

The Noun-Phrase Elements on the Usage of the Zero Article

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Abstract : Compared to content words, function words have been relatively overlooked by English learners especially articles. The article system, to a certain extent, becomes a resistance to know English better, driven by different elements. Three principal factors can be summarized in term of the nature of the articles when referring to the difficulty of the English article system. However, making the article system more complex are difficulties in the second acquisition process, for [-ART] learners have to create another category, causing even most non-native speakers at proficiency level to make errors. According to the sequences of acquisition of the English article, it is showed that the zero article is first acquired and in high inaccuracy. The zero article is often overused in the early stages of L2 acquisition. Although learners at the intermediate level move to underuse the zero article for they realize that the zero article does not cover any case, overproduction of the zero article even occurs among advanced L2 learners. The aim of the study is to investigate noun-phrase factors which give rise to incorrect usage or overuse of the zero article, thus providing suggestions for L2 English acquisition. Moreover, it enables teachers to carry out effective instruction that activate conscious learning of students. The research question will be answered through a corpus-based, data- driven approach to analyze the noun-phrase elements from the semantic context and countability of noun-phrases. Based on the analysis of the International Thurbur Thesis corpus, the results show that: (1) Although context of [-definite,-specific] favored the zero article, both[-definite,+specific] and [+definite,-specific] showed less influence. When we reflect on the frequency order of the zero article , prototypicality plays a vital role in it .(2)EFL learners in this study have trouble classifying abstract nouns as countable. We can find that it will bring about overuse of the zero article when learners can not make clear judgements on countability altered from (+definite) to (-definite).Once a noun is perceived as uncountable by learners, the choice would fall back on the zero article. These findings suggest that learners should be engaged in recognition of the countability of new vocabulary by explaining nouns in lexical phrases and explore more complex aspects such as analysis dependent on discourse.

Keywords : noun phrase, zero article, corpus, second language acquisition

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