

Chapter 6: SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

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General Notes on Chapter 6

- **OBJECTIVE:** Correct use of final *-s/-es* is a common problem among learners of English. Even though students may “know” the grammar for using the final *-s/-es* suffix, they are still not consistent in using it correctly in their own production, both oral and written. To abet self-monitoring and development of correct patterns of production, this chapter focuses attention on final *-s/-es* and singular–plural distinctions, beginning with a review of some rules for spelling and pronouncing the final *-s/-es* suffix. The main sections deal with the problem of number: quantities and various aspects of singular–plural agreement between subject and verb.
- **TERMINOLOGY:** The term “expression of quantity” is used for any quantifier (e.g., *some of, a lot of, several of, two of*), determiner (e.g., *no, each, every, some, any*), or predeterminer (e.g., *all, both*) that expresses amount or size.

□ EXERCISE 1, p. 83. Preview: using -S/-ES. (Charts 2-1, 6-1, 6-2, and 7-4)

This is a kind of pre-test or preview. Give the students a few minutes to add *-s/-es*, then discuss. Possible points of discussion:

- grammatical explanations for final *-s/-es*
- pronunciation of *-s/-es*: /s/, /z/, and /əz/ (See the *Introduction*, p. xxiii, for pronunciation symbols.)
- variations in spelling: *-s* vs. *-es*; *-ys* vs. *-ies*
- basic grammar terminology: noun, verb, adjective, singular, plural
- the basic structure of the simple sentence: subjects and verbs and complements
- count vs. noncount nouns: items 5 and 6 have the noncount noun *water*, to which no final *-s* is added (see the following chapter, Chart 7-4)
- expressions of quantity: *every, nine, many, a lot of*

The students are assumed to be familiar with most of the above-mentioned points, so the class can provide much of the information. You may wish to tell them that you know this exercise is “too easy,” but that for the average learner, problems with singular–plural persist through many years of English study and use; hence, this review of basics.

Use the chalkboard so that everyone can focus on a word that requires *-s/-es*. Also discuss why other words do NOT have an *-s/-es* ending.

EXPANSION ACTIVITY (for use now or later in the unit): Using copies of any paragraph(s) you choose, have the students circle and discuss every word that ends in *-s*. (Some words, of course, are simply spelled with a final *-s*, e.g., *bus*.)

ANSWERS: 2. works /s/ = *singular verb* [Note: *every* is a “singular word” followed by a singular, never plural, noun; therefore, *day* does not take a final *-s* here.] 3. consists /s/ = *singular verb* [a present tense verb; subject: *system*] planets /s/ = *plural noun* 4. rotates /s/ = *singular verb* 5. animals /z/ = *plural noun* [*water* is a noncount noun, so it has no final *-s*.] 6. needs /z/ = *singular verb* 7. Students /s/, tests /s/ = *plural nouns* 8. wings /z/ = *plural noun* [Note: The bird pictured in the chapter heading is a swallow — specifically a barn swallow. Other kinds of swallows have shorter tails.] 9. Swallows /z/, creatures /z/ = *plural nouns* 10. Butterflies /z/ = *plural noun* [*-y* is changed to *-i*. Also: an adjective, *beautiful*, does NOT take a final *-s*.] 11. sunsets /s/ = *plural noun* [An adjective, *beautiful*, does not take a final *-s*.] 12. contains /z/ = *singular verb*, books = *plural noun* 13. Encyclopedias /z/, things /z/ = *plural nouns* 14. watches /əz/ = *singular verb* [*-es* is added, not just *-s*, and pronunciation adds a syllable.] 15. changes /əz/ = *singular verb* [Only *-s* added, but the pronunciation adds a syllable.]

CHART 6-1: FINAL *-S/-ES*: USE, PRONUNCIATION, AND SPELLING

- Most of your students are probably well aware of the elementary grammar in this chart but still sporadically or even frequently omit final *-s/-es*. The text seeks to reinforce student awareness of *-s/-es* by a review of rules and an emphasis on oral production.

