

## **SOME SYNTACTIC ERRORS IN SOME SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF THE ISANGI TERRITORY (DRC): 2020- 2021. THE CASE OF THE USE OF SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT IN ENGLISH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article examined Some Syntactic Errors in Some Secondary Schools of the Isangi Territory (DRC): 2020- 2021. The Case of the Use of Subject-Verb Agreement in English. The population of the study consisted of 15 teachers of English with the ratio of one teacher per school and 150 pupils of sixth form; i.e., 10 pupils per school. Moreover, the participants were chosen randomly. The analysis of the results showed that the syntactic error had two principal causes, that is, interlingual and intralingual. But intralingual was the most dominant. And these two causes have pushed them to make three main subject-verb agreement errors, notably omission, addition, and substitution errors. And also the pupils of the sixth form have presented a low performance in English writing because of the lack of qualified teachers.

**Keywords:** Subject, Verb, Agreement, Pupils of the sixth form, Teachers of English.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The present article focuses on the findings of the errors made by both teachers of English and their respective pupils of the sixth form on the Use of Subject- Verb Agreement in English. Findings are constituted of the statistics of types, frequency of errors, and their causes.

It is to be noted that the variables function, sex, and age are taken into account to present the statistics of those errors made. The present investigation took place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, more specifically in Tshopo Province, in the Isangi Territory. The population of the investigation consists of 15 teachers of English with the ratio of 1 teacher per school and 150 pupils of sixth form; i.e., 10 pupils per school. Moreover, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and its importance.

This study is a linguistic one, the descriptive method is used herein to describe a particular phenomenon happening in a particular setting by analyzing the writings of teachers of English and pupils of six forms in order to discover the nearer or further causes of subject-verb agreement error. Apart from the descriptive method, the quantitative method is used in this article since it helps me to reckon the number of teachers of English in the selected schools, the number of selected pupils of the sixth form, and, of course, the frequency of this syntactic error. In reference to approaches, EA as proposed by Corder (1974) will be used in this investigation since it will help me to collect and analyze the samples of sentences provided by the targeted groups in order to point out subject-verb agreement errors.

To achieve the aims of the present study, participants have been given a questionnaire with two series of questions, first, an open questionnaire (i.e., inviting free response) that had ten questions and second a closed questionnaire (i.e., a multiple-choice questionnaire) in which both teachers of English and pupils of the sixth form have been asked to choose the good answer. This questionnaire had predicted errors (thanks to contrastive analysis) and was often submitted to both groups for the identification of errors.

## I. Types of Subject-Verb Agreement Errors

In this point types of errors made by the targeted groups are given. Let's note that those types are given according to the two functions; i.e., teachers and pupils.

### I.1. Types of Errors made by the Teachers

This sub-section concerns the different types of subject-verb agreement errors made by the teachers of English in some secondary schools of the Isangi Territory.

The following errors have been observed:

**1. Omission:** omission errors mean linguistic forms to be omitted, by the learner because of their complexity in oral and written production. [www.journal.upy.ac.id](http://www.journal.upy.ac.id) writes that omission error is a type of error that happens because the learners still in lack of form or grammar that is supposed to have in the sentence but the learners omit or delete it.

For example, the omission of – s and – es in the following sentences, respectively –s for sentences 1 and 2, and – es for sentences 3, 4, and 5.

1. John **speak** English well.
2. Carol **play** football.
3. My mother **go** to the market.
4. Pamela **do** her homework.
5. The English teacher **studies** English grammar.

**2. Addition:** this means that applicants do not only omit elements but also add redundant elements. The applicants often overuse the third-person singular morpheme “-s/ -es.” [www.journal.upy.ac.id](http://www.journal.upy.ac.id) explains that addiction is a type of error that happens when the students add an unnecessary word/ phrase. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen argue that it is the “result of all-too-faithful use of certain rules” (1982: 156). They proceed by stating that it is regularization, which involves overlooking exceptions and spreading rules to domains where they do not apply. For instance, the addition of –s at the end of modal auxiliaries: Peter **mays** play football well and David **cans** write English.

**3. Substitution:** [www.link.springer.com](http://www.link.springer.com) writes that substitution error is the automatic replacement of one item in a sentence, strategy, word, or phoneme when the specific information is forgotten or unknown. But for the present study, we refer to substitution as the learner uses the other verb forms, words, or lexicon in place of another. Let use this example given by a teacher of English in the Isangi Territory to show how the substitution is done: my uncle **have** done his work.

