Semantic number in relation to English language learner awareness

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Abstract
This paper focuses on semantic number in English and its effect on students' understanding of countability and how they see the world through English. Semantic nominal plurality of reference is not always equivalent to a marked plural noun or S-V plural agreement. The paper aims to explain and illustrate whether morphosyntactic markedness of number coincides with semantic specificity/informativity, and if EFL learners' worldview shifts depending on their awareness of semantic number. The linguistic issue of number is paired with education, i.e. learners' development in a foreign language framework. The research was targeted towards English majors (Faculty of Philology, Skopje, N. Macedonia), whose knowledge of number agreement (competence) in English was explored via a questionnaire covering various instances of number inconsistencies. It is noteworthy that most students afterwards stated a rising level of confidence in communicating in English due to a higher level of language accuracy and semantic awareness.

Keywords: *semantics, number, agreement, countability, accuracy, EFL, ELT*

Introduction

It is indisputable that humans feel the need to quantify the world around them. Every object or person, even abstract concept and occurrence that has language counterparts through the category of nouns, can be counted or measured, i.e. can be marked in language in regards to its countability or quantity. However, the issue that arises and is covered in this paper is to what degree number markedness in English is visible or built in the nominal structure itself, how the corresponding verb form agrees with it, and what influence it has (if any) on how learners of English view the world, and even their identity. Singularity and plurality are basic characteristics of nouns, but if a noun does not externally expose both forms (especially the plural one), it should not be classified simply as an exception or an irregularity, but rather considered a seemingly deceptive abnormality. The categorization of the grammatical category of number is based on varying degrees (partitivity, collectivity, distributivity) linked to the nominal descriptions. Research on number treats the plural as wielding far more complexity than is thought. "Number might appear to be one of the simplest natural categories, as simple as 'two and two are four.' Yet on closer inspection it presents a great many difficulties, both logical and linguistic" (Jespersen 1924: 188). Therefore, number is not a binary distinction of singular vs. plural determined in a purely grammatical manner, but a multi-faceted linguistic phenomenon of markedness and unmarkedness, simultaneously embedding syntax and semantics; the former being key to EFL learners' grasp of language accuracy, and the latter being key to EFL learners' communication skills and identity.

Theoretical linguistic background: connection to ELT

Works by linguists like Bock, Corbett, Gillon, Lasersohn, Link, and Pelletier represent the backbone of the theoretical framework regarding the category of number in English. Each linguist contributes to this language issue in their own specific way, highlighting the discrepancies, thus proving that the contrast between "one" and "not one" (or "more than one") is an inherent property of the noun, rooted in conceptualization.

Bock & Miller's work (1991) is regarded to be seminal, detailing how a superficially simple syntactic operation of S-V number agreement is occasionally derailed in sentences like: **(1)** *The cost of the improvements have not yet been estimated*. Examining the incidence of such agreement errors, they concluded that this was largely due to the presence of subject-like semantic features in the immediate preverbal nouns, regardless of the number of the head noun; proximity being the key feature. Questions arise regarding the semantic vs. syntactic nature of sentence subjects. The semantic features of sentence subjects are relevant to the syntactic process that implements agreement. In addition, Bock et al. (2001) have researched nouns that are at the intersection of grammatical number and their conceptualization (e.g. *scissors*), as well as complex subject NPs (e.g. *the advertisement for the scissors*); they use the term 'attraction', which has been established in language use. Learners of EFL juggle such mutual dependencies in order to be grammatically accurate; they especially need to be sensitive to semantic number at a point in processing in their mind when such information is less accessible, thus not be misled by mere proximity for S-V agreement. It is expected that learners be sensitive to such conceptualization and complexity at a later stage of their learning English, having done suitable accuracy-oriented activities. The CEFR further states that consistently maintaining a high degree of grammatical accuracy belongs to C1 and C2 levels, as accuracy is related to internalized linguistic information (Council of Europe 2001: 114, Housen & Kuiken 2009). Conceptualizing the language, though, implies digging deeper in the core of English and visualizing not the meanings of words, but rather the contextualization of grammar, specifically number.

Corbett (2001, 2006b) conveniently summarizes language phenomena; even though quite theoretical, he unifies the underlying concepts. Corbett's all-inclusive monograph (2000) is considered to be the most comprehensive work thus far addressing the morphological-typological point of view of number. Number, with all its singular-plural subtleties, especially interpretations used for special emotive purposes in language, is the most underestimated of all grammatical categories. Furthermore, forms (e.g. *mines* and *wines*) which are morphologically equivalent may have completely different semantic values (Corbett 2000: 55). Therefore, transferred in an EFL context, learners must not simply take it for granted that the morpheme for plurality (*-s*) is a straightforward embedded notion of "more than one"; in fact, nouns are tricky and not clear-cut in regards to their participation in the number system. The Agreement Hierarchy is closely linked to collectives – or 'corporate nouns' – as 'collectives' has been an overused and loaded term in linguistics (Corbett 2000, 2006a). Distance/proximity does influence S-V agreement: the further away a target is from its controller, the lesser the probability of syntactic agreement. For example: **(2)** *The couple has since moved away and now live in Essex.* – doesn't sound strange to the ear although *has* is a singular verb and *live* is plural, both verbs referring to the same corporate noun: *couple*. EFL learners do grasp the underlying semantics behind collective nouns but are faced with a dilemma when it comes to the choice of either singular or plural verb form for S-V agreement, i.e. the acceptability of both forms depending on whether they view the noun in a collective or distributive sense. The semantic number of collective nouns actually opens learners up to "the interpretation of the *idea* of number rather than the actual presence of the grammatical marker of number" (Quirk et al. 1972: 360, Svensson 1998), as they start to comprehend the fluid nature of number and its inextricable link with reality.

