies

Options:

(b)are (b) is (c) was

Responses		Percentage
Correct	18	50%
Incorrect	18	50%
Undecided	0	0 %
Total	36	100%

From the above table we can understand that eighteen respondents chose the correct option (a) are and the remaining eighteen (18) respondents chose the wrong answers (b) is and (c) was respectively.

Furthermore, the responses of question fourteen to twenty one showed that most of the respondents were really confused in choosing the correct answer. It

should be they were not aware about what a linguist by name lamidi (2000) “consider as an agreement in gender, case number or person between different words that share a reference. That is if an expression contains a proper noun and somewhat later a pronoun and they agree in number, that is for both singular and plural and gender for both masculine and feminine.

a. PERFORMANCE IN WRITTEN ESSAYS

The table below indicates the performance in (percentage) of the respondents found in some written essays in the second part of the test.

Responses		Percentage
Correct	15	41.7%
Incorrect	20	55.6%
Undecided	1	2.8%
Total	36	100%

From the above table, we can observe that fifteen (15) respondents performed thoroughly while twenty respondents showed total failure in their

use of concord. A respondent leave a space blank possibly because, he is afraid to be caught up short or do not want share what he knows with others.

DISCUSSION

From the above tables we can understand that the majority of the students, who sat for the test performed very badly, because of their ignorance of the rule of concord. Many linguists have been exploring the rules of agreement in English grammar.

Alobo (2008) opined that subject – verb agreement entails the agreement between the subject and the verb in a sentence. The verb has to agree with its subject in numbers, singular or plural verbs. If we look at question ten (10) of the test which says “Eating and drinking ...prohibited in the mosque” Options (a) are, (b) is, (c) have been. Twenty two respondents chose the wrong answers, while fourteen (14) respondents chose the correct option. Therefore, based on this findings, it is identified that various student have difficulty in using subject- verb concord, especially while dealing with the two subjects connected by “and”.

Again, many students try to pluralize “The verb” preceding the subject by “S” to it. For example, 59. weher mercilessly .Options (a) beats (b) beat (c) beaten. Thirty (30) respondents chose the wrong answer “beats” as in

the case of third person singular pronoun (she, he, and it). Four (4) respondents choose the correct options (b) beat, to show their knowledge of concord. The above rule was really opined by another linguist by name Leech (1971), that is the first, second and often plural subject must be followed by “normal root of a verb”

In relation to the above explanation, it is observed that many students have difficulty or rather have problem of using the rule of concord in the English language.

Again, many linguists like Quirk and Greenbum (1973), Leech (1992) and Channel (1988) opined that people begin to learn how to choose and arrange sentence elements extremely early in life. As babies, people learn how to make and express rudimentary needs and wants. This expands in to the entire words and finally people master the basis of sentences construction and learn how to use specific words in a particular fashion. According to them, the more sounds and words a child learns and the better he gets at putting them to gather, the more complex ideas he can convey.

Therefore those who are studying English as a second language find the analysis of sentence construction very useful. They use it in a method called comparative analysis, in which they see how the elements and structures of the

two languages are the same or different. It is important because someone has to abandon the engrained structural rules of his native language to properly employ the second language.

In English, for example, objects precede the words they modified; on the other word in French they generally follow the modified words.

Certainly, using the proper words but under the wrong arrangement is a sigh that someone is not a native speaker. So also, by considering the respondent's responses in relation to the topic in question, we are made to realize the fact that such students either they do not have the background knowledge of subject – verb agreement in the sentence construction since their early like or they were not clearly acquainted with the rules of agreement.

FINDINGS

Based on the research findings, it is observed that many students have difficulty in using subject – verb agreement, especially while dealing with “single and plural verbs” concord associated with linking expressions” such as “with,” “as well as” etc, as well as between two subjects connected by “and.” Element of failure is also shown while dealing with plural subject as majority of the students try to pluralized “the verb” preceding the subject by adding an “s” to it. This was drawn from the analysis of the responses made which

showed the correct answers only to come from the simple agreement type that deals with singular subject preceded by singular verb and the third person singular subject followed by the base form of a verb with an “s” that is an inflectional morpheme. First second and often plural subject. Followed by the nominal root of a verb

Specifically, these are drawn for the fact that tables (3), (4), (5), and (6) had shown students incompetence in using subject – verb agreement that deals with auxiliary cases, so also with liking expressing like “with”, as it is clearly indicated that only 11.1 %, 11.1%, 10.8% and 38.9% of the respondents got the correct answers in the four tables respectively. Again, the students revealed inadequate knowledge of subject – verb agreement in respect with two subject separated by “and” but referred to the same person or thing. Table seven (7) showed only 2.7.7% were correct.

