MISTAKES COMMITTED BY IRAQI UNDERGRADUATE EFL STUDENTS' IN THE USE OF THE INDEFINITE ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

This study is an analysis of structure written by Iraqi first-, second-, third- and fourth-stage collage English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. This study aims at identifying with restriction the types of errors they potential errors in the use of the indefinite article. Nine kinds of error were identified, and their recurrence calculated and then compared through the three levels. These errors are: (1) delete phrases represent the indefinite article, (2) writing within of the noun/adjective it is the following (3) Replaced by the indefinite for the definite article, (4) substituting of the definite for the indefinite article, (5) substituting of *a* for *an*,(6) using of the indefinite article with undifferentiated plurals, (7) use of the indefinite article with remarkable plurals, (8) use of the indefinite article with uncountable nouns, and (9) using of the 2indefinite..article..with..adjectives. The different earlier error analyses, native language converts and transfer was found to substitute which is at best minimal. The evaluation revealed that all errors, except one, are independent of the student' native language. The only kind of error which could be keep track back to the influence of Arabic, among other sources, was the deleting of the indefinite article. Developmental elements and popular learning strategies such as facilitation and over generalization were found to compute for the plurality of learners' errors. The using of these strategies was obvious among the EFL learners of the four stages who were found to do well on assured items and to have difficulty with others.

KEYWORDS: Foreign Language (EFL) students, ESL/EFL learners, Indefinite Article with Uncountable Nouns, and Article with Adjectives

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The English article system is one of the most hard structural a parts for ESL/EFL learners, exceptionally for those whose native languages do not utilize articles or disquisition -such as morphemes. Master (2002) characteristic this onerousness to three facts about the article method:(a) Articles are among the most repeated task words in English (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999), making stable principle application difficult over an prolonged stretch of converse analysis; (b) function words are in a normal manner unstressed and subsequently are very difficult for non-municipal speakers to discern, which influence the availability of input in the spoken process; and (c) the article design a pile of objects multiple functions onto a elementary morpheme, which constitutes a major encumbrance for the learner who usually looks for a having a one-to-one with trainee correspondence between mode and function, especially in going early stages of language studying. In spite of the verity that articles are paramount functional framework, they are difficultly incisive communication devices, which is confirming by the fact that they are declining in telegraphic substitution. Thus, unlike tenor words, function words are generally disregard by learners when handling language mostly for meaning. According to Pienemann (1998), the difficulty of the intending expressed by an article is planned by the novelty and

abstractness of the idea, not to indication learners' changing hypotheses about article3employ at different phase in inter language evolution and the potential effect of the native language which may moreover complicate the function.

Articles do not handicap understanding, for in verbal connection, they are generally ceremonial and almost unheard. Nevertheless, given the principle that they are among the most continual words in English, it is of the ultimate prominence that university students have some surveillance of their employment. The English articles **a(n)**, **zero**, and **the** are completely difficult to get not only for ESL/EFL learners but also for children learning English as a first language. Articles are assured to be a source of stiffness for learners (and teachers) of English as a second/foreign language, essentially for those whose native languages do not have articles or do have articles or article-such as morphemes that are applied in ways that vary from English articles(Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999). In a morpheme learning by Brown (1973), the articles **a** and **the** came up at numbers nine and ten in the subjugation of fourteen morphemes. It has been found to be less tricky than the prepositions **in** and **on**, regular plural and possessive inflection -**s** but more difficult than the current progressive inflection -**ing**, regular and irregular third person singular (e.g. **cleans** and **has**), regular and irregular past tense (**cleaned** and **went**) and contracted and un contracted link verb (copula) and (auxiliary)**be**. The Arabic article style is comparable to that of English in meant. While form is quite varied widely; however, the Arabic mode lists a dual uniqueness between the defined and the undefined, the English manner exhibits a ternary distinction. The Arabic manner was defined which remarkable by the definite article /**al**/, and the undefined that which marked by the absence of /**al**/, coincide to the English manner was defined that marked by the definite article **the**, and the undefined (marked by the indefinite articles **a(n)** and **zero**). on the other hand, even nevertheless the concept is present in the two languages, confusion in English is marked by lexical evolution and the potential effect of the native language which may moreover complicate the function.

