



## SUBJECT-VERB CONCORD PROFICIENCY AMONG EFL BOSNIAN STUDENTS

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### Abstract:

This study explores the application of subject-verb concord rules among Bosnian EFL students, focusing on the influence of proficiency level, academic performance in grammar-related subjects, and preferences for American or British English. Guided by three research questions, the study examines whether students' general language proficiency impacts their ability to correctly apply subject-verb concord rules, whether there is a correlation between their grammar course grades and performance on a concord-focused questionnaire, and whether students demonstrate a preference for American or British English concord rules. The research involved 41 university students with proficiency levels of B2 and C1. The findings reveal that students' proficiency levels and grammar score grades do not significantly influence their application of subject-verb concord rules. Despite demonstrating a good overall understanding, students frequently struggled with specific categories, such as plural nouns and coordination with *or/nor*. Additionally, the results indicate a notable preference for American English concord rules over British English. These findings underscore the pedagogical importance of subject-verb concord and highlight the need for targeted instructional strategies to address persistent errors. The study also emphasizes the value of error analysis in identifying interlingual influences and improving language learning materials.

**Keywords:** subject-verb concord, EFL, B2 and C1 level of English proficiency

### 1. Introduction

Second language acquisition is an extremely complex process involving various elements and processes. Compared to first language acquisition, L2 acquisition is generally considered a more complicated endeavor for several reasons. Firstly, L2 is almost always acquired after L1, and L1 often influences the acquisition of L2, either positively or

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negatively. Next, L1 is typically acquired early in life, L2 can be acquired at any stage, making it challenging to achieve the same level of accuracy and fluency as a child who learns the language at an early age. Lastly, the context and need for L2 acquisition can also vary significantly from one learner to another (Ellis, 2015: 17).

During the acquisition of a second language, learners may produce utterances that are considered grammatically incorrect, particularly when dealing with complex structures such as conditional clauses (Brdarević-Čeljo et al., 2018), negative concord (Bureković, 2012, 2024), phrasal verbs (Rizvić-Eminović et al., 2023; Bureković et al., 2024), false friends (Rizvić-Eminović et al., 2020), and subject-verb agreement Alahmadi (2019), all of which often pose significant challenges. Traditionally, it was believed that errors in a second language indicated the learner had not fully mastered the rules and needed to repeatedly study and practice them until those errors were eliminated. Therefore, the appearance of errors in second-language utterances suggested the learning process was not efficient (Corder, 1975). However, according to Corder (1967), the appearance of errors in second language acquisition is normal and notable. Learners' errors hold great significance in three ways. Firstly, they are significant for the teacher, as they reveal the learner's progress and what remains to be learned. Secondly, they are important for the researcher, as they provide evidence of how language is acquired and the strategies the learner uses in the language-learning process (Bureković et al., 2023). Lastly, errors are of great importance for the learner, as they can serve as devices for learning (Corder, 1967; Rizvić-Eminović et al., 2018).

Richards (1971) identifies two types of errors in second language acquisition: the first type is interlanguage errors, caused by interference with the native language; the second type is intralanguage or developmental errors caused by the language the learner is acquiring. However, intralanguage or developmental errors do not indicate the learner cannot separate the two languages. Instead, the developmental errors the learner makes at any point during their learning process reflect their competence in that particular language and at that given time (Richards, 1971: 208).

Building upon the previously discussed observations, the current paper investigates the subject-verb concord errors in L2 made by university students whose native language is Bosnian. More specifically, the research focuses on the subject-verb concord proficiency of students majoring in English Language and Literature.

## **2. Theoretical background**

### **2.1. Defining subject-verb concord**

Subject-verb concord, also known as subject-verb agreement, is *“the relationship between two grammatical units in which one displays a particular feature (e.g. plurality) that accords with a displayed (or semantically implicit) feature in the other”* (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik, 1995: 755). In sum, the verb in the English language always agrees with the subject in number and person, regardless of any other distinctions it may have. Furthermore, subject-verb concord always applies to the first verb in the verb phrase. (Greenbaum, 1996: 237).

