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Errors Made by Iraqi EFL Learners in the Use of Articles : An Error Analysis Study

A B S T R A C T

The current study seeks to identify the article errors for both first and third year students in conversations. To achieve this the aim, interview and spot the differences tasks are used as a source for data collection. The study targeted 60 samples in the Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Mosul, for the academic year 2021-2022. Participants are chosen randomly from the students. As for data analysis, errors are described according to Corder's (1973) classification viz omission, addition, misordering, and selection. The current study demonstrated that learners of English as a foreign language face some difficulties in using articles in conversations. Regarding the description of errors, first year students made 65% of the errors related to the omission category, while 31% of the errors were related to addition category. Errors related to selection category occupy only 4% of article errors. As far as third year students, it has been noticed that 60% of article errors related to omission category , it represents the highest percentage among other categories. Errors associated with addition category have the percentage of 38% , while 2% of these errors are represented by choosing inappropriate items. No errors have been noticed for two levels at the level of article ordering. Regarding sources of errors, both interlanguage and intralanguage were seen as sources of article errors.

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الأخطاء التي يرتكبها الطلبة العراقيون متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية في أستخدام أدوات التعريف والتنكير: دراسة تحليل الأخطاء

رشا فاتك محمد مرعي/ كلية التربية–قسم اللغة الانكليزية–جامعة الموصل

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الخلاصة:

تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى تحديد الأخطاء النحوية الشائعة في أدوات التعريف والتنكير لدى طلبة المرحلتين الأولى والثالثة في المحادثة باللغة الإنجليزية. لتحقيق هدف البحث, تم استخدام المقابلة الشفوية

ومهمة تحديد الفروق بين صورتين كأداتين لجمع البيانات. تضمنت عينة البحث 60 طالب وطالبة من المرحلتين الأولى والثالثة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية,كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية, جامعة الموصل للعام الدراسي 2021-2022. تم اختيار المشاركين بشكل عشوائي. وتم تحليل الأخطاء بالاعتماد على تصنيف كوردر 1973 . وتم تحديد الأخطاء بالاعتماد على طريقة ريتشارد 1971 في تحديد أخطاء الطلبة. أثبتت نتائج الدراسة ان طلبة المرحلتين الأولى والثالثة يواجهون صعوبات في أستخدام أدوات التنكير والتعريف خلال المحادثات. فيما يتعلق بوصف الأخطاء التي يرتكبها طلبة المرحلة الأولى, فان 65% من الأخطاء التي ارتكبوها تتعلق بفئة الحذف, بينما 31% من الأخطاء تتعلق بفئة الإضافة و 4% من الأخطاء تتعلق بفئة التحديد. أما بالنسبة للأخطاء التي يرتكبها طلبة المرحلة الثالثة, فقد وجد البحث ان 60% من الأخطاء تتعلق بفئة الحذف وهي تمثل أعلى نسبة بين الفئات الأخرى. وبلغ نسبة الأخطاء المرتبطة بفئة الإضافة 38% بينما تم تمثيل 2% من هذه الأخطاء باختيار عناصر غير مناسبة. لم يتم إيجاد أي أخطاء على مستوى ترتيب اداوت التنكير والتعريف بالنسبة لكلا المرحلتين. فيما يتعلق بمصادر الأخطاء, فقد وجد ان interlanguage, intralanguage على انها مصادر لاخطاء أدوات التعريف والتنكير.

الكلمات الافتتاحية: تحليل الأخطاء , أدوات التعريف والتنكير , المحادثة

Introduction

With the social nature, daily tasks, and knowledge exchange, people need a systematic and intricate method to communicate with each other. Language is, therefore, used as a mean to facilitate these communication facets. Speaking is often considered to be one of the most crucial skill that a student must be achieved by a language learning (Goh & Burn, 2012, p.256).Three basic skills are needed for effective communication: speaking, listening, and body language (Zumbrum, 2006, p2). Beattie (1983, p.33) states that "spontaneous speech is unlike written text. It contains manymistakes, sentences are usually brief".

