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An analysis of errors made by Burundian english learners in the use of some definitive and indefinite determiners : the case of the ,A (N) ,(A) few and (A) little in " 1 L M "

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UNIVERSITY OF BURUNDI

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

AN ANALYSIS OF ERRORS MADE BY BURUNDIAN ENGLISH LEARNERS IN THE USE OF SOME DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE DETERMINERS : THE CASE OF *THE*, *A (N)*, *(A) FEW AND (A) LITTLE* IN "1 L M"

By

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE : **"Licence en Langue et Littérature Anglaises"**.

Bujumbura, June 1999

DEDICATION

To my late father

To my dear mother

To my brothers and sisters

To my dear husband.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this work calls for the expression of deep gratitude to a number of people who contributed to it.

First and foremost, I wish to express my special thanks to Dr Firmard SABIMANA, Senior Lecturer at the University of BURUNDI, who, despite his numerous academic responsibilities and commitments accepted to supervise this work. He assisted this work from its first pages to its completion.

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Claire INAMUCO

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Chapter.I : INTRODUCTION

I.1. Background and statement of the problem

Foreign languages were introduced in Africa during the colonial period. In the past, English was used by the world of trade. In Africa, however, the English language was generally used as a medium of countries which were members of the Commonwealth.

English was introduced in Burundi secondary schools in the late 1960's. It was seen as a colonial language. English was then taught for many years with no clear role. That is why Burundians, especially students, have never considered it as an important course.

Today, English is the most widely used language all over the world. As a matter of fact, almost all countries have felt the need to use English for different purposes. Not only do these countries have to use English for political and economic reasons but also they must use it for cultural exchanges. And this last reason seems to be the crucial standpoint in learning any language.

As far as BURUNDI is concerned, Burundians have to learn English for political and economic reasons. This need is justified by our geographical situation. In fact, we have no access to the sea. So, we must co-operate with our neighbours-Tanzanians, Ugandans and Kenyans who are English speakers. Apart from that politico-economic need, no one should ignore that English is a language of education. Most studies seem to be published in English. Hence, whether one is studying Applied Sciences, Medicine, Technology, Business Administration, Sociology,... or other sciences, one needs some knowledge of English. Therefore, it is up to all Burundians to see the crucial role of learning

English for communicative needs. In the same line of ideas, Norrish (1983 :3) agrees that

> *language isn't a set of facts to be learned but a medium of expressing thoughts, feelings and communicating with other people.*

In other words, if one knows a language, he/she uses it and benefits it from all kinds of exchanges with other people.

For the case of BURUNDI, many schools are poor and lack suitable materials for learning. This situation prevailing in many schools is dangerous where pupils have little chance of experiencing English, thus adopting efficient strategies in their attempt to learn the new language. As a matter of fact, many schools don't have textbooks, teaching materials, libraries, qualified teachers... As a consequence, a great number of pupils are unable to use articles or other determiners even at an advanced level, that is, in ILM.

1.2. Aim of the study

The main aim of this study is to look into errors made by pupils of First Form of the Arts section in the use of articles and *(a) few* and *(a) little*. Besides, this work aims at showing some factors which are obstacles to the learning English in general and the learning of these expressions in particular. Moreover, my work will try to know why these errors occur so that some strategies and recommendations be suggested in order to improve the teaching of English grammar. The main assumption is that once we find out why these errors occur, we will be able to reduce them to a minimum.

I.3. Motivation

As regards the motivations for the choice of this study, during my teaching training in secondary schools, I noticed that many students of First Form were making many errors in using these particular determiners. The idea of knowing why these errors occur came to my mind. I thought that these determiners are not taught correcty at the low level. My second motivation is to contribute to the improvement of the teaching of English grammatical structures. Hence, I intend to make some suggestions to coursedesigners in order to find appropriate methods for a good knowledge of the English language. Last but not least, I have chosen this topic to create the same awareness in other researchers.

I.4.Structure of the study

My study is made of five main parts. The first one is an introductory part. It briefly introduces the topic. Thus, it points out the background and statement of the problem, the aims of the study, the motivations and the structure of the study.

The second part is theoretical. It talks about the major theories on Error Analysis. In that part, I present some definitions of what can be Error Analysis, the problems of Error Analysis, its signifiance, its aims and the types of errors.

The third one deals with Methodology. Here, we show how the data was collected. Hence, we indicate our research subjects, that is, our population. Indeed, the form of the test and the data analysis procedures will be explained.

The fourth part concerns the data analysis and findings. Here, some definitions and explanations of some notions related to determiners will be given before analysing my data. After that, some comments on my test results will be discussed. In addition, an attempt to explain the types of errors recorded and some assumptions about the causes of these errors will be provided.

The last part points out the conclusions derived from the findings which, in turn, lead to some suggestions.

Chapter II : LITERATURE REVIEW

II.0. Introduction

Error Analysis is a part of Applied Linguistics concerned with the study of the learner's errors. It investigates the second or the third language. It reveals to both the teacher and the learner the psychological process of language learning. In fact, the learning of the second language after the first one is not an easy task to account for. The learner has already a firm knowledge of the first language so that the integration of a new language is likely to encounter some problems. At the time Burundian students are introduced to English, they have already acquired the French language. As a matter of fact, it goes without saying that the knowledge of French is certainly going to influence the acquisition of English. But, adopting certain strategies that have nothing to do with the new language is taken as making errors. In the present chapter some theories which have been produced in the area of Error Analysis will be reviewed.

II.1. What is Error Analysis ?

When a language learner breaks the rules of the target language as a result of faulty learning, he makes an error.

According to Norrish (1983 : 7), there is a difference between an error, a mistake and a lapse. For him, an error is a systematic deviation when a learner has not learnt something and consistently gets it wrong.

A mistake is an inconsistent deviation. This means that a learner gets a form right but sometimes he gets it wrong.

A lapse is neither a mistake nor an error and can happen to any one and at any time. It may due to a lack of concentration, shortness of memory or fatigue....For example, a pupil may normally know to use a particular item correctly, but while writing a composition or doing an exercise, he might use it incorrectly because he is careless, tired, sick, bored, writing quickly or thinking ahead.

But if, on the other hand, a pupil uses correctly an item many times but gets it wrong once, he/she has obviously made a mistake.

However, a pupil can frequently use the same item wrongly, then, he is certainly making errors. In other words, an error results from an incomplete knowledge and a mistake is made by a learner while writing or speaking and is caused by a lack of attention, carelessness or some other aspects of performance.

Corder (1974 : 51) defines Error Analysis in the following way :

Error Analysis is both an ancient activity and at the same time a comparatively new one .

For him, in its old sense Error Analysis is simply the informal and intuitive activity of any teacher who makes use of utterance of his pupils to see whether they have or have not learnt particular linguistic points that he/she has been trying to teach. In other words, it is a means of assessing and checking on pupils'progress. He proceeds in saying that it is a comparatively new activity because in Error Analysis we are comparing the learner's language with the whole of the target language or, more exactly, with what has been selected for incorporation in the syllabus.

Error Analysis is a device used in the teaching process which permits the teacher to evaluate the pupils' learning in general and to see what have not been mastered in particular. Besides, the study of students'errors reveals the learning strategies that are used while learning a foreign language. That is why, as a comparative activity, Error Analysis compares the learner's language with the target one.

When a learner comes to his/her secondary school, he often brings with him language habits which he thinks are correct but which in actual facts are faulty. The learner often ignores that the process of learning a second or a third language is of a fundamental different nature from the acquisition of a first one since they differ in the motivation of the learning. As stated by Geoffrey Broughton (1980 : 8),

> *the foreigner is learning English to express ideas rather than emotion ; for his emotional expressions he has his mother tongue.*

Again, the learner will not learn as easily as he does for his mother tongue, for to come to this task he has to forge new habits, those of the new language to be learned. In so doing, the learner is automatically reduced to the process of trial and error. Pit Corder, (1981 : 5) puts an emphasis on this idea saying that

> *the learner is using a definite system of language at every point of his development although it is not the adult system in one case nor that of the second language in the other. The learner's errors are the evidence of this system and are themselves systematic.*

In using a definite system of language, the learner is deviating at the sometimes from both the rules of the target language and those of the second language. However, the systematicity of his errors is a sign that the learner is actually testing hypotheses about the new language. Pupils'errors provide evidence of the learning procedures. Besides, these errors supply the teacher with information on which he can base his remedial teaching.