The most important type of concord, known as simple agreement, in English is the third person number agreement between subject and verb (Quirk et al., 1995: 755). When simple concord is present, 'the verb agrees with a subject with the form of an NP whose person-number classification derives from its head noun' (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002: 499). For example: 'My daughter watches television after supper' (Quirk et al., 1995: 755). In this example, the head noun of the noun phrase 'my daughter' is singular. Hence, the verb following the subject is also singular. In contrast, if the subject is plural, it requires a plural verb. For instance: 'My daughters watch television after supper' (Quirk et al., 1995: 755).

Beginner ESL/EFL learners often tend to make errors when using simple agreement. In most cases, beginner learners simplify or completely leave out the third-person singular inflection. On rare occasions, learners will overgeneralize the rule and apply it to uninflected forms, such as modals (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 57). There are various reasons for this error. Firstly, it may stem from phonological factors. Learners of English are sometimes able to understand the rules of agreement and use them correctly in writing, but face difficulties in speech. This occurs when the native language of the learners differs greatly from the second language being acquired. In other cases, this error will occur due to slow and late acquisition of the second language (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 58).

## 2.2. Types of concord

In English, the subject number is determined by more than a simple feature indicating plurality or singularity. Instead, there are three types of distinctions, leading to three different types of concord: grammatical, notional and proximity concord. These three concord types serve as the foundation for determining the rules governing other concord categories (Francis, 1986: 310-311).

The grammatical concord follows previously mentioned rules, where the verb matches the subject in number (Quirk et al., 1995: 757). It is a morphologically based concord (Francis, 1986: 311). Notional concord, on the other hand, is a type of concord in which the verb agrees with the subject 'according to the notion of number, rather than the actual presence of a grammatical marker' (Quirk et al., 1995: 757). For example, under notional concord, collective nouns in British English are treated as notionally plural, as seen with the collective noun 'government' (ibid). The final type is proximity concord, which is positionally based, meaning that the verb agrees in number with the noun phrase closest to it, rather than the noun functioning as the subject (Francis, 1986: 311). For instance: *No one except his own supporters agrees with him.* As can be seen from this example, the verb 'agree' follows the proximity concord and is in plural because the noun preceding the verb (*supporters*) is also in plural. (Quirk et al., 1995: 757).

In addition to this, American English and British English exhibit different subject-verb agreement patterns, especially with collective nouns (Bock et al., 2006: 64). Generally speaking, linguists tend to be quite careful when comparing these two types of varieties of English and the rules of concord in the mentioned varieties. When we consider collective nouns, American English usually uses singular verbs for singular collective

nouns, whereas in British English plural verbs are used more commonly (Depraetere, 2003: 103). Additionally, the use of plural in American English in formal settings, especially written English, is generally avoided (Lock, 1996: 25). For example, for the collective nouns *family* and *management* American English uses singular verbs, and British English uses plural verbs (Bock et al., 2006: 64), as portrayed in the following examples:

American English: *I think my family was pretty open-minded about different kinds of people and Management is not responsible for the street team* (Bock et al., 2006: 64-65).

British English: *I don't think the Royal Family are really known for their intelligence and The management are not responsible* (Bock et al., 2006: 64-65).

These examples of British English would be considered unacceptable when perceived by American speakers. This was proven true by a test done in the USA and Britain, where American students corrected British-style agreement 95 percent of the time, compared to 29 percent by British students (Bock et al., 2006: 65). Moreover, the difference between American and British English was also confirmed by Bauer (1988), who compared the results of his elicitation test with a test carried out by Johansson (1979) and concluded that American English speakers showed a clear preference for singular verbs when using collective nouns.

Learners of the English language often struggle with subject-verb agreement because they are unsure which type of concord to use. Prescriptive teaching imposes a strict rule of grammatical concord, expecting learners to apply it correctly. However, issues arise when deciding whether to use grammatical or notional concord, as notional concord tends to supersede grammatical concord. Additionally, the inclusion of proximity concord further complicates matters, as learners may disregard the other two concords if proximity is present. This leads to frequent errors in subject-verb agreement (Quirk et al., 1995: 757).

