



# Noun-Verb Agreement Errors: A Putra Bangsa University Case Study

Dwi Lia Rakhmasari  
{[dwiliarakhmasari@gmail.com](mailto:dwiliarakhmasari@gmail.com)}

Universitas Putra Bangsa, Indonesia

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**Abstract.** As international language, English is learnt widely around the world including Indonesia. Learning language that is not originally spoken in daily activity is difficult especially if the language has different rules with their first language. For some Indonesian, arranging good sentences in English is so difficult since English has very different rules with their first language. The difference rules from their L1 and the target language matter because learners tend to get interference from their L1 when they learn new language. One of the most difficult to learn is noun-verb agreement in sentences. Using nouns in sentences is quite complicated. The difficulties are also faced by Putra Bangsa University learners. This study was mixing qualitative and quantitative methods as one with 153 participants. The data was taken from observation and multiple-choice test. This study found out, there were thirteen noun-verb agreement errors made by EL from Putra Bangsa University and three reasons of noun-verb agreement errors made by EL from Putra Bangsa University.

**Keywords:** Nouns, Noun-Verb Agreement, Errors

## 1. Introduction

As one of the most widely spoken language in the world, English is learnt by hundreds of countries and commonly used as a trade language or diplomatic language [1]. English is also the language of international communication, the media and the internet. According to the British Council, by 2020 about two billion people in the world will be studying English. Therefore, it is highly likely that if ones meet someone from another country, ones will both be able to speak English. English can help people communicate with global citizens. Nowadays, teaching and learning English in Indonesia become more popular since people realize the importance of English to open wider opportunity in the world.

Learning a foreign language is a challenging thing for Indonesian since it is a long-term process [2]. English Learners (EL) need to deal with the point of learning language, that is to transfer information. ELs need to make good sentences to transfer information well since good sentence structures provide us the clear written expression of one's idea. Unfortunately, EL in Indonesia cannot keep away from Bahasa Indonesia as their first language (L1) [3]. It becomes a crucial problem since L1 can interfere with EL grammar error [3], [4]. EL often depend on their L1 whereas the target language, in this case English, has very different rules from their L1. This tends to make errors while they are learning English [5].

The previous study has been conducted to find the error in thesis word class [6]. The L2 transformation and diversification [7] and the difficulty in comprehending the clause change [8], [9]. English sentences have some rules, one of them called subject-verb agreement. Subject-verb agreement forces EL to choose the correct singular or plural verb after the subject. The subject and verb in a sentence must agree in person and number [10]. It means that if the subject is singular, the verb must be singular; if the subject is plural, the verb must be plural. English sentences mostly use nouns as subjects. Nouns in English describe a person, place, or thing [11]. Nouns also can be used to express a range of additional meaning such as concepts, qualities, organizations, communities, sensations and events [11]. English nouns are little bit complicated for EL in Indonesia. According to their kinds, nouns are divided into common, proper, abstract, concrete, collective, and compound nouns [11]. In placing in the sentences, EL need to distinguish them into countable and uncountable nouns, and if they are countable, EL also need to categorized their plural form. Those rules tend to confuse EL in Indonesia since it has very different rules of their L1.

This happened to EL of Putra Bangsa University. It showed when the teacher made EL to choose between these sentences:

*The news is bad.*

*The news are bad.*

EL were still confused and mostly choose *the news are bad*, which is wrong. Students still have confusion about which noun is plural and which noun is singular. Learners admitted that they had difficulties on how to distinguish between singular and plural nouns. Whereas, nouns have varied types that need to be learned. Most EL are more concerned with the meaning of nouns than with their grammar. Subject-verb agreement errors in general had been explained in some experts. They found out that EL in Indonesia still have difficulties about subject-verb agreement [12], [13], [14]. It showed from the errors that students made in the class. Unfortunately, none of them specifically talked about noun-verb agreement errors. Whereas, the lack of knowledge about nouns, especially as subjects, has big tendency to make errors in sentences. In fact, nouns can convey a substantial portion of the information in most texts. This study is going to explain what kind of agreement between nouns as subject and verb that EL mostly make errors and the reasons nouns-verb agreement are difficult for EL.