This shows that the teacher is not aware that there is another inflectional form of the verb to have when conjugated in the third person singular in the simple present tense. The correct sentence is then; my uncle **has** done his work. So, substitution is at the level of the use of “have” in place of “**has**.”

## I.2. Types of Errors made by the Pupils

The analysis of errors made by the pupils has shown that the types of these errors, though with a higher incidence, are much similar to those made by their teachers. Examples to support each type are just given because theories for each type have already been given when talking about the teachers.

**1. Omission:** for example, the omission of – s and – es in the following sentences, respectively –s for sentences 1 and 2, and – es for sentences 3, 4, and 5.

1. John **speak** English well.
2. Carol **play** football.
3. My mother **go** to the market.
4. Pamela **do** her homework.
5. The English teacher **study** English grammar.

**2. Addition:** for instance, the addition of –s in the end of modal auxiliaries: Peter **mays** play football well and David **cans/ canes** write English.

**3. Substitution:** let use this example given by a learner of English in the Isangi Territory to show how substitution is done: my uncle is done **his** work.

This shows that the learner is not aware that the present perfect tense in English is conjugated by using the auxiliary “to have”. The correct sentence is then; my uncle **has** done his work. So, substitution is at the level of the use of “is” in the place of “has.”

## II. Distribution of Errors According to the Variable Function

This section discusses about distribution of errors according to the variable function and the frequencies for each type are given.

**Chart 1: Teachers' Error Distribution**

N <sup>o</sup>	Error Types	Frequencies	%
01	Overgeneralization errors	3	14.28
02	Teacher induced errors	3	14.28
03	Addition errors	3	14.28
04	Substitution errors	4	19.08
05	Omission errors	5	23.80
06	Faulty teaching errors	3	14.28
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>

The results from this chart show that the types of errors that the teachers made were omission errors at the rate of 23.80% followed by substitution errors at 19.08%. Concerning the causes

of this syntactic error, I observed that most errors had their causes intralingual at 66.67%, whereas interlingual at 33.33%. From this I presume that these teachers were not well taught when they were learning English before being employed as teachers.

**Chart 2: Pupils' Error Distribution**

N <sup>o</sup>	Error Types	Frequencies	%
01	Overgeneralization errors	3	8.57
02	Teacher induced errors	10	28.57
03	Addition errors	3	8.57
04	Substitution errors	6	17.14
05	Omission errors	5	14.28
06	Faulty teaching errors	8	22.87
TOTAL		35	100

This chart shows that most errors that the sixth form pupils have made were due to teacher-induced errors at the rate of 28.57% and faulty teaching errors at 22.87%. From this, I conclude that the teachers are the main sources of errors made by their pupils in using subject-verb agreement in English. This is due to their qualifications because according to DRC secondary school curricula, they are not accepted to teach in terminal classes. All results show that the rates of interlingual errors is 20% and 80% for intralingual. From these rates, it is observed that different the languages spoken in the Isangi Territory do not have a great influence on the learning of English, but the non-qualification of the teachers.

### III.1. Causes (sources) of Errors made by the Teachers

Errors made by the teachers of English in the Isangi Territory have got two main sources, namely Interlingual and Intralingual.

#### 1. Interlingual Errors

Interlingual errors are errors caused by the TL learner's mother tongue or other previously learned languages. Corder (1981) explains that these kinds of errors occur when the learner's habits (patterns, systems, or rules) interfere with or prevent him or her to some extent, from acquiring the patterns and rules of the second language.

Let's consider the omission of the morpheme – es and –s in the following sentences below to illustrate the influence of the learner's mother tongue and French to an extent.

1. My mother **go** to the forest today.
2. Pamela **do** her homework.
3. John **speak** English well.
4. Carol **play** football.

This error comes from the influence of whether French, vernacular languages spoken by the learner where special rules for the third person singular do not exist for vernacular languages and French for verbs belonging to the first, i.e., ending in –Er as manager, donner, visiter, etc.

Another example to illustrate the influence of another language on the learning of English is the influence of French where modal (verbs) auxiliaries are conjugated in the place of the main verb; i.e., the modal (verb) auxiliary agrees with the subject. For example, ils peuvent venir demain matin (they can come tomorrow morning). In this French sentence, the modal (verb) auxiliary (pouvoir: can) is accommodated with the subject "ils: they."