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respectively (Lyons, 1999). For example, the Arabic and English clause below are translation tantamount to equal:

- *Man appeared in town*
- *A man appeared in town.*

Despite enduring efforts by EFL instructors to exclude article errors, these errors were found to suffer the speech and writing of their students all over the world. Existence an EFL instructor itself, the current researcher endeavors to look into this issue for the aim of adding to the conclusions drawn by preceding research.

This study was tested the winning of the English indefinite article by a cross-section of Thi-Qar university students. It has three main objectives: (1) to recognize the errors the learners make in items of their types and prospect sources, (2) to numeration, approach and compare the relative recurrence of these errors to evaluate any developmental directions among the learners of the varies levels and scales of proficiency, and (3) to Identify any potential variations among the subjects which may be impute to class grade or median length of compositions. To complete these objectives, the current researcher and investigator to seeks answers, results and outcomes to the following questions:

- What are the kinds and potential sources of information in the errors Iraqi EFL students make in the utilize of the indefinite article?

- Are there any developmental inclusions in the comparative duplication of the occurrence of these errors?

- Are there any wide variety in the students' errors which can be attributed to stage level?

- Is there a relationship between the median length of compositions and the repetition number of errors made in indeterminate article use?

This study came up its importance from the significance of the theme it addresses and the certainty that it trials to reconnoiter a modern fields in accomplishments analysis, viz, the relationship between the median length of compositions and the frequency of number's errors in them, which is expected to add another anticipative to the present literature on the English article mode. In spite of the fact that only indefinite article errors are studied, the current study is determine in its scope and generalize ability of outcomes to people similar to the present one. in addition, the principle that different students are targeted at each stage level may add another limitation posed by these students' potentially different personalities, motivation, and writing abilities, a limitation which would have been avoided if the same students were studied over a four-year period of time. Finally, examining the students' speech would have added further validity to the claims made in this research.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS LITERATURE

The literature has a plethora of research conducted on the processes of learning the English articles by EFL/ESL learners. However, this research has been found to focus on isolated features of the English article system (Chaudron and Parker, 1990; Goto Butler, 2002;Jarvis, 2002; Kharma, 1981; Liu and Gleason, 2002; Mizuno, 1999; Yamada and Matsuura, 1982; Yoon, 1993) falling into two areas: pedagogy and its effectiveness and the process of acquisition. A good number of the studies which yielded important findings (Hakuta, 1976; Huebner, 1979, 1983; Tarone, 1985) were specifically conducted to examine grammatical morphemes rather than article acquisition per se. Only Master (1987 and 1997), Parrish (1987), Tarone and Parrish (1988), and Thomas (1989) specifically studied the acquisition of articles. To the

best of this researcher's knowledge, Master (1987) was the first to point out that articles seem to be acquired differently, depending on whether or not they occur in the learner's native language. Overall, the acquisition of the definite article *the* precedes the acquisition of the indefinite article *a* (Huebner, 1983; Master, 1997; Parrish, 1987; Thomas, 1989). Several studies (Huebner, 1985; Parrish, 1987; Thomas, 1989; Chaudron and Parker, 1990) found an overuse of the definite article, but higher proficiency learners improved in accuracy with indefinite *a*. Although both Master (1997) and Huebner (1983) referred to the phenomenon of '*the*-flooding' in which *the* is over generalized with a dramatic rise in usage, Thomas (1989) found the *zero* article over generalized across proficiency levels. For learners whose native languages lack articles, researchers (Master, 1997; Parrish, 1987; Ekiert, 2004) reported that *zero* dominates in all environments for articles in the early stages of language learning. Parrish (1987) suggested an order of acquisition in which the *zero* article, the definite article, and the indefinite article are acquired consecutively. Master (1997) concluded that these learners seem to acquire the *zero* article first although he warns that one cannot tell the difference between the *zero* article and omission of the article. Master's data showed that *zero* accuracy is close to 100% for the low-ability level participants, which then drops, and rises to nearly 100 % again for the high-ability level participants. He further reported that the overuse of *zero* article decreases with the increase in proficiency level, although the overuse of *zero* article persists more than the overuse of the other articles. Liu and Gleason (2002:5) reexamined Master's data and offered a new interpretation of the overuse of the *zero* article and under use of *a* and *the*; *this overuse of the zero article and the under use of the at the advanced stage would suggest that the two articles are acquired rather late.*

Liu and Gleason's hypothesis was supported by Young's (1996) data on the use of articles by Czech and Slovak learners of English, for while definiteness was not encoded by *the* at the early stages of acquisition, it persisted even at the more advanced stages. However, participants encoded indefiniteness by means of the indefinite article *a* at all levels of proficiency with rising frequency as acquisition progressed.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) claim that the problematicity of the use of the article system is due in part to whether or not the lexical classification into countable versus uncountable nouns corresponds in the native and target languages. For example, while *furniture* and *equipment* are uncountable in both Arabic and English, *chalk* and *information* are countable in Arabic and uncountable in English. This mismatch may very well add to the complexity of the learner's task, for he/she needs to learn both the article system and other noun distinctions.