Knowing (either explicitly or implicitly) how to use language effectively in every given context is an important part of being able to use a language well. Griffiths, C. & Soruc (2019,p.32) argue that learners should be made aware of how spoken language differs from

written forms in order to exercise choices rather than taking a prescriptive approach to what is correct based on models of written language. Nonetheless, each language has its unique grammar, which makes learning more difficult for studentsand causes many grammatical errors. For this reason, identifying the grammatical errors could be important in order to find tangible solutions.

Rationale of the study:

Making lots of grammatical errors could prevent speakers in general and learners of English in particular from delivering their messages and ideas successfully. Grammatical problems can cause a wide range of communication problems that can negatively affect personal and professional interactions.

Aim of the study:

This study aims to investigate article errors made by Iraqi EFL learners atEnglish Department of Mosul University and describe the kind of error.

Research questions:

1.what are the article errors committed in conversation by undergraduatestudents in Iraq.

2. what are the causes/sources of article errors committed in conversationsby undergraduate students in Iraq.

Literature review The concept of errors

Making errors is a natural part of life for humans. But what do we mean by error? Error arises “only when there was no intention to commit
one” (James 1998, p.77) argues that errors are caused by the learner's lack ofknowledge of the target language's right rules.

Errors versus mistakes

Error analysis (henceforth EA) distinguishes between mistakes and errors. Corder (1981,p.10) argues that while native speakers make unsystematic „performance" errors (like slips of the tongue) from time to time, second language learners make more errors, and often ones that no
native speaker ever makes. Such errors tell us something about the learner"s interlanguage or the strategies underlying the language being learned. Dulay,
H., Burt, M., & Krashen, S.D. (1982) also focus on the errors when languagelearners change the systematic rules.

Norrish (1983,p.7) remarks that errors occur invariably when a systematic deviation happens due to learners misunderstanding something; for that, there were attempts to put errors into the context go together with either language learning or second language acquisition process. In the same context, Cunningworth (1987,p.87) says, "Errors are systematic deviations from the norms of the language being acquired".

Error Analysis

Corder (1967, p.170) maintains that EA is a technique that includes collecting samples of learner language, identifying errors in the sample, describing these errors, explaining them according to their sources, and assessing their significance. The goal of EA is to discover what the learner knows and what he/she does not know and to "ultimately enable the teacher to supply him not only with the information that his hypothesis is incorrect, but also, crucially, with the right kind of information or data for him to form a more adequate concept of a rule in the target language".

Brown (1980, p.166) defines EA as the process of identifying, analysing, and describing errors from the second language rules and subsequently revealing the system that the learner operates. Richards, J., Platt, J., & Weber, H (1985, p.96) say, "EA is the study

of errors made by second and foreign language learners". Crystal (1987, p.112) defines EA as "a technique for identifying, categorising, and systematically analysing the unsatisfactory forms generated by someone learning a foreign language, utilising any of the principles and procedures supplied by linguistics".

Furthermore, Gass and Selinker (2008, p.102) define EA as "a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make".

Hence, it can be stated that EA is the process of identifying, describing, explaining, evaluating, and minimising learner errors. The major advantages of using EA are that:

a. Identifying the language learning mechanisms that students employ.

b. Trying to figure out what is causing the learner‟s errors.

Gathering information on common language learning obstacles, such as teaching or preparing teaching materials (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p.201).

Sources of errors

Many scholars in methodology and applied linguistics, have characterised the type of errors according to their sources. Brown (2007, p.263) argues that the source of errors is used to figure out why particular errors occur and what techniques are at the root of those problems? (Richards, 1971) shows the four main causes of errors:

1. Overgeneralisation: refers to situations in which a learner applies adeviant structure based on his prior knowledge of other structures in the target language. For example,

*He gived the meat" instead of "He gave the meat.

