A research paper entitled by The L2 Acquisition of English Articles by Arabic Speakers of Libya

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Introduction

This paper will discuss the reasons why Libyan learners of English have difficulties with articles in English as well as the kinds of errors they make with articles.

The English article system is widely used in the English language. It consists of the definite, the indefinite article and the zero article. The Arabic language in contrast has only a definite article which is al- (أل). This disparity leads to error making for Libyan second language learners of English.

Articles (a, an, the, and zero) in English are used frequently as function words (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Function words according to Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) are words that are used more than lexical words to point to the elements in language or to the speakers and hearers' role, less often to refer to things and actions in the actual world.

 Swan (2005, p. 51) defines articles as ''small words that are often used at the beginning of noun phrases''. He adds that the exact usage of the articles is considered to be the most problematic points in English

grammar. Arab learners face difficulties when using articles in English and make several errors (Kharma, Hajjaj, 1989). Examples as:

*The philosophy is not a science.

*All men fear the death (Kharma, Hajjaj, 1989).

Arab learners commit such errors with articles due to some reasons. Swan and Smith (2001) justify that there is no indefinite article in Arabic, and the definite article has a wide range of uses which is unlike the uses found in English. The indefinite article is the cause for many problems because it is widely dropped out when used with singular and plural countables as in,

* ''He was soldier''. * These are a books (Swan & Smith, 2001, p. 205).

The misuse of the English article system is a massive problem for second language learners in general and for Libyan students of English in particular. This study investigates the reasons for such difficulty for a limited number of participants. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) is an approach related to second language acquisition which includes a prediction and an explanation of problems of learners on the base of comparing the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) to determine the similarities as well as the differences (Saville- Troike, 2006).

Study Focus

This study focuses on why 3rd year students at English department in Elmergib university face challenges with English articles and why they

make [1]mistakes/errors as well as the kinds of errors they typically produce. It attempts to investigate the reasons for such an issue and the solutions too.

Objectives of this study and research questions

This study aims the following:

1- The present study will identify what errors in the English article uses might be the most common and why.

2- This research is trying to examine whether interference (i.e. negative transfer) plays

a role in the acquisition of the English article system by Libyan learners and whether

the difficulties encountered in learning the English article system can be attributed to the mother tongue interference or because of other factors.

3- This study will pave the way for Libyan teachers of English to better teach the article system and avoid any possible limitations.

The above aims will be looked through the following research questions:

- What Kind of errors 3nd year Libyan students make when using articles?

- What are the most frequent errors and less frequent ones as well as the reasons for such errors?

Background of the Study

The English article system is undoubtedly a challenging grammar point in the English language and can cause problems to learners of English as a

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[1] Mistakes are slips or a random guess. Errors are an obvious deviation from the adult grammar of native speakers, reflects the learner competence (Brown, 2007).

whole and in particular to Libyan learners. This will lead to the misuse of the English articles among learners. Many studies have attempted to account for the difficulties and challenges with second languages. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) of which there are two versions was a theory of second language. This section will provide an overview of the two areas in second language acquisition, namely Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) and Error Analysis (EA). In the first section, CAH will be discussed in order to find out the similarities and the differences between the English and the Arabic article system, CAH will be employed for this reason.

The second part will discuss EA, which will be used to detect errors of Libyan learners of English as well as the role of errors in language learning.

Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

CAH is ''a way of comparing languages in order to determine potential errors for the ultimate purpose of isolating what needs to be learned and what does not need to be learned in a second language learning situation'' (Gass & Selinker, 2001,p. 72). Hence, CAH studies two languages in order to find similarities and differences. Magnan (1983, p. 383) states that ''CA is rooted in Behaviourism and structuralism''. Behaviourism was a theory of learning that was prominent in the 1940s and 1950s, especially in the United States.

Behaviourism sees language learning as a habit formation. It stems from work in psychology which displayed that any sort of learning behaviour is based on stimulus and response. This idea views human beings as being exposed to various stimuli in their surroundings (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Lado (1964, cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2006) claims that the

difficulties with L2 acquisition could be attributed to the dissimilarities between L1 and L2.

Transfer (L1 interference) in second language acquisition

Transfer according to Dulay et al. (1982) occurs when referring to a procedure called the ''authentic, uncontrolled, and subconscious use of past learned behaviors in the attempt to provide new responses'' (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982, p. 101).

