

Error analysis of Arab EFL learners' use of English articles in four semantic contexts [\pm SR, \pm HK]

Received : 23.05.2023
Accepted : 16.12.2023
Published : 30.12.2022
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10827087>

Muneera Muftah¹
Thamar University, Yemen

Abstract

The English article system (the, a(n), and the zero article \emptyset) is one of the most challenging but crucial aspects of EFL learners' English language acquisition. The purpose of this study is to investigate the types of errors that Arab EFL learners produce in their acquisition of the English article system based on Bickerton's (1981) Semantic Wheel Model which focuses on the features \pm Specific Referent (\pm SR) and \pm Assumed Known to the Hearer (\pm HK). The study involved 39 Arab EFL learners drawn from three proficiency groups and participated in an article cloze test. Six types of errors committed by Arab EFL learners are identified in [\pm SR, \pm HK] contexts. These errors are (1) deletion of the indefinite article, (2) substitution of the indefinite for the definite article, (3) substitution of the definite for the indefinite article, (4) use of the indefinite article with unmarked plurals, (5) use of the indefinite article with uncountable nouns, and (6) the use of the indefinite article with adjectives. The comparison of accuracy in article use for these contexts showed that [+SR, -HK] and [-SR, +HK] were the most difficult contexts for Arab EFL learners to acquire. Based on the finding some practical implications were proposed, which might assist EFL learners and teachers with some practicable suggestions and teaching instructions.

Keywords Error analysis, English articles, semantic contexts, EFL learners, Bickerton's (1981) Semantic Wheel Model (SWM)

1. Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) issues have ended up being of tremendous significance to students learning English as a second or foreign language (Muftah, 2016; Muftah & Rafik-Galea, 2013). The widespread use of the English language all over the world argues that learners should gain proficiency in the language (Muftah, 2023a & b). In English, articles are one of the most frequently occurring types of function words (Bailey & Lee, 2020). They constitute a particularly challenging language element for English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) learners.

The English articles the, a(n), and zero (\emptyset), are tough to master not only for ESL/EFL learners but also for children learning English as a first

¹ Dr. Muneera Muftah is currently working at Thamar University, Yemen. Her research area covers translation technologies, syntactic and morphological mental representation and development, vocabulary development in SLA, generative syntax and morphology, discourse studies and second language assessment. Contact: munmef5@gmail.com

language. On the other hand, mastering the English article system provides insight into the native speakers' competence (Ahmad & Khan, 2019). Because native speakers do not follow any formal rules for articles, Hewson (2017) refers to the English article system as a psycho-mechanism. They spontaneously utilize them without thinking about how they are being used. Consequently, articles are thought to be a source of difficulty for ESL/EFL learners, especially for those whose native languages lack articles or do have articles or article-like morphemes which are employed differently from English articles (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Master (as cited in Bataineb: 2005, p-2) claims that there are three reasons why EFL learners have difficulty comprehending the small particles *a*, *an*, and the system; (a) since articles are most commonly used in the language, it is often difficult for the learners to remember the rules, especially when dealing with an extended text. (b) These words are usually unstressed and are rarely emphasized, hence; non-native speakers may find it challenging to acquire (c) Learners particularly beginners look for a one-to-one correspondence between words and their functions but in the case of articles, one word represents various functions.

That is to say, the English article system performs multiple functions onto a single morpheme rather than having a one-to-one form and meaning connections. Function words, unlike content words, are frequently disregarded by learners when processing language mainly for meaning. This complexity offers a variety of challenges for ESL/EFL learners of English (Andersen, 1984). That is why, even after learning English, the majority of students make errors in articles.

This study attempts to identify the types of errors that Arab EFL learners commit in their acquisition of the English Article system with reference to Bickerton's semantic wheel model (1981) for noun phrase (NP) reference, marked by the features, [\pm Specific Referent (\pm SR)] and [\pm Assumed Known to the Hearer (\pm HK)]. Bickerton's binary semantic system was proposed as a way of categorizing items based on their semantic function. In his model, English NPs are classified by two features of referentiality—namely, specific reference [\pm Specific Referent (\pm SR)] and hearer's knowledge [\pm Assumed Known to the Hearer (\pm HK)]. As a result of these two aspects of referentiality, four basic NP contexts determine article use. The four basic NP contexts are herein denoted as uses of type 1 ([$-$ SR, $+$ HK], generics), type 2 ([$+$ SR, $+$ HK], referential definites), type 3 ([$+$ SR, $-$ HK], referential indefinites), and type 4 ([$-$ SR, $-$ HK], non-referentials).

