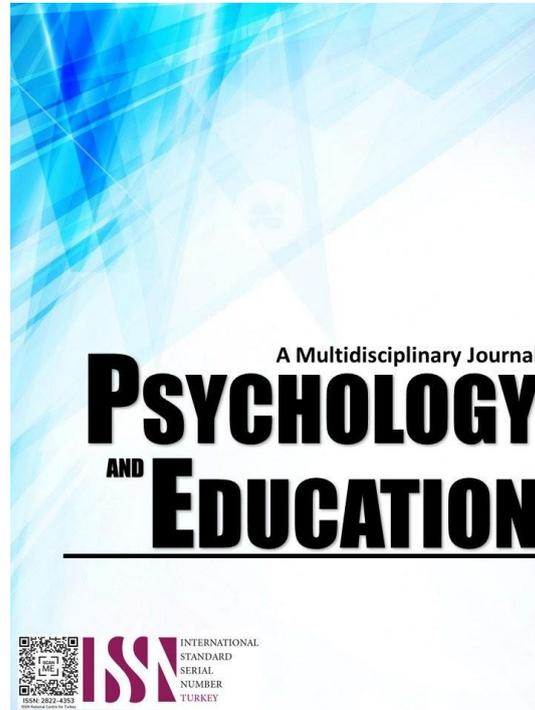


**GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN ENGLISH AMONG  
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**PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL**

2023

Volume: 13

Pages: 44-49

Document ID: 2023PEMJ1137

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.8309882

Manuscript Accepted: 2023-30-8



## Grammatical Errors in English Among Grade 8 Students: Basis for Module Development

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### Abstract

Reports show that Filipino students have deteriorating communication skills in the English language. To verify these, it is significant to investigate their communicative competence. Thus, this study was conducted. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions: 1) What are the common students' errors in the application of subject-verb agreement rules in English? 2) What are the grammar rules that are mastered and those that are not? 3) What interventions can be done to enhance the performance of Grade 8 students in the least mastered grammar rules? The study used a descriptive-evaluative research design. The students were given a diagnostic test composed of 90-item multiple-choice questions about 18 subject-verb agreement rules in sentences, where each rule was represented by five questions. The grammatical errors made by the students were determined based on the number of correct responses in each rule. The top most common grammatical errors, the mastered and unmastered rules were identified. The respondents were 291 randomly selected Grade 8 students from secondary schools in Milagros, Masbate. The selection of sample respondents was done using stratified random sampling. Based on the result of the diagnostic examination, the following were the findings: 1) The Grade 8 students' score in each of the 18 rules was below the mastery level of 75% and it shows low level of mastery of all the rules in subject-verb agreement. 2) Students got a near mastery level score in only one out of 18 rules and it deals with mathematical abstractions. Based on the findings, the conclusion was drawn: 1) Grade 8 students in Milagros, Masbate involved in this study have very poor performance in subject-verb agreement rules. Based on conclusion, the researcher recommended the following: 1) Grammar rules must be given enough time. 2) Devise a learning module targeting the identified errors to master the rules.

**Keywords:** *grammatical errors, subject-verb agreement rules, communication competence*

### Introduction

The Department of Education is now embracing the K to 12 curriculum. A curriculum that will bring the educational system of our country in the global standard. The additional two more years in the new curriculum means a decongestion of the old curriculum and a development of mastery of competencies or skills including communication skill.

Communication is a vital part of personal life and is also important in business, education, and any other situation where people encounter each other (Microsoft Encarta, 2009). With this instance, communication (either oral or written) serves a crucial role in having greater understanding among mankind. To develop communication skill, one must undergo basic education training focusing on the principles of arts in communication. One of the core subjects in basic education is English that deals with the development of speaking, writing, reading, and viewing competence of the learner.

To attain mastery in communication, there are so many rules to be memorized, understood and internalized so that one could become fluent speaker and writer, but if he/she fails to do so, there is a possibility that mis-

communication or misunderstanding has occurred. To attain mastery of such skill, there is a need to identify the grammatical errors of every student to be able to implement appropriate interventions so that they will be ready in facing the global society.

### Research Questions

This study focused on the diagnosis of common grammatical errors, specifically subject-verb agreement, of Grade 8 students in public secondary schools in Milagros, Masbate, Philippines. Specifically, it sought answers to the following inquiries:

1. What are the common students' errors in the application of subject-verb agreement rules in English?
2. What are the specific grammar rules that are mastered and those that are not?
3. What interventions can be done to enhance the performance of Grade 8 students in the least mastered grammar rules in subject-verb agreement?

