

YEMENI STUDENTS' ERRORS IN THE USE OF ENGLISH ARTICLES

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Abstract:

This study is conducted as an attempt to explore some grammatical errors made by Yemeni students in the use of English articles in Faculty of Education, Zingibar. To collect the data of the study, a test was performed and administered to the students to fill the appropriate article in the space provided (blanks). The participants were 100 students of English of second year. The subjects of the study were selected randomly from students in the English department, college of Education Zingibar, University of Aden. The analysis of article errors prove that second year students face serious problems in the use of articles especially in the use of the zero article which is found to be substituted for 'the' in several contexts, and most of these errors are due to the effect of their mother tongue (interference) on English. They use the Arabic definite article "al" into the English definite article "the" even if it is expressed by a zero article in English.

Introduction

Learning English becomes more and more important nowadays since we all know that English is one of the international languages which can be used to communicate around the world. In Arab countries, English is learnt as a foreign language. Learning a different language is sometimes difficult since the target language has different components compared to the native language. These differences typically cause students to make errors when using it. Learning English articles has always been one of the most problematic grammar points facing English as foreign language (EFL) learners from different linguistic backgrounds in terms of article use. Since Yemeni EFL learners face similar problems, analysing their article errors would be of great use to them. It would help learners, as well as teachers; focus on troublesome areas with regard to article usage so that learning takes place more efficiently.

Error Analysis

Systematically analyzing errors made by language learners makes it possible to determine areas that need reinforcement in teaching (Corder, 1974).

Error analysis is a sort of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners create. It consists of a comparison between the errors created within the Target Language (TL) and that TL itself.

Corder (1967) is regarded as the "father" of this field (E.A). He dealt with errors in a totally different point of view that they were dealt with before. Corder showed that errors were regarded as "flaws" that should be eradicated, but he considered them as very important 'devices' that the learners use to learn; they are 'indispensable'. (Abi Samra, 2003). Crystal (2003) defines error analysis as a technique of identifying classifying and systematically interpreting the mistakes that learner of second language commit while they are performing oral or written tasks by using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics. EA is also a means of describing the learners' knowledge of the target language in any particular moment in their learning to relate this knowledge to the teaching they have been receiving (Corder, 1974).

Error analysis is a branch of applied linguistics with concern of two vital functions namely theoretical and practical. The theoretical function stems from the methodological perspective where it

describes the learners' knowledge of the target language. It helps the researcher to find out the nature of psychological processes and the relation between the knowledge and the teaching the learner has been receiving. On the other hand, the practical function of EA is the function of that knowledge in remedial action to overcome the mismatch between the knowledge of the learners and the demands of the situation (Corder, 1981).

Articles in English

There are three articles in English. These are a, an, the.

Articles can be classified as:

- 1- Indefinite articles ('A' and 'An')
- 2- Definite article ('The')

Indefinite articles 'a' and 'an' are used before a countable singular noun. Article 'a' is used before a noun that begins with a consonant sound and 'an' before a vowel sound. 'A'/'An' is used to modify non-specific or non-particular nouns.

E.g. There was a poor boy who was living in a big city. (any boy, any city).

Definite article 'The' is used before countable and uncountable nouns, singular and plurals, if they refer to specific or particular nouns; and they are known to both the speaker and the hearer.

E.g. The poor boy used to beg in the city. (The particular poor boy and particular city).

Using article 'the':

- 1- To show specific reference
E.g. I like the shirt which you wore in the party. (not any shirt, it was which you wore).
- 2- With superlative forms
E.g. He is the cleverest boy in the class.
- 3- With the things which are unique in the world.
E.g. The sun, The moon, The earth etc.
- 4- With the names of rivers, seas, mountain, holy book, ships etc.
E.g. The Ganga, The Himalayas etc.
- 5- When one noun is used to show entire species or class.
E.g. The dog is a faithful animal (All dogs).
The man is mortal (All human being).
- 6- We don't use 'the' with proper nouns and abstract nouns.

Articles in Arabic:

Arabic is completely different from English therein it has solely a definite article 'al-' pronounced /el/ in Arabic and it is a bound form, not a separate word as in English. In contrast to in English, The definite article 'al' is used with all common nouns, as well as, specific and unspecific uncountable nouns, abstract nouns, and generic plurals. Indefiniteness is encoded by the use of no articles with nouns, and this can be one of the major differences between Arabic and English.

Methods:

Statement of the problem:

EFL learners suffer from several problems related to producing the English language. A learner in the colleges of education at Aden University commits errors in all aspects of language, particularly in their writing skill. They commit errors in all writing such as tenses, preposition, weak vocabulary, and articles that are the most common and frequent type of errors. Such errors may be seen clearly in their performance. They do not have contact with English outside the classroom. These students begin to use English as a language of teaching and learning from grade seven, and yet they find it tough to express themselves in grammatically acceptable English. They have to be adequately exposed to all of the four basic skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. The foremost crucial problem for Yemeni

student-teachers of English is the grammar items that are not mastered by them. The research especially comes out of the need to investigate articles errors and their reasons why English students produce written language which is full of articles errors which seem to be persistent.

Aims of the study

The aim of this research is to explore the grammatical errors made by Yemeni EFL students in the use of English articles and to identify the causes of these errors. And to explore the major problems of translating the English articles which Yemeni EFL students may face when translating them into Arabic; to examine the causes of the errors and to provide solutions to eliminate such errors.

Research Questions

The Research will attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1- Do Yemeni EFL students make grammatical errors in the use of English articles?
- 3- What are the causes of those errors made by Yemeni EFL students?
- 4- What are the difficulties faced by EFL Yemeni students in the use of English grammar?

