

## An Analysis of Students' Ability In Using Subject-Verb Agreement

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**Abstract.** *The objective of this research was to describe the ability of students in using subject-verb agreements of three tenses, namely: Present Tense, Past Tense and Present Perfect Tense. The result of the data analysis of students' ability in using subject-verb agreement of the eighth grade students of SMP Islamiyah Kotaagung. It was found that the students' ability in using subject-verb agreement of the eighth grade students of SMP Islamiyah Kotaagung in the academic year of 2016/2017 had fair level by mean score 58.03.*

**Key words:** *analysis; subject-verb agreement*

### A. Background

Language is very important thing used in daily activity. According to Siahaan, language is a set of rules used by human as a tool of their communication (Siahaan, 2008). While Hornby states that language is a human and non-intensive method of communicating ideas, feelings and desires by means of a system of sounds and sound symbols (Horby, 2007). In short, language is a tool of communication for delivering messages and ideas from speaker or writer to listener or reader in an interaction.

There are many languages in the world. One of them is English. Edge states that English is an international language of the present historical period (Edge, 1993).

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Then, he adds that English serves for many people as a bridge into the world of higher education, science, international trade, politics, tourism or any other venture which interest them. Consequently, for those who want to expand their knowledge should be able to understand English since many books and other resources are written in English.

English is as a foreign language in Indonesia. As a foreign language, English is not used in everyday life by Indonesian. It is only used by certain people such as academicians, groups or individual in a certain fields. As Broughton, et.al. state that English as a foreign language means that it is taught in schools, often widely, but it does not play an essential role in national or social life (Broughton, 1980). It means that as a foreign language, English does not use in daily communication. It is just used in the certain places such as in schools, university, office, etc. In Indonesia, English become the first foreign language which used only in the school not in daily conversation.

As we know that in Indonesia English become the first foreign language and one of the compulsory subjects that is taught in junior high school and senior high school. In learning English, the students are expected to be able to master four language skills and language elements. In the process of language learning, there are four basic skills that must be mastered. They are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Besides the major skills, there are three elements of English, they are phonology, vocabulary, and grammar (Louder, 2008). By mastering those skills and elements of English, the students are supposed to be able to explore themselves in accessing many kinds of information source in English such as article, novel, magazine, etc.

Furthermore, one element that students must master in learning English is grammar. Grammar is the central component of language (Greenbourn, 2002). Grammar is rules for forming words and making sentences. It means that

grammar is the central component of language, which consists of rules of grammatical structure.

Moreover, as Corder in Widodo's journal states that grammar is taught to furnish the basis for a set of language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Handoyo, 2006). Furthermore, Ur in Widodo's journal states that grammar rules enable students to know and apply how the sentence patterns should be put together. It means that grammar covers all of language skills.

It is clear that grammar is one of the important things of a language. It makes students know how to produce good sentences and to express ideas and feelings. By using grammar correctly, somebody will tend to write and speak English well. It is supported by Harmer who states that if grammar rules are too carelessly violated, communication may suffer (Harmer, 2007). Thus, without grammar, the meaning in a written or spoken form can be lost or cannot be submitted.

There are many materials in English grammar. One of the materials is about subject-verb agreement. Eastwood states that subject-verb agreement means choosing the correct singular or plural verb after the subject. In addition, Pyle and Page state that the subject and verb in a sentence must agree in person and number (Pyle and Page, 2002). It means that if the subject is singular, so the verb is singular; if the subject is plural, so the verb is plural.

Lock states that mastering the functions of Subject and Finite from the beginning is important for second language learners. Without such mastery, they are likely to have many problems with basic sentence structure, with the formation of questions and negatives, and with the marking of tense and of number agreement (Eastwood, 1994). It means that subject-verb agreement is a basic sentence structure that should be mastered by the second language learners.

According to the explanations above, the concept of subject-verb agreement is simple. Unfortunately, although making subject-verb agreement seems easy, but it is the one of the most common mistakes in standard written English (Dubib, 2013). It is proved by Marzuki, Zainal *et.al.*, and al-Dubib in al-Dubib's thesis found that the most frequent error was subject-verb agreement.

