AN ERROR ANALYSIS ON THE USE OF ENGLISH ARTICLES IN STUDENTS' WRITTEN DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS
A Case of Class X MIA 1 of SMA N 1 Binangun, Cilacap
in the Academic Year 2014/2015

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Aticle Info	Abstract
	This study is a case study which investigates errors on the use of English articles. It is focused on the errors made by tenth grade students of SMA N 1 Binangun, Cilacap in their written descriptive texts. *The total of 32 students of class X MIA 1 became the subjects of this study and they were asked to write descriptive texts. The object of this study was errors in using English articles which occurred in their texts. The data were analyzed based on Ellis's Error Analysis Procedure and normalization formula by Pica.* *The result of this study from the highest to the lowest exposed errors are: indefinite a/an-for-zero errors (61.51%), zero-for-indefinite a/an errors (22.19%), definite the-for-indefinite a/an substitution error (5%), definite the-for-zero substitution error (4.65%), zero-for-definite the substitution error (4.41%), and indefinite a/an-for-definite the substitution error (2.23%).* *Based on the result gained from this study, the dominant error exposed by the students is grammatical error (indefinite a/an-for-zero). This condition shows that the students find difficulties to differentiate between countable and non-countable nouns. It is suggested that the teacher give more attention to this problem and start to improve his attitude in teaching grammar.* © 2016 Universitas Negeri Semarang

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INTRODUCTION
Background of the Study

As a prospective teacher of English, I have many experiences regarding English teaching. One of the experiences was the moment I did my PPL (Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan) in one of vocational schools in Ungaran, Semarang. Based on the 2013 curriculum, the students are required to master listening, speaking, reading, and writing aspects using scientific approach. Besides that, the students also have to learn grammar in order to construct a good sentence. The curriculum, which requires students to solve their own problems while teachers most likely serve as an advisor, makes the students get difficulties in learning grammar. It is because the students do not get explicit explanation about grammar. In addition, based on my observation in classes, the students also tend to get anxious when it comes to learning grammar. It is supported by Mekhlafi and Nagartman's research about students' attitude towards grammar. They said that 'within the classroom, any mention of grammar causes the student moments of discomfort and sometimes even terror' (Mekhlafi and Nagartman, 2011:69). Their being anxious is mostly caused by their teachers who teach grammar strictly and the material which are commonly about memorizing rules.

Talking about grammar, the common specific problem faced by the students is applying English articles. English articles are based on definiteness and indefiniteness evidently on the texts in the use of 'the' as definite article, 'a/an' as indefinite article, and zero or no article. On the other hand, the article system of Indonesian does not classify into definite and indefinite articles. It is only similar with English in the function of use as determiners (Koesnosoebroto, in Kusumaningrum 2011: 1). Hence, the students easily make errors in applying English articles.

The condition in which the students easily make errors in applying English articles is limited on my experience as a PPL teacher. Therefore, I am interested in doing a research about analyzing English articles errors in different school. I would like to know whether the problem faced by my students in PPL school is also become a problem for the students from different school.

Reasons for Choosing the Topic

The reason why I choose this topic is that English article system is one of the important parts of English grammar. It is mostly seen as a trivial aspect. Yet, it is very important to learn. Barret and Chen (2011:2) conclude that the use of articles supports an understanding between the writer and reader; enabling the reader to locate where a noun or noun phrase is as well as identify if it is already understood. Furthermore, they also mention that 'English article involves the integration of semantic, pragmatic, and grammatical functions, as no one-to-one form-function mapping exists for each article, creating a large number of rules for students to be mastered' (Barret and Chen 2011:3).

The are many proofs showing that article system of Standard English is considered to be one of the most difficult aspects of the grammar to acquire, especially by learners whose language does not have articles (Butler 2002; Geng 2010; Han, Chodorow & Leacock 2006; Huebner 1985; Ko et al. 2008; Master 1997; Parish 1987; Robertson, 2000; Robinson 2010; Thomas 1989; Whitman 1974; and others can be found in Guillemin 2013:1). However, the allocation of its teaching is limited. In fact, in textbooks, English article system is not explained clearly. Mostly, English teachers in Indonesia more focus on teaching certain English material to prepare their students facing the final examination rather than prepare them to master English communicatively. Meanwhile, English articles are important in the matter of communication. Thus, English articles are not taught clearly by the teacher so the students may not acquire it well and make errors on its application. Moreover, I am afraid that this condition will lead them to the fossilization which is even more difficult for them to make correction.

