

Persistent Errors in English Writing and speech Made by Urdu Undergraduates at UAJK: A Case of Mother Tongue Interference

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Abstract

The learning process of second or foreign language learners can be improvised by identifying and rectifying the errors these learners commonly made. Errors found in the inter-languages of second language learners are broadly categorized as developmental and interference errors. The developmental errors reflect a normal pattern of development common among all language learners while the interference errors are the result of overgeneralization and of fossilization of the rules which are transferred from the learners' native languages to the target language. This paper deals with the most persistent and numerous kind of interference errors i.e., article errors, found in written composition written and speech production of Urdu learners of English. The subjects were forty-one undergraduate students enrolled in BS English; first semester of the academic session 2014-18 at University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. Forty-one pieces of written composition were collected from these subjects on the topic 'A/An (terrifying/ happy/ displeasing/ exciting/ unforgettable) experience' of their lives and ten participants were randomly selected and audio-recorded whilst narrating 'I have a dream'. The results of the study show the most problematic area in the use of articles is the omission and the substitution of definite article 'the'. It appears that incorrect omission and substitution of 'the' is not independent of context. These Urdu speakers overuse 'Ø' before nouns 'made particular in context' and 'the' before 'bare plural and mass nouns in generic context'.

Keywords: Error Analysis, L1 interference, interlanguage errors, articles, bare plurals, Urdu L2 learners/L2ers.

1. Introduction

It was with the emergence of the generative-transformational theory in linguistics and the cognitive movement in psychology that language learners' errors were started tolerating and accepted as a common phenomenon in language learning (Huang, 1974). The new era began where learners' errors were considered to provide information about the learning process and chance for teachers to see procedures of both teaching and learning. Gass and Selinker (2001) explain that a mistake can be self-centered, but an error is systematic. Mistakes are slips of tongue that can be self-corrected, whereas errors are caused by a learner's inadequate knowledge of the target language (Mourtaga, 2004). Errors occur repeatedly and cannot be recognized by the learner. Hence, only the teacher or researcher could locate them. Errors provide the researcher/teacher an evidence of what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in learning a language. Hourani (2008, p.11) classifies errors as, 'Interlingual errors and intralingual errors. Interlingual or interference errors are those which are the result of the native language influence whilst intralingual or developmental errors are those which are due to the language being

learned'. Thus the analysis of the errors and correction through feedback is essential in the process of language learning. Corder (1967) mentions the usefulness of error analysis in three aspects: to the researcher, to the teacher and to the learner himself. Seeing the results from error analysis a research, and considering the approaches and the methods enforced by the researchers, a teacher may develop language teaching material to help language learner who ultimately realizes his errors in the process of language learning. For these reasons, present research focuses on the most common errors in written texts and speech of Urdu L2ers of English, and after analysis it suggests possible solutions.

English is the second compulsory language in the state of Azad Kashmir (Pakistan) and it is taught as a compulsory subject from nursery to graduation level almost in all educational institutions. Despite having spent 12 years in these institutions, the level of English language proficiency of students in Azad Kashmir is far from satisfactory. The students being weak in English, especially in their speech, commit numerous errors and face a uphill battle to gain proper understanding of the language. The present study pin points four major language problems in the writing of Urdu speakers and finds that errors in articles use are the headmost among these top four categories of errors. Indeed, in Azad Kashmir (Pakistan) the English article system is learned in the traditional descriptive grammar framework. The use of articles is presented as a set of rules. These rules are based on prescriptive dictation. Fowler and Aaron (1992, p.748-788; 1995, p.727-728)¹⁵ summarize the rules for article use in English as follows:

1. *'The'* is a definite article, it precedes a noun when the thing named is already known to the reader.
2. *'A'* and *'an'* are indefinite articles, they precede a noun when the thing named is not already known to the reader.
3. Use *'a(n)'* with a singular count noun and do not use them with a plural noun.
4. Do not use *'the'* with a plural noun or a mass noun when the noun refers generally to all representatives of what it names. Use *'the'* when referring to one or more specific representatives of what the noun names.

In other words, abstract nouns, mass nouns and plural count nouns can occur with zero or null article. These are general rules that do not reflect the wide array of environments where native English speakers rely on intuition rather than generalized conventions. Hence, this area is the major source of difficulty for Urdu speakers. For, the language that Urdu speakers have grown up with and speak daily carries no articles or grammatical morphemes that behave in the same way as English articles do (Sing, 1996). For the reason, this is quite interesting to investigate what kind of mistake Urdu speakers make in the use of English article, and what are the possible factors that influence the use of these articles?

