

THE USE OF ARTICLES IN THE INTENSIVE COURSE STUDENTS' COMPOSITIONS OF UNIVERSITAS NEGERI SURABAYA

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Abstrak

Kemampuan untuk menyatakan pikiran dan pendapat baik secara lisan dan tertulis sangat penting saat ini. Hal ini diperlukan tidak hanya di pekerjaan, tetapi juga di bidang pendidikan. Oleh karena itu, siswa harus belajar dan berlatih untuk menulis dengan baik dan akurat. Keakurasian didalam penulisan itu penting untuk mendapatkan arti sebenarnya dan mengurangi kesalahan gramatikal yang dapat menyebabkan kalimat menjadi ambigu. Pembicara *non-native* termasuk orang Indonesia cenderung memiliki masalah yang berhubungan dengan keakurasian saat menemui hal yang tidak terlalu familiar dan berbeda dari L1 mereka. *English article* sangat penting karena digunakan untuk mengukur kepastian dan ketidakpastian suatu benda. Penggunaan *article* yang tepat dalam penulisan bahasa Inggris adalah suatu keharusan. Aturan dalam penggunaan *English articles* berbeda dengan penggunaan *article* didalam bahasa Indonesia. Studi ini merupakan penelitian deskriptif kuantitatif dalam bentuk *ex post facto* yang bertujuan untuk mengetahui keakurasian mahasiswa IC didalam menggunakan *English article* dan jenis *article* yang sulit untuk dikuasai oleh mahasiswa tersebut. Data yang digunakan yaitu karangan mahasiswa yang didapatkan setelah *pretest* dan *posttest* dilakukan oleh tim IC. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa keakurasian mahasiswa dalam menggunakan *English article* masih rendah, Jenis *article* yang sulit dikuasai oleh mahasiswa IC adalah *zero article* Ø.

Kata Kunci: Program IC, *Article*, Karangan Mahasiswa.

Abstract

The ability to express thought and opinion both in spoken and in written is very important. It is needed not only in the job field but also in education. Therefore, students should learn and practice to write well and accurately. Accuracy in writing is important to get a good composition. It is important not only to get the actual meaning but also to reduce grammatical errors which can cause ambiguity within sentences. Non-native speakers of English including Indonesian tend to have problem in accuracy when dealing with terms which were unfamiliar and different from their L1. Articles are very important in English due to its necessity in measuring definiteness and indefiniteness of nouns. It is a must in English to use the correct article. The rules in using English articles are different from using articles in Bahasa Indonesia. This study was a descriptive quantitative in the form of *ex post facto* research which was aimed to find out the accuracy of the IC students in using the English articles and the most difficult article for them. The data are the students' compositions obtained after a pretest and a posttest were administered by the IC team. The result shows that the students' accuracy on the use of articles is still low. The most difficult article for the IC students was *zero article* Ø.

Keywords: IC Program, Articles, Composition.

INTRODUCTION

For years English has been taught in Indonesia not only in high school level but also in university level.

There is always a concern to improve the quality of the English teachers in Indonesia. English teachers are expected to have fluency in English as stated by Djiwandono (1999:22), "Fluency in English is basic and

prerequisite for teachers of English.” They should master not only the basic understanding about the language but also all of the skills and components of it.

Writing as one of the English skills is a complex activity. It is always related with the use of grammar and vocabulary which cannot be separated from writing. For many years, writing was a skill that was the exclusive domain of scholars in educational institutions. Weigle (2002:40) stated that placement test as well as entrance and exit examination of many university consist of writing test. Furthermore, Harmer (2004:3) stated that in the context of education, it should be noted that most exams often rely on the writing proficiency to measure knowledge. According to this statement, the students of the English Department need to master writing skill because they will be teachers after graduating from university. Therefore, mastering all skills especially writing will benefit them when they teach later on.

