

## **The Accuracy of the Usage of the 'Subject and Verb Agreement' by the Learners of English as a Second Language**

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Subject -verb agreement is a basic rule of English grammar which states that subjects and verbs must agree in person and number. Therefore, singular subjects need singular verbs whereas plural subjects need plural verbs. At tertiary level, Sinhala speaking ESL (English as a second a language) learners very often get confused with the nuances of the rules of subject -verb agreement. For example, compare, *the jury (a collective noun) is walking to the courtroom* and *the jury (refers to many people as individuals) are discussing among themselves*. According to Bock and Miller (1991), elicited sentence productions show that the occasional errors of subject-verb agreement that speakers make are more likely to occur when a singular head noun is followed by a plural as in *The producer of adventure stories have arrived* than when a plural head is followed by a plural (Nicol, Foster & Veres, 1997). The objective of this study is to analyze the tertiary level Sinhala-speaking ESL learners' accuracy patterns of the usage of subject -verb agreement in their writing tasks in order to find out relevant methods to facilitate the teaching of subject -verb agreement in English Language. A sample of 50 first year undergraduates who are randomly selected from the University of Kelaniya participated in this study. The research tool of this experimental study is a sentence battery consisting of gap-filling tasks where the learners have to use the correct verb according to the given subject. Excel spread sheets and SPSS will be used for data analysis. Two way ANOVA will be run and the Post Hoc Tukey HSD Test will be computed to compare the significant differences in the accurate use of each sub rule of subject and verb agreement. Findings of these accuracy patterns can be applied to teach subject -verb agreement in the ESL classrooms more effectively. The findings of the study will also inform syllabus design, lesson materials and lesson plans on the use of tenses in English grammar.

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