The errors in subject-verb agreement that has been found such as the students are still confused in applying subject-verb agreement rules and their lack of knowledge of the rules of the target language is the main factor causing the written production errors. Then, another research about subject-verb agreement by Thalib *et.al.*, showed that the students' ability in subject-verb agreement was low by founding 70.57% error of subject-verb agreement (Thalib, 2013). It means that the students are still confused when using subject-verb agreement and do not know the rules of it.

Based on the preliminary research conducted on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016, by interviewing the English teacher in SMP Islamiyah Kotaagung, Meta Famelia, the researcher asked about the students' capability in mastering grammar. The teacher said that the students did not master grammar well. Then the researcher asked about the students' ability in using subject-verb agreement in some sentences that have been taught. Those are simple present tense, simple past tense, and present perfect tense. The teacher said that she has taught about the use of subject-verb agreement when she taught tenses but did not use term subject-verb agreement and the teacher said that actually she did not explain the material of subject-verb agreement clearly. The teacher only taught that the subject should agree with the verb.

Besides doing the interview with the teacher, the researcher also interviewed to some of the students. The researcher asked about their capability in grammar. The

students said that grammar is difficult and there are many rules in grammar so that they are confused to use those rules.

Then, the researcher asked about subject-verb agreement to the students and they said that they did not know about it. Then, the researcher explained about subject-verb agreement generally and gave some examples. They said that they knew it, only they did not know the name. Furthermore, the researcher asked about simple past tense, simple present tense, and present perfect tense to them. They said that they are still confused about the materials, for example in simple present tense when they should add *s* or *es* in a verb.

For those reasons, the researcher was interested in conducting a research about subject-verb agreement. The researcher decided to conduct a research of subject-verb agreement in some tenses that had been studied by the eighth grade students of junior high school. Those were simple present tense, simple past tense and present perfect tense. Therefore, the researcher proposed a research with a title: an Analysis of Students' Ability in Using Subject-verb Agreement of the Eighth Grade Students at the First Semester of SMP Islamiyah Kotaagung in the Academic Year of 2016/2017.

### **B. Formulation of the Problem**

Based on the limitation above, the formulation of the problem in this research was: How far is the students' ability in using subject-verb agreement in simple present tense, simple past tense, and present perfect tense of the eighth grade students of SMP Islamiyah Kotaagung?

### **C. Concept of Subject-verb Agreement**

#### **1. Definition of Subject-verb Agreement**

Every sentences which is made needs agreement grammar. According to Mas'ud, agreement grammar is very important to be learnt if someone wants to understand

and use English in written and spoken well (Mas`ud, 1996). It means that agreement grammar is needed in written and spoken English. Agreement grammar will help the reader or listener to understand the clear meaning of sentences.

According to Hornby in Mas`ud, agreement (concord) is agreement between the subject with its verb (predicate). Similarly, by Leech, who states that concord (is also called agreement) in the most general terms, concord is a relation between two elements such that they match one another in terms of some grammatical feature (Leech, 2006). It means that agreement is a relation between two elements that should agree each other, for instance the agreement between a subject and verb.

Moreover, according to Leech, in addition to subject-verb agreement (concord), there is also noun-pronoun agreement (concord), that is agreement between a pronoun and its antecedent in terms of number, person, and gender. Then, he adds that in English, the most important agreement (concord) is number concord between subject and (finite) verb. Furthermore, According to Sihombing and Burton, in a simple sentence, a verb usually comes after the subject. It can be a word or a phrases which contains a simple form of verb, an adverb, a modal or an auxiliary. The form of a verb must be agree with the form of the subject (Sihombing, 2010). In addition, Sihombing and Burton state that a singular subject uses a singular verb and a plural subject uses a plural verb. It means that a subject-verb agreement is agreement between subject and verb. If the subject is singular so the verb is singular and if the subject is plural so the verb is plural.

Furthermore, Huddleston and Pullum state that the subject normally indicates the actor, the person or thing performing the action, while the predicate describes the action (Huddleston, 2005). It means that a subject can be person or thing performing the action and a predicate describes the action.