With the omission of the third person (-s), over-generalization removes the necessity for concord, thus relieving the learner of

considerable
effort. ."Since [in English] all grammatical persons take the same zero verbalending except the third person singular in the present tense omissions of the (-s) in the third person singular may be accounted for by the heavy pressure of all other endingless forms.

2. Incomplete application of rules: This refers to a failure to establisha system fully. As a result, learners are seen using declarative word order instead of "Do you like to play" in queries like "You like to play"

3. False concepts hypothesised: This occurs when learners do not completely understand a distinction in the target language, such as the usageof "was" as a past tense marker, as in the sentence "one day it was happened".

4. Ignorance of rule restriction refers to applying rules in situations when they are inappropriate. "He made me to laugh" is an example of extinction of the pattern present in the majority of verbs that accept infinitival complements, such as he asked/ invited me to go, etc.

Conversation

Firth urges Linguists to concentrate on conversation since heconsiders it the key to a better understanding what language is and how it works (as cites in Coulthard, 1985, p1). Levinson (1983, p.284) adds that conversation is definitely the prototype form of language usage, the form in which one is first exposed to language. It happens when a speaker communicates with another person or individuals. According to Elizabeth (2003, p.66), conversation characteristics are an informal, real-time sharing of thoughts and feelings. The interchange of comments, information, and feelings that characterises a conversation ensures that each person has an equal opportunity to express themselves.

A literature review demonstrates that the term „conservation" refers to various discourse forms (Warren, 2006, p. 6). Davy and Crystal (1975, p. 2) argue that the term „conversation" is too broad

since it may refer to any discourse "from casual chat to formal discussion; hence we use the term" informal conversation" to emphasise which end of the conversational spectrum we are concerned with". Have (1999, p. 3) defines conversation as "people talking together" or "talk which is not motivated by any clear pragmatic purpose" (Eggins and Slade, 1997 p.19) or "two people talking directly to each other to share information, ideas and feelings" (Woodilla, (1998, p.31).

Article

The definite and indefinite articles (the and a /an) are the most common determiners in English (Leech, 2006,p.12). Articles are part of the function word class in the English language. It can be definite (the) or indefinite (a/an). Both specific and generic references can be found in these articles. When the article is used to refer to a particular person or thing, the specific reference is employed, whereas the generic reference is used to referto the class as a whole rather than a specific member of that class (Penston, 2005, p.99). In this context, (Biber, Johansson, Leech, and Conrad ,1999,p. 265) point out that.

1. Singular countable nouns with an indefinite article
2. Singular and nationality words in a definitive article
3. Plural countable and uncountable nouns with the zero article

Any English instructor knows that his or her students make a number of frequent, predictable errors. First and foremost amongst these is the frequent misuse of the article system, which appears to be a major stumblingblock for learners(Swan & Smith, 1987,p.218). So far, numerous academic researchers have agreed that article usage is an area of grammar that has "considerable prominence in any EA"" (Oller and Redding, 1971,p. 85).

It is evident that correct English article usage is clearly an issue for students, even for university students who are ready to become English teachers, and it looks that it will never be fully mastered (Mohammed, 2012,p.27). According to the findings of Mohammed"s (2012,p.43) study, students" learning of the English article system is a challenge, and they do not acquire it spontaneously. Even university students who will become future

English teachers do not learn the system through study.

Model of analysis:

The first model is represented by Corder (1973) which is concerned with describing the errors made by students..The procedures of corder (1973) for analzing the data are:

1-Collecting the samples.2- Identifying the errors.

3-Describing the errors. Corder‟s taxonomy (1973)4- Explaining the errors. Richard (1971)

5- Evaluating the errors.

Procedure of analysis

The current study is basically a descriptive one. It is after investigating andidentifying the grammatical errors that may be found in Iraqi EFL learners „conversation . It attempts to describe one aspect of the second language acquisition which is grammar. A quantitative approach is used to reveal the frequencies of preposition errors

Methods of data collection

To examine the grammatical errors that participants have in their conversations, determine the preposition errors that students made and explain the sources of these errors, two methods are conducted: Interview and Spot the differences.