Research findings show similarities in the kind of problems facing ESL/EFL learners, of which some are believed to be more serious for learners from certain language backgrounds. The findings of comparative studies of first and second language acquisition are widely varied. Some morpheme studies (cf., for example, Cook, 1973) report similar stages of development, while others (cf., for example, Larsen-Freeman, 1975) report apparent variability in the order of acquisition of different groups. A third group (cf., for example, Ervin-Tripp, 1974) yet limits the similarity to natural learning situations. Corder(1973) maintains that unlike natural language learning, where learners make and test their own hypotheses about the language, second language learners in tutored situations follow an externally imposed syllabus. The review of research on the effects of instruction on second language development suggests that instruction has a positive effect on second language learning, the rate of acquisition and learners' ultimate level of attainment. Some even go as far as claiming that certain structures may not be acquired if not taught (Cook, 1973). Certain findings, however, exclude any potential influence on the order of acquisition which is believed to be independent of the kind and amount of instruction

the learner receives (Long, 1983).

Articles need to be taught because not only do they carry meaning but using them erroneously often causes misreading and confusion (Wrase, 1982; Rinnert and Hansen, 1986). This is made more plausible by Rinnert and Hansen's (1986) report of significant improvement in article use by more than one thousand learners from different native language backgrounds following a systematic instructional approach using self-developed material. It has been reported that very few EFL/ESL textbooks present a systematic approach or adequate practice to positively affect learners' performance in article usage.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

The subjects for this study were all students of English at Thi-Qar University (Nasiriya city, Iraq.) in the second semester of the academic year 2014/2015. The four groups of subjects started their degree in 2010, 2011, 2012 or 2013 respectively, which made them freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors at the time of the research. A total of 209 male and female students, all of whom were between 18 and 23 years of age, were selected for the study. Like all Iraqi students, the ones who participated in this study started learning English as a foreign language in, or before, the fifth grade (currently from the first grade). They were homogeneous in terms of their linguistic and socioeconomic background, educational system, and field of study. The subjects lived in an exclusively Arabic-speaking community and had learned English as a foreign language prior to taking it up as their major field of study at the university. Since the only course where freshmen students were uniformly asked to write paragraph/essay-type texts in English was Eng 105, an English Language Skills course, subjects who represented freshmen were drawn from the two sections of this course. The rest of the subjects were drawn from a three-year course sequence starting at the sophomore year and ending in the senior year: Eng 202 Writing the Paragraph, Eng 206 Writing the Essay, and Eng 320 Writing about Literature. Class level and average length of compositions are the only two variables. The subjects were asked to write about one of the following topics:

Why do you study English? *Iraqi University campus*, *violence in movies*, *car accidents*, and *my favoriteauthor/story/poet*.

Only the written work of two hundred of these students was included in the analysis. Nine students' compositions were excluded because their writers failed to indicate their student identification numbers on the answer sheets and, thus, the researcher was unable to determine their respective class level. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample in terms of gender and class level.

Table 1: Distribution of the Sample

Gender / Class Level	Male	Female	Total
Freshmen Class of 2013/2014	17	24	41
Sophomores Class of 2012/2013	29	47	76
Juniors Class of 2011/2012	26	20	46
Seniors Class of 2010/2011	14	23	37
Total	86	114	200
Unidentified	5	4	9
Grand Total	91	118	209

The compositions were all written in 50-minute class sessions. The students were allowed to use their respective choices of an English monolingual dictionary. For every composition, a word count was made and errors in the use of the indefinite article were counted, classified and later analyzed. The types and frequency of these errors were compared to observe similarities and/or differences in the type and number of errors made across the four levels. The length of the compositions was different across individual respondents as well as across class levels. A word count was performed excluding the instructions and questions which some of the subjects copied onto the answer sheet. An average word count for each class level was used to calculate the percentage of errors in indefinite article usage. The average length of the compositions for each of the four class levels is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Average Length of Composition across Class Level