As regards plural NPs, Gillon (1987) raises the issue of when such phrases are susceptible to a collective reading, and when they are viewed distributively. In syntax, the plural is treated as an operation that is not about counting, but about dividing. Gillon (1992) focuses on the semantics of the noun, stating that plurality is not the same as collectivity: a plurality is nothing more than the sum of its atomic parts, whereas a collective is more than just the sum of its atomic parts, it is a unified constituency (the key word being 'unified'). Searching for a common semantics for English count and mass nouns, Bunt (1979), Gillon (1992), and Lasersohn (2011) analyze and exemplify the differences between such nouns. Transferring these linguistic concepts into the field of ELT means opening a stretch

of undiscovered land for EFL learners, and possibly even expanding their worldview on how the feeling of unity among group members in real life is expressed through English. Link (1998) raises awareness of the problem of precision in English, stating that a typical difficulty for EFL learners is the fact that plural terms are notoriously vague in their reference, so achieving language accuracy implies learners' need for recognition and use of fine-tuned language. Additionally, the elaborated descriptive scales in CEFR state that C2 Reading is characterized by "understanding subtleties of style and meaning which are both implicitly and explicitly stated" (Council of Europe 2001: 239), and C2 Writing is characterized by "conveying finer shades of meaning precisely" (Ibid: 241).

Pelletier (1974, 2010, 2012a, 2012b) claims that the traditional account of viewing nouns is syntax-driven: they come with certain syntactic features (to guarantee well-formedness) plus an intrinsic semantic value. The lexical items are additionally assigned either a mass (uncount) or a count feature, and this feature controls the syntactic admissibility or inadmissibility. He advocates an alternative approach, interpreting nouns not simply as always belonging to either the mass or count category, but as specific occurrences thereof. Thus, semantic number in a given noun is not fixed, and in consequence should definitely not be treated as such. Pelletier (2011) turns towards descriptive metaphysics and Sapir-Whorfianism to put into perspective the count-mass distinction, concerned slightly more with a philosophical standpoint – the relation between correct semantic analysis of linguistic phenomena and the reality that is supposed to be described, e.g. the fact that *knowledge* is a mass term, while *belief* is a count noun has raised questions about whether *knowledge* is in fact an all-encompassing singularity. Chierchia (1998: 99) states: "The mass/count distinction does not appear to be reducible to any physical notion, it does not appear to be based on any pre- or extralinguistic psychological feature of our cognitive system, it does descend from logic." In the realm of EFL, the count/uncount distinction of nouns is taught early on in the learning stages (CEFR A1-A2; see British Council), as these two concepts are distinguished by the feature of countability, i.e. whether the noun can be counted (plural *-s* is added) or not (plural *-s* is not added). However, new developments in English have shown that due to linguistic economy, it is perfectly fine to pluralize certain uncount nouns, albeit the semantics of the nouns changes course (semantic narrowing: *what* is counted?) (Zhou 2012). EFL learners are in the midst of these changes and pointing out to them that count vs. uncount is not a battle of one *or* the other widens their horizon on how so much meaning can be imported in the plural suffix or lack thereof.

In English, the feature of countability is inherently marked inside the singular noun, i.e. it is externally the unmarked form, while the plural noun represents the morphologically marked form. The meaning of 'more than one' is coded in the noun through the inflectional suffix *-s* (and its irregular variants), but this need not necessarily regard the semantics. Mathieu (2014) explains that there are instances in which this is not a clear-cut situation: **(3)** *Do you have children?* – is a much more appropriate question to ask than **(4)** *Do you have a child?* The former contains a plural noun morphologically marked for number, but semantically unmarked in that context, while the latter contains a singular noun morphologically unmarked for number, but semantically marked. Linked to ELT, in a communicative event (e.g. getting to know the interlocuter, first impressions), the EFL learner needs to increase the area of congruence in the understanding of the specific situation for the interest of effective communication (Council of Europe 2001: 51). Semantics comes into play here as the learner must be aware that the inherent contextual sense of this example of a politeness (conversational) convention in English is related to their sociocultural knowledge of the language, hence an aspect of knowledge of the world (see the Illustrative Descriptor Scales for Sociolinguistic Appropriateness in Council of Europe 2018: 137-138). Although this convention might differ from their native tongue or culture (e.g. countries with a one-child policy), EFL learners must take into account the strangeness, even rudeness, of **(4)**. In addition to organizing words into well-formed sentences, learners need to be equipped with their interrelations (semantic competence) so as not to leave any room for misunderstanding.

The Hypothesis of Cognitive Individuation refers to how people conceptually distinguish count-mass nouns in their mind beyond grammatical categorization. It states that count nouns refer to entities that speakers conceptualize as kinds of individuals, distinct and countable, whereas mass nouns refer to entities that in the minds of speakers are conceptualized as non-individuated, non-distinct and uncountable (Wierzbicka 1988). On the one hand, *constellation* or *library* are considered mass nouns, while their building blocks – *star* and *book* respectively – are count nouns. When people imagine a library, they conceptualize the spatial aspect of the noun and its collectivity, not focusing on its components, regardless of the number of components, i.e. books. These examples further demonstrate the importance of conceptualization and countability for the EFL learner, regardless of how abstract they might be for them (Radden & Dirven 2007), e.g. getting the more advanced EFL learner to explain the difference between *noodle* and *spaghetti*, and why *noodles* is correct, but not **spaghettis*, will surely be a challenging task, yet will open them up to the opportunities of viewing the world differently through the spectrum of English.

