

SUDANESE EFL LEARNERS' SOURCES OF ERRORS IN THE PRODUCTION OF ARTICLES

Dr. Omer Elsheikh Hago Elmahdi

Associate Professor, Taibah University
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this study is to detect to what extent Sudanese EFL learners commit errors attributable to the differences between their L1 and L2. Furthermore discovering the types of errors in use of articles (omission of articles, redundant, or wrong use of articles) is among the objectives of the study. In the direction of checking the status of various categories of errors of articles made by Sudanese EFL learners as a result of the transitional limitations between Arabic and English, an error analysis was performed. Therefore, the researcher developed a writing task in order to find out the inter-lingual article errors committed by the participants as a result of transfer between L1 and L2. A total number of 25 male students studying English at the tertiary level took part in the study and carried out the writing task. The analysis of the results indicated significant differences between different types of errors made by the participants. Sudanese EFL learners had the most problems in terms of the errors related to the redundant use of articles. They were at the second position in the errors of wrong use of articles and finally they had the less frequent errors with respect to the omission of articles in L2 while writing into English.*

Keywords: Error Analysis, Error, Intra-Lingual Error, Inter-Language, Target Language, Mother Tongue, Sources Of Errors, Written Production, EFL.

INTRODUCTION

It is known as a common fact that errors in foreign language learning are difficult to avoid. Researchers have always been interested in errors produced by EFL learners, either in their speech or writing or both. Dessouky, (1990) thinks that learners 'errors have been the subject of extensive investigation and heated controversy for quite a long time. Through time, as indicated by Mahmoud, (2011): error Analysis is a non-stop area of research, and will remain so because people will commit errors as long as they participate in language learning process. Also, one can say: error Analysis, as a diagnostic tool, is of certain importance to language teaching and learning by answering questions and proposing solutions regarding a variety of aspects of language pedagogy. The systematic analysis of learners' errors makes it possible to decide the problematic areas which need reinforcement in language teaching.

The analysis of EFL learners' errors writing performance plays a great role for teachers to become aware of the types and sources of these errors to use more professional teaching methods and techniques so that EFL learners can acquire English language better and enhance their language production competence.

In the early 1950's, language was accepted as a system and second language learning as acquisition of two language systems. To linguists and language teachers, errors have been considered as an evidence of language transfer, and seen as the result of ineffective language learning. As well, Khodabandeh, (2007) indicates that errors were regarded as evidence of

language transfer, and were seen as the result of ineffective language learning and their elimination became the intension of linguists and language teachers. Throughout the sources of EFL learners' errors, it easy to come across why, when, where, and how the errors are committed. At the same time it is not that easy mission to treat EFL learners' errors without detecting and identifying sources of errors.

The main aim of this study is to identify and analyze the sources of errors committed by Sudanese EFL learners when using English articles. The results may be valuable to EFL teachers, syllabus designers, and researchers.

Statement of the Problem

English articles as a significant area of English grammar are generally misused by EFL/ESL learners. Furthermore very little attention has been paid to the effect of negative transfer of Arabic linguistic system, mainly the case of articles, on the learners' inter-language system. Not a success to predict the common errors committed by EFL learners lead to a sort of fossilization. Accordingly, they would to get rid of these fossilized items. It is also worth noting that only a few studies have attempted to explore the cross-linguistic influence of English and Arabic articles on foreign/second language learning. Therefore, this study might contribute to develop the cross-linguistic knowledge in comparison with English articles versus Arabic articles. Thus this study was an attempt to investigate the types and the amount of errors in the field of articles committed by the Sudanese EFL learners.

