

Correlation Between the Usages and the Uses of English Articles in Select Contexts



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Abstract- *Barring a few exceptions, English language teaching in India has been synonymous with teaching of grammar and English literature. As a result, the language taught here is more of written kind than spoken. The grammatical rules are more characteristics of written English, hence over-emphasized. The net result is that this approach tends to teach the usages rather than the uses of English required in real lifetime situations. Hence the need for this study entitled 'A STUDY OF CORRELATION BETWEEN THE USAGES AND THE USES OF ENGLISH ARTICLES IN SELECT CONTEXTS.' 509 tertiary students pursuing their post-graduation in M.A English Literature at government aided-institutions and private institutions situated in and around the educational district of Coimbatore constituted the sample for the present study. The independent variables included their gender and medium of education at school. The sample thus selected were diagnosed for their capacity for the recognition and the production of articles in select forty contexts and their omissions by means of a researcher-constructed questionnaire. Results obtained were analyzed with 't' tests, One – Way ANOVA, Correlation tests and Association tests.*

Results: *The major finding of the study is that 'Gender' has a major affiliation in that the competence of the women respondents in recognizing the usages of the select articles in terms of grammatical rules and producing them is strikingly higher than that of their counterparts. Mother Tongue of the respondents has a very significant association with the recognition and the production of the articles selected for this study. In conclusion, the study establishes the correlation between the knowledge of the rules of grammar as usages and their application as uses in real life time situations.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In a country such as India, where more than 1000 languages are spoken and where more than 100 languages are used as medium of instruction at the primary level, only 15 languages are used for medium of instruction at the tertiary level. If a person from Tamil Nadu wants to speak to a person from Delhi, the medium of communication can either be Tamil or Hindi. Here comes the second language (SL) English to help both of them with their communication. The present study was conducted to determine the influence of Gender and Mother tongue on the usages and the uses of articles in English among the tertiary level students..

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The main aim of this study was to test whether the difference in gender and the mother tongue influence of the respondents have any impact on the usages (recognition), uses (production) and omissions of articles in the select contexts

II. THE USAGES VERSUS THE USES

A study of language as science, in terms of theories, leads to the accumulation of knowledge of the *usages* of language in terms of grammar, which in turn results in the manifestation of the language system. But the *use* of language in day-to-day life does not demand one's knowledge of language as a set of rules or *usages*. Also, the entire language cannot be explained in terms of rules. In lifetime situations, one is not called upon to make an exhibition of one's knowledge of the *usages* of language. Contrarily, one is called upon to demonstrate one's ability to *use* language in effective communication. *Usages* involves accumulation of knowledge in terms of the rules of grammar by the process of analysis. Whereas, *uses* involves the application of the same for communicative purposes by synthesis.

When a learner acquires L1, he does so by learning how to behave in situations, not by learning the rules about what to say. In other words, the formulation of linguistic statements is by no means essential to language learning. For, none of the formulaic expressions do demand any knowledge of grammar for their mastery. The following simulated conversation is illustrative of this fact.

Peter: I want to buy a house. If I had money I would buy a house.

Thomas: Well. *If wishes were horses beggars would ride.*

If the knowledge of grammar behind this expression were a prerequisite for the use of it, many of us would not use it with ease. But, one uses it because one is habitually used to it as it stands. Brooks (1960, p. 47) declares that "the single paramount fact about language learning is that it concerns, not problem solving, but formation and performance of habits." Language learning is a process of forming habits. This process is similar and it holds good for all children, in all speech communities. Though it can be argued that mere definitions of the linguistically valid situations and statement of grammatical rules and their exceptions cannot be solutions for the language learning problems, a study of the correlation between the usages of English in terms of grammatical rules and their exceptions and their corresponding uses in communication alone can resolve this controversy.

III. ARTICLES AND ITS EVOLUTION

Articles are short words often used in the beginning of noun phrases.



There are basically two types of articles – ‘the’ (definite article) and ‘a/an’ (indefinite article). Like quantifiers, articles belong to a larger class of prenominal modifiers known as ‘determiners’. Determiners are words or phrases that come at the beginning of noun phrases. They not only signal whether the information is new or familiar but also tell us something about quantity. In certain exceptions when a noun is not preceded by an article, it is called as the ‘zero article.’

The correct use of the articles is one of the most difficult aspects of English grammar. Fortunately, most mistakes regarding articles do not matter. Even if all the articles are omitted from sentences, usually they can be understood. In spite of their high frequency and early input, the acquisition of the highly complex article system remains one of the biggest challenges for an ESL or EFL learner wherein Hewson (1972, p.132) has called the English article system a “psycho mechanism”, through which native speakers use articles correctly but unconsciously.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY

1. To identify the linguistic competence of select tertiary respondents in the recognition and the production of articles in select contexts.
2. To analyze the impact of factors such as Gender and Mother tongue on the recognition and the production of articles in select contexts.
3. To study whether a knowledge of the rules governing the uses of articles has any association with their actual uses.