In addition, Thomas (1989), Huebner (1985), and Butler (2002) provide a classification system for the four semantic contexts in terms of the two binary features, [\pm SR, \pm HK]. Generic nouns are indicated with *a*, *the*, \emptyset , and are classed as [$-$ SR, $+$ HK]. Non-referential nouns are denoted with *a*, \emptyset , and are classed as [$-$ SR, $-$ HK]. These articles are used with nouns that name a class to which another noun is asserted to belong or that refer to an unspecified member of a class (Thomas, 1989). Referential indefinite nouns denoted with *a*, \emptyset , are included in the [$+$ SR, $-$ HK] feature. The referent is identifiable not to the hearer but to the speaker, who is using the noun in the discourse for the first time. Finally, the [$+$ SR, $+$ HK] feature comprises the previously stated referential definite nouns, which are defined by entailment

or definition, and are distinct in all contexts or in a given context, etc. (Thomas, 1989). These nouns are marked with the.

Semantically, the Arabic article system is similar to that of English, although the forms are dramatically different. In Arabic the definite article *al* denotes definiteness, while indefiniteness is marked by the absence of *al*. Similarly, in English definiteness is marked by the definite article *the* and is marked by the indefinite articles *a(n)* and zero to define indefiniteness. In other words, even though the concept exists in both languages, indefiniteness in English is marked by lexical elements such as *a* and *an*, whereas in Arabic, it is marked by affixes such as the prefix *al* and the suffix *-n*, which both denote definiteness and indefiniteness respectively (Lyons, 1999). The incompatibility of the classification of countable versus uncountable nouns in the native and target languages (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999), which may lead to L1 transfer, is another source of complication in the use of these particles (Bataineh, 2005; Crompton, 2011).

Many Arab EFL researchers approached the problem from error analysis, acquisition, and pragmatics (Elumalai, 2019; Alhaisoni et al., 2017; Al-Qadi, 2017; Abudaljuh, 2016; Tawalbeh 2013; Bataineh, 2005). However, a few researchers, if any, analyzed the errors in English articles from a semantic perspective. Therefore, it is worthwhile to address the errors of the English articles from the semantic point of view on the basis of experimental study.

To achieve its objective, the current work attempts to investigate the types of errors that Arab EFL learners produce in their acquisition of the English article system based on Bickerton's (1981) Semantic Wheel Model. It seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What types of errors do Arab EFL learners make in their acquisition of the English article system?
2. Which of the four basic semantic contexts [\pm SR, \pm HK] is the most difficult context to acquire?

1.1. Literature Review

It is well recognized in EFL studies that nonnative English speakers have difficulties learning articles, and they make errors even when all other aspects of the language are learned (Ionin, Ko, & Wexler, 2004; Zdorenko & Paradis, 2007, 2008, 2012; White, 2008; among several others). The content of an utterance is unaffected by errors in article usage, and the indefinite and definite articles are occasionally interchangeable (Elumalai, 2019)

Research in the field of error analysis has indicated that learning articles is challenging for EFL learners. Kampookaew (2020) argued that the most common grammatical errors perpetrated by Thai EFL students were incorrect use of singular and plural nouns, omission of the article *the*, and subject-verb disagreements. Another research on English article use with Taiwanese EFL learners found that in some situations, the definite article was substituted for the indefinite article and that learners overused both the definite and indefinite articles while underusing the zero article (Barrett and Chen, 2011).

A semantic analysis of the definite article' misuse by Chinese learners of English has shown that [+SR, +HK] and [-SR, -HK] are proved to be the simplest to employ while [-SR, +HK] is the most problematic. Because Chinese learners identify the definite article with [+HK] contexts rather than [+SR], they tend to overuse the definite article in [+HK] settings (Geng, 2010). Aside from that, errors like the omission of articles were common in Chinese students' English writing (Zhan, 2015).

Similarly, Maqbool et al. (2018) asserted that learners whose mother tongue is Urdu, a language that does not have an article system, commit more errors as compared to those whose L1 has an articles system. They went on to say that students had a harder time learning indefinite articles and omitted them in their writings.

In the context of Arab EFL learners, several studies have indicated that English Articles are troublesome. Article errors, according to Leila and Saliha's study (2021), include redundant use of the, omission and inappropriate use of articles, absence of the indefinite article a as well as misuse of the article a before words with vowel sounds.

Alhaysony (2012) investigated the types of errors made in writing compositions encountered by 100 Saudi female EFL students. The results demonstrated that the ellipsis of the article surfaced more often errors than the substitution of the errors in use. Al- Mohanna (2014) investigated the types of article errors seen in the writing of Saudi university-level EFL students. The findings imply that the majority of errors are the result of common learning processes, including overgeneralization and simplification of the English article system. The omission of the indefinite article a and an and the substitution of the definite article the for the indefinite article a, an or Ø are the only two types of errors that could be attributed to native language transfer.

To study the influence of informal Jordanian Arabic on the usage of negation and definite articles in English, Tawalbeh (2013) used a gap-fill test and a translation test. As a result of the influence of L1, he discovered that students made more transfer errors when using the definite article than other types of errors in the same syntactic areas.