Similarly, the students proved to be incompetent by failing to choose the correct answer tables (1), (2) and (13) were designed to test their level of mastery or knowledge in terms of concord that deals with plural subjects to be followed by plural verbs. Only 66.6% and 36.1% choose the correct options, the rest of the respondents were failed to do so.

On the other hand, tables (11), (12) and (18) of the test indicated students' much failure in using the subject – verb agreement dealing with correlative conjunctions like neither nor, as well as, or e.t.c, as to the fact that, there are 72.3%, 75% and 80.6% of the wrong responses to such questions respectively.

However, tables (1), (8) (16) of the same test showed proper and effective use of agreement dealing with singular subjects, especially “ third person” with the verb in its simple present tense with regards to the above questions the majority of the respondents choose the correct options. Again, with regard to the two subject connected by a conjunction “and” that is on table (22) the responses are equal.

So, in the general perspective, it is clearly shown that majority of the students learning English as a second language at Isah Kaita College of Education, Dutsin-ma encounter difficulties in using subject – verb agreement as to the fact that table (15) of the test reveals that majority (77.8%) usually and most of the times do encounter problems in the use of the topic in question. That in only 14.4% had no problem with it.

Therefore, the above proved students' shallow knowledge or experience of the aspect, data had been obtained from their responses on the causes and solution of the topic in question. Thus, the analysis of tables above revealed the

facts that, lack of practice of the aspects are the major causes, and lack of qualified teachers of grammar. Besides, the solutions to the problems are to engage in practice and making researches.

Finally, based on the responses of the data analyzed in respect with the research questions, it had indicated that most of the targeted students have inadequate knowledge of the rule of concord or agreement. This is justified as to the fact that, there are more incorrect responses than the correct ones with a wider gap of responses. It is clearly indicated that, the difference between the two is very wide.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This chapter is designed to contain the summary of the previous chapters, findings and recommendations, as well as the general conclusion in respect to the topic in question.

5.1 SUMMARY.

This research work titled “The Misuse of subject verb agreement in the English in student’s continuous writing” is chosen to examine the areas that tend to pose difficulties in L2 learners’ essays. Agreement is one of the most controversial aspects of grammar, therefore, if it’s often been ignored by many ESL Learners. The research attempted to study the level of mastery and difficulty in the use of “subject – verb concord” of the 200 level students of the Department of English language, Isah Kaita Collage of Education, Dutsinma, Katsina state and some of the same level from history and Islamic studies Departments, as the case study, with the population of about forty (40) students in which only thirty six (36) were chosen as a sample.

A lot had been reviewed in the course of this research on the views of several scholars in relation to the topic in question. This research work had

used an approved research method in which data had been obtained from various respondents which provide significant information in the formulated cloze test. The responses were also for data analysis and interpretations using percentages and tables with subsequent explanations.

5.2. CONCLUSION

Subject-verb agreement is relatively successful unit of English grammar that attempts to explain the relationship that exist between the subject of a sentence (the doer of an action) and the verb of that same sentence (the action itself). Therefore, many linguists are of the view that a sentence is appear to be meaningful if such a sentence contains agreement. That is singular subject vs singular verb and plural subject vs plural verb. The research explored to investigate the performance of NCE II students of English at Isah Kaita College of Education Dutsinma, Katsina State on the use of subject verb agreement in their essay writings. In the process of doing so, a lot of works related to the unit were consulted, data were analyzed in a tabular form and the findings re-affirmed the assertion that most of the NCE II students of English Language at the above mentioned college were violating the rule.

Furthermore, thirty six students were selected randomly to participate in the conduct of the research work. So, the general overview of the research

works. So, the general overview of the research opined the fact that NCE II student of English Language of Isah Kaita College of Education Dutsin-ma, Katsina State were having a very little or no knowledge of using concord in their essay writings. It occurred as a result of the poor background knowledge of concord, lack of poor extension reading by the students and poor communicative competence among the students.

To put an end to this research work, the grammatical aspect of “Concord” should be taught extensively right from the secondary school level. Lecturers should as a matter of fact provide an avenue for teacher – learner interaction and conversation in the classroom situation, which will enable them to detect learners’ difficulties in the use of subject verb agreement.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This research work is restricted only on the subject verb agreement particularly concord of numbers, that is singular subject and singular verb, plural subjects and plural verbs respectively. Therefore, another aspect or unit of agreement in the English grammar like the agreement between collective nouns and irregular verbs in an expression is a unit that needs further investigation.

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