Transfer consists of two types: Negative transfer (interference) and positive transfer. The former refers to the making of an error as a result of old, usual behaviour which is not similar to the new learned behaviour. For example, Spanish learners would write and say, *the boy clever* instead of *the clever boy* when interacting in English (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982).

On the other hand, positive transfer occurs as a result of transfer of L1 structure exactly into L2 performance which results in a precise statement. Spanish learners use plural marker-s and –es on nouns in English correctly as in English plural nouns such as *niña*-s in Spanish and girls in

Strong and weak version of CAH

There are two versions of CAH. The strong view maintains that ''one could make predictions about learning and hence about the success of language-teaching materials based on a comparison between two languages'', whereas the weak version analyses primarily errors of learners (Gass & Selinker, 2001 p. 73).

Error analysis (EA)

Error analysis appeared as an alternative to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis. CHA has failed to explain some of the learner's errors (Corder, 1967). Error analysis is a kind of language analysis that its primary focus is the errors learners commit. ''Error analysis provides a broader range of possible explanations than contrastive analysis than for researchers/teachers to use to account for errors, as the latter only attributed errors to the NL''(Gass, & Selinker, 2001,p. 79). Errors can be divided into two kinds: interlingual and intralingual (developmental). Interlingual errors are the errors that could be from the native language (NL). In contrast, intralingual errors are the errors that are because of the language being learned, autonomous from the NL (Gass, &Selinker, 2001); (Saville-Troike, 2006).

These two kinds of errors belong to the term interlanguage. Interlanguage (IL) was introduced by Selinker (1972). It refers to the intermediate states of a learner's language as it goes towards the target L2.

Errors, as stated by Corder (1981), are considered of great usefulness as they tell teachers how much a learner has learned. It is a proof of learning. Thus, errors making is seen as an unavoidable element and are essential for the learning environment.

Errors and Mistakes

Errors are an apparent deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflects the proficiency of the learner. Learners of English who ask ''Does John can sing'' are all possibility reflecting a competence level in which all verbs necessitate a pre-posed *do* auxiliary for question making. As such, it is an error, most likely not a mistake, and an error that exposes a portion of the learner's capability in the target language (Brown, 2007).

On the other hand, mistakes are attributed to tongue slips or because of tiredness (Saville-Troike, 2006).

The Article system in Arabic and English

The Arabic and English languages have both different article systems. The Arabic language is a Semitic language, whereas English is an Indo-European language. Arabic uses a binary system, namely: /al/ (the) and zero. Arabic uses a varied system for referring to the definiteness and indefiniteness in the language. Arab learners uses a/an and often zero article similarly. For instance,

* He is doctor. * David gave me a valuable advice (Kharma &Hajjaj, 1989).

The definite article ...أل, al… is the only definite article found in Arabic. It is always used for all noun cases, numbers or genders by placing it right at the beginning of a noun or an adjective. However, there is no indefinite article in the Arabic language. For example, أَلْعِلْمُ-_al-_ilmu, science.

Arabic quite often uses the definite article where English does not. The abstract noun in Arabic takes an article in most cases. For example, * the maths is not a science. Similarly, the mass noun in Arabic takes the definite article when referring to the whole kind such as * the milk is useful to the body. Furthermore, proper nouns in Arabic normally take (the). To exemplify, * the Cairo is a nice city which is wrong in English. Moreover, whether the noun is singular or plural, (the) is used in Arabic. * The horses are fast animals. Or * the children are nice creatures.

The English language in contrast has three articles, *the* and *a/an* as well as the zero article (Parrott, 2000). The definite article (the) ''both signals a noun and tells us that a specific noun is being referred to'' (DeCapua,

2008, p. 58). For instance, they like movies, or they like *the* movies at Cinema I.

The indefinite article in English on the other hand is used when we refer to something that is not stated, something which is not clear or not defined. It is used with singular countable nouns. The indefinite article consists of two forms, and this is dependent on the initial vowel sound which comes after the article. Nouns or adjectives starting with a vowel sound, then we should use (an) as in an apple. If the word begins with a consonant sound, then we should use (a) as in a horse (DeCapua, 2008).