Significance of the Study

An appropriate error analysis can help facilitate the achievement of the goals and expectations of tertiary level programs. Considering the related literature in the field of language learning and teaching in Sudanese universities, the scarcity of research in this area is obvious. The significance of this study originates from the fact that it tried to recognize and set up the Sudanese EFL learners in terms of their errors of in the usage English articles. In the improvement of students' errors in practicing English articles and the way in which teachers treat their errors it is very important to analyze these errors. The present study may also be of significance to educational institutes in the countries with the similar language systems. The study is also important for decision makers in material preparation and curriculum design. Improving EFL learners' language competence requires treatment of their errors. It is feasible to treat EFL learners' errors only if the sources of these errors are discovered and identified. Concerning the previous studies done on EFL learners' errors, as mentioned in the literature review, with respect to EFL learners' error commitment, researchers haven't reached a unanimous contention on the key role of one of the two major error sources. On the other hand, some researchers consider inter-lingual factors as the main source of EFL learners' errors while others believe that errors mostly occur because of intra-lingual factors. Therefore, the present paper shed some light on the source of errors concerning correct use of English articles.

Objective of the Study

Taking into account that Sudanese universities offer an EFL context for language learning it is obvious that learners face a lot of problems in learning English naturally.

Therefore, to detect the area of learners' errors and make productive actions one of the main objectives of the present study was investigating the extent which Sudanese EFL learners make the English articles errors when developing a writing task. Also, identifying the types of errors

in making use of English articles committed by the participants was among the objective of the study.

Research Questions

According to what has been introduced so far, the following questions will be addressed in this study:

1. To what extent do Sudanese EFL learners make the English articles errors when developing a writing task?
2. What types of errors in use of articles (omission of articles, redundant or wrong use of articles) are more likely to be made by Sudanese EFL learners when developing a writing task?

METHODOLOGY

As clearly, stated by Leedy, P.D (1993) that research design is an outline of the phases planned for the total research procedure and the methods utilized in the data collection course, jointly with the steps that will be taken to examine data. This study makes use of a quantitative design.

Participants

About thirty male EFL learners learning English at the Neelain University were initially selected for this study. The learners are at the same level concerning age, and linguistic background. So, this sameness determines the homogeneity of the subjects, who were selected as the main participants of the study.

Instrument

To serve the purposes of this research, the researcher used a free writing task as an instrument for data collection. They subjects were allowed to do the task in a limited amount of time, that is, forty five minutes. Therefore, the subjects wrote their first immediate response.

Data Analysis Procedures

After collecting the writing tasks the researcher personally scored the papers. The responses that the subjects gave to the writing task were of three kinds: wrong or inappropriate equivalence; omitted article, and redundant articles. To categorize the obtained data clearly, the results of frequency of article errors in terms of the use of articles in the writing task were tabulated and presented in the following table.

Frequency of different types of article errors.

Types	Frequencies	Percentage
Articles' omission	16	17.8
Redundant articles	54	60
Wrong choice of articles	20	22.2
Total	90	100%

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the early 1950's the conception of language as a system, and mainly, the concept of second language acquisition as the meeting of two language systems gained more acceptance and linguists began to look upon errors as evidence of language transfer. It was the time when Contrastive Analysis (CA) emerged. The status of CA as a psychological approach to the investigation of the second language process was not accepted for some reasons and CA gradually lost its validity. Strong criticisms of CA showed that it was not as functional as it claimed to be. CA strongly emphasized that the notion of difficulty was equated with the degree of errors. Essentially, the more L2 learners made errors in their acquisition of L2 the more it was assumed to be difficult and consequently the more the target and native languages were different. Another pitfall of CA was its inability in identifying sources of difficulty other than the learners' L1. Moreover CA didn't contribute to language pedagogy effectively. Because of the drawbacks of CA, in late 1960s and early 1970s, the specialists' attitudes towards errors changed gradually, and the emphasis shifted from the product to the underlying process with respect to ESL/EFL learners' error commitment. The students' errors were not regarded as problems anymore but as normal and inevitable events in language learning process which could contribute to the understanding of the strategies employed by first or second language learners. The first argument for significance of learners' errors was made by Corder in 1967. Corder (1967) mentioned that errors are evidence of the learners' in-built syllabus which show how L1 and L2 learners develop an independent system of language. In fact, language learners make their own language which is different from their L1 and L2 and has its own set of rules. The term inter-language was coined by Selinker (1972) to refer to this linguistic system.