## 2. Intralingual Errors

Intralingual errors are errors that have as their main sources the target language itself. This can happen when a learner misuses items or rules. Richard (1974) explains that "intralingual interference refers to items produced by the learner, which reflects not the structure of mother tongue, but generalization based on partial exposure of the target language." This is shown through this sentence "he may help you to clean the house." Such an error has as its source the target language itself. The learner knows that when an English verb is conjugated in the simple present tense, it takes a special inflectional form in the third person singular; this is the reason why he/ she has generalized this rule to all English verbs including modals. For this kind of error, the learner is ignorant of the rule on the third person singular which states that modal auxiliaries keep their base form in the third person singular and the main verb which follows the modal auxiliary also remains in its base form. This type of error is an overgeneralization error, specifically addition (the learner adds an unnecessary morpheme where it is not needed). Let us add that these intralingual errors belong to different subcategories.

### 2.1 Incomplete Rule Application

According to [www.e.journal.hamzanwadi.ac.id](http://www.e.journal.hamzanwadi.ac.id), incomplete application of rules arises when the learners fail to fully develop a certain structure required in producing acceptable sentences; this type of error occurs when the student [learner] fails to learn the more complex types of structure because he/ [she] finds that he/ [she] can achieve communication by using relatively simple rules. Let us consider this example produced by the teachers of English in the Isangi Territory "David cans write English."

In producing such sentences, the teacher knows the general rule concerning the conjugation of English verbs in the simple present tense in the third person singular and this rule has been applied to this modal verb (auxiliary). But the teacher is ignorant of the particular rule on the third person singular which claims that modal (verbs) auxiliaries keep their forms in the third person singular and the same rule is applied to the main verb which follows a modal verb. This error may have many sources. To start with, the Overgeneralization of the general rule applied to all English verbs and **incomplete application of rules (teacher-induced error)**. Now, the correct sentence is: David **can** write English.

### 2.2. Overgeneralization Errors

This is the use of one form or construction in one context and extending its application to other contexts where it should not apply. [www.thought.com](http://www.thought.com) writes that overgeneralization is the application of a grammatical rule in cases where it doesn't apply. Let's illustrate it through this sentence produced by the teachers of English "The pupil **studys** English grammar."

Here the teacher is aware of the general rule on the third person singular which states that when a verb is conjugated in the simple present tense, the verb takes an –s ending. And he/she has generalized this rule to all English verbs. But the teacher is ignorant of the particular rule which states that the verb which ends in –y and –y is preceded by a consonant, -y is changed into –i before adding –es. When can add –s only if –y is preceded by a vowel. The right sentence is: The pupil **studies** English grammar.

### **2.3 Teacher-Induced Errors**

This sub-point does not treat teachers of English as learners of English, but it shows what happened when they were also learning English before they were hired as teachers.

According to [www.eltnotebook.blogspot.com](http://www.eltnotebook.blogspot.com), induced errors are those which are in some way provoked by the teacher or materials.

For me, induced errors are those provoked by the teacher's teaching materials and explanations. This may be illustrated by these sentences given to pupils of the sixth form: Peter may play football well and David can write English. These errors may result from the teacher's teaching materials or explanations.

### **2.4 Faulty Teaching (Teacher-Induced Errors) Errors**

This sub-point treats what happened when the teachers were also learning English before being hired as teachers.

Sometimes it happens that learners' errors are teacher-induced ones, i.e., caused by the teacher, teaching materials, or order of presentation (pedagogical procedures).

## **3. Lack of documentation**

This is explained by the fact that the teachers do not have documents that could help them in their teachings. Many teachers claimed that they do not have even an English grammar book for their teachings. The only references they have are their old English exercise notes which were sometimes taught by unqualified teachers and with plenty of errors.

## **4. No- teacher training**

Many teachers who are teaching in secondary schools of the Isangi Territory didn't attend universities or colleges and they explained that since they have been teaching English in this Territory, they have never had teacher training in order to help them improve their teachings. They continued by saying that each one is teaching from what he/ she got at secondary school.

Even those who attended TTC Isangi, Yangambi, and Yambula claimed that even there they were not well trained since courses were taught mainly during holidays and for a short period of time.