There is no such thing as total synonymy between two nouns in English, but there is near synonymy. The literature on the count-mass noun distinction often points to lexical doublets, consisting of a count and a mass noun that are taken to be near synonyms. Some doublets have little logic to them being divided, while others lexicalize a distinct set of attributes, e.g. *carpets/carpeting*, *clothes/clothing*, *coins/change*, *leaves/foliage*. In such cases, the paradox is that each doublet refers to the same semantic entity, but the difference lay in the fact that one of the nouns is a marked plural count noun or a noun in pluralia tantum, while the other is a mass noun (Ojeda 2005).

Research questions

Grounded in the described theoretical background on semantic number as well as ELT, the research that was conducted on students aimed to answer and interpret the following questions:

a) *Is semantic nominal plurality of reference always equivalent to a marked plural noun (in an NP) or S-V plural agreement in a sentence? How aware are you [as students] of this?*

b) *Did you [as students] experience any shift in your understanding of English or reality in general after doing the questionnaire and the class discussion? Explain.*

Expressing singularity and plurality on a syntactic level can create dilemmas as to which form of the verb (singular or plural) is most appropriate in relation to the noun/NP and, primarily, its semantic number, leading to the aspect of language accuracy in EFL learners. Consistently maintaining a high degree of grammatical accuracy is a qualitative aspect of C1/C2 language use on an analytic scale (Council of Europe 2001). This was in fact the starting point when deciding on the background of the research focused on semantic number and, on a broader scale, how it is associated with the way EFL learners view not only English, but reality as a whole.

The research that was done was targeted towards EFL students (English majors); more precisely first-year (CEFR B2) and fourth-year (CEFR C2) students at the Department of English Language and Literature (Blaze Koneski Faculty of Philology, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, in Skopje, N. Macedonia) in the academic years 2017/2018, 2018/2019, and 2019/2020, therefore covering a time span of three years and a total of 310 students (Year 1: 145; Year 4: 165). Their knowledge of semantic number and S-V agreement in English was explored via a questionnaire covering various instances of number inconsistencies, and their answers were later analyzed. The data that was cumulatively yielded is visually represented in Figure 1 and Figure 2 (in percentages). The next step was class discussion, during which the students were additionally asked a contemplative question: to explain how this specific linguistic issue influenced their awareness of the complexities in English as well as their worldview.

The aim of this research was to examine students' competence in number agreement in English for the purpose of making them aware of the significant role of semantics (semantic number) in EFL learning and language accuracy, and how sometimes a noun outwardly marked for number can be

misleading, yet it is the connection between number and reality that students need to be cognizant of. These target groups were chosen primarily due to the fact that they represent the beginning and final stages of academic studies, in addition to the fact that they were heading on the path to becoming English teachers or translators, and it is these professions that should first and foremost strive to language perfection, to knowing the hidden intricacies of English, and to being perceptive of reality.

The Appendix at the end of this paper shows the questionnaire, consisting of 28 sentences, created for the purpose of this research (adapted from Quirk et al. 1972); each sentence with a different and tricky syntactic and semantic number issue, i.e. a different NP in sentence subject position, followed by a choice of two options for the corresponding verb form. The students' task was to circle the correct option (S-V agreement), and they also had some blank space at the end if they felt they needed to expand or comment on any of their choices.

Being knowledgeable about the students' level of English and grammar awareness, I set off on this research with certain expectations in mind: the first-year students (B2) would make more mistakes than the fourth-year students (C2) since the former up to the point when they were given the questionnaire would still not have covered the unit on number in detail in their grammar classes, while the latter, being more advanced grammar-wise, would have covered not only number but all the other grammatical categories, so they would predictably make fewer mistakes and be more alert regarding number inconsistencies in English. This should certainly not be an excuse for the first-year students, but bearing their background context, particularly the fact that they each came from a different starting point, these expectations were grounded in reality. Furthermore, students of both years were expected to encounter difficulties with sentences 25 and 26 because their head nouns are collectives, so students would undoubtedly be confused as to what the correct option is, especially since they were told only one option was to be circled in the sentences in the questionnaire.

Results and discussion

Regarding the research results, what became quite visible when analyzing them was that sentences 6 (the second verb), 8, 10, 11, 13 and 17 had a rate of 100% correct answers among first-year students, whereas more examples, i.e. sentences 5, 6 (the second verb), 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 27 and 28 had a rate of 100% correct answers among fourth-year students. Therefore, students starting even from year 1 are already well aware that in English, plural syntactic agreement occurs: after 'both of the NP', in an NP with 'and' (coordination), after a plural NP + quasi-coordinator ('along with') + singular NP, after nouns with zero plural before which there is a plural modifier, and after 'most of the NP'. Students in these cases are led to the correct choice of verb form by activating their knowledge of semantic number. In addition, it is clear that there is more accuracy among fourth-year students. When analyzing the opposite case, or a rate of 100% incorrect answers, it is interesting to note that this did not occur in any sentence. Moreover, students of both years were well aware that in sentence 16, 'most of the news' ('news' being a noun marked for plural but expressing semantic singularity) is followed by a singular verb, so they were not misled by the *-s* suffix in 'news'.