II.2. Problems of Error Analysis

In Error Analysis, most teachers are perfectly well able to give an account of the typical errors made by students who pass through their hands. They often build up a useful list of the so called common errors. In this way, the teacher is rarely in a position to observe his/her pupils performance of the language in real situation of language use. In other words, most teachers simply do not know how well their students perform when they have to use the language for communication. They only guess. Certainly, the ordinary tests and examinations results will not tell them reliably. Teachers often reteach that particular part of the language which has proved to be a problem by simply teaching again with the same methods and the same materials. The point in question is that, very often, a lot of work produce relatively little improvement. In the same line of ideas, Pit Corder (1986 : 52) proposes that

> *effective remedial teaching requires that we should understand the nature of the pupils'difficulties.*

In other words, it is not sufficient to classify pupils'errors in some superficial way as it is too frequently done into errors of omission, wrong sequence, wrong selection...But it requires a good analysis, leading to an

explanation and understanding of the causes of these errors. For instance, an understanding of the learning process or a linguistic comparaison of the mother tongue or the second language with the target language can yield explanations. Moreover, a teacher may give incomplete or false information or ambiguous one so that pupils may quite logically draw wrong conclusions.

II.3. Significance of Error Analysis

We cannot deal with errors when we do not understand their significance. In addition, errors have been always viewed as inevitable and as part of the learning process.

However, the making of errors is considered by some linguists as a sign of failure. They are ascribed to the ignorance or a lack of effective teaching. Furthermore, different views are held about the making of errors.
Corder (1981 : 19) mentions two schools of thoughts in respect to the learner's errors :

> *In the field of methods there have been two schools of thought in respect of learner's errors. Firstly, the school which maintains that if we were to achieve a perfect teaching method, the errors would never be committed in the first place and therefore the occurrence of errors is merely a sign of the present inadequacy of our teaching techniques.*

So, this school regards the fact of making errors as a sign of imperfect teaching. For this school's view, errors provide a feedback, they tell the teacher something about the effectiveness of his teaching materials. Furthemore, errors

show that part of the syllabus that have been inadequately taught and needs further attention.

The second school's view however, contradicts somehow the first one. Corder goes on :

> *The philosophy of the second school is that we live an imperfect world and consequently errors will always occur in spite of our best efforts. Our ingenuity should be concentrated on techniques for dealing with errors after they have been occurred.*

Since we live in an imperfect world, there is no way to avoid the occurrence of errors. Moreover, it is necessary for learners to make errors if it means that they are attempting to test their hypothesis about the target language. In the same line of ideas, Peter Strevens (1980 : 20) supports this opinion in saying that

> *errors should not be viewed as a problem to overcome but rather a normal and inevitable feature indicating the strategies the learner use.*

Indeed, it is on the basis of the information the teacher gets from errors that he can vary his teaching procedures and techniques.

Similarly, for Richards (1984 : 25), the learner's errors are useful both for the teacher and the learner. He characterises the significance of errors in three ways :

1° First, they are significant to the teacher in that they tell him if he undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and, consequently, what remains for him to learn .

2° . . . second, they provide to the researcher with evidence of how a language is learnt or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language.

3° . . . third, they are indispensable to the learner himself because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn. It is a way the learner has of testing his hypothesis about the nature of the language he is learning.

In fact, errors are very significant to the teacher because they tell him what his learners know and what they don't know. This new information will direct the teacher's attention to areas where the learner has problems.

The researcher comes to realise that the errors a pupil makes in the process of building a new system of language need to be analysed carefully, for they possibly hold in them some keys to the understanding of the process of foreign language acquisition.

Finally, errors are indispensable to the learner himself because, they tell him if the hypotheses put about a new language are right or wrong and how to reformulate them.

II.4. Aims of Error Analysis

Firstly, Error Analysis is the study and analysis of errors made by second or third language learners. According to the Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, Error Analysis may be carried out in order to obtain information on common difficulties in language learning as an aid in teaching or in the preparation of the teaching materials. In the same line of idea, Corder (1981 : 19) says

> *Error Analysis is done to realise the areas of difficulty which the learner would encounter so as to direct the teacher's attention to these areas that he might devote a special care and emphasis in his teaching, to the overcoming of these errors or even avoiding predicted difficulties.*

Hence, Error Analysis is advantageous in that it highlights the areas of difficulty on the part of the learner and, allows the teacher to undertake a remedial work in order to help his learner to overcome his learning problems. Furthermore, Error Analysis is useful in the setting up of more appropriate programmes, the teaching materials as well as new teaching strategies in accordance with the linguistic development of the learner. For Jan Startvik (1973 : 13),

> *the term Error Analysis should be reserved for the study of erroneous utterances produced by groups of learners at some stage of their learning career.*

In any learning situation, errors are indication of the problems that the learner has with certain aspects of language. They are therefore essential in that they reflect various stages in learning any language.

In one word, the aims of Error Analysis are varied. Error Analysis is generally concerned with the study of the learners'errors, not only those which can be associated with the mother tongue interference, but all kinds of errors that can occur in the learner's performance. We can also says that Error Analysis may be carried out in order to :

- find out how well a learner knows a language,
- find out how a person learns a language,
- obtain information on common difficulties in language learning as an aid in the teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials.

II.5. Types of errors

Until the late sixties, errors in the second language learning were considered to be the result of the mother tongue interference. However, not all errors of the foreign language learner can be attributed to the mother tongue interference. Some errors are caused by the second or third language's structures. In fact, the acquisition of a new language always involves several types of errors which do not necessary derive from transfer of other languages. Thus, we have to distinguish between interlingual and intralingual errors.

Interlingual problems are caused by linguistic differences between L_1 and

L_2 . They are traditionally interpreted as interference errors. These errors are generally due to the learner's native language, that is, they result from language transfer. Interference as a strategy of communication illustrates the case of errors due to the inability for students to use appropriate English structures to certain specific contexts. As far as Burundian pupils are concerned, they appeal to Kirundi and especially to French, in which they have more experience. The learner prefer to use his French language, not necessary because he cannot do otherwise, but because he does not want to make the effort needed to master the new language.

Intralingual problems are by definition not predictable on the basis of Contrastive Analysis. They cannot be traced back to the differences between L_1 and L_2 but they are related to a specific interpretation of the target language. As a matter of fact, intralingual errors result from a faulty or partial learning of the target language. Students try to reduce the system of the English language to few structures they have acquired, no matter what other parts of rules they still have to meet. These errors cannot be therefore described as mere failure to memorise or as occasional lapses in performance due to memory limitations and other factors.

Therefore, in the system of English learning, and especially in Burundi context of language learning, these two types of errors are not only common to all learners of English but also easy to account for.

In the same line of idea, Selinker (1972), Richards (1971), and Corder (1971), have categorised errors.

For Selinker, the learner creates a system of his own, different both from his source language and the target language. Selinker calls it interlanguage. Five processes are used by the learner to create this interlanguage.

1) Language transfer (also called interference by Richards).

Here, the learner proceeds by transferring the grammatical and/or stylistic elements from the source language to the target language.

2) Overgeneralisation

The learner overgeneralises if he extends the target language rules to areas they do not apply.

3) Transfer of training

These errors result from the way the learner has been presented the material. They are due to the pedagogical procedures contained in the text or employed by the teacher. Here, the teacher remains the principal model for his pupils. Let us agree with Wilkins (1974 : 55) that

> *the less qualified the teacher of English is, the more narrow are the potential limits of achievement of his pupils.*

If rules are explained in a clumsy style, it goes without saying that the learner will hypothesize false rules.

4) Strategies of learning

These are signs of the way the learner builds up his approaches to learning the material. Finding the material too difficult for him, he may oversimplify the rules.

5) Strategies of communication

When a learner attempts to communicate in the target language without having completely acquired the grammatical forms necessary to do so, the errors he makes are referred to as strategies of communication.

Richards (1971), reexamines Selinker's interlanguage and comes up with six sources of errors : interference, overgeneralisation, performance errors, markers of transitional competence, strategies of communication and assimilation and the teacher's induced errors. Four of these six sources are already mentioned by Selinker. These are interference or language transfer in Selinker's terms, overgeneralisation, strategies of communication and assimilation and the teacher's induced errors. The latter category is referred to as transfer of training by Selinker. Performance errors happen if such things as memory lapses, fatigue, confusion or strong emotion cause the learner to make unsystematic errors. These are also called lapses or slips of the tongue. Markers of transitional competence result from a natural or perhaps inevitable developmental sequence in the language learning process.

Like Selinker, Pit Corder also observes that the language learner has a different language. He calls this *interlanguage* or *transitional dialect.*

Corder's contribution is of a different dimension of classification based on the definition of errors. Corder considers how the researcher or the teacher recognizes an utterance as erroneous and seeks to classify errors with respect to the notions of acceptability and appropriateness. Acceptability of the learner's utterances is concerned with whether or not an utterance conforms to the rules of the language. Inappropriateness is a matter of wrong selection of appropriate

forms according to contextual and situational factors whereas judgements of inacceptability are in principle context free. For Corder, an utterance may be both acceptable and appropriate. In this case, there is no error, that is, the learner may not know the rules but happen to produce a correct utterance by mere guessing.