Previous studies on the acquisition of articles

A number of studies have been conducted to study the English article system acquisition for a wide range of languages such as Taiwanese, Iranian and Arab learners of English. Among these studies, for example, Crompton, 2011; Alhaysony, 2012 which have shown that first language influence was apparent. Crompton (2011) conducted a study on tertiary level 1 Arabic speakers of English. Crompton attempted to identify the kinds of errors learners make in their writing test. In his detailed study, argumentative essays were used for data collection by first and second year Arab students aged 18-20 at the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The results of his study have shown that the most common errors committed were the misuse of the definite article for generic reference. He concluded that this issue can be attributed to L1 transfer rather than an interlanguage developmental error. His findings showed that the definite article misuse happened for the most part in Ø contexts. An example of this would be,

 *these things destroy the society.

Alhaysony (2012) conducted a case study on Saudi female students majored in English. The study focused on error types committed by students when using the English article. The data collection tool she used for her study was a written sample by asking the participants to write essays about familiar topics such as the Saudi family, shopping and summer holiday. The findings show that the participants made omission errors extensively, and other few substitution errors. (a) was omitted frequently as an error, while (an) was the least frequent.

In her study, Alhaysony maintains that the mother tongue interference plays a vital role in committing these errors. In addition to intralingual errors which caused some of the other errors. Crompton (2011) agrees with Alhaysony's case study in the sense that Arabic plays a significant role in L2. However, Crompton's study was conducted on different Arab nationalities in UAE.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative method. Quantitative research is a type of research paradigm that refers to previous investigations which used accessible data from hypotheses (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989).

Instrument

In this study, a written translation task will be adopted. To the best of our knowledge, a written translation task is the first testing tool conducted in this study. Other studies usually adopt a multiple choice or writing paragraph as a collecting data tool, etc. 20 Arabic sentences will be written and then distributed to the subjects. These sentences are adapted from Swan & Walter (1997) and Swan (2005). These sentences will contain the definite, indefinite article and the zero article.

A translation written test will be distributed among the participating subjects. Arabic sentences containing definite and indefinite articles as well as the zero article will be written in the task. This test was chosen because respondents will not be able to choose from a list of options as in the multiple choice questions. Also, this kind of task will reflect the linguistic knowledge or competence of articles usage in the English language.

Subjects

The number of subjects participating in this study is thirty students (30) selected randomly. These participants are Libyan students studying in English language department at Elmergib University. They are third year students. Their ages are ranging from 20 to 23 years old.

Data Analysis and Results

The researchers analysed the errors of learners according to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The kinds of errors were namely, substitution, omission, and addition errors, writing the frequency of each type as well as the percentage. In analysing participants' errors, the researchers followed Ellis (1997) steps which are collecting data, identifying errors, classifying errors, analysing errors, and then explaining errors.

Errors found in Articles

Article errors were categorized using SPSS as (substitution, omission, and addition). Starting with the definite article *the*.

Table 1: Participants' marks for the definite article (the)

Q_the					
Marks		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2.00	8	26.7	26.7	26.7
	3.00	15	50.0	50.0	76.7
	4.00	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

The above table shows how participants answered the questions related to the definite article.

8 students received a mark of 2 out of 5 with a percentage of 26.7%. 15 students got a grade of 3, with a percentage of 50.0%. Lastly, 7 students out of 30 got a mark of 4, with a percentage of 23.3%.

The sentences of the definite article (the) are below.

1- I love the sea.

3- Put the books on my table.

4- The game we played was very enjoyable.

10- The Times magazine is popular.

18- I do not like the cinema.

All sentences are asking to insert the definite article *the* as an answer. Sentence 1 as written above was answered correctly by 21 participants with a percentage was 70.0%. Sentences 3 and4 were answered by 28 students each with a high percentage of 93.3%. Sentence 10 was answered by 7 students only with a low percentage of 23.3%. Sentence 18 which was the last sentence in the use of the article *the,* was answered correctly by 5 participants with a low percentage of 16.7%.

Table 2: participants' marks for the indefinite article (an)

	Marks	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	.00	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
	1.00	6	20.0	20.0	23.3
	2.00	4	13.3	13.3	36.7
Valid	3.00	2	6.7	6.7	43.3
	4.00	8	26.7	26.7	70.0
	5.00	9	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

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1 student scored 0 mark out of 5 in the use of the indefinite article (an) with a percentage of 3.3% as shown in the above table.

6 students got 1 mark 23.3%. 4 students got 2 out of 5 36.7%, whereas 2 students had 3 out of 5 43.3%, while 8 students received a mark of 4 out of 5 70.0%. Other 9 students received 5 out of 5 with 100.0%.

