Difficulty in the using of English Articles between Libyan EFL learners at Tobruk University

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Abstract
During the academic year 2021/2022, the current study aims to investigate errors made by EFL learners at the English Department, Faculty of Art / Tobruk University when utilizing English articles (a, an, and the). The data were collected in the form of a 30 gap-fill task from 43 sophomores Libyan learners of English. The findings demonstrated that participants continue to make numerous errors while utilizing English articles, which might be attributed to a variety of factors, including discrepancies in article usage between the students' native tongue and the target language. The Researcher suggests that more focus be made on the differences in article usage between the two languages, which could help students improve their English language usage.

Key words: Definite and indefinite articles , Libyan EFL learners , difficulty
Introduction

The current study looks at the usage of definite and indefinite English articles in selected assessments given to Libyan EFL students at the English Department of the Faculty of Arts at Tobruk university.

As previously said, mastering the English articles is one of the most challenging concerns in L2 learning, and most Arab EFL learners still encounter numerous challenges in comprehending the right usage of articles. A language student in English needs to acquire three key articles in order to employ them correctly in sentence construction. The first of these words is the definite article "the" while the other two are indefinite articles "a, an. There is also the zero article, which is completely overlooked in current study.

Research Questions

Researcher is on the lookout for solutions to the following questions:

Q1 - What kinds of faults do EFL students at Tobruk University, English Department in the Faculty of Arts make in the English article system?

Q2 - Do EFL students at this point fully comprehend English articles?

Literature Review

For EFL Libyan learners, the usage of definite and indefinite articles, and more especially, articles, causes several complications. There has undoubtedly been an abundance of study on the obstacles that EFL learners face when utilizing English articles. Bataineh [4], Gaibani[7], Lyons [10], Master [12,13,14], Rababah [16], Sawalme [17], and Zughoul [19] have all mentioned the challenges of understanding English articles. To refer to definite and indefiniteness, English utilizes a three-part system, whereas Arabic uses a binary system. Despite the fact that both Arabic and English employ the same article system (definite and indefinite articles), many EFL students make several mistakes in their compositions, according to Lyons [10]. However, according to Lyons [10], there are parallels between the two languages: in English, there are definite and indefinite articles, as well as the zero article. In Arabic, the definite article is indicated by appending the prefix (al), but the indefinite article is signified by the lack of the prefix (al).

Zughoul [19], for example, studied 25 students from various Arab nations who were enrolled in an intense language program at the University of Texas. The study found that
article mistakes were the most prevalent, with 47.2 percent representing the absence of the indefinite articles a(an) from a noun phrase and 44.6 percent representing the omission of a(an) where their usage is required. He blames the disparities in the article systems of the two languages for the unfavorable outcomes).

Gaibani [7] also performed research on 15 Libyan English language students at Omar Al-Mukhtar University. His research sought to uncover the types of faults that undergraduate students make when using articles in their writing. His findings demonstrated that a primary source of these errors was learners' lack of understanding of target language rules. Furthermore, learners' misuse of articles was caused by overgeneralizations and simplifications of English norms.

Furthermore, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman [5] note that one of the key challenges for L2 learners is that their native language and the target language do not coincide. There is a distinction between how articles are used in Arabic and how they are used in English, which causes confusion among learners. Al-haysony [2] conducted a study on 100 female undergraduates majoring in English at the university of Hail in Saudi Arabia to determine the sorts of errors made by Arab EFL learners when using English articles. She asked the participants in her study to write on descriptive themes in their life. The participants made numerous errors, including omission and substitution of articles, according to the findings. According to the findings, learners’ L1 interference has a significant impact in the occurrence of such errors. Crompton [6] also performed research at the American university of Sharjah on advanced L1 Arabic English learners. The research looked at a significant number of argumentative essays submitted by first and second-year students between the ages of 18 and 20. The majority of his research suggested that learners make the most errors when using articles.

Mourssi [15] also performed an English language research on 74 Arab Omani high school students. Mourssi looked on the mother tongue's cross-linguistic effect on L2 learning, particularly the usage of English articles. His research subjects were split into two groups, with levels ranging from pre-intermediate to intermediate The participants had a lot of trouble utilizing English articles correctly, which was attributed to the fact that their native tongue had a distinct article structure. Mourssi believes that learners apply particular L1 article rules
to their L2 performance, and that translation might aid such learners in applying the correct norms.

Sawalmeh [17] conducted a study with 32 Arabic-speaking Saudi EFL male students, collecting data from 32 written essays. His research participants' errors were recognized and classified into several categories. He came to the conclusion that the majority of Arabic EFL learners' faults could be traced back to the L1 transfer, which had a significant impact on their L2 writing. He went on to say that language teachers should focus on the issue of L1 transfer in L2 written discourse.

According to the findings of past studies, Arab EFL students have a lot of trouble correctly employing English articles. Many factors contribute to these issues, including disparities in learners' L1 and the target language system's usage of articles. As stated in the abstract, differences are the most visible factor that causes pupils to struggle with comprehending the articles. Both academics will look into the same topic in the Libyan EFL environment in this study.

**Methodology**

The current study's major goal is to look at EFL learners' mistakes in utilizing the right articles (a, an, and the) in the English Department at Tobruk University's Faculty of Arts. During the data collection step, a total of 20 sentences from grammar books were carefully picked and utilized as a test. The researchers gave the exam to the study participants because they wanted to see if EFL learners could tell the difference between the different English articles.

