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**THE ERROR ANALYSIS OF KURDISH TERTIARY LEARNERS OF ENGLISH IN  
THE USE OF SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT: A CASE STUDY**

**ARAFAT ABDULLAH SHUKUR**

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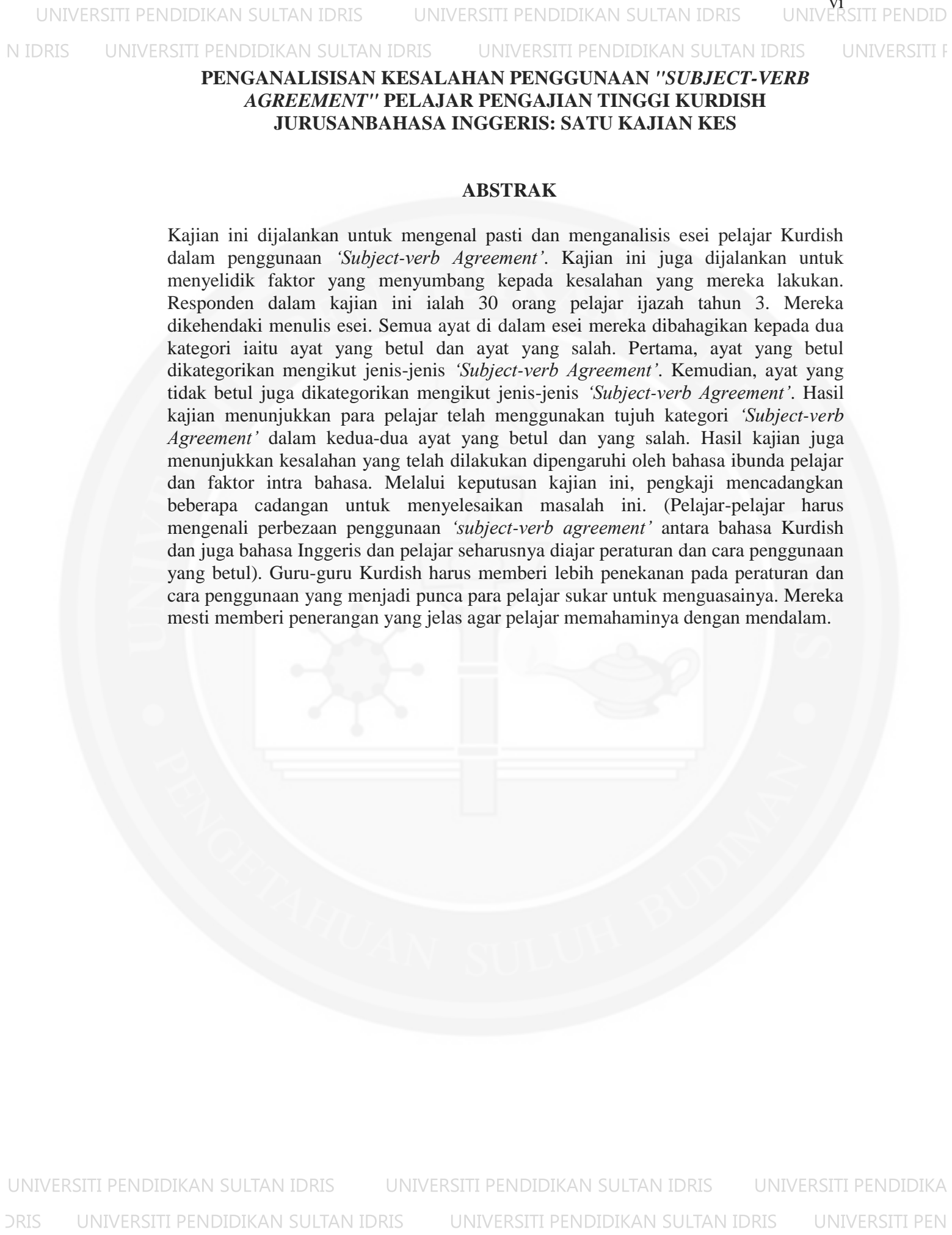
**ABSTRACT**