### Literature Review

Ghadessy (1980) examined errors made by Iranian



university freshmen in their written compositions. The most frequent types of errors he found were tenses, articles, prepositions, word order, morphology, syntax, and lexis. According to Ghadessy, these errors occurred as a result of overgeneralization, analogy, incomplete application of rules and false hypothesis based on limited knowledge of the target language.

Nayan (2009) conducted a study on Malaysian ESL students about their application of subject-verb agreement. Students in higher learning institutions in Malaysia need to write lots of reports based on the projects done. Since they are at the tertiary level of education, they are required to use English in their reports. This is to ensure that they are able to function well in English later at the workplace. Writing requires students to apply rules regarding sentence structures, grammar and also its mechanic that refers to punctuation and capitalization. However, many of the students have problems in applying these rules in their writing even though they have been learning English for about 12 years in school.

In a study in the Philippine context, Lasala (2014) found out that the level of communicative competence in oral and writing skills of the students is both acceptable. Soliven (2015), however, commented on the state of English competence of Filipinos. She said, "I guess the real concern is that the Filipino teachers have lost the competence in speaking English. The same situation exists among students of state colleges whose command of the English language is nil as one frustrated professor observed, 'My preschool child's English is even better than my university students'." The deterioration of English language proficiency among Filipinos according to Tormes (2008) has been associated with a number of factors, including but not limited to, an overall decline in Philippine education.

## Methodology

The study used descriptive-evaluative research design. Descriptive-evaluative type of research is concerned with describing the gathered information and then making judgment about it. This study identified the grammatical errors of students after taking a multiple-choice diagnostic test on the application of subject-verb agreement rules and then determined whether their performances reach the mastery level.

## Participants

The respondents of this study were randomly selected Grade 8 students from public secondary schools in

Milagros, Masbate. Under the Junior High School in the K to 12 curriculum, these students are required to take up English subjects from Grade 7 through Grade 10. Further, due to the dominant use of the English language in Philippine media, communication, and within the community, these students learn English in informal ways.

## Procedure

The study used the random sampling procedure. Specifically, it used the stratified random sampling to get the proportion of the population in each school to the total population of all public secondary schools in Milagros. The proportion served as the basis in computing the number of samples from each school.

To determine the desired number of samples, the Slovin's formula was used. In this formula, the population is divided by the sum of 1 and the population itself multiplied by the square of alpha ( $\alpha$ ). In symbols,

$$n = N / (1 + N * \alpha^2)$$

Using the alpha value of 0.05, the number of samples was estimated to be 291.

Table 1. *Distribution of Respondents by School*

<i>School</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
Jamorawon National High School	182	17.02	50
Mary Perpetua E. Brioso Memorial High School	76	7.11	21
Masbate School of Fisheries	322	30.12	88
Melchor B. Burlaos Memorial High School	131	12.25	36
Milagros National High School	144	13.47	39
Serafin C. Rosero Memorial High School	149	13.94	39
Taisan High School	65	6.08	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>1069</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>291</b>

## Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the results of the survey on grammatical errors in English among Grade 8 students of public secondary schools in Milagros, Masbate. It also shows the discussion and interpretation of data based on the tables using the appropriate analytical methods and procedures.

In this section, the performance of the students in the grammar diagnostic test is evaluated based on their scores. The lists of unmastered and mastered skills are



also presented. Each finding is supported by relevant theories or similar studies on the English language errors committed by ESL learners.

### Performance of Students in the Diagnostic Test

The performance of Grade 8 students in the diagnostic test is below the mastery level defined earlier. Almost all the percentages of correct answers for the grammar rule items fall below 75%. Only one rule is considered nearing mastery. This means that the students have a very dismal performance in applying the subject-verb agreement rules in English sentences. This result confirms the reports on the decline in the English language proficiency among Filipino learners (Soliven, 2015; Tormes, 2008).

Despite the ubiquitous use of English, Filipino learners still have difficulty in developing acceptable communication skills. Filipino learners are exposed to a variety of English materials, from books to other media. In fact, Philippine TV programs and commercials, commercial product labeling, and legal documents are communicated mostly in English. However, in the local communities, the use of English is limited only in school setting and online communications. The use of mother tongue and Filipino at home and within the community is still prevalent in many rural areas in the countryside. That is why English grammar is not mastered because what the learners learned in school is not being reinforced due to its limited use in the community to which the learners belong.

Table 2 shows the grammar rules and the corresponding percentage of correct answers. Data show that the students did not master almost all the subject-verb agreement rules, as the percentage of students who correctly answered each grammar rule did not reach 75%. Students' committing errors can be inferred from the incorrect selection of answer in the test. However, this study made a test composed of multiple-choice items in which students would just select a response, so the information on students' misapplication of rules was limited only to the distractors given. The types of errors in applying subject-verb agreement rules cannot be exactly identified because the distractors used in the multiple-choice items only determine these types of errors. Some of the predetermined distractors merely change the number (plurality or singularity) of the correct answer (verb or subject).