## **2.3. Subject-verb concord rules**

### **2.3.1. Uncountable nouns ending in -S**

The rules for this category can be one of the following two. The first category are those nouns that always take singular. Such are the nouns referring to games, such as darts or dominoes, and school subjects, linguistics. The second category are those nouns whose number changes depending on the context of the sentence. One such noun is the noun 'politics'. If the noun refers to the current science of government, the plural is used. On the contrary, if the noun refers to a political view, the singular is used (Quirk et al., 1995: 299-300).

### **2.3.2. Collective nouns**

In English, certain nouns that refer to a group can be used with either a singular or plural verb form. These are known as collective nouns. As a general rule, a singular verb is used

when the group is considered a single, unified entity. Conversely, the plural form is employed when the group is viewed as a collection of individuals (Hewings, 2023: 80).

In addition to this, there are differences in number agreement between American English and British English. In American English, the verb is more commonly singular. For instance: *America has won the cup*. Conversely, British English uses both singular and plural verbs depending on the context of the sentence. Specifically, the verb number depends on whether the group is viewed as a single, undivided entity or a collection of individuals. Generally, a plural verb is more frequent in speech, whereas in writing British English typically employs singular verbs (Quirk et al., 1995: 758).

### 2.3.3. Plural nouns

Plural nouns in English usually come in pairs, such as *shoes* and *trousers*. The general rule is that the verb is in the singular form if the word pair is present, as in *a pair of jeans*. However, if the word *pair* is absent, the verb will take the plural form, regardless of whether one pair or more is being referred to (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 61). There are a few exceptions to these rules. Firstly, the words *data* and *media* are plural, but they almost always appear with a singular verb. However, in formal contexts, they may appear with a plural verb. Secondly, the words *criteria* and *phenomena* are always used with plural verbs, regardless of the context of the sentence (Hewings, 2023: 84).

### 2.3.4. A/the number of

The general rule is that *A the number of* uses a plural verb, whereas *the number of* uses a singular verb (Hewings, 2023: 82). This rule is usually applied due to the fact that the noun 'number' in the phrase *the number of* modifies a single entity. In contrast, when the phrase *a number of* is used, the verb is plural, as the noun *number* in this case refers to multiple entities (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 61). For instance: *A number of refugees have been turned back at the border* (Hewings, 2023: 82).

### 2.3.5. EVERY + coordinated noun

The rule for this category is quite straightforward, without any exceptions. When a noun is combined with *every*, such as *every room*, the general rule is always to use a singular verb. For instance: *Every boy and girl takes part in the activity*. As illustrated in this example, even though the word *every* is combined with two nouns, the verb still appears in a singular form rather than a plural one (Hewings, 2023: 82).

### 2.3.6. Coordination with OR/NOR

The rules for this category are somewhat more complex than those for the previously mentioned categories. Grammatical concord is easily understandable when both entities mentioned are of the same number. In such cases, if the entities are singular, the verb will take the singular form, whereas if they are plural, the verb will take the plural form. However, the problem arises when the entities in the coordination appear in different numbers, with one being singular and the other plural. This dilemma cannot be solved with grammatical concord (Quirk et al., 1995: 762). Examined from a notional perspective,

*or* is disjunctive, implying that each entity is treated independently rather than as a single unit. Since this dilemma cannot be resolved using grammatical or notional concord, proximity concord is applied. Consequently, the number of the verb is determined by whichever phrase appears last (Quirk et al., 1995: 762).