¹⁵*The Little, Brown Handbook* is described by the authors as being a guide to standard written English (Fowler & Aaron 1995:xvi). Although the book is mainly intended for native English speakers the most recent edition acknowledges English as a Second Language (ESL) speakers.

2. Literature Review

The prior knowledge facilitates all types of learning, and language learning is not an exception. When one is learning a second or a foreign language, one would try to use the existing linguistic knowledge to assist the learning (Ringbom, 2007). This may be the reason why transfer happens in the first place. The role of language transfer in second language acquisition has been widely investigated by number of researchers since the concept emerged.

Language transfer comes from behaviorist theories that consider the interference from prior knowledge as the main impediment to learning. Fries (1945), one of the major proponent of behaviorism and structuralism formulated Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) which was later developed by Lado (1957). CAH compares the structures of two or more languages with the attempt of finding out the points of differences that are the main source of difficulty for language learner. It asserts that the degree of difficulty depends primarily on the extent to which the Target/second Language (TL/L2) pattern is similar to or difficult from a Native Language (NL/L1) pattern. When L1 and L2 are similar it is easier to learn L2 through transference from L1 whereas differences between two languages will cause interference of L1 (Ellis, 1994). Ergo, CAH asserts that learning of a second language influenced by the first language. On the other hand, in the 1960s Corder and his colleagues established Error Analysis (EA), as an alternative to CAH, which seeks to find out more about the nature of learners' errors. McLaughlin (1987, p. 67) cites Dulay and Burt (1972) state that '...the majority of errors that children make reflect the influence of the target second language more than the influence of the child's first language'. To wit, interlanguage¹⁶ errors are not merely the outcome of L1 transference or interference; yet, the learners' knowledge gap in their target language can be the source of these errors. Error Analysis thus tries to identify and elucidate errors in a learner's interlanguage.

Since 1970s, many researchers conducted studies by using different error analysis procedures in order to identify the frequency, nature and the cause of the errors in the writings of EFL learners. Kim, (2006) conducted a study with two-hundred 10th grade Korean EFL learners using their English translation of Korean sentences. She identified 1122 errors in which transfer errors resulting from L1 structure were higher (24%) than overgeneralization errors (23%). Furthermore, she identified the 1122 detected errors in terms of six domains and subdivided them into 22 linguistic categories. Her findings revealed that errors in articles were most common (354) and that there were only 8 errors in word order and 2 in voice.

Khodabande, (2007) identified and classified Iranian EFL students' difficulties. For this study, 58 male and female graduate students of English were given a test which included thirty Persian and thirty English headlines and were asked to translate them. All the students' translations were analyzed in order to investigate possible problems in translating headlines. The results of the research indicated that the graduate students had grammatical and lexical errors in their headlines. Most local errors were caused by misuse and omission of prepositions, articles, auxiliaries, lack of subject-verb agreement, and faulty lexical choice.

¹⁶The term is coined by Selinker (1969) which is defined as 'the interim grammars constructed by second language learners on their way to the target language.'

Pongpairoj's (2007) study notes that many researchers employed error analysis to enquire into errors of articles made by L2 learners. These include: Kuribara, 1999; Robertson, 2000; Trenkic, 2000, 2002, 2007; Leung, 2001, 2005; Ionin and Wexler, 2003; White, 2003a; Goad and White, 2004; and Ionin, Ko, and Wexler, 2004. These studies indicate that the acquisition of English article system remains one of the biggest challenges for ESL or EFL learners. Additionally, the issue becomes more striking when it comes to the acquisition of English article by the learners whose native language doesn't have an article system. To illustrate, Ionin et al. (2004) examined article choices in the L2-English of adult speakers of Russian and Korean and found that both groups overused *the* with [+specific] indefinites, and overused *a* with [-specific] definites. Ionin et al. (2007) compared L2 learners whose L1 has articles (Spanish) with L2 learners from an article-less L1 (Russian) background. The results indicated that the Spanish learners transferred article semantics from their L1 to their L2, and they distinguished between *the* and *a* on the basis of definiteness. On the other hand, the Russian speakers, in the absence of L1 transfer, were less accurate than the Spanish speakers, as they use 'the' and 'a' interchangeably.

