

**EFFECTS OF CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS AND
ERROR ANALYSIS ON ENGLISH ARTICLES
PERFORMANCE OF EAST MALAYSIAN
SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN
WRITTEN PRODUCTION**

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DECLARATION

The materials in this dissertation are original except for quotations, excerpts, summaries and reference, which have been duly acknowledged.

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ABSTRAK

KESAN-KESAN ANALISIS KONTRASTIF DAN ANALISIS KESILAPAN DALAM PEMBELAJARAN ARTIKEL BAHASA INGGERIS DI KALANGAN PELAJAR-PELAJAR MALAYSIA TIMUR YANG MEMPELAJARI BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA DALAM PENULISAN

Sistem artikel tidak wujud dalam Bahasa Melayu seperti mana yang terdapat dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini dilaksanakan untuk mengkaji penggunaan dan masalah yang dihadapi dalam pembelajaran artikel Bahasa Inggeris di kalangan pelajar-pelajar Malaysia Timur yang mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua. Ini termasuk bentuk kesilapan yang dilakukan, susunan hieraki kekerapan setiap kesilapan yang dilakukan dan keberkesanan Analisis Kontrastif and Analisis Kesilapan dalam pembelajaran artikel Bahasa Inggeris. Analisis Kontrastif dan Analisis Kesilapan telah diaplikasikan dalam kajian ini untuk mengenalpasti kesan-kesan kedua-dua elemen ini terhadap pembelajaran pelajar-pelajar yang berkenaan. Dua tugas, yakni soalan aneka pilihan dan ujian melengkapkan petikan telah diberikan kepada 85 orang pelajar Tingkatan 4, iaitu 41 orang pelajar dalam kumpulan rawatan dan 44 orang pelajar dalam kumpulan kawalan. Satu ujian pra dan satu ujian pos telah dilaksanakan ke atas kumpulan pelajar yang berkenaan. Keputusan telah menunjukkan bahawa artikel yang paling susah untuk dikuasai adalah $\emptyset$ (artikel kosong), manakala penguasaan '*a*' dan '*ar*' adalah masalah-masalah utama, '*the*' adalah artikel yang paling susah dikuasai. Antara kesilapan-kesilapan yang paling kerap dilakukan oleh subjek ialah 'pembuangan *the*' dan 'penggantian $\emptyset$ dengan *the*'. Dalam tugas aneka pilihan, telah didapati bahawa kesilapan yang melibatkan penggunaan artikel berlebihan adalah ketara, manakala dalam ujian melengkapkan petikan, kesilapan yang melibatkan pengabaian artikel adalah ketara. Selain itu, kesilapan tentang penggunaan '*the*' yang berlebihan untuk menunjukkan kepentingan dan ketelitian telah didapati terutamanya untuk kata nama yang disebut buat kali pertama dalam ujian melengkapkan petikan. Subjek-subjek yang berkenaan juga menunjukkan kelemahan dalam penggunaan '*a*' dan '*ar*' kerana tanggapan palsu telah dibentuk dan dipercayai bahawa '*ar*' harus diletakkan sebelum perkataan-perkataan yang bermula dengan a, e, i, o, u dan '*a*' harus diletakkan sebelum perkataan-perkataan yang bermula dengan huruf atau nombor yang lain. Antara masalah-masalah yang didapati adalah penggunaan artikel sebelum adjektif yang diletakkan di depan kata nama, kata nama khas dan kata nama bukan jamak am. Bahasa ibunda tidak mempengaruhi secara langsung terhadap pembelajaran artikel dan kebanyakan kesilapan yang dilakukan adalah disebabkan oleh penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris dan boleh diperbaiki melalui pendedahan.

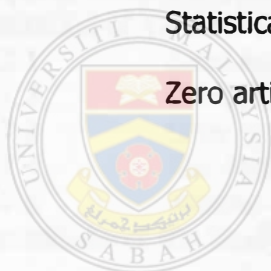
ABSTRACT

EFFECTS OF CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS AND ERROR ANALYSIS ON ENGLISH ARTICLES PERFORMANCE OF EAST MALAYSIAN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN WRITTEN PRODUCTION