## 2. Method

One hundred and fifty-three (153) English learners from six different classes participated in this study. This study was categorized into quantitative and qualitative method. Qualitative data can be obtained through participant/non-participant observation, open-ended, unstructured, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, diaries, testimonies, archived documents, records, notes [15]. Quantitative data can be obtained through postal, telephone or online questionnaires, Likert scales, or tests [15]. There were two instruments used in this study. They were participant observation and multiple-choice tests. Observation is one of the most important methods in researches. As a matter of fact, observation is regarded as the basis of everyday social life for most people; ones are diligent observers of behaviors and of the material surroundings. One may watch, evaluate, draw conclusions, and make comments on interactions and relations [16]. Participant observation was used in this study. Participant observation strives towards an “immersion” in a specific culture, preferably for a longer period of time, in order to acquire an insider understanding of this culture either as a (marginal) member or as a visitor [16]. As the researcher and the teacher all at once, participant observation was the easiest way to gain the data in this study. Observation method is described as a method to observe and describe the behavior of a subject and it involves the basic technique of simply watching the phenomena until some hunch or insight is gained [17]. The method assisted this study to find out EL’s specific culture and understanding about nouns as subjects and the agreement toward verb in the sentences.

Using multiple choice tests was also chosen in this study since it could obtain the percentage of EL’s errors. Besides, the use of multiple choice has at least three advantages [18]. Multiple-choice tests could obtain all the EL’s knowledge about noun-verb agreement since this study could make questions based on all of the type of noun-verb agreement rules in English. Multiple-choice tests provide a method of assessing a broad spectrum. It helped the study to assess large number of candidates. Multiple-choice tests also can be marked automatically using computers thus they have relatively low impact to the time.

Qualitatively, this study presented the data through verbatim quotes, categories, themes, metaphors, and conceptual frameworks to aid understanding. Quantitatively, this study presented the data through numerical format tables, graphs and figures to summarize some data to aid understanding.

## 3. Findings

This study obtained two findings agree with the research questions. The first finding is about noun-verb agreement errors made by EL from Putra Bangsa University. The second is the reasons of noun-verb agreement errors made by EL from Putra Bangsa University. Some studies about subject-verb agreement have been done by some researchers. This study is different from the others studies. Pandapatan (2020), Nurjanah (2017), Sepriyana and Kurniawan (2016) have explained about the difficultness of EL in Indonesia about subject-verb agreement [12], [14], [13]. It showed from the errors that students made in the class. Unfortunately, those studies have not talked specifically about nouns as subject and how they agree with the verbs. The object of this study is also different since this study enclosed EL from Putra Bangsa University. Here are the explanations about the findings obtained in this study.

## Noun-Verb Agreement Error

There are thirteen kinds of noun-verb agreements that may appear in the sentences. To obtain all of the errors made by EL, this study gave several numbers of a multiple-choice test. The test consisted of all kinds of noun-verb agreement that may appear in sentences. All of the questions use simple present tense since it is the easiest way to see how the agreement between nouns and verbs. This study sorts the noun-verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University from the highest to the lowest. Here are the noun-verb agreement errors from the highest to the lowest.

## Compound Noun- Verb Agreement Errors

Compound nouns are nouns consisting of two or more parts that are also bases [19]. Collective nouns enquire EL to analyse singular and plural forms when they come in sentences. In this study, EL were given 4 different multiple-choice questions that contained singular and plural concrete nouns then they had to agree with action verbs and to be. Here were the Multiple-choice questions given to the EL.

Table 1. Multiple-Choice Questions for Compound Nouns

Compound Nouns	Verb	
	Action Verb	to be
<b>Singular</b>	The water bottle keeps my coffee cold. The water bottle keep my coffee cold.	The full moon is the best time for me to go out in the night. The full moon are the best time for me to go out in the night.
<b>Plural</b>	Rainforests absorb more carbon dioxide than all other types of forests. Rainforests absorbs more carbon dioxide than all other types of forests.	French fries is my comfort food. French fries are my comfort food.

From that test, many EL still make errors in choosing the right answer. Here are the percentage of compound noun-verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University.