Related to the mastery of the writing skill, it is worth remembering that accuracy in writing is important to get a good composition. Moreover, it is important not only to get the actual meaning but also to reduce grammatical errors which can cause an ambiguity within sentences. According to Llach (2011:42), “grammatical and lexical errors are considered as signs of ‘bad’ writing and lack of writing skill on the part of the learner.” Non-native speakers of English including Indonesian tend to have problem in accuracy and mistakes which relate to their mother tongue. Mistakes in using function words are commonly occurred in their writing. Setiawan et al. (2007:712) stated that, “a foreign language learner often makes mistakes in using function words.” Whereas Ekiert (2004:2) stated that, “function words, ..., generally overlooked by learners when processing language primarily for meaning.” Non-native speakers usually have less consideration in the use of function words because these words intrinsically have a little meaning. But somehow, function words have some vital roles in expressing the meaning of sentences. Setiawan et al. (2007:712) stated that despite having little intrinsic meaning, function words are vital in expressing grammatical relationships among words within a sentence.

Chung and Pennebaker (2007) in Fiedler (2007:347) stated that function words are like the cement that holds the content words together. Moreover, they also stated that, “function words include pronouns, prepositions, articles, conjunctions, and auxiliary verbs.” These parts of function words take important roles in getting a good composition. If one or two of the parts is not used accurately, the aim to get a good composition is hardly achieved. As a part of function words, articles also take an important role in writing. Therefore, the article system should be learned by the students, but on the other hand, the use of articles has become the prime problems in mostly Indonesian learners’ compositions. Mistakes within the article system are commonly done by them. Furthermore, Ekiert (2004:1) stated that, “the English article system, which includes the indefinite article *a* (*n*), the definite article *the*, and the *zero(or null)* article is one of the most difficult structural elements for ESL

learners.” Moreover, Miller (2005:80) stated that, “for academic writing, however, ..., and the correct article becomes an indication not only of mastery of the language but of exactness in thought and expression.” Moreover, according to Master (2002) as cited in Crompton (2011:5), article *the* is the commonest word in English and article *a* in the top five. From this statement, it can be inferred that article system is important to be learned.

Mostly Indonesian speakers of English find it difficult to use articles because these are not commonly used. The articles system actually exists in Bahasa Indonesia, but the use of the articles is not separated in different uses (*a* and *an*, *the*, and *zero article*) as in English. Here are sentences as an illustration, for example, (1) I find a ring on the floor, (2) I put the ring in my bag. The difference between ‘*a ring*’ and ‘*the ring*’ in the sentences is subtle but significant. These sentences hint to possible differences in the speaker’s and audience’s knowledge, contexts, and interpersonal relationships.

The use of articles before nouns is important in writing English due to its necessity in measuring definiteness and indefiniteness of the nouns. Thus, this study is aimed to find out the students’ accuracy in using the English articles and the most difficult article for them.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study was designed as a descriptive quantitative research which was classified as an ex post facto research. According to Cohen et al. (2000:205), an ex post facto research was a method of finding out previous events that have possibly happened and cannot be engineered or manipulated by the investigator. Moreover, Ary et al. (2010:345) stated that an ex post facto research was aimed to investigate relationships when the researcher cannot randomly assign or manipulate subjects to different conditions.

Subject of the Research

The subject of the study was the students of English Department of Unesa. The first year students who joined the Intensive Course program batch of 2012 were chosen as the population. There are 230 students who were grouped into seven classes from class A to G.

Having determined the population of the study, then the sample of the study was chosen. Among 230 IC students, 25 of them were taken as the sample randomly using simple random sampling.

Data Collection Technique

The data of the study were the students’ compositions made in the writing tests. The writing tests consisted of pretest and posttest. The students were assigned to write an essay containing 200 words in the pretest under the topic of the description of the students themselves, their English ability, and their expectation on being accepted as a student in English Department. The pretest was done in 30 minutes and used to know the

students' proficiency before joining the IC program. Then after joining the IC program, the students were assigned to write an essay containing 200 words in the posttest about the description of the students themselves, their present English ability, and their plans for their study at English Department. This test was also done in 30 minutes used to know the students proficiency after joining the IC program.

Data Analysis Technique

In order to get answers for the research questions, the data were analyzed based on the theories proposed by some experts which were used as the indicators to examine the students' accuracy on using English articles. There were some steps to analyze the data of this study. First, after the data of the pretest and posttest were collected, they were analyzed to find words which needed articles and put in a table. Afterwards, the nouns were grouped as the rules on using articles and put in a table. Then, they were analyzed and calculated according to the type of article supplied and article required in contexts and put in a certain table. By applying such an analysis technique, it could be investigated how accurate the students apply the English articles and what article is the most difficult article used by the students.