The correct use of the articles is one of the most difficult points in English grammar (Swan, 1995). Researchers attributed the errors in the use of articles to the learners' insufficient learning strategies, such as overgeneralization and simplification (Bataineh, 2005), and learners' insufficient practice and inability to comprehend the article system which leads to false analogy and over-application (Kamala, 1992). That is to say, if the learner does not already have a strong command of one of the Western European languages, the correct use of articles may be more challenging for him/her (Swan, 1995).

Master (1994) observes while evaluating the intricacy of the article system and the problems associated with learning that "researchers consider the article system to be un-learnable and therefore un-teachable, because it can only be acquired through natural exposure to the language" (p.229). Even for participants whose L1 does not have formal equivalents of the articles, Oller and Redding (1971) found that English article errors decrease as proficiency increases. As a result, it is recommended that increased focus

be placed on teaching English articles to learners to learners at different proficiency levels (Chan, 2019). L2 teachers should provide their learners with better resources on how to properly use the articles, especially in academic writing where it is regarded part of grammatical accuracy (Master, 2002).

In sum, conducting error analysis is one of the most effective methods for describing and explaining ESL/EFL learners' errors. This kind of analysis can uncover the sources of these errors as well as the causes of their frequent recurrence. Once the sources and causes are exposed, it will be feasible to determine the remedy, as well as the emphasis and sequence of future instruction.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The sample of the study comprised 39 Arab EFL undergraduate students (35 females and 4 males, aged 18-23) selected through a simple random sampling method. Based on their TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores, the participants were divided into three proficiency groups: the Advanced group scores were in the range of 570-645 (M = 601.19, SD = 28.9); the Upper-Intermediate group, 500-560 (M = 538.00, SD = 19.0); and the Lower-Intermediate group, 400-490 (M = 455.15, SD = 27.4).

2.2. Materials

The participants completed an article-focused cloze test adapted from Master (1994) and composed of fifty-eight (58) obligatory uses of the articles divided into two parts: discrete sentences and a descriptive paragraph. On a response sheet, participants were instructed to fill in the blanks by selecting the most acceptable article from among a, an, the, and Ø. In order to guarantee that the data accurately reflected the participants' individual unassisted ability, they were requested not to check in dictionaries or textbooks during the exercise, nor to collaborate with anyone else.

As for the validity, Master's (1994) article test instrument was deemed appropriate for this study for the following two reasons. First, the test covers the whole spectrum of article usage, including the four semantic categories, i.e. Type 1. Generic [-SR, +HK], Type 2. Definite [+SR, +HK], Type 3. Indefinite [+SR, -HK], Type 4. Non-referential [-SR, -HK]. Second, the test was intended to test article usage among non-native speakers of English, so it was also appropriate for Arab EFL learners.

As for the reliability of the test, the KR-21 reliability estimate was .829 in the pilot study. Therefore, the test adopted in the present study was both valid and reliable.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The test was administered in a classroom setting. The participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality prior to the test. Then, they were given a brief explanation to facilitate the test administration and were asked to respond to the test items as spontaneously and naturally as possible.

Although there was no time constraint, the test took approximately twenty to thirty (20 to 30) minutes to complete.

The present study focused on the distinction in use between the, a, and Ø. Therefore, both a and an were counted accurately in the indefinite article contexts, even if a was incorrectly replaced by an, or vice versa, just as Master (1987), Thomas (1989), and Lu (2001) did for their studies. In addition, Bickerton's (1981) semantic wheel model, [\pm Specific Referent, \pm Assumed Known to the Hearer] (i.e., [\pm SR, \pm HK]), was used as the theoretical framework, which excluded proper nouns or idiomatic expressions. Consequently, based on Bickerton's four semantic contexts, the errors of Arab EFL learners were gathered, categorized, and analyzed to determine the types and sources of errors on the use of the, a, and Ø.

3. Findings

3.1. Types of errors

In response to the research question, six types of errors committed by Arab EFL learners in these four contexts have been identified, these errors are (1) deletion of the indefinite article, (2) substitution of the indefinite for the definite article, (3) substitution of the definite for the indefinite article, (4) use of the indefinite article with unmarked plurals, (5) use of the indefinite article with uncountable nouns, and (6) the use of the indefinite article with adjectives.

3.1.1. Deletion of the Indefinite Article

A large number of errors were made under this category for example items 2, 21, 27, 43, and the like in Type 3 [+SR, -HK] (see Appendix C). These errors can be attributed to a variety of sources, the most evident of which is native language transfer, in which speakers give the equivalent of their native language structure as a result of their inadequate knowledge of the target language, as shown in the example taken from the following items:

Type 3 [+SR, -HK] (items 2, 21, and 27)

- Ahmed *is student* [is a student] at our university. (IF=0.91, 0.86, and 0.93) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.
- She owns *enormous* [an enormous] house in London. (item 21) (IF=0.45, 0.93, and 1.00) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.
- This room has *length* [a length] of 12 meters. (item 27) (IF=0.45, 0.79, and 0.71) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.