This study was conducted to identify and analyze the errors of Kurdish learners in the use of subject-verb agreement (SVA) rules when they write essays. Additionally, the study investigated the factors that contribute to the errors committed by Kurdish learners. The participants of this study were 30 third year learners. They were required to write essays. All the sentences in the essays were divided into two categories, correct sentences and incorrect sentences. First, correct sentences were categorized according to the types of SVA. Then, incorrect sentences also were categorized according to the types of SVA. The results of this study showed that the learners used seven types of SVA in both correct and incorrect sentences. The results also indicated that the errors were committed as a result of the interference of the mother tongue and intralanguage factors. In the light of the results of the study, the researcher suggests that remedial actions need to be taken in order to curb this problem. Moreover, the differences between Kurdish and English in the use of subject-verb agreement should be identified in order to inform the learners how to use these rules in English adequately. Also, the Kurdish English teachers should focus more on the rules which are difficult for the learners, and they should also provide clear explanation for the learners to understand better.

**PENGANALISISAN KESALAHAN PENGGUNAAN "*SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT*" PELAJAR PENGAJIAN TINGGI KURDISH  
JURUSAN BAHASA INGGERIS: SATU KAJIAN KES**

**ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengenal pasti dan menganalisis esei pelajar Kurdish dalam penggunaan '*Subject-verb Agreement*'. Kajian ini juga dijalankan untuk menyelidik faktor yang menyumbang kepada kesalahan yang mereka lakukan. Responden dalam kajian ini ialah 30 orang pelajar ijazah tahun 3. Mereka dikehendaki menulis esei. Semua ayat di dalam esei mereka dibahagikan kepada dua kategori iaitu ayat yang betul dan ayat yang salah. Pertama, ayat yang betul dikategorikan mengikut jenis-jenis '*Subject-verb Agreement*'. Kemudian, ayat yang tidak betul juga dikategorikan mengikut jenis-jenis '*Subject-verb Agreement*'. Hasil kajian menunjukkan para pelajar telah menggunakan tujuh kategori '*Subject-verb Agreement*' dalam kedua-dua ayat yang betul dan yang salah. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan kesalahan yang telah dilakukan dipengaruhi oleh bahasa ibunda pelajar dan faktor intra bahasa. Melalui keputusan kajian ini, pengkaji mencadangkan beberapa cadangan untuk menyelesaikan masalah ini. (Pelajar-pelajar harus mengenali perbezaan penggunaan '*subject-verb agreement*' antara bahasa Kurdish dan juga bahasa Inggeris dan pelajar seharusnya diajar peraturan dan cara penggunaan yang betul). Guru-guru Kurdish harus memberi lebih penekanan pada peraturan dan cara penggunaan yang menjadi punca para pelajar sukar untuk menguasainya. Mereka mesti memberi penerangan yang jelas agar pelajar memahaminya dengan mendalam.