### 3. Previous research

Interlingual and intralingual errors in language acquisition have long captured the attention of both linguists and educators. Ghezzou and Mammeri (2016) investigated interlingual and intralingual errors in middle schools in Algeria. Using a corpus of 62 written compositions, they discovered that students tend to make both interlingual and intralingual errors in their writing compositions. Findings reveal that some of the major errors include spelling, tense, punctuation, and subject-verb agreement. Subject-verb agreement comes in fifth place in errors, with 7.8% of students making subject-verb agreement errors (Ghezzou and Mammeri, 2016: 65). Wu and Garza (2014) adopt a similar approach and investigate interlingual and intralingual errors in the writing compositions in middle schools. The results of this study show that students are prone to making grammatical, lexical and semantic errors in this writing. Notably, results show that 96% of students made subject-verb agreement errors in their writing (Wu and Garza, 2014: 1260).

Furthermore, Alahmadi (2019) examines subject-verb agreement errors made by students whose proficiency level is intermediate or upper intermediate. After a longitudinal study, the results show that, regardless of their proficiency level, the students tend to make subject-verb agreement errors, especially with singular subjects (Alahmadi, 2019: 58). Similarly, Mendez Pandapatan (2020) investigates this topic with 70 English majors at UNTIRTA. The research revealed that the students face issues even with the simplest subject-verb agreement. Moreover, the findings imply that the main reason for the errors is the interference of the first and second languages (Mendez Pandapatan, 2020: 127). In the domain of English language acquisition by Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian learners, Komaromi and Jerković (2023) explore interlingual and intralingual errors in engineering students' translations, concluding that 16% of the translations contain subject-verb agreement errors.

Considering that research in other languages, particularly Croatian, highlights a high percentage of errors in subject-verb agreement and emphasizes the importance of error analysis (Komaromi and Jerković, 2023; Leko, 2015; Sholehah et al., 2023), this study aims to investigate specific factors influencing the application of subject-verb concord rules among EFL Bosnian students. To address the aim, the following research questions are posed:

**Q1:** Does the general level of language proficiency, encompassing all language skills, influence the ability to correctly apply subject-verb concord rules?

**Q2:** Is there an association between success in applying subject-verb concord rules and students' grades in grammar-related subjects during studies, given that these rules are closely tied to grammatical knowledge?

**Q3:** Do native Bosnian-speaking students show a preference for subject-verb agreement rules from American English or British English, considering the potential influence of American English on younger speakers?

The selection of the aforementioned aspects in this questionnaire was guided by the notable differences between the grammatical rules governing these features in English and their counterparts in the BCS language.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Participants of the research

The research comprised 41 university students, consisting of 9 males and 32 females. Out of 41 participants, 10 of them are freshmen, 12 are sophomores, 13 are juniors, and 6 are seniors. Furthermore, all of the participants are currently students of English Language and Literature. No placement test was administered; however, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), all participants were presumed to possess an English proficiency level corresponding to B2 or C1.

### 4.2. Design and procedure of the study

The research questionnaire was formulated using several grammar references, including Advanced Grammar in Use by Martin Hewings (2023), The Oxford English Grammar by Sydney Greenbaum (1996), and A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language by Randolph Quirk, Sydney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, and Jan Svartvik (1985). These sources were selected due to their widespread recognition and extensive use in English language studies.

Initially, the different subject-verb concord rules were examined. Two main criteria guided the selection of sentences for the questionnaire: the proficiency level of the students and the differences between Bosnian and English. As the participants were students of English Language and Literature, presumed to possess a B2 or C1 proficiency level, the sentences with the simple subject-verb agreement rules were not considered (e.g. *Tom likes his cat*). Furthermore, it was determined that the best sentences would be those where English and Bosnian rules significantly differ. After a thorough examination, six previously discussed subject-verb concord rules were selected for inclusion in the questionnaire.