From the explanations above, it is clear that subject-verb agreement is agreement between subject and verb. If the subject is singular, the verb is singular and if the subject is plural, the verb is plural because the meaning of a sentence will be ambiguous without the subject and the verb that agree each other.

## 2. Subject-verb Agreement in Simple Present Tense

According to Eastwood, there is an agreement in present tense. Then he adds that a third-person singular subject takes a verb in *s* or *es*. It means that verb in simple present tense—both of verbal and nominal form should agree with its subject. In verbal form the subject is followed by verb and *do* or *does* is used as auxiliary for all of subject in negative or question sentence. Whereas nominal form the subject is followed by adjective, noun or adverb. It does not consist of the verb form but in nominal sentence consists of *to be*. *To be* that are used in simple present tense are *is* used for the subject (*she, he, it*), *am* used for the subject *I* and *are* for the subject (*they, we, you*).

## 3. Subject-verb Agreement in Simple Past Tense

According to Eastwood, there is agreement with *be*, *have*, and a present-simple verb. Then he adds that with a past-tense verb is agreement only with *be*. It means that subject-verb agreement of simple past tense is in nominal form.

## 3. Subject-verb Agreement in Present Perfect Tense

According to Eastwood, there is agreement with *be*, *have*, and a present simple verb. It means that *be* and *have* are about present perfect tense for nominal and verbal form. Rules of subject-verb agreement in this tenses are:

## **D. Research Design**

In this research, the researcher used descriptive quantitative research. According to Schreiber and Asner-self, descriptive studies simply describe some phenomenon using numbers to create a picture of a group or individual

(Schreiber, 2011). Besides, quantitative research is based on the measurement of quantity or amount. It is applicable to phenomena that can be expressed in terms of quantity (Kothari, 2011) It means that descriptive quantitative research is describing some phenomenon of a group or individual in numerical form.

Furthermore, descriptive research can be either quantitative or qualitative. It can involve collections of quantitative information that can be tabulated along in continuum in numerical form, such as scores on a test or the number of times a person chooses to use a certain feature of a multimedia program, or it can describe categories of information such as gender or patterns of interaction when using technology in a group situation. Therefore, the researcher decided to use quantitative data because the researcher was to know the students' ability in using subject-verb agreement, so that the researcher specified a set of situation to obtain data by administering a test (Gene, 2016) The test instrument was used to obtain the data about subject-verb agreement ability. This instrument was chosen because this was the appropriate instrument to know the students' ability. It is supported by Arikunto who states that test is a list of questions or exercises which is used to measure a skill, intelligence, ability, or aptitude of an individual or group (Arikunto, 2013).

Based on the explanations above, it can be concluded that by using descriptive quantitative research, the students' ability in using subject-verb agreement in simple present tense, simple past tense, and present perfect tense had been gained. Then, the researcher described the result of the students' ability in using subject-verb agreement in simple present tense, simple past tense, and present perfect tense.

#### 1. Population and sample

According to Sugiyono, population is a generalization region consisting of objects or subjects that have certain qualities and characteristics are determined by the



researcher to be studied and then make conclusion (Sugiyono, 2011). In this case, the population is the total number of students in the research. The population of this research was the eighth grade students of SMP Islamiyah Kotaagung in 2016/2017 academic year. The population of this research consisted of 60 students including of two classes, with the detail as in the following table (Famelia, 2015)

A sample is a small proportion of population selected for observation and analysis (Best, 1995) It means that sample is part of individual members which is chosen to represent of the whole population. In this research, the researcher used cluster random sampling technique. The researcher used this probability sampling to give the same opportunity to the population to be a member of sample because the resracher wanted to know the stundents' ability in using subject-verb agreement in simple present tense, simple past tense, and present perfect tense.

The researcher chose one class by using lotteries. The researcher wrote the name of the classes at the eighth grade of first semester in a small piece of paper, and then those pieces of paper were rolled and put in the box. The box was shaken and the researcher took one piece of paper to be sample of the research.

After doing sampling technique, B class was out as sample of this research which consisted of 30 students. Then, A class as a class out of the sample which consisted of 30 students that was used to tryout the tryout test. (See appendix 5 on page 89 and appendix 6 on page 90)

## 2. Data Collecting Technique

According to Sugiyono, "Data collecting technique is the first main step in the research, because the main purpose of the research is to get the data. In gathering the data, the researcher used test.