In addition, an utterance is covertly erroneous, when it is acceptable but inappropriate, that is, when it looks all right but is not in appropriate context. Finally, an utterance may be both inacceptable and inappropriate. This case is an overtly erroneous utterance.

Chapter III. METHODOLOGY

III.0. Introduction

The present study is entitled *An Analysis of Errors made by Burundian English learners in the use of some definite and indefinite determiners : the case of* ***a (n)***, ***the***, ***(a) few*** and ***(a) little*** *in ILM* . Therefore, it comprises a methodology chapter aiming at describing the way the data was collected and analysed. According to Richards, et al. (1985 : 177),

methodology is a set of methods used in doing something.

Thus, this chapter points out how the study has been conducted. It describes the population, the corpus and the data analysis procedures.

III.1. Data collection procedures

III.1.1. The population

Whenever one undertakes a linguistic study, he/she must have a specific methodology to follow both in collecting data and in analysing them. In such a study, she/ he has to know to which population the study will be directed, and then, sees if its characteristics will respond to the need of her/his research. She /he has to take into account the number of the subjects to be tested, to see if they can be representative of the whole population.

As a matter of fact, the subjects who made up my population are pupils of First Form of the Arts section in five secondary schools. These particular

schools are : Lycée of Vugizo, Lycée of Jabe, Lycée Saint Gabriel, Petit Séminaire of Kanyosha and Lycée of Rohero. The whole sample is about one hundred and five pupils. In addition, my study concerns only the category of pupils who speak Kirundi as their native language and French as their second language which have been previously acquired. Moreover, I am concerned with the upper level in secondary school, that is, with the students of First Form because during my teaching practice I was in that class and this would ease my investigation. Similarly, in selecting that particular level, I want to know if after four years of English learning the learner has been exposed to a good method of teaching, especially the teaching of articles and some quantifiers like *(a) few* and *(a) little*.

III.1.2. The corpus

As noted above, I decided to give a test to pupils of First Form of the Arts section in the five schools mentioned earlier. The test was presented in a written form. Two types of exercises were chosen from English grammar books.

The first type of exercises comprises thirteen (13) sentences. This exercise was designed specifically to test if pupils of ILM have understood or not the use of *little* and *few* with or without the indefinite article. It was formulated as follows :

I. Put *a little*, *little*, *few* and *a few* into these sentences if necessary.

Similarly, the second type of exercise was elaborated in the following way :

II. Complete the following sentences with *a, an, the* or ϕ (zero article)

This type of exercise contains twenty (20) sentences. Again, this second type of test will highlight whether or not pupils of ILM have mastered the use of articles in more details.

III.2. Data Analysis procedures

After having collected useful data, a procedure of analysis sounds necessary. In fact, a deep analysis is required for a better understanding of the causes of errors. Thus, at this specific point, I intend to follow three stages as proposed by Corder S.P, (1981). These are : identification of errors, their description/classification and an attempted explanation of their causes.

Firstly, the errors in the corpus will be identified. Here, I will identify erroneous utterances which comprise these particular determiners. After that, I will suggest a well formed reconstruction of these sentences in the target language. That is, the correct item will be given in parantheses after each sentence.

Secondly, these errors will be classified. Here, I will categorize the type of errors which occurred. A description of these errors will help me to give a possible explanation of their occurrence.

Thirdly, as already mentioned, I will attempt to find out the causes of these errors. Here, I will end my study by showing areas of difficulty in the use of these determiners.

Chapter IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

IV.0. Introduction

As said earlier, we have proceeded with Error Analysis. It aims at an analysis of the competence of learners concerning a particular subject matter. Therefore, my study deals with the error analysis of some determiners like *a(n) the, (a), few* and *(a) little.*

The present chapter is subdivided into four main sections, namely :

a) a descriptive analysis of English definite and indefinite expressions.
b) presentation of the test results.
c) types of errors.
d) the causes of the errors encountered.

Section a) tries to give definitions and explanations of some notions which are useful before analysing the data.

Section b) deals with a presentation and a discussion of the results from the test given in classroom.

In section c), I will attempt an explanation of the types of errors in showing if they are due to interference, overgeneralisation or ignorance of rule restrictions.

The last section provides some hypotheses about the causes of errors made by pupils of First Form of the Arts section. In fact, it discusses the possible factors which brought about pupils'errors.

IV.1. A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE EXPRESSIONS

IV.1.1. What is a determiner ?

We use a number of words in front of common nouns which we call determiners because they affect or determine the meaning of the noun. Determiners are numerous. Among them, some are definite, some others are indefinite. In fact, determiners make clear, for example, which things we are referring to or how much of a substance we are talking about. Determiners always precede the noun they determine but, according to their position before a noun, they are classified into three subgroups.

1) Predeterminers

Examples

(all, both, half)

2) Central determiners

a) Articles

Examples

a, an, the

b) Demonstratives

Examples

this, that, these those

c) Possessives

Examples

my, yours, our...

3) Postdeterminers

a) Cardinal numbers

Examples

one, two, ten…

b) Ordinal numbers

Examples

the 1st, the 2nd

c) Quantifiers

Examples

more, much, a little…

Predeterminers are unique among determiners in occurring before all the others.

Examples

a) All these complications
b) Half an hour

However, predeterminers cannot occur with other determiners denoting quantity.

Examples

*All a little time

*Both few cases

But

All these cows are cutting grass.

The most common and typical central determiners are the definite and indefinte articles *the, a(n)* respectively. Central determiners may be preceded by predeterminers and followed by postdeterminers.

Examples

All the five cows

Pred. central.post.

Postdeterminers follow predeterminers and central determiners. They include quantifiers such as *many, much, some, (a) few*... Some of them occur with noncount nouns and some others with count nouns.

Examples :

a) She has few books (count, plural)

b) She hasn't got much money (plural, uncount)

However, these three types have been set up on the basis of their position before the noun. Thus, we cannot find,

central det + predeterm

Example

* their all boys

post det + predet.

Example

* five all boys

The only order that is possible is :

predeter + central deter + postdeterm

central deter + postdeter

Examples

both their families

half the second hour

the few cases mentioned earlier

We may notice that these three types are also subdivided into other two classes :

1° words which help to classify or identify :

The indefinite article

Example

I bought a new shirt yesterday.

The definite article

Example

The shirt I am wearing is new (I am telling which)

Demonstratives

Example

I bought this /that shirt yesterday

Possessives

Example

Do you like my new shirt ? (The one that belongs to me)

2° words which enable us to indicate quantity

a) Numbers

Example

I bought two new shirts

b) Quantifiers

Example

I didn't buy many shirts because I had little money

U. B

IV.1.2. Definiteness and indefiniteness in English

First, definite expressions are those that refer to some particular items which can be identified by the addressee. In English, determiners or expressions used to particularise the referent are the definite article, the demonstratives and the possessives.

Example

Mary and John have lost few books. These / the books were stolen by their friends.

Here, *these the* express definiteness because the books have been referred to earlier. They are definite.

However, *few* expresses indefiniteness since we don't know which books were lost. As a matter of fact, it is the first time that the term *books* is introduced in this part of the utterance. So, indefiniteness refer to those expressions that are newly introduced and are not clearly identifiable in the discourse. Among the common definite expressions most frequently used are *the, my, their, this, that...* Whereas the most common indefinite expressions used are *some, a, an, a little, many, few, more, much...*

Meanwhile, as we cannot possibly deal with all these indefinite and definite expressions in English in our study, we have chosen to concentrate on those which are commonly used but pose particular problems to English learners. Thus, we are only concerned with *a(n), the, (a) few and (a) little.*

IV.1.3. Generic vs specific reference

Reference itself is defined as the relationship which exists between an uttered noun phrase and the object or the person referred to. Generic reference is a reference to a whole natural class of specimens without any distinction, while specific reference is the reference to a particular object, animal or person.

Examples

a) A lion and two tigers are sleeping in a cage .

Here, the reference is specific since we have in mind specific specimens of the classes of tigers and lions. If, on the other hand, we say,

b) Tigers are dangerous animals,

the reference is generic since we are thinking of the class tiger without any special reference to particular tigers. The sentence in b) can have the same meaning as :

c) the tiger is a dangerous animal

d) a tiger is a dangerous animal

c) is the generic use of the definite article and d) is the generic use of the indefinite article. When we are talking about a whole class of objects as here, the difference between definite and indefinite, singular and plural tends to loose their importance. Quirk et al. (1985 : 265) agrees with this idea :

The distinction between definite and indefinite and between plural and singular are important for specific reference. They tend to be less crucial for generic reference because, generic reference is used to denote the class or species generally.

Thus, the sentences above, that is, b), c) and d) have the same referent, which is *all the tigers in the world.*

On the other hand, the specific noun phrases in the following sentences have three different referents :

a) the young cows are missing (plural, definite)
   reference : the cows particulary, the young ones.

b) a cow is running towards us (Sing, indefinite)
   reference : a certain cow which the speaker can point at.

c) the cow you are looking for is cutting grass. (Sing, definite)
   reference : not any cow, the one you are looking for.