Encourage the clear and correct pronunciation of *-s/-es* in your students’ speaking throughout the term. Perhaps mention that the use of the wrong pronunciation of final *-s/-es* contributes to having a “foreign accent.” Although there’s nothing wrong with having a foreign accent as long as others can understand the speaker, students may wish to work on minimizing their accents.

□ EXERCISE 2, p. 85. Pronunciation of final *-S/-ES*. (Chart 6-1)

See p. 13 of this *Teacher’s Guide* for information about voiced and voiceless sounds.

EXPANSION ACTIVITY: After the three groups of words have been practiced, you may want to try a game in which you spell a word aloud or write it on the chalkboard, and a student must pronounce it correctly, with special attention to the *-s/-es* pronunciation.

NOTE: Almost all students find *th* + final *-s* a difficult mouthful. Words you can use if you want to practice *th* + final *-s* follow:

voiceless /θs/: *months, tenths, strengths*

voiced /ðz/: *clothes* (Few words end in /ðz/. Others: *soothes, loathes, seethes*)

voiceless vs. voiced: *baths* (n.) vs. *bathes* (v.), *breaths* (n.) vs. *breathes* (v.)

ERRATUM: In the first printing of the student textbook, the second column in Group C contains two items numbered 30. Instead of 30 through 34, the second column should be numbered 30 through 35. This is corrected in subsequent printings.

GROUP A ANSWERS: 2. feeds /z/ 3. hates /s/ 4. lids /z/ 5. sleep /s/ 6. robs /z/
7. trips /s/ 8. grabs /z/ 9. wishes /əz/ 10. matches /əz/ 11. guesses /əz/

GROUP B ANSWERS: 12. books /s/ 13. homes /z/ 14. occurs /z/ 15. fixes /əz/
16. sizes /əz/ 17. pages /əz/ 18. unlocks /s/ 19. fills /z/ 20. ashes /əz/
21. sniffs /s/ 22. miles /z/ 23. rugs /z/

GROUP C ANSWERS: 24. arranges /əz/ 25. itches /əz/ 26. relaxes /əz/ 27. rises /əz/
28. laugh /s/ 29. days /z/ 30. pies /z/ 31. agrees /z/ 32. faces /əz/
33. quizzes /əz/ 34. judges /əz/ 35. asks /s/

EXERCISE 3, p. 85. Spelling of final -S/-ES. (Chart 6-1)

ANSWERS: 3. talks /s/ 4. blushes /əz/ 5. discovers /z/ 6. develops /s/
7. seasons /z/ 8. flashes /əz/ 9. halls /z/ 10. touches /əz/ 11. coughs /s/
12. presses /əz/ 13. methods /z/ 14. mixes /əz/ 15. tries /z/ 16. trays /z/
17. enemies /z/ 18. guys /z/

EXERCISE 4, p. 86. Pronunciation and spelling of final S/-ES. (Chart 6-1)

Have a student say a word that ends with the suffix *-s/-es*. You can supply the words or let the students make up their own, using plural nouns or singular verbs. Or take three cards with the symbols on them, show one card privately to a student, and have that student say a word with that ending. Everyone writes down the word under the symbol for the correct pronunciation. This exercise is useful for developing both listening and speaking skills.

If you wish, divide the class into two teams. The winning team has the most correct answers in the correct columns.

EXERCISE 5, p. 86. Pronunciation of final -S/-ES. (Chart 6-1)

Students could work in pairs and correct each other's pronunciation. They could note pronunciation in their books using the symbols /s/, /z/, and /əz/. Another possibility is to have each student make three cards with symbols /s/, /z/, and /əz/. When a student says a word with a final *-s/-es*, someone (the speaker, another student, you, the rest of the class, or everyone) holds up the card that represents the sound being said.

