

English Articles ‘a’ and ‘the’ in Saudi English: An Emerging World Englishes Variety

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المخلص

من الدوافع المحفزة لهذا البحث هو ظهور اللغة الإنجليزية السعودية كنوع جديد من الإنجليزية ضمن إطار اللغة الإنجليزية العالمية. فالإنجليزية السعودية هي نوع ناشئ من اللغة الإنجليزية لم يتم بحثه بشكل جيد وتم بحثه بشكل أساسي فقط من منظور بيداغوجي. ولذلك تهتم هذه الورقة البحثية بالسمات المميزة للغة الإنجليزية السعودية في الكتابة الأكاديمية لدارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من حيث البحث في العلاقة بين استخدام حروف التعريف الإنجليزية (أي الحذف والإفراط في الاستخدام والإبدال) وسنوات الخبرة مع اللغة الإنجليزية. شاركت في هذا البحث 55 من الطالبات السعوديات (تتراوح أعمارهن بين 18 و22 عاماً). تم جمع البيانات بواسطة تمارين تعتمد على تقنيات الاستنتاج. هدفت الدراسة إلى التحقق مما إذا كانت الكفاءة اللغوية المعززة (أي سنوات الخبرة) قد حسنت استخدام حروف التعريف الإنجليزية. أظهرت النتائج وجود علاقة تناسبية سلبية بين الإفراط في استخدام حروف التعريف والاستبدال وسنوات الخبرة. ومن ناحية أخرى، لم تؤكد الدراسة وجود مثل هذا الارتباط بين حذف حروف التعريف وسنوات الخبرة. وبالتالي، فمن الممكن الإقرار بأن الخبرة في اللغة الإنجليزية يمكن أن تقلل من هذه السمات في اللغة الإنجليزية السعودية، إلا أن النتائج الحالية لم تنكر وجود مثل هذه السمات على الرغم من سنوات الخبرة. ختاماً، تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية إلى توسيع مجال أدبيات اللغة الإنجليزية، حيث يمكن أن تساعد أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة العربية السعودية من إيجاد حلول تطبيقية على ضوء هاته النتائج.



Abstract

The recent evolution of Saudi English as a new variant within the World Englishes framework has motivated this research. Saudi English (SE) is an emergent variety of English that has not been well-researched and has been primarily investigated from a pedagogical perspective. This paper is concerned with the distinctive features of SE in the academic writing of EFL learners in terms of the relationship between the use of English articles ‘a’ and ‘the’ (i.e., omission, overuse, and substitution) and their years of experience. The participants in this study were 55 native Saudi female English language learners (aged between 18 and 22). Data were collected using two forced elicitation tasks. The study aimed to investigate whether enhanced language proficiency (i.e., years of experience) improved the use of English articles. Results showed a negative correlation between article overuse and substitution and years of experience. On the other hand, it did not confirm such a correlation between article omission and years of experience. Thus, it is true that experience with the English language can reduce such features in SE, yet the current results did not deny the existence of such features despite years of experience. Ultimately, this paper seeks to broaden the field of SE literature, as the current findings could catalyze practical implications for English language instructors.

Keywords: *EFL, English articles, Saudi English, World Englishes world*

Introduction

The English language has a rich and enduring presence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), with its roots dating back to elementary institutions in 1924 (Al-Shurafa, 1989; Determann, 2013). The discovery of oil in the early 1930s profoundly impacted how English was taught and learned in the region. In 1957, King Saud University established the first English department. Since then, the Saudi government has emphasised the importance of English in critical sectors such as business, education, and government (Al-Haq & Smadi, 1996; Elyas, 2011). Today, the 2030 vision of KSA has resulted in a rise in English utilisation within the country. Various government agencies now offer English training programs for their employees and companies.

The King Abdullah Scholarship Program, active from 2005 to 2020, has dramatically emphasised the significance of English language proficiency. This scholarship program, generously supported and managed by the Saudi government, aims to offer Saudis the opportunity to pursue high-quality higher education (Hamdan, 2015). It strives to enhance academic and professional standards, foster cross-cultural exchange, and nurture a pool of competent Saudi faculty and staff (Hall, 2013). Consequently, many Saudi students opt to pursue higher education in English-speaking countries (Fallatah, 2017).