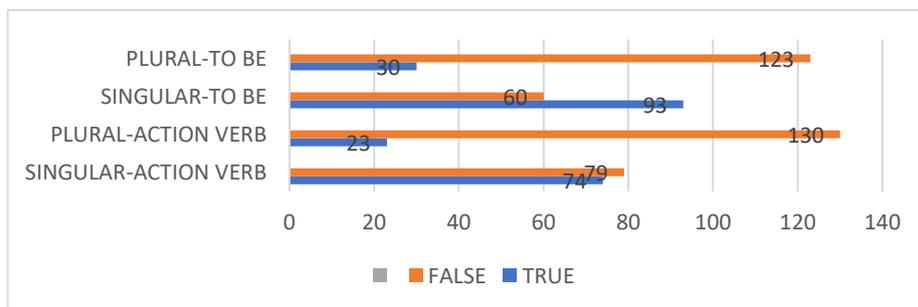


Figure 1. Noun-Verb Agreement Errors (Compound Nouns)

## Abstract Noun- Verb Agreement Errors

Abstract nouns are words about nonphysical ideas that cannot be perceived through the senses [20]. In making abstract nouns as subjects, EL requires to analyse singular and plural forms when they come in sentences. In this study, EL were given 4 different multiple-choice questions that contained singular and plural abstract nouns then they had to agree with action verbs and to be. Here were the Multiple-choice questions given to the EL.

Table 2. Multiple-Choice Questions for Abstract Nouns

Abstract Nouns	Verb	
	Action Verb	to be
<b>Singular</b>	Imagination play important role of my career. Imagination plays important role of my career.	Good education is the best investment in Indonesian's future. Good education are the best investment in Indonesian's future.
<b>Plural</b>	My mother's advices changes their lives.	Your suggestions is very important to me. Your suggestions are very important to me.

From that test, Many EL still make errors in choosing the right answer. Here are the percentage of abstract noun-verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University.

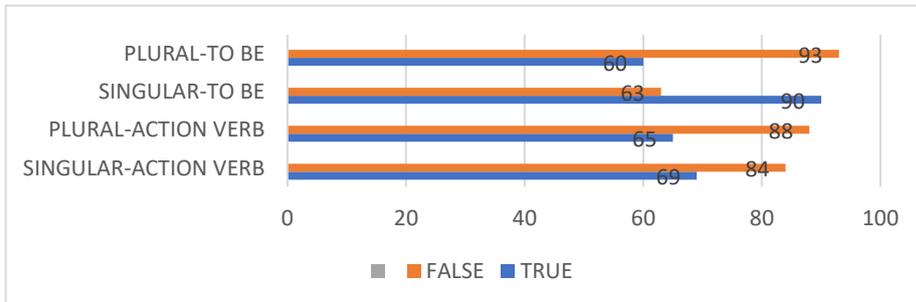


Figure 2. Noun-Verb Agreement Errors (Abstract Nouns)

### Common Noun-Verb Agreement Errors

Common nouns are nouns discussed about general things [21]. Common nouns mostly are countable. EL requires to analyst singular and plural forms when they come in sentences. In this study, EL were given 4 different multiple-choice questions that contained singular and plural common nouns then they had to agree with action verb and to be. Here were the Multiple-choice questions given to the EL.

Table 3. Multiple-Choice Questions for Common Nouns

Common Nouns	Verb	
	Action Verb	to be
Singular	The president works in white house.	This company is my dream place to work.
	The president work in white house.	This company are my dream place to work.
Plural	The birds fly from tree to tree.	The magazines is on the floor.
	The birds flies tree to tree.	The magazines are on the floor.

From that test, Many EL still make errors in choosing the right answer. Here are the percentage of common noun-verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University.

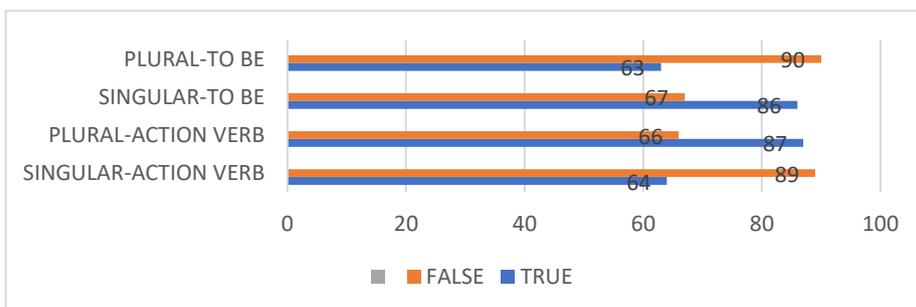


Figure 3. Noun-Verb Agreement Errors (Common Nouns)

### Collective Noun-Verb Agreement Errors

Collective nouns are noun that appears singular in formal shape but denotes a group of persons or objects [19]. Collective nouns enquire EL to analyst singular and plural forms when they come in sentences. In this study, EL were given 4 different multiple-choice questions that contained singular and plural concrete nouns then they had to agree with action verbs and to be. Here were the Multiple-choice questions given to the EL.