The perspectives which see English articles as unimportant aspects to be taught make me encouraged to do this research. I expect to change teachers' attitude towards English articles. I believe by holding an error analysis on the use of

English articles will open up the fact that students do not acquire English article system completely. Thus, the teachers will aware of it and make changes in their teaching techniques.

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

To meet the objectives of the study, I apply the following methodology which is partitioned into seven sections: (1) Subject of the Study, (2) Object of the Study, (3) Instruments for Collecting Data, (4) Procedures of Collecting Data, (5) Procedures of Analyzing Data, (6) Triangulation, and (7) Research Design. The descriptions of them can be seen as follows:

Subject of the Study

The subjects of this study are 32 students of class X MIA 1 of SMA N 1 Binangun, Cilacap. This class was chosen based on the English teacher's suggestion. He considered the students of class X MIA 1 to be the most motivated students in learning English. As this study is a case study, the result is only applicable to the students of class X MIA 1 and cannot be generalized to the other classes.

Object of the Study

This study focuses on the English articles errors. Thus, the object of this study is errors in using English articles which occurred in the students' written descriptive texts.

Instrument for Collecting the Data

The instrument of this study is a writing test. Students will work individually to write a descriptive text during the given time. In order to trigger the students' idea, I suggested some topics. The students can choose one of the topics and start writing.

Procedures of Collecting the Data

In order to collect the data efficiently, I firstly did an observation at the school. Before holding the writing test, I met the students of class X MIA 1 to explain about my research and their role as the subjects of it. I also discussed the proper time to do the writing tests.

The writing test was held for 90 minutes and the students were given certain topics to ease them. They were ordered to write 15 sentences at minimum so there will be wider range to collect the data (English article error identification).

Procedures of Analyzing the Data

The data gained were analyzed to eventually determine the article distribution as has been done by Barrett and Chen in their research toward Taiwanese College Students' EFL writing. In analyzing the data, I use the procedures of Error Analysis by Ellis as follows:

1. Identifying Errors

Counting English articles errors in each of students' composition.

2. Describing Errors

After the total of English articles errors in each of students' composition are identified, they are classified into their types of error.

3. Explaining Errors

In this step, the identified English articles errors are analyzed based on their source of error.

4. Evaluating Errors

The identified English articles errors gained from previous steps are put into table to show their distribution and analyzed to know what students' difficulties based on the most exposed errors.

Triangulation

In order to ensure the validity of the result, I use triangulation for checking my data analysis. Triangulation is 'a kind of checking technique of the validity which uses something else out of the data' (Moeloeng, 2004:330). There are four kinds of triangulation:

1. Data triangulation is the use of a variety of data sources in a study.
2. Investigator triangulation is the use of several different researchers or evaluators.
3. Theory triangulation is the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data.

Methodological triangulation is the use of multiple methods to study a single problem. (Denzin in Kusumaningrum 2008:28)

In this research, I use the investigator triangulation for checking the error identification. Thus, there will be a second investigator to identify errors made by the students. Then, the identified English articles errors by the second investigator are compared with my identification as the first investigator.

Research Design

In order to eventually gain the data of students' error in using English articles, a case study is conducted as it enables me focusing on the case deeply. This has been emphasized by Yin (2009:56) that 'case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.' A case study proposing that there is a 'case' which is an object of this study and should be 'a complex functioning unit, investigated in its natural context with a multitude of methods, and contemporary' (Johansson, 2003:2). Therefore, I am conducting this error analysis study by using a case study to get an exact result of the case (errors in using English articles).

Different important aspect of case study methodology is validation. It is important that the data gained is valid by triangulation. Triangulation provides an important way of ensuring the validity of case study research. Normally, data collection methods are triangulated (many methods are combined), but in addition to this, data sources, theory, or investigators might also be triangulated (Denzin in Johansson 2003:8). A case study will be the research method of this study. The problem being investigated is errors made by the students in using English article system.