At least three forms can be used generically with a count noun.

a) the + N (singular) + verb

   Example

   The tiger is a dangerous animal

b) A + N (singu.)+ verb

   Example

   A tiger is a dangerous animal

c) ϕ + N (plural) + verb

   Example

   Tigers are dangerous animals

However, with noncount nouns, only the ϕ (zero article) is used generically with a singular noun.

Examples

a) Water is composed of hydrogyn and oxygen

b) Music can teach

IV.1.4. Distinction between count and noncount nouns

Before we look at articles in more details, the first thing that need to be understood is the concept of countable and uncountable nouns. Countable nouns are those nouns that can be used in singular form to refer to one and, in the plural form to refer to more than one thing. Uncountable nouns, in contrast, are those that refer to things that connot be counted. They are usually substances such as gazes, liquids, solids like sugar or salt composed of such small units that we could not count. Uncountable nouns are also solid masses such as butter or cheese which form a unit. They may be also abstract nouns that name quantity or concepts such as beauty or truth....

Common nouns are then subclassified into common count nouns and common noncount nouns. Common count nouns take definite and indefinite articles and admit plural forms.

Example

a day, the day

two days, many/some days

Common noncount nouns take ϕ (zero article) as well as the definite article or indefinite quantifiers but, they do not take the indefinite article or have a plural form.

Examples

a) I want ϕ milk (zero article)

b) The milk your are taking is good (definite article)

c) Some milk is not here (indefinite quantifier)

But not * they drink some milks

* they drink a milk

* they drink two milks

In the same line of idea, L.G. Alexander (1988:38) says that

> *the distinction between countable and uncountable nouns is fundamental in English, for only by distinguishing between the two can we understand when to use singular or plural forms and when to use the definite, the indefinite article, or the appropriate quantifier.*

Thus, because articles have not general or special plural forms in English, their use seems easy to learn at first. However, the choice is complicated by three factors :

- whether a noun is countable or uncountable
- whether we are making generic or specific statements
- whether we are referring to something the listener or reader can positively identify or not.

To understand the grammatical role of determiners, we have to consider what determiners and nouns can occur together. There are three classes of common nouns used after a determiner. These are singular count nouns (*bottle)*, plural count nouns (*bottles)* and mass noun (*butter)*. Thus, *a(n)* is used before singular count nouns (*a* house), *the* is used before singular count nouns (*the* hat) , a plural count noun (*the* houses), an uncountable noun *the* water you are drinking is mine.

Unfortunalety, we cannot always rely on common sense using the idea of counting as a guide to tell us when a noun is used with a determiner or not. For example, the noun *information* is uncountable in English but its equivalent in other languages may refer to one piece or many pieces of information and will therefore be countable.

Example

Beaucoup d'informations on été données (French)

Many informations have been provided (English)

There are a number of nouns considered to be uncountable in English but which are countable in other languages and this can cause confusion. Other examples of such nouns are :

advice	experience
courage	traffic
difficulty	news
progression	

Abstract nouns like these are usually uncountable in English, but they can be used as countable nouns when they refer to an instance or example.

Example

Experience is the best teacher (uncountable).

She experienced *one a difficulty* after another (countable).

These nouns are countable in other languages and, therefore, are used in singular and plural forms. They can also be taken as countable nouns in English as shown above.

IV.1.5. Different use of articles

The Encyclopedia Americana defines an article as a part of speech used before noun to limit or define their application. In the English language, *a* and *an* are indefinite articles whereas *the* is the definite article. *A* is used before a noun beginning with a consonant sound and *an* is used before a noun beginning with a vowel or an unpronounced *h* . The chief function of articles is one of the most difficult point for foreign learners of English grammar. The different use of articles is complicated because learners don't know when to use them or when to omit them.

IV.1.5.1. Use of *the*

The is the commonest specific determiner. It is called the definite article. However, when using *the*, we must always bear in mind two basic facts. First, the person or thing referred to is assumed to be known by the speaker or hearer. Second, *the* combines with singular countable, plural countable and uncountable nouns. The word *the* alone is insufficient and means nothing to identify the nouns . In fact, if we examine the use of *the* as a specific determiner, we can see that there are three reasons why in English we specify a particular noun :

a) because the noun has been mentioned before and we want to refer back to that specific object, animal or person.

Example

I saw *a* lion. *The* lion was very dangerous

b) because it has been specified in the noun group and in this case the use of *the* presupposes that identification of the item under question will be given to the listener by a following text.

Examples

a)My office is the room on your right.

b)The wine that France produces is good.

In a) the room is identified by the prepositional phrase which follow the noun. In saying the room, the speaker assumes that there is only one room on the hearer's right. In b) the interdepedence between the determiner and the relative clause is obvious.

c) because it is specified in the context. The context can be a global one which is known to all people.

Example

The sun is shining.

When we talk about the moon, the sun, the sky, the presupposition is that in our experience or field of interest, there is only one moon, one sky, which are concepts common to mankind as a whole. Indeed, the use of *the* presupposes that the items are so specific as to be unique for pratical human purposes, in a narrow or a broad situation. Thus, the sun, the moon, the sky are unique in the universe, being aspects of experience common not only to the speaker or listener but also to mankind as a whole.

IV.1.5.2. Use of ϕ (zero article)

We often use no article at all in English. This non use of articles is so important that we give it a name *the zero article* . Thus, the use of nouns on their own without an article is so fundamental in English that we should not regard this omission of an article as something negative.

Proper names are nouns of specific people and things. They are distinguished chiefly by being written with capital letters. Some nouns require the use of zero article. Here are some guidelines.

No definite article required : Names of persons, days, months, festivals, religions, geographical areas (towns, place names, most countries, continents, lakes, islands, mountains, hills), states, prominent features of towns (streets, buildings, bridges, parks, etc.), most planets and stars, seasons and holidays.

Examples

Continents

	But
Africa, Asia	The North of America
Central Asia	The Equator

Lake

Lake Tanganyika

Lake Geneva

Islands

Christmas Islands

Park

Serengeti Park

Proper names

John

Days

Monday, Saturday

In addition, there are a number of count nouns that take zero article in abstract or rather specialised use chiefly in certain idiomatic expressions with verbs like *be*, *go*, and with *prepositions*.

Examples

	but
go by car	Sit in the car
be in bed	Sleep in the bed
go to school	

The definite article is however required for titles where personal names are not given, for political parties, institutions and organisations, rivers, newspapers, hotels, public bodies, historical events, oceans...

Historical events

Examples

The French Revolution

The Victorian Age

Official tittles

Example

The Queen

Political Parties

Examples

The Conservative Party

The Labor Party

Public bodies

Examples

The Army

The Government

The T.V...

IV.1.5.3. Use of *a(n)*

The converse of the rule that uncountable nouns must not be preceded by *a* or *an* is that countable nouns must be preceded by *a*, *an* or *the*. *A* is used before a word beginning with a consonant sound and *an* is used before a vowel or before a word beginning with *h* which is not pronounced.

Examples

a : a boy, a European, a union

an : an apple, an idiot, an urn

an hour

With some words *a* or *an* is used according to whether the speaker pronounces the *h* or not.

Example

an hospital /a hospital

However, *a* is preferred before a sounded *h*

Examples

a history

a horse

It is the pronounciation not the spelling that determines the form of the indefinite article.

The indefinite or definite article can be used before singular countable nouns, but a singular countable noun cannot be used without an article

Examples

The/a book is on the table

but not

* book is on the table

IV.1.6. Use of *(a) few* and *(a) little*

As said earlier, determiners signal nouns in various ways. They may identify a noun as specific or general, they may refer to quantity. Quantifiers are words like *many*, *some*, *several*, *(a)few*, *(a) little*, which often modify the noun and show how many things or how much of something we are talking about. Quantifiers combine with count nouns or uncount nouns.

Examples

There are many eggs

We have a few books

There is a little milk left

We have much time

In my study, I am only concerned with *(a)few* and *(a) little*. Thus, *(a)few* determines plural count nouns while *(a) little* determines noncount nouns.

However, there is a semantic difference between *few* and *little*, on one hand, and *a few* and *a little*, on the other hand. In the case of *(a) few* and *(a) (little)* there is a positive or negative contrast according to whether or not the indefinite article is used.

Examples

1) Hurry, we've got little time. Meaning : (we must hurry because we have not much time left)
2) Do you like sugar ? Yes, please put a little in my cup
   Meaning : (you must put much sugar because I like it).
3) My books have been stolen, that is why I have few.
4) This is not the first time the car has broken down, it has happened a few times before

In the same line of ideas, Edouards Woods (1990 : 87) says the following :

> *There is an important difference between* ***little*** *and* ***a little*** *and between* ***few*** *and* ***a few*** *. There is a negative/positive contrast between the two. When* ***a*** *is used the quantity is meant to be a positive quantity but without* ***a*** *the quantity is negative.*

Thus, *few* and *little* although not morphologically negative are negative in meaning. In fact, *few* suggests a small non significant number, almost none and it is used with count nouns, while *little* suggests a very small amount and it is used with uncountable nouns.

