



Bamberg Studies in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Ba-TEFL

No. 2

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November 2023

Edited by Theresa Summer

To cite this article: Ledermann, Anna (2023): Collective nouns in the *Green Line* and *Access* series: Comparing textbook language with natural usage data. *Bamberg Studies in Teaching English as a Foreign Language* 2. 1–20.

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Collective nouns in the *Green Line* and *Access* series: Comparing textbook language with natural usage data

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 0009-0009-8735-0380

Abstract

German textbooks of English influence their users' acquisition of agreement patterns with collective nouns in two ways. On the one hand, the use of collective nouns throughout the textbooks serves as a language model for students, and on the other hand, their grammar sections provide explicit rules on agreement patterns with collective nouns. The present study analyzes both these aspects in the LehrplanPLUS versions of the textbook series *Green Line* and *Access* for Bavarian secondary schools (*Gymnasien*) and compares them to native speaker data from Levin (2001). Although this comparison shows that the agreement patterns with collective nouns throughout the textbooks support their nativelike acquisition, the grammar sections show some deficits that might inhibit the nativelike acquisition of agreement patterns with collective nouns.

Keywords: collective nouns, agreement patterns, textbook language, grammar sections, nativelikeness

1. Introduction

The development of grammatical competence requires learners to master the English subject-verb agreement, which might differ from their native language(s). For instance, while it is ungrammatical to use the morphologically singular noun *Team* with a plural verb in German as in (1), this is possible in English (see 2).

(1) **Das Team spielen gut.*

(2) *The team are playing well.*

Morphologically singular nouns, like *team*, that denote two or more discrete entities and that can occur with singular and plural verbs, as well as singular and plural personal and relative pronouns, are called *collective nouns* (Levin 2001: 18, 2006: 321; Depraetere 2003: 86). Since the collective noun controls in which number the verb or pronoun occurs, it is also called *controller* (Fernández Pena 2014: 324). The verb or pronoun that agrees in number with the syntactic and/or semantic feature of the controller is referred to as *target* (Fernández Pena 2014: 324; Levin 2001: 21).

One influential factor regarding the number of the target is the semantic context (Levin 2001: 159). Here, the target is used in the singular when the unity/collectivity of the group denoted by the collective noun is stressed, whereas the target occurs in the plural when the individual group members are emphasized (Levin 2001: 159; Hundt 2006: 207). Hence, learning about collective nouns can teach students the importance of context when choosing between linguistic variables (here singular or plural target number) and improve their comprehension skills by enabling them to understand nuances in meaning based on the target number.

Previous research (Levin 2001, 2006; Biber et al. 2021; Fernández Pena 2014; Smith 2017; Sturt 2022; Depraetere 2003; Hundt 2006, 2009; Wong 2009) has identified a multitude of factors that influence agreement patterns with collective nouns. While these factors are subconsciously applied by native

speakers, they have to be acquired by learners of English. In a school setting, this acquisition is usually largely shaped by the textbooks used in class (cf. Elsner 2016: 442). German textbooks like the *Green Line* and the *Access* series for English education at Bavarian secondary schools (*Gymnasien*) influence this acquisition in two ways. On the one hand, they use collective nouns throughout the textbooks in texts, activities, or example sentences, and on the other hand, they devote specific grammar sections to collective nouns.

Due to the didactic purpose of the textbooks, it is likely that the grammar sections on collective nouns will not refer to all factors influencing agreement patterns that have been discussed in previous linguistic research. This didactic reduction aims to transform a complex (scientific) topic into a learner-accessible form (Lehner 2020: 11). A detailed description of linguistic structures is likely of little use to (younger) learners and might also demotivate them. Although necessary, this simplification also has its drawbacks. For instance, the choice between singular and plural targets might seem more clear-cut than it is in the reality of native speakers since not all factors that might influence this choice are presented. Therefore, the agreement patterns of collective nouns throughout the textbooks are pivotal in enabling students to use singular and plural agreement with collective nouns in a target-like manner.

For this reason, the present study not only examines the explicitly stated rules in the grammar sections of the above-mentioned Bavarian textbook series but also analyzes the agreement patterns of collective nouns throughout the textbooks regarding the most discussed factors in linguistic research that influence said agreement patterns: parts of speech, focus on collectivity vs. on individual members of a group, and individual nouns. By doing this, the present study seeks to find out how well the textbook data matches native speaker agreement patterns with collective nouns, and hence if the textbooks provide a good language model for learners of English. However, whether native speakers should be the language model in English language education is debated by scholars (Llurda 2016: 52). While the traditional goal of English language education is to become as close to a native speaker as possible, newer approaches stress the importance of English as a *Lingua Franca* and suggest becoming a successful communicator with native and non-native speakers as the new goal of English language education (Llurda 2016: 54).

This paper first outlines the factors influencing the choice between singular and plural agreement with collective nouns that have been discussed in previous research. Then, the methodology section will introduce the analyzed textbook series and explain the procedure of finding and categorizing relevant instances of collective nouns and their respective targets. Next, I will present and discuss the results of the analysis of the grammar sections on collective nouns as well as of the use of collective nouns and their targets throughout the textbooks with regard to the parts of speech, focus on collectivity vs. on individual members of a group, and individual nouns. Based on this discussion, I will point out practical implications with the help of an example grammar section on collective nouns.

2. Previous research on agreement with collective nouns

Whether targets occur in the singular or plural with collective nouns is largely influenced by the meaning of the collective that is emphasized: its unity or its individual members (Levin 2001: 159). While this approach focuses on semantic agreement, it leaves aside syntactic agreement. However, the latter is included in Corbett's agreement hierarchy (2022: 182):

attributive > predicate > relative pronoun > personal pronoun.