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter covers the analysis and the presentation of the data. They are divided into three subchapters (Description of the Data, Analysis of the Data, and Triangulation) which are elaborated as follows:

Description of the Data

The data analyzed in this study were the English article errors found in the students' descriptive texts. There were 32 texts from 32 students as the subjects of the research. After the data were identified, it was found that all of the subjects made errors in the use of English articles in their texts. The examples of their errors are as follows:

1. Ade Roswikasari (My Friend)

Sentences	Correction
My friend is *a* beautiful.	My friend is beautiful.
She is (…) student in one of SMP	She is a student in one of SMP.
She is *the* clever children.	She is a clever student.
And like annoying *the* some friends.	And like annoying some friends.

2. Ari Okti N. (Destry, My Best Friend)

Sentences	Correction
Destry is (…) good person.	Destry is a good person.
She always becomes (…) number one in the class.	She always becomes the number one in the class.
She also has (…) pet.	She also has a pet.
The pet is (…) goat.	The pet is a goat.
And she has (…) hobby, the hobby is eating.	And she has a hobby, the hobby is eating.
She likes *a* violet color.	She likes violet color.
She has (…) favorite drink that is orange juice.	She has a favorite drink that is orange juice.

3. Gilar Wildan A. (My House)

Sentences	Correction

Sentences	Correction
I have (…) small house but comfortable.	I have a small house but comfortable.
My house has two bathrooms, four bedrooms, and two kitchens which one of it has (…) hanging cupboard.	My house has two bathrooms, four bedrooms, and two kitchens which one of it has a hanging cupboard.
My bathroom has (…) shower, (…) closet, and (…) bathtub.	My bathroom has a shower, a closet, and a bathtub.
The room that I very like is my bedroom and (…) garage.	The room that I very like is my bedroom and the garage.

4. Lenny Riyanti (My Idol)

Sentences	Correction
I have a idol, his name is Justin Drew Bieber.	I have an idol. His name is Justin Drew Bieber.
He has straight hair, white skin, and (…) tattoo in his back.	He has straight hair, white skin, and a tattoo on his back.
He is a idol for all people with such a beautiful voice.	He is an idol for all people with such a beautiful voice.
He has a idol which name is Usher	He has an idol whose name is Usher.
He was inspired to be (…) singer from Usher.	He was inspired to be a singer by Usher.
He thinks Usher is a best singer in the world.	He thinks Usher is the best singer in the world.
He has (…) favorite color, it is violet.	He has a favorite color, it is violet.

5. Tri R. (My Sweet Bird)

Sentences	Correction
I have (…) sweet bird.	I have a sweaty bird.
It is (…) beautiful bird.	It is a beautiful bird.
It has green fur with *the* small motif in its wings.	It has green fur with a small motif in its wings.
It has small legs with (…) ring in it legs.	It has small legs with a ring in it legs.
It lives in (…) wonderful bird cage with *the* yellow color.	It lives in a wonderful bird cage with yellow color.
Sometimes, I put *the* new food to it.	Sometimes, I put new food in it.

Note: In the sentences column, the '(…)' symbol means that the students missed one article, and the italicized article means the student made error by applying that article.

Analysis of the Data

Based on the procedure of data analysis by Ellis as described in the previous chapters, the data which had been identified then were classified into the types of error. There are seven types of error found in the subjects' composition as follows:

Indefinite 'a/an' for zero substitution: 90 errors

This error was identified when the students used zero article instead of indefinite article 'a/an' as the correct form in their sentences.

For example: In the sentence Destry is good person, the student made an error by using zero article proceeding 'good person'. The correct form should have been Destry is a good person because Destry is a name of a person and indicates a singular noun. Therefore, in this case, the students who made this kind of error show a lack of understanding in grammatical aspect (differentiating singular and plural or countable and non-countable nouns).

Zero for indefinite 'a/an' substitution: 27 errors

This error was identified when the students used indefinite 'a/an' article instead of zero article as the correct form in their sentences.

For example: In the sentence My yard has a two big tree, the student made an error by using indefinite article 'a' proceeding two big tree. The correct form of this sentence should have been My yard has two big trees because 'two big trees' is a plural noun phrase and cannot be proceeded by indefinite article 'a/an'. Therefore, the students who commited this kind of error actually have the same problem as the students showing the first type of error (problem in differentiating singular and plural or count and non-count nouns).

Zero for definite 'the' substitution: 7 errors

This error identified when the students used definite 'the' article instead of zero article as the correct form in their sentences.