Arikunto states that test is used to know and measure the objects' ability in a study (Arikunto, 2010). So in this research was to know the students' ability in using subject-verb agreement in simple present tense, simple past tense and present perfect tense in the positive forms. The researcher used multiple choice test to collect the data. Multiple choice test was conducted to get the data of students' ability in simple present tense, simple past tense and present perfect tense because based on the syllabus of *KTSP 2006*, those materials had been taught at the eighth grade of the first semester of junior high school.

### 3. Research Instrument

There are two kinds of instruments: test and non-test instrument. In this research, the instrument that was used by the resercher was test. The researcher used multiple choice test to know the students ability in using subject-verb agreement in simple present tense, simple past tense and present perfect. The purpose of this kind of test was to measure the ability of the students' understanding in using subject-verb agreement in simple present tense, simple past tense and present perfect tense.

Table.1 The Item Test Classification after Tryout Test

No	Aspects of the Material	Distribution		Total
		Odd	Even	
1	Nominal sentence of simple present tense	1,3,5,9,7	2,10	7
2	Verbal sentence of simple present tense	11,13,15,17,19	12,14,18,20	9
3	Nominal sentence of simple past tense	21,29	22,24,26,30	6
4	Nominal sentence of present perfect tense	35,37,39	34,40	5
5	Verbal sentence of present perfect tense	49	44,50	3
Total		16	14	30

#### 4. Validity and Reliability of the Test

A good test is the test that has validity. The test can be said valid if the instrument item can be used to measure should be measured (Arikunto, 2012). Furthermore, according to Gronlun quoted by Brown, validity is that the extent to which inferences made from assessment results should be appropriate, meaningful, and useful in terms of the purpose of the assessment (Brown, 2004). It means that a test is valid when it measures effectively what it is supposed to measure whether it can be achievement, aptitude or proficiency in the language, for instance, to measure grammar mastery, one might give students grammar test. To measure whether the test has good validity or not, the researcher used content validity, construct validity and internal validity. Reliability is the consistency or stability of the values, test scores, or weight measurement. It means that reliability is the consistency of scores which is resulted from administration of particular examination.

#### 5. Data Analysis

After the data was collected, the data was analyzed by using percentage or descriptive statistics. According to Schreiber and Asner-self, descriptive statistics are a set of procedures to summarize numerical data where a large number of observed values is reduced to a few numbers. It means that the students' scores would be classified into classification of students' ability such as excellent, good, fair, poor, and very poor. The following formula and criteria were employed:

a. 
$$P = \frac{f}{N} \times 100\%$$

Notes:

P : percentage number

f : frequency

N : number of cases (number of frequency or individual)

b.

Table 2. Student's Score Category

No	Score Interval	Level of Ability
1	80-100	Excellent
2	66-79	Good
3	56-65	Fair
4	40-55	Poor
5	0-39	Very poor

### E. FINDINGS

Based on the result of counting the test, the students' score can be seen on the table and figure below:

a. Table and figure of students score

Table 3. The Result of Students' Score

No	Students' score	Total of students
1	80	2
2	77	2
3	73	1
4	70	2
5	67	1
6	63	3
7	60	5
8	57	5
9	53	1
10	47	2
11	43	1
12	40	2
13	37	1
14	33	2
Total of student		30