(3) *This team is winning.* *They are very happy.*

The further right a target is in the hierarchy, the more important the semantic feature (focus on unity or individual members of a group) becomes in comparison to the syntactic/grammatical feature of the

controller (Corbett 2022: 183) and so does the likelihood of the occurrence of the target in the plural (Levin 2001: 106). Unlike verbs and personal pronouns, relative pronouns are not marked for number, yet their number “can be inferred from the accompanying verbs” (Levin 2001: 55). Therefore, *which* can be counted as a singular target, *who* as a plural target and *that* as a neutral target (Levin 2001: 55–60).

Factors that increase the odds of plural agreement and decrease the odds of singular agreement are a large distance as well as syntactic boundaries (e.g., period or comma) between the controller and the target (Levin 2001: 92) and an intervening plural noun phrase between the controller and the target (Levin 2001: 102–103) as in *Her family, the Zajacs, are in Cracow* (Carleton-Gertsch et al. 2017b: 165). The semantics of the (pre-)determiner of the controller (Levin 2001: 121) or of the verb (Levin 2001: 149, 151) can influence the agreement patterns of collective nouns as well. Usually, a (pre-)determiner emphasizes the collective noun as a unit, like *this* in (3), and thus increases the likelihood of singular agreement (Levin 2001: 125). However, the pre-determiners *all* and *half* focus on the members of a collective, and hence plural targets are more likely to occur (Levin 2001: 124–125). Verbs that describe the composition (e.g., *consist*), the forming (e.g., *form, found*), or the size of the collective (e.g., *grow, decrease*) are almost never used in the plural (Levin 2001: 149, 151).

Apart from those more general factors, the agreement patterns with collective nouns are also largely dependent on the individual collective nouns (Levin 2001: 129). Some collective nouns, like *crew* or *family* in British English (BrE), have no clear tendency for plural or singular verb agreement, and a few collective nouns, like *staff* in BrE, prefer plural verb agreement (Biber et al. 2021: 190). However, most collective nouns more often occur with verbs in the singular than in the plural (Biber et al. 2021: 190; Levin 2001: 129). This preference is more pronounced in American English (AmE) than in BrE (Levin 2001: 70). Regarding pronouns, there is more singular agreement in written corpora in AmE than in BrE and more plural agreement in informal speech in AmE than in BrE (Levin 2001: 70, 109). In general, plural agreement is more likely to occur in speech than in writing and is especially frequent in informal speech (Hundt 2006: 209, 2009: 208–209).

So far, the agreement patterns used with collective nouns throughout German textbooks of English have not been analyzed. However, with the help of Levin’s (2001) corpus data, Schlüter (2019: 205–209) has demonstrated that the statement of the *Green Line Basisgrammatik* that plural agreement can be found very often in English – if taken to mean that plural agreement occurs more frequently than singular agreement – is not true. The present study seeks to fill this research gap and therefore analyzes the explicitly stated grammar rules on collective nouns as well as the actual usage of collective nouns throughout the textbooks in the *Green Line Basisgrammatik*, the *Green Line Oberstufengrammatik* and the *Green Line* and *Access* textbooks for grades 5 to 10.

3. Methodology

3.1. Textbook series: *Access* and *Green Line*

The present study focuses on the LehrplanPLUS versions of the *Access* and the *Green Line* series, two established textbook series that are accredited by the Bavarian State Ministry of Education for the instruction of English as the first foreign language in Bavarian *Gymnasien* (secondary schools) (Judenmann n.d.; Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus 2022: 6). Both textbook series cover grades 5 to 10 and therefore comprise six students’ textbooks each. Additionally, the *Green Line Basisgrammatik* and the *Green Line Oberstufengrammatik*, which are reference grammars for 7th to 10th grade and 11th to 12th grade, respectively, are included in the present study. In the following, the two grammars and the students’ textbooks will be subsumed under the term *textbooks*. Table 1 provides an overview of the textbook corpus, including the language used and the text genres found in the textbooks.

Grade	Access	Green Line	Language	Content in English
5	Access Bayern 5 (Thaler & Rademacher 2016)	Green Line 1 (Carleton-Gertsch et al. 2017b)	Mostly English, share increases in higher grades	Texts from a range of genres: e.g., conversations between friends, emails, informational texts, and short stories
6	Access Bayern 6 (Thaler & Rademacher 2018)	Green Line 2 (Carleton-Gertsch et al. 2017a)		
7	Access Bayern 7 (Thaler & Rademacher 2019)	Green Line 3 (Carleton-Gertsch et al. 2019)		
8	Access Bayern 8 (Thaler & Rademacher 2020)	Green Line 4 (Baer-Engel et al. 2020)		
9	Access Bayern 9 (Thaler & Rademacher 2021)	Green Line 5 (Baer-Engel et al. 2021)		
10	Access Bayern 10 (Thaler & Rademacher 2022)	Green Line 6 (Baer-Engel et al. 2022)		
7–10		Green Line Basisgrammatik (Butzko et al. 2013)	German and English	Summaries of grammatical topics and activities (short texts: e.g., dialogues, emails, fictional texts, travel guides)
11–12		Green Line Oberstufengrammatik (Bettinger et al. 2012)	Mostly German	Example sentences

Table 1: Overview of the textbook corpus

The students' textbooks consist of units, which include texts and activities that are mostly in English, a grammar section, and a vocabulary section. Besides these central parts, sociocultural information, descriptions of important skills and methods, longer stories, and additional activities can be found in most books. Both American and British settings are included, although it is generally not specified whether British or American English is used in a text. Textbooks that include explicit grammar rules regarding collective nouns are marked in green in Table 1.