Table 4. Multiple-Choice Questions for Collective Nouns

Collective Nouns	Action Verb	Verb to be
<b>Singular</b>	My family always walks to the store My family always walk to the Store	The jury is in Safari hotel right now. The jury are in Safari hotel right now.
<b>Plural</b>	The crowds gets ready for the final round. The crowds get ready for the final round.	The faculties is of different minds on the subject of pass-fail courses. The faculties are of different minds on the subject of pass-fail courses.

From that test, Many EL still make errors in choosing the right answer. Here are the percentage of collective noun-verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University.

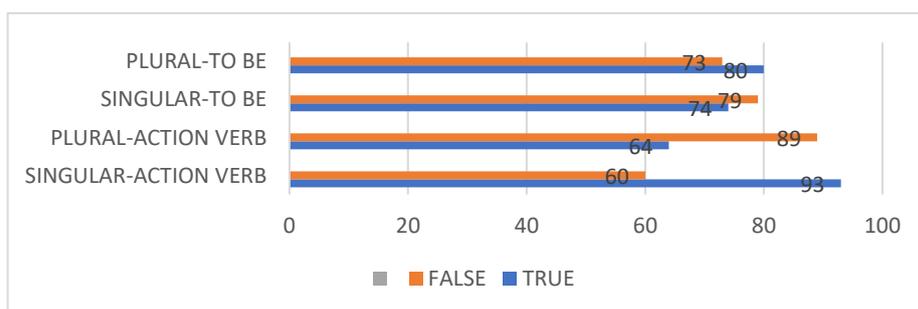


Figure 4. Noun-Verb Agreement Errors (Collective Nouns)

### Proper Noun-Verb Agreement Errors

Proper nouns are words discussed about specific things [21]. Proper nouns mostly are countable. EL requires to analyst singular and plural forms when they come in sentences. In this study, EL were given 4 different multiple-choice questions that contained singular and plural proper nouns then they had to agree with action verb and to be. Here were the Multiple-choice questions given to the EL.

Table 5. Multiple-Choice Questions for Proper Nouns

Proper Nouns	Action Verb	Verb to be
<b>Singular</b>	Dr Prakash research about the different between errors and mistakes. Dr Prakash researches about the different between errors and mistakes.	Lisa is my friend since high school. Lisa are my friend since high school.
<b>Plural</b>	The Americans always dines at a burger shop. The Americans always dine at a burger shop.	The Great Lakes are home to fascinating birds and fish. The Great Lakes is home to fascinating birds and fish

From that test, Many EL still make errors in choosing the right answer. Here are the percentage of proper noun-verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University.



Figure 5. Noun-Verb Agreement Errors (Proper Nouns)

### Possessive Nouns-Verb Agreement Errors

Possessive nouns the form of a noun used to indicate ownership or possession [22]. The possessive nouns represent the owners of something and usually comes right before another noun representing what they own. In this study, EL were given 4 different multiple-choice questions that contained singular and plural possessive nouns then they had to agree with action verbs and to be. Here were the Multiple-choice questions given to the EL.

Table 6. Multiple-Choice Questions for Possessive Nouns

Possessive Nouns	Verb	
	Action Verb	to be
<b>Singular</b>	The largest capital cities of Asia have the biggest income per capita. The largest capital cities of Asia has the biggest income per capita.	My house's front door is painted green. My house's front door are painted green.
<b>Plural</b>	Ilia's dogs runs away every morning. They try to can find each of them every day. Ilia's dogs run away every morning. They try to can find each of them every day.	The steering wheel of my cars are the best. The steering wheel of my cars is the best.

From that test, Many EL still make errors in choosing the right answer. Here are the percentage of trick-singular noun-verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University.

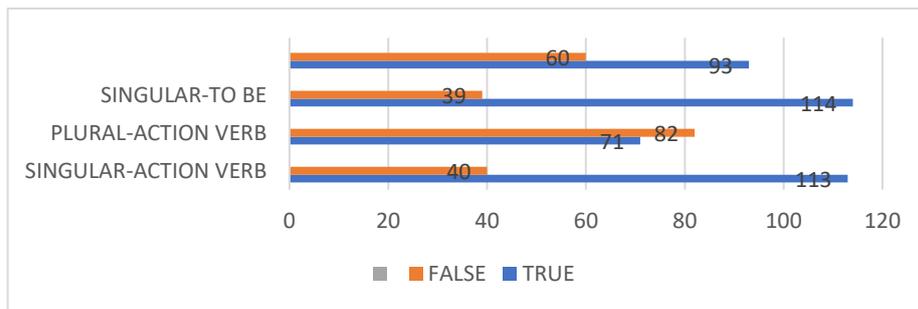


Figure 6. Noun-Verb Agreement Errors (Possessive Nouns)