The quantifier *little* (not much) should be distinguished from the adjective *little* (small) which occurs with singular or plural count nouns.

Examples

a little girl

five little girls

(a) little as in these examples can't be analysed as consisting of the indefinite article *a* plus the quantifier *little*, since the indefinite quantifier *little* cannot cooccur with plural count nouns.

IV.2. Presentation of the test results

IV.2.0 Introduction

The present section deals with a presentation and a discussion of the results from the test given in classroom. As mentioned earlier, the data collected appeared in a written form. In fact, a test was given to one hundred and five pupils from five different schools. Two types of exercises were given. The first was related to the use of (*a) few* and *(a) little* and comprised thirteen (13) sentences to be completed. The second one had twenty (20) sentences that deal with *(a)n*, *the* and ϕ.

Hence, in order to make my analysis easier, the data will be presented by means of tables so as to help the reader to follow the analysis smoothly. The numbers that appeared in tables show all the students' choices for each item. Under each table, right and wrong answers are recorded in percentages. The correct item is given in parentheses after each sentence. This will help the reader to get a clear idea of the pupils' performance as far as the use of *(a)n, the, (a) few* and *(a) little* is concerned.

I. Put *a little, little, few* and *a few* into these sentences, if necessary

1. A lot of food was prepared but... of it was eaten (little)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a little	9	9	8	11	10
little	5	6	3	8	9
few	4	3	3	5	4
a few	2	2	1	1	2

Total right answers : 29.5 % (31/105)
Total wrong answers : 70 %

2. There are ... people who can be trusted anymore (few)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a little	1	2	-	1	1
little	9	4	4	2	2
few	11	8	10	14	14
a few	5	6	1	8	8

Total right answers : 54 % (57/105)
Total wrong answers : 46 %

3. I think there is still.... wine left (a little)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a little	8	9	7	8	10
little	9	5	6	9	10
few	2	2	2	2	-
a few	1	4	-	6	5

Total right answers : 40 % (42/105)
Total wrong answers : 60 %

4. He is not an expert but he knows.... about cars (a little)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a little	5	6	3	8	9
little	9	9	8	11	10
few	4	3	3	5	4
a few	2	2	1	1	2

Total right answers : 29.5 % (31/105)
Total wrong answers : 70.5 %

5. A lot of people have tried but... have succeeded (few)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a little	1	2	-	2	1
little	2	2	2	3	2
few	7	7	5	9	10
a few	10	9	8	11	12

Total right answers : 36 % (38/105)
Wrong answers : 64 %

6. Hurry ! we've got... time (little)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a little	9	10	7	9	9
little	5	6	3	7	9
few	4	2	4	4	6
a few	2	2	1	5	1

Right answers : 28.5 % (30/105)
Wrong answers : 71.5 %

7. Do you like milk ? Yes, put.... in my cup (a little)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a little	6	7	5	10	10
little	9	8	6	8	12
few	2	3	2	5	3
a few	3	2	2	4	2

Right answers : 36 % (38/105)
Wrong answers : 64 %

8. We don't have money but Tom had ...(a little)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a little	8	7	5	8	9
little	6	6	4	7	8
few	2	3	3	6	5
a few	4	4	9	4	3

Right answers : 35% 37/105
Wrong answers : 65 %

9.I didn't think Jill will be a good teacher.
She had got... patience with children (little)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a little	8	3	9	11	10
little	5	8	4	8	11
few	2	4	2	4	3
a few	5	6	1	2	1

Right answers : 34 % (36 /105)
Wrong answers : 66 %

10. This is not the first time the car has broken down. It has happened ... times before (a few)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a little	3	4	2	5	4
little	7	3	4	6	4
few	7	7	5	9	10
a few	3	6	4	5	7

Right answers : 24 % (25 /105)
Wrong answers : 76 %

11. We invited all our friends but... of them turned up (few)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a little	3	3	2	2	3
little	3	3	4	5	1
few	10	11	8	11	13
a few	4	3	6	7	8

Right answers : 55 % (53/105)
Wrong answers : 45 %

12. He speaks English correctly, he makes... mistakes (few)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a little	2	1	1	2	2
little	2	3	2	2	3
few	8	10	8	13	12
a few	8	6	4	8	8

Right answers : 48.5 % (51/105)
Wrong answers : 51.5 %

13. It is a pity, Peter has....insufficient formal training (little)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a little	6	8	7	8	8
little	6	7	5	10	9
few	6	4	2	3	4
a few	2	1	1	4	3

Right answers : 35 % (37/105)
Wrong answers : 65 %

II. Complete the following sentences with *a, an, the* or *ϕ*

1. .... Honesty is the best policy (ϕ)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a	4	4	3	5	8
an	2	3	2	5	6
the	10	8	12	3	5
ϕ	4	10	3	2	6

Right answers : 24 % (25/105)
Wrong answers : 76 %

2. She was invited to have..... dinner with the governor's wife (ϕ)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a	13	12	11	7	10
an	-	-	-	-	-
the	4	6	5	2	8
ϕ	3	7	4	6	7

Right answers 25.5 %
Wrong answers 74.5 %

3. ... president has arrived. Please turn on the radio (the)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a	3	3	6	5	7
an	-	-	-	-	-
the	14	22	12	8	13
ϕ	1	-	2	2	5

Right answers : 66 % (69/105)
Wrong answers : 34 %

4. I don't like.... sugar, thank you (ϕ)

	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha
a	7	7	2	8	4
an	-	-	-	-	-
the	12	11	10	13	15
ϕ	1	2	3	4	6

Right answers : 15 % (16/105)
Wrong answers : 85 %

5. We decided to stay in... hotels (ϕ)

	Lycée Jabe	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo
a	6	7	6	1	7
an	2	2	3	2	4
the	10	10	9	8	2
ϕ	2	6	2	4	7

Right answers : 20 % (21/105)
Wrong answers : 80 %

6. They say that ... Japanese language is particularly difficult for Europeans (The)

	Lycée Jabe	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo
a	9	8	5	4	8
an	1	1	-	-	-
the	8	13	11	7	11
ϕ	2	3	4	2	6

Right answers : 48 % (50/105)
Wrong answers : 52 %

7. She experienced..... difficulty ofter another (a /one)

	Lycée Jabe	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo
a	3	7	5	8	11
an	-	-	-	1	-
the	8	5	5	1	8
ϕ	9	13	10	5	6

Right answers : 32 %
Wrong answers : 68 %

8. .... wine that France produces is good (the)

	Lycée Jabe	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo
a	3	6	3	4	5
an	-	-	1	-	-
the	11	15	14	10	13
ϕ	6	4	2	1	7

Right answers : 60 % (63/105)
Wrong answers : 40 %

9. .... sun is shining (the)

	Lycée Jabe	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo
a	9	13	9	6	12
an	-	-	-	-	-
the	6	8	5	6	11
ϕ	5	2	6	3	2

Right answers : 34 % (36/105)
Wrong answers : 66 %

10. .... Water is necessary for life (ϕ)

	Lycée Jabe	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo
a	4	2	5	5	6
an	-	-	1	1	-
the	12	12	10	10	10
ϕ	4	6	4	4	9

Right answers : 25.5 % (27/105)
Wrong answers : 74.5 %

11. From the heart of London to... heart of Paris (the)

	Lycée Jabe	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo
a	8	7	10	6	8
an	7	5	2	4	3
the	8	7	5	5	9
ϕ	2	1	3	-	4

Right answers : 32 % (34/105)
Wrong answers : 68 %

12. At the last we reached..... Lake Tanganyika (ϕ)

	Lycée Jabe	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Vugizo
a	2	3	2	3	4
an	-	-	-	2	-
the	20	16	10	11	17
ϕ	3	1	3	4	3

Right answers : 13 % (14/105)
Wrong answers : 87 %

13. He flew over.... Pacific Ocean (the)

	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Vugizo
a	7	8	5	8	6
an	-	-	-	-	-
the	10	7	8	9	15
ϕ	8	5	2	3	4

Right answers : 46.5 % (49/105)
Wrong answers : 53.5 %

14.... Optimist believes in progress (an)

	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Vugizo
a	1	2	1	-	2
an	15	13	8	12	11
the	9	5	6	6	10
ϕ	-	-	-	2	2

Right answers : 56 % (59/105)
Wrong answers : 44 %

15. He was sent to... prison for three years (ϕ)

	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Vugizo
a	3	5	7	5	4
an	3	-	-	-	-
the	11	10	9	6	15
ϕ	8	5	4	4	6

