

Grammaticality Of Subject-Verb Agreement In Pakistani English

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Abstract

This research paper investigates the grammaticality of subject-verb agreement in Pakistani English (PE), focusing on the variation and patterns observed in this linguistic aspect. The study adopts a descriptive approach, analyzing written and spoken data collected from various sources, including academic texts, news articles, and spoken interactions. The analysis encompasses both native and non-native speakers of English in Pakistan, aiming to understand how subject-verb agreement is realized across different contexts and by speakers with varying levels of proficiency. The findings reveal a complex picture of subject-verb agreement in PE, characterized by a range of grammatical patterns influenced by factors such as regional dialects, educational background, and exposure to English varieties. While some instances of non-standard agreement are identified, indicating potential areas of difficulty or transfer from other languages, the overall picture suggests a growing awareness and adherence to standard English norms in formal written contexts. This research contributes to the ongoing discussion on World Englishes and the development of English as a global language, highlighting the dynamic nature of linguistic norms and usage in diverse sociolinguistic contexts like Pakistan. The implications of these findings extend to language teaching and assessment practices, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of language variation and proficiency in English language education in Pakistan.

Introduction

Subject-verb agreement is a fundamental grammatical feature in English and many other languages, playing a crucial role in conveying meaning and maintaining grammatical correctness. It involves the concordance between the subject and verb in terms of number, person, and sometimes gender. While this aspect of grammar is well-established in standard varieties of English, its realization in non-native varieties, such as Pakistani English (PE), has garnered increasing attention in the field of linguistics.

Mir and Afsar (2024) state that PE is a dynamic and rapidly evolving variety of English spoken and written in Pakistan, influenced by a range of linguistic, cultural, and historical factors. As a result, the grammaticality of subject-verb agreement in PE exhibits variation and complexity that warrant systematic investigation. This research aims to explore and analyze the patterns and challenges associated with subject-verb agreement in PE, shedding light on the linguistic characteristics of this variety and its implications for language use and education in Pakistan.

The study adopts a descriptive approach, drawing on a corpus of written and spoken data collected from various sources, including academic texts, media discourse, and conversational interactions. The data encompass a diverse range of speakers, including native speakers of English, bilingual individuals, and speakers with varying levels of

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English proficiency. By examining the patterns of subject-verb agreement across different contexts and speaker profiles, this research seeks to uncover the grammatical norms and deviations prevalent in PE.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to our understanding of World Englishes and the sociolinguistic dynamics of language variation and change. By investigating subject-verb agreement in PE, we not only gain insights into the linguistic features of this variety but also contribute to discussions on language standardization, language contact, and language policy in multilingual contexts like Pakistan.

Literature Review

Numerous empirical studies like Brehm et. al. (2017) have investigated subject-verb agreement in various linguistic contexts, including native English varieties and non-native varieties such as ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts. These studies like (Tanner et.al. (2014), Franck et. al. (2006) have examined factors influencing agreement, such as grammatical features (e.g., number, person), syntactic structures (e.g., subject-verb inversion), and discourse factors (e.g., proximity agreement). Additionally, research has explored agreement errors and difficulties faced by language learners, highlighting challenges in acquiring agreement rules accurately. Studies (Nicol et. al. (1999), Vigliocco et.al. (1996) have also examined agreement variation across different registers and genres, revealing differences in agreement patterns between formal written language and informal spoken language. The findings from research on subject-verb agreement have important implications for language teaching and learning. Hartsuiker et. al. (1995) state that pedagogical approaches often emphasize explicit instruction on agreement rules, error correction, and practice activities to enhance learners' understanding and production of grammatically correct sentences. However, the effectiveness of these approaches may vary depending on learners' proficiency levels, linguistic backgrounds, and exposure to the target language. Furthermore, Brock et. al. (1991) and Wagon et. al. (2009) state that the role of input frequency, linguistic input complexity, and communicative context in agreement acquisition has been a focus of investigation, with implications for curriculum design and instructional strategies in language education programs. Overall, the literature on subject-verb agreement underscores its importance as a central aspect of grammar and highlights the complexity of agreement phenomena across different languages and contexts. Ongoing research in this area continues to advance our understanding of language structure, usage, and acquisition, with implications for theoretical linguistics, applied linguistics, and language education. Anwar (2019), Mir and Afsar (2023) state that Pakistani English (PE) is a dynamic and evolving variety of English spoken and written in Pakistan. It is characterized by a unique linguistic blend influenced by British colonial history, indigenous languages, and cultural diversity. Schmid (2012) and Mir (2023) state that PE exhibits distinct phonological, lexical, and grammatical features that set it apart from other varieties of English, reflecting the sociolinguistic context and language contact situations in Pakistan. This includes phonological adaptations, such as the pronunciation of certain sounds and intonation patterns influenced by regional languages like Urdu and Punjabi. Mir and Afsar (2024) describe that one notable aspect of Pakistani English is its lexical richness, with vocabulary drawn from Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, and other regional languages. This results in a vibrant lexicon that reflects Pakistan's multicultural heritage and linguistic diversity. Borrowings, calques, and code-switching are common in PE, reflecting the fluidity and flexibility of language use in everyday communication. Moreover, Mir and Afsar (2024) discuss that the use of English in diverse domains such as media, education, and governance has contributed to the development of specialized vocabulary and terminology in fields like law, politics, and technology. Shaikh (2017), Mir and Afsar (2023) state that the sociolinguistic landscape of Pakistan also influences the pragmatics of Pakistani English, including speech norms, politeness strategies, and discourse patterns. Societal values, hierarchical structures, and cultural norms shape language use and