For example: In the sentence And like annoying the some friends, the student made an error by using definite article 'the' before the noun phrase 'some friends'. The correct form of it should have been And like annoying some friends. This sentence is found in the text written by Ade Roswikasari (see Description of the Data) and classified as new information. Thus, the use of definite article 'the' is wrong and the students who made the same error have semantic issue of specificity as they overuse the definite article 'the' in the specific environment.

Definite 'the' for zero substitution: 6 errors

This error was identified when students used zero article instead of definite 'the' article as the correct form in their sentences.

For example: In the sentence The room that I very like is my bedroom and garage, the student made an error by not using any articles proceeding 'garage'. The correct form of the sentence should have been The room that I very like is my bedroom and the garage. This sentence is found in the text by Gilar Wildan A. (see Description of the Data) and 'garage' is classified as a specific information according to his references about his house which he had already talked about. Thus, he had to use definite article 'the' before the word 'garage'. The students who showed the same error have problem in pragmatic aspect as they cannot identify clearly the hearer knowledge of the NP.

Definite 'the' for indefinite 'a/an' substitution: 4 errors

This error was identified when students used indefinite 'a/an' article instead of definite 'the' article as the correct form in their sentences.

For example: In the sentence He thinks Usher is a best singer in the world, the student made error by using indefinite article 'a' before the noun phrase 'best singer' instead of definite article 'the'. The correct form of this sentence should have been He thinks Usher is the best singer in the world. This sentence is found in the text written by Lenny Riyanti (see Description of the Data) and NP 'best singer' is considered as specific information and should be preceded by definite article 'the'. The students showing the same error have semantic problem as they have difficulties to identify the specific reference of the NP.

Indefinite 'a/an' for definite 'the' substitution: 3 errors

This error was identified when students used definite 'the' article instead of indefinite 'a/an' article as the correct form in their sentences.

For example: In the sentence It has green fur with the small motif in its wings, the student made an error by using definite article 'the' to modify the NP 'small motif' instead of indefinite article 'a'. The correct form should have been It has green fur with a small motif on its wing. This sentence is found in the text written by Tri R. (see Description of the Data) and the NP small motif is considered as new information in form of a singular noun. Thus, she had to use indefinite article 'a'. The students who commited the same error show a pragmatic difficulty of understanding the hearer knowledge aspect in the sentence.

Indefinite 'a' for indefinite 'an' substitution: 3 errors

This error was identified when students used indefinite 'an' article instead of indefinite 'a' article as the correct form in their sentences.

For example: In the sentence *I have a idol*, the student made an error by using indefinite article 'a' instead of indefinite article 'an'. The correct form should have been *I have an idol*. This

sentence is found in the text written by Lenny Riyanti (see Description of the Data) and included into the grammatical error.

Based on the types of error explained above, the result can be drawn into a diagram as follows:
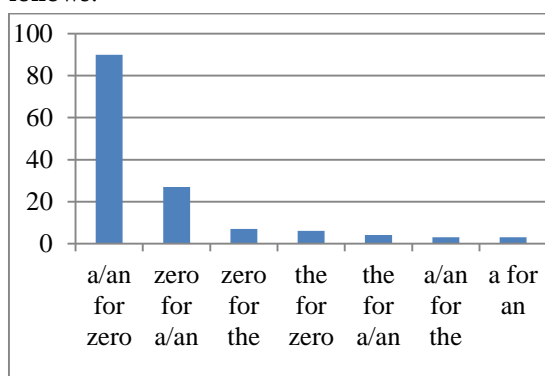
After the data were classified, I used a formula proposed by Pica in order to accurately analyze the error distribution. In order to be accurate, the data identified from the students' written descriptive texts, which obviously various in lengths, need to be normalized. According to Pica (in Barret and Chen 2011:11) 'in a longer text, there are more opportunities for errors to occur, so 'normalization' is a formula that adjusts the raw frequency counts so texts of different lengths can be compared.' Before the application of the normalization formula, the mean of the text length had to be counted first.

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{The\ total\ words\ from\ the\ total\ texts}{The\ total\ number\ of\ texts}$$

The total words of the students' descriptive texts were 3484 words from the total of 32 texts. Based on the formula previously explained, the mean can be determined as follow:

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{3484}{32}$$

Thus, the mean of the text length is 109 words per text

Then, I analyzed the error distribution by using Pica's normalization formula as follows:

$$N = \frac{the\ raw\ frequency\ of\ certain\ type\ of\ error}{the\ number\ of\ words\ in\ the\ text} \times mean\ of\ the\ text\ length$$

(Pica, in Barret and Chen 2011:12).