RESULTS

Accuracy in Using Articles

The study was conducted to describe the accuracy of the IC students in using articles prior and after the IC program. Detailed frequencies of articles supplied in the students' compositions in the pretest and in the posttest were presented in the following table.

Table 1: the percentage of occurrences on articles usage in the students' compositions

Articles	Percentage			
	Pretest		Posttest	
	Accurate	Inaccurate	Accurate	Inaccurate
Ø	63%	37%	55%	45%
a	75%	25%	86%	14%
an	66%	34%	87%	13%
the	67%	33%	74%	26%
all articles	66%	34%	64%	36%
TOTAL	100%			

All of misused articles in the pretest were 238 (34%) out of 701 articles occurred in the texts. Thus, it could be concluded that the accuracy rate of overall articles used in the pretest was 66% (463 out of 701 articles). Table 1 showed that the accuracy rate of Ø (63%), an (66%), the (67%), and a (75%).

All of misused articles in the posttest were 102 (36%) out of 282 articles occurred in the texts. The accuracy rate of overall articles in the posttest was 64% (180 out of 282 articles). It has decreased by 2% from the pretest. It meant that the students tended to make more mistakes on using articles in the posttest than in the pretest. Furthermore, it can be seen that the accuracy rate of Ø (55%), the (74%), a (86%), and an (87%).

Firstly, dealing with *the*, it was found that the students used 126 articles *the* in the pretest which consisted of 85 correct-used articles and 41 misused articles. On the contrary, the number of the article *the* used by the students in the posttest became smaller. They used 54 articles *the* in the posttest which consisted of 40 correct-used articles and 14 misused articles.

From 41 misused articles in the pretest, 21 misused articles were where the students tended to use *the* when zero article Ø was required in the contexts. In the other hand, 9 out of 14 misused articles in the posttest were involving the same matter. Here were some examples:

- [1] First, I love English very much and *the second* I want to learn English seriously.
(Subject 10 - Pretest)
- [2] I seldom read books that *the contain* like tenses, vocab, etc.
(Subject 14 - Pretest)
- [3] Before I'm going on to study *the sport journalism*.
(Subject 17 - Pretest)

In sentence [1] and [2], the word *second* was an adverb and the word *contain* was a verb. In sentence [3], the word *sport journalism* was an uncountable noun. Based on those characteristics, the italic words in the examples above required zero article Ø rather than *the*.

Then, 14 misused articles in the pretest were where the students tended to use *the* when *a* was required in the contexts, whereas, there were 3 misused articles in the posttest which also dealt with that matter, for examples:

- [4] I always get *the good mark* when I was in junior and senior high school.
(Subject 14 - Pretest)
- [5] I love to observe what *the composer* actually meant in song lyrics.
(Subject 17 - Pretest)
- [6] I choose *the university* which have English Literature program.
(Subject 24 - Pretest)

Next, 2 misused articles in the pretest and 1 misused article in the posttest were where the students tended to use *the* when *an* was required in the contexts, for examples:

- [7] Because English language is *the International language*.
(Subject 2 - Pretest)
- [8] I will join *the air traffic controller recruitment*.
(Subject 2 - Posttest)

The nouns in sentence [6] to [8] were non-specific in the contexts. Non-specific nouns required the article *a/an* rather than *the*. Therefore, the article *the* in the italic words was inappropriate. The nouns in sentence [4] to [6] required the article *a* because they were started with consonant sounds, whereas, the nouns in sentence [7] and [8] required the article *an* because they were started with vowel sounds.

Afterwards, 4 misused articles in the pretest were where the students tended to use *the* when other determiner was required in the contexts. There was 1 misused article in the posttest which also dealt with the same matter. Here were some examples:

- [9] One day when *the teacher* look for a student to accompany him to promote our school, I'm the one who chosen by my teacher. [*my teacher*]
(Subject 18 - Pretest)
- [10] I like one of the boyband's member and *the name* is Kyuhyun. [*his name*]
(Subject 19 - Pretest)

The constructions above required determiners rather than the article *the*. The nouns in sentence [9] and [10] required possessive pronouns which is more appropriate in the contexts.