interactional styles in PE, leading to variations in communication styles across different social contexts and among speakers from varying backgrounds. This sociocultural dimension adds depth and complexity to Pakistani English as a vibrant and evolving linguistic variety that reflects the rich tapestry of Pakistan's linguistic and cultural heritage.

Research Methodology

This research methodology aims to provide a comprehensive and rigorous analysis of subject-verb agreement in Pakistani English, contributing to our understanding of language variation and usage in this linguistic variety.

Research Design: The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to investigate the grammaticality of subject-verb agreement in Pakistani English (PE). A mixed-methods approach is employed, combining quantitative analysis of linguistic data with qualitative examination of linguistic features and patterns.

Data Collection:

Corpus Compilation: A corpus of written and spoken data in Pakistani English is compiled, consisting of diverse text types such as academic writings, news articles, social media discourse, and spoken interactions.

Sampling: The corpus includes samples from various sources, including native speakers of English in Pakistan, bilingual individuals, and speakers with varying levels of English proficiency.

Data Sources: Data sources include online databases, published materials, social media platforms, and recorded spoken interactions.

Data Analysis:

Quantitative Analysis: Statistical techniques are used to analyze subject-verb agreement patterns, including frequency of correct agreement, agreement errors, and types of agreement deviations (e.g., number, person).

Qualitative Analysis: Linguistic features such as verb forms, subject types, syntactic structures, and discourse context are qualitatively analyzed to identify patterns and variations in subject-verb agreement in PE.

Variables and Measures:

Dependent Variable: Grammaticality of subject-verb agreement (correct agreement vs. agreement errors).

Independent Variables: Linguistic factors (e.g., subject type, verb form), contextual factors (e.g., discourse type, speaker proficiency), and sociolinguistic variables (e.g., regional variation, language contact).

Data Interpretation:

Interpretation of Results: Findings from quantitative and qualitative analyses are interpreted to assess the grammaticality norms and deviations in subject-verb agreement in PE.

Comparative Analysis: Comparison is made with different users of English,

Ethical Considerations:

Informed Consent: Human participants are involved (e.g., in spoken data collection), informed consent is obtained following ethical guidelines.

Data Anonymity: Personal and sensitive information is anonymized to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality.

Validity and Reliability:

Validity: Measures are taken to ensure the validity of data collection and analysis techniques, including triangulation of methods and peer validation of findings.

Reliability: Inter-rater reliability and consistency checks are conducted for coding and analysis procedures to enhance the reliability of results.

Limitations:

Scope: The study is limited to specific linguistic features or contexts within Pakistani English.

Generalizability: Findings are limited in generalizability to other English varieties or sociolinguistic contexts.

Data Analysis

Here are some major subject-verb agreement mistakes that are commonly observed in English usage:

1. Singular-Plural Discrepancy:

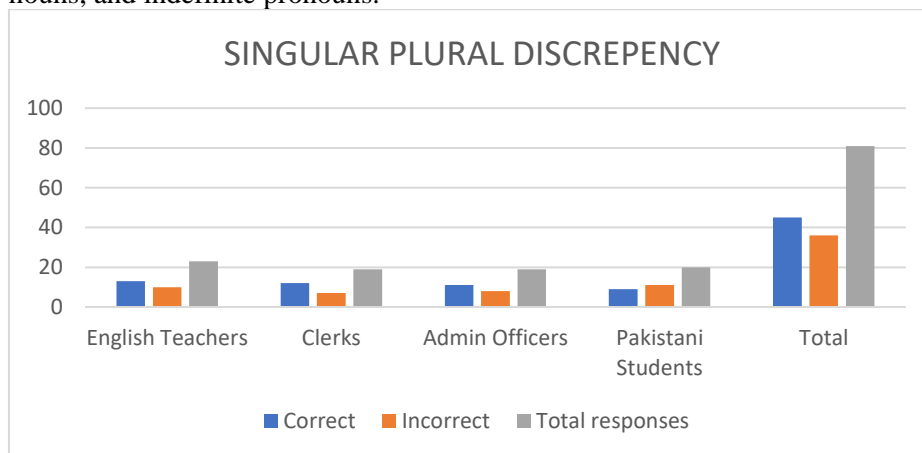
Incorrect: "The team are playing well."