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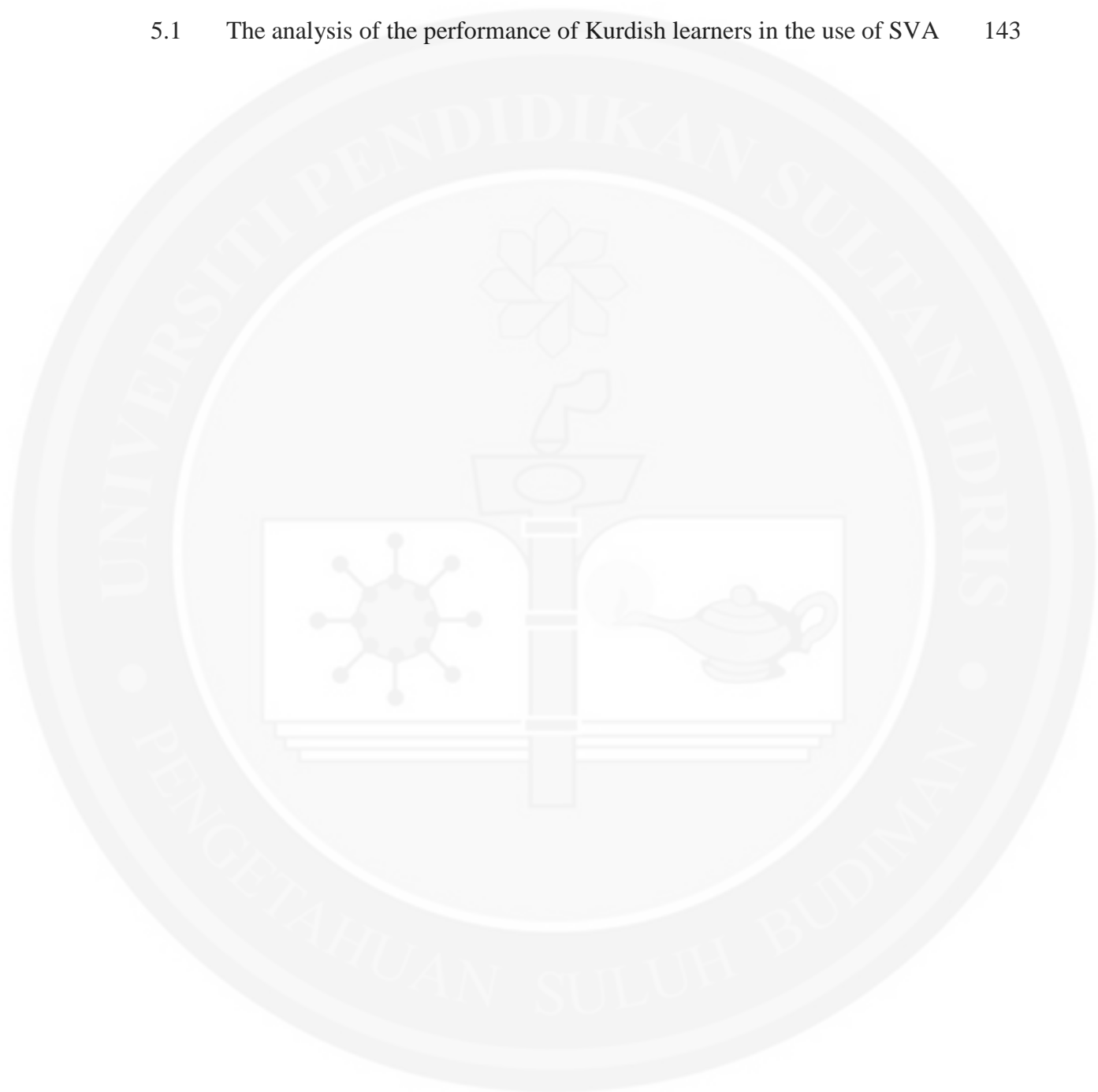


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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Nowadays, English language is undeniably the most common and well known means of international communication, education, and business around the world. In the current era of globalization, more people are communicating in English. English is a native language in several countries, such as United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, and New Zealand. On the other hand, it is also taught and used widely in many other countries as a foreign or second language.

Over 350 million people speak English as their first language, including 55 million in the UK and more than 200 million in the USA. It is an official language in over 50 countries around the world. The total number of people, who can speak English including those, who speak it as a second language, is well over a billion

(Speak English, n. d.). In the current century, English has become a universal

language. It has an essential importance in politics, economy and commerce. Therefore, the number of second language learners is increasing rapidly. So, those learners need to master grammatical features of English in order to have the ability to communicate in English correctly.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

In the process of acquiring a second language, learners face many problems. One of the most significant problems is committing grammatical errors. Errors can be found in both spoken and written production of second language learners, thus errors may be considered as a part of second language acquisition. Linguists created three distinct hypotheses, which were “Contrastive analysis” (CA), “Interlanguage” (IL) and “Errors Analysis” (EA). These hypotheses refer to various models of linguistics and second language acquisition in which they explore the causes of errors, the techniques of error correction and pedagogical instructions. Lado (1957) developed the method of contrastive analysis. He states that the learner’s mother tongue becomes an obvious obstacle in the process of acquiring a second language. Furthermore, he states that habits formed in the mother tongue would interfere with second language’s habits. When the learner of a second language is not sure about a specific syntactic pattern of the second language such as structure and word, he/she would use first language rules that cause the learner to commit errors.

