



## Investigating Students Written Discourse in Understanding and Using Collective Nouns in English

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### Abstract

It has been observed by the researcher in teaching English at the university level that learners have difficulties in writing sentences in which there is a subject verb agreement when a collective noun is involved. These difficulties show themselves in the systematic errors made by the learners at this level.

The findings of the study showed that the third year university students in the Faculty of Education in Khoms, Al Mergeb University, during the academic year 2011/2012 encountered systematic difficulties in understanding and using English collective nouns. Thus, the most common errors made by Libyan learners were due to negative transfer. Therefore, when respondents were asked to show their ability in interpreting the meaning of the NP, the percentage of the problematic area was so high.

It is also interesting to note that the students' ability in recognizing the function of determiners and their effect on agreement were less problematic for the students. However, collective nouns which take two possible answers were the most difficult for the students. Thus, 92% of the students failed to do agreement with such collectives.

These difficulties maybe attributed to two main reasons: First, the absence of the plural morpheme constituted a greater difficulty. Second, there is evidence of negative transfer with such collective nouns since some errors were a direct translation from Arabic.

Key words: interlingual transfer, overgeneralization, communication strategies, unmarked plural-only nouns