Interview

An interview "is typically a face-to-face conversation between a researcher and a participant involving a transfer of information to the interviewer "(Cresswell, 2009,p3). A semi-structured interview was

used in this study to measure EFL learners‟ ability to speak accurately during a conversation. This type of interview requires pre-determined questions open-ended answers, in which the researcher is free to seek further clarification from the participants (Holloway Wheeler 2010,p45). Hand (2003) found thatusing an open nature of questions can bring out more language for the purpose of measurement. For this reason, this type of interview is used.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher interviews each participant and asks him to answer the following questions for 4- 6 minutes. Most of these questions were taken from the IELTS test..

- What did you do on your last birthday? What were your presents?
- Describe your last photograph. How was the weather at that time? Whotook it? why do you like it

- Describe a place you have recently visited.
- Talk about your future goals.
- Talk about your plans for the next week.
- Talk about the car that you want to own in the future.

Spot the difference

In the “spot the difference” task, each learner in a pair or group has incomplete information or differs from their peers. This task entails sharing knowledge and ideas with the other person they were not previously aware of (Alahmed, 2017, p233). This task encouraged participants to interact and analyse their spontaneous conversation for measurement.

Procedural stages of error analysis

The following subsections present Coder's classification (1981) to analyse the participant's errors in five stages

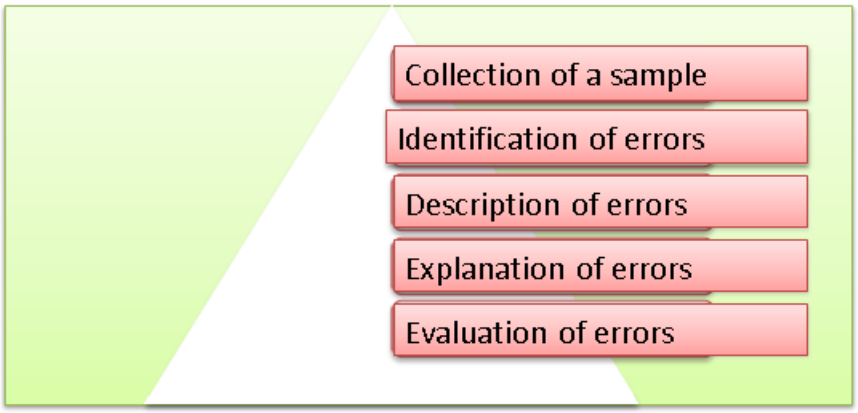


Diagram (1.1): Corder's procedures

1. Collection of a sample of learner language

The researcher begins collecting the samples using interview-task, and spot-the-differences task. The data is recorded online via Google meet and transferred into transcriptions. Then, the researcher identifies the data based on the following step.

2. Identification of errors

The second stage in analysing the errors is identifying the existing errors after collecting the necessary data. The required data of speaking errors were initially identified by Syakur (2007, p.4), who said that there are at least five components of speaking: comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. The researcher in this study limits the analysis area to article errors. Writing down the sentences that included errors and then underlining the words and/or phrases that illustrate the errors is the procedure of error identification by comparing learners‟ incorrect sentences to the right sentences.

3. Description of errors

The description of errors is another stage of analysing a learner's errors in the current study. Errors can be described into a number of distinct types on the basis of surface structure taxonomy by Corder (1973), who subsumes the following four categories, namely omission (a required element may be omitted, not only in phonology but also in morphology and syntax).

Addition of a wrong element (learners not only eliminate some elements but also add some redundant elements). Selection of an incorrect element (an error that occurs when the element is not used correctly in a sentence).