Errors indicate the feedback of the learner and his/her improvement in the second language acquisition. The analysis of errors shows to what extent the learner acquired the second language which according to Norris and Ortega, (2003, p.717), is “used to elicit, observe and record the language (and language related behavior of L2 learners) and to enable the resulting evidence in light of explanatory theories of the language acquisition process”. Lightbown and Spada (2006) claim that an error is one of the significant aspects that show the development of the inter-language system. The analysis of error which is considered to be systematic contains insightful information for second language acquisition researcher, teacher and the learner as well (Corder, 1976, cited in Ellis, 1994). This means that the errors enable a researcher to know how a language is learned and what strategies of learning are used by the learner. Furthermore, the teacher can know how the learners progress in acquiring the second language. In addition to that, the learners learn from the errors.

The process of acquiring a second language concentrates on many aspects. One of the most important aspects of second language acquisition is grammatical rules. In every language, there are grammatical rules of writing, and using these rules incorrectly influence the meaning and the structure of the sentences. In those previous studies that were conducted by (Stapa & Izahar, 2010; Qaid, 2011; Wahyudi, 2012; Al-Dubib, 2013), it was found that the second language learners faced difficulties in using subject-verb agreement rules in their writing in English. It was also investigated that the second language learners misused subject-verb agreement rules in their production and they committed errors in various types of subject-verb agreement. The misuse of the subject-verb agreement rules in their writing caused the ambiguity in the sentences for the reader whether the subject of the sentence is singular or plural.

Thus, when the subject is singular the verb must be singular too. When the subject is plural the verb must be plural too. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (2010) state that there is a clear difference between copular verbs like *be* and all other verbs in English. Table 1.1 shows how the subject agrees with its verb when the verb is copular *be*. Table 1.2 shows how the subject agrees with its verb when the verb is lexical verb such as *walk*.

Table 1.1

*The distribution of the verb “to be” in the present tense and past tense*

<b>Copular Be</b>				
<b>Present tense</b>			<b>Past tense</b>	
<b>Person</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	I am	we are	I was	we were
2 <sup>nd</sup>	you are	you are	you were	you were
3 <sup>rd</sup>	he/she/it is	they are	he/she/it was	they were



Table 1.2

*The forms of the lexical verb “walk” in the present tense and past tense*

Verb “walk”				
Present tense			Past tense	
Person	Singular	plural	Singular	plural
1 <sup>st</sup>	I walk	we walk	I walked	we walked
2 <sup>nd</sup>	you walk	you walk	you walked	you walked
3 <sup>rd</sup>	he/she/it walks	they walk	he/she/it walked	they walked

*(Adapted from Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 2010)*

### 1.2.1 English in Kurdistan

The history of studying English language in Iraq started in the early thirties of the twentieth century, when Iraq was occupied by the British. Since the occupation of Iraq by the British, English language was taught in schools as a compulsory subject in grade five of primary schools to university level as a subject called English language. In Iraq, the curriculum for all the grades of primary to university level was in Arabic. Arabic was used as the only official language in the whole country. Even in the northern part of Iraq which is called Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Kurdish learners were obliged to study in Arabic.