Table 2: participants' marks for the indefinite article (a)

	Marks	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	1.00	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
	2.00	3	10.0	10.0	13.3
Valid	3.00	7	23.3	23.3	36.7
	4.00	12	40.0	40.0	76.7
	5.00	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

As for the indefinite article (a), 1 student received 1 out of 5 with a percentage of 3.3% as shown in the above table. 3 students got 2, 13.3%. 7 students got 3, 36.7%. Also 12 students had 4, 76.7%. Lastly, 7 students got 5, 100.0%.

The sentences for the article (an) and (a) are written below.
2- My child is an angel.
9- I want to eat an apple.
11- Libya has an excellent football team.
12- It is an honour to be in your house.

17- Leptis is an ancient city.

5- There is a car in front of your house.

7- I want to drink a cup of coffee.

14- Salem is a farmer.

16- Russia is a European country.
19- Salem works as a taxi driver.

Sentence number 2 was correctly answered by 15 students, and the percentage of this question was 50.0%. While sentence 9 was answered correctly by 25 respondents, and its percentage was high and was represented in 83.3%. Sentence 11 was answered correctly by 23 students and with a percentage of 76.7%. Sentence 12 was answered correctly by 15 participants, and the percentage was 50.0%. Sentence 17 was answered by 20 respondents, and it received a percentage of 66.7%.

As for the indefinite article *a*. Sentence number 5 was correctly answered by 28 students with a total percentage of 93.3%. Nearly similarly, sentence 7 was answered by 23 respondents, and it got a percentage of 76.75. 27 students answered sentence 14 and it scored a high proportion of 90.0%. On the other hand, sentence 16 and 19 were answered correctly by 10 and 24 students respectively, and they both scored completely different percentages of 33.3% and 80.0% respectively.

The last article is the zero article. Below is a table illustrating participants' scores.

Table 2: Participants' marks for the zero article

Q_zero				
Marks		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
	2.00	5	16.7	16.7	20.0
	3.00	5	16.7	16.7	36.7
	4.00	9	30.0	30.0	66.7
	5.00	10	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

1 student scored 1 mark out of 5 in the use of the zero article and with a percentage of 3.3%. Then 5 respondents scored 2 out of 5 and with a percentage of 16.7%. Another 5 scored 3 out of 5 and with a similar percentage of 16.7%. Then 9 students got 4 out 5 with a percentage of 30.0%. Lastly, 10 respondents got 5 out of 5 with a percentage of 33.3%.

Question sentences are as follows:
6- Birds can fly.
8- Cairo is beautiful.
13- Life is sweet.
15- Amina is in prison.
20- I like cheese.

Sentence 6, 8 participants answered it correctly with a percentage of 60.0%. Sentence 8, 29 respondents got it right with a high percentage of 96.7%. Sentence 13, 22 students answered it correctly, and the percentage was 73.3%. 16 students answered sentence 15 correctly and with a percentage of 53.3%. The last sentence 20 was answered correctly by 27 students with a high percentage of 90.0%.

This table below shows the descriptive statistics of all article scores, giving the means of all scores.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for marks of article types

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for marks of article types					
Articles	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q_the	30	2.00	4.00	2.9667	.71840
Q_zero	30	1.00	5.00	3.7333	1.20153
Q_a_an	30	3.00	10.00	6.9333	2.24274
Q_all	30	7.00	18.00	13.6333	3.12370
Valid N (listwise)	30				

With respect to the definite article *the*, the lowest mark was 2 out 5 and the highest mark was 4 out 5. The mean was 2.9667. For the zero article, the lowest mark was 1 and the highest grade was 5. The mean was 3.7333. As for *a/an*, the lowest grade was 3 and the highest mark was 10. The mean was 6.9333.

Kinds of errors

 The following 3 tables display the total percentages of all correct answers for all articles. They also show the kinds of errors and their percentages. Further, they represent the most frequent article use error committed as well as the type of error. There are three different types of errors in this study as previously mentioned above: Substitution errors, omission or deletion errors, and addition or insertion errors where students insert or add an article where it is not required.

Table 4: Percentages of all correct answers for all articles and error types

the					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	89	59.3	59.3	59.3
	Substitution	3	2.0	2.0	61.3
	Omission	58	38.7	38.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

In the above table, there are correct answers, then followed by substitution errors and omission errors. 89 is the number of answers in the use of the definite article with a percentage of correct answers of 59.3%. 3 errors were made as substitution errors in the use of *the* with a percentage of 2.0%. 58 errors were omission errors in the use of the definite article with a percentage of 38.7%.