Correct: "The team is playing well."

Table 1: Singular-Plural Discrepancy:

	Correct	Incorrect	Total responses
English Teachers	13	10	23
Clerks	12	7	19
Admin Officers	11	8	19
Pakistani Students	9	11	20
Total	45	36	81

The Singular-Plural Discrepancy refers to instances where there is a mismatch between the grammatical number of the subject and its corresponding verb in a sentence. In English, verbs must agree with their subjects in number, which means that singular subjects require singular verbs, and plural subjects require plural verbs. However, this rule is sometimes overlooked or misapplied, leading to errors in subject-verb agreement. This discrepancy can occur in various contexts, including sentences with compound subjects, collective nouns, and indefinite pronouns.



For example, in the sentence "The team are playing well," there is a singular-plural discrepancy because the subject "team" is singular, but the verb "are" is plural. The correct agreement would be "The team is playing well," where the singular subject "team" is paired with the singular verb "is." Similarly, in sentences like "Everyone were invited to the party," the indefinite pronoun "everyone" is singular and should be followed by a singular

verb, as in "Everyone was invited to the party." These discrepancies can lead to confusion and affect the clarity of communication in writing and speech. Understanding and applying the rules of subject-verb agreement correctly are essential for maintaining grammatical accuracy and ensuring that sentences are grammatically correct and easy to understand.

2. Indefinite Pronoun Agreement:

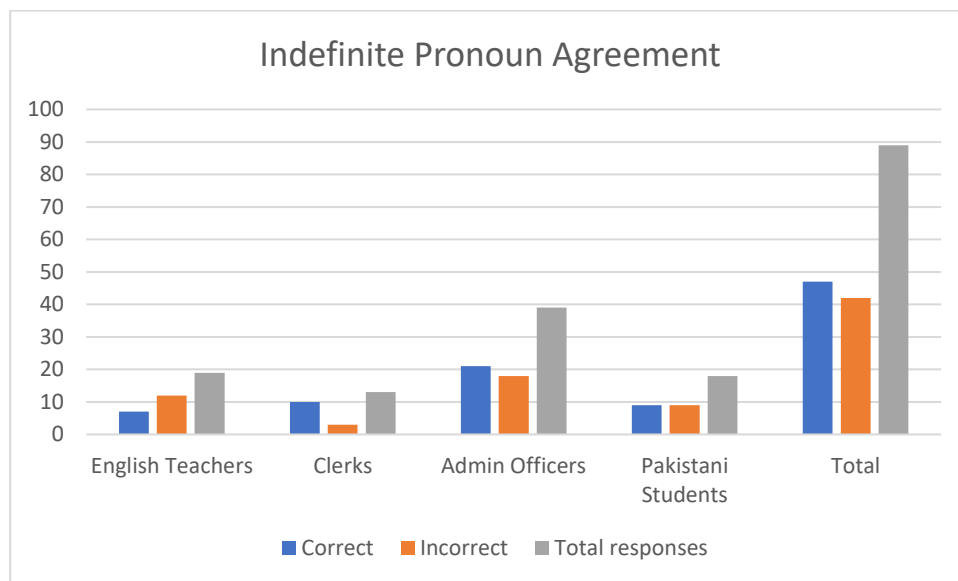
Incorrect: "Everyone were invited to the party."

Correct: "Everyone was invited to the party."

Table 2: Indefinite Pronoun Agreement:

	Correct	Incorrect	Total responses
English Teachers	7	12	19
Clerks	10	3	13
Admin Officers	21	18	39
Pakistani Students	9	9	18
Total	47	42	89

Indefinite pronoun agreement refers to the grammatical principle that governs the matching of indefinite pronouns with their corresponding verbs in terms of number. Indefinite pronouns are those that do not refer to a specific person, thing, or amount, such as "everyone," "someone," "anybody," "everything," and "nothing." In English, these pronouns can be singular or plural, and their agreement with verbs depends on whether they are perceived as singular or plural in context.