Error analysis emerged in the sixties to reveal that learner errors were not only because of the learner's native language but also they reflected some universal learning strategies, as a reaction to contrastive analysis theory, which considered language transfer as the basic process of second language learning as what behavioristic theory suggested. Error analysis, on the other hand, deals with the learners' performance in terms of the cognitive processes they make use of in recognizing or coding the input they receive from the target language. Therefore, a primary focus of error analysis is on the evidence that learners' errors provide with an understanding of the underlying process of second language acquisition. It is to say that Keshavars (1999) suggests that the field of error analysis can be divided into two branches: (i) theoretical, and (ii) applied.

The advocates of EA considered it important to draw a distinction between mistake and error, which are "technically two very different phenomena" (Brown, 1994, p. 205). In the same direction, Corder (1967) took notion of Chomsky's "competence versus performance" distinction relating errors to failures in competence and mistakes to failures in performance. According to this notion, a mistake occurs not because of learners' inability in utilizing knowledge of TL. So, it has nothing to do with learner's competence. An error results violation of the rules of TL language and hence experience deviation in grammaticality of TL. Errors come up because of lack of competence. Native speaker can know and correct mistakes, but L2 learner needs the linguistic competency in TL to identify errors and correct them consequently. Error analysis focuses on the errors learners commit by making a comparison between the errors made in (TL) and that TL itself.

The indication of EA, Corder (1987) explains the significance of learners' errors in three different ways. "The first to the teacher in that they tell him, if he undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards the goal the learner has progressed, and consequently what remains

for him to learn. Second, they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language. Thirdly, (and in a sense this is their most important aspect) they are indispensable to the learner himself, because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn." At the same time, Brown (1987) gives the definition of error analysis as follows;" The fact that learners do make errors and these errors can be observed, analyzed, and classified to a number of different categories for describing errors have been identified. Corder (19787) classifies the errors in terms of the difference between the learners' utterance and the reconstructed version. In this way, errors can be classified into four categories:

- 1) Omission of some required element
- 2) Addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element
- 3) Selection of an incorrect element
- 4) Misordering of the elements.

If look at the way errors classified in terms of the difference between the learners' utterance and the reconstructed version by Corder, we come to a fact that Ellis (1996) expresses that "classifying errors in these ways can help us to diagnose learners' learning problems at any stage of their development and to plot how changes in error patterns occur over time."

English articles as a significant area of English language are generally found difficult by EFL/ESL learners. Brown (2000) believes that the occurrence of errors in L2 learners' production is inevitable. He adds that if learners neither make errors nor receive any feedback on their errors, their acquisition process will be impeded. These errors, deemed meaningful and systematic, are of outmost importance to researchers and teachers of L2 writing (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Lin, 2002 ;). Matsuda, Canagarajah, Harklau, Hyland, and Warschauer (2003) draw attention to the significance of the study of student text in teaching effectively. According to Yang (2010), if the learner was operating the phonological or the graphological

substance systems, i.e. spelling or pronouncing, we say he or she has produced an encoding or decoding error. If he or she was operating the lexico-grammatical systems of the TL to produce or process text, we refer to any errors on this level as composing or understanding errors. If he or she was operating on the discourse level, we label the errors occurring mis-formulation or misprocessing errors. In a study conducted by Nayernia (2011), written sentences of learners were analyzed to find out what proportion of the learners' errors were intra-lingual errors and whether the native language plays a significant role in learners' difficulties in learning the target language. Her findings revealed that only 16.7 percent of the errors were inter-lingual errors and most of errors could be attributed to target language system.