Class Level	Average Composition Length
Freshmen Class of 2013/2014	227
Sophomores Class of 2012/2013	301
Juniors Class of 2011/2012	541
Seniors Class of 2010/2011	656

The aim of the linguistic analysis of the compositions was to observe errors in the use of the indefinite article which could be *inter lingual errors* caused by the influence of the learners' native language; *intralingual errors* caused by the influence of the target language itself; *transfer of training errors* caused by faulty material presentation by teachers or textbooks*; second language learning strategies* which are the processes by which learners form, test, or modify hypotheses about the nature of the target language; and *second language communication strategies* by which learners attempt to handle the heavy communication demands facing them. To achieve the objectives of the study, each composition was read twice, once by the present researcher and another by one of two independent raters. Data from each reading were organized using the following error categories: (1) deletion of the indefinite article, (2) writing *a* as part of the noun/adjective following it, (3) substitution of the indefinite for the definite article, (4) substitution of the definite for the indefinite article, (5) substitution of *a* for *an*, (6) use of the indefinite article with unmarked plurals, (7) use of the indefinite article with marked plurals, (8) use of the indefinite article with uncountable nouns, and (9) use of the indefinite article with adjectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the researcher presents and discusses the findings of the study in light of its objectives. First, the errors made by the four groups of subjects are identified in terms of their types and potential sources; second, the frequency of these errors is computed and compared to detect any developmental tendencies among the four levels; and third, potential differences among the subjects which can be attributed to class level or average length of compositions are detected.

Types of Errors: Discussed below are the nine types of error the subjects made in the use of the article.

Deletion of the Indefinite Article

Table 3 below, shows that a large number of errors were made under this category (viz., 67, 51, 20 and 9 errors by freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors, respectively). These errors can be attributed to more than one source, the most obvious of which may be native language transfer, for the learners may be giving the equivalent native language structure as the result of their inadequate knowledge of that of the target language, as shown in the examples below:

*Iraqi University has **beautiful campus** [a beautiful campus].*

*English is **international language** [an international language].*

*My neighbor was killed in **car accident** [a car accident] near Nasiriyah.*

Where a considerable number of the subjects made the error of deleting the indefinite article **a(n)** whose use is obligatory with the singular countable nouns **campus, language,** and **accident**. While English requires the use of an indefinite article, Arabic shows indefiniteness by not using an article at all. Due to the aforementioned differences between the two languages, ungrammatical structures are produced. The fact that Arabic does not have a distinct marker for indefiniteness the way English does is probably the cause of the learners' deviation from the target language rule. This assumption is further supported by previous work by researchers like Duskova (1969), Richards (1971) and Bataineh (2002), among others, where the same error was made by learners from this and other language backgrounds that either do not have corresponding article systems or articles altogether.

Another potential source of this error is the strategy of simplification. Learners could be attempting to reduce the learning burden whereby the target language structure (viz., the indefinite article) is simplified into a form which is compatible with the learners' still developing inter language system. They may be using the *zero* articles with both singular and plural unidentified countable nouns, which would certainly reduce the system into a more manageable one.

Writing the Indefinite Article as a Part of the Element Below

Although this is by far the most frequent error among the learners of the four levels, it seems to be the easiest to explain. Since it could not be traced to either the native or the target language, transfer of training seems to be the ideal explanation, for very early on in the acquisition process, these learners are presented with the indefinite article **a** as an inseparable companion to the noun (and later the adjective) it modifies. It is always **a book**, **a pen** or **a pencil** but never

book, *pen* or *pencil*. By such presentation, learners are led to believe that *a book* is a single item rather than a two-item noun phrase made of an indefinite article and a noun. This is further worsened by the fact that early material presentation is mostly oral, which may mean that by the time the learner is exposed to the written form, the misconceived structure has already been imprinted in his/her inter language system.

