Sluicing

It is a general and well-known rule of English grammar that the subject must agree with the verb in number – a singular subject requires a singular verb, and a plural subject requires a plural verb. There are many situations where the verbs are the same, but in one case – the verb *be* – there is always a difference between singular and plural in the third person:

- *He is/was going to give us some old questions on the exam.*
- *He are/were going to give us some old questions on the exam.*
- *They are/were going to give us some old questions on the exam.*
- *They is/was going to give us some old questions on the exam.*

However, in the second clause of the following sentence,

- *He’s going to give us some old questions on the exam, but which ones isn’t clear.*

... the word *ones* is plural, but it appears to be the subject of a singular *isn’t*. Moreover, changing the *isn’t* to a plural *aren’t* to agree with *ones* produces a sentence that may be grammatical (at least to some), but which has a different meaning:

- *?He’s going to give us some old questions on the exam, but which ones aren’t clear.*

What’s going on here, and why does the singular *isn’t* work better than the plural *aren’t*?

**HINT:** Obviously there has been some deletion in this clause. Start by figuring out what parts have been left out and determine what rules can apply to this clause.

**HINT:** The phenomenon described here goes by the name of *Sluicing.*

Maximum 1 page.