After the revolution of Kurdish people against the Baath regime in 1991, and the liberation of Kurdistan from the reign of the Baath, the curriculum and syllabus had been changed one after another. The first change was in the syllabus of first grade of primary schools when the medium of instruction for subjects were changed from Arabic to Kurdish. Then the process of change continued every year until the entire syllabus for primary and secondary schools were changed from Arabic to Kurdish. In the case of English language, it remained the same as before. It is taught at fifth grade of primary schools to the university level. At that time, there were only few colleges with curriculum in English such as college of medicine, college of engineering, and college of science.

When the United States of America liberated Iraq in 2003, the Iraqi people became more familiar with English language because they needed to speak with American soldiers and worked with them as translators. Furthermore, those who know English language would have more opportunities to get jobs and work with foreign corporations, associations and organizations. After the liberation of Iraq, English language was learnt in the first grade of primary school to university level. English is taught as a subject every school day for 40 minutes. This limited amount of English classes is one of the main reasons for the weakness of Kurdish learners in applying grammatical rules, such as subject-verb agreement in their writing. In addition to that, a majority of Kurdish English teachers teach English language in Kurdish especially in primary and secondary schools because they are not fluent in speaking English. When Kurdish learners go to colleges, they do not have adequate proficiency in English. Therefore, it is extremely difficult for them to write good essays.

Errors in English language still exist in the writing of Kurdish tertiary learners who study English as a foreign language. The majority of the learners concentrate on speaking because their major goal is speaking not writing. Therefore, when they are asked to write an essay or any assignment, they commit errors in their writing. They cannot apply subject-verb agreement rules in their writing, in spite of the simplicity of these rules. On the other hand, in Kurdistan even those who are professional in English language make mistakes in the use of subject-verb agreement rules in their production because English is used as a foreign language and they do not use it in their daily life.

After the Ministry of Higher Education of Kurdistan's Regional Government announced the "Human Capacity Development Program" (HCDP) on 25<sup>th</sup> of Nov 2010 Kurdish learners became more interested in English because they obtained opportunities to continue their studies and receive scholarship to complete their studies in a foreign country. Since the declaration of HCDP more than two thousand Kurdish learners have been sent to foreign countries to study at master and doctorate levels. In order to apply for master or doctorate programs, learners need to take English proficiency test of such as TOEFL, IELTS or any other formal tests. Therefore, they need to master subject-verb agreement rules to have the ability to establish the agreement between the subject and the verb of the sentence in their writing in formal tests.

### **1.3 The Need for the Study**

There is a need to conduct the present study because the learners who participate in this study are going to be teachers in the future. Therefore, the participants have to know how to teach subject-verb agreement rules when they become teachers. Furthermore, the participants of the present study will write a project paper in the last semester before they graduate, so they have to master subject-verb agreement rules in order to write more effectively.

It is also crucial to conduct the current study because the majority of the Kurdish learners tend to make mistakes in using subject-verb agreement rules in their production. So, the misuse of the subject-verb agreement rules in the production of the learners cause the ambiguity of the meaning of the sentence for the reader who wants to read their production. Therefore, the learners have to master the subject-verb agreement rules in order to make the correct agreement between the subject and the verb of the sentences.

There is a need to conduct the current study to get feedback on which errors are mostly committed in using subject-verb agreement rules in the writing of the Kurdish learners and to examine the reasons behind these errors. Furthermore, this study aimed to investigate the interlanguage and intralanguage factors that contribute to the errors made by Kurdish learners in their essays.

Finally, there is a need for this study in order to identify the influence of Kurdish language on the production of the Kurdish learners in using subject-verb agreement rules. Also, to investigate the Kurdish features that causes difficulties for Kurdish learners when they apply subject-verb agreement rules in their writing. Furthermore, this study is conducted to show the differences of subject-verb agreement rules between Kurdish language and English language.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to analyze the errors made by Kurdish tertiary learners of English in the use of subject-verb agreement rules in a selected university in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Also, this study intends to identify and analyze the types of subject-verb agreement that were performed correctly by the Kurdish learners. Furthermore, it plans to identify and analyze the types of subject-verb agreement errors that were committed by Kurdish tertiary learners of English in writing essays. Besides that, this study intends to identify the factors that contribute to the errors committed by Kurdish learners of English when using subject-verb agreement rules in their writing.