This table displays the type of errors students made in the use of the indefinite article *a/an*.

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Table 5: Percentages of all correct answers for all articles and error types

a_an					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	210	70.0	70.0	70.0
	Substitution	13	4.3	4.3	74.3
	Omission	77	25.7	25.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

210 were correct answers with a total percentage of correct answers 70.0% in the use of the indefinite article. 13 errors are substitution errors with a percentage of 4.3%. 77 errors are omission errors with a percentage of 25.7%.

This table below shows the number of correct answers and the error types of zero article.

Table 6: Percentages of all correct answers for all articles and error types

zero

Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	112	74.7	74.7	74.7
	Substitution	1	.7	.7	75.3
	Addition	37	24.7	24.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

112 are correct answers in the use of zero article with a percentage of 74.7%. 1 error is a substitution error with a low percentage of .7%. 37 errors are addition errors and its percentage is 24.7%.

The tables underneath are displaying all the correct and incorrect answers with error types of all articles, with all the sentences used in the data collection task.

Frequency Table

This sentence requires putting the definite article before unique places. Most students answered it correctly with a percentage of 70.0%.

Table 7: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

the I love the sea					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	21	70.0	70.0	70.0
	Substitution	1	3.3	3.3	73.3
	Omission	8	26.7	26.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

In this sentence, almost all students answered it correctly, with a percentage of 93.3%.

Table 8: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

the Put the books on my table					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	28	93.3	93.3	93.3
	Omission	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Similarly, this sentence was answered by almost all students, with a percentage of 93.3%.

Table 9: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

the The game we played was very enjoyable					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	28	93.3	93.3	93.3
	Omission	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

In this sentence, few students answered it correctly but the rest had difficulties with using the definite article in front of names of magazines or newspapers. The percentage is 23.3%.

Table 10: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

the The Times magazine is popular					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	7	23.3	23.3	23.3
	Omission	23	76.7	76.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

As for this sentence, only 5 students got it right. The percentage is 16.7%.

Table 11: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

the I do not like the cinema					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	5	16.7	16.7	16.7
	Substitution	2	6.7	6.7	23.3
	Omission	23	76.7	76.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

This sentence was correctly answered by almost all students, with a percentage of 93.3%.

Table 12: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

_a_ There is a car in front of your house		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	28	93.3	93.3	93.3
	Omission	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

In this sentence, most students got it right. The percentage is 76.7%.

Table 13: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

_a_ I want to drink a cup of coffee		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	23	76.7	76.7	76.7
	Omission	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Likewise, this sentence was answered correctly by almost all students, with a percentage of 90.0%. This indicates that they are capable of using the indefinite article before singular nouns.

Table 14: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

_a_ Salem is a farmer				
Error types & correct answers	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Correct	27	90.0	90.0	90.0
Omission	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

This sentence caused a problem for most of the students. They think that the word European should be preceded by an as it starts with a vowel letter. The percentage is 33.3%.

Table 15: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

_a_ Russia is a European country				
Error types & correct answers	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

Valid	Correct	10	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Substitution	13	43.3	43.3	76.7
	Omission	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

This sentence was answered correctly by the majority of students, with a percentage of 80.0%.

Table 16: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

_a_ Salem works as a taxi driver					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	24	80.0	80.0	80.0
	Omission	6	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

This sentence was answered correctly by half of the students. The percentage is 50.0%.

Table 17: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

_an_ My child is an angel					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	15	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Omission	15	50.0	50.0	100.0

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| | Total | 30 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

The sentence below was correctly answered by most of the students, and it received a percentage of 83.3%.

Table 18: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

_an_ I want to eat an apple					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	25	83.3	83.3	83.3
	Omission	5	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Again, this sentence was answered correctly by most of the students, with a percentage of 76.7%.

Table 19: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

_an_ Libya has an excellent football team					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	23	76.7	76.7	76.7

		7	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Omission	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Also, this sentence was answered by half of the students, scoring a percentage of 50.0%.

Table 20: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

_an_ It is an honour to be in your house					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	15	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Omission	15	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

This sentence was answered by most students, and it received a percentage of 66.7%.

Table 21: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

_an_ Leptis is an ancient city					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	20	66.7	66.7	66.7
	Omission	10	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

More than half of the students answered this sentence correctly. They reached a percentage of 60.0%.