Table 2. *The Percentage of Correct Response in Each Grammar Rule Item*

Rule No.	Grammar Rules	%
1.	A. The subject and verb must agree in number. B. Compound subject take plural verb.	42.20
2.	A compound subject referring to a single person takes a singular verb.	29.28
3.	Compound subjects modified by each and every are singular.	27.28
4.	The verb agrees with its subject, not with the predicate nominative.	42.41
5.	When compound subjects are joined by or, nor, either – or, neither –nor, the verb agrees with the subject nearer it.	34.85
6.	When regarded as a unit, a collective noun is singular. When regarded as individuals, a collective noun is plural.	38.35
7.	When preceded by the article A, the subject number is plural. When preceded by the article The, the subject is singular.	31.87
8.	The verb agrees with the affirmative, not with the negative.	26.60
9.	A. Singular indefinite pronouns like someone, anyone, each, neither, either, take singular verbs. B. The plural indefinite pronouns such as all, both, several, few, many, take plural verbs.	25.20
10.	Nouns plural in form but singular in meaning takes singular verb.	31.13
11.	Scissors, refreshments, clothes, pliers, etc. are always plural.	27.22
12.	Impersonal pronoun It, at the beginning of a sentence is followed by a singular verb.	45.22
13.	An amount of money, space of time or unit of measurement even in plural form, take a singular verb.	37.53
14.	Fractions are singular or plural depending upon the of-phrase.	20.21
15.	Adjectives used as nouns are considered plural.	28.18
16.	Singular verbs are used with mathematical abstractions.	53.54
17.	Intervening expressions such as along with, together with, in addition to, as well as, etc. do not affect the number of the subject.	29.69
18.	A relative pronoun used as a subject of the verb takes a verb that agrees with the antecedent of the pronoun.	38.14

Overall, Grade 8 students in Milagros, Masbate have difficulties in applying subject-verb agreement rules in English sentences. This finding is similar to the result of study conducted by Ting, Mahadhir, and Chang (2010), in which applying subject-verb agreement rules was one of the most common grammar errors committed by students. Further, it implies that the students' knowledge of English grammar is incomplete or that they misapplied the rules in sentences (Ghadessy, 1980; Richards, 1974).

Table 3 above shows the top 10 most common errors committed by Grade 8 students, wherein the top most common rule is the rule with the least percentage of students who got the correct answer. Firstly, one can note that only 20.21% of the respondents know that fractions are singular or plural depending upon the of-phrase. Students' knowledge of fraction concepts and terms may be limited or they view fraction as only part of a whole, less than one. So this may suggest that using fraction terms in the subject makes the subject singular and thus requires singular subject.



Table 3. *Top 10 Most Common Grammatical Errors*

Rank	Rule No./Grammar Rule	Percentage of correct answer
1	14. Fractions are singular or plural depending upon the of phrase.	20.21%
2	9. A. Singular indefinite pronouns like someone, anyone, each, neither, either, take singular verbs. B. The plural indefinite pronouns such as all, both, several, few, many, take plural verbs.	25.20%
3	8. The verb agrees with the affirmative, not with the negative.	26.60%
4	11. Scissors, refreshments, clothes, pliers, etc. are always plural.	27.22%
5	3. Compound subjects modified by each and every are singular.	27.28%
6	15. Adjectives used as nouns are considered plural.	28.18%
7	2. A compound subject referring to a single person takes a singular verb.	29.28%
8	17. Intervening expressions such as along with, together with, in addition to, as well as, etc. do not affect the number of the subject.	29.69%
9	10. Nouns plural in form but singular in meaning takes singular verb.	31.13%
10	7. When preceded by the article A, the subject number is plural. When preceded by the article The, the subject is singular.	31.87%

Secondly, the respondents could not determine the number of the indefinite pronouns. They could not grasp the quantity being described by the pronouns. For example, “someone” may be construed as “many” because of the word “some”, so students believed that the pronoun is plural. Similar misapplications may have the same causes.

These errors were probably the result of some confusing rules in English grammar. As predetermined by the distractors in the test used in this study that the students would make errors on the plurality or singularity of the subject and verb, this study assumes that the types of errors committed by respondents revolve around misapplication of certain rules. To illustrate, the rule on adding “-s” after a noun to make the noun plural is similar to the rule on adding “-s” to a verb in present tense to make it singular. This rule may confuse the ESL learner, especially if the learner has difficulty in identifying the subject and its number. There are also irregular verbs whose past tenses do not follow the conventional rule of adding “-d” or “-ed” after the root word. Another very irregular rule is the past tense and number of “be”. For example, in the sentence “I love you”, the number of the subject “I” is plural; while in the sentence “I was loved”, the number of “I” is singular. In the subjunctive mood, the number of “I” is plural as illustrated in the phrase “If I were

you”. Due to the complexity of English grammar rules, ESL learners tend to misapply these rules in communicating in the language.