PRONUNCIATION NOTES: 1. encourages /jəz/ . . . students /nts/ 2. chickens /nz/, ducks /ks/
. . . turkeys /iz/ . . . eggs /gz/ 3. possesses /səz/ . . . qualities /iz/ 4. wages /jəz/ . . .
taxes /ksəz/ 5. serves /vz/ . . . sandwiches /čəz/ 6. coughs /fs/, sneezes /zəz/ . . .
wheezes /zəz/ 7. shapes /ps/ . . . sizes /zəz/ 8. practices /səz/ . . . sentences /səz/
9 shirts /ts/, shoes /uz/, socks /ks/, dresses /səz/, slacks /ks/, blouses /səz/, earrings /ɪz/ . . .
necklaces /ləsəz/ [Note: *slacks* has no singular form; there is no such thing as "one slack."]
10. scratches /čəz/ OR /čɪz/ . . . itches /čəz/ OR /čɪz/

□ **EXERCISE 6, p. 87. Use of final -S/-ES. (Chart 6-1)**

This exercise could be led by the teacher giving the cue, or used for group or pair work, with the students monitoring each other's pronunciation.

A note on sentence stress: In these sentences, the loudest (stressed) words are the **second** word and the **last** word.

ANSWERS: 1. A stamp collector collects /kts/ stamps /ps/. 2. An animal trainer trains /nz/ animals /lz/. 3. A bank robber robs /bz/ banks /ŋks/. 4. A dog catcher catches /čəz/ dogs /gz/. 5. A book publisher publishes /šəz/ books /ks/. 6. A tax collector collects /kts/ taxes /ksəz/. 7. A ticket taker takes /ks/ tickets /ts/. 8. A fire extinguisher extinguishes /šəz/ fires /rz/. [Note: A fire extinguisher is a metal bottle that contains a special liquid to spray on a small fire to put it out.] 9. A mind reader reads /dz/ minds /ndz/. [Note: This term is used humorously when someone seems to know what another is thinking without being told.] 10. A bullfighter fights /ts/ bulls /lz/. [Note: It is traditional to write *bullfighter* and *storyteller* (item 12) as one word.] 11. A wage earner earns /rnz/ wages /jəz/. 12. A storyteller tells /lz/ stories /riz/.

□ **EXERCISE 7, p. 87. Use of final -S/-ES. (Chart 6-1)**

The students should have fun trying to make generalizations about the given nouns. Provide additional vocabulary for the completions as needed. Keep calling attention to final *-s/-es*.

As an alternative format, you could give plural cues, e.g., *birds* instead of *bird*. Or you could vary singular and plural cues so that the students have to listen carefully for final *-s/-es* sounds. If you say "bird," the sentence has to begin with "A bird . . ." If you say "birds," the sentence must begin with "Birds . . ."

EXPANSION ACTIVITY: Add nouns for vocabulary discussion and further practice with *-s/-es*. For example, students often find it interesting and entertaining to find out what sounds animals make in English: a duck quacks, a cow moos, a snake hisses, a horse whinnies or neighs, a chicken clucks, a rooster (American) or a cock (British) crows "cockadoodledoo," a goose honks, a pig oinks, a mule or donkey brays, etc. You could also include nouns about professions (an architect, a welder, a day-care worker, a banker, etc.); machines or devices (a computer, a camera, a toaster, a bulldozer); and things in nature (fire, a planet, a volcano, a tree, etc.).

POSSIBLE ANSWERS: 1. A baby cries / drinks milk / sleeps a lot. 2. A telephone rings. 3. A star shines / twinkles. 4. A dog barks / runs / fetches. 5. A duck quacks / swims. 6. A ball bounces / rolls. 7. A heart beats / pounds / races / pumps. 8. A river flows / overflows / dries up. 9. A cat purrs / chases mice. 10. A door closes / shuts / opens / swings. 11. A clock ticks / chimes / tells time. 12. An airplane flies / lands / takes off. 13. A doctor heals / sees patients / prescribes medicine. 14. A teacher teaches / instructs / educates / lectures. 15. A psychologist studies human behavior / helps people with problems.