Significance of the study:

The findings of study are expected to be useful for:

- 1- The students to improve their using of English articles?
- 2- Identifying the English articles faced by the students in the college of education of Yemen?

Methodology

Sample of Study

As this study investigated the errors encountered by EFL students in the use of English articles in college of education in Aden University. So, the sample was randomly selected from students who were attending the English language teaching department in college of education, Zingbar. The sample consisted of 100 Yemeni students who are studying in second year college of education, Zinigbar. The participants are quite familiar with the English for 6 years at primary and secondary school as subject. Second year students, they have already studied the usage of articles in English in the first year as part of their grammar curriculum.

Instrument of the study

The instrument used to collect data and to achieve the aim of study is a test made up 6 questions on articles. The students were instructed to fill the appropriate article in the space provided (blanks).

- 1- There's **a** newspaper on the table.
- 2- I want to buy **a** laptop computer next week
- 3- He doesn't eat **Ø** mutton.
- 4- Please meet me at the train station in **an** hour from now.
- 5- I got my mom a necklace for **Ø** Mother's Day.

Data Analysis:

The collected written data from students were analyzed and interpreted by the research in order to identify the errors on English articles and to show the percentage of errors committed by the sample.

Sentence no. 1

There's **a** newspaper on the table.

College	Correct Responses	%	Deviant Responses	%
Zingibar	45	4%	55	5%

Table 1: The percentage of errors while answering the article 'a'

Observation:

In the first sentence in the sample which is about the indefinite article 'a' most students put zero article instead of indefinite article in the above table which shows there are 55 respondents e.g. 55% from College of Education Zingibar have given deviant responses.

Interpretation:

Depending on the above observation the students chose zero articles for the blank. They omitted the article; they thought that no article is used while the use of indefinite article is needed actually.

Sentence no.2

I want to buy a laptop computer next week

College	Correct Responses	%	Deviant Responses	%
Zingibar	25	2%	75	7%

Table 2: The percentage of errors while answering the article 'a'

Observation:

In the second sentence in the sample which is about the indefinite article 'a' most of students put definite article instead of indefinite article in the above table which shows there are 75 respondents e.g. 75% from College of Education Zingibar have given deviant responses.

Interpretation:

Depending on the above observation the students chose definite article for the blank. They misused the correct article. The misuse of articles is one of the most common problem face more than half students in college, zingibar, Aden University.

Sentence no.3

He doesn't eat Ø mutton.

College	Correct Responses	%	Deviant Responses	%
Zingibar	15	1%	85	85%

Table 3: The percentage of errors while answering the article 'Ø'

Observation:

In the third sentence in the sample which is about the zero Article 'Ø' more than half of students commit errors and put the definite article instead of zero article 'Ø'. In the above table which shows there are 85 respondents e.g. 85% from College of Education Zingibar have given deviant responses.

Interpretation:

The above table shows a large number of the respondents from the college of Education, Zingibar add the definite article 'the' instead of the zero article 'Ø', they are under the influence of the Arabic article 'al' in their mother tongue (Arabic). Only 15 students from the college of Education, Zingibar have given the correct answer.

Sentence no.4

Please meet me at the train station in **an** hour from now.

College	Correct Responses	%	Deviant Responses	%
Zingibar	50	50%	50	50%

Table 4: The percentage of errors while answering the article 'an'

Observation:

In the fourth sentence in the sample which is about the indefinite Article '**an**'. The students put the indefinite article '**a**' instead of '**an**'. In the above table which shows there are 50 respondents e.g. 50% from College of Education Zingibar have given deviant responses.

Interpretation:

From the above observation, it is clear that the students made confusion errors by putting the incorrect article instead of the correct article, half of the students in the college of Education, Zingibar thought that the indefinite article 'a' come before word starts with consonant letter, not consonant sound so they concentrate on letter instead of sound.

Sentence no.5

I got my mom a necklace for **Ø** Mother's Day.

College	Correct Responses	%	Deviant Responses	%
Zingibar	12	12%	88	88%

Table 5: The percentage of errors while answering the article 'Ø'

Observation:

In the fifth sentence in the sample which is about the indefinite Article '**Ø**'. The students put the definite article '**the**' instead of zero article '**Ø**'. In the above table which shows there are 88 respondents e.g. 88% from College of Education Zingibar have given deviant responses.

Interpretation:

The above table shows a large number of the respondents from the college of Education, Zingibar added the definite article '**the**' instead of the zero article '**Ø**'; they put 'the' where it doesn't need to use an article with proper nouns.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

After the data analysis and interpretation, it is concluded that Yemeni students encounter huge difficulty while learning English articles and the cause of such difficulty is the distinction between Arabic article and English articles and the mother tongue interference. The students don't have any knowledge about grammar in general and articles in specific. They have been influenced in their mother tongue 'Arabic'.

According to Arabic there is no indefinite articles and zero articles, there is only one definite article 'al' in Arabic so the student missed the English articles by translating them to Arabic and place the definite article 'the' instead of zero article. They misuse the indefinite articles 'a' and 'an' because such an article does not exist in the learners' mother-tongue (Arabic). They made an error when they inserted the definite article 'the' wrongly, they can't easily distinguish between the zero article and the definite article.

Based on the above conclusions, following recommendations have been given for college students, teachers: as Master (1997, p.216) claims, for teachers to make a positive contribution to learners' knowledge in this important area. English teachers should help students to overcome these problems to improve their English articles by using more interesting materials and teaching aids to pay attention of students to lesson. Teachers should make a simple comparison between the use of zero article and the definite article.

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