Table 3: Number and Percentage of Error across Class Levels

Class Level	Deletion of the indefinite article		Writing a as Part of the Following Word		Substitution of the Indefinite Article for the Definite Article		Substitution of the Definite Article for the Indefinite Article		Substitution of a for an		Using the Indefinite Article With Unmarked Plurals		Using the Indefinite Article With Marked Plurals		Using the Indefinite Article With Uncountable Nouns		Using the Indefinite Article With Adjectives		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Freshmen Class of 2013-2014	67	45.6	137	59.3	27	31.4	21	44.7	8	61.5	2	20.0	3	75.0	8	66.7	10	90.9	283	50.4
Sophomores Class of 2012-2013	51	34.7	66	28.6	19	22.1	15	31.9	4	30.8	2	20.0	1	25.0	2	16.7	0	0	160	28.5
Juniors Class of 2011-2012	20	13.6	6	2.6	22	25.6	3	6.4	0	0	1	10.0	0	0	1	8.3	1	9.1	54	9.6
Seniors Class of 2010-2011	9	6.1	22	9.5	18	20.9	8	17.0	1	7.7	5	50.0	0	0	1	8.3	0	0	64	11.4
Total	147	100	231	100	86	100	47	100	13	100	10	100	4	100	12	100	11	100	561	100

† The percentage is calculated by dividing the number of errors in each of the nine categories by the total number of errors in that category.

This misconception causes them to write the article as part of the following element almost whenever they happen to observe the English rule of using one with singular unidentified countable nouns as seen in the examples below.

*No one can deny that Thi-Qar University has **a beautiful**[a beautiful] campus. Shakespeare wrote so much he became **a famous**[a famous] playwright. Speed is the most common case for **a lot**[a lot] of accidents.*

The present researcher herself had made this error a few times in fear of being reprimanded by zealous teachers who would not tolerate the deletion of the article, which seems consistent with Wrase's (1982) warning against too much worry too early about which article goes where claiming that to be counter-productive in writing. It is worth noting that this error is subsequent to that of article deletion, because once the learner realizes that an indefinite article is required, he/she often fails to treat it as a separate entity from the noun or adjective it modifies and, thus, continues to produce deviant structures.

Substitution Errors

The substitution of the indefinite article *a(n)* or *null* for the definite article *the*, of the definite article *the* for the indefinite article *a(n)* or *null*, and of the indefinite article *a* for the indefinite article *an* were observed among the students of the four levels, as shown in the following examples: *Thi-Qar University Street is **a commercial center** [the commercial*

center] of Nasiriya city.

English may be **an only language** [the only language] of business.

The international language [an international language] is used by people all over the world. Knowing more than one language makes **the person** [a person] smart. **The person** [a person] needs English for communication. She broke her arm in **a accident** [an accident]. He has not **a enough time** [?] to leave the car.

Table 3 shows numbers as well as the frequency of occurrence of the subjects' errors. The way substitution errors are distributed in Table 3 may appear odd. Compared to freshmen, sophomores, and seniors, juniors made the least number of substitution errors, while seniors erroneously substituted the indefinite for the definite article, the definite for the indefinite article, and *a* for *an*. Juniors aside, sophomores and seniors exhibit a pattern which is best described as puzzling. Freshmen, sophomores, and juniors seem to do a little worse than seniors in the erroneous substitution of the indefinite for the definite article (compare 31.4%, 22.1%, and 25.6% to 20.9%, respectively). This phenomenon, however, may make better sense if one keeps in mind that the subjects of the former levels made more errors in article deletion than seniors (compare 45.6%, 34.7%, and 13.6% to 6.1%). In other words, while freshmen, sophomores, and juniors deleted more indefinite articles, most seniors recognized the fact that English requires the use of one with singular unidentified countable nouns which may have led them to over generalize the rule to instances where it is not applicable. The fact that the third substitution error, viz. that of *a* for *an*, occurred only in one junior's composition and in a totally inappropriate context makes it appear like a nonce mistake or a slip of the pen. In addition to the faulty substitution, *he has not a enough time to leave the car* does not even call for the use of an article. Furthermore, the use of the sentence *he does not have enough time* is quite frequent in ESL/EFL textbooks and classroom situations, which lends itself to further support this analysis.

Using of the Indefinite Article with Marked & Unmarked Plurals

Like the erroneous substitution of the indefinite for the definite article, seniors surprisingly made the largest number of errors in the use of the indefinite article with unmarked plurals, as shown in the examples below:

English is spoken by **a people** [people] from every nation.

A students [students] who know English have a better chance in life.

Nevertheless, they made no errors in the use of the indefinite article with marked plurals. Analogy or overgeneralization of other target language structures could be offered to explain this error. The learners were probably applying the rules of indefiniteness where it is not applicable.