### Concrete Noun-Verb Agreement Errors

Concrete nouns are words about physical things that can be seen, touched, heard, etc [20]. In making concrete nouns as subjects, EL requires to analyst singular and plural forms when they come in sentences. In this study, EL were given 4 different multiple-choice questions that contained singular and plural concrete nouns then they had to agree with action verbs and to be. Here were the Multiple-choice questions given to the EL.

Table 7. Multiple-Choice Questions for Concrete Nouns

Concrete Nouns	Verb	
	Action Verb	to be
<b>Singular</b>	The chocolate milk in the refrigerator seem a bit old, I am afraid. The chocolate milk in the refrigerator seems a bit old, I am afraid.	Your dog is in my house. Your dog are in my house.
<b>Plural</b>	The rosses smells very good. The rosses smell very good.	Some pictures is on the floor. Some pictures are on the floor.

From that test, Many EL still make errors in choosing the right answer. Here are the percentage of concrete noun-verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University.

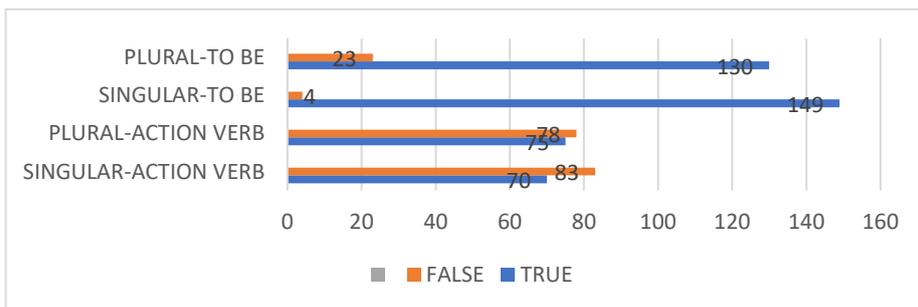


Figure 7. Noun-Verb Agreement Errors (Concrete Nouns)

### Noun End in “S” but are Considered Singular-Verb Agreement Errors

Some nouns are used only in the singular, even though they end in -s [23]. Here were the Multiple-choice questions given to the EL.

Table 8. Multiple-Choice Questions for Nouns End in ‘S’

Nouns end in ‘s’	Verb	
	Action Verb	to be
Economics tries to convince me to study more and more about it every single day.	Aerobics is very fun; you should try sometimes.	Aerobics are very fun; you should try sometimes.
Economics try to convince me to study more and more about it every single day.	Aerobics are very fun; you should try sometimes.	Aerobics is very fun; you should try sometimes.

From that test, many EL still make errors in choosing the right answer. Here are the percentage of end in ‘s’ noun-verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University.

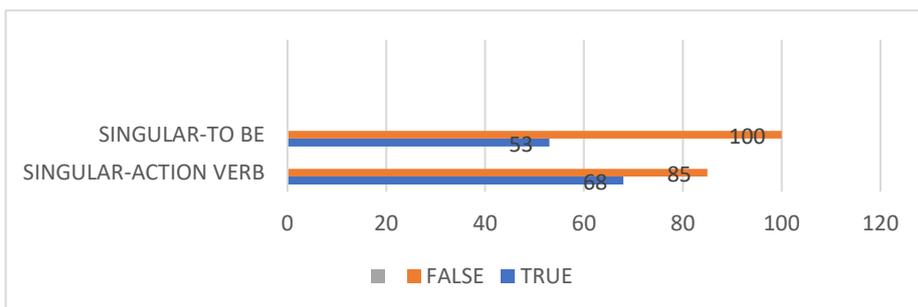


Figure 8. Noun-Verb Agreement Errors (Noun End in ‘S’)

### Irregular Noun- Verb Agreement Errors

In English, there are some nouns that do not follow the rules for pluralization. This is called irregular nouns [24]. In general, there is no way to recognize them easily. The only way that EL can do is to memorize them all. Here were the Multiple-choice questions given to the EL.