Analyses, Results, & Discussion

The articles errors have been classified under three main headings: omission of articles, redundant of articles, and wrong choice of articles as shown in table (2), below:

Types of Articles errors

Types	Cases	Percentage
Articles' omission	16	17.8
Redundant articles	54	60
Wrong choice of articles	20	22.2
Total	90	100%

The possible explanation for omission of articles' errors is MT interference as in the following examples:

- 1- *They use (...)heart transplantation for patients who...*
- 2- *to send food for(...) people who live there.,*
- 3- *This method is used for (...) patient.,*
- 4- *(...) united nations' delegate is invited by (...) Sudanese government .., and so on.*

However, in Arabic, as no form of indefinite article exists, indefiniteness is expressed by the absence of the definite article '?al' 'the' and the use of zero morpheme instead. So the students transfer this Arabic rule to English and in effect they make mistakes. Another possible explanation to this is the irregularity of the English article system which hinders the formulation of a generalized rule. This view is confirmed by Jain (1974:205), who states that "In many English language teaching situations, three typical areas: article, prepositions, and the tense system; the major difficulty about them is that they don't submit themselves to any easy generalization or overgeneralization based on some consistent regularity." This means that, if we regard the generalization rule which says that the indefinite article is used with singular countable nouns, and should not be used with uncountable nouns, it is found that a number of non-confirming examples as cited by Jain (ibid:205),:

- a- *As painter, he is not well known.*
- b- *It is a pleasure to see you.*

Where the singular countable noun 'painter' in example (a), lacks the indefinite article and the uncountable noun 'pleasure' in (b), takes the indefinite article. In examples (a) and (b), above, learners have adopted the strategy of simplification, deleting the indefinite article to reduce the linguistic burden of the TL because they didn't arrive firm generalizations in the use of indefinite article. Carelessness may also contribute to the occurrence of indefinite article omissions. This claim can be justified by the fact the occurrence of such errors is inconsistent.

Concerning the redundant articles, one can say this type of errors could be attributed to MT interference on the one hand and to the ignorance of rule restrictions of the TL itself on the other hand. English doesn't use the definite article with mass/uncountable nouns with generic reference. Arabic, on the other hand, selects the definite article as such usages. For example:

- a- *?lma'u muhimon lil hayati.*
**The water in necessary for the life.*

It should be Water is necessary for life

Redundant use is also observed with geographical names as in the example below:

b- *Alkhartoum University.*

**the Khartoum university*

it should be Khartoum University.

Finally, the errors made by the wrong choice of articles are mainly resulted from the interchange of definite and indefinite articles. Here, students replace the definite article 'the' by the indefinite article 'a/an' in places which require the definite article. So the students ignore the rule that if a noun is preceded by a modifier and an indefinite article 'a/an', the article comes before the modifier only not after it. So, this error is due to ignorance of rule restrictions. Sudanese EFL learners had the most problems in terms of the errors related to the redundant use of articles. They were at the second position in the errors of wrong use of articles and finally they had the less frequent errors with respect to the omission of articles in L2 while writing into English.

CONCLUSION

Although interference from mother tongue is considered as a source of errors, as a matter of fact, many sources of errors have been identified beyond the scope of interlingual errors. Results obtained in this study showed that intralingual factors had the most impact on advanced Sudanese EFL learners' error commitment. As mentioned before, incomplete application of language rules (undergeneralization) and overgeneralization of language rules were respectively the major intralingual factors causing errors in EFL learners' written productions. As Taylor (1975) mentioned, overgeneralization of language rules by language learners is an attempt to systematize and regularize the complex structures in the TL.

Pedagogical Implications

Teachers, EFL learners, syllabus designers and researchers benefit from the findings of EA. Erdogan, (2005) indicates that teachers can examine the effectiveness of their teaching styles and techniques by studying learners' errors. Additionally, Errors have feedback value and correct diagnosis of error sources helps teachers choose proper sort of treatment. Erdogan, (2005), comes to a conclusion that error awareness is essential for both teachers and learners. Being aware of the most frequent error types as well as the main error sources, teachers can focus on the learners' linguistic difficulties. Corder (1967) thinks that learners' errors are evidence of a definite language system which show learners' language development at any point. At the same time, EA helps syllabus designers and material developers to design systematic syllabuses and arrange the sequence of materials in the most appropriate way.

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