□ **EXERCISE 8, p. 87. Preview: subject–verb agreement. (Charts 6-2 → 6-5)**

Students should complete this exercise before studying the next section of this chapter. It contains the subject–verb agreement rules in Charts 6-2 through 6-5. You can give an overview of these charts when you discuss the answers to this exercise. Advanced classes that have little trouble with this exercise can review the material on pages 88–98 quickly. Students who have difficulty identifying subjects and verbs should be referred to Appendix Chart A-1.

ANSWERS: 2. gets 3. are 4. is 5. is 6. are 7. is 8. are 9. is
 10. is 11. are 12. has 13. has 14. was/were 15. is 16. speak
 17. are [also possible and common, but informal and substandard: *is*] 18. is 19. is
 20. is 21. is 22. like 23. are 24. Japanese (language) is 25. Japanese
 (people) have 26. are 27. works 28. are 29. is 30. is

CHART 6-2: BASIC SUBJECT–VERB AGREEMENT

- The grammatical term “third person” refers to this pattern:

SINGULAR: **I** = the person who is speaking, the “first person”

you = the person who is being spoken to, the “second person”

he/she/it OR **a singular or noncount noun** = the person or thing that is being discussed, the “third person”

PLURAL: **we** = the speaker and included persons, the “first person plural” form

you = all persons who are being spoken to or included in the audience, the “second person plural” form

they OR **a plural noun** = people or things that are being discussed, the “third person plural” form

- In (g) and (l): Errors in subject–verb agreement are common for second language learners (and to some degree for native speakers, too) when the subject is separated from the verb by an intervening noun of a different number. For example, in (g) the plural noun “parties,” being closer to the verb than the singular subject, may influence the writer to use a plural verb. This is a point learners need to be aware of to improve their self-monitoring skills in their writing.

□ **EXERCISE 9, p. 89. Subject–verb agreement. (Chart 6-2)**

Students must be able to identify the grammatical subject, then select the correct form of the verb. The grammatical subject may not be the logical subject. Subjects with *every* and *each* (e.g., *every man, woman, and child*) may seem to be plural because the expression can logically be seen to refer to many people, but the grammatical concept of *every* and *each* is singular. Naturally, this is a difficult point for learners.

ANSWERS: 1. astounds 2. are 3. is 4. are 5. agree 6. approves
 7. has 8. is 9. is 10. was 11. do 12. were 13. Is 14. has

CHART 6-3: SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT: USING EXPRESSIONS OF QUANTITY

- Explain how and why examples (a) and (b) are different: (a) deals with only one book, whereas (b) deals with more than one book, and point out how that affects the verb. Emphasize that the expression of quantity preceding the noun does NOT determine the verb in (a) through (f). It is the noun that determines the verb, not the quantifier.
- Refer the students to Chart 7-11, p. 125, for a list of expressions of quantity with *of*.
- In addition to *none of* [examples (j) and (k)], ***neither of*** and ***either of*** + *plural count noun* can be followed by either a singular or plural verb, with the singular verb usually preferred in formal English: *Neither of the boys **is** (formal) OR **are** (common informally) here.* [Chart 16-2 covers agreement when the subject includes paired (correlative) conjunctions: *Neither the boy nor the girl **is** Neither the boy nor the girls **are** Neither Tom nor I **am** (formal) OR **are** (common informally)*]

□ EXERCISE 10, p. 90. Using expressions of quantity. (Chart 6-3)

ANSWERS: 1. is 2. are 3. are 4. is 5. are 6. is 7. is 8. has
9. has 10. is 11. is/are . . . are 12. are 13. is 14. is 15. Do
16. Does 17. were 18. was 19. is 20. is 21. Do [Note: Approximately
70% of the earth's surface is covered by water.]