Misordering is the incorrect placement of elements in a sentence. The following sentences are examples of this classification:

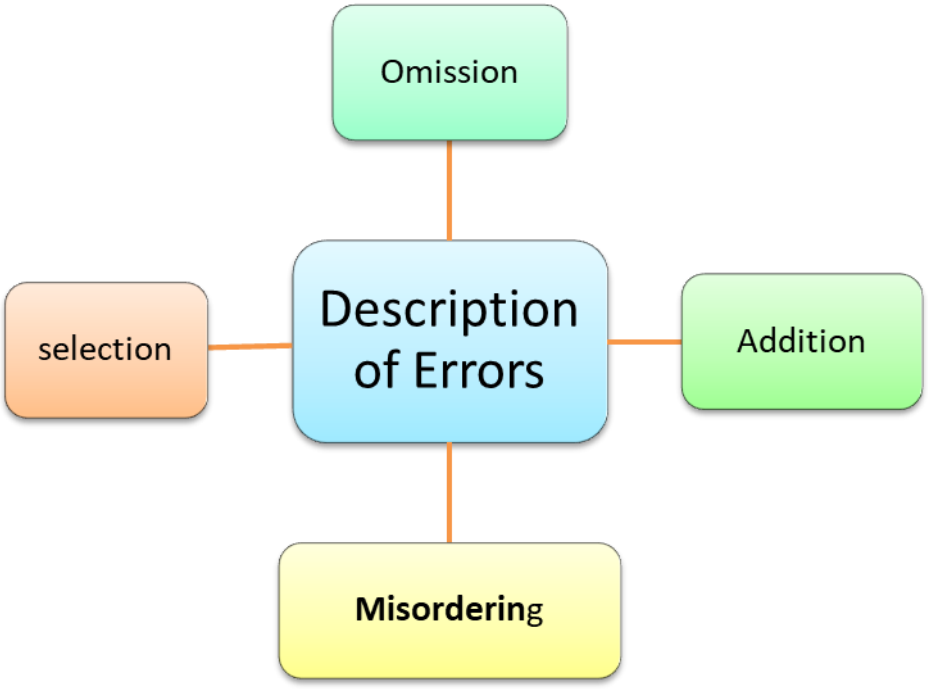


Diagram (2.1) : The adopted models for describing the grammatical errors

1. Omission

Morphological omission :

*no one remember my birthday.

2. Addition

Morphological addition :

* there is a big trees.

3. Selection

Morphological selection :

* my brother is oldest than me.

4. Misordering

Syntactical misordering :

* I visited park Sami Abdil Rahman.

Dulay (1982, p.25) also uses the linguistic level of the errors to describe them. Ellis (1997) points out that Corder‟s explanation of errors can assist in detecting FL learners‟ learning problems at any level of their development.

4. Explanation of errors

The fourth step in the current study is the explanation of errors. There are three ways to analyse learners‟ errors in terms of grammatical analysis.

1. Declaring the grammatical rules that have been broken, stating the correct form and recognising the causes of the errors.

This section is the most vital part of the EA process since it answers the third question of the study and explains the factors that caused the learners to make such errors.

Richards (1971) differentiates three sources of error. The first source of error is called „interference error‟, which results from the mother tongue interference. The second source, „intralingual error‟, reflects the incorrect generalisation of the rules within the target language. The last source is „developmental errors‟, occurring when the learners hypothesise about the target language based on their limited knowledge.

Intralingual classified into four categories:

(i) Overgeneralisation; covering instances where the learners create a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structures of the TL.
(ii)Ignorance of the rule restriction occurs due to failure to observe the restrictions or existing structures.
(iii) Incomplete application of rules, arising when the learners fail to develop a certain structure required to produce acceptable sentences fully
(iv) False concepts hypothesised, deriving from faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language.