Regarding instances of unexpected data, for sentence 6 (the first verb), 33% of the first-year students and only 22% of the fourth-year students circled the correct option, while for sentence 25, 76% of the first-year students and only 15% of the fourth-year students circled the correct option. This would imply that the dilemma underlying whether to use a singular or a plural verb after the 'neither of + plural pronoun' construction is not yet clear enough for students. It is indeed baffling for them because they cannot decide with certainty which form takes precedence over the other, thus controlling the verb: 'neither' (singular verb) or 'them' (plural verb)? In fact, they are mistaken because they view 'neither' as a partitive marker of the NP, in addition to wrongly assuming that proximity is the leading factor.

The low percentages of correct answers for both years of a suitable verb form after 'each of the + plural noun', 'neither-nor' (with 3 person singular), 'neither of + plural pronoun', dependent clauses with

plural nouns, 'most of the + pluralia tantum noun', and 'a pair of + plural noun' demonstrates that students might not be well instructed in or still have not fully grasped the semantics of the mentioned NPs with modifiers, relying largely on proximity for S-V agreement. Furthermore, syntactic agreement with collective nouns is a separate unit for them since they have knowledge about such nouns in English and what they represent, but it seems that they have limited themselves to strict grammar rules only, not viewing the adjacent environment and its influence on the collective noun. There might be other factors at play that should be considered, aside from students' reliance on proximity. Hoshino et al. (2010) have noted that if an individual is bilingual in two languages that compute grammatical and conceptual number similarly, then bilingualism itself might not be expected to affect the ability to produce agreement correctly in each language. They state that a small number of studies have examined the production of such S-V agreement in bilinguals. In each case, these studies show that bilinguals appear to exploit grammatical and conceptual information in each of their languages (Nicol, Teller & Greth 2001, Nicol & Greth 2003). Nicol & Greth (2003) have argued that bilinguals tend to transfer agreement strategies from L1 to L2; if L1 does not easily enable transfer to occur, then the acquisition of agreement in L2 will presumably be more difficult. In the context of this research, L1 (Macedonian) and L2 (English) do compute grammatical and conceptual number similarly, however the issue lay in 'each' and 'neither', which are gender-variable (three forms) and number-variable (two forms) in Macedonian, as opposed to English, which has only one form for all genders and both numbers, thus affecting students' accuracy in L2 S-V agreement. In addition to L1-L2 transfer constraints, the performance of bilinguals may differ for their two languages. Studies suggest that for relatively proficient bilinguals, L2 is likely to be processed less automatically and to make additional demands on cognitive resources compared to L1 (Segalowitz & Hulstijn 2005, Miyake & Friedman 1998, Michael & Gollan 2005). In Hoshino et al.'s study (2010), bilinguals who were relatively (but not highly) proficient in L2 failed to demonstrate sensitivity to conceptual number in L2, suggesting that adequate cognitive resources are required to maintain the conceptual representation of the subject during the computation of S-V number agreement in L2.

For sentence 25, 76% of the first-year students and only 15% of the fourth-year students circled the correct option. This too was an unexpected and disappointing percentage regarding the fourth-year students, especially since they should have paid closer attention to the clue in that sentence (NP 'an amazing *formation*'), implying a unity (collectivity) and leading them to choose the singular verb after the collective noun 'flock'. After the results were fully analyzed, the next step was that each sentence in this questionnaire was discussed in more detail in class with the students, as they were asked to respond to and explain their reasoning behind choosing one option over the other. The first-year students justified doing much better than the fourth-year students for that specific sentence because they had just studied the wide variety of collective nouns a few lessons previously in their Contemporary English Language classes, so it was still "fresh" [several students' choice of wording] in their minds. This explanation, combined with research on retention and EFL performance (Craik & Tulving 1975, Ellis 2003), was the main motivation for my present research on S-V agreement with subject-position NPs containing 'each', 'neither', and collective nouns. The underlying issue with collective nouns therefore arises as to how students should apply their theoretical grammatical knowledge (competence) into real-life communicative contexts (performance) and how they should expand the concepts of collectivity and distributivity. Students from both years added a prescriptive comment at the end of the questionnaire that 'flock' was actually a collective noun that could be followed by both a singular and plural verb, however their choice was influenced by the fact that "it just sounded more natural", or even "sometimes the true meaning is hidden on a deeper level" [students' words]. Only a few explained their mistake as "unfortunately not having read the whole context of the sentence" and "if only I had relied on the surrounding elements" [students' words].

Regarding the above stated second research question, after the class discussions were finished, 88% of the students voiced their opinions on this questionnaire as being beneficial to their view of the world, the wholesome development of their identity as EFL learners, and especially to their awareness that what is on the outside (morphological number) might not always be connected to what is on the inside (semantic number): "I had no idea how much meaning there is in the plural suffix, so I'll be much more alert, for the sake of precision"; "I'm an English major and it's my responsibility to use language correctly and with care when expressing something, so this has been a point of awakening for me"; "I can add a whole new depth of meaning and this easily transfers to culture"; "I have experienced a growing level of confidence in communicating in English, so I am going to be more accurate when expressing even minor things"; "This has changed my perception of how English works and how closely tied it is to reality"; "Semantics is visible even in something as small as a suffix, but it's so meaningful"; "I could never have imagined that even politeness is connected to English plurals"; "I now realize that a whole worldview and culture can be expressed through a suffix or lack of a suffix, and so I'll be more adaptable and certainly more open-minded"; "English doesn't function on its own, but it's part of a community and reality, and language and reality go hand in hand"; "This observation might seem silly, but I feel like I've unlocked another aspect of my understanding of how the world works"; "You can't judge a book by its cover in the same way that you can't judge a word by what it looks like – it has life inside it" [a selection of students' quotes].