3.2. Finding and filtering out relevant hits

Since previous research has shown that the agreement patterns vary considerably depending on the individual nouns (Biber et al. 2021: 190; Levin 2001: 129), the same 26 collective nouns as in Levin (2001: 50) were searched for in the OCR-processed PDF versions of the textbooks to ensure comparability of the results. These collective nouns are:

army, association, audience, band, clergy, club, commission, committee, company, council, couple, crew, crowd, department, faculty, family, government, group, majority, minority, party, population, the press, the public, staff, team

In the next step, irrelevant hits like *club* with the meaning of 'discotheque' as well as targets that could not be classified as either singular or plural were discarded. This included the relative pronoun *that* (Levin 2001: 60), instances where the textbooks provided the singular and the plural target, as in (4), and instances that were part of an activity where the correct form of the target had to be chosen by the

student, as in (5). Based on this procedure, the collective nouns *clergy*, *faculty*, and *staff* were excluded from further analysis since no relevant hits could be found in the textbooks.

- (4) *His family wants/want to move to Bristol.* (Thaler & Rademacher 2020: 144)
- (5) *Nukilik's family 1 ... (want) to stay in Nunavik but he doesn't know how to plan a future there* (Thaler & Rademacher 2020: 43).

3.3. Categorizing targets

The targets were categorized according to number (singular/ plural), part of speech (verb/ personal pronoun/ relative pronoun), and whether the unity or the individual members of the collective were emphasized. A target was marked as singular when it was the third person singular form of a verb, the personal pronoun *it* or *its*, or the relative pronoun *which*. The plural was chosen when the target was the plural form of a verb, the personal pronoun *they*, *them*, *their*, or *themselves*, or the relative pronoun *who*.

A focus on the collective as a unit was assumed when every member of the collective was doing the same thing (6) or when the collective performs an action to which every member is contributing as in (7). A construction was labeled as emphasizing the individual members of a collective when the differences within a group were highlighted (8), or even though the members were all doing the same thing, they were not contributing to a bigger group product (9).

- (6) *Does your family celebrate anything like Thanksgiving?* (Carleton-Gertsch et al. 2019: 93)
- (7) *Our club assists minorities in the fight against racism.* (Baer-Engel et al. 2021: 185)
- (8) *the government are arguing about ...* (Thaler & Rademacher 2020: 43)
- (9) *The press are waiting outside.* (Bettinger et al. 2012: 120)

3.4. Comparison of the results with Levin's study (2001)

To check the rules as well as the actual usage of collective nouns and their targets throughout the textbooks for their nativelikeness, the results from Levin's study (2001) on agreement with collective nouns in AmE and BrE were consulted. Due to this comparison with Levin's study (2001), native speakers were chosen as the language model in the present study.

In this study, Levin analyzes the influence of several factors on the agreement patterns with collective nouns, including the factors that have also been analyzed in the present study: parts of speech, focus on the collectivity vs. on the individual members of a group, and individual nouns. However, native-speaker hits were not tagged based on the semantic factor of unity vs. collectivity. As written corpora, Levin uses the 1995 editions of two newspapers, *The New York Times* (AmE) and *The Independent* (BrE), while the analysis of spoken English is based on the Longman Spoken American Corpus (LSAC) and the British National Corpus (BNC) (Levin 2001: 43). The LSAC was collected in 1995 (Ackermann et al. 2011: 4) and contains around 5 million words of mainly conversational texts, but also includes other spoken AmE texts like lectures (Levin 2001: 44). The spoken component of the BNC consists of 10 million words of British English (Levin 2001: 44). The data includes mostly conversations and context-governed texts, like lectures, political speeches, or sports commentaries, from the 1990s (Levin 2001: 44; Burnard 2007).

4. Results

4.1. Explicit grammar rules in the textbooks

Explicit grammar rules on collective nouns can be found in the textbooks *Access 8*, *Green Line 4*, *Green Line Basisgrammatik*, and *Green Line Oberstufengrammatik*. Except for the *Green Line Oberstufengrammatik*, terms like *nouns for groups of people* (*Green Line Basisgrammatik*) are used instead of *collective nouns*. This conceptual fuzziness is also reflected in the nouns included in the grammar sections, which include *police* (*Access 8*, *Green Line Basisgrammatik*) and *people* (meaning ‘persons’) (*Green Line Basis- and Oberstufengrammatik*), which almost always take plural targets, and *salmon* (*Green Line 4*), which takes singular verbs when referring to the food but can also be used as an irregular plural form of the animal salmon and hence take plural targets. Table 2 gives an overview of the collective nouns mentioned in the different grammar sections.

Textbooks	Collective nouns
<i>Access 8</i> (p. 144)	<i>band, family, government, group, team, audience, choir, class, club, crowd, enemy, majority, minority</i>
<i>Green Line 4</i> (p. 173–174)	<i>family, team</i>
<i>Green Line Basisgrammatik</i> (p. 13–15)	<i>class, crowd, family, team</i>
<i>Green Line Oberstufengrammatik</i> (p. 120)	<i>audience, orchestra, class, club, crew, staff, department, family, team, jury, bank, school, university, college, company, the press, army</i> <i>as well as proper nouns like the United Nations, the BBC, ...</i>

Table 2: Collective nouns mentioned in the textbook corpus

Regarding the part of speech of the targets, all textbooks mention verbs, and, apart from the *Green Line Oberstufengrammatik*, also refer to pronouns and provide examples of personal pronouns. Examples of possessive pronouns can be found in *Access 8* and *Green Line Basisgrammatik*. Moreover, the English summary in the latter states that “You can use nouns for groups of people [...] with singular or plural [...] determiners” (Butzko et al. 2013: 14).

