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Investigate Students' Performance in using Articles in Sudanese Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to investigate the errors made by Sudanese secondary school students in handling English articles. The sample selected for this study was (100) out of (200) students randomly chosen from the third level, Khartoum secondary school for girls. The subjects were from the same mother tongue (Arabic language. The students' age range between (16-18) years. The data was collected through a test given to the students. It contained (15) multiple choice questions, to choose one of the articles (a), (an), (the), or select no article at all. The analysis of the students errors showed that they commit errors as a result of interlingual and intralingual factors, and the main factor was mother tongue interference (44%). The highest of errors was in zero article (43.52%), where as the lowest percentage was in indefinite article (an) (7.60%).

Key Words: language , English articles , Students' Performance.

Introduction

Language is the most means of communication used by humans, there are many ways for people to communicate. For example, deaf people communicate through sign language. Other creatures communicate through different mediums, honey bees communicate through dancing, the male spider, before he approaches his lady love goes through elaborate gestures to inform her that he is a spider and not a crumb or a fly to be eaten. Cipollone.(1994, 23). Communication took place through the four skills. Listening, reading, speaking and writing. Listening and speaking are relevant to language expressed through the aural medium, on the other hand, reading and writing are considered to relate to language expressed through the visual medium. In the activity of using language, speaking and writing are known to be productive skills, whereas listening and reading are said to be receptive skills. On the other hand communication through the four skills is interchangeable. Where there is a speaker there is a listener, and a writer needs a reader.

The skill of writing requires the mastery of the other skills. As Wringe (1989:81), states that “ something incorrectly written may not affect the present communication, but if attention is not drawn to it, it may be taken as a model for future writing, where it may prove misleading or distracting”. Moreover writing is open to inspection, and it is used in tests and examinations.

Composing in English is not an easy task, it requires, joining words, phrases, and modifying words with determiners and articles. Raimes. (1993, 261) expresses : “ Composing means expressing ideas, conveying meanings, composing means thinking”.

Statement of the problem

The researcher observes that Sudanese EFL learners tend to be poor in English language. This issue is of a very wide range that covers the four skills. In addition, they could not even express themselves thoroughly when they start writing English structures. Particularly, Sudanese EFL learners at secondary school level, who are weak at using English Articles when they write in English. English articles are lexical items which do not have clear meaning. So students tend to confuse their function and usage.

This paper is an attempt to investigate Sudanese EFL learners in English Articles. It tries to shed light on the types of errors committed by the learners, and to find out the reasons behind these errors.

Objectives

This paper aims to :

- 1 - Identify the problems in using English Articles done by Sudanese learners.
- 2 – To analyze the reasons behind these problems.
- 3 – To find solutions to these problems in order to facilitate the process of writing, that is, students work with no or fewer errors.

Review of Literature

There are two approaches which are relevant to this study, and review of the research. Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis approaches.

The Contrastive Analysis Approach

The last two decades of enthusiasm for contrastive analysis in foreign language teaching can be traced to Charles Fries (1945:9), who stated that “the most effective materials are those that based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner”. Robert Lado (1957: 2) supported that claim, when he laid the fundamental assumption of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, that individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture, both productively when attempting to speak the language and

respectively when attempting to grasp and understand the languages as practiced by natives in the comparison between native and foreign language lies the key to ease or difficulty in foreign language learning.

C.A hypothesis rests on the following assumptions about the process of language learning as it summarizes by Rivers (1964: 65):

1 – Language learning is a habit formation.

2 – An old habit hinders or facilitates the formation of a new

habit, depending on the differences or similarities, respectively, between the old and the new. The first assumption derives primarily from the general paradigm of behaviorist psychology. Habit formation may be described in a variety of ways, that rely on the principles of associations, that is frequently, contiguity, intensity, etc, of stimulus and response in the occurrence of the event that become a habit. The second assumption, which follows from the first derives from interference theory, in verbal learning and memory research. Interference theory until (1959) rested on the assumption of the associative of context and / or with response. Learning a new response to the same stimulus and/ or in the same context would require (extinction) of the old association. Otherwise the old habit would prevail. The prevalence of an old habit in attempting to perform a new task is called “negative transfer” (Rivers 1964:65).