Bukhari and Hussain, (2011) conducted a study to investigate the errors of Pakistani students in prepositions and articles. The main focus of the study was to analyze the errors of students in articles and prepositions. They found that the total number of errors made by students in the use of articles was 152. Out of which (127) 83.56 % was observed in indefinite articles and (25) 16.44% was observed in definite articles. They also found that 52.63% of the total errors were omission errors, 19.08% were insertion errors and 28.29% were confusion errors. The results also revealed that Pakistani students faced more difficulties in learning indefinite articles in their writings. But, the study didn't explain the reasons behind these difficulties.

To sum up, there has been a considerable amount of research conducted by scholars on the processes of acquisition of English articles by non-native learners of English; yet, the studies carried out about the process of acquisition of English article by Urdu speakers i.e. an articleless language, are very rare. Therefore, the study employs EA techniques to identify errors made by Urdu speaker in appropriate use of English and utilizes CA to explain those errors. For, it would be of great theoretical and practical significance to get a relatively realistic picture of why Urdu learners misuse English articles. The situation also demands to speculate the possible solutions to this issue by providing some beneficial pedagogical suggestions for teachers who may be able to decide then what to emphasize when teaching English articles.

3. Methods

In the present study, error analysis has been utilized to investigate interlanguage errors in the written composition and oral production of Urdu speakers. The procedural analysis of Ellis's (1997) is followed in this study. This procedural analysis has the following steps:

1. Collection of a sample of learner language
2. Identification of errors
3. Classification of errors
4. Analysis of errors
5. Explanation of errors

Following, two samples of the data were collected from the Urdu speakers (41 written composition and 10 oral productions). The samples were examined to identify the most common errors. To analyze the learners' errors systematically, the errors found in the corpus were then classified into four grammatical categories.

The following section presents information about the participants and discusses the procedure adopted for the study.

3.1 Participants

The subjects were forty-one (41) undergraduate students enrolled in BS program in the first semester of the academic session (2014-2018) in department of English at University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. The total number of students in that session was sixty-one 61. After asking about their mother tongue, I shortlisted the sample and excluded fifteen (15) participants. These participants were having Pahari, Gojri and Hindko (other languages of the region) as their L1. This short listing was necessary because the present work aims at investigating the interlanguages of only Urdu learners of English. It is important to mention here that these participants were the children of Pahari, Gojri and Hindko speaking parents. But since their childhood, the parents of these subjects were using Urdu with them at home and none of the subjects spoke languages other than Urdu in their daily course of life. For the reason, the influence of a third language does not seem to affect the Urdu learners' acquisition of English article system. So, forty-six (46) participants having Urdu as their L1 were selected for this research. The subjects were also similar in terms of age (ranging from 19-20 years old) and L2 exposure (approximately 12 years). All the participants were L2 learners (L2ers) of English who formally started learning English between ages 4-6 (mean age, 5 years old) years old and continued learning it as a compulsory subject at secondary and high school. Participants' exposure to English was quite limited especially in listening and speaking.

To judge the general proficiency level of the participants in English, this homogenous sample of 46 subjects was classified using the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) (Syndicate U.C.L.E., 2001), paper and pen version 2 (see, Appendix A). The test consists of 60 multiple-choice questions. On the basis of test result, 5 subjects were excluded from the test as they scored too low i.e. below 30, in the test. Finally, the subjects of the study were 41 undergraduates at UAJ&K.

3.2 Procedure

Forty-one written compositions and 10 speech productions were collected from the participants. For the written composition the participants were asked to freely write on the topic '*A/An (terrifying/ happy/ displeasing/ exciting/ unforgettable) experience of life*'. Then 10 participants were randomly selected and audio recorded whilst narrating '*I have a dream*'. The data was gathered to identify the predominant errors in the writing and speech of Urdu L2ers. The written compositions were collected in March 2014. The subjects were informed that they were going to take part in a research study but to get the more accurate data the subjects were not told what the researcher is exactly trying to locate through this data. To reduce the pressure on the subjects, there was no restriction of time and also on the length of the composition. The subjects completed

the writing task in average time frame of 45-50 minutes. After the interval of one month, 10 participants were randomly selected and audio-recorded using Samsung Galaxy S4. The approximate time of each of the recording was 7-10 minutes.