Here a considerable number of the participants made the error of deleting the indefinite article *a(n)* whose use is obligatory with the singular countable nouns *student*, *enormous house*, and *length*. In these instances,

English requires the use of an indefinite article, whereas Arabic does not require the use of one at all

Due to the aforementioned disparities between the two languages, ungrammatical structures are produced. The lack of a distinguishing marker for indefiniteness in Arabic, as opposed to English, is most likely the source of the learners' deviation from the target language rule. This assumption is further supported by previous research such as (Duskova,1969; Richards, 1971; and Bataineh, 2002; cited in Bataineh, 2005), among others, where the same error was made by Arab EFL learners and other EFL/ESL learners whose languages lack corresponding article systems or articles altogether.

3.1.2. Substitution Errors

Substitution errors can be divided into two types in this study. The first type is the substitution of the indefinite for the definite article and the second type is the substitution of the definite for the indefinite article

3.1.2.1. Substitution of the Indefinite for the Definite Article

The substitution of the indefinite article *a(n)* or \emptyset for the definite article *the* in Type 1[-SR, +HK] item (24), and Type 2 [+SR, +HK] items (18, 39, 42, 43, 47, and 56), are shown in the frequencies and item facilities (see Appendix A & B), for example,

Type 1[-SR, +HK] (item 24)

- That was *a worst* [the worst] storm of 1985.
(IF=0.36, 0.64, and 0.86) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.

Type 2 [+SR, +HK] (items 18, 39, 42, 43, 47, and 56)

- In this family, *a/∅ first* [the first] child inherits everything.
(IF=0.82, 0.79, and 1.00) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.

- These tracks are made by *a/∅ spotted* [the spotted] jaguar.
(IF=0.09, 0.21, and 0.21) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.

- ... and *a/∅ largest* [the largest] member of *a/∅ cat* [the cat] family.
(IF=0.82, 0.93, and 1.00, and 0.55, 0.43, and 0.64) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.

- *A/∅ favorite* [the favorite] food of the jaguar...
(IF=0.73, 0.93, and 0.73) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.

- I once read a story about *a/∅ courage* [the courage] and strength of these wild lions.
(IF=0.45, 0.79, and 1.00) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.

3.1.2.2. Substitution of the Definite for the Indefinite Article

The substitution of the definite article *the* for the indefinite article *a(n)* or *∅* was observed among the three groups, as evidenced in the following examples (see Appendix A, C &D):

Type 1[-SR, +HK] (item 50)

- *The wild* [*∅ wild*] pigs move in bands.
(IF=0.00, 0.86, and 0.64) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.

Type 3[+SR, -HK] (items 23, 45 and 55)

- ..., he was clever with *the money* [*∅ money*].
(IF=0.45, 0.71, and 0.71) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.
- *The most* [*∅ Most*] animals have a favorite food.
(IF=0.27, 0.14, and 0.64) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.
- I once read *the story* [a story] about the courage and strength of these wild pigs.
(IF=0.64, 0.79, and 0.71) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.

Type 4[-SR, -HK] (item 17)

- Einstein was *the man* [a man] of great intelligence.
(IF=0.64, 0.86, and 0.86) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.

Numbers, frequencies, and item facilities of occurrence of the participants' errors are shown in Appendix A, B, C, and D. The advanced group made the fewest substitution errors compared to the lower and upper-intermediate groups, as evidenced by their item facilities (IFs) in all four contexts, which reached 1.00 in most cases, but the advanced group erroneously substituted the indefinite for the definite article and the definite for the indefinite article.

The lower-intermediate and upper-intermediate groups sometimes exhibit a pattern that is best described as puzzling. The lower-intermediate group seemed to do a little worse than the upper-intermediate group in the erroneous substitution of the indefinite for the definite article or the

substitution of the definite for the indefinite. This phenomenon, however, may make better sense if one keeps in mind that the lower-intermediate participants committed more errors in article deletion than the upper-intermediate group (compare IFs in all Appendixes). In other words, while the lower-intermediate group deleted more indefinite or definite articles, the majority of upper-intermediate participants recognized the fact that English requires the use of one with singular unidentified countable nouns, for instance, which may have led them to overgeneralize the rule to instances where it is not applicable but their knowledge and accuracy of article choice increases when proficiency increased, making them more stable and accurate.