Table 9. Multiple-Choice Questions for Irregular Nouns

Irregular Nouns	Verb	
	Action Verb	to be
People buy things like cameras and MP4-players online these days.	People buys things like cameras and MP4-players online these days	The criteria is little bit confusing. The criteria are little bit confusing.

From that test, Many EL still make errors in choosing the right answer. Here are the percentage of irregular noun-verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University.

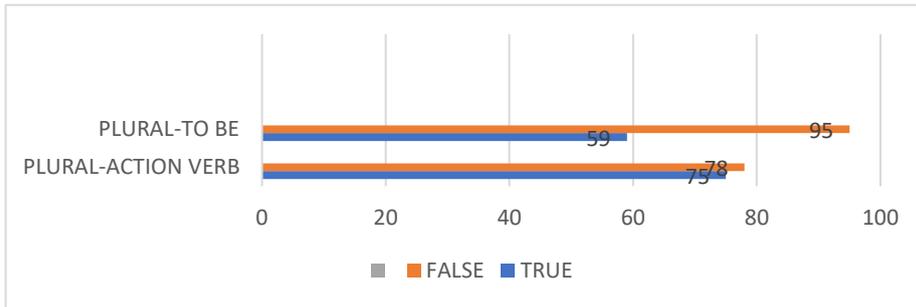


Figure 9. Noun-Verb Agreement Errors (Irregular Nouns)

### Trick-Singular Noun - Verb Agreement Errors

The trick-singular nouns are usually marked by *every* or *each* in sentences [25]. Even though these determiners are taught so many times EL are still have difficulties to recognize them easily. Here were the Multiple-choice questions given to the EL.

Table 10. Multiple-Choice Questions for Trick-Singular Nouns

Trick-Singular Nouns	Verb	
	Action Verb	to be
	Every parent always attends the meet.	Each moment is always the best for me.
	Every parent always attend the meet.	Each moment are always the best for me.

From that test, Many EL still make errors in choosing the right answer. Here are the percentage of trick-singular noun-verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University.

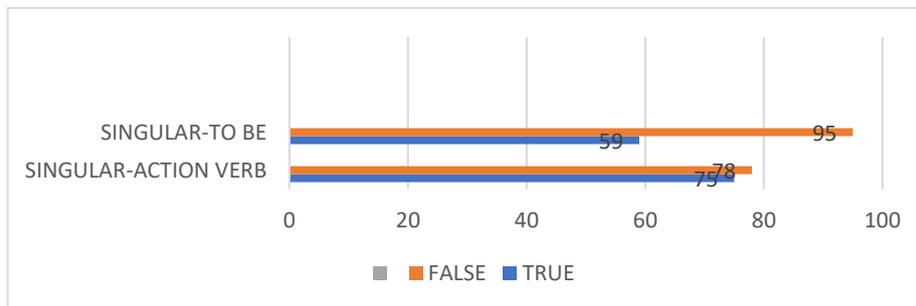


Figure 10. Noun-Verb Agreement Errors (Trick Singular Nouns)

### Gerunds - Verb Agreement Errors

Gerund nouns are a form of a verb that ends in -ing that is used as a noun [26]. Here were the Multiple-choice questions given to the EL.

Table 11. Multiple-Choice Questions for Concrete Nouns

Verb	Gerunds Nouns	
	Action Verb	to be
Singular	Sleeping on a very fancy bed of an expensive hotel still feels hard if you suffer from anxiety.	Baking in my lovely kitchen with super complete stuffs on weekend is my mood booster to face my super busy weekdays.
	Sleeping on a very fancy bed of an expensive hotel still feel hard if you suffer from anxiety.	Baking in my lovely kitchen with super complete stuffs on weekend is my mood booster to face my super busy weekdays.
Plural		

From that test, Many EL still make errors in choosing the right answer. Here are the percentage of gerund noun-verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University.

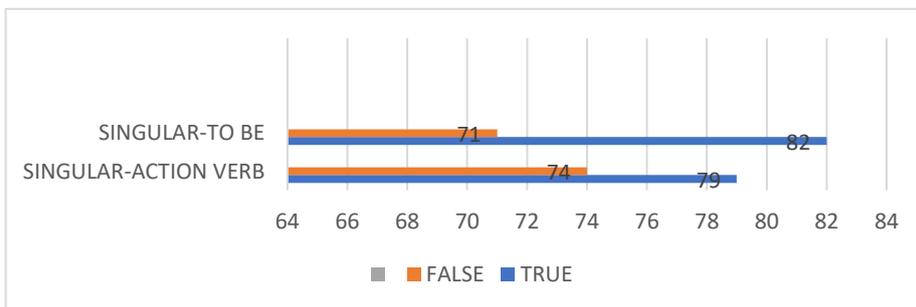


Figure 11. Noun-Verb Agreement Errors (Gerund)

### Nouns Joined by “or,” “nor,” or “but,” - Verb Agreement Errors

Two or more nouns joined by *or*, *nor*, *but* form a plural compound subject [27]. A compound subject contains *or* or *nor*, the verb should agree with the part of the subject closest to it. Here were the Multiple-choice questions given to the EL.