The notion of interference between two systems struck linguists and teachers as specially interesting, since it appeared to account for the problems of second language learning. Lado (1957: 11) tended to emphasize points of contrast between two language systems. He declared that: “errors were an indication of the difficulties the learners had with certain aspects of language, which could be explained by the persistence of the habit of the mother tongue and their transfer of the new language. Then errors are the result of the interference and in an ideal teaching situation can be avoided”.

Error Analysis

Sridhar (1981: 87) points out that Error analysis has a long tradition prior to the early 1970s, however, E.A consisted of little more than impressionistic collections of “common” errors and their linguistic classification. The goals of tradition Error Analysis were pedagogic- error providing information which could be used to sequence items for teaching or to device remedial lessons. The absence of any theoretical framework for explaining the role played by the errors in the process of Second Language Acquisition (S.L.A) led to no serious attempt to define “error ” or to account for it in psychological terms. Also as the enthusiasm for C.A grew, so the interest in E.A declined. In accordance with Behaviorist Learning Theory, the prevention of errors (the goal of C.A) was more important than identification of errors. It was not until 1960s that was a resurgence of interest in E.A. A series of articles by Corder (e.g. 1967, 1971, 1975) in *International Review of Applied Linguistics*; traced to this resurgence and help to give it direction. In his (1967) paper, Corder made a distinction between a mistake and an error. Where

as a mistake is a random performance slip caused by fatigue, excitement, etc, and therefore can be readily self- corrected, an error is a systematic deviation made by learners who have not mastered the rules of the L2 . Richards (1978: 172) in his paper “Anon- Contrastive Approach to Error Analysis”, focused on several types of errors observed in the acquisition of English as a second language, which do not derive from transfers from another language. Errors of this nature are frequent, regardless of the learners language background. They may be called intralingual and developmental errors, they reflect the learner’s competence at a particular stage. Richards (1978:174) states that intralingual errors are those which reflect the general characteristic of rule learning, such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules. On the other hand developmental errors as Richards states, are the errors illustrate the learner attempting to build up hypothesis about the English language from his limited experience of it in the classroom or text book.

George (1972:23) adds that other errors were attributed to simplification, or redundancy reduction, such as when a plural marker was omitted from a noun preceded by a cardinal number larger than one. Other errors as Stenson (1974:60) states were labeled communication-based errors which resulted in communication strategies, and induced errors.

Methodology of the study :

The analytic descriptive qualitative approach was used, the tool of the research was a multiple choice test, contains fifteen questions. The students were asked to choose one of the four articles “a, an, the, or zero article”. The subjects were chosen randomly from Khartoum secondary school. They were forty female students “third year” . The results were analyzed, then interpreted and reported. as a consequence.

Results

This paper is an attempt to investigate the performance of the Sudanese EFL learners at secondary schools level in using English Articles.

The Findings

Articles errors were classified into indefinite articles errors (29.29%), definite article errors (27.52%). The highest percentage of errors were found to be in zero articles (43.52%), where as the lowest percentage were in indefinite article (an) (7.60%).

Conclusions

The study showed that students commit errors as a result of interlingual and intralingual factors. The main factor was mother tongue interference (M.T) (44.9%), beside developmental errors i.e. overgeneralization (17.5%). Ignorance of rule restriction, in addition to students carelessness (37.6%). The researcher found that the function of articles are similar in English and Arabic

language, but the inconsistency of the English article system which hinders the formulation of a generalized rule, would contribute to occurrence of some errors.

Suggested Recommendation :

In the light of the findings the following recommendation can be made:

- 1 – The articles are lexical items which do not have clear meaning. Learners tend to confuse or omit them. So, the teacher's instructions and feedback are very important to minimize the problem.
- 2 – When using articles, the English article system should be emphasized by giving the students more exercises and drills so as to avoid omission or confusion in using them.
- 3 – The function of the articles should be explained and made clear for the students.
- 4 – When teaching articles, where there is a gap between Arabic and English, contrastive method of teaching can be useful.

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