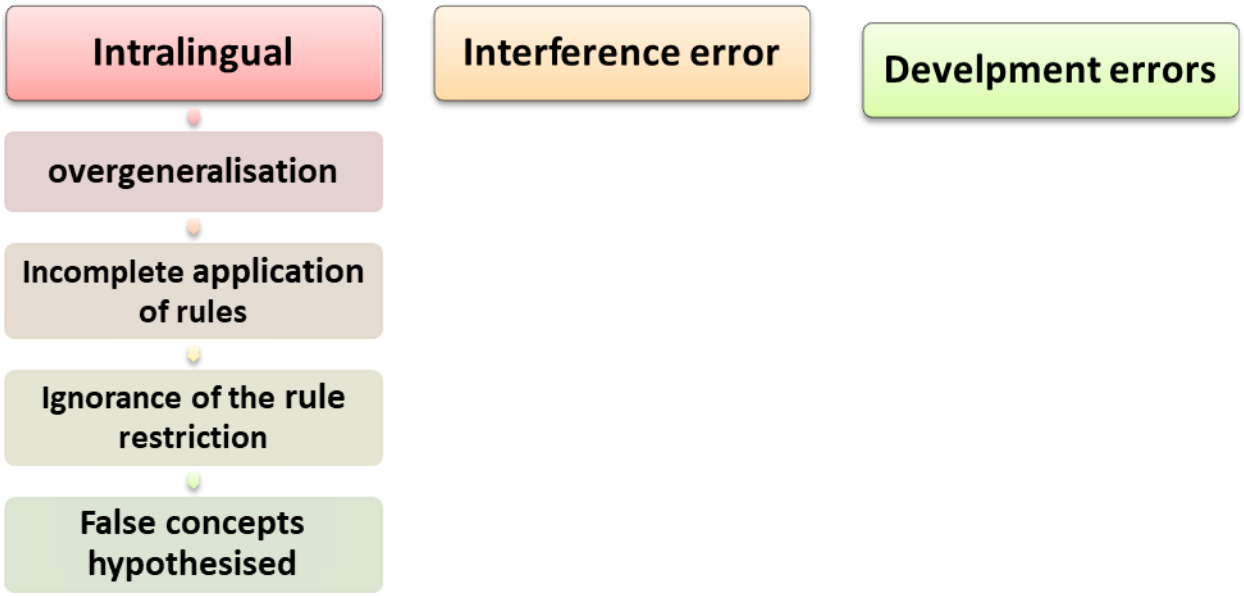


Diagram (2.2) : The adopted model of explaining the sources of grammatical errors

5. Error evaluation

The final stage in the EA process is to evaluate errors and develop conclusions based on the results obtained. The various errors are valued here to determine which errors should be given greater attention by both teachers and students, especially when students do not clearly understand the topic.

SPSS program helps in calculating the grammatical errors made by Iraqi EFL learners. The main purpose of using this program is to facilitate the process of collecting grammatical data and determining the frequency of the grammatical categories.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The results of the first and third questions

The following account answers the first question. What are the most common grammatical,

Errors in Article

In this study, article usage seems to be one of the common grammatical issues faced by Iraqi EFL learners. The results related to article errors reveal that 71% of these errors have been made by first-year students, while 82% of them were made by third-year students. Besides, errors in article are not a problematic issue because it does not affect the meaning of the sentences which in turn keeps the interaction running properly.(not sure if can I add this comment)

As far as the description of errors for first year students, 65% of the errors they made related to the omission category, while 31% of the errors were related to addition category. Errors related to selection category occupy only 4% of article errors. No errors have been found by third year students in the category of article ordering.

As far as third year students, it has been noticed that 60% of article errors related to omission category , it represents the highest percentage among other categories. Errors associated with addition category have the percentage of 38% , while 2% of these errors are represented by choosing inappropriate items. Again , no errors have been noticed at the level of article ordering.