The research utilized a questionnaire structured into three distinct sections. The initial section featured three general inquiries concerning the students, year of study, gender, and grades in the courses the students took during college, respectively. The students were required to select the appropriate response. Following this, Section B comprised ten sentences to test knowledge of the previously mentioned subject-concord rules. Each sentence presented two options for the verb form, as shown below:

(1)

- a. *The news starts/start at six.*
- b. *Measles is/are responsible for the death of many children.*
- c. *Every boy and girl takes/take part in the activity.*

- d. *The public has/have been fair.*
- e. *The audience was/were enjoying every minute of it.*
- f. *Neither he nor his wife has/have arrived.*
- g. *Either the teachers or the principal is/are to blame.*
- h. *All the data is/are available for public inspection.*
- i. *I agree that the criteria is/are not of equal importance.*
- j. *A number of refugees has/have been turned back at the border.*

The students were tasked with identifying the correct answer, with the option to select both answers if they believed both were correct. The final section, Section C, mirrored Section B in format, consisting of ten sentences focusing on subject-verb concord rules. However, this section included a mix of correct and incorrect sentences. The sentences were as follows:

- (2)
- a. *Darts are becoming very popular as a spectator sport.*
  - b. *Mathematics are the science of quantities.*
  - c. *Every man and woman consider it a brilliant idea.*
  - d. *Either the Mayor or his deputy are bound to come.*
  - e. *The council have postponed a decision on the new road.*
  - f. *The public have a right to know.*
  - g. *Neither the Prime Minister nor the Education Minister has anticipated this situation.*
  - h. *The data was collected yesterday.*
  - i. *Such phenomena has puzzled scientists for centuries.*
  - j. *The number of books in the library has risen to over five million.*

The students were instructed to evaluate each sentence. If a sentence was incorrect, they were required to identify and correct the error. For example, in the sentence *Darts are becoming very popular as a spectator sport*, there is a mistake in subject-verb concord. The correction would be *Darts is becoming very popular as a spectator sport*. Conversely, if a sentence was correct, students were instructed to write 'correct' below it. For instance, for the sentence *The number of books in the library has risen to over five million*, the appropriate response would be to write 'correct'. To ensure clarity, each section included detailed instructions in Bosnian, eliminating potential confusion. Additionally, the students were unaware of the study's specific focus, thereby avoiding any potential bias or clues when responding to Section C.

The primary objective of the second and third sections was to assess the depth of students' knowledge of subject-verb concord. Given the inclination of students to resort to guessing when provided with possible answers, the inclusion of the third section aimed to ensure a genuine grasp of subject-verb concord knowledge by having the students determine the correctness of the sentences.

The research was conducted at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Upon obtaining permission to conduct the survey, teachers distributed the questionnaires to students following their regular classes, and the students completed them accordingly. The gathered data were analysed and processed using SPSS. Taking into account that several questions in Section B offered two answers, both of which were



correct, the data were processed as follows. Firstly, if the sentence had a formal and informal option, the formal version was treated as correct. For example, in the sentence *Neither he nor his wife has/have arrived* both options are correct. However, during the analysis of the data, only the formal option (*has*) was considered correct. If the student chose the plural option (*have*) it was treated as incorrect in this case, regardless of the fact that it is grammatically correct. Secondly, if both singular and plural options were correct, the sentence was divided into two parts in SPSS and given two codes, one for singular and one for plural. Thus, if the students chose the singular option, it was correct for the singular code in SPSS but incorrect for the plural code, and vice versa. For instance, in the sentence, *The audience was/were enjoying every minute of it* both given options were correct. Consequently, this sentence had two codes (C2S and C2P) during the processing in SPSS. If the student circled the singular option (*was*) as correct, the data was correct for the C2S code and incorrect for the C2P code. If the student chose the plural option (*were*), the data was incorrect for the C2S code and correct for the C2P code. Once all of the data was entered, the sentences that belonged to each category were combined. As a result, one variable per category was created for the categories utilized in the questionnaire. Lastly, any unanswered questions were treated as incorrect responses.