It is well known that the Malay language does not have functional equivalents of the English definite and indefinite articles. Correspondingly, there is plenty of observational evidence that second language learners have difficulty with the English article system. This study investigated the error patterns that occur in the usage of English articles produced by the East Malaysian second language learners of English in their written tasks. The hierarchical order of each kind of error in terms of the frequency of its use was identified as well. Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis were applied in this study to investigate the effects of both elements on the performance of students on article system learning. Contrastive Analysis (CA) is the systematic comparison between the native language and the target language. Error Analysis (EA) is a way to assess the learner's competence in his use and knowledge of a second language. Two tasks, namely 24 multiple-choice article insertion questions and a multiple-choice cloze test in which a, an and the were given as options to complete a text, were given to 85 Form 4 students, i.e. 41 and 44 students in treatment group and control group respectively. A pre-test and a post test with the same set of tests in each stage were conducted on these students to investigate the effectiveness of the EA and CA elements in the article system learning. The results of the study indicated that the most difficult article to be mastered was the Ø (zero article), whereas 'a' and 'an' were major problems, and 'the' was the least difficult one. The types of error most frequently committed by the subjects were 'omission of the' and 'the used instead of Ø'. In multiple-choice article insertion questions, it was found that overextension (overproduction of articles) errors were prominent, whereas in multiple-choice cloze test, underextension (omission of articles) errors were prominent. Another worth noticing finding was that, the subjects were prone to overspecify the first-mention object in the multiple-choice cloze test. The subjects were also weak in the usage of 'a' and 'an', as they seemed to form false hypotheses that 'an' is placed before words that begin with a, e, i, o, u and 'a' is placed before words that begin with other letters or numbers. It was also found that the more the adjectives that precede the nouns, the higher possibilities the subjects would omit the article. Among the problems faced by the subjects in both tasks were the usage of articles before proper nouns and before singular unspecified nouns. Native Language has no strong direct influence on the learning of articles and the majority of the errors could be accounted as the mastering of the language in nature, since the English article system is a grammatical item that is comprised of multiple elements. It is believed that there are some aspects of grammar that are not teachable and they must be learned through exposure.

List of Short Forms and Symbol Used:

SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
PMR	Penilaian Menengah Rendah
EA	Error Analysis
CA	Contrastive Analysis
TL	Target Language
NL	Native Language
SL	Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science
Ø	Zero article



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Over the years, it has been noticed that there is a decline in the standard of English in Malaysia. 'Judging from the English used in the mass media and by students, particularly university students, there is justification to the opinion of Malaysian leaders and educationists that there has been a drop in the standard of English among Malaysian speakers. This decline in the standard of English is not only felt in the academic circle but also in the diplomatic service' (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992: 87). Students with low competence in English often find themselves inadequate when they come to the university and when given the lists of books to read in their chosen faculties, 'it has now become an uphill task for students in the universities to refer to texts written in English...' (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992: 12). According to Asmah (1992), the cause is obvious. 'Concentration on Bahasa Melayu as the main medium of instruction has caused the scale on the English language side to tip downwards' (p. 12).

However, English is still used extensively in the private sector, especially the industrial and commercial side. Wang (1987) states, though it is evident that English has been used less and less intranationally, it has been used more and more internationally. Nevertheless, Lee (1998) comments that even the government has stressed on the importance of English lately since the implementation of a few projects like the Multimedia Super Corridor and

promoting Malaysia as an educational centre internationally. The increasing number of private college offering twinning and credit transfer programmes with foreign colleges and universities have also enhanced the importance and use of English language. Though Malaysians still have easy access to opportunities to improve their listening skills through the mass media, they hardly have any opportunity to speak English, especially for those who live in rural areas (Wang, 1987).

The growing demand for the use of English at the international level has produced an urgent need for remedying this situation. Thus, the Malaysian University English Test was implemented in 1999 to help students to practise the language. Besides that, the English paper and 1119 in SPM have been combined, and, English literature has been added into the syllabus. Those are aimed at bringing up the English language proficiency level of Malaysian learners.

In this fast developing country of ours, it will be an added advantage to have a good command of English. Whether this will be realized depends a lot on our present educational system. With the above scenario, it is important to understand the problems of the learners when learning English and thus effective teaching can be carried out to help students to master in English.

Grammar plays a very important role in any language. It determines the accuracy of the message that is being conveyed by the speaker or the writer. English articles, as one of the elements in English grammar, also play an

important role in learning English. The incompetence in using English articles may rarely lead to miscomprehension, however, it may undermine a person's integrity and credibility greatly (McGirt, 1984). In view of that, it is significant to study the difficulties that learners face in learning English articles.