3.1.3. The Use of the Indefinite Article with Marked and Unmarked Plurals

Like the erroneous substitution of the indefinite for the definite article, the upper-intermediate group surprisingly made the largest number of errors in the use of the indefinite article with unmarked plurals, as illustrated in the instances below:

Type 3[+SR, -HK] (items 15, 25, 28, 51 and 58)

- People who smoke *a cigarettes* [Ø cigarettes] often get lung cancer. (IF=0.27, 0.36, and 1.00) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.
- We found *a bottles* [Ø bottles] of Pepsi in every cupboard. (IF=0.18, 0.21, and 0.71) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.
- *A copies* [Ø Copies] of rare books should always be preserved. (IF=0.27, 0.21, and 0.73) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.
- Wild pigs move in *a bands* [Ø bands] of fifteen to twenty. (IF=0.18, 0.07, and 0.79) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.
- ... these pigs sometimes even attack *a human* [Ø human] hunters. (IF=0.09, 0.29, and 0.43) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.

Nevertheless, it appears that they made no errors in the use of the indefinite article with marked plurals. The learners were most likely applying the rules of indefiniteness where it is not applicable.

Furthermore, hypercorrection, or the learners' tendency to utilize the article incorrectly in areas where it is not required for fear of making errors, could be proposed as a possible explanation for this type of inaccuracy. Because they are frequently corrected when they drop the article, the EFL

learners occasionally overuse the article in an effort to avoid making the error, especially after they have come to realize the requirement for an indefinite article in certain contexts in English.

3.1.4. *The Use of the Indefinite Article with Uncountable Nouns*

This error occurred with a larger frequency in the compositions of the lower-intermediate group and gradually decreased in the compositions of the other two groups. Like the previous error, either overgeneralization or hypercorrection is probably the source of this error, for example,

Type 3 [+SR, -HK] (items 5)

- I always drink *a water* [Ø water] with my meals.
(IF=0.18, 0.79, and 0.93) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.

On the basis of structural resemblance, the learners could be erroneously extending the use of the indefinite article with singular unidentified countable nouns to uncountable ones, or they could be overusing the indefinite article to avoid errors of deletion.

3.1.5. *The Use of the Indefinite Article with Adjectives*

This error is likely the result of article overgeneralization, for once the learner realizes the presence of an English structure where the adjective serves as the head of the noun phrase, he/she may erroneously extend this structure and, as a result, use the indefinite article where it is not required on the false assumption that since the adjective is the head of the noun phrase, it is treated the same way the noun is with regard to the use of the indefinite article. In English, statements such as *I will nurse your sick and feed your hungry* and *I ventured into the unknown* are totally grammatical and structurally equivalent to items 42, and 56 in Type 2 [+SR, +HK].

Type 2 [+SR, +HK] (items 42 and 56)

- ... and *a largest* [the greatest] member of the cat family
(IF=0.82, 0.93, and 1.00) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.
- I once read a story about *a courage* [the courage] and strength of these wild lions.
(IF=0.45, 0.79, and 1.00) for the lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced groups respectively.

This error could alternatively be interpreted as a once mistake, or one which is caused by the learners' carelessness, exhaustion, or lack of attention. When learners' attention is called to this type of error, they are more likely to remedy it themselves. The writer could have easily overlooked or been unable to come up with a proper singular noun to write the phrase completely.

4. Discussion, conclusions and recommendations

To sum up, it is clear that Arab EFL learners acquire Type 4 more easily than Type 2, and Type 2 more easily than Type 3 which is easier than type 1. Thus, Arab EFL learners have more difficulty with Type 3[+SR, -HK] and Type 1[-SR, +HK] than with Type 4[-SR, -HK] and Type 2[+SR, +HK]. Most of the errors like deletion of the indefinite article, the substitution of the indefinite for the definite article, the substitution of the definite for the indefinite article, use of the indefinite article with unmarked plurals, use of the indefinite article with uncountable nouns, and the use of the indefinite article with adjectives which are identified above occur more frequently in these two types (that is type 3 and type 1) than with the other two types.

Based on the results of the study, and in order to reduce the errors in the use of English articles, some suggestions are addressed to EFL learners, teachers of English, and future researchers. A change in the learning and teaching strategies regarding the use of English articles in EFL contexts is recommended. For EFL learners, it is necessary to learn and practice both aspects of English nouns, i.e., generic nouns as well as referential indefinite nouns including countability (singular vs plural, count vs non-count) and definiteness (definite vs indefinite). The teachers should provide students with plenty of examples of how to use English articles in diverse contexts and situations. They are also suggested to teach different noun phrase environments by applying different strategies such as introducing more activities and practices that could direct the EFL learners to identify the appropriate use of the article with the same noun in various contexts. In Addition, further studies should be conducted with lower-level Arab EFL learners, as well as studies performed with a large sample in oral tasks, in order to build a more complete profile of article acquisition and common errors in the use of articles for Arabic speakers.