The limitations of this research will be overcome in future research, as the following are some suggestions for enhancing the existing research at the intersection of semantic number and ELT: **(a)** covering a broader span of number inconsistencies in English; **(b)** doing the questionnaire online so that more students (even including English majors from other countries) could be reached for the quantitative research, implying that there are pertinent variables that have to be considered (e.g. L1 interference); **(c)** examining the consequences of L2 proficiency in more detail so as to better understand its relation to cognitive resources and how they are used in planning well-formed utterances; **(d)** doing a longitudinal study on semantic number in a much wider time frame; **(e)** analyzing the National Curricula and Teaching Plans for EFL in primary/high school education in N. Macedonia regarding their inclusion of and approach towards number; **(f)** tasking the fourth-year students who have taken the EFL Methodology (practical) course to create age-appropriate and level-appropriate accuracy activities that focus on number (for primary/high school EFL learners).

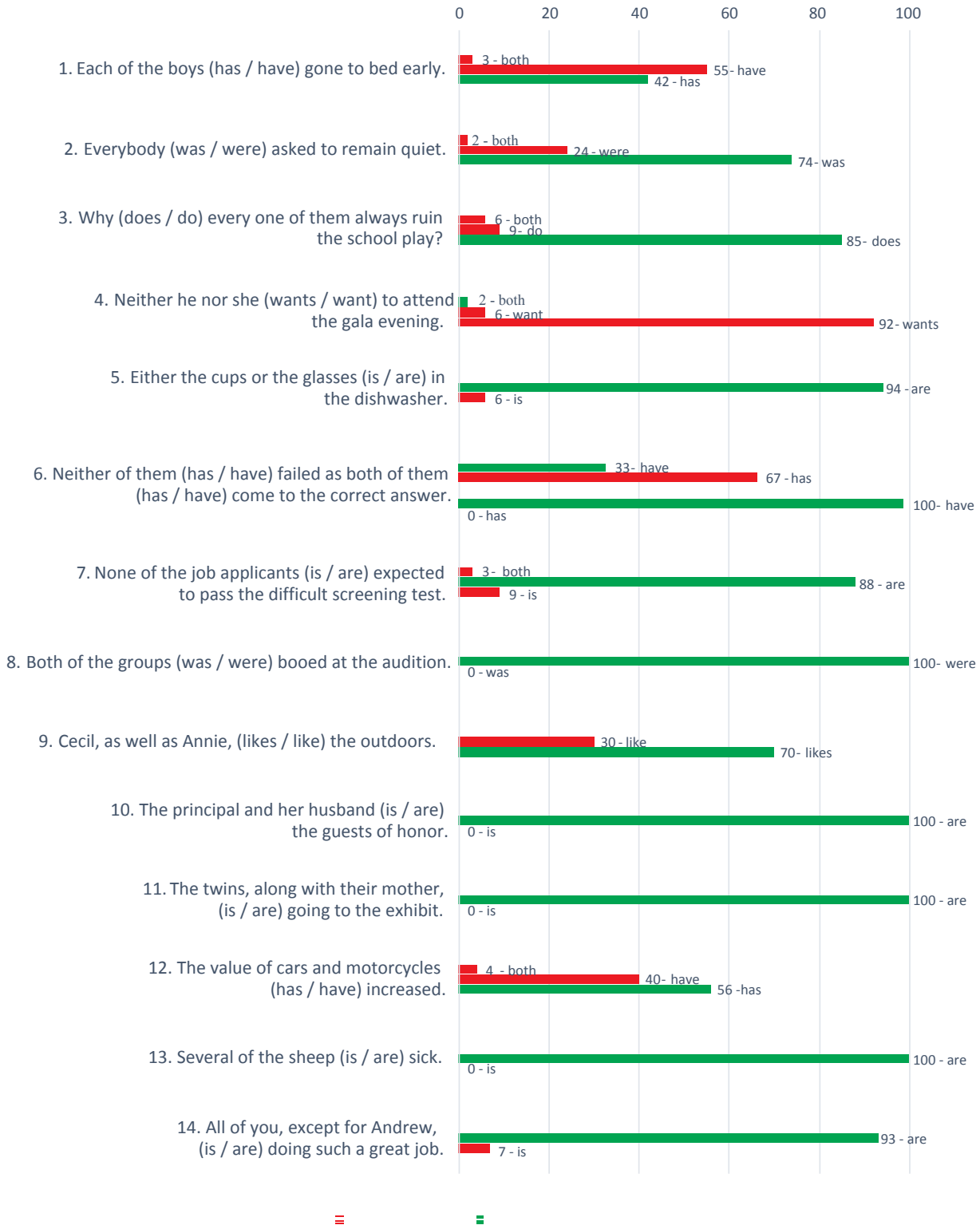
Conclusion

The prescriptive rule EFL learners are introduced to about the difference between count and uncount nouns is that only count nouns can be made plural since they are loaded with information regarding countability, while uncount nouns cannot be made plural because of their homogeneous composition. However, this interpretation is quite limited and semantics enters into the equation as well, so it should not be unusual that EFL learners are introduced to semantic number as well. Consequently, it has an impact on the form of the following verb. Singular noun-singular verb and plural noun-plural verb isn't as straightforward as it seems, as singularity is not always unmarked, while plurality is not always marked. In fact, syntactic number agreement involves close collaboration between lexical, morphological and semantic information inherent in the nominal structure, as well as reference, in order for there to be harmonization among the sentence elements. The research done among University students of three generations demonstrates that EFL learners' view of the English language and reality is intertwined, hence awareness of such issues brings about awareness of the inner workings of English paired with a shift in their worldview. Bock & Miller (1991) call S-V agreement a superficially simple syntactic operation and this proves that further research on this language issue is worthwhile.