## **III.2. Causes (sources) of Errors made by the Pupils**

As mentioned by the teachers, errors made by the pupils have got two main sources, namely Interlingual and Intralingual. That is why, theories to explain each cause are omitted, but to exemplify them examples are provided.

### 1. Interlingual Errors

Let us consider the omission of the morpheme – es and –s in the following sentences below to illustrate the influence of the learner’s mother tongue and French to an extent.

1. My mother go to the forest today.
2. Pamela do her homework.
3. John speak English well.
4. Carol play football.

This error comes from the influence of whether French or vernacular languages spoken by the learner where special rules for the third person singular do not exist for vernacular languages and French for verbs belonging to the first, i.e., ending in –Er as manager, donner, visiter, etc.

Another example to illustrate the influence of another language on the learning of English is the influence of French where modal (verbs) auxiliaries are conjugated in the place of the main verb; i.e., the modal (verb) auxiliary agrees with the subject. For example, ils peuvent venir demain matin (they can come tomorrow morning). In this French sentence, the modal (verb) auxiliary (pouvoir: can) is accommodated with the subject “ils: they.”

### 2. Intralingual Errors

This is shown through this sentence “he mays help you to clean the house.” Such an error, has as its source the target language itself. The learner knows that when an English verb is conjugated in the simple present tense, it takes a special inflectional form in the third person singular; this is the reason why, he/ she has generalized this rule to all English verbs including modals. For this kind of error, the learner is ignorant of the rule on the third person singular which states that modal auxiliaries keep their base form in the third person singular and the main verb which follows the modal auxiliary also remains in its base form. This type of error is an overgeneralization error, specifically addition (the learner adds an unnecessary morpheme where it is not needed). Let us add that these intralingual errors belong to different subcategories.

#### 2.1 Incomplete Rule Application

Let us consider this example produced by learners of English in the Isangi Territory “David cans write English.”

In producing such sentences, the teacher knows the general rule concerning the conjugation of English verbs in the simple present tense in the third person singular and this rule has been applied to this modal verb (auxiliary). But the teacher is ignorant of the particular rule on the third person singular which claims that modal (verbs) auxiliaries keep their forms in the third person singular and the same rule is applied to the main verb which follows a modal verb. This error may have many sources. To start with, the Overgeneralization of the general rule

applied to all English verbs, and incomplete application of rules (teacher induced error). Now, the correct sentence is: David can write English.

## 2.2. Overgeneralization Errors

Let illustrate it through this sentence produced by the pupils of sixth form "The pupil studys English grammar."

Here the pupil is aware of the general rule on the third person singular which states that when a verb is conjugated in the simple present tense, the verb takes an –s ending. And he/ she has generalized this rule to all English verbs. But the pupil is ignorant of the particular rule which states that the verb which ends in –y and –y is preceded by a consonant, –y is changed into –i before adding –es. When can add –s only if –y is preceded by a vowel. The right sentence is: The pupil studies English grammar.

## 2.3 Teacher Induced Errors

This may be illustrated by these sentences given by the pupils of sixth form: Peter mays play football well and David cans write English. These errors may result from the teacher's teaching materials or explanations.

## 2.4 Faulty Teaching (Teacher-Induced Errors) Errors

Sometimes it happens that learners 'errors are teacher-induced ones, i.e., caused by the teacher, teaching materials, or order of presentation (pedagogical procedures).

**3. Unqualified teachers:** many problems that sixth form pupils face are due to the qualification of their teachers because some are almost unqualified to teach in secondary schools and in terminal classes for others.

## IV. Main Findings of the Study

After the analysis of the data, the study has revealed the following findings:

1. The majority of the targeted groups tend to translate some ideas into French or local languages.
2. Both teachers of English and pupils of sixth form encounter almost the same types of difficulties in using Subject- Verb- Agreement in English.
3. The notions on Subject- Verb- Agreement are not well taught in many secondary schools.
4. Differences between French, local languages and English on Subject- Verb- Agreement cause difficulties in both teachers of English and their pupil of sixth form in writing (and speaking to an extent as this was not fully tested) performance.
5. Pupils of sixth form and some teachers of English are unable to read and write English correctly.
6. Both of the targeted groups commit the same types of Subject- Verb- Agreement errors, i.e.; omission, addition, and substitution.