Right answers : 26 % (27/105)
Wrong answers : 74 %

16. ... Tigers are dangerous animals (ϕ)

	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Vugizo
a	2	6	2	5	4
an	-	-	-	-	-
the	18	10	13	6	15
ϕ	5	11	5	4	6

Right answers : 29.5 % (31/105)
Wrong answers : 70.5%

17. He is a graduate of... University of Havard (the)

	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Vugizo
a	3	3	2	4	4
an	9 -	6	5	2	5
the	13	11	13	9	14
ϕ	-	-	-	-	2

Right answers : 57 % (60/105)
Wrong answers : 43 %

18. She is at.... church arranging flowers (ϕ)

	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Vugizo
a	4	3	5	2	5
an	-	-	-	-	-
the	13	14	13	8	10
ϕ	8	3	2	5	5

Right answers : 30 % (23 /105)
Wrong answers : 70 %

19. When you live in.... community, you should obey its rules (a)

	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Vugizo
a	16	14	13	10	17
an	3	2	1	-	2
the	6	-	5	3	4
ϕ	-	4	1	2	2

Right answers : 67 % (70/105)
Wrong answers : 33 %

20. The Playhouse is... old theatre but it puts on modern plays (an)

	Petit Séminaire Kanyosha	Lycée Jabe	Lycée Saint Gabriel	Lycée Rohero	Lycée Vugizo
a	2	3	2	1	3
an	14	12	13	10	13
the	8	5	4	2	6
ϕ	1	-	1	2	3

Right answers : 59 % (62/105)
Wrong answers : 41 %

IV.2.1. Results and comments

As mentioned earlier, the data collected appeared in a written form. In fact, a test is given to one hundred and five pupils from five different schools. Two types of exercises were given. The first is related to the use of *(a) few* and *(a) little* and comprises thirtheen sentences to be completed. The second one has twenty (20) sentences that deal with *a(n)*, *the* and ϕ. The numbers that appeared in tables show all the students' choices for each item. Under each table, right and wrong answers are compared in percentages.The correct item is given in parantheses after each sentence.

Thus, if we look carefully at these percentages we easily notice a striking difference between right answers and wrong answers. In the former case, there is a high predominance of very low percentages varying from 24 % to 48,5 % for the first type of exercise and, for the second type of exercise, varying from 13 % to 49 %, while in the latter, the absolute majority of the percentages is above the average (varying from 53,5 % to 85 %) in the two types of exercises.

It is not by chance that I have come up with such a situation which holds that the wrong answers are more numerous than the right ones. Of course, the results show the learner's failures and weaknesses as far as the use of articles and indefinite quantifiers like *(a) few* and *(a) little* are concerned. Most of the pupils failed to complete successfully the exercises.

The results of the second type of exercises dealing with articles are significant in that they reveal that pupils who took part in the test made a great deal of errors. They show that they have not mastered and understood how articles are used though these expressions are taught at least for four years in secondary schools. The use of *a(n)* , *the* and ϕ was the most difficult to the

testees since articles are associated with higher percentages as far as the wrong answers are concerned.

It goes without saying that even for the first type of exercise dealing with *(a) few* and *(a) little* the wrong answers percentages are higher than the right ones. However, the results of this type of exercise is not so bad in comparison of the second type of test : in the first case, the worst percentage is 23 % whereas the lowest percentage of the second type of exercise is 13 %..

Meanwhile, one should mention that there exist few cases where the tendency is totally different. In these cases, the percentages for the right answers are higher than the average, that is, 50 %. Take for instance, the third sentence of the second type of exercise, where the percentage is 63,5 %, the 8 th (60 %) , the 14 th (56 %), the 17 th (57 %), the 19 th (67 %), the 20 th (59%). For these particular sentences which seemed to be easy, the great majority of pupils has succeeded. This situation is not observed however, for the first type of exercise concerning the use of *(a) few* and *(a) little*, where the percentages of many sentences are between 32 % and 46%.

Even though there are few cases where students have succeeded, these are limited and too few to change the general pattern holding that the right answers percentages are lower than the wrong ones.

Moreover, some sentences seemed to be more difficult than the others. For instance, the 4 th, the 5 th and the 12 th sentences of the second type of exercise are exclusively associated with low percentages, that is, 15 %, 20 %, and 13% respectively.

In addition, we may notice that many pupils supplied similar responses considering the numbers of correct and incorrect responses in each class. Take for instance Table 16 of the second type of exercise, where almost all students have given the following :

* The tigers are dangerous animals.

For this particular sentence, 62 pupils out of 105 had put the definite article *the* before *tigers* .

Other examples :

* She was invited to have a dinner...

About 53 pupils out of 105 provided this erroneous sentence :

* The water is necessary for life

For this sentence 54 pupils out of 105 have give such erroneous sentence.

The results above show that pupils of First Form still experience difficulties in using definite and indefinite determiners. We have noticed that these expressions pose particular problems to pupils in all the five schools tested. Sometimes, they got right answers as if by chance, because they didn't know the real meaning of these items, which is most of the times confusing.

However, for the first type of exercise, the majority of these pupils were aware of the distinction between the use of *(a) little* with mass nouns and *(a) few* with count nouns. Yet, they ignored the role played by *a* before these quantifiers. Hence, if we consider the amount of correct and incorrect responses, we can agree that none of them has performed well. Rather incorrect responses are greater in number. There were three types of problems for the pupils.

Firstly, they failed to make a clear distinction between the use of *(a) few* with count nouns and *(a) little* with mass nouns.

Secondly, they failed to account for the use of *few* and *little* with or without the indefinite article *a*.

Thirdly, they were unable to make a difference between specific and generic reference, the use of ϕ instead of *the* and vice versa, the use of *a(n)* instead of *the* and vice versa and the use of *a (n)* instead of ϕ and vice versa.

All in all, pupils of First Form in these five schools, have not mastered rules and restrictions which guide the use of indefinite quantifiers and the use of articles. Thus, the data gathered has fully corresponded to our expectation.

IV.3. Types of errors

IV.3.O. Introduction

The results of my data collection lead me to make the following observations. The acquisition of a new language inevitably involves making errors. However, to enumerate all possible sources of the pupils'errors is an impossible task since there are surely hundred of such sources. Here, all I will do is outline a number of the major sources frequently found. Hence, I have recorded two types of errors : interference errors and intralingual errors. By interference errors we mean that the foreign learners tries to derive the rules behind the data to which he has been exposed and develop hypotheses that correpond to his mother tongue or his second language. Intralingual errors show either faulty generalisation of rules learnt, ignorance of rules restrictions or incomplete application of rules. Hence, in Burundian context of English learning these two types of errors are not only common to all learners but also easy to account for. However, an exhaustive study of all answers provided by all

students is impossible. For this reason, we have concentrated on the erroneous sentences with which the majority of pupils have failed.

IV.3.1. Interference errors

At the time Burundian pupils begin to learn English, that is, in sixth Form, they already speak Kirundi as their native language and they are being taught most courses in the French language at school. Thus, when they finish their secondary school, the use of French overrides that of Kirundi. Hence, the learner transfers his French structures as a learning strategy.

As far as the present study is concerned, it is in the second type of exercise, concerning the use of *a(n)* and *the*, that interference errors have appeared. In these sentences, we believed that pupils have first of all formed the sentences from French and reproduced their ideas in English.

Example

a) Tigers are dangerous animals

For this sentence, many pupils have written,

*The tigers are dangerous animals

We think that the failure to insert the *zero* article may be explained by the fact that in French, when we want to express generic meaning we use the definite articles *le*, *la* and *les*, whereas in English we simply omit the definite / indefinte article.

Examples

b) Les lions sont des animaux dangereux

c) Le lion est un animal dangereux

In a) the reference is generic since we are thinking of the class tigers without special reference to specific tigers. That is why in English we leave out the definite article *the* and instead use the *zero* article. While making a choice between ϕ and *the* pupils have not grasped the fact that a given noun can refer to either one particular object or to all the objects in the set which the noun denotes. Let us take another example :

d) I don't like sugar, thank you.

The majority of pupils put,

*I don't like the sugar, thank you.

This is an other case of interference of the French language with the English one. In French, we say,

Je n'aime pas le sucre, merci.

The learner has formed his idea in French and thereafter translated the sentence in English. The negative transfer is illustrated by the case of errors due to the inability for learners to use appropriate English structures to certain specific contexts. Here, the learner has appealed to the French language in which he has more experience. As a mass noun, *sugar* cannot have an article before it. The pupils have conceived the use of *the* in the English language as equivalent to the use of *le* , *la* in French.

Example

e) At last, we reached... Lake Tanganyika.

Many pupils have answered as follows :

* At last, we reached the Lake Tanganyika.