Table 22: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

zero article Birds can fly					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	18	60.0	60.0	60.0
	Addition	12	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Again, this sentence was answered correctly by all students except one. The percentage is 96.7%.

Table 23: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

zero article Cairo is beautiful					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	29	96.7	96.7	96.7

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Addition	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

This sentence was answered correctly by the majority of the students, with a percentage of 73.3%.

Table 24: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

zero article Life is sweet					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	22	73.3	73.3	73.3
	Addition	8	26.7	26.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

In this sentence, half of the students got it right, with a percentage of 53.3%. It shows that students have a difficulty with using zero article.

Table 25: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

zero article Amina is in prison					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	16	53.3	53.3	53.3
	Substitution	1	3.3	3.3	56.7
	Addition	13	43.3	43.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

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Lastly, this sentence was answered by almost all students with a percentage of 90.0%.

Table 26: Frequency table for all correct and incorrect answers with error types

zero article I like cheese					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	27	90.0	90.0	90.0
	Addition	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

In this table below, a total of all percentages of error types of all articles including the correct answers as well as substitution and omission errors. But not addition errors as these errors were the least frequent.

The total percentage of all correct answers of all articles is 68.5%. All substitution errors of all articles score a percentage of 2.83% while omission errors' percentage is 28.67%.

Table 27: A total of all percentages of error types and correct answers of all articles

The, a, an, zero					
Error types & correct answers		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Correct	411	68.5	68.5	68.5
	Substitution	17	2.83	2.83	71.33
	Omission	172	28.67	28.67	100

Total	600			

To summarize, the use of the zero article was the most frequently answered correctly among the other articles. It reached a percentage of 74.7%. Then comes the use of the indefinite article *a/an,* with a percentage of 70.0%. Finally, the definite article *the,* was the most problematic article for the participants in this study which scored 59.3% percent.

With regard to error types, the definite article had substitution errors with a percentage of 2.0%. It also had omission errors with a percentage of 38.7%. The omission error was the most frequent error type in the use of *the*.

As far as the indefinite article is concerned, it scored 4.3% as substitution errors, and 25.7% as omission errors. Thus, omission errors were the most frequent committed error.

Lastly, the zero article got .7% substitution errors and 24.7% addition errors. Addition error was frequent and problematic. The percentage is 24.7%.

Discussion / the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

The contrastive analysis hypothesis has partially succeeded in predicting errors made by 3rd year Libyan learners in the use of English article system. For instance, in the results section, there were 12 predictions of some of the challenges that 3rd year Libyan students may encounter when learning the English article system.

The findings of this study and the difficulties predicted in the literature review part

The CAH was used in order to predict the errors that Libyan learners of English may make in the use of the English articles. Some predictions are written below. Also, Interference from the native language and also the role of the target language caused such errors.

Omission errors

Omission errors of all articles except the zero article were the most occurring errors in this study with a percentage of 28.67%.While 38.7% is regarding the use of *the*, *a/an* is 25.7%. Omission errors come first compared with all other types of errors. This concurs with Alhaysony's study (2012).

> *****omission of *the*
>
> *omission of *a/an*

Substitution errors

Substitution errors of all articles scored a percentage of 2.83% of which 2.0% is the definite article *the* and 4.3% for the indefinite article and .7% for the zero article.

> *substitution of *the*
>
> *substitution of *a/an*

Addition errors

Addition errors were only for the zero article with a percentage of 24.7%.

> *addition of the definite article the while it must not be used.

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Conclusion

This study has attempted to identify the difficulty of the English article system faced by L2 learners of Libya. The researchers have adopted two strategies in this study, namely, the Contrastive analysis Hypothesis (CAH) and Error Analysis (EA). The researchers adopted the CAH in order to compare the article system found in Arabic and English. The comparison resulted in L2 predictions which were predictable and expected to be committed by L2 Libyan learners of English in the use of the English articles. The comparison of the systems of the English article in both languages has shown that the acquisition of the definite article *the* and the zero article was problematic for Libyan learners of English.

Error analysis was also adopted in this study to identify error kinds made by 3rd year Libyan learners. The types of errors were three: Omission errors, substitution errors and addition errors. The omission of the definite article *the* was the most **frequent** error in this study with a percentage of 38.7%. Also, the indefinite article *a/an* was less **frequent** with a percentage of 25.7%. Furthermore, the addition of the definite article *the* was less **frequent** with a percentage of 24.7%.

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