Appendix (Questionnaire):

1. Each of the boys (has / have) gone to bed early.
2. Everybody (was / were) asked to remain quiet.
3. Why (does / do) every one of them always ruin the school play?
4. Neither he nor she (wants / want) to attend the gala evening.
5. Either the cups or the glasses (is / are) in the dishwasher.
6. Neither of them (has / have) failed as both of them (has / have) come to the correct answer.
7. None of the job applicants (is / are) expected to pass the difficult screening test.
8. Both of the groups (was / were) booed at the audition.
9. Cecil, as well as Annie, (likes / like) the outdoors.
10. The principal and her husband (is / are) the guests of honor.
11. The twins, along with their mother, (is / are) going to the exhibit.
12. The value of cars and motorcycles (has / have) increased.
13. Several of the sheep (is / are) sick.
14. All of you, except for Andrew, (is / are) doing such a great job.
15. All of the milk (has / have) gone bad, so don't drink it.
16. Most of the news (is / are) unfortunately bad, but please don't get worried.
17. Most of the seats at the theater (was / were) taken, although we arrived on time.
18. Here into the main ring of the circus (comes / come) the trained elephants.
19. Beyond the mountains (is / are) a fertile valley.
20. One hundred dollars (is / are) not a lot of money for a high-quality bike.
21. A pound of cookies (costs / cost) just over a dollar.
22. Measles (is / are) one of the most uncomfortable diseases.
23. (Has / Have) the pair of earrings been found?
24. The United States (is / are) a country of contrasts.
25. The flock (is / are) creating such an amazing formation in the sky.
26. The jury (was / were) polled for their verdicts.
27. The members of the band (has / have) arrived for practice.
28. The library, holding thousands of books, (is / are) free to all.

Figure 1: Percentages of correct and incorrect answers from the questionnaire (Year 1).