In French we may say *le Lac Tanganyika* . Here again, pupils have transferred their ideas from French. The word *lake* is a geographical name like the names

of countries, continents, cities,... These names are distinguished by being written with capital letters. Thus, they lack articles.

Example

f) She was invited to have... dinner with the governor's wife.

Here, many students have written the indefinite article *a* before *dinner*.
In article usage, a failure to consider restrictions may derive from analogy. Pupils have related the French system of using articles to that of English though

French and English have two different structures. For the learner, *un dîner* in French is equal to *a dinner* in English. The learner does not know that *dinner* (lunch) cannot be preceded by an article in the noun phrase (have + noun) where the verb is followed by a noun. However, the indefinite article *a* may be used if a specific meal is in question, or, if a choice is implied, as in,

A dinner at that restaurant is very expensive

Here, the meaning is that the price of one dinner is high.

Many other cases of interference errors were noticed. These errors are due to an unawareness of the distinction between generic and specific meaning, the use of *the* instead of ϕ, the use of *a(n)* instead of *the* and vice versa. Hence, interference errors are numerous because French is a medium of instruction in Burundi secondary schools. That is why Burundian learners unconsciously have a tendency to use French structures.

IV.3.2. Intralingual errors

Intralingual errors are in principle common to all foreign language learners. Like interference errors, intralingual errors are understood as a sign of partial experience in the target language. Their origin is found within the structure of English itself and, they show the strategies employed by the learner while acquiring a new language. Thus, the expression, *intralingual error* reflects those errors which are characteristics of rule learning such as overgeneralisation, a failure to learn the conditions under which rules apply...

IV.3.2.1. Overgeneralisation

As a case of intralingual error, the learner overgeneralises if he/she extends the target language rules to areas to which they do not apply.

Examples

a) We decided to stay in hotels.

Many pupils put *the* before hotels. There is an overgeneralisation because the learner has applied the rule where it shouldn't. Students thought that the definite article must be used before any word considered as a plural count noun. Thus, for pupils, *hotels* is a plural count noun that ends in *s* .Therefore, *the* must be used before this word.

However, some other pupils wrote,

* We decided to stay in a hotels

We observe that the learner is progressing as far as the use of indefinite article with nouns begining with *h* but generalise their use. So, *h* is pronounced in the word *hotels* , the learner overgeneralised and put *a* before this word whether or not it is in a plural form.

b) She experienced one/a difficulty after another

Some pupils have put no article before *difficulty*. In fact, pupils overgeneralised the rule which says that uncount nouns are not marked by *a an* or *the* and they have put zero article before difficulty. For them, *difficulty* is not a countable noun, therefore, no article is needed . The learner did not know that some abstract nouns like this are usually uncountable in English but can be used as a countable when they refer to instances or an examples.

c) The sun rises in the East and sets in the West

Some students wrote the indefinite article *a* before *sun* . They have applied the rule that singular contable nouns beginning with a consonant must be preceeded by *a* . The term *sun* seems not to require any indefinite article because it is so specific as to be unique. With the use of *the* in the example above, the reference is immediately understood by the users of the language. When we use *the*, the presuppositon is that in our field of experience there is only one sun. This is the same with the moon, the sky, the earth... Because of these particular nouns *the* must be put before them.

IV.3.2.2. Ignorance of rule restrictions

This type of intraligual error must be taken as a failure to learn under which conditions rules apply. These errors were mostly noticed with the first type of exercise, that is, with the insertion of *(a) few* and *(a) little*. We observed that pupils have failed to take into account the restrictions regarding the use of these quantifiers.

Examples

a) A lot of food was prepared but little of it was eaten

Many pupils have put a before *little* . They have applied the rule that *little* is used before mass nouns. However, they clearly ignore that the meaning of the sentence is negative or positive depending the presence or absence of the article *a* before the noun. This is a restriction rule which misled pupils during the test. In the sentence above, the word *but* shows that there is a constrast between the quantity of food prepared to be eaten and the very small amount eaten compared to what was expected.

b) Hurry, we've got little time !

Many students put *a* before *little*. Again, we noticed the ignorance of the role of the indefinite article *a* before *little* or the omission of it. All what many pupils know is that *(a) little* is put before uncount nouns whereas *(a) few* is put before count noun. In the sentence above, the learner assigned *time* to the class of mass noun but added *a* before little even if the utterance has a negative meaning. We can interpret the sentence in b) as, *we must hurry because we have not much time.*

As far as these particular quantifiers are concerned, pupils of First Form in the Arts section showed that they know that *a little* is used with mass nouns whereas *(a) few* is used with count nouns. Yet, they deliberately omit *a* where it was necessary. Some others add this indefinite article where it was not needed.

All in all, the different types of errors frequently encountered, that is, overgeneralisation and ignorance of rule restrictions often cooccur. Besides, there is a close link between overgeneralisation and ignorance of rule restriction

because, in both cases, the learner has not applied rules where they fit. In addition, some students' responses looked as if the pupils knew some rules but simply failed to apply them correctly. They got the right forms as if by chance. It is a random guessing. The types of errors gathered do not necessarily derive from transfer of French grammatical structures. In addition, they are not seen as occasional lapses in performance due to memory limitation, fatigue...Most of the time, pupils showed that they have not mastered the rules governing the use of articles. As far as *(a) few* and *(a) little* are concerned, the learners' answers proved that they didn't know the semantic contrast between *few* and *little* with or without *a*.

IV.4. Cause of errors

IV.4.0. Introduction

It is not sufficient to classify the types of errors encountered into types. In addition, a careful thought about their causes is necessary for, it can help us to sort out the pupils' problems. Moreover, eventhough teachers follow theoretical models and techniques, they often witness a lack of improvement in the pupils'learning process. This state of affairs is examplified by the data gathered. We noticed that even at an advanced level, that is, in First Form in the Arts section, pupils still experience great problems in using articles and (*a) few* and *(a) little*. As foreign languages are not so easy to be learnt, pupils attempt to find strategies to express their thoughts. In so doing, they misuse some items. Nevertheless, it is not an easy task to tell the real reasons why such errors have occurred. In fact, there are many factors that interfere as far as English is concerned. As Corder (1973: 190) says

learning strategies, different leaming procedures, individual differences of teachers, learning, textbooks... all seem to operate to make each learning situation different from the other.

Hence, the precise reasons for our pupils failures cannot be stated by ourselves. It is not one or two reasons but a combination of interconnected causes that have created such a bad situation. However, some assumptions can be provided such as the teaching method, a lack of knowledge of how these particular expressions are used, a lack of sufficient time to accomplish this task and a lack of motivation, which is not somehow separated from a good teaching since a good teaching method inevitably motivates pupils.

IV.4.1. A lack of knowledge of how these particular expressions are used

From our data, we observed that pupils are unable to complete successfully the two types of exercises. This weakness may result from the inability of pupils to build good sentences. Most learners try to transfer their French structures and items because they did not have appropriate elements in the target language. We also noticed many cases of overgeneralisation and ignorance of rule restrictions. Both these errors are seen as a lack of knowledge in the target language. The learners did not know the rules guiding the use of these expressions. Perhaps, the teacher had not shown clearly their different uses in appropriate contexts. Pupils crucial problem was that of knowing that *(a) little* and *(a) few* have a positive meaning and *few* and *little* a negative one. We assumed that these deteminers are not taught clearly. That is why most pupils are unable to complete the sentences successfully.

IV.4.2. The teaching method.

Some new grammatical structures /items are introduced by the teacher. However, the way they are perceived by him does not always correspond to their correct use.

In addition, some errors are left uncorrected because teachers think they are not significant. Besides, some teachers may not have given a variety of exercises in order to enlighten different uses of structures. After having introduced a new grammatical structure, teachers should predict where pupils can have difficulty and, therefore, provide a variety of examples. In this way, teachers will be able to tell whether or not pupils are able to handle the different uses of the new grammatical items.

Meanwhile, there is a number of ways in which teachers view and still view pupils errors. They say that their errors are due to the lack of attention, or a lack of motivation, poor memorisation... They never think that, most of the time, errors occur because of the inadequacy of the teaching process. In the same line of ideas. Hubbard et al (1983 :135) wrote :

> *Naturally, teachers can be blamed for causing errors by sloppy or careless teaching or planning. On the other hand if teachers blame the students (and must accept the fact that they often do) their accusations are usually directed at lack of motivation, self discipline or general intelligence .*

We must agree that even the most intelligent and motivated students do make errors while learning under the best possible conditions.

IV.4.3. A lack of motivation

The lack of motivation on the part of the learner can be another cause. In Burundi secondary schools, English is taught as a foreign language. As a matter of fact, English is given little importance in school curriculum (few hours). Pupils do not see the crucial role of a language which is only spoken during classroom activities, in news broadcasting and in other programmes. That is why when pupils are given tests and exams the great majority of them are doomed to failure, for they are not interest in English. The lack of motivation is actually accompanied by a lack of concentration while learning. Teachers should continue to seek the appropriate means to improve the ease and effectiveness of language learning through modification of their way of motivating pupils.