## 5. Results and discussion

Table 1 provides a clear comparison of student performance across different subject-verb rules:

**Table 1:** Analysis of the results

Subject-verb concord rule	Number of correct answers	Percentage	Number of incorrect answers	Percentage
Nouns ending in -s	25	39%	16	61%
Collective nouns	40	97.6%	1	2.4%
Plural nouns	4	9.8%	37	90.2%
A- the number of	22	53.7%	19	46.4%
EVERY + coordinated nouns	27	65.9%	14	34.1%
Coordination with OR/NOR	13	31.7%	28	68.3%

The analysis of the categories reveals that the majority of them had a higher number of correct answers, with the exception of plural nouns and coordination with "or/nor." Notably, the category of 'collective nouns' demonstrated 40 correct answers per sentence, resulting in a success rate of 97.6%. This is the only category that surpassed a 70% success rate. Section B contained two sentences concerning collective nouns: *The public has/have been fair* and *The audience was/were enjoying every minute of it*. Both options in the provided sentences were correct. In the former sentence, 7 students chose both options as correct, 2 chose the plural verb, and the rest of the students chose the singular verb. The results for the latter sentence differ slightly, with 8 answers for both options and 6 answers for the verb in plural. Similarly to Section B, Section C had two sentences containing collective nouns (*The council have postponed a decision on the new road* and *The public have*

*the right to know*). More than half of the students corrected both of the sentences, 21 of them, showcasing their preference for American English over British English. Following closely is the 'every+ coordinated noun category' with a 65.9% success rate, and the 'A the number of' category with a 53.7% success rate. The number of students who chose the correct option in Section B for the 'every+ coordinated noun category' in the sentence *Every boy and girl takes/take part in the activity* was high, reaching to 27 correct answers. On the other hand, only eleven students managed to identify the mistake in the sentence *Every man and woman consider it a brilliant idea*. As for the 'A-the number of' category, students showed good knowledge of concord, having more than half of the correct answers in both sections. More specifically, 26 students chose the correct option in the sentence *A number of refugees has/have been turned back at the border* and 36 students recognized that the sentence *The number of books in the library has risen to over five million* is correct. The final category with positive results is 'uncountable nouns ending in -s', which had approximately 25 correct answers per sentence. In Section B, 15 students chose the correct answer for the sentence *The news starts/start at six*. In Section C, the number of correct answers for the sentence *Darts are becoming very popular as a spectator sport* is slightly lower, with 13 correct answers. On the other hand, the sentence *Mathematics are the science of quantities* showed better results than the sentence in Section C, having 35 correct answers.

In contrast, the results for the categories 'plural nouns' and 'coordination with OR/NOR' differed significantly from the categories mentioned earlier. The category 'plural nouns' had the lowest results, with approximately 4 correct answers per sentence. For instance, for the sentence, *I agree that the criteria is/are not of equal importance* in Section B, only 5 students chose the correct answer. The situation is similar in the sentence *All the data is/are available for public inspection* where only four students recognized that both options were correct, while only one student chose the formal option (*are*) as correct. In Section C, the number of correct answers per sentence almost completely mirrors the previous section. For example, only 6 students managed to recognize that the sentence *Such phenomena has puzzled scientists for centuries is incorrect*. Additionally, one student managed to recognize that the sentence is incorrect, but offered an incorrect correction (*Such phenomena is puzzling scientists for centuries*). Similarly to this, only one student chose to correct the sentence *The data was collected yesterday* into *The Data were collected yesterday*. This means that for every sentence in this category, 90.2% of participants selected the incorrect answer. Hence, a notable disparity of 87.8% between the category with the highest and lowest number of correct answers is evident. The category 'coordination with or/nor' showed slightly better results than the previous category, with approximately 13 correct answers per sentence. Hence, in Section B, for the sentence *Neither he nor his wife has/have arrived* only 6 students chose the formal option (*has*), two chose both options (*has/have*) and the rest of the students chose the informal option (*have*). The results for the sentence *Either the teachers or the principal is/are to blame* are slightly better, with 14 students choosing the formal option (*is*) and 6 students choosing both options (*is/are*). In Section C, the results for both sentences are comparable, with 14 correct answers for the sentence *Neither the Prime Minister nor the education minister has anticipated this situation* and 9 correct

answers for the sentence *Either the Mayor or his deputy are bound to come*. However, the success rate for this category was still well below 50%. Consequently, it can be concluded that 68.3% of participants chose the incorrect answers for this category.