The prevalence of spoken English among Saudis and foreigners, including tourists, pilgrims, and multinational business personnel, highlights the significance of the English language (Elyas, 2011). English is extensively used as a lingua franca (LF) in KSA, especially in international businesses and academia. This facilitates efficient communication between individuals from diverse nations, even in the absence of a shared language. Adopting English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in KSA is crucial for fostering economic growth and enhancing global integration.

Developing proficiency in the English language can significantly improve the job opportunities available to university graduates in both KSA and abroad. Al-Rawi (2012) posits that acquiring English language skills enhances the career prospects of university graduates across a wide range of Saudi and international corporations. This trend has resulted in a phenomenon where affluent families with strong financial backgrounds actively encourage their children to enroll in educational institutions that prioritise teaching English as a second language. Education and English language skills have become essential parts of the social fabric of KSA, as numerous Saudis are now enrolling in online English classes (Elyas, 2011; Elyas & Picard, 2010, 2018).

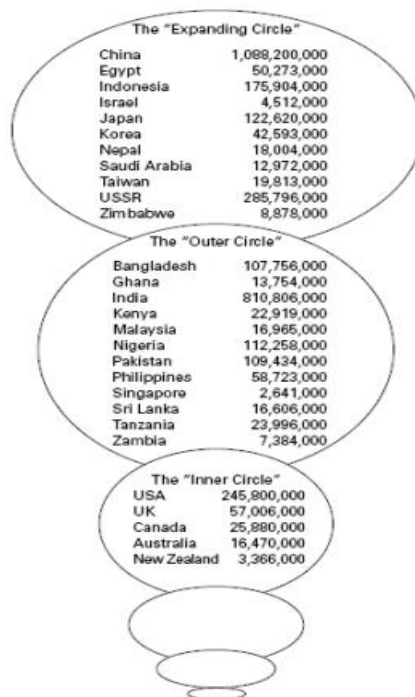
Literature Review

Over the past few decades, English has experienced a gradual process of globalisation, leading to shifts in its sociolinguistic profile and the emergence of fresh variations of the language (Schneider, 2004). Nowadays, the English language has undergone significant changes, becoming not only extensively utilised by native speakers. English has also attained official language status in numerous territories previously under British and American control. The categorisation of World Englishes (WEs) and the need to adapt English Language Teaching to its changing status have raised significant issues (Pennycook, 2006).

Kachru (1985) presents a comparative analysis of the distribution of English use throughout three concentric rings, namely the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. According to Kachru (1985), the circles shown in Figure 1 symbolise the distribution of English use across other cultures and languages.

Figure 1

Kachru's (1985) World Englishes Paradigm



The Inner Circle denotes nations where English is an official language used in routine societal interactions and governmental establishments. These countries include the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The Outer Circle consists of former British territories where English is extensively used in social and formal domains as a second language, such as India, Malaysia, Singapore, Ghana, and Kenya. Expanding Circle refers to countries that include English as a non-native language in their educational frameworks, particularly to enhance English contact between the Inner and Outer Circles (Kachru, 1985). Numerous countries, such as China, Nepal, and Saudi Arabia, falls within this category.

Saudi English (SE) refers to the variant of English influenced by Arabic and often spoken by individuals from the Middle Eastern Arab region (Al-Shurafa, 2008). In contrast to other nations in the area, KSA does not have a historical background of British colonisation. Consequently, it falls into the 'Expanding Circle' category for English rather than the 'Outer Circle'. Mahboob and Elyas (2014) advocate that American English has the most influence in KSA. Nonetheless, the insertion of Arabic terms, creative linguistic expressions, and Gulf religious ideology contribute to developing a 'Gulf English' variety, which has helped construct a Gulf identity in English linguistic practice (Alshurafa, 2014). Thus, according to several studies (e.g., Al-Rawi, 2012; Elyas et al., 2021; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014), L1 interference

influences ‘Arabicized English’ which is a term advocated by Saudi researchers (e.g., Elyas et al., 2021; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014).

English is used in KSA in a way that is unique to the country, and Saudis and foreigners have been observed to use Saudi, American, and British English interchangeably (Elyas et al., 2021). Since the United States and the West generally seem to have much power, English is used and taught as a foreign language in this circle due to socio-political pressure. According to Schneider's (2004) framework, the variety of English spoken in KSA may be characterised as ‘endonormative’ or a variety that does not excessively resist linguistic transfer (