This study was conducted to investigate the errors of the use of English articles in students' written production. There is no doubt that many studies have been carried out to analyse errors in students' compositions (for instance, Ho, 1973; Wyatt, 1973; Bhatia, 1974; Ghadessy, 1976; Lim, 1976; Lim, 1994; Nuwar, 1995; Chiang, 1997; Nada, 2003 etc). There are also some studies done on analysing the acquisition of articles (e.g. Zehler, 1980; Kubota, 1994; Lee, 1994; Park, 1996; Takahashi, 1997; Ekiert, 2004); on teaching the article system (McEldowney, 1977; Masters, 1986; Yoshii, 1998); on the description of the article system (Mizuno, 1993; Master, 1997); on analysing the error in the usage of the English article system (El-Halees, 1984; Lee, 1997; Lepple, 2000; Robertson, 2000; On, 2002; Bataineh, 2005 etc). The research literature to date, however, provides no information regarding the error patterns in the use of the English articles of the Malaysian second language learners. It is hoped that this study on the use of English articles of Malaysian learners will provide some insights so that the English article system can be learned more effectively.

1.2 The Problem

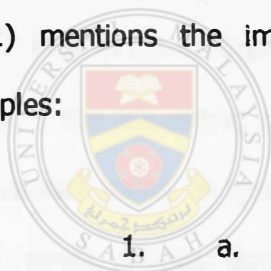
There are many studies done on analysing the errors in students' written production (e.g. Buteau, 1970; Ho, 1973; Wyatt, 1973; Bhatia, 1974; Ghadessy, 1976; Lim, 1976; Lim, 1994; Lee, 1997 etc.). In those studies, it is discovered that the error in the articles has a very high percentage among other errors. Tongue (1979) states that the article has been one of the three major areas of difficulties for foreign learners in learning English. Master (1997) provides a reason for the difficulty in learning the articles. He states, 'what language learners seem to find particularly difficult in acquiring English generally is grammatical items that are comprised of multiple elements' (p. 220).

In the article system, the elements are countability, number, and definiteness, which must all be considered in arriving at the correct choice of article, thus making the system difficult to learn. Indeed, it has been reported, both empirically and anecdotally, that articles are among the most difficult English grammatical morphemes to be acquired by ESL learners, especially those whose native tongues have no article structure (Aaronson and Ferres, 1987; Grannis, 1972). Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) states that 'articles are understandably problematic from a cross-linguistic perspective: most Asian and Slavic languages and many African languages have no articles'.

In learning a language as a second language or as a foreign language, the learners usually may be influenced by their first language (Master, 1988 and

Park, 1996). Klien (1986) claims that a second language learner will usually refer to their first language if they have any difficulties in learning a second language. The Malay language that does not have an article system is the first language of the subjects in this study. To them, English articles would be something totally new and there is nothing as such that is equivalent in their first language in which they can refer to. Therefore, the Malaysian second language learners whose first language is Malay language may face difficulties when they are introduced to the English article system.

The article may seem to be a minor aspect of English grammar, because it rarely leads to miscomprehension, whether spoken or written. However, Berry (1991) mentions the importance of articles. He explains by using these examples:



1.
 - a. I'm looking for **a** wife.
 - b. I'm looking for **the** wife.
2.
 - a. I wasn't born on Sunday. (i.e. you can't fool me)
 - b. I wasn't born on **a** Sunday. (statement of fact)
3.
 - a. Police investigating the crime have discovered **a** gun.
 - b. Police investigating the crime have discovered **the** gun. (i.e. the one used in the crime)

For certain styles of English, it is perfectly legitimate to omit articles. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to overgeneralise it. Consider the vast difference in meaning and implication in *one* and *two*, or the subtle distinction made in *three*. There are also cases where the incorrect omission of an article could have disastrous consequences. Consider the following example in which if French learners who say *four* when they mean *five*.

4. I want to know **the** English.

5. I want to know English.

(Berry, 1991)

Pica (1983a) investigates native speakers using articles in exchanges involving the requesting and giving directions, and concluded that 'even though participants spoke in grammatically correct utterances, communication broke down when articles were used in reference to items in one participant's experience but not in another's' (p. 231).

According to Master (1997), at a sophisticated level, e.g. in academic work, article errors may undermine the author's integrity because they reveal an imperfect control of the language, and, imperfect control may, conscious or subconsciously, suggest imperfect knowledge. If such an attitude is engendered in the mind of a professor grading a student's paper, that student's grade may suffer (McGirt, 1984).

Considering the facts mentioned above, it is valid to conclude that the correct use of articles may be crucial for successful communication particularly in written communication. It is, therefore, vital to find out learners' difficulties and problems in using the English article and thus to help them to understand the article system. The application of Error Analysis and Contrastive Analysis is important in teaching the English article system for students whose first language does not have such article system in order to identify the differences of both linguistic system and that to improve students' English language proficiency.