Finally, the accurate error distribution for the average of 109 words per text can be explained as follows:

Article	The		Zero		Indefinite 'a/an'	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
The			6.3	4.65	6.78	5
Indefinite 'a/an'	3.02	2.23	83.32	61.51		
Zero	5.97	4.41			30.07	22.19

The table above is read from left to right. The vertical axis indicates the article being substituted while the horizontal one shows the article substitution. For example, reading the table from left to right indicates 4.65% *the-for-zero substitution* errors occurred. The highest errors which were exposed by the students are *indefinite a/an-for-zero substitution* (61.51%). The number of *zero-for-the* errors and *a-for-the* errors are low at 5.97% and 2.23%, respectively, indicating that the frequency of definite article overuse is low. However, it seemed that the students underuse definite article for the result of *the-for-zero* and *the-for-a* are 4.65% and 5% showing lack of understanding in term of specificity in using English articles. The result shows 61.51% *indefinite a/an-for-zero* errors, and 22.19% *zero-for-indefinite a/an* errors as the highest exposed error in the students' compositions. Based on the result, the students exposed more grammatical errors than pragmatic and semantic ones. Grammatical errors are due to noun countability in which the students must assign the indefinite article to singular nouns and zero article for plural or non-countable nouns.

Triangulation

The result shown in this research had already been triangulated to ensure the validity of the data analysis. In this case, I used investigator triangulation in order to check the validity of the error identification in the students' compositions. At first, I identified the English articles errors

found in the students' compositions. Then, the second investigator who was the English teacher of class X MIA 1 (Sunaryo, S.Pd) also identified the English articles errors found in the texts. Lastly, I compared my errors identification result to his result.

The data which had been compared then discussed as there were some differences between mine and the second investigator. However, they cannot be shown in the appendices for they do not affect the data analysis. The exact data result shown in the data analysis and the appendices were yielded after the discussion between me and the second investigator about the differences in our findings.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS
Conclusions

The main objective of this study is to determine the students' acquisition of the use of English article system in their written descriptive text. Based on the data in Chapter IV, it is clearly defined that the students of class X MIA 1 did make errors on the use of English articles in their texts.

Based on the result, the dominant error, *indefinite a/an-for-zero substitution error*, indicates that the students are apt to make errors in using English articles grammatically because they cannot differentiate appropriately between count/non-count nouns. Besides that, the students also made errors in using definite article which could be classified as errors regarding to the acquisition of pragmatic and semantic function of English article. Although the percentages of the errors are low, it is still concerned the errors might be led to the fossilization.

The dominant error which shows the low mastery in understanding the differences between count/non-count nouns could affect the students' learning in other aspects besides English article system. As we know, count/non-count is one of basic grammar features which the students have to master. Therefore, if they do not clearly understand it, they might find difficulties in learning other English features such as composing sentences referring to singular or plural nouns, unable to catch the meaning of noun with two meanings (count and uncountable), etc.

Suggestions

After conducting the research and measuring the students' capability on using English article system in written descriptive texts, I suggest they pay more attention to the teaching and learning activities especially regarding to grammar. It is also best for them to increase their study towards English article system.

For the teacher, I suggest that he should give more explicit explanation about the use of English article system. The teacher has to note that there is no rule such count/non-count in Bahasa Indonesia as the students' first language that might become their difficulty in properly using English article system based on its noun countability. Furthermore, in order to follow up the teaching, the teacher should give more exercises to the students to improve their acquisition of English article system and give extra attention to the students who get low scores in their exercises and give them remedial teaching.

The population of this study is limited to the tenth grade students of class X MIA 1 of SMA N 1 Binangun, Cilacap in the academic year 2014/2015. Thus, it is suggested that an error analysis in the use of other English features can be conducted at other instutions. In the end, we can see how the acquisition level of the students in Indonesia and give the best treatment to overcome their difficulties. Hopefully, the suggestions can help the students, the teachers, and the researchers to minimize the errors in using English articles and the teaching learning process will show a better result than before.

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