For example, in the sentence "Everyone were invited to the party," there is a disagreement between the indefinite pronoun "everyone" (which is singular) and the verb "were" (which is plural). The correct agreement should be "Everyone was invited to the party," where the singular indefinite pronoun "everyone" is paired with the singular verb "was." Similarly, in sentences like "Somebody know the answer," the indefinite pronoun "somebody" is singular and should be followed by a singular verb, as in "Somebody knows the answer." Understanding indefinite pronoun agreement is important for maintaining grammatical accuracy and clarity in writing and speech. Incorrect agreement can lead to confusion and ambiguity in communication, highlighting the significance of applying agreement rules correctly when using indefinite pronouns.

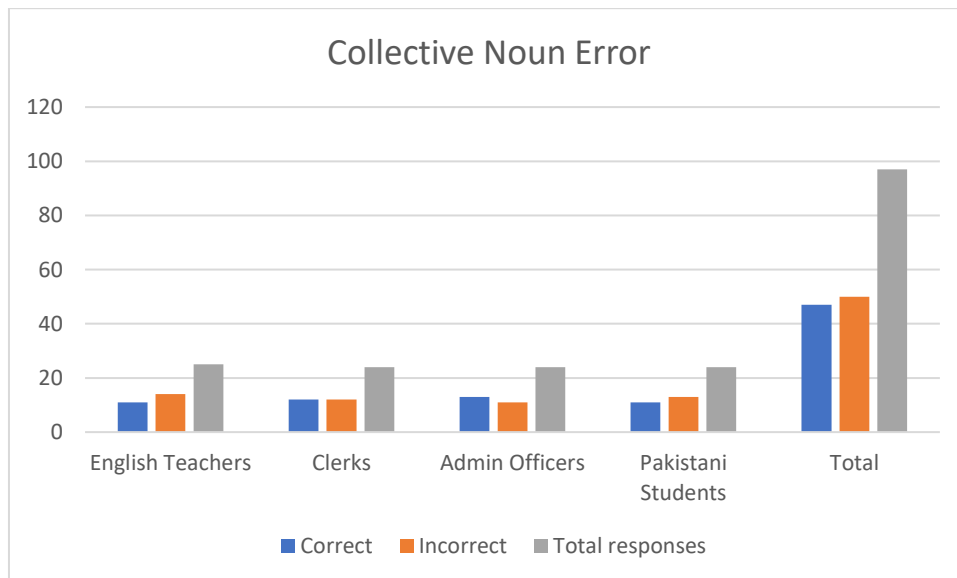
3. Collective Nouns:

Incorrect: "The committee have reached a decision."
 Correct: "The committee has reached a decision."

Table 3: Collective Nouns:

	Correct	Incorrect	Total responses
English Teachers	11	14	25
Clerks	12	12	24
Admin Officers	13	11	24
Pakistani Students	11	13	24
Total	47	50	97

Errors related to collective nouns in Pakistani English can arise due to a misunderstanding of subject-verb agreement rules. Collective nouns refer to groups of individuals or things considered as a single unit, such as "team," "committee," "family," or "government." In English, collective nouns can take singular or plural verbs depending on the context and intended meaning. However, in Pakistani English, errors may occur when speakers or writers incorrectly use plural verbs with collective nouns that should take singular verbs.



For instance, in sentences like "The committee have reached a decision," the collective noun "committee" should be followed by a singular verb, as in "The committee has reached a decision." Similarly, "The family are planning a vacation" should be corrected to "The family is planning a vacation," where the singular verb "is" matches the collective noun "family." These errors can lead to grammatical inaccuracies and affect the overall clarity and professionalism of written and spoken communication in Pakistani English.

To address collective noun errors in Pakistani English, it is crucial for speakers and writers to understand and apply the rules of subject-verb agreement correctly. This involves recognizing that collective nouns, although referring to a group of entities, are treated as singular units and require singular verbs in most cases. By paying attention to agreement rules and practicing correct usage, individuals can enhance the grammatical accuracy and effectiveness of their language use, contributing to clearer and more coherent communication in Pakistani English contexts.