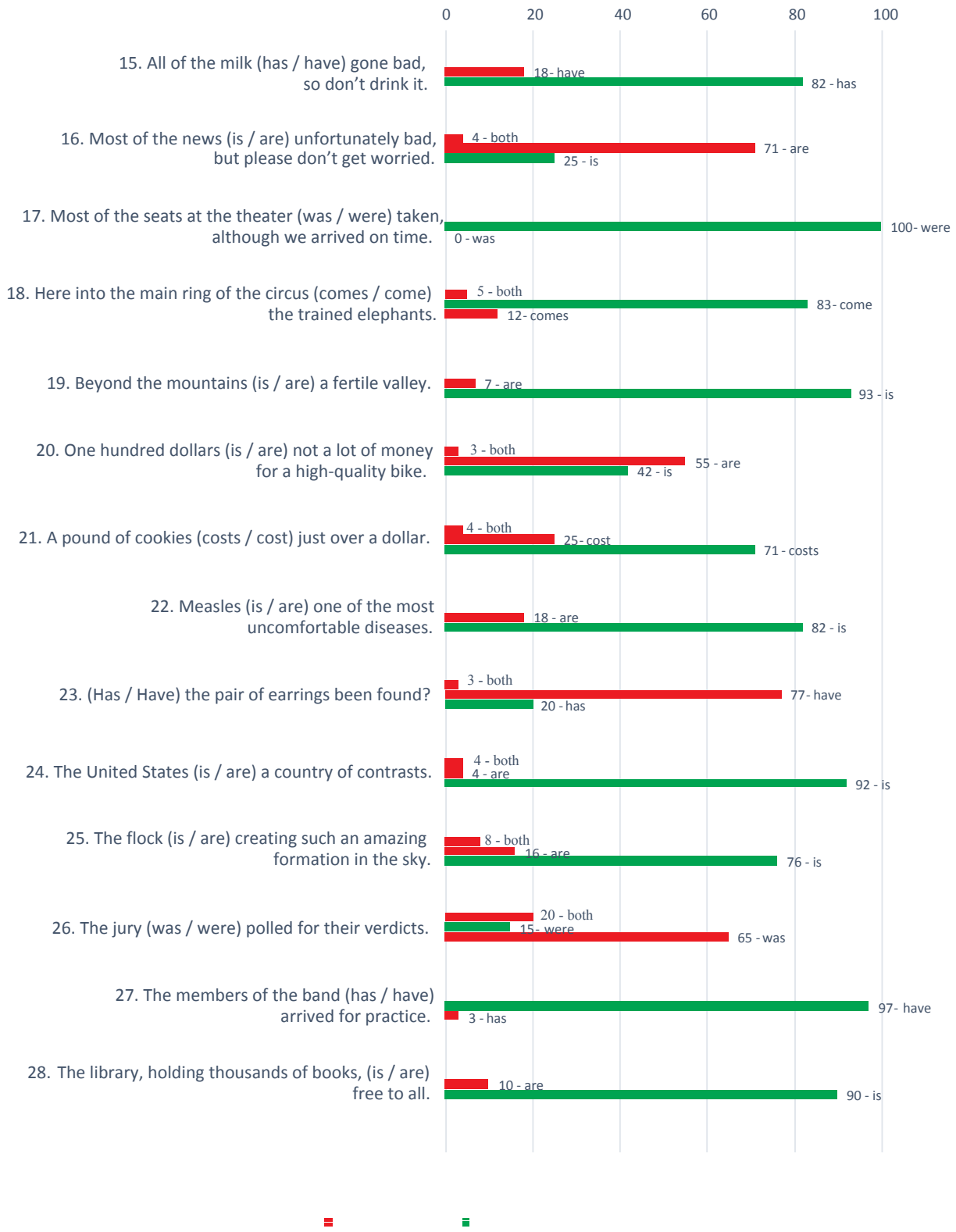
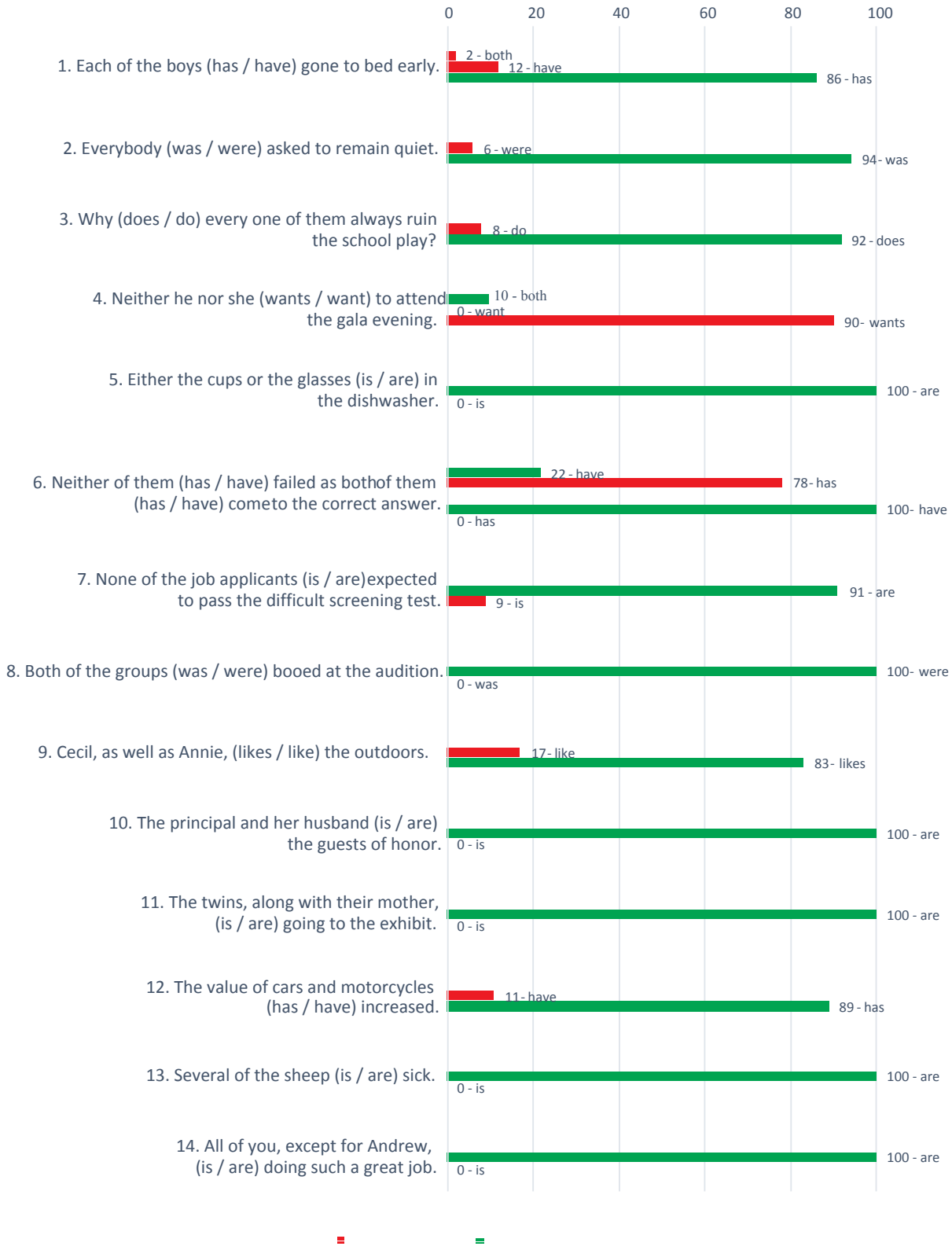
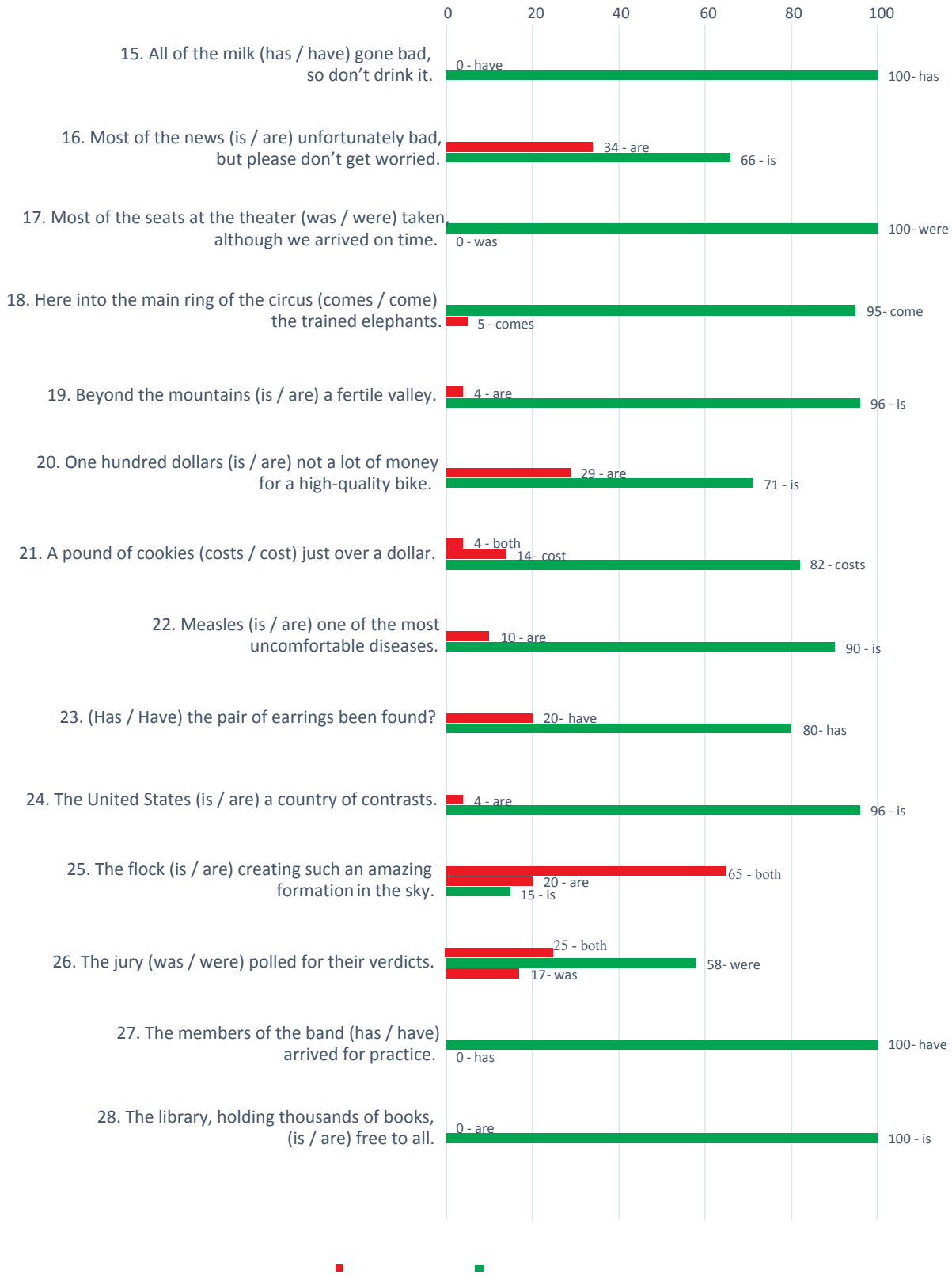