4. Results

Following Corder's (1974) procedural analysis, the written data was analyzed and errors found in the corpus were classified into four grammatical categories namely; errors in the use of articles, prepositions, tenses and morphology. With error tags, the occurrence frequency of each error type is counted and tabulated. The following table illustrates the number and percentage of errors in each grammatical category:

Table 1: Grammatical errors found in 41 written compositions

Types of Error		No of Errors	Percentage of errors	
Articles	1.Omission	The	174	44%
		a/an	63	16%
	2.Substitution	⊙/The	129	32%
		The/a	31	08%
Total		397	100%	
Morpho-syntactic	1.Subject- Verb agreement			
		Omission of singular 's'	98	35%
		Addition of singular 's'	41	15%
		'Was/were' substitution	83	30%
	2.Nouns and Pronouns agreement		52	19%
Total		274	100%	
Prepositions	1.Wrong substitution		137	72%
	2.Omission of preposition		52	28%
Total		189	100%	
Tenses	1.Simple present instead of simple past		61	46%
	2.Wrong verb form		72	54%
Total		133	100%	
Total		993	100	

Table 1 indicates that the total number of errors made by Urdu L2ers was 993, out of which (397) i.e. 40 % of errors were observed in the use of articles, (274) i.e. 27% in the use of morphology; whereas, (189) i.e 19% errors show incorrect use of preposition, and 13 % that make 133 errors in number, display misuse of Tenses. The categorization of errors shows that the lowest number of errors among the grammatical categories is errors in tenses accounting for 13% of the total number of errors in the corpus.

In bottom-up consideration, the participants seem not have clear understanding of when to use present and past tense as they have substituted the simple present for simple past. The total amount of 46% of the erroneous use of simple present tense is witnessed in the data. Moreover, the

subjects have used wrong form of the verb enormously (54%) in the data. It can be seen in the following examples:

- 1.a. I drink water and break my fast because I dint have energy. (drank, broke)
- b. The thing hurted me in my childhood is the death of my mother. (was)
- c. My father had finish his breakfast. (finished)
- d. we had plan to go to Murree. (planned)
- e. I have saw so many things. (seen)

The result is not surprising since English notion of tense is confusing to the Urdu L2 learners, as Urdu unlike English, lacks a comprehensive morphological process of verb inflection and auxiliaries are used to indicate time.

Similarly, the results demonstrate the incorrect use of preposition as deletion and wrong substitution of prepositions is evident in the data. The highest frequency of errors is found in wrong substitution of prepositions (72%). The confusion can be the result of L1 interference because the prepositional system of both the languages (Urdu and English) are quite different. For example, the translation of Urdu preposition 'se' is different in English language, in different contexts it can be 'of', 'with' and 'from'. Consider the instances below:

- 2.a. muje apne bai se der lgta hai
I my brother of afraid be
I am afraid of my brother.
- b. Wo muj se naraz hai
she me with angry be
She is angry with me.
- c. Wo bazar se ebi wapis aya hai
He market from just come has
He has just come from the market.

The diverse use of Urdu preposition 'se' is evident in the above examples. The other Urdu preposition also behave in the same manner, for example Urdu preposition 'me' is used in some English context as 'in' and 'to' and in others it is used as 'into' (Bilal et.al, 2013). Hence, these tiny words make a complex system that is not easy to grasp for the Urdu L2ers and they commit. Following are some examples found in the written composition of Urdu L2ers:

- 3.a. I was afraid from my brother. (of)
- b. If we compare this earth quake with the earth quake in 1935. (to)
- c. We went to the University in bus. (by)