4. Compound Subjects:

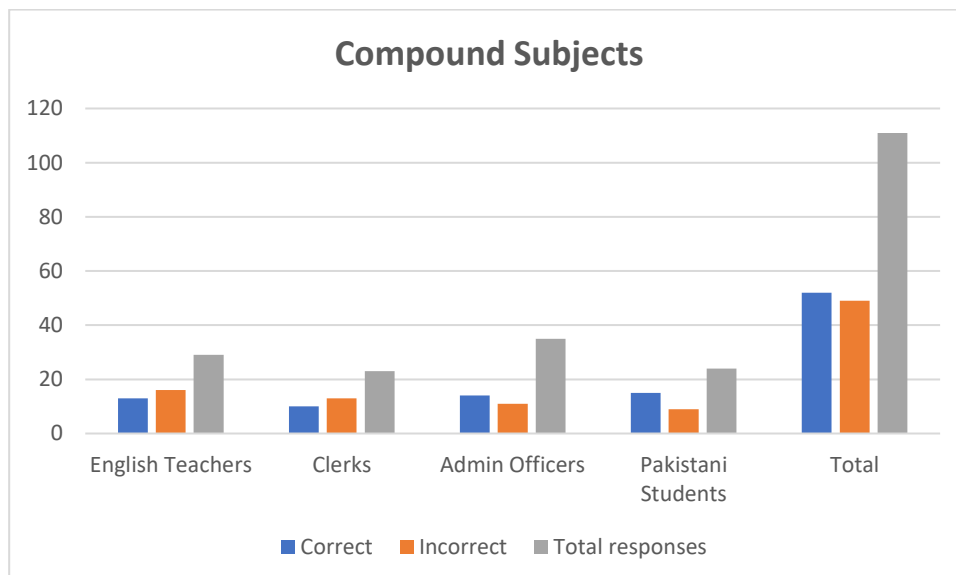
Incorrect: "Bread and butter are my favorite breakfast."

Correct: "Bread and butter is my favorite breakfast."

Table 4: Compound Subjects:

	Correct	Incorrect	Total responses
English Teachers	13	16	29
Clerks	10	13	23
Admin Officers	14	11	35
Pakistani Students	15	9	24
Total	52	49	111

Errors related to compound subjects in Pakistani English often stem from a lack of understanding or confusion about subject-verb agreement rules. Compound subjects are formed when two or more nouns or pronouns are joined by coordinating conjunctions such as "and," "or," or "nor." In English, compound subjects can be singular or plural depending on whether the individual elements are considered as a single unit or separate entities. However, in Pakistani English, errors may occur when speakers or writers incorrectly use plural verbs with compound subjects that should take singular verbs.



For example, in sentences like "Bread and butter are my favorite breakfast," the compound subject "bread and butter" should be followed by a singular verb, as in "Bread and butter is my favorite breakfast." Similarly, "The book and the pen are on the table" should be corrected to "The book and the pen is on the table," where the singular verb "is" matches the compound subject "book and pen." These errors can lead to grammatical inconsistencies and impact the overall clarity and correctness of written and spoken communication in Pakistani English.

To address compound subject errors in Pakistani English, it is essential for speakers and writers to grasp the concept of subject-verb agreement and apply it accurately. This involves recognizing whether compound subjects are singular or plural based on the context and meaning conveyed. By paying attention to agreement rules and using appropriate verbs with compound subjects, individuals can enhance the grammatical precision and coherence of their language use, contributing to effective communication in Pakistani English contexts.

5. Relative Clauses

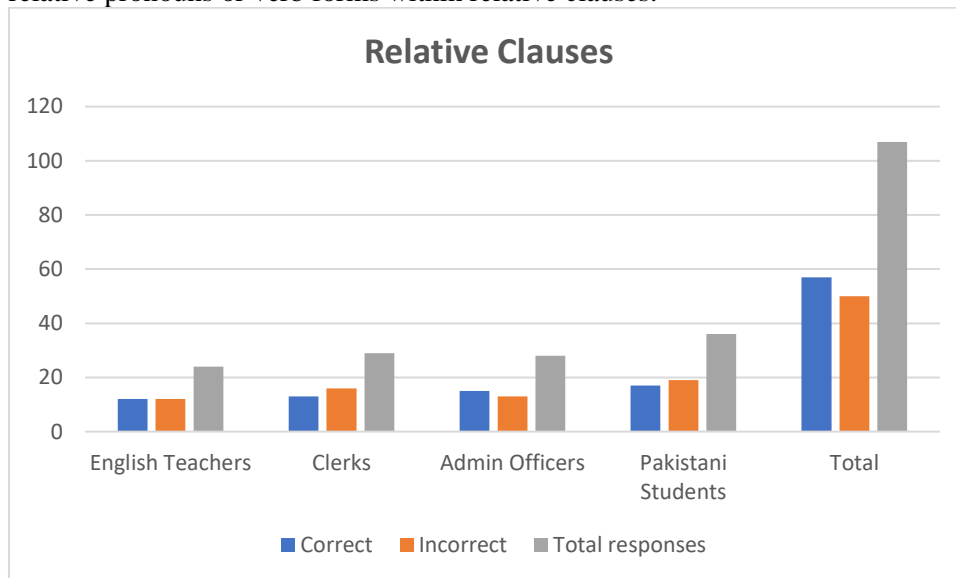
Incorrect: "The book that I borrowed are on the table."