Even though it is not possible to identify all the factors that affect the learning process, an attempt is made in this study to identify some factors such as Gender, Mother tongue

V. THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study not only involved recognition and production, but also grammaticality judgment, where respondents were surmised to provide grammatical explanation for why an article was used, omitted or not used in a particular sentence of a select context. Hence, the Post Graduate students of Literature in English were selected assuming adequacy and competence in linguistic knowledge to qualify as sample for the study. Non - Probability sampling method was involved in the process of selecting the samples, wherein 509 post graduate students from various colleges were chosen using stratified random sampling method. Aforementioned samples were collected from various colleges in Coimbatore, Erode and Tirupur districts. On account of the targeted respondents being post graduate students, samples were collected from the study area covering both government and private colleges to procure a reasonable sample size. Even though it is not possible to identify all the factors that affect the learning process, an attempt is made in this study to identify some factors such as Gender and Mother tongue influence of the respondents.

VI. CONSTRUCTION OF TOOL FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

A researcher constructed questionnaire was used to collect the first hand information from the respondents

selected for the present study. Even though there are many contexts where the articles are used and omitted, a test of all the contexts is impractical. Accordingly, 40 contexts were selected based on their frequency of usage. In this process, it was decided to involve 40 testing items for production, 40 for recognition and 40 for the grammaticality judgment test. The intention was to test each of the 40 usages of the articles once in recognition test, production test and also in grammaticality judgment test. The questionnaire designed for the present study was broadly classified into four parts. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of the demographic details of the respondents to elicit a few of the important factors affecting the performance of the students. The second part involved production wherein the students are supposed to fill in the blanks with or without articles and the third part involved recognition in two sections, the first section requiring the respondents to choose the best option that explains why the article is used in the given context and the later choosing the correct explanation for the omission of articles in the given context. The fourth part involved giving the correct grammatical explanation to the usage and omission of the articles in the given context.

The present study requires a thorough knowledge of the usage, the use and omission of articles, as it engaged in Recognition, Production and a grammaticality judgment test of select contexts of articles in English. Because of this reason it was determined to have the respondents who have already got a formal linguistic education in English as samples.

VII. RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS - ANALYSES

Gender and Medium of Education at school are the two important factors determining the proficiency in the recognition and the production of articles in English. In the present study, Gender was studied under two strata viz., Masculine and Feminine gender.

Distribution of the respondents according to their gender

Gender		
Sex	No.	Percent
Men	166	32.6
Women	343	67.4
Total	509	100

It could be observed from the above table that 166 (32.6%) respondents were men and the remaining 343 (67.4%) respondents were women. From the analysis, it was inferred that women respondents constituted maximum learners of English language at Post graduate level than men respondents.



VIII. MEDIUM OF EDUCATION AT SCHOOL

The medium of instruction in school is an important factor in determining the ability of the tertiary level respondents in the usage, the use and omission of articles.

Distribution of the respondents based on their medium of education at school

Medium of Education at School		
Language	No.	Percent
English	272	53.4
Tamil	237	46.6
Total	509	100

The presented schematic shows that 53.4% respondents studied the medium of English while in school, and the remaining 46.6% respondents in the medium of Tamil. Shifts in the country toward more global schooling compelled public attraction towards English medium schools in the past few decades, which is the cause of lesser number of Tamil medium respondents.

IX. COMPARISON OF SECTIONS SCORES AMONG THE RESPONDENTS BASED ON THEIR GENDER

The total score was found out for each respondent by adding the number of questions answered correctly out of forty questions. The total score will theoretically range between 0 and 40. So higher the score, the more will be the knowledge. These scores were further analyzed by comparing among the groups of selected personal variables.

Mean scores - A mean is the same as an average. So it goes without saying the higher mean score the better the performance is. The questionnaire's three sections scores were compared between Men and Women respondents. The Means and Standard Deviations of these scores were found out for Men and Feminine respondents and are presented in the following table:

Table No: 4.1- Mean performance for the distribution of Respondents in terms of Gender

Gender	Section I Production			Section II Recognition			Section III Grammaticality Judgment test			
	N	No.	Mean	Sd	No.	Mean	Sd	No.	Mean	Sd
Men	509	166	14.50	3.99	166	14.13	4.18	166	3.16	3.34
Women	509	343	17.42	4.48	343	15.86	5.00	343	5.40	3.80
Total		509	31.92	8.47	509	29.98	9.18	509	8.56	7.14

The table shows that the mean scores for Men respondents in all the three sections were lesser (14.50, 14.13, 3.16) than

the mean scores of Women respondents (17.42, 15.86, 5.40). To find whether there was a significant difference in the mean scores of Men and Women respondents, the t-test was applied and the result is given below:

Table No: 4.1. A - Result of t'-test showing the influence of the gender.