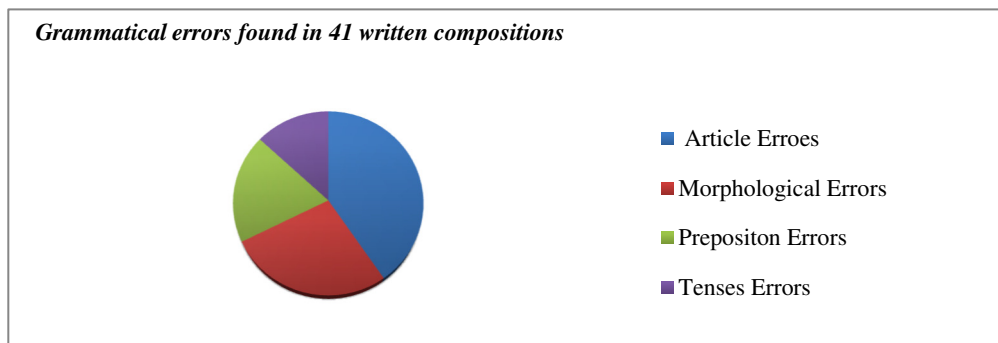
The sentences 3(a-c) reveal word-to-word translation of L1 into the target language. The Urdu learners have picked the equivalent L2 prepositions 'from' for 'se', 'with' for 'k-sath' and 'in' for 'me'. Another reason behind the misuse of preposition can also be the erratic nature of English prepositions.

The results also show another problematic area for Urdu L2ers is the subject-verb agreement (81%), and noun and pronoun agreement (19%). It is apparent that the type of the tense most affected by subject-verb agreement is the simple present tense. On top of that, in simple present errors of omission of 3rd person singular has the highest (35%) number of occurrences. The examples are given below:

- 4.a. My body feel pain. (feel)
 b. She cry when she describe her feelings. (cries, describes)
 c. The cries of people makes us not to sleep even today. (make)
 d. Her shoes, necklace and dress was awesome. (were)
 e. The huge crowd of the students were praying restlessly in the ground. (was)

If the subject is singular, the verb must be in singular form and vice versa. But, it is clear in the examples presented above that the participants have not used the 3rd person singular marker 's' correctly and they have erroneously substituted 'was' and 'were'. Subjects were able to correctly use the 3rd person morpheme just over 50 % of the time on the written tests. In other words, in these examples the verbs that follow the subjects do not agree with the subjects in case of number. This misuse can be due to L1 transfer because there is no distinct third person singular form of present tense verbs does exist in Urdu. For reasons of time and space, the detailed analyzing process of these errors is not shown here. These errors are just listed to identify the most frequent error in the speech of Urdu L2ers. But this short overview indicates that interlanguage interference does exist.

Over and above, the data demonstrates that article errors are the top one error type with the highest occurrence frequency. These results can be best displayed with the help of following pie-chart:



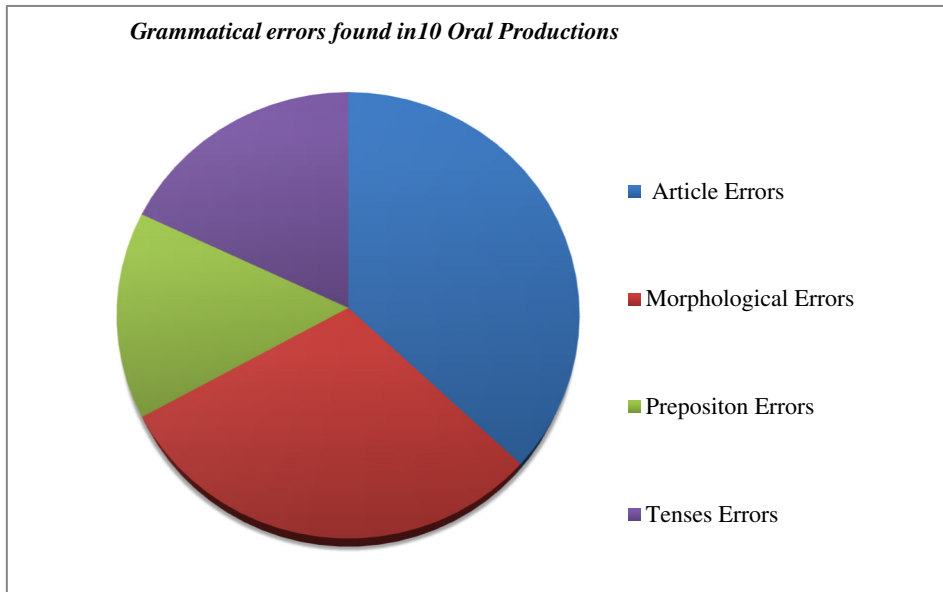
The above chart displays article usage is a major problem for Urdu L2ers. This is because of the fact that in Pakistani context, teachers usually give more attention to spelling errors, morphological errors or errors in the use of tenses etc. English articles are taught to students in junior middle schools and after that there is no further educational process about English articles. As, it is a general perception that article do not contribute much to the meaning of a sentence. For the reason, the L2 teachers are busy otherwise in helping L2ers improving sentence structures. Likewise the students reduce their attention to the use of articles, no matter if it is in their oral or written English. To confirm the results of the written data, 10 subjects were randomly selected and

audio recorded while narrating 'I have a dream'. The results indicate that Urdu L2ers of English face die-hard problems in English article use. Consider the following table:

Table 2: Grammatical Errors Found in 10 Oral Productions

Types of Error		No of Errors	Percentage of errors	
Articles	1.Omission	the	41	43%
		a/an	14	14%
	2.Substitution	⊙/The	24	25%
		a/the	17	18%
Total		96	37%	
Morpho-syntactic	1. Subject- Verb agreement			
	Omission of singular "s"		44	57%
	Was/were substitution		07	09%
	2.Nouns and Pronouns agreement		26	34%
Total		77	30%	
Prepositions	1.Wrong substitution		26	70%
	2.Omission of preposition		11	30%
Total		37	15%	
Tenses	1.Simple present instead of simple past		27	57%
	2.Wrong verb form		20	43%
Total		47	18%	
Total		257	100	

The above table shows the number of errors the subjects made in their speech production. The errors are shown in terms of percentages. In the second sample of the data, tenses errors occur most frequently than prepositional errors. We can see that most of the tense errors were made because of the using of the present tense when the past tense should be used in the context. On the other hand, omission of 3rd person singular is the most common among the morphological errors. For reasons of space, the analyzing process of these errors will not be shown here, again. These errors are just listed to identify the most frequent error in the speech of Urdu L2ers. The data tells that learners of English have relatively more problems with English articles than with any other grammar area. The following pie-chart exhibits the real pictures:



In order to compare the results of 41 written compositions and 10 oral productions, the percentage of the main error types occurring in both sets of data are listed in the table below. Both sets of data illustrate that Urdu learners of English performed worst as far as the correct use of articles is concerned. The table below virtually illustrates this fact:

Table 3: Percentage of errors found in 41 written compositions and 10 speech productions

Types of Error	Percentage of errors found in 41 written compositions	Percentage of errors found in 10 speech productions
Articles	40	37
Morphological	28	30
Prepositions	19	15
Tenses	13	18

In written compositions, the occurrence percentage of article errors is 40% whereas in speech production it is 37%. The result is the proof that articles are the notorious elements for the Urdu L2ers of English to get mastery on. Therefore, it is interesting and useful to think of the causes of

errors in article use. For decades, linguists have been trying to determine what exactly accounts for the article errors made by L2 learners. One of the most mentioned causes is mother tongue interference (Bennui, 2008). The present study aims at exploring if the errors in the writings of Urdu L2ers can be traced back to mother tongue interference or these errors are the developmental errors in the interlanguages of these learners of English. For this purpose, the subsequent section presents the detailed discussion of the article errors. The discussion starts by listing the article errors from the both sets of data in the table below:

Table 4: Percentage of errors found in 41 written compositions and 10 speech productions

Types of Errors			No of Errors	Percentage of errors in 41 written compositions	No of Errors	Percentage of errors in 10 speech productions	Total number of each error
Articles	Omission	The	186	44%	41	43%	227
		a/an	63	16%	14	14%	77
	Total		249	63%	55	57%	304
	Substitution	Ø/The	117	32%	24	25%	141
		a/the	31	08%	17	18%	48
	Total		148	37%	41	43 %	189
Total			397	100	96	100%	493

The table shows that the subjects have committed omissions and substitution errors, such as omission of 'the' before unique nouns and substitution of 'the' instead of Ø before abstract nouns, etc. The percentage of omission of articles in written composition and speech production is 63% and 57%¹⁷, whereas the percentage of substitution error is 37% and 43% respectively. It represents that the Urdu L2ers are far from fully acquiring the use of English articles.

The results in the data seem to clarify that the rate of omission errors is greater than the rate of substitution errors as the subject have omitted the English article in 304 obligatory contexts and wrongly supplied them in 189 contexts where they were not required. It shows that a learners' first language has much effect on the acquisition of a second language. Sing (1994) explained that Urdu noun phrases appear in a 'bare form' without any markers.