Secondly, dealing with *a*, the students used 130 articles *a* in the pretest which consisted of 97 correct-used articles and 33 misused articles. Different from the pretest, the students only used 38 articles *a* in the posttest which consisted of 33 correct-used articles and 5 misused articles.

From 33 misused articles in the pretest, 22 misused articles were where the students tended to use *a* when zero article \emptyset was required in the contexts. Then, 5 misused articles in the posttest also dealt with this matter. Here were some examples:

- [11] I have *a curly hair*.
(Subject 1 - Pretest)
- [12] I have *a great memories* with my friend.
(Subject 19 - Pretest)
- [13] I hope I can get *a new knowledge*, many experiences.
(Subject 21 - Pretest)

Most of the problems involved uncountable nouns as in sentence [11] and [13]. There were also some which involved non-specific plural nouns as in sentence [12]. Based on these characteristics, the italic words in sentence [11] to [13] were not required the article *a*. There should be zero article \emptyset before those words.

The other 4 misused articles in the pretest were where the students tended to use *a* when *an* was required in the contexts, for examples:

- [14] I will make my dreams come true to be *a employee* of Department of Tourism.
(Subject 7 - Pretest)
- [15] Everybody thought I want become *a English teacher*.
(Subject 14 - Pretest)

The words *employee* and *English teacher* in sentence [14] and [15] were singular countable nouns. Therefore, they needed articles. Somehow, the article *an* was the most appropriate instead of the article *a*. It turned out this way because these words were started with vowel sounds.

The last 7 misused articles in the pretest were where the students tended to use *a* when *the* was required in the contexts, for example:

- [16] I am so glad to accepted as *a student* on this university.
(Subject 2 - Pretest)

Most of the problems dealt with the word *student* which has been identified before. According to this matter, the article *the* is the best one to be used.

Thirdly, dealing with *an*, the students used 12 articles *an* in the pretest which consisted of 8 correct-used articles and 4 misused articles. On the other hand, they used 8 articles *an* in the posttest which consisted of 7 correct-used articles and 1 misused article. From 4

misused articles in the pretest, 1 misused article was where the student tended to use *an* when zero article \emptyset was required in the context.

Then, 1 misused article in the pretest and 1 misused article in the posttest dealt with a matter, i.e. the student tended to use *an* when *a* was required in the context, for examples:

- [17] Now I want to search English course that have *an famous title* as like the best English course around Surabaya.
(Subject 9 - Pretest)
- [18] I am *an student* of English Literature in English Department of UNESA.
(Subject 11 - Posttest)

The words *famous title* and *student* in sentence [17] and [18] were non-specific countable nouns which started with consonant sounds, thus the article *a* was the most appropriate article supplied before this word.

The last 2 misused articles in the pretest were where the students tended to use *an* when *the* was required in the contexts.

Finally, dealing with \emptyset , the students used 433 zero article \emptyset in the pretest which consisted of 273 correct-used articles and 160 misused articles. On the contrary, the number of zero article \emptyset used by the students has decreased in the posttest. The students only used 182 zero article \emptyset in the posttest which consisted of 100 correct-used articles and 82 misused articles.

From 160 misused articles in the pretest, 58 misused articles were where the students tended to use zero article \emptyset when *a* was required in the contexts. Then, 28 out of 82 misused articles in the posttest involved the same matter. Here were some examples:

- [19] I have a family, *big family* that always give me some advice to face the world in recently for world globalization.
(Subject 4 - Pretest)
- [20] I learn it from *simple thing* likes vocabulary.
(Subject 10 - Pretest)
- [21] I lost my wallet in *bus* because I didn't keep my bag carefully.
(Subject 5 - Posttest)

The other 23 misused articles in the pretest were where the students tended to use zero article \emptyset when *an* was required in the contexts. There were 9 misused articles in the posttest which dealt with this matter. Here were some examples:

- [22] When I was on *senior high school*, my English teacher choose me to lead *English club* that he wanna made.
(Subject 9 - Pretest)
- [23] It is used as *International language*.
(Subject 11 - Pretest)
- [24] And I think English is *interesting subject*.
(Subject 24 - Posttest)

The majority of the misused articles as in the examples above were where the students intended countable nouns. Two ways of correcting these problems would be whether to pluralize them or to use *a/an*. The nouns in sentence [19] to [24] were analyzed as singular countable nouns in which required articles. Therefore, the nouns in sentence [19] to [21] required the article *a*. It turned out this way because they were started with consonant

sounds. In the other hand, the nouns in sentence [22] to [24] required the article *an*. It is so because they were started with vowel sounds.

The next 76 misused articles in the pretest and 45 misused articles in the posttest were where the students tended to use zero article \emptyset when *the* was required in the contexts, for examples:

- [25] In *first class* I also dislike *English lesson*.
(Subject 3 - Pretest)
- [26] I choose *English Department* because I want to serve my self for my notion, Indonesia.
(Subject 9 - Pretest)
- [27] The culture and the language is different that used in *United States of America*.
(Subject 14 - Pretest)

In sentence [25], the word *first class* was involving an ordinal form to show order, and then the word *English lesson* has been identified before by the writer. In sentence [26], the word *English Department* were involving institutions. It was worth noting that *English Department* was the commonest word occurred in the texts either in the pretest or in the posttest. In sentence [27], the word *United States of America* was involving the exceptions of countries. According to their characteristics and the rules on using the article *the*, the nouns in sentence [25] to [27] needed the article *the*.

The last 3 misused articles in the pretest were where the students tended to use zero article \emptyset when other determiner was required in the contexts, for examples:

- [28] Sometimes I also try using my English on my own project, a role-playing game on *personal computer*.
[my *personal computer*]
(Subject 11 - Pretest)
- [29] But with a help from my friends and *teacher*, I can pass all of the barrier. [my *teacher*]
(Subject 13 - Pretest)

The nouns in sentence [28] and [29] required possessive pronouns which is more appropriate in the contexts.

The Most Difficult Article

This study was also conducted to describe the most difficult article for the Intensive Course students. The table below listed and ordered the misused articles in the pretest and in the posttest from the most to the least common.

Table 2: frequencies of type of misused articles

Type of misused articles	Pretest	Posttest
	N	N
\emptyset for <i>the</i>	76	45
\emptyset for <i>a</i>	58	28
\emptyset for <i>an</i>	23	9
<i>a</i> for \emptyset	22	5
<i>the</i> for \emptyset	21	9
<i>the</i> for <i>a</i>	14	3
<i>a</i> for <i>the</i>	7	0
<i>a</i> for <i>an</i>	4	0
<i>the</i> for other determiner	4	1
\emptyset for other determiner	3	0
<i>the</i> for <i>an</i>	2	1
<i>an</i> for <i>the</i>	2	0
<i>an</i> for \emptyset	1	0
<i>an</i> for <i>a</i>	1	1
Total	238	102

Table 2 showed that zero article \emptyset ranked among three most common misused articles made by the students both in the pretest and in the posttest. \emptyset for *the* type ranked the first place in both tests with the sum (N) of 76 articles in the pretest and 45 articles in the posttest. \emptyset for *a* type ranked the second place with the sum of 58 articles in the pretest and 28 articles in the posttest. Then, \emptyset for *an* ranked the third place with the sum of 23 articles in the pretest and 9 articles in the posttest. Based on the fact, it could be inferred that zero article \emptyset was the most common misused article in the students' composition either in the pretest or in the posttest. The students seemed to ignore the rules of using articles, thus the overuse of zero article \emptyset was spread all over the texts.