0
20
40
60
80
100
15. All of the milk (has / have) gone bad, so don't drink it.
18- have
82 - has
16. Most of the news (is / are) unfortunately bad, but please don't get worried.
4 - both
71 - are
25 - is
17. Most of the seats at the theater (was / were) taken, although we arrived on time.
100- were
0 - was
18. Here into the main ring of the circus (comes / come) the trained elephants.
5 - both
83- come
12- comes
19. Beyond the mountains (is / are) a fertile valley.
7 - are
93 - is
20. One hundred dollars (is / are) not a lot of money for a high-quality bike.
3 - both
55 - are
42 - is
21. A pound of cookies (costs / cost) just over a dollar.
4 - both
25- cost
71 - costs
22. Measles (is / are) one of the most uncomfortable diseases.
18 - are
82 - is
23. (Has / Have) the pair of earrings been found?
3 - both
77- have
20 - has
24. The United States (is / are) a country of contrasts.
4 - both
4 - are
92 - is
25. The flock (is / are) creating such an amazing formation in the sky.
8 - both
16 - are
76 - is
26. The jury (was / were) polled for their verdicts.
20 - both
15- were
65 - was
27. The members of the band (has / have) arrived for practice.
97- have
3 - has
28. The library, holding thousands of books, (is / are) free to all.
10 - are
90 - is

Figure 2: Percentages of correct and incorrect answers from the questionnaire (Year 4).




0
20
40
60
80
100
15. All of the milk (has / have) gone bad, so don't drink it.
0 - have
100- has
16. Most of the news (is / are) unfortunately bad, but please don't get worried.
34 - are
66 - is
17. Most of the seats at the theater (was / were) taken, although we arrived on time.
100- were
0 - was
18. Here into the main ring of the circus (comes / come) the trained elephants.
95- come
5 - comes
19. Beyond the mountains (is / are) a fertile valley.
4 - are
96 - is
20. One hundred dollars (is / are) not a lot of money for a high-quality bike.
29 - are
71 - is
21. A pound of cookies (costs / cost) just over a dollar.
4 - both
14- cost
82 - costs
22. Measles (is / are) one of the most uncomfortable diseases.
10 - are
90 - is
23. (Has / Have) the pair of earrings been found?
20- have
80- has
24. The United States (is / are) a country of contrasts.
4 - are
96 - is
25. The flock (is / are) creating such an amazing formation in the sky.
65 - both
20 - are
15 - is
26. The jury (was / were) polled for their verdicts.
25 - both
58- were
17- was
27. The members of the band (has / have) arrived for practice.
100- have
0 - has
28. The library, holding thousands of books, (is / are) free to all.
0 - are
100 - is

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