Homework #5

English has at least two kinds of –s suffixes. One is added to verbs in the present tense when the subject of the verb is 3rd-person singular (he, she, it, the woman, a man, etc.):

She walks to school every Tuesday.

Let us call this “agreement –s.” Another type of –s is added to nouns to make them plural:

He bought the books.

Let us call this “plural –s.”

Both of these are examples of what we have called “inflectional morphology,” which we know is sometimes difficult for second language learners to acquire. In this assignment, we will look for learner errors with these two suffixes. We will look both for errors of omission (where they omit the suffix when it should be there) and for errors of commission (where they add the suffix when it shouldn’t be there).

Part I: Agreement -s

Using an internet search engine such as Google, look for errors with this suffix in text written by a non-native speaker of English. Find 4 examples of errors of omission, and 4 examples of errors of commission. Use the following format to present each example:

Sentence containing error (with error in **boldface**)
URL (web site address) of the page where you found the example

To make the search easier, do the following:

- From the Google main page, click on “Advanced Search”.

- Put what you think might be a likely error in the “with the exact phrase” blank (you will probably have to try lots of cases to find enough actual errors). For example, to find an error of omission with agreement –s, you might try searching for “she walk”. To find an error of commission, look for something like “I walks”, and so on. Try lots of different verbs.

- In “Domain”, put “forums.eslcafe.com/student/” (without the quotation marks). This will limit your results to a Chinese discussion forum in which many of the participants are non-native speakers.
If you install the “Google Toolbar” (to get information, click on “More” on the Google main page), you will then be able to have the phrase you are looking for highlighted in yellow in the text, which can save you some time.

**Part II: Plural -s**
Now do the same with the plural -s suffix: 4 examples of errors of omission, and 4 examples of errors of commission. Use the same format as in Part I. A good way to look for errors with this suffix is to search for “many book” (or “many” followed by any singular noun) for errors of omission, and things like “a books” for errors of commission. You will have to try lots of different nouns.

**Part III**
Given the hierarchy of output processing strategies that we talked about, which of these two –s suffixes would you expect to be more difficult to acquire? In other words, which one requires a higher-level processing strategy? Explain your answer (briefly!).

Note: Though you can turn this assignment in handwritten if you like, I would encourage you to do it on a computer, since then you will be able to cut and paste the example sentences and URL’s without having to copy everything down by hand.