#### **1.5 Statement of the Problem**

The idea of conducting this study stemmed from the experience of the researcher's three years of teaching English in a secondary school. During the teaching process, the grammatical rules of subject-verb agreement were introduced to Kurdish learners

in the class. The learners claimed that the rules are too straightforward and simple. However, when they were asked to write and apply these rules, most of them were not able to establish the agreement between the subject of the sentence and its verb in their writing, despite the simplicity of the rules.

Writing is one of the difficult skills of learning in every language. Even first language learners face difficulties to write paragraphs or essays. So, it will be much more difficult to write in the foreign language, because learners think in the first language then translate it to the target language. As a result, learners commit grammatical mistakes because the first language has its own rules especially when these rules are used to construct sentences in the second language. Therefore, they influence on the production of the second language learners.

Moreover, the learners of the second language produce a new language between first language and second language which is neither first language nor second language. The grammatical rules that the learners apply in their writing, are from the mixture of grammatical rules of both first language and second language. The learners transfer the rules of first language in using second language especially when they are not certain about specific rules of second language. Ellis (1997, p.33) says that “the learner’s grammar is transitional. Learners change their grammar from one time to another by adding rules, deleting rules, and restructuring the whole system.” Therefore, learners feel that the second language is so difficult and complex.

Sagvan (2013) conducted a study entitled “Selected Errors Made by Kurdish Learners of English”. In his study, he claimed that Kurdish learners of English have

difficulties in using subject-verb agreement rules in their writing. He stated that the subject-verb agreement errors could easily be pointed out with the singular and plural subjects. He also claimed that Kurdish learners could not match the singular verb with singular subject. He claimed further that the learners had problems with plural subject too. He asserted that the interference of Kurdish was the main reason of subject-verb agreement errors made in the writing of Kurdish learners of English.

Moreover, Kargar (2013) conducted another study entitled “Errors in Using Past Tense Forms in Writing Essays among Kurdish University Learners of English”. In his study, he stated that the Kurdish learners committed various grammatical errors in their writing, such as spelling errors, errors in using prepositions and conjunctions, errors in subject-verb agreement, punctuation, sentence structure and errors in using tenses and their aspects. Additionally, the misuse of the subject-verb agreement rules among Kurdish learners is a serious problem among Kurdish learners according to the studies that were conducted by Kargar (2013) and Sagvan (2013).

## **1.6 Research Questions**

This study was conducted to provide the answer to the following research questions.

- 1- What are the types of subject-verb agreement that were performed correctly by Kurdish tertiary learners of English?
- 2- What are the subject-verb agreement errors that were made by Kurdish tertiary learners of English in their essays?

- 3- What are the factors that contribute to the errors committed by Kurdish tertiary learners of English when using subject-verb agreement rules in their essays?

### 1.7 Significance of the Study

Error analysis is one of the fields that researchers and linguists are interested in. Errors have a significant role in the process of second language acquisition, without committing errors it is impossible to acquire any second language. Therefore, errors become a crucial part of second language acquisition. However, only few studies are conducted in this area in the Kurdish context. This study will be conducted to analyze the performance of Kurdish tertiary learners of English in the use of subject-verb agreement rules in their writing in a selected university in Kurdistan.

This study has a significant importance because it attempted to discover the factors that contribute to the errors committed by Kurdish learners in using subject-verb agreement rules in their writing. It investigated the errors that are made, as a result of the interference of the mother tongue of the Kurdish learners. Furthermore, the errors that are committed as a result of intralanguage are examined too. After the source of the errors is investigated, it is easier for lecturers to find pedagogical remedies to reduce these errors. This may help them to teach learners efficiently and use modern pedagogical instruction to decrease these grammatical errors.

Many teachers will be interested in this study especially those, who teach English as a foreign language in Kurdistan to develop the learners' level of proficiency in English. This study will help the Kurdish English teachers to identify