This can be the reason why Urdu speakers when write in English make errors by not using articles in front of noun phrases. On the other hand, substitution errors are commonly referred as developmental errors in the interlanguage of L2ers (James, 1998). To explore further the reasons behind the omissions and substitution errors, these errors in both sets of the data were summed up (493) and then divided into 16 article error categories adapted from Richards (1971) and Chakorn (2005). The rationale behind choosing this classification is that these researchers have categorized almost all type of article errors committed by the learners of [-Art] languages. The article errors^[17] were classified into these categories using code words, for instance, 'otun' which stands

¹⁷ The previous studies have quoted more errors in oral production. The reason behind the slight low percentage in oral production in this study, can be the less amount of data obtained through oral production. For, the students were quite reluctant while speaking English and even discussing about 'I have a dream'.

for omission of *'the'* before unique nouns (see Appendix, B).

Table 5: Categories of Article Errors in 41 written compositions and 10 speech productions

No	Categories	Freq uency	Perce ntage
1	omission of "the" before unique nouns	57	12%
2	omission of "the" before nouns defined by adjectives of nationality	26	5%
3	omission of "the" before nouns made particular in context	104	21%
4	omission of "the" before a noun modified by a participle	21	4%
5	omission of "the" before superlatives	19	4%
6	omission of "a" before nouns	50	10%
7	omission of "a" before singular nouns defined by adjectives	27	5%
8	"the" used instead of Ø before proper names	34	7%
9	"the" used instead of Ø before abstract noun	29	6%
10	"the" used instead of Ø before nouns behaving like abstract nouns	6	1%
11	"the" used instead of Ø before plural nouns	72	15%
12	"the" instead of "a"	28	6%
13	"a" used instead of "the" before unique nouns	06	1%
14	"a" instead of Ø before a plural noun	02	0%
15	"a" instead of Ø before uncountable nouns	0	0%
16	"a" instead of "the"	12	3%

In the above table, categories (1-7) show omission and categories (9-16) show substitution of articles. The participants made 15 out of the 16 types of article errors. None of the participant used 'a' before countable nouns. The findings indicate that the subjects most frequently omitted *'the'* before nouns made particular in context, comprising 21% of all errors. Whereas, in case of substitution errors, insertion of *'the'* before Ø plural nouns is the predominant error, comprising 15% of the total errors. In other words, these errors can be classified as interlingual and intralingual errors, respectively. The data supports the findings of Gass and Selinker, (2001) who state that the errors made by L2ers match to these two types.

The findings of the study reveal that the Urdu L2ers experience L1 interference as they omitted articles in the required contexts. It also depicts that the omission of definite article *'the'* is the frequently observed problem for these learners. Richards and Schmidt (2002) classified errors of omission of *'the'* before nouns as interlingual errors for the learners of article-less languages. As can be seen, this error is the result of negative transfer from L1 into target language. Following are some examples of omission errors observed in the data.

- 5.(a) At that day I realized that #telephone is a very useful invention:
- (b) That information could be shared through #email.
- (c) #Earthquake had ruined the city in one jerk.
- (d) #Girl was scared of the snakes.

Examples 5 (a) and (b) indicate that Urdu L2ers face problems in generic use of article as the participants have used *zero* article with the individual instance of the kind ‘*telephone*’ and ‘*email*’. In other words they are failed to use the correct article in the obligatory context. The possible reason behind this faulty use of *zero* article can be the negative transfer from their native language. Urdu is an article-less language and in this language the genericity of nouns is expressed through bare singular and plurals, as can be seen in example below:

6. (a) kutt-e ki Char tangien hoti hain
 dog-sing-Gen of four legs present be
 A/The dog has four legs.
 (b) kutt-on ki Char tangien hoti hain
 dog-plu-Gen of four legs present be
 Dogs have four legs.

Example 6 (a) and (b) illustrate that omission of ‘*the*’ and ‘*a*’ in generic context (5a, b) can be the result of L1 transfer. As, considerable amount of previous research has pointed out that L2ers first think a sentence in their L1 and then translate it into target language. Moreover, in 5 (c) and (d) ‘*earthquake*’ and ‘*girl*’ werethe instances of the second mention of the words but a number of participants didn’t use ‘*the*’ before these ‘*nouns made particular in context*’. In these example errors can also be traced back to L1 interference. Sing (1994, p. 220) states that NPs having prototypical agent properties are definite in Hindi/Urdu. Even an inanimate agent gets definite reading if it has agent properties. Consider the example below:

7. bijli-ne gar jala diya
 lightning-ERG house burn give-PST
 The lightning burned the house.