DISCUSSION

From the result of the study above, it seems fair to conclude that the accuracy of using the English articles among the IC students prior and after joining the Intensive Course program is low. Furthermore, *zero article* \emptyset is the most difficult articles to be mastered by the Intensive Course students. According to Brown (1973:357), the accuracy rate of 90% or higher was a sign of acquiring or mastering the articles. In fact, the accuracy rate of the students on the use of articles is only 66% in the pretest and 64% in the posttest. In other word, the accuracy rate of the students in using all articles (\emptyset , *a*, *an*, and *the*) is less than 90% both in the pretest and in the posttest. Therefore, it can be inferred that the IC students have not fully mastered the English articles in the pretest as well as in the posttest. They make many mistakes in using all the English articles. This is in line with Rahayu's study of *The Error Analysis of Recount Text Made by the Eight Graders of SMPN 28 Surabaya* (2010) who stated that the eight grade students in SMPN 28 Surabaya applied wrong articles. Furthermore, her study showed that the students sometimes add unnecessary article for the noun which already uses an article, whereas this kind of error does is not showed in the IC students' compositions.

The conclusion above is also in line with Miller (2005:80), Master (1990:461), and Han et.al (2006:115) who said that the problem on the use of articles was the most difficult aspect faced by non-native speakers and often indicated in most of their compositions. It means that the English articles are difficult by most of non-native students. The main reason which causes this problem is the fact that they do not have the article system in their first language (L1) or their mother tongue. It causes the students to be unfamiliar with the English article rules. If non-native learners have the article system in their L1, they would be able to transfer their knowledge of the L1 article system to help them in dealing with the English articles. On the contrary, learners with L1 that lack of articles could not rely on their L1 knowledge and instead show more variations in their article choices (Ionin et al., 2003; Ionin et al., 2008; Han et al., 2006).

The problem above is also faced by Indonesian learners. Although, there are articles in Bahasa Indonesia, the use of these articles is not the same with the English articles. The English articles are closely similar to which is called *kata sandang* in Bahasa Indonesia (*sang*, *para*,

si), such as *sang Raja, para Kyai, si Kancil* (Kridaleksana, 1994 as cited in Sobar, 2010). The words *sang* and *si* mean singular, whether the word *para* means plural. In addition, there are no certain rules related with zero article Ø in Bahasa Indonesia. It is a fact that the rules on the use of articles in both languages are very different. Therefore, Indonesian learners and also the Intensive Course students in this matter could not rely on the L1 knowledge in dealing with the English articles. Based on the result of the study, the Intensive Course students made various mistakes in using the articles. They have not fully mastered the English articles especially on using zero article Ø.

Somehow, the English articles must be mastered by the Intensive Course students because the articles are the most common word used in English language (Butler, 2002:452). They also become an indicator whether a noun is a specific item or a general item. Hence, stating an article whether it is *a*, *an*, *the*, or *zero article* before a noun is a must in English to avoid an ambiguous meaning of the noun. It is also due to a matter that the article system is a marker of certainty.

Unfortunately, the IC students seem to ignore those matters. This situation is revealed by the results of the data analysis in the study. The students make mistakes in almost all articles. The overuse of *zero article* Ø is scattered equally throughout all article contexts not only in the pretest but also in the posttest. They also tend to use *the* in contexts where it is not required. Misused articles can cause the reader to misunderstand the message implied. These rarely caused misunderstanding in spoken language but misunderstanding usually happened when the ESL students have to write (Master, 1990:461).

There is a plausible factor that serves as the reason of the students' ignorance in using the articles before nouns. This factor causes the accuracy rate of the students on the use of articles either in the pretest or in the posttest is low. This phenomenon might be happened because the materials of the IC 2012 or the students' handouts do not include a specific discussion about the English articles. There are also no practices prepared in the handouts. Without materials which discussed the articles, the students will not pay more attention to the use of articles before nouns. Moreover, they could not practice more in order to master the articles which are very important in writing English.

CONCLUSIONS

It could be concluded that the Intensive Course students still make many mistakes on the use of the articles both in the pretest and in the posttest. In fact, their accuracy in using the articles in the posttest and in the pretest is low. They do not reach the minimum standard in acquiring the English articles in both tests yet. Misused articles are found throughout the texts. These cover all English articles i.e. *the*, *a*, *an*, and *zero article* Ø.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the study is the overuse of *zero article* Ø. Most of the Intensive Course students make many mistakes in using *zero article*

Ø. They tend to use *zero article* Ø when *the*, *a*, or *an* are required in the contexts.

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