Gender	Section I Production			Section II Recognition			Section III Grammaticality Judgment test		
	t Value	Df	Si g	t Value	Df	Si g	t Value	Df	Si g
Men	7.14	507	**	3.85	507	*	6.49	507	*
Women									

From the above table the t-test value of all the three sections (7.14, 3.85, and 6.49) are found to be significant at 1% level. This shows that the mean scores of Men and Women respondents differ significantly.

X. COMPARISON OF SECTIONS SCORES AMONG THE RESPONDENTS BASED ON THEIR MEDIUM OF EDUCATION AT SCHOOL

The sections scores were compared between the total respondents based on their Medium of education they had at their school and are presented in the following table:

Table No: 4.5 - Mean performance for the distribution of Respondents based on their medium of education at school.

Medium Of Education	Section I Production				Section II Recognition			Section III Grammaticality Judgment test		
	N	No.	Mean	Sd	No.	Mean	Sd	No.	Mean	Sd
English	509	272	17.65	4.51	272	15.63	4.93	272	5.40	4.00
Tamil	509	237	15.12	4.18	237	14.90	6.55	237	3.73	3.31



Total	509	32.77	8.70	509	30.54	9.59	509	9.21	7.32
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Section III Scores	0.487**	0.452**	1
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** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The table shows that the mean and standard deviation scores in all the three sections of those respondents who had Tamil as their medium of education at school is lesser (15.12, 14.90 and 3.73) than the respondents who had English (17.65, 15.63 and 5.49) as their medium. To find whether there is any significant difference in the mean scores of the respondents based on their medium of education at school the t-test was applied and the result is given below:

Table No: 4.5.A

Result of 't'-test showing the influence of the medium of education at school

Medium Of Education	Section I Production			Section II Recognition			Section III Grammaticality Judgment test		
	t Value	Df	Sig	t Value	Df	Sig	t Value	Df	Sig
English	6.52	507	**	1.70	507	NS	5.36	507	**
Tamil									

From the above table the t-test value of sections I (6.52) and III (5.36) are found to be significant at 1% level. This shows that the mean scores of respondents having Tamil as their medium of education and respondents having English differ significantly. Whereas, in section II the t-value (1.70) show that it is not significant.

XI. CORRELATIONS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SECTION I, SECTION II AND SECTION III SCORES

The following table shows the relationship between the Section I, Section II and Section III Scores.

Table No: 4.12 - Results of correlation relationship between section I, section II and section III scores.

Sections	Section I Scores	Section II Scores	Section III Scores
Section I Score	1	0.361**	0.487**
Section II Scores	0.361**	1	0.452**

XII. ASSOCIATION BETWEEN RECOGNITION AND PRODUCTION SCORES OF THE RESPONDENTS WITH RESPECT TO PARTICULAR CONTEXT

To check whether there is an association between recognition and production scores of the respondents, with respect to particular context, this analysis of association test was applied. The present study has taken some forty various contexts.

XIII. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The present study reveals the following:

1. 'Gender' has a major affiliation with the recognition and the production of articles in select contexts in the medium of writing, in that the competence of the women respondents' is strikingly greater than that of the men respondents.
2. 'Medium of education' at school has a strong with the recognition and the production of articles in the contexts selected, in that the respondents who had English as their medium of instruction at school exhibited a better command than their counterparts did.
3. Though the respondents were able to recognize and produce articles in the contexts selected, they were not able to give explanations required in the grammaticality judgment test.
4. The different tools used for the present study namely 'Fill in the Blanks' and the 'Grammaticality Judgment Test' for production and 'Choose the Best Alternatives' for recognition of articles in the contexts selected are found to be reliable.

The overall results of the correlation test and the association test for testing the relationship of the usages with the uses of articles show a positive correlation.



XIII. V.DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

1. Even though the number of women respondents is higher than that of the men respondents, the performance of the former is better than that of the latter. This may be due to the reason that the women respondents feel free to communicate their thoughts. Further, they have the genetic advantage of talking spontaneously. This inference is based on the means scores of the men respondents in all the three sections of the questionnaire and those of the women 14.50, 14.1, 3.16 and 17.42, 15.86, 5.40 respectively.
2. The study reveals that the 'Medium of education' at school has a strong association with the recognition and the production of the target contexts in which articles are used. This may be due to the fact that in English-medium students are exposed to the use of these contexts or that they have an environment where they can observe, use, and correct their uses of such contexts with or without knowing the usages.
3. From the results of the study it is well proved that using English for interpersonal communication has an impact both on the recognition and the production. It may be due to the reason that the respondents are used to the recognition and the production of the same during their frequent use of English in the spoken mode.

XIV. CONCLUSION

From this study, it is evident that students are unaware of the usages and uses of articles even when they are at their tertiary level of education. Additionally, the students whose medium of education at school was not English do not run parallel to those of whom medium of instruction was English faced with problems both in the recognition and the production of articles in English.

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