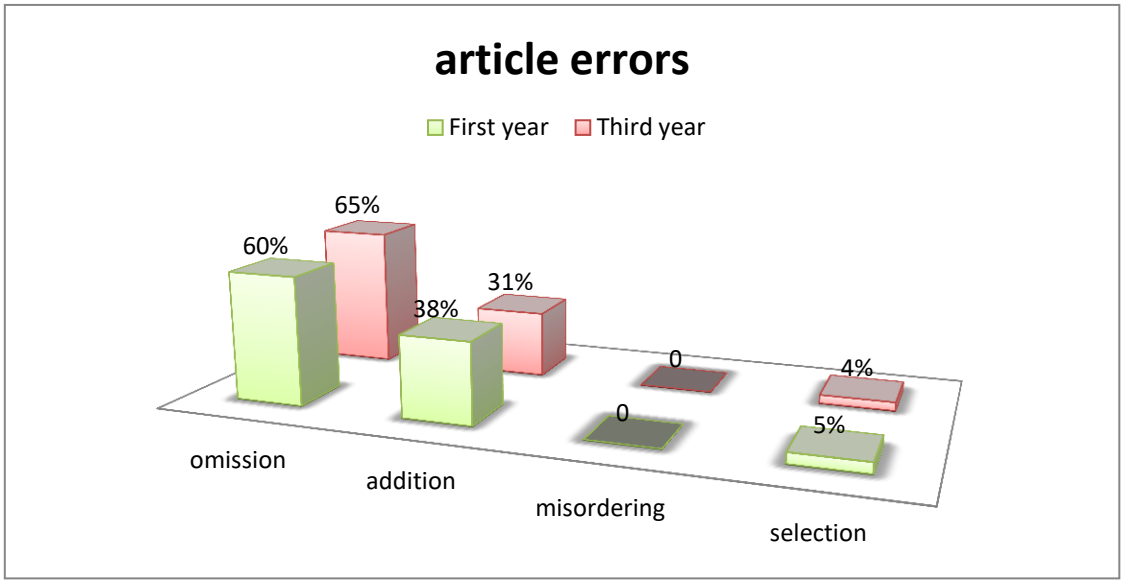


Figure 1.1: Article errors for first year and third year

Table 1.1: Errors in articles for first-third year students

Identification of errors	Description of article	First year	Third year
1-*I want to be (-) translator	Omission	65%	60%
2- to buy)a(new clothes for eid	Addition	31%	38%
———	misordering	Zero	Zero
3- There was (the) final exam.	Selection	4%	2%

Errors in article omission

The example no.1 in table 4-4 demonstrates the occurrence of errors in the domain of article omission. Interlingual sources were most likely to be caused of these errors. It is very clear that the errors regarding the omission of the indefinite articles „a" or „an" are caused by the L1 interference. This is due to the fact that the Arabic language has only zero as an indefinite article.

Errors in article addition

In example no.2 inside table 4-3, the student adds the indefinite article incorrectly before a plural noun, resulting a problem of article addition. The intralingual factor seems to be the source of the error. The students who made this error were aware that English has the article system but they tend to overgeneralize article usage, resulting an error.

Errors in article selection

In this category the student includes (the) instead of (a) and Vic versa, which means the student unaware about the articles usages. This type of error has low frequency in this study.

The analysis shows that errors of article are caused by both interlangauge and intrelanguage.

Conclusion

The current study has proved that Iraqi EFL learners face some difficulties in using articles through conversations. Concerning the description of errors, The results related to article errors reveal that 71% of these errors have been made by first-year students, while 28% of them were made by third-year students. Regarding the description of errors, first year students made 65% of the errors related to the omission category, while 31% of the errors were related to addition category. Errors related to selection category occupy only 4% of article errors. As far as third year students, it has been noticed that 60% of article errors related to omission category , it represents the highest percentage among other categories. Errors associated with addition category have the percentage of 38% , while 2% of these errors are represented by choosing inappropriate items. No errors have been noticed for two levels at the level of article ordering. Regarding sources of errors, both interlanguage and intralanguage were seen as sources of article errors. Intelanguage source is found in selection errors. since these errors could result from the confusion between native and target language. Some specific rules in the target language may be rather confusing and may have some exceptions in which the students need to understand, memorize and practice in order to acquire use the accurately. On the other hand, errors in omission and addition could result from intralaguage source.

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