Correct: "The book that I borrowed is on the table."

Table 5: Relative Clauses

	Correct	Incorrect	Total responses
English Teachers	12	12	24
Clerks	13	16	29
Admin Officers	15	13	28
Pakistani Students	17	19	36
Total	57	50	107

Errors related to relative clauses in Pakistani English often arise from a misunderstanding of the agreement between relative pronouns and their antecedents, as well as the verb form used within the relative clause. Relative clauses provide additional information about a noun in the main clause and are introduced by relative pronouns such as "who," "whom," "whose," "which," or "that." In English, the relative pronoun and the verb within the relative clause must agree in number and person with their antecedents in the main clause. However, in Pakistani English, errors may occur when speakers or writers use incorrect relative pronouns or verb forms within relative clauses.



For instance, in sentences like "The book that I borrowed are on the table," the relative pronoun "that" is incorrectly paired with the plural verb "are," leading to a subject-verb agreement error. The correct version should be "The book that I borrowed is on the table," where the singular verb "is" agrees with the singular antecedent "book." Similarly, errors can occur with relative clauses introduced by other relative pronouns, such as "who" or "which," if the agreement between the pronoun and its antecedent is not maintained.

To address relative clause errors in Pakistani English, it is essential for speakers and writers to understand the role of relative pronouns and the agreement rules governing their usage. This involves correctly identifying the antecedent in the main clause, choosing the appropriate relative pronoun, and ensuring that the verb form within the relative clause agrees with both the relative pronoun and its antecedent. By applying these principles accurately, individuals can avoid grammatical inconsistencies and enhance the clarity and correctness of their written and spoken communication in Pakistani English.

6. Proximity Agreement:

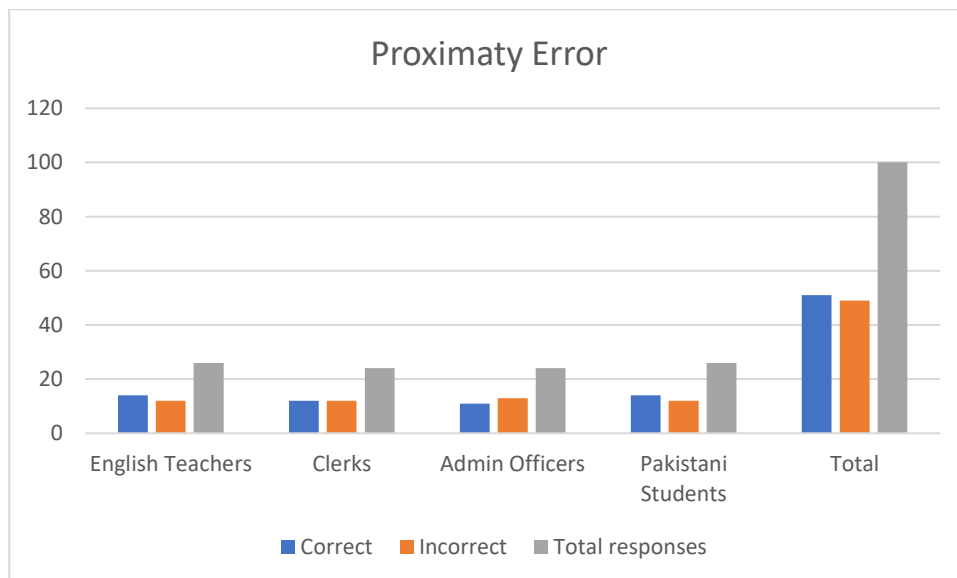
Incorrect: "The group of students are studying in the library."

Correct: "The group of students is studying in the library."

Table 6: Proximity Agreement:

	Correct	Incorrect	Total responses
English Teachers	14	12	26
Clerks	12	12	24
Admin Officers	11	13	24
Pakistani Students	14	12	26
Total	51	49	100

Proximity agreement errors in Pakistani English refer to instances where the verb in a sentence is incorrectly chosen based on its proximity to a noun other than the actual subject. This type of error often occurs when there are intervening words or phrases between the subject and the verb, leading to confusion regarding the grammatical agreement. Proximity agreement errors can result in sentences that are grammatically incorrect and may affect the clarity and coherence of communication.