All textbooks advise the students to use singular targets if the collectivity of the group is emphasized, and plural targets if the focus is placed on the individual members of a group. For instance, *Access 8* states the following: “As we can think of a group of people either as a number of individuals or as a single unit, we can use a plural verb and pronoun or a singular verb and pronoun after these nouns” (Thaler & Rademacher 2020: 144). Apart from the *Green Line Basisgrammatik*, all textbooks refer to the differences between British and American English in some way. Here, the *Green Line Oberstufengrammatik* gives the most detailed account by stating that especially in BrE the plural form of a verb is used when the individual members of a collective are emphasized, while in AmE singular verbs are usually used (Bettinger et al. 2012: 120). *Access 8* implicitly assumes BrE as a standard and mentions that in AmE singular targets are generally more common (Thaler & Rademacher 2020: 144). It therefore does not limit its explanations to verbs as targets. Lastly, *Green Line 4* explains that speakers of BrE in particular can distinguish between a focus on the unity and a focus on the individual members of a collective (Baer-Engel et al. 2020: 173). This is in line with Levin (2001:70) who states that these “semantic factors are allowed different degrees of influence in the choice between singular and plural targets” in the different varieties. One rule that is only stated in the *Green Line Oberstufengrammatik* is that names of clubs and teams are used with the plural form of a verb (Bettinger et al. 2012: 120).

4.2. Agreement patterns throughout the textbooks

The textbooks *Green Line 1–6*, *Green Line Basisgrammatik*, *Green Line Oberstufengrammatik*, and *Access 5–10* include 399 relevant collective nouns that act as controllers and 499 relevant targets that agree with them. 62% of these targets occur in the singular. The following chapter will show which factors influence the choice between a singular and a plural target.

4.2.1. Part of speech

Targets that agree with the collective noun are verbs in 64% of the cases, personal pronouns in 33%, and relative pronouns in 3% of the cases. Figure 1 shows the percentage of plural targets for each part of speech.

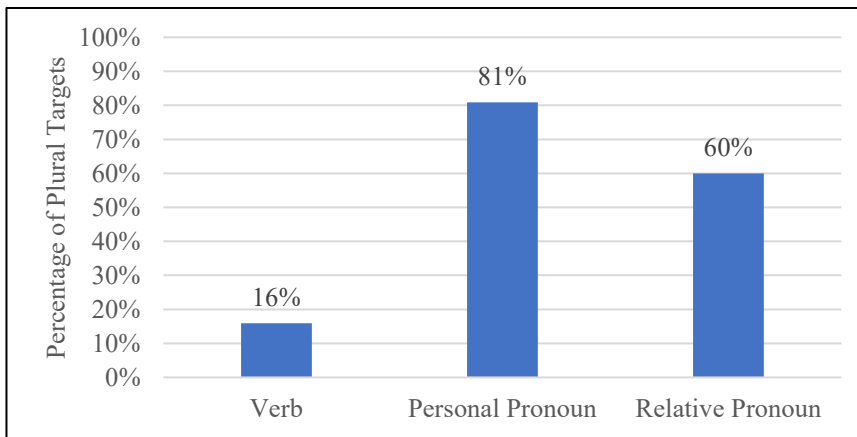


Figure 1: Percentage of plural targets for each part of speech of the target in the textbook corpus

The results reveal that verb targets occur mainly in the singular, while the plural is used with the majority of pronoun targets. For relative pronouns, this majority is smaller than for personal pronouns, which are used with the plural four out of five times.

4.2.2. Focus on collectivity vs. focus on the individual members

Around two-thirds of all targets occur in a context that emphasizes the collectivity of the group denoted by the collective nouns, while a third of the targets occur in a context that emphasizes the individual members. Figure 2 shows the percentages of plural agreement in these contexts.

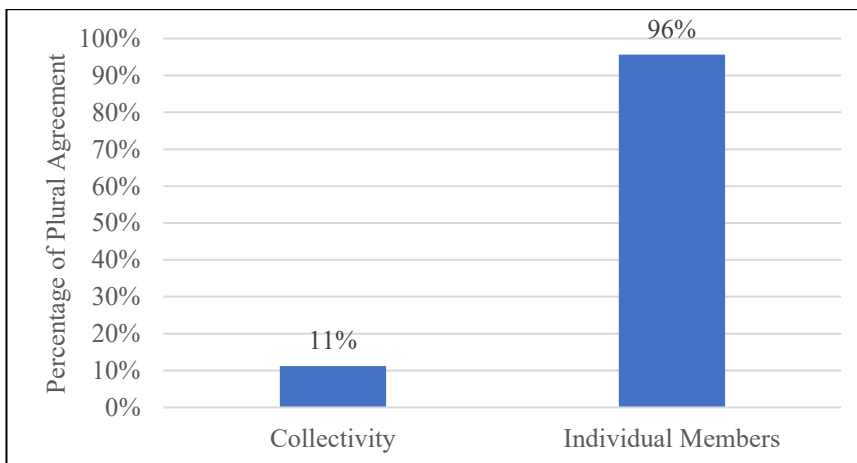


Figure 2: Percentage of plural agreement for the focus on collectivity vs. the focus on the individual members in the textbook corpus

If the collectivity of a group is highlighted, the singular form of the target is clearly preferred. In contrast, if the individual members of a collective are focused on, targets occur in the plural in 96% of the cases. Overall, 41 targets deviate from this strong tendency.

4.2.3. Individual nouns

Most of the collective nouns investigated in the present study occur more often with singular than with plural targets. Table 3 provides an overview of nouns in the textbook corpus and the percentages of their plural targets.

81–100%	<i>majority</i>
61–80%	<i>couple</i>
41–60%	<i>audience, team, council, crew, department, family, group</i>
21–40%	<i>committee, army, the press, band, crowd, population, government</i>
<21%	<i>company, party, club, association, commission, minority, the public</i>

Table 3: Percentage of plural targets with individual nouns in the textbook corpus

Majority and *couple* are used mainly with plural targets, while there is no clear preference for plural or singular agreement with *audience, team, council, crew, department, family,* and *group*. However, only the collective nouns written in green are the controllers of more than 10 targets. A list of the collective nouns that includes their raw frequencies as well as the exact percentages of plural and singular targets can be found in Appendix A.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the grammar sections on collective nouns shows that these usually also include nouns with other irregularities regarding agreement patterns. This might lead students to extend the rules for agreement patterns with collective nouns to non-collective nouns. Moreover, the sparsity of examples of collective nouns given in *Green Line 4* and the *Green Line Basisgrammatik* does not represent the multitude and diversity of collective nouns and therefore could lead students to believe that collective nouns are very few in number and hence not worth studying. For instance, although *clergy* and *faculty* are frequent collective nouns (Levin 2001: 49), they are neither mentioned in any of the grammar sections nor used as controllers throughout the textbooks. This could result in learners only using these collective nouns with the singular, even if they occur in a context that would favor plural agreement. To prevent this, the number of collective nouns used in classroom interactions should reach beyond the ones mentioned in the grammar sections of the textbooks.