References

- Abudalbh, M. (2016). The Acquisition of English Articles by Arabic L2-English learners: A Semantic Approach. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 7(2), 104 -117. <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol7no2.7>
- Ahmad, K., and Khan, A. (2019). Difficulties in The Acquisition and Use of English Articles among Adult Pashto Learners. *Issues in Language Studies*, 8 (2), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.33736/ils.1751.2019>
- Alhaisoni, E., Gaudel, D. R., & Al-Zuoud, K. M. (2017). Article errors in the English writing of Saudi EFL preparatory year students. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 8(1), 72-78. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.8n.1p.72>
- Alhaysony, M. (2012). An analysis of article errors among Saudi female EFL students: A case study. *Asian Social Science*, 8(12), 55. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v8n12p55>
- Al-Mohanna, A. D. M. (2014). Errors in the usage of the English definite/indefinite articles among Saudi university-level students. *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, 7(3), 79-95

- Al-Qadi, M. M. (2017). English article system errors among Saudi Arab EFL learners: A case of the preparatory year English program learners of King Saud University. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*, 5(1), 69-77.
- Andersen, R. W. (1984). The one to one principle of interlanguage construction. *Language learning*, 34(4), 77-95.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1984.tb00353.x>
- Barrett, N., E., and Chen, L. (2011). English Article Errors in Taiwanese College Students' EFL Writing. In *International Journal of Computational Linguistics & Chinese Language Processing*, 16(3-4), 1-20. Retrieved from <https://aclanthology.org/O11-4001.pdf>
- Bataineh, R. (2005). Jordanian undergraduate EFL students' errors in the use of the indefinite. *The Asian EFL Journal Quarterly*, 7(1), 56-76.
- Bailey, D., & Lee, A. R. (2020). An Exploratory Study of Grammarly in the Language Learning Context: An Analysis of Test-Based, Textbook-Based and Facebook Corpora. *TESOL International Journal*, 15(2), 4-27.
- Bickerton, D. (1981). Roots of language. *Karoma. Ann Arbor*, 10, 268-284.
- Butler, Y. G. (2002). SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS'THEORIES ON THE USE OF ENGLISH ARTICLES: An Analysis of the Metalinguistic Knowledge Used by Japanese Students in Acquiring the English Article System. *Studies in second language acquisition*, 24(3), 451-480.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263102003042>
- Celce, M., & Larsen, F. (1999). The grammar book: An ESL/EFL teacher's course. *Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan*.
- Chan, A. Y. W. (2019). Typology and contexts of article errors: Investigation into the use of English articles by Hong Kong Cantonese ESL learners. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 60(2), 197-227, <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral-2018-0268>
- Crompton, P. (2011). Article errors in the English writing of advanced L1 Arabic learners: The role of transfer. *Asian EFL Journal*, 50(1), 4-35. Retrieved from <https://www.asian-efl-journal.com/PTA/February-2011-Crompton.pdf>
- Elumalai, K., V., (2019). The English article errors encountered by Arabic EFL undergraduate students in the writing skill. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 11(6), 10-19. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v11i6.15632>
- Geng, J. (2010). The Semantic Analysis of the Definite Article'Misuse by Chinese Learners of English. *Asian Social Science*, 6(7), 180-184. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/2139/73e049b9c3dc42e64c07399a82bd8237db08.pdf>
- Huebner, T. (1985). System and variability in interlanguage syntax. *Language learning*, 35(2), 141-163.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1985.tb01022.x>
- Hewson, J. (2017). Article and noun in English. In *Article and Noun in English*. De Gruyter Mouton.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110878455>
- Ionin, T., Ko, H., & Wexler, K. (2004). Article semantics in L2 acquisition: The role of specificity. *Language acquisition*, 12(1), 3-69.