### Mastered and Unmastered Rules

From the scores obtained by this study, the mastered and unmastered grammar rules were identified using the definition of mastery level. The following tables show the list of mastered and unmastered rules in subject-verb agreement. However, results show that no grammar rule was answered correctly by at least 75% of the takers. The highest percentage of correct response is below the mastery level, which means that all of the given competencies or subject-verb agreement rules were not mastered by Grade 8 students in Milagros.

Table 4. *List of Nearly Mastered Grammar Rule*

Grammar Rule	Percentage of correct answer
16. Singular verbs are used with mathematical abstractions.	53.54%

Table 4 above shows that among the eighteen rules utilized to test the grammatical skills of Grade 8 students, only Rule Number 16 has reached the near mastery level which is 53.54%. This result is a manifestation that students learn the grammar rules through formal study and practice. This rule has been slightly mastered by the students because they are exposed to it, and it is both understandable and meaningful to them (Krashen, 1982) since mathematical abstractions are taught as early as Grade 1.

Table 5 above shows the unmastered rules with percentages of correct response below 50%. It further shows that out of eighteen rules tested, seventeen of them fall below the near mastery level of 50% to 74%. It is evident that many students find difficulty in applying subject-verb agreement rules in sentences. This may be due to the students’ limited knowledge of the English language and incomplete application of subject-verb agreement rules (Ghadessy, 1980; Richards, 1974).

Table 5. List of Unmastered Grammar Rules

Rank	Rule No./Grammar Rule	%
1	14. Fractions are singular or plural depending upon the of phrase.	20.21
2	9. A. Singular indefinite pronouns like someone, anyone, each, neither, either, take singular verbs. B. The plural indefinite pronouns such as all, both, several, few, many, take plural verbs.	25.20
3	8. The verb agrees with the affirmative, not with the negative.	26.60
4	11. Scissors, refreshments, clothes, pliers, etc. are always plural.	27.22
5	3. Compound subjects modified by each and every are singular.	27.28
6	15. Adjectives used as nouns are considered plural.	28.18
7	2. A compound subject referring to a single person takes a singular verb.	29.28
8	17. Intervening expressions such as along with, together with, in addition to, as well as, etc. do not affect the number of the subject.	29.69
9	10. Nouns plural in form but singular in meaning takes singular verb.	31.13
10	7. When preceded by the article A, the subject number is plural. When preceded by the article The, the subject is singular.	31.87
11	When compound subjects are joined by or, nor, either – or, neither –nor, the verb agrees with the subject nearer it.	34.85
12	An amount of money, space of time or unit of measurement even in plural form, take a singular verb.	37.53
13	A relative pronoun used as a subject of the verb takes a verb that agrees with the antecedent of the pronoun.	38.14
14	When regarded as a unit, a collective noun is singular. When regarded as individuals, a collective noun is plural.	38.35
15	A. The subject and verb must agree in number. B. Compound subject take plural verb.	42.20
16	The verb agrees with its subject, not with the predicate nominative.	42.41
17	Impersonal pronoun It, at the beginning of a sentence is followed by a singular verb.	45.22

Subject-verb agreement is one of the fundamentals of English grammar, lack of mastery of which may lead to the learners' inability to cope with advanced sentence patterns and constructions, syntax, and other more complicated grammar rules. Students involved in this study showed a very dismal performance in this area and may have trouble in communicating their ideas using the English language, whether in speech or in writing. On one hand, this problem is presumed to have worsened due to the limited exposure of learners to English materials or media in schools or in their respective communities. On the other hand, their learning in school is not being scaffold by relevant experiences or actual usage beyond the classroom walls. This complexity in mastering subject-verb agreement rules will remain or even worsen unless appropriate interventions are made to help students acquire the prerequisite skills in advancing English grammar skills. Using these rules in familiar situations may be helpful in enhancing the students' sense of connection between what they learn in school and what they actually do in life.

## Conclusion

Based on the foregoing findings, the following conclusions were drawn: (1) Grade 8 students involved in this study have very poor performance in applying subject-verb agreement rules in sentences. (2) The eighteen rules of subject-verb agreement are not mastered by Grade 8 students in Milagros, Masbate, Philippines. (3) Participants in this study have incomplete application of subject-verb agreement rules and limited knowledge of the English language.

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