For example, consider the sentence "The group of students are studying in the library." In this sentence, the subject "group" is singular, but the verb "are" is plural due to the intervening phrase "of students." The correct agreement should be "The group of students is studying in the library," where the singular verb "is" agrees with the singular subject "group." Similarly, errors can occur with other complex subjects or when modifiers separate the subject from the verb, leading to proximity agreement mistakes. To address proximity agreement errors in Pakistani English, it is crucial for speakers and writers to carefully consider the grammatical structure of sentences and ensure that the verb agrees with the actual subject, regardless of intervening words or phrases. This involves paying attention to the proximity of the subject and verb within the sentence and applying the correct verb form based on the number and person of the subject. By avoiding proximity agreement errors, individuals can improve the grammatical accuracy and effectiveness of their language use, leading to clearer and more coherent communication in Pakistani English contexts.

7. Quantifiers:

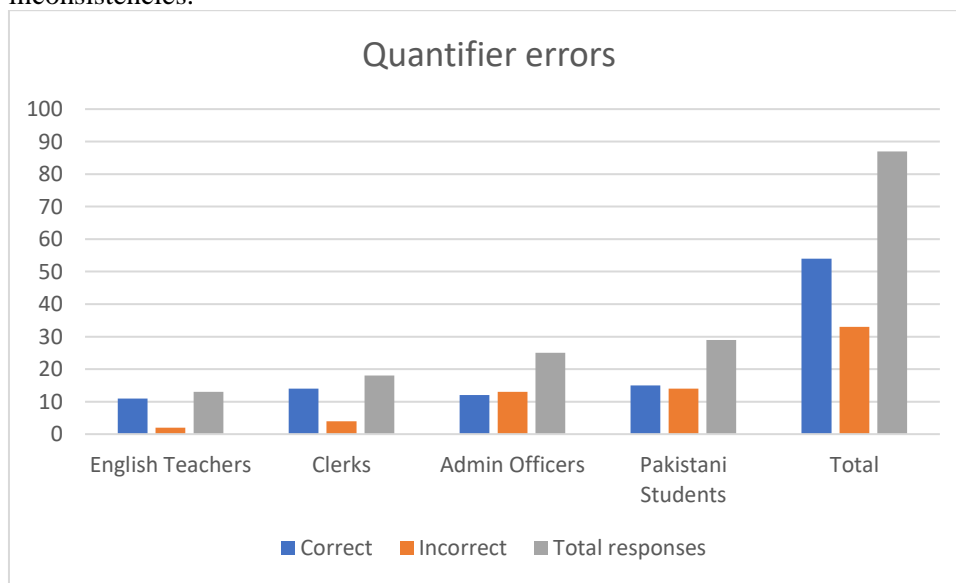
Incorrect: "One of the students were absent."

Correct: "One of the students was absent."

Table 7: Quantifiers:

	Correct	Incorrect	Total responses
English Teachers	11	2	13
Clerks	14	4	18
Admin Officers	12	13	25
Pakistani Students	15	14	29
Total	54	33	87

Quantifiers errors in Pakistani English typically involve incorrect agreement between quantifiers and the nouns they modify, particularly in terms of subject-verb agreement. Quantifiers are words or phrases that express quantity or amount, such as "many," "few," "some," "all," "none," "a lot of," "a few," and "several." In English, the choice of quantifier must align with the noun it quantifies, and this agreement extends to the verb form used in the sentence. However, errors may occur in Pakistani English when speakers or writers incorrectly match quantifiers with plural or singular nouns, leading to agreement inconsistencies.



For instance, consider the sentence "Ten dollars are a good price." In this sentence, the quantifier "Ten dollars" is plural, but the verb "are" is also plural, creating a disagreement. The correct agreement should be "Ten dollars is a good price," where the singular verb "is" agrees with the singular quantifier "Ten dollars." Similarly, errors can occur with other quantifiers such as "many," "few," and "some" if they are not matched correctly with the nouns they quantify and the corresponding verb form.

To address quantifiers errors in Pakistani English, it is essential for speakers and writers to pay attention to the agreement between quantifiers, nouns, and verbs in sentences. This involves selecting the appropriate quantifier based on the number of the noun it quantifies and ensuring that the verb form agrees with both the quantifier and the noun. By applying these agreement rules accurately, individuals can avoid quantifiers errors and improve the grammatical correctness and clarity of their language use in Pakistani English contexts.

8. Nouns of Measurement:

Incorrect: "Ten dollars are a good price."