Furthermore, hypercorrection, or the learners' tendency to erroneously use the article inplaces where it is not required for fear of making errors, could be offered to explain this type of error. Because they are so often corrected when they drop the article, learners occasionally overuse the article to avoid making the error, especially after they have begun to recognize the need for an indefinite article in certain contexts in English.

The Using of the Indefinite Article with Uncountable Nouns

This error occurred with larger frequency in the compositions of the freshmen and gradually decreased in the compositions of the other three groups (8 vs. 2, 1, and 1 for freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors, respectively). Like the previous error, either overgeneralization or hypercorrection is probably the source of this error. *Young people use*

information [information] to imitate the crimes in movies. The learners could be erroneously extending the use of the indefinite article with singular unidentified countable nouns to uncountable ones on the grounds of structural similarity, or they could be overusing the indefinite article to avoid errors of deletion.

The Using of the Indefinite Article with Adjectives

This error is possibly the result of 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, thus, 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. Sentences like *I will nurse your sick and feed your hungry* and *I ventured into the unknown* are perfectly grammatical in English and, in fact, not structurally different from a sentence like *English is an extensive* and *The buildings are all a classical*.

This error could also be explained as a nonce mistake, or one which is caused by learners' carelessness, exhaustion or lack of attention. It has been found that learners usually correct this type of error themselves once their attention is drawn to it. The writer could have easily neglected or even not been able to come up with an appropriate singular noun to complete the sentence. Surprisingly, this researcher finds it hard to come up with an appropriate noun for the sentence. Actually, the best she can do here is use the noun substitute *one* and *ones*, respectively.

The Effect of Class Level

The subjects made a total of 561 errors in the use of articles, which are divided into 283 errors by freshmen, 160 errors by sophomores, 54 errors by juniors, and 64 errors by seniors. The analysis of the different types of errors revealed that the learners' performance varied from one item to another, for as students did well on certain items, they had some difficulty with others. Table 3 shows that learners' performance differs significantly from one item to another among the four proficiency levels. Most surprisingly, juniors seem to consistently do better than their counterparts, except in the errors of substituting the indefinite for the definite article and using the indefinite article with adjectives, scoring a total error percentage of 9.6 compared to 50.4% by freshmen, 28.5% by sophomores, 9.6% by juniors, and 11.4% by seniors. This researcher intends to investigate this phenomenon further in future research. As juniors did better than freshmen, they outdid sophomores in all areas but one (viz., substitution of the indefinite for the definite article) (compare 22.1% to 25.6%). They also outdid seniors in all but the avoidance of three errors (viz., the deletion of the indefinite article, substitution of the indefinite for the definite article, and using the indefinite article with adjectives (compare their 13.6%, 25.6%, 9.1% to the seniors' 6.1%, 20.9%, and 0%, respectively). This phenomenon would not seem so odd if one kept in mind that seniors made the least number of errors in article deletion. The fact that they used more articles explains their making more errors in writing *a* as part of the following element, substitution of the indefinite for the definite article, and the use of the indefinite article with marked plurals.

The Connection between the Length of Composition and the Number of Errors

Composition length was not found to have a consistent relationship with the number of errors made. While freshmen, who wrote compositions of an average count of 227 words, made a total of 283 errors, sophomores, who wrote compositions of an average count of 301 words, made a total of 160 errors, juniors, who wrote compositions of an average count of 541 words, made a total of 54 errors, and seniors, who wrote compositions of an average count of 656 words,

made a total of 64 errors.

This result is not consistent with traditional teacher warnings that the more one writes, the more errors he/she is bound to make. In fact, these figures may readily support the researcher's claim that the errors made by the subjects are more developmental than thought in previous research. Although juniors and seniors wrote compositions with almost double the length of those written by their freshmen and sophomore counterparts, their errors were dramatically cut to less than 20% and 23% of those made by freshmen and 34% and 40% of those made by sophomores, respectively.

CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained above suggest that the majority of errors made by the four groups are the result of common learning processes, such as overgeneralization and simplification of the English article system. The impact of the subjects' native language was found minimal.

The only type of error that could possibly be ascribed to native language transfer, among other sources, is the deletion of the indefinite article.

Although the results achieved in this study are sound and significant, more research is needed. A longitudinal study using the same subjects over the period of their study might prove invaluable for these purposes, not to mention incorporating oral as well as written data in the analysis.

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