Table 12. Multiple-Choice Questions for Nouns Joined by *Or*, *Nor* Or *But*

Nouns joined by or, nor, but	Verb	
	Action Verb	to be
Either my mother or my sister has sent me these flowers.	Neither Maya nor William is a full-time worker.	
Either my mother or my sister have sent me these flowers.	Neither Maya nor William is a full-time worker.	

From that test, Many EL still make errors in choosing the right answer. Here are the percentage of noun joined by *or*, *nor* or *but* -verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University.

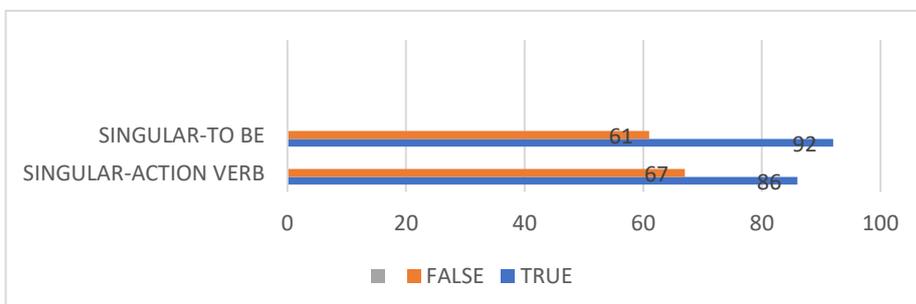


Figure 12. Noun-Verb Agreement Errors (Noun Joined by *or*, *nor*, or *but*)

### Nouns Joined by “And” - Verb Agreement Errors

Two or more nouns joined by *and* form a plural compound subject, which takes plural verbs [27]. Here were the Multiple-choice questions given to the EL.

Table 13. Multiple-Choice Questions for Concrete Nouns

Nouns joined by and	Verb	
	Action Verb	to be
Lulu, Rita, and Nesbit always waters the flowers in their backyard.	Tumkin and Maya is in Serbia right now.	
Lulu, Rita, and Nesbit always water the flowers in their backyard.	Tumkin and Maya are in Serbia right now.	

From that test, Many EL still make errors in choosing the right answer. Here are the percentage of noun joined by and -verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University.

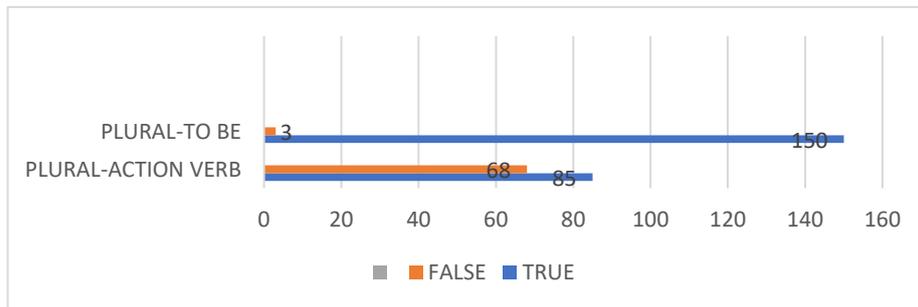


Figure 13. Noun-Verb Agreement Errors (Noun Joined by and)

### The Reasons of Noun-Verb Agreement Errors Made by Putra Bangsa University English Learners

Since still many noun-verb agreement errors made by EL of Putra Bangsa University, this study at least found three reasons why EL still made errors in pairing noun-verb in sentences. These findings are based on the observation toward the participants. Here are the explanations of the three reasons.

#### English Learners' First Language (Bahasa Indonesia) and English Have Different Noun-Verb Agreement Rules

Placing nouns in English sentences has complicated rules that may confused some English learners. Unfortunately, in learning English, EL from Indonesia especially EL from Putra Bangsa University tends to imitate rules from their first language, Bahasa Indonesia. Language learners often produce errors as a result of the influence of their L1, such as mapping its grammatical patterns inappropriately onto the L2, pronouncing certain words incorrectly or with difficulty, and confusing items of vocabulary [28]. This is known as L1 transfer or language interference.