IV.4.4. A lack of sufficient time

We think that the time devoted to the English course is not sufficient as far as the learning of a foreign language is concerned. Since English is gaining more and more importance all over the world, it should deserve priority.

While the teacher is presenting his new grammatical items, he is unable to give a variety of exercises within 45 minutes. The program of the whole year is so vast that teachers are obliged to teach new grammatical structures superficially in order to finish the programm imposed by course designers. In one word, the time devoted to English is not enough to learn this language effeciently.

Chapter V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

V.O. Introduction

The preceding chapter was about the analysis of the data collected. In fact, the previous chapter was important in that my classification of errors and identification of their causes will help me in this last part to arrive at some conclusions and suggestions. Only when we know why an error has been produced can we seek about to correct it in a systematic way. Indeed, an effective teaching requires that we understand the nature of problems in order to reduce them to a minimum.

V.1. Conclusion

My study had two main aims. My first aim was to see and have evidence if, after four years of English learning grammatical structures and items, pupils of First Form of the Arts section are able to handle the use of articles and *(a) few* and *(a) little* successfully. However, my study has revealed a number of facts. Even at an advanced level, pupils are unable to deal with these items. They still have many problems using them. Another important fact noticed is that these errors were caused by French interference especially, in the use of articles. It was also seen that Burundian pupils were more influenced by French language structures than by Kirundi ones.

As it was not sufficient to identify the types of errors, an attempt was made to find the underlying causes to these errors. We assumed that many were due to the inadequacy of teaching, the lack of sufficient time, the lack of motivation and the lack of knowledge of how these expressions must be used.

Hence, the curriculum does not provide much time to English. While teaching, teachers have to follow the course designers' instructions which suggest this schemas : reading text-vocabulary explanation-structure.

Moreover, some other obstacles prevent the learner to master his language. There is a lack of suitable materials at the teacher's disposal. Here, pupils are victims of the poverty of their schools in textbooks, libraries, qualified teachers... As Wilkins (1954:23) would put it this way :

> *You cannot teach people to read if adequate material is not available. They cannot learn to understand natural spoken language if no means exist for them to hear natural spoken language.*

Moreover, many classes are too large to facilitate the teacher's task. Such classes are really difficult to handle and constitute a great barrier to language teaching. These large numbers of pupils in one class make practice almost impossible.

V.2. Recommendations

The second aim of my study is to make suggestions which could improve the materials and techniques of teaching. Indeed, the findings which came out of this study appeal for a large number of changes to be operated in order to reorganise the teaching of English grammatical structures.

First and foremost, the value of this analysis is directed to the teacher's attention so that he can devote special care and emphasis on his /her teaching. Hence, while introducing a new grammatical structure, the teacher should

provide numerous exercises and examples containing the new items in discourse. The teacher should try to teach these items in more details ; students should memorise the rules and practise their use. If pupils manage to formulate the rules that they have been practising, it means that they understand well how other kinds of exercises can be done. They will never forget the rules they have deduced themselves. In addition, while transmitting the knowledge, teachers should not leave students to themselves. Rather, they should be preoccupied by their discipline, class participation, the psychological and individual problems As Melville (1980 : 8) put it,

> *the job of the teacher is to work on the students while the students work on the language.*

In addition, the teacher must know that the methodological guides proposed by course designers are meant to help the teacher in case of need. Still, it is good to look for strategies and techniques while teaching without being a slave of what is proposed by the syllabus. Coursebooks do not predict the need of the class or the particular problems that students have. For instance, a teacher can create an authentic context in which he/she can present a new item. He can also give a variety of oral exercises. A large number of varied communicative activities develop students' oral skill, for a language is primarily spoken.

Moreover, if the class is too large, it is up to the teacher, to organise the class in groups of work if necessary. The teacher has responsibility to look for effective and adequate means to fit the learner's needs. Knowledge is better transmitted when it is given in good conditions, using appropriate teaching techniques.

The second recommendation is directed to the Government in general and to the Ministry of Education in particular. It is a good thing that Burundi authorities have grasped the overwhelming importance of English all over the world in introducing this language in school programmes. Nevertheless, its status as a foreign language does not motivate pupils. It goes without saying that English cannot be learned effectively unless given a more important role than it has at present. Everyone knows that Burundi is a land-locked country whose economic transactions are mostly done via its English speaking neighbours like KENYA, TANZANIA, ZAMBIA... So, we suggest that the importance of English should be revised for economic reasons. Therefore, Burundi should adopt English language accordingly. We recommand that English should be introduced in primary school. However, I don't mean that it should be the language of instruction replacing French, but, introduced as earlier as possible. In this way, English will be acquired effectively at a low level, and will consequently allow Burundian pupils to benefit from the many opportunities offered by English as a world language.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education should encourage teachers to be trained enough by organising seminars. The retraining of teachers must be revised since it helps them to improve their quality of teaching. Furthermore, the retraining is an opportunity to gather teachers' views, criticims and feelings about the teaching of English in general and the teaching of grammatical structures in particular.

Additionally, the Ministry of Education should avoid to favour large classes almost sacrificing the quality of teaching. Hence, the decision makers have to reduce the size of the classes in order to lead teachers to a better accomplishment of their duties. In this way, pupils will get more opportunities

to practice and experience English, thus, adopting efficient strategies in their attempt to acquire the new language.

As we have pointed out earlier the problem of insufficiency of materials in secondary schools, we recommend that school administrators with the support of the Ministry of Education endeavour to avail teachers with necessary teaching materials. Here, we suggest that every school should be supplied with the same materials. But, more importantly, these materials should be complete : textbooks, complementary books, libraries ... In addition, these materials should be used in an uniform way, and the teacher should evaluate their outcomes or shortcomings as often as possible so as to improve them. Moreover, some materials should be elaborated according to the difficulties of the learner regarding a particular subject matter. In one word, course designers are asked to look for good and clear methods which could guide the teacher to accomplish his/her task.

The last recommendation is directed towards pupils themselves.
We assume that many pupils refuse to make the effort needed to overcome their problems while learning English. Here, learners are responsible for their failures. Other students learn English for the sake of being evaluated and graded. Instead, they should be motivated in order to be good at English either outside or inside of the classroom. To pupils, we recommend to be conscious of the need to improve their English language and to practice it either during classroom activities or in other activities accomplished out of the class. They should remember that *Practice makes perfect*

APPENDICES

Appendix I. The Test

The following exercises were chosen from S.P, Corder (1960) An intermediate English Practice Book and from P. Strevens, (1980), Net work : Student's Book.

I. Put *a little, little, few* and *a few* into these sentences if necessary

1. A lot of food was prepared but....of it was eaten.
2. There are .... people who can be trusted anymore.
3. I think there is still..... wine left.
4. He is not an expert but he knows.... about cars.
5. A lot of people have tried but....of them have succeeded.
6. Hurry ! we've got.... Time.
7. Do you like milk ? Yes, put .... in my cup.
8. We don't have money but Tom has....
9. I didn't think Jill will be a good teacher. She had got ..... patience with her children.
10. This is not the first time the car has broken down. It has happened..... times before.
11. We invited all our friends but..... of them turned up.
12. He speaks English correctly, he makes.... mistakes.
13. It is a pity, Peter has..... insufficient formal training.

I. Complete the following sentences with *a, an, the* or ϕ

1. .... Honesty is the best policy.
2. She was invited to have.... dinner with the governor's wife.
3. ..... President has arrived. Please turn on the radio.
4. I don't like ..... sugar, thank you !
5. We decided to stay in..... hotels.
6. They say that..... Japanese language is particularly difficult for Europeans
7. She experienced..... difficutty after another.
8. ..... wine that France produces.
9. .... Sun rises in the East and sets in the west.
10. ..... Water is necessary for life.
11. From the heart of London to..... heart of Paris.
12. At last we reached..... Lake Tanganyika.
13. He flew over..... Pacific Ocean.
14. ..... optimist believes in progress.
15. He was sent to..... prison for three years.
16. ..... Tigers are dangerous animals.
17. He is a graduate of..... University of Harvard.
18. She is at.....church arranging flowers.
19. When you live in..... community you should obey its rules.
20. The Playhouse is.... old theatre but it puts on modern plays.

II. Key to exercises

I.

1) little
2) few
3) a little
4) a little
5) few
6) little
7) a little
8) a little
9) little
10) a few
11) few
12) few
13) little

II.

1) ϕ
2) ϕ
3) the
4) ϕ
5) ϕ
6) the
7) one/a
8) the
9) the
10) ϕ
11) the
12) ϕ
13) the
14) an
15) ϕ
16) ϕ
17) the
18)ϕ
19) a
20) an

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