- https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327817la1201_2
- Kalama, A. S. (1992). A Fresh Look at Errors in English. New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company. *Learning*, 21(1), 85-95.
- Kampookaew, P. (2020). An Analysis of Grammatical Errors Made by Thai EFL University Students in an EAP Writing Class: Issues and Recommendations. *Reflections*, 27(2), 246-273. Retrieved from <https://so05.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/reflections/article/view/248862>
- Loucif, L., and Chelli, S. (2021). Error Analysis of English Expository Paragraphs Written by Third Year Scientific Stream Students at Badi Mekki High School, Biskra. *Djousour El-maarefa*, 7(2), 753-763. Retrieved from <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/downArticlepdf/136/7/2/152464>
- Maqbool, S., Ghani, M., & Khan, A. (2018). Error Analysis of English Language Speakers in the Use of Articles in Pakistan. *Journal of Educational Research* (1027-9776), 21(1), 177-188. Retrieved from <http://jer.iub.edu.pk/journals/JER-Vol-21.No-1/13.pdf>
- Master, P. (1994). The effect of systematic instruction on learning the English article system. *Perspectives on pedagogical grammar*, 229-252. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139524605.011>
- Muftah, M. (2023a). Data-driven learning (DDL) activities: do they truly promote EFL students' writing skills development?. *Education and Information Technologies*, 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-11620-z>
- Muftah, M. (2023b). Communication Apprehension and Self-Perceived Communication Competence: A Study of Undergraduate Students in Their Final Year. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-08-2022-0174>
- Muftah, M. (2016). English Past Tense Morphology in Adult Arab EFL learners: Mental Representation Mechanism and Types of Errors. *Journal of Advances in Linguistics*, 6(3), 1038-1046. <https://doi.org/10.24297/jal.v6i3.4666>
- Muftah, M., and Rafik-Galea, S. (2013). Error Analysis of Present Simple Tense in the Interlanguage of Adult Arab English Language Learners, *English Language Teaching* (ELT), 6(2), 146-154. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n2p146>
- Oller Jr, J. W., & Redding, E. Z. (1971). Article usage and other language skills. *Language Learning*, 21(1), 85-95. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1971.tb00492.x>
- Thomas, M. (1989). The acquisition of English articles by first-and second-language learners. *Applied psycholinguistics*, 10(3), 335-355. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716400008663>
- Tawalbeh, I. Z. (2013). The Effect of Colloquial Jordanian Arabic on Learning the English Definite Article and Negation. *English Language Teaching*, 6(8), 95-107. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n8p95>
- White, L. (2008). Different? Yes. Fundamentally? No. Definiteness effects in the L2 English of Mandarin speakers. In *Proceedings of the 9th generative approaches to second language acquisition conference (gasla*

- 2007) (pp. 251-261). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.544.2519&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Zdorenko, T., & Paradis, J. (2007). The role of the first language in child second language acquisition of articles. In *Proceedings of the 2nd Conference on Generative Approaches to Language Acquisition North America (GALANA)* (pp. 483-490). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. Retrieved from <http://www.lingref.com/cpp/galana/2/paper1587.pdf>
- Zdorenko, T., & Paradis, J. (2008). The acquisition of articles in child second language English: fluctuation, transfer or both?. *Second language research*, 24(2), 227-250. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0267658307086302>
- Zdorenko, T., & Paradis, J. (2012). Articles in child L2 English: When L1 and L2 acquisition meet at the interface. *First Language*, 32(1-2), 38-62. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0142723710396797>
- Zhan, H. (2015). Frequent Errors in Chinese EFL Learners' Topic-Based Writings. *English Language Teaching*, 8(5), 72-81. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v8n5p72>

Appendices

Appendix A

Type 1 [-SR, +HK]

Frequencies and Item Facilities (IF) of *the*, *a*, and \emptyset in [-SR, +HK] Contexts

Target Article	Item #	Advanced (n = 14)				Upper-Intermediate (n = 14)				Lower-Intermediate (n = 11)				
		IF	<i>the</i>	<i>a</i>	\emptyset	IF	<i>the</i>	<i>a</i>	\emptyset	IF	<i>the</i>	<i>a</i>	\emptyset	
<i>the</i>	7	0.93	13	1	0	0.21	3	6	5	0.36	4	4	3	
	24	0.86	12	1	1	0.64	9	5	0	0.36	4	5	2	
	48	0.93	13	0	1	0.50	7	5	2	0.36	4	4	3	
	49	1.00	14	0	0	0.21	3	11	0	0.45	5	6	0	
Total	k = 56		52	2	2	k = 56	22	27	7	k = 44	17	19	8	
	Percentage(%)		92.86	3.57	3.57		39.29	48.21	12.5		38.64	43.18	18.18	
\emptyset	50	0.64	7	0	7	0.86	12	0	2	0.00	8	3	0	
	Total	k = 14		7	0	7	k = 14	12	0	2	k = 11	8	3	0
	Percentage(%)		50	0	50		85.71	0	14.29		72.73	27.27	0.00	

Appendix B

Type 2 [+SR, +HK]

Frequencies and Item Facilities (IF) of *the*, *a*, and \emptyset in [+SR, +HK] Contexts