None of the grammar sections mentions relative pronouns as possible targets, which might lead to a non-nativelike usage of relative pronouns with collective nouns by students. Furthermore, the *Green Line Basisgrammatik* incorrectly states that “[y]ou can use nouns for groups of people [...] with singular or plural [...] determiners” (Butzko et al. 2013: 14). This wording not only includes possessive determiners like *their*, for which the statement would be correct (see 10), but also, for instance, demonstratives like *these* which cannot be combined with morphologically singular collective nouns (see 11).

(10) *There is even a football team here now. They're so angry - they're afraid they'll miss **their** match!*
(Butzko et al. 2013: 13)

(11)* ***These** team are angry.*

Levin (2001: 105–110) demonstrates that the likelihood to take the plural decreases from left to right in the following hierarchy: personal pronouns > relative pronouns > verbs. This factor is not mentioned in the school grammars and students might therefore use the plural form of verbs, personal pronouns, and relative pronouns with equal frequency.

To simplify grammatical explanations for learners, all textbooks only reference between one and three factors that influence the choice between singular and plural agreement with collective nouns. They all correctly mention that the singular form of the target is used when the collectivity of a group is highlighted and the plural form is used when the individual members of a group are focused on (Levin 2001: 159). Apart from the *Green Line Basisgrammatik*, the factor variety is presented in the grammar sections of the textbooks as well. However, apart from the *Green Line Oberstufengrammatik*, the simplification of the factor variety results in incorrect overgeneralization according to which plural agreement, in general, is less frequent in AmE than in BrE. If the learner's target variety is American English, these rules could inhibit a nativelike usage of agreement patterns with collective nouns. Without reference to the variety, the *Green Line Oberstufengrammatik* states that names of clubs and teams are used with the plural form of a verb. However, according to Levin, BrE and AmE differ here (Levin 2001: 61). While names of clubs and teams are frequently used with plural verb targets in BrE, these types of collective nouns are only infrequently used with plural verb targets in AmE (Levin 2001: 61).

Since the explicit mention of all factors that influence agreement patterns with collective nouns would overwhelm the students, the English used throughout the textbooks acts as a language model and becomes crucial for a proficient acquisition of the agreement patterns with collective nouns. The present study has found that the usage of collective nouns throughout the textbooks is similar to the one of native speakers.

However, first, it should be mentioned that the comparisons made in the following should be taken with a grain of salt due to the differing times of data collection – Levin's data is from the 1990s while the textbooks were published between 2012 and 2022 – and the different genres analyzed in Levin's and the present study. While Levin analyzed newspapers (13,414 targets) as well as spoken conversations and context-governed speeches (3,775 targets), the textbooks include texts from a range of different genres. Genres can have a substantial effect on agreement patterns with collective nouns (Levin 2001: 78–86). To minimize this effect, the data from the different genres is combined and compared with the data of the present study (see Appendices B and C). However, due to the higher number of targets in newspapers, this combination of data still leads to a bias in the direction of the newspaper genre.

The analysis of the use of collective nouns throughout the textbooks has shown that 38% of all targets occur in the plural, which is most similar to British English in Levin's data, where 37% of all targets appear in the plural. When looking at the percentage of plural agreement based on the part of speech, the textbook corpus lies between the data of spoken British and American English (Levin 2001: 108–109). However, since the textbook corpus does not consist of spoken English, which has a higher percentage of plural targets than written English, it could be speculated that the percentage of plural agreement might be higher in the textbooks than would be nativelike. In Levin's study (2001: 108–109), verbs are the most frequent targets in both varieties, followed by personal pronouns, and relative pronouns (only *who* and *which*). The present study confirms this hierarchy for textbook data but includes considerably fewer relative pronoun targets. This low frequency throughout the textbooks might be the reason why relative pronouns are neither explicitly mentioned nor included as examples in the grammar sections on collective nouns. Regarding the focus on the collectivity of the group or the focus on the individual members, the textbooks largely agree with Levin's analysis of verbs that should prefer singular agreement (description of the composition, the forming, or the size of the collective) and of the pre-determiners *all* and *half*, which favor plural agreement (Levin 2001: 124–125, 149). Lastly,

the individual collective nouns that occurred with more than 10 targets in the textbook corpus show similar agreement patterns to British English in Levin's data (see Appendices B and C). The preference of *majority* and *couple* for plural agreement is likely due to their inherent reference to number (Levin 2001: 134–135), while *company*, *party*, *commission*, and *association* all refer to decision-making bodies, which are likely to be “perceived as fairly abstract entities” (Levin 2001: 142), and therefore occur mainly with singular targets.

6. Practical implications

Figure 3 illustrates a possible grammar section on collective nouns, which addresses the above-mentioned deficits of the *Green Line* and *Access* grammar sections on collective nouns by building on the results of Levin's study (2001). Regarding the vocabulary and grammar used, this section is designed for 8th grade students, since this is the year the Bavarian LehrplanPLUS requires students to learn about agreement in English (Staatsinstitut für Schulqualität und Bildungsforschung 2023). This grammar section can be used as a source of reference for students. They can review what they have learned about collective nouns during lessons and clarify any uncertainties they might have. Moreover, students can consult this grammar section while doing their homework or preparing for exams.