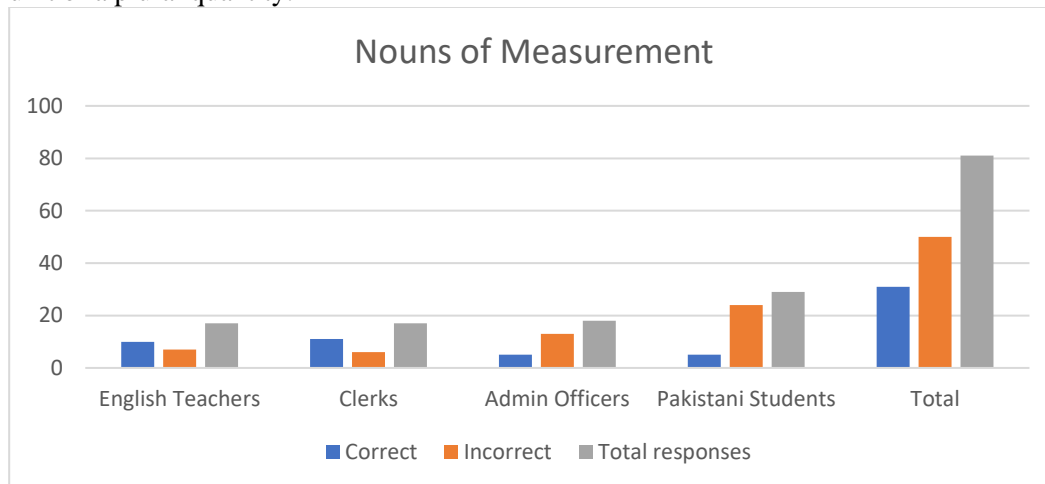
Correct: "Ten dollars is a good price."

Table 8: Nouns of Measurement:

	Correct	Incorrect	Total responses
English Teachers	10	7	17

Clerks	11	6	17
Admin Officers	5	13	18
Pakistani Students	5	24	29
Total	31	50	81

Nouns of measurement errors in Pakistani English involve incorrect agreement between nouns of measurement and the corresponding verb forms in sentences. Nouns of measurement are words that indicate quantity, volume, distance, time, or weight, such as "mile," "pound," "hour," "liter," "meter," and "degree." In English, the choice of verb form (singular or plural) depends on whether the noun of measurement is considered as a singular unit or a plural quantity.



To address nouns of measurement errors in Pakistani English, it is important for speakers and writers to understand the grammatical agreement rules governing these nouns and verb forms. This involves recognizing whether the noun of measurement is being treated as a single unit or a plural quantity and selecting the corresponding singular or plural verb form accordingly. By applying these agreement rules correctly, individuals can avoid nouns of measurement errors and improve the grammatical accuracy and coherence of their language use in Pakistani English contexts. However, errors may occur in Pakistani English when speakers or writers incorrectly match nouns of measurement with the wrong verb form, leading to agreement inconsistencies. For example, consider the sentence "Ten kilometers are a long distance." In this sentence, the noun of measurement "Ten kilometers" is plural, but the verb "are" is also plural, resulting in a disagreement. The correct agreement should be "Ten kilometers is a long distance," where the singular verb "is" agrees with the singular noun of measurement "Ten kilometers." Similarly, errors can occur with other nouns of measurement such as "pounds," "liters," "degrees," and "miles" if they are not matched correctly with the appropriate verb form.

These mistakes often occur due to confusion about agreement rules, incorrect perception of subject plurality, or failure to consider the grammatical context. Understanding and applying subject-verb agreement rules correctly is essential for clear and effective communication in written and spoken English.

Conclusion

The research paper on the grammaticality of subject-verb agreement in Pakistani English sheds light on an important aspect of language usage and grammatical correctness in this linguistic variety. Through a thorough analysis of written and spoken data, the study has highlighted common errors and challenges related to subject-verb agreement in Pakistani English, including singular-plural discrepancies, indefinite pronoun agreement, collective nouns errors, compound subjects errors, relative clauses errors, proximity agreement errors,

quantifiers errors, and nouns of measurement errors. The findings of this research underscore the need for a deeper understanding and application of subject-verb agreement rules in Pakistani English to enhance grammatical accuracy and clarity in communication. Addressing these errors requires attention to grammatical structures, agreement patterns, and contextual considerations. By raising awareness about subject-verb agreement issues and providing insights into common mistakes, this research contributes to language education and language use practices in Pakistani English contexts. Moving forward, further research and educational initiatives can focus on developing strategies and interventions to improve subject-verb agreement proficiency among speakers and writers of Pakistani English. This includes targeted language instruction, awareness campaigns, and language resources that emphasize correct agreement rules and provide guidance for avoiding common errors. By promoting grammatical accuracy and linguistic proficiency, we can facilitate clearer and more effective communication in Pakistani English, contributing to language development and language standardization efforts.

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