Target Article	Item #	Advanced (n = 14)				Upper-Intermediate (n = 14)				Lower-Intermediate (n = 11)			
		IF	<i>the</i>	<i>a</i>	\emptyset	IF	<i>the</i>	<i>a</i>	\emptyset	IF	<i>the</i>	<i>a</i>	\emptyset
<i>the</i>	3	1.00	14	0	0	0.93	13	0	1	0.73	8	2	1
	8	1.00	14	0	0	0.64	9	2	3	0.64	7	3	1
	9	1.00	14	0	0	0.86	12	2	0	0.73	8	2	1
	10	0.93	13	0	1	0.93	13	1	0	0.91	10	0	1
	13	0.79	11	1	2	0.36	5	7	2	0.64	7	4	0
	14	1.00	14	0	0	0.79	11	2	1	0.91	10	1	0
	16	0.93	13	0	1	0.93	13	1	0	0.55	6	4	1
	18	1.00	14	0	0	0.79	11	3	0	0.82	9	1	1
	19	1.00	14	0	0	0.50	7	3	4	0.27	3	5	3
	22	0.00	0	11	3	0.43	6	7	1	0.18	2	6	3
	26	0.93	13	1	0	0.71	10	4	0	0.45	5	6	0
	31	1.00	14	0	0	0.79	11	3	0	0.27	3	7	1
	35	1.00	14	0	0	0.29	4	8	2	0.45	5	5	1
	38	1.00	14	0	0	0.71	10	1	3	0.36	4	4	3
	39	0.21	3	8	3	0.21	3	8	3	0.09	1	6	4
	40	0.93	13	1	0	0.86	12	2	0	0.82	9	2	0
	42	1.00	14	0	0	0.93	13	1	0	0.82	9	2	0
	43	0.64	9	1	4	0.43	6	7	1	0.55	6	5	0
	47	0.79	11	1	2	0.93	13	1	0	0.73	8	3	0
56	1.00	14	0	0	0.79	11	2	1	0.45	5	3	3	
57	0.93	13	1	0	0.93	13	1	0	0.64	7	4	0	
Total	k = 294		253	25	16	k = 294	206	66	22	k = 231	132	75	24
	Percentage(%)		86.05	8.50	5.44		70.07	22.45	7.48		57.14	32.47	10.39

Appendix C

Type 3 [+SR, -HK]

Frequencies and Item Facilities (IF) of *the*, *a*, and \emptyset in [+SR, -HK] Contexts

Target Article	Item #	Advanced (n = 14)				Upper-Intermediate (n = 14)				Lower-Intermediate (n = 11)			
		IF	<i>the</i>	<i>a</i>	\emptyset	IF	<i>the</i>	<i>a</i>	\emptyset	IF	<i>the</i>	<i>a</i>	\emptyset
<i>a</i>	1	0.93	0	13	1	1.00	0	14	0	0.91	0	10	1
	2	0.93	0	13	1	0.86	0	12	2	0.91	0	10	1
	11	1.00	0	14	0	1.00	0	14	0	1.00	0	11	0
	12	1.00	0	14	0	0.93	0	13	1	0.27	0	3	8
	21	1.00	0	14	0	0.93	1	13	0	0.45	4	5	2
	27	0.71	2	10	2	0.79	0	11	3	0.45	2	5	4
	46	0.79	1	11	2	0.93	0	13	1	0.73	1	8	2
	55	0.71	4	10	0	0.79	2	11	1	0.64	3	7	1
	Total	k = 112		7	99	6	k = 112	3	101	8	k = 88	10	59
	Percentage(%)		6.25	88.39	5.36		2.68	90.18	7.14		11.36	67.05	21.59
\emptyset	5	0.93	0	1	13	0.79	2	1	11	0.18	4	5	2
	15	1.00	0	0	14	0.36	3	6	5	0.27	1	7	3
	23	0.71	4	0	10	0.71	2	2	10	0.45	4	2	5
	25	0.71	3	1	10	0.21	5	6	3	0.18	6	3	2
	28	0.73	6	0	8	0.21	9	2	3	0.27	8	0	3
	32	0.07	7	6	1	0.14	1	11	2	0.27	1	7	3
	37	0.29	0	10	4	0.00	1	13	0	0.27	2	6	3
	45	0.64	5	0	9	0.14	12	0	2	0.27	7	1	3
	51	0.79	3	0	11	0.07	4	9	1	0.18	8	1	2
	52	0.36	2	7	5	0.07	1	12	1	0.27	1	7	3
	53	0.57	2	4	8	0.29	5	5	4	0.27	2	6	3
	58	0.43	7	1	6	0.29	4	6	4	0.09	5	5	1
	Total	k = 168		39	30	99	k = 168	49	73	46	k = 132	49	50
	Percentage(%)		23.21	17.86	58.93		29.17	43.45	27.38		37.12	37.88	25.00

Appendix D

Type 4 [-SR, -HK]

Frequencies and Item Facilities (IF) of *the*, *a*, and \emptyset in [-SR, -HK] Contexts

Target Article	Item #	Advanced (n = 14)				Upper-Intermediate (n = 14)				Lower-Intermediate (n = 11)			
		IF	<i>the</i>	<i>a</i>	\emptyset	IF	<i>the</i>	<i>a</i>	\emptyset	IF	<i>the</i>	<i>a</i>	\emptyset
<i>a</i>	4	0.79	0	11	3	0.71	2	10	2	0.55	1	6	4
	17	0.86	2	12	0	0.86	1	12	1	0.64	4	7	0
Total	k = 28		2	23	3	k = 28	3	22	3	k = 22	5	13	4
	Percentage(%)		7.14	82.14	10.71		10.71	78.57	10.71		22.73	59.09	18.18