CHART 6-4: SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT: USING *THERE* + *BE*

- *There + be* is very different in meaning from *They are there*, in which *there* represents a particular place, substituting for a prepositional phrase of place or other place expression. In fact, it is not unusual to say “There are lots of people there.” Be sure students understand that the expletive “there” has no meaning in and of itself. The structure itself (***there + be + noun***) conveys the meaning that something exists.
- Stress that the verb agrees with the noun following *be*; *there* is neither singular nor plural.
- In (f): The use of a singular verb when the noun is plural (*There's some books on the shelf*) jars the ears of many native speakers, but it would seem that sometimes our brains don't always leap ahead to know that the noun following is going to be plural, so a singular verb slips out. Even some well-educated sticklers for correct grammar sometimes find themselves slipping up with a singular verb here. A singular verb is even more commonly used when the subject consists of two singular nouns: *There's a pen and a piece of paper on the desk.* vs. *There **are** a pen and a piece of paper on the desk.* OR *There's a man and a woman in the car behind us.* vs. *There **are** a man and a woman in the car behind us.* Formal grammar would insist on a plural verb in these examples, but a singular verb is exceedingly common in actual usage and is the form preferred by many native speakers in daily speech. With an advanced class, ask the students which verb, singular or plural, “sounds best” to them in these examples. If the singular verb “sounds best,” that might indicate a near-native familiarity with the structure. Also ask the students which verb they would choose if these sentences were items on a standardized test (in which case they should choose the one considered correct in standard written English, i.e., the plural verb).

□ **EXERCISE 11, p. 91. Using THERE and BE. (Chart 6-4)**

ANSWERS: 1. aren't 2. isn't 3. are 4. is 5. are 6. are 7. isn't
8. was 9. is 10. are 11. has been 12. have been

□ **EXERCISE 12, p. 91. Using THERE and BE. (Chart 6-4)**

Tell students to begin with "There is/are . . ." and not merely respond with a list of nouns. This exercise is intended only as a quick check to see if the students are having any problems with this structure. No problems are anticipated, but sentences with informal singular rather than plural verbs (e.g., *There's one door and three windows in this room*) might spur a discussion of actual usage of this structure in everyday spoken English.

CHART 6-5: SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT: SOME IRREGULARITIES

• The footnote about the word "people" may need further explanation. This word has two meanings, each requiring a different grammatical interpretation.

- (a) the *people* of Great Britain = the British (plural)
- (b) They are *one people*. = one nation (singular)

- (a) the *people* of Canada = the Canadians (plural)
- (b) They are *one people*. = one nation (singular)

- (a) *Most people* in Great Britain and Canada *speak* English. (plural)
- (b) *The peoples* of Great Britain and Canada *are* loyal to the Queen. (the peoples = two nations)

□ **EXERCISE 13, p. 93. Irregularities in subject-verb agreement. (Chart 6-5)**

The answers below also give the pronouns that would be used to refer to the nouns in question. Sometimes it helps students decide on number if they try to substitute a pronoun for the noun. For example, in item 1 most students easily recognize that the correct pronoun to refer to *the United States* is the singular *it*, not the plural *they*.

ANSWERS: 1. The United States (*it*) has 2. news (*it*) . . . is 3. Massachusetts (*it*) is 4. Physics (*it*) seeks 5. Statistics (*it*) is 6. The statistics (*they*) . . . are 7. Fifty minutes (*It*) is 8. Twenty dollars (*It*) is 9. Six and seven (*It*) is 10. Many people (*They*) . . . do 11. police (*they*) are 12. Rabies (*It*) is 13. The English (*They*) are 14. English (*It*) is 15. Many Japanese (*They*) commute 16. Portuguese (*It*) is . . . isn't 17. The poor (*They*) are 18. effect (*it*) . . . depends . . . Most people (*They*) are . . . there have been instances

□ **EXERCISE 14, p. 93. Review: subject-verb agreement. (Charts 6-2 → 6-5)**

This can be a fast drill; you say the cue, and students respond with *is* or *are*. Or students could work in pairs/small groups. In addition to oral practice, you could ask the students to write out complete sentences.