7. The syntactic errors made by both teachers of English and pupils of sixth form on the use of Subject- Verb- Agreement have two main sources, that is, Interlingual (at the rates of 20% for the pupils and 33.33% for the teachers) and Intralingual (at 80% for the pupils and at 66.67% for the teachers).

## **V. Remedies for Errors and Recommendations**

### **V.1 Remedies for Errors**

Through this research, it has been observed within teachers and pupils' answers three types of Subject- Verb Agreement errors, namely omission errors, addition errors, and substitution errors. Let's recall that omission errors are due to the omission of linguistic forms where they could be used. By contrast, addition errors are errors raised from the overuse of the third person singular morpheme. Finally, substitution errors are due to the use of other verb forms, words or lexicon in the place of another.

To avoid these errors discussed above on Subject- Verb Agreement, the teachers must insist on the teaching of the third person singular by giving correctly the general rule and the particular ones.

They need to teach their pupils (students) how to think and to use English as its native users. English as Foreign Language learners must accumulate knowledge about Subject- Verb Agreement; only in this way they can free themselves from the negative transfer or influence of their first language. Also both teachers of English and pupils of sixth form need to improve their communication skills in English; this could be an essential instrument for both to improve their writing skills.

### **V.2 Recommendations**

#### **V.2.1 Recommendations for Further Research**

From the findings of this study, researchers are recommended to:

1. conduct more researches on syntactic errors among students of different Teacher Training Colleges of the Isangi Territory using different tools as a questionnaire or personal writing on a given topic.
2. replicate the same study with too many schools in order to improve the generalizability of the findings.
3. involve in the study the same number of schools for private schools to compare the results with the present one.
4. conduct more studies on the investigation of syntactic errors among conventional, non- conventional, private secondary schools in order to establish the real differences and similarities.

#### **V.2.2. Recommendations for School Authorities and Pupils**

Some recommendations for school authorities and pupils are given based on the findings of the present investigation:

1. Teachers who are teaching English in the secondary schools of the Isangi Territory must do their best to attend universities or Training Colleges in order to improve their level and teaching.
2. Lecturers who teach in different higher institutions of the Isangi Territory need to have good time for their different English teachings in order to help their students to overcome errors that they got from their secondary school studies.
3. The existence of these errors shows that the learners have to ameliorate their writing. For instance, by giving them many exercises which can help them to improve their writing.
4. To give them texts for reading so that they can expose them in front of their classmates. These texts can be given individually or collectively. Krashen and Lee (2004: 10) write that "reading provides writers with knowledge of the language of writing, the grammar, vocabulary and discourse style writers use."
5. Congolese EFL learners in general, and Isangi learners in particular must have a basic knowledge of English verbs, grammar as well as writing skills.
6. Secondary school authorities need to equip their teachers with good English grammar books and dictionaries for their teachings.
7. The school authorities have to hire as teachers of English only those who have finished their university or Training college studies in English department.
8. Congolese government need to pay the same salary to all teachers in DRC in order to keep undergraduate and graduate teachers teaching even in villages.

## CONCLUSION

The present article was the findings on Some Syntactic Errors in Some Secondary Schools of the Isangi Territory (DRC): 2020-2021. The Case of the Use of Subject- Verb Agreement in English. The analysis of data shows that the learning of English in the Isangi Territory is very low since the pupils of sixth form have made 57.53% of errors. Among the 15 secondary schools investigated, only 1 school have made few errors. Concerning the causes of this subject-verb agreement error, it has been found that for both, the teachers of English and the pupils of sixth form, this error has two main causes; i.e., interlingual (at the rates of 33.33% for the teachers and 20% for the pupils) and intralingual (at the rates of 66.67% for the teachers and 80% for the pupils). And these cause them to make omission, addition, and substitution errors. As far as the variable age is concerned, it has been found that the teachers' age varied between 33 years old to 55 and for the pupils between 17 years old to 23. Through this investigation, it has been observed that the majority of the teachers were unqualified to teach in secondary schools. The variable sex shows that I had 102 masculine pupils and 48 feminine pupils as participants of the present investigation. It has been realized that masculine pupils made more errors (87.4%) than feminine pupils (69.9%).

From these results, I conclude that English language is not well taught in the Isangi Territory. And the principal cause is the lack of qualified teachers.

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