She also claims that an experiencer is always definite, as is the case in,

8. lerka hañsa
 boy laugh PST
 The boy laughed.

In example 7, the bare agentive NP ‘*bijli/lightning*’ and in (8) experiencer ‘*lerka*’ both are definite and same is the case with nouns in 5 (c) and (d) i.e earthquake and girl. It’s quite obvious that the participants first constructed the sentences in Urdu and translated it in English without supplying article ‘*the*’. The learners might have thought these nouns definite even without the use of article ‘*the*’; so, they incorrectly selected ‘ \emptyset ’ rather than ‘*the*’. It’s noteworthy that the frequency of indefinite ‘*a*’ is less as compared to the definite ‘*the*’. Perhaps greater accuracy with indefinite singular articles by Urdu L2ers of English is because of the presence of a quasi indefinite article ‘*ek/one*’ in Urdu. The novel entities in Urdu discourse are introduced using this quasi indefinite ‘*ek*’. For example:

9. Wahan se *ek badsha* ka guzar howa.

There/that place a king pass by be
 A *king* passed by that place.

As, the numeral '*ek*' serve almost as the indefinite article in Urdu, the Urdu L2ers face less difficulty in using indefinite article and correctly supply it in most of the context. The misuse of indefinite article in the data is mostly observed in generic context where Urdu prohibits its use.

Besides, a closer look at the overuse of articles by the participants can provide an interesting insight into the developing interlanguage systems of the L2ers. The overuse of 'a' is not found in the study. Whilst, the frequency of overuse of the definite article is quite higher, indicating that learners tend to over-generalize the use of the definite article in their acquisition process. Consider the examples below:

- 10.a. Girl was afraid of *the* snakes.
- b. He was in need of *the* money.
- c. I faced the situation with *the* courage and never *give up*.
- d. We all were having party at *the* Toli Peer.

Examples 6 (a-d) display the incorrect insertion of '*the*'. The data illustrates that Urdu L2ers have greater tendency to use '*the*' before bare plural, mass and proper nouns. The phenomenon is suggestive of the occurrence of "the-flooding" chronicled in earlier studies (Huebner, 1983; Master, 1997). In other words, these errors can be the signs of the developmental errors. For, Urdu L2ers of English have used zero and indefinite article almost perfectly but they face difficulties in using definite article. Thus the results indicate that these learners are far from the acquisition of definite '*the*'. The main cause of this failure is the interference from L1 and also the erratic nature of the English definite article '*the*'.

Conclusion

This paper is a part of PhD research. The analysis of this study is ongoing. However, the paper reveals some interesting preliminary findings of article use. The zero (\emptyset) and the indefinite article (a) are less problematic for the Urdu L2ers. Whereas, the negative transfer from L1 results in a higher rate of wrong selection of the definite article (the). Lardiere (2009) is of the view that the features that are present in the L1 such as definiteness and plurality have to be reconfigured or remapped from the way they are represented in the L1 into new formal configurations in the target language. In Urdu there is no definite article, so it is harder for learners to reconfigure the [+definite] feature in the L1 to a new configuration on the lexical item '*the*' in the L2. But, the task of reconfiguring the [-definite] feature is likely possible for the Urdu learners because '*ek*' functions as a quasi indefinite article in this language.

The findings reflect that under the influence of negative transfer, Urdu L2ers tend to omit '*the*' when necessary and overuse it in non-obligatory context. It appears that incorrect omission and substitution of articles is not independent of context. The participants used ' \emptyset ' before nouns made particular in context and '*the*' before bare plural and mass nouns in generic context. So the point worth noting is that use of articles in English generics is not easy to acquire for Urdu speakers. Hence, more investigation is needed on the use of English articles in generic context.

Errors in second/foreign language acquisition indicate what aspects of the target language are particularly problematic to certain individual as well as groups of learners. Hence Error Analysis is a useful technique which can be implied to give some pedagogical suggestions to overcome L2ers errors (either interlingual or intralingual). The findings of the paper suggest that in Pakistani context, instructions must explicitly focus on teaching of the generic uses of English articles.

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