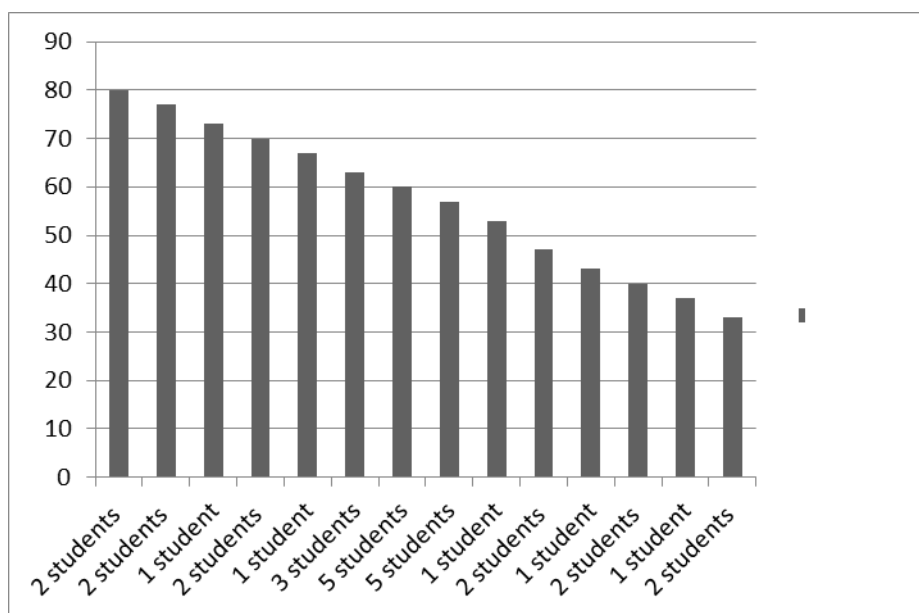


Figure 1

From the table and figure above, it can be seen that there were two students got 80, two students got 77, one student got 73, two students got 70, one student got 67, three students got 63, five students got 60, five students got 57, one student got 53, two students 47, one student got 43, two students got 40, one student got 37, and two students got 33. These explanations can be seen in the following table and figure:

b. Percentage of students' ability category.

Table 4. The Percentage Result of Students' Score Classification

Level of Ability	Frequency (f)	Percentage (P)
Excellent	2	6.66%
Good	7	23.33%
Fair	11	36.66%
Poor	7	23.33%
Very Poor	3	10%
Total	30	100%

Table above shows that majority students` ability in using subject-verb agreement in simple present tense, simple past tense and present perfect tense fell in fair category (36%), followed by good and poor category that have the same percentage (23.33%). Very poor category is the next one with (10%) students in this place. The last was Excellent in which there were only (6.66%) students who got this criterion.

## **F. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

### **Conclusion**

The result of the data analysis of students` ability in using subject-verb agreement of the eighth grade students of SMP Islamiyah Kotaagung was: the students` abilities in subject-verb agreement that had excellent level were 2 students by **6.66 %**, the students` ability in subject-verb agreement that had good level were 7 students by **23.33 %**, the students` ability in subject-verb agreement that had fair level were 11 students by **36.66 %**, the students` ability in subject-verb agreement that had poor level were 7 students by **23.33 %**, and the students` ability in subject-verb agreement that had very poor level were 3 students by **10%**. Based on the result of the data above, it was found that the students` ability in using subject-verb agreement of the eighth grade students of SMP Islamiyah Kotaagung in the academic year of 2016/2017 had fair level by mean score 58.03.

### **Suggestion**

The researcher would like to deliver some suggestions, they are:

1. For the teacher
  - a. The teacher should be creative in teaching subject-verb agreement. For instance, the teacher can apply a method, so all of the students can participate in learning activity.
  - b. The teacher may explain the rules of subject-verb agreement step by step clearly.

c. The teacher should give motivation to the students, how the important the use of subject-verb agreement is.

2. For the students

a. The students should have high motivation, pretension, and curiosity to learn something in learning English, especially about subejct-vereb agreement.

b. The students should be active in the class, such as in asking and answering, discussion, and so on especially about subject-verg agreement material.

c. The students should understand about the rules of subject-verb agreement.

d. The students have to keep practicing of the use of subject-verb agreement well.

3. For the other researcher

a. This research was about an analysis of students' ability in using subject-verb agreement of the eighth grade students at the first semester of SMP Islamiyah Kotaagung in the academic year of 2016/2017. The researcher hopes that this research can be used as a reference for a research about subject-verb agreement with different objectives, sample, and methodology.

b. To next researcher can do analysis another parts of subject-verb agreement.

4. For the readers

After reading this thesis, the readers are hoped to get information, knowledge, and advantages especially about the use of subject-verb agreement in simple present tense, simple past tense and present perfect tense.

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