EL of Putra Bangsa University admitted that they had difficulties since the target language in this case English have very different rules with their own language. The interference of their L1 often produced errors when they used English as the target language. The most significant errors were about noun-verb agreement. It is because EL required to distinguish countable and uncountable nouns. When it comes to countable nouns, EL required to make it singular or plural forms. In English, to distinguish the form, ones need to learn about the using or article whereas in Bahasa Indonesia they do not that kind of forms. Article in English that can be used are a / an, can only be used with singular countable nouns, the, can be used with all kinds of nouns (countable and uncountable nouns), plural countable nouns and uncountable nouns can be used with no article, but singular countable nouns cannot, plural countable nouns should be add with -s / -es (with or without article) plural countable nouns may come after numbers, plural countable nouns and uncountable nouns may come after quantities marker [29].

#### English Learners are Lack of Vocabulary

Based on the observation, EL of Putra Bangsa University as the participants of this study also said that they had difficulties to choose the right answers since they were lack of vocabulary knowledge. In order to understand the text well, English Learners need use their background knowledge. English Learners need to know the meaning of the text and able to make conclusion by using their own words based on their reading [30]. This lack of background knowledge of vocabulary made EL produce errors when they needed to pair nouns and verbs. Proficiency in English also depends on the knowledge of its vocabulary possessed by the second and foreign language learners and even the native speakers [31]. Though developing the vocabulary is vital, it poses several problems, especially, to non-native students of English. Furthermore, vocabulary is important factor for language learning because inadequate vocabulary knowledge leads the learners to encounter difficulties in language learning [32]. By developing ability to use vocabulary learning strategies learners can significantly increase their general English level. It is reasonable that EL in Putra Bangsa University still have problems in choosing the right answers in the questions.

## English Learners Tent to Forget What They Have Learnt

As English is categorized as a foreign language in Indonesia. English as a foreign language (EFL) means English is performance varieties and have no official status [33]. EFL (English as Foreign Language) used to describe English learning by non-native speakers in countries where English is not used in daily life. The recognition of English as a foreign language was based on government policy that was formulated through the act of the Parliament [34]. The expanding or extending circle refers to nations which recognize the importance of English as an international language, but which were not colonized by the countries of the inner circle, and which have not given English any special official status. In these countries, English is taught as a foreign language. Indonesia belongs to this group, which also includes China, Japan, Greece and Poland [34]. Since they do not use English in their daily life EL tend to forget easily what they have learnt. It is reasonable if EL are easily to forget the rules of English sentences that they have learnt. There are two kinds of language learning strategy [35]. The first is conscious learning, it refers to the way the language learners in improving language skills by focusing on the language forms. The second is subconscious learning or language acquisition, it refers to the way language learners in improving language skills by communication practice with authentic media. If EL from Putra Bangsa University never practice with one of those strategies to learn, it is possible for EL to keep making errors.

## 4. Discussion

As one of the most complicated parts to learn, nouns need to get so much attention. Nouns have important roles to make good sentences. Researching subject-Verb agreement errors has been done by some researcher. This study is different with the others research since it specifically talks about agreement between nouns and verbs. Noun-verb agreement is important to talk since nouns play important role in the sentences especially as subjects. Nouns form in English is difficult for English Learners especially for EL from Putra Bangsa University. EL feel difficult about nouns because they have very different rules with their L1. This study is really needed to describe the errors made by English Learners from Putra Bangsa University. This study showed a clear result that EL from Putra Bangsa University still have difficulties about nouns and at least have three reasons why EL from Putra Bangsa University made errors. The reason are nouns in English and Indonesia has different rules, EL lack of vocabulary knowledge, and EL tent to forget what they have learnt. This study is important to be done since it can help teachers to overcame the problems and find a good method to improve the problems.

## 5. Conclusion

Noun-verb agreement errors often happen for EL of Putra Bangsa University. This study found out the highest error came from compound noun- verb agreement and the lowest erroe came from noun joined by and in agreement with verb. Besides this study also found out that there were three reasons why EL made noun-verb agreement errors. They are EL lack of vocabulary knowledge, and EL tent to forget what they have learnt. This result can be used as a picture to research about how to decrease the errors from noun-verb agreement.

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