1.3 Research Questions

This study attempts to investigate the Malaysian second language learners' error patterns on the use of the English articles in writing and to find out the hierarchical order of the error patterns. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the error patterns of the English articles use of the Malaysian second language learners in their written tasks?
2. What is the hierarchical order of the article error patterns committed by the Malaysian second language learners?
3. Will there be any significant difference in the number of article errors between learners presented with lessons with the elements of Error Analysis and Contrastive Analysis and those without Error

Analysis and Contrastive Analysis?

1.4 Objectives of Study

In order to find answers to the research questions, the following objectives of the study are specified:

1. To identify the error patterns of the English articles use of the Malaysian second language learners in their written tasks.
2. To identify the hierarchical order of the article error patterns committed by the Malaysian second language learners.
3. To investigate the difference in the number of article errors between treatment group presented with lessons with the elements of Error Analysis and Contrastive Analysis and control group without Error Analysis and Contrastive Analysis.

1.5 Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses were formed to be tested.

- 1.5.1 $H_A 1$: Learners in the treatment group will have lesser number of errors of 'Omission of *the*' than those in the control group.
- 1.5.2 $H_A 2$: Learners in the treatment group will have lesser number of errors of '*the* used instead of $\emptyset$ ' than those in the control group.
- 1.5.3 $H_A 3$: Learners in the treatment group will have lesser number of errors of '*a* used instead of *the*' than those in the control group.
- 1.5.4 $H_A 4$: Learners in the treatment group will have lesser number of errors of '*a* used instead of $\emptyset$ ' than those in the control group.
- 1.5.5 $H_A 5$: Learners in the treatment group will have lesser number of errors of 'Omission of *d*' than those in the control group.
- 1.5.6 $H_A 6$: Learners in the treatment group will have lesser number of errors of '*an* used instead of *d*' than those in the control group.



- 1.5.7 H_{A7} : Learners in the treatment group will have lesser number of errors of '*a*' used instead of *ar*' than those in the control group.
- 1.5.8 H_{A8} : Learners in the treatment group will have lesser number of errors of '*an*' used instead of *the*' than those in the control group.
- 1.5.9 H_{A9} : Learners in the treatment group will have lesser number of errors of '*an*' used instead of $\emptyset$ ' than those in the control group.
- 1.5.10 H_{A10} : Learners in the treatment group will have lesser number of errors of 'Omission of *ar*' than those in the control group.
- 1.5.11 H_{A11} : Learners in the treatment group will have lesser number of errors of '*the*' used instead of *a*' than those in the control group.
- 1.5.12 H_{A12} : Learners in the treatment group will have lesser number of errors of '*the*' used instead of *ar*' than those in the control group.

1.6 Importance of the Study

The Error Analysis technique employed to carry out the research will probably reveal the area of difficulty of these subjects whose first language is Malay and the causes of their errors. In addition, the findings of this study may

be of use to educationists and curriculum planners of the national education system. They could serve as a guide to formulating syllabuses and evaluating language programmes.

The findings, if presented to the users of English particularly those whose first language is Malay, could also make them more aware of their problematic areas. Besides, the findings will likely be able to provide an insight into some of the mental processes of the Malaysian second language learners of English.

This study would give us an idea of how far English language, especially the English articles are acquired by students after six years of learning English in national primary schools and four years in secondary schools and with Science and Mathematics being taught in English since Form One. This would provide a guideline for the researchers and teachers in secondary schools to prepare and arrange the interpretation of the syllabus according to the needs and ability of the students. This will thus in turn enable remedial, reinforcement and enrichment work to be done if the students are found to be weak in certain areas.

Apart from that, teachers can be more sensitive of the factors that will facilitate or help the learning of English language. A more appropriate school-based programme can be drawn up to provide a more effective way of learning English by the school authorities.

With this study, it is hoped that this study will help those who are involved in designing the English language curriculum to know what is lacking in teaching articles, especially in national schools, in the present English language syllabus in KBSR and KBSM. This study will also offer information about the learning of the English articles. Besides that, this study will provide insights for English language teaching and learning in the aspect of article system as follows:

1. It may help to contribute towards a research gap related to this area (the errors in the use of the English articles).
2. The findings of this study may contribute to English language learning of similar settings elsewhere.
3. Information on students' strength, weaknesses and the factors which affect their learning of English in particular the article system can be highlighted.

Grammar plays a very important role in language learning and the absence of article system in Bahasa Melayu is one of the main difficulties for the Malaysian second language learners whose first language or spoken language at home is Bahasa Melayu to pick up the language. Therefore, this study is aimed to provide a guideline for teachers in secondary schools to prepare and arrange the interpretation of the syllabus according to the needs and ability of the students. However, it concerns only the written work of a small pool of the Malaysian second language learners of English.