The current research was conducted in the English Department at Tobruk University's Faculty of Arts during the academic year 2021/2022. The current study included 43 sophomore students, which represented the total number of students in the second year. The reason for choosing this group in particular was that the researcher wanted to see if EFL learners at this time fully understood how to use English articles.

**Study sample**

The current study included 43 students at Tobruk University who were learning English as a foreign language. The study participants all had a similar background, having studied
English in the previous two stages before moving on to their present level with a minimum competence to master English articles. They have a similar cultural background.

Test

The questions were carefully chosen from several grammar texts and structured in such a way that each article (a, an, and the) has 20 spaces. The participants were given enough time to complete the exam and were asked to fill in the gaps with one of the three primary articles.

Study instrument

A verbal authorization was received from both the Faculty Dean and the English department head in order to administer the test to the participants. Researchers conducted the exam to the subjects after receiving clearance in February 2022, and were given enough time to fill in the blanks. Furthermore, in order to ensure the study participants' willingness and spontaneity, they were asked ahead of time if they would engage in the current study, and they all consented to do so.

Data analysis

The primary purpose of this study, as stated in the methodology, is to see if second-year EFL students understand how to use English articles. The Researcher only described and investigated the percentages of participants and the quantity of errors committed in the given replies during the data analysis stage.

The data was acquired using a carefully selected test from various grammar books and distributed to the participants. The findings revealed that participants continue to make mistakes when it comes to correctly using definite and indefinite articles (a, an, the). In addition, the data illustrates the quantity and distribution of errors committed by each participant separately in order to get a thorough sense of the participants' errors in the given test. The quantity and distribution of errors made by participants are shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants 'number</th>
<th>Errors in The</th>
<th>Errors in An</th>
<th>Errors in A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the offered test, the study participants made (528) errors in the use of English articles. Errors can be divided into the following categories: In the provided exam, the definite article \( \text{the} \) received the most number of errors (215). The indefinite article \( \text{an} \) is next, with (187) errors, followed by the indefinite article \( \text{a} \) with (126) errors. Many factors could account for such a high number of errors, including the absence of necessary articles, the inclusion of wrong ones in the supplied test, and the overuse of one article to be used instead of others, in some cases using zero articles.

The data clearly shows that Libyan EFL students continue to make numerous errors when using English articles, as evidenced by the high number of errors per article. As previously stated, there are numerous reasons for this, including the misuse of one item in place of others, which is the most common in the current study. The findings are consistent with the findings of numerous prior research, which show that Arabic EFL learners continue to struggle with English articles. For example, Master [14] identified three primary factors for EFL learners' difficulty in English articles. Furthermore, Kharma [9] discovered that the use of the indefinite article caused the most errors (\( \text{a} \).)

**Conclusion**

In EFL learning, mastering English articles is a challenging goal to acquire. Articles are "one of the most severe challenges to overcome in teaching English grammar to foreigners," according to (Whitman as cited in Wulf [8]). Arabic learners in general, and Libyan EFL learners in particular, continue to struggle with English definite and indefinite articles. Such challenges were obvious in the high number of participants in the current study's delivered test.

Learner challenges in comprehending and utilizing English articles have been mentioned by researchers such as (Albaqami, [1]; Al-Qadi, [3]; Grami and Alzugaibi, [8]; Crompton, [6]; Kharma, [9]; Maher and Al-Khasawneh, [11]; Wulf, [18]). According to Master (2002), there are three key reasons for the difficulty in employing English articles: (a) Articles serve many roles as a single morpheme, adding to the challenges faced by EFL students. (b) Articles are the most often used functional terms in the English language, which necessitates the application of a specific use rule. (c) Articles are frequently unstressed, making them difficult to understand for non-native speakers.
Researchers discovered that the use of the definite article (the) had the maximum number of mistakes (249) among study participants, while the usage of the indefinite article (the) had the lowest (a). Despite being sophomores, this is a strong sign that the EFL students have not yet understood the English article system. Gaibani [7] found that the major cause for learners' mistakes was their lack of awareness of the target language's article structure, which was similar to the findings of Gaibani [7], who evaluated 15 Libyan EFL learners at Omar Al-Mukhtar University. EFL students at Azzaytuna University still have a long way to go in terms of mastering the L2 article structure. Furthermore, the results are congruent with Crompton's findings (2011).

It is assumed that understanding the English article system is a difficult endeavor that will require a significant amount of effort. Despite spending at least six years in prior levels and two years in their four-year college degree, Libyan EFL students still make numerous mistakes. According to Master [14], these mistakes can be attributed to discrepancies in the article systems in L1 and L2.

The findings of this study add to the numerous prior findings that English articles are extremely difficult to learn. This is not to say that knowing and understanding when and where to employ each is difficult (a, an, or the). The findings of this study may help university language professors see the need of emphasizing the distinctions between the article systems in English and Arabic. Furthermore, practicing when and where to utilize (a, an, the) might help EFL students overcome their issues with the English article system.

**Direction for further research**

Most ESL/EFL students still struggle with English articles, and Libyan students still need to put in a lot of effort to overcome these challenges. The following factors were attributed to Libyan EFL students' faults in the use of English articles: (1) The most prevalent explanation is the deletion of the indefinite article in favor of the definite article. (2) When writing in L2, the transfer of L1 rules. (3) The substitution of one article for another.
References