ANSWERS: 1. is 2. are 3. are 4. is 5. is 6. are 7. is 8. is
 9. is 10. is [the language] 11. are [the people/they] 12. is 13. is 14. are
 15. are 16. is 17. are 18. is 19. is 20. are [clothes are/clothing is]
 21. is 22. is 23. are 24. is 25. is 26. are 27. are 28. is/are
 29. are 30. is 31. are 32. are 33. is 34. are 35. is

□ **EXERCISE 15, p. 94. Error analysis: subject–verb agreement. (Charts 6-2 → 6-5)**

ANSWERS:

3. All of the employees in that company are required to be proficient in a second language.
4. A lot of the people in my class work during the day and attend class in the evening.
5. Listening to very loud music at rock concerts has caused hearing loss in some teenagers. [The subject is *listening*.]
6. Many of the satellites orbiting the earth are used for communications.
7. (*no errors*)
8. Chinese [the language] has more than fifty thousand written characters.
9. About two-thirds of the Vietnamese work in agriculture.
10. (*no errors*)
11. (*no errors*)
12. (*no errors*)
13. Every girl and boy is required to have certain immunizations before enrolling in public school.
14. Seventy-five percent of the people in New York City live in upstairs apartments, not on the ground floor.
15. Unless there is a profound and extensive reform of government policies in the near future, the economic conditions in that country will continue to deteriorate.
16. While I was in Paris, some of the best food I found was not at the well-known eating places, but in small out-of-the-way cafes.
17. Where are my gloves? Have you seen them anywhere? I can't find them.
18. (*no errors*)
19. (*no errors*) OR [possible but extremely formal: *are*]
20. (*no errors*)
21. Studying a foreign language often leads students to learn about the culture of the country where it is spoken.
22. (*no errors*)
23. Some of the movies about ~~the~~ gangsters are surprisingly funny.
24. (*no errors*)
25. How many people are there in Canada?
26. (*no errors*)
27. Which one of the continents in the world is uninhabited? [*answer*: Antarctica]
28. One of the most common names for dogs in the United States is Rover.
29. Everybody in my family enjoys music and reading.
30. Most of the mountain peaks in the Himalayan Range are covered with snow the year round.

□ **EXERCISE 16, p. 96. Review: subject-verb agreement. (Charts 6-2 → 6-5)**

ANSWERS: 2. are 3. keeps 4. makes 5. is 6. is 7. Does 8. Do
9. is 10. are 11. are 12. Are 13. is 14. beats 15. provides
16. oversimplifies 17. is 18. plan 19. concerns 20. is 21. is
22. appears 23. are 24. is 25. speaks

□ **EXERCISE 17, p. 98. Review: subject-verb agreement. (Charts 6-2 → 6-5)**

POSSIBLE ANSWERS: 1. All of the rooms in . . . are/have, etc. 2. In my country, there is + *singular noun* / are + *plural noun* 3. A lot of + *singular noun* + is / *plural noun* + are
4. people . . . are/have, etc. 5. The number . . . is 6. A number . . . are/have, etc.
7. Each of . . . is/has, etc. 8. The United States is/has, etc. 9. The English language is/has, etc.
10. The English [people] are/have, etc. 11. English [the language] is/has, etc. 12. One of my . . . is/has, etc.
13. Most of the food . . . is/has/tastes, etc. 14. Most of my classmates are/have, etc. 15. Linguistics is, etc. 16. Linguists are/study . . .
17. The news about . . . was, is, etc. 18. There are + *plural noun* . . . 19. Greece, as well as Italy and Spain, is/has/etc. . . . 20. Fish is nutritious. Fish live in water. [Note: The use of *fish* is tricky; this item previews some of the information in Chapter 7. In the sentence “Fish is nutritious,” *fish* refers to fish as a food and is used as a noncount noun (like *meat*). In the sentence “Fish live in water,” *fish* refers to animals and is a count noun with an irregular plural form (i.e., the plural form is the same as the singular).]