Unlike the textbooks analyzed above, this grammar section does not mix collective nouns with other nouns like *salmon*. This decreases the likelihood of learners incorrectly extending the rules for collective nouns to other nouns. Moreover, each example contains a different collective noun and at the end of the section a list of other frequent collective nouns is given. Here, the three dots indicate that there are more collective nouns in English than the 26 (Levin 2001: 50) mentioned in the grammar section. These diverse collective nouns, this open-ended list as well as the short definition of collective nouns at the beginning of the grammar section can help learners identify collective nouns and thus use nativelike agreement patterns with them.

Moreover, the contexts that can influence agreement patterns with collective nouns are presented in a structured and more detailed way than in the textbooks. Although the explanations for each context are short, no incorrect simplifications are made. Instead, general tendencies, indicated by the adverbs *usually* and *(more) often*, are provided. Hence, the incorrect overgeneralization according to which plural agreement is less frequent in AmE than in BrE is not repeated in Figure 3. Therefore, not only learners whose target variety is British English are enabled to use nativelike agreement patterns with collective nouns. Nativelike agreement patterns with collective nouns are also promoted by the addition of the part of speech as well as the medium (written and spoken) as context that influences the choice between a singular or a plural target. Regarding the part of speech, the present grammar section also explicitly refers to relative pronouns, which are an important type of target but are not mentioned by any of the textbooks analyzed.

However, although more contexts that influence agreement patterns with collective nouns are included in Figure 3 than in the textbooks, many contexts identified by Levin (2001) are not included. This was done to keep the grammar explanations comprehensible and prevent students from feeling overwhelmed by the large number of contexts.

Agreement with collective nouns	
Collective nouns describe groups of people, animals, or things. When these nouns are in the singular, the verbs and pronouns that are connected to them can be in the singular or plural depending on the context.	
Contexts	Examples
Group as one unit or individual members of a group	
If the group is acting as one single unit, you usually use singular verbs and pronouns.	<i>"Our club creates the yearbook."</i>
If you want to emphasize the individual members within a group, you usually use plural verbs and pronouns.	<i>"His family are arguing about their next vacation. They all want to go to different places."</i>
Personal pronoun, relative pronoun, or verb	
You use pronouns more often in the plural than verbs.	<i>"Our team is winning the game. They have already scored three goals."</i>
Relative pronouns have no singular or plural form. When you use collective nouns, you use <i>which</i> as a singular and <i>who</i> as a plural relative pronoun.	<i>"The audience, which was greeted by the band, cheered loudly." <i>"The band, who were close to tears, thanked the audience."</i></i>
Written or spoken	
You use singular verbs and pronouns more often in writing than in speech.	<i>"The government plans to create a national park."</i>
In speech, you use pronouns more often in the plural than in the singular.	<i>"The crowd was going crazy. They were screaming and jumping up and down."</i>
American English or British English	
In writing, British English speakers use plural pronouns and verbs more often than speakers of American English.	<i>"The student council are discussing the colour of the school uniforms."</i>
However, in speech, speakers of American English use plural pronouns more often than speakers of British English.	<i>"The yearbook committee is looking at the pictures of the bake sale last fall. They want to include a picture of the cookies in the yearbook."</i>
More collective nouns that are frequent in English: <i>army, association, clergy, commission, company, couple, crew, department, faculty, group, majority, minority, party, population, the press, the public, staff, ...</i>	

Figure 3: Example grammar section on collective nouns for 8th grade and above

7. Conclusion

The present study has demonstrated that while the explicitly stated rules in the grammar sections have some deficits that might inhibit the nativelike acquisition of agreement patterns with collective nouns, the usage of collective nouns and their targets throughout the textbooks largely conforms to the native speaker data collected by Levin (2001), and therefore supports a nativelike acquisition of agreement patterns with collective nouns.

The lack of explicit references to as well as of examples of relative pronouns in the *Green Line* and *Access* grammar sections might result in the learners using singular and plural agreement with relative pronouns in a non-nativelike way. Furthermore, the missing detail concerning American English in the grammar sections could lead students whose target variety is American English to produce non-nativelike agreement patterns with collective nouns. Lastly, the *Green Line Basisgrammatik* claims that determiners can occur in the singular or plural when agreeing with a collective noun. While this is true for possessive determiners, it is incorrect for other types of determiners, and hence students following this rule will produce non-nativelike agreement patterns with collective nouns. In a classroom setting, these shortcomings of the grammar sections could be compensated through corpus-informed teaching methods (cf. Keck & Kim 2014: 87-120). A grammar section that addresses these shortcomings and can serve as a model for future textbooks was presented in section 6.

Throughout the textbooks, the agreement patterns with collective nouns show a closer resemblance to native speaker patterns. Here, a tendency towards British English can be observed regarding the overall percentage of plural agreement and the agreement patterns with collective nouns that occurred with at least 10 targets in the textbook data. The agreement patterns for different parts of speech of the textbook data lie between those observed for AmE and BrE in Levin's study (2001).

However, within the scope of the present study, only a rough comparison of the agreement patterns with collective nouns was possible because of the different genres included in Levin's data and the textbook data. Since different genres also influence agreement patterns with collective nouns, the data of the present study should also be compared to native speaker data from more comparable genres. Moreover, this study has shown how the grammar sections on collective nouns in the *Green Line* and *Access* textbooks and their usage throughout the textbooks might influence language learning but did not verify these claims. Since no previous studies exist that verify these claims, further research is needed to find out which agreement patterns with collective nouns German learners of English actually use and if these reflect the tendency of the textbooks towards British English.

Acknowledgements

The present publication has emerged from an interdisciplinary seminar entitled "Researching and Teaching English Grammar", taught by Prof. Julia Schlüter and Prof. Theresa Summer in the winter term 2022/2023 at the University of Bamberg. I would like to give my warmest thanks to my supervisor Prof. Julia Schlüter for her support and valuable advice throughout the research and writing of this paper. Many thanks also go to Prof. Theresa Summer for the opportunity to publish my paper in this series and to Prof. Theresa Summer and Regina Grund for their helpful comments on this paper.