Overall, two main conclusions can be inferred from Table 1. Firstly, the students were successful in recognizing the correct subject-verb agreement for the majority of the categories. Furthermore, the majority of the categories exceeded the 50% success rate. Secondly, the students most likely had difficulties with two categories due to overgeneralization. For the category of 'coordination with OR/NOR', the issue most likely arose from the subject-verb concord of proximity. Namely, out of all the possible options of concord, students tend to apply this type of subject-verb agreement the most. Similarly, students could have overgeneralized the rule for plural nouns and used it in the sentences of the questionnaire where the rule is not applicable (i.e. the sentences contain the exceptions words for this category). Therefore, it could be assumed that overgeneralization is the reason they failed to be successful in this category.

Table 2 illustrates the correlation between students' proficiency levels and their performance on the questionnaire. While the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = .176$ ) indicates a positive relationship, the significance value ( $p = .270$ ) suggests that this correlation is not statistically significant. With a sample size of 41 ( $N = 41$ ), the data imply that students with higher proficiency levels did not consistently achieve better results on the questionnaire.

**Table 2:** Correlation between proficiency levels and performance

		Total
Level	Pearson Correlation	.176
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.270
	N	41

Similar to Table 2, Table 3 illustrates the correlation between students' grades in grammar courses and their performance on the questionnaire. The Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = .203$ ) indicates a weak positive relationship. However, with a significance value of  $p = .204$ , the correlation is not statistically significant. This finding suggests that higher grades in grammar courses did not consistently correspond to better questionnaire performance.

**Table 3:** Correlation between grades and performance

		Total
Grade	Pearson Correlation	.203
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.204
	N	41

Table 4 illustrates students' preference for American English subject-verb concord rules over British English rules. The data indicate a clear preference for American English, as evidenced by the mean scores: .76 for American English compared to .32 for British

English. Additionally, the lower standard deviation for American English (.223 vs. .274) suggests greater consistency in students' selection of American English options.

This preference was examined within the category of collective nouns, where differences between American and British English usage are most evident. As previously discussed, American English typically employs singular verbs with collective nouns, while British English generally favors plural verbs. For example, in the sentence, *The public has/have been fair* 32 students selected the singular verb (*has*) as correct, with the majority of the remaining students choosing both options. Similarly, in the sentence *The council have postponed a decision on the new road*, 24 students incorrectly corrected the verb to conform to American English rules, despite the sentence being correct in British English. These findings further reinforce the students' preference for American English subject-verb concord rules over their British counterparts.

**Table 4:** Students' preference

	<b>American English</b>	<b>British English</b>
Mean	.76	.32
N	41	41
Std. Deviation	.223	.274

## 6. Conclusion

Subject-verb concord is a fundamental aspect of English grammar, yet it remains one of the most intricate due to its numerous and often complex rules. These complexities frequently pose challenges for learners and lead to errors. The present research investigated whether students majoring in English Language and Literature possess adequate knowledge of subject-verb concord and understand the nuances of its rules. The findings underscore several significant conclusions. First, students' overall proficiency level was found to be unrelated to their knowledge of subject-verb concord. Second, no significant correlation was observed between students' grades in grammar courses and their understanding of subject-verb concord. Although the results suggest that students demonstrate a high level of knowledge regarding subject-verb concord rules, errors were observed in more than 50% of cases, indicating persistent challenges across all years of study. This underscores the need for improved strategies for teaching subject-verb concord effectively. The most frequent errors occurred in the categories of 'plural nouns' (90.2% incorrect answers) and 'coordination with OR/NOR' (68.3% incorrect answers). Additionally, the findings revealed a notable preference among the students for American English subject-verb concord rules over British English rules. These results highlight the complexity and pedagogical importance of subject-verb concord, irrespective of learners' proficiency level. Moreover, the study underscores the value of error analysis and the role of interlingual errors in second language acquisition. By identifying and analyzing these errors, educators and researchers can better understand the influence of learners' native languages, enabling the development of more targeted teaching strategies and effective language learning materials.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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