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Appendix

A. Textbook corpus: Individual collective nouns with the raw and relative frequencies of singular and plural targets

Collective nouns that occur with more than 10 targets are marked in green.

	N of all targets	Singular		Plural	
		N	%	N	%
<i>army</i>	3	2	67%	1	33%
<i>association</i>	1	1	100%	0	0%
<i>audience</i>	7	3	43%	4	57%
<i>band</i>	28	19	68%	9	32%
<i>club</i>	30	28	93%	2	7%
<i>commission</i>	1	1	100%	0	0%
<i>committee</i>	5	3	60%	2	40%
<i>company</i>	36	31	86%	5	14%
<i>council</i>	8	4	50%	4	50%
<i>couple</i>	3	1	33%	2	67%
<i>crew</i>	2	1	50%	1	50%
<i>crowd</i>	20	15	75%	5	25%
<i>department</i>	4	2	50%	2	50%
<i>family</i>	83	44	53%	39	47%
<i>government</i>	42	32	76%	10	24%
<i>group</i>	112	59	53%	53	47%
<i>majority</i>	8	1	13%	7	88%
<i>minority</i>	1	1	100%	0	0%
<i>party</i>	7	6	86%	1	14%
<i>population</i>	12	9	75%	3	25%
<i>the press</i>	3	2	67%	1	33%
<i>the public</i>	4	4	100%	0	0%
<i>team</i>	78	38	49%	40	51%

B. Textbook corpus: Individual collective nouns with the raw and relative frequencies of singular and plural targets based on the part of speech of the target

	Verb				Relative Pronoun				Personal pronoun			
	Singular		Plural		Singular		Plural		Singular		Plural	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>army</i>	2	100%	0	0%	-	-	-	-	0	0%	1	100%
<i>association</i>	1	100%	0	0%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>audience</i>	3	60%	2	40%	-	-	-	-	0	0%	2	100%
<i>band</i>	16	84%	3	16%	2	67%	1	33%	1	17%	5	83%
<i>club</i>	20	100%	0	0%	-	-	-	-	8	80%	2	20%
<i>commission</i>	1	100%	0	0%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>committee</i>	3	100%	0	0%	-	-	-	-	0	0%	2	100%
<i>company</i>	26	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	4	44%	5	56%
<i>council</i>	3	60%	2	40%	-	-	-	-	1	33%	2	67%
<i>couple</i>	1	100%	0	0%	-	-	-	-	0	0%	2	100%
<i>crew</i>	1	100%	0	0%	-	-	-	-	0	0%	1	100%
<i>crowd</i>	12	100%	0	0%	-	-	-	-	3	38%	5	63%
<i>department</i>	2	100%	0	0%	-	-	-	-	0	0%	2	100%
<i>family</i>	42	75%	14	25%	-	-	-	-	2	7%	25	93%
<i>government</i>	28	90%	3	10%	2	100%	0	0%	2	22%	7	78%
<i>group</i>	55	81%	13	19%	0	0%	8	100%	4	11%	32	89%
<i>majority</i>	1	14%	6	86%	-	-	-	-	0	0%	1	100%
<i>minority</i>	1	100%	0	0%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>party</i>	3	100%	0	0%	-	-	-	-	3	75%	1	25%
<i>population</i>	8	80%	2	20%	-	-	-	-	1	50%	1	50%
<i>the press</i>	2	67%	1	33%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>the public</i>	4	100%	0	0%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>team</i>	35	88%	5	13%	1	100%	0	0%	2	5%	35	95%

C. Summarized relevant results from Levin's study (2001)

C.1. Plural agreement in all genres distributed across varieties and part of speech of the targets

	Verbs		Personal Pronoun		Relative Pronoun	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
AmE	132	4	667	41	197	26
BrE	1354	27	1053	62	455	46
All	1486	17	1720	52	652	38

C.2. Individual collective nouns with the raw and relative frequencies of singular and plural targets based on the part of speech of the target.

C.2.1. American English: Newspaper and spoken texts

	Verb				Relative Pronoun				Personal Pronoun			
	Sg.		Pl.		Sg.		Pl.		Sg.		Pl.	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>army</i>	74	100	0	0	9	75	3	25	32	73	12	27
<i>association</i>	135	100	0	0	71	99	1	1	91	90	10	10
<i>audience</i>	193	99	2	1	15	83	3	17	24	32	52	68
<i>band</i>	171	97	6	3	42	63	25	37	116	74	41	26
<i>clergy</i>	3	38	5	63	0	–	0	–	1	25	3	75
<i>club</i>	133	100	0	0	18	100	0	0	40	74	14	26
<i>commission</i>	129	99	1	1	38	100	0	0	65	96	3	4
<i>committee</i>	175	99	1	1	35	95	2	5	36	80	9	20
<i>company</i>	358	99	4	1	62	89	8	11	109	63	63	37
<i>council</i>	122	99	1	1	36	97	1	3	42	84	8	16
<i>couple</i>	19	39	30	61	0	0	24	100	0	0	29	100
<i>crew</i>	114	98	2	2	9	90	1	10	18	35	34	65
<i>crowd</i>	205	99	3	1	23	55	19	45	53	37	90	63
<i>department</i>	158	100	0	0	41	100	0	0	42	78	12	22
<i>faculty</i>	18	90	2	10	1	20	4	80	0	0	2	100
<i>family</i>	267	96	12	4	11	55	9	45	14	15	80	85
<i>government</i>	217	100	1	0	23	100	0	0	75	86	12	14
<i>group</i>	355	89	44	11	34	33	69	67	71	43	96	57
<i>majority</i>	17	71	7	29	1	100	0	0	2	22	7	78
<i>minority</i>	16	94	1	6	4	50	4	50	6	67	3	33
<i>party</i>	109	100	0	0	33	97	1	3	48	89	6	11
<i>population</i>	200	100	1	0	11	61	7	39	9	43	12	57
<i>press</i>	45	100	0	0	8	89	1	11	10	63	6	38
<i>public</i>	77	99	1	1	1	50	1	50	6	40	9	60
<i>staff</i>	137	97	4	3	7	54	6	46	12	31	27	69
<i>team</i>	178	98	4	2	15	65	8	35	33	55	27	45

81–100%	<i>couple</i>
61–80%	<i>clergy</i>
41–60%	<i>majority</i>
21–40%	<i>group, faculty, crowd, family, minority, crew</i>
<21%	<i>audience, staff, band, team, company, public, army, press, population, club, council, department, committee, government, association, party, commission</i>

C.2.2. British English: Newspaper and spoken texts

	Verb				Relative Pronoun				Personal Pronoun			
	Sg.		Pl.		Sg.		Pl.		Sg.		Pl.	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>army</i>	75	79	20	21	1	25	3	75	11	41	16	59
<i>association</i>	174	87	26	13	40	75	13	25	51	55	41	45
<i>audience</i>	73	82	16	18	8	42	11	58	5	10	46	90
<i>band</i>	28	61	18	39	5	38	8	62	2	15	11	85
<i>clergy</i>	0	0	4	100	0	–	0	–	0	0	1	100
<i>club</i>	124	69	56	31	17	44	22	56	20	27	54	73
<i>commission</i>	92	90	10	10	25	89	3	11	25	68	12	32
<i>committee</i>	201	83	40	17	70	77	21	23	69	62	43	38
<i>company</i>	448	94	31	6	97	81	23	19	93	70	40	30
<i>council</i>	463	76	144	24	42	72	16	28	58	41	83	59
<i>couple</i>	10	13	66	87	1	2	40	98	1	2	57	98
<i>crew</i>	29	44	37	56	11	46	13	54	2	7	25	93
<i>crowd</i>	95	59	65	41	17	38	28	62	17	15	98	85
<i>department</i>	134	91	13	9	12	67	6	33	31	54	26	46
<i>faculty</i>	0	–	0	–	0	–	0	–	0	–	0	–
<i>family</i>	167	61	108	39	15	43	20	57	10	10	91	90
<i>government</i>	659	88	89	12	25	71	10	29	123	60	81	40
<i>group</i>	237	70	100	30	69	42	95	58	34	24	107	76
<i>majority</i>	14	22	51	78	2	20	8	80	0	0	7	100
<i>minority</i>	6	50	6	50	1	13	7	88	0	–	0	–
<i>party</i>	250	92	23	8	32	82	7	18	67	76	21	24
<i>population</i>	65	92	6	8	5	50	5	50	4	44	5	56
<i>press</i>	61	62	37	38	4	40	6	60	5	26	14	74
<i>public</i>	110	53	97	47	4	19	17	81	2	5	40	95
<i>staff</i>	8	4	201	96	1	3	33	97	0	0	47	100
<i>team</i>	152	63	90	37	28	41	40	59	17	16	88	84

81–100%	<i>clergy, staff, couple</i>
61–80%	<i>majority, minority, crew</i>
41–60%	<i>crowd, public, family, team, band, group, audience, club, press</i>
21–40%	<i>army, council, committee, association</i>
<21%	<i>department, government, population, commission, company, party</i>

C.2.3. American and British English: Newspaper and spoken texts

	Verb				Relative Pronoun				Personal Pronoun			
	Sg.		Pl.		Sg.		Pl.		Sg.		Pl.	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>army</i>	149	88	20	12	10	63	6	38	43	61	28	39
<i>association</i>	309	92	26	8	111	89	14	11	142	74	51	26
<i>audience</i>	266	94	18	6	23	62	14	38	29	23	98	77
<i>band</i>	199	89	24	11	47	59	33	41	118	69	52	31
<i>clergy</i>	3	25	9	75	0	–	0	–	1	20	4	80
<i>club</i>	257	82	56	18	35	61	22	39	60	47	68	53
<i>commission</i>	221	95	11	5	63	95	3	5	90	86	15	14
<i>committee</i>	376	90	41	10	105	82	23	18	105	67	52	33
<i>company</i>	806	96	35	4	159	84	31	16	202	66	103	34
<i>council</i>	585	80	145	20	78	82	17	18	100	52	91	48
<i>couple</i>	29	23	96	77	1	2	64	98	1	1	86	99
<i>crew</i>	143	79	39	21	20	59	14	41	20	25	59	75
<i>crowd</i>	300	82	68	18	40	46	47	54	70	27	188	73
<i>department</i>	292	96	13	4	53	90	6	10	73	66	38	34
<i>faculty</i>	18	90	2	10	1	20	4	80	0	0	2	100
<i>family</i>	434	78	120	22	26	47	29	53	24	12	171	88
<i>government</i>	876	91	90	9	48	83	10	17	198	68	93	32
<i>group</i>	592	80	144	20	103	39	164	61	105	34	203	66
<i>majority</i>	31	35	58	65	3	27	8	73	2	13	14	88
<i>minority</i>	22	76	7	24	5	31	11	69	6	67	3	33
<i>party</i>	359	94	23	6	65	89	8	11	115	81	27	19
<i>population</i>	265	97	7	3	16	57	12	43	13	43	17	57
<i>press</i>	106	74	37	26	12	63	7	37	15	43	20	57
<i>public</i>	187	66	98	34	5	22	18	78	8	14	49	86
<i>staff</i>	145	41	205	59	8	17	39	83	12	14	74	86
<i>team</i>	330	78	94	22	43	47	48	53	50	30	115	70

81–100%	<i>couple</i>
61–80%	<i>clergy, majority, staff</i>
41–60%	<i>public, crowd</i>
21–40%	<i>family, group, minority, crew, team, press, faculty, club, audience, council, band, army</i>
<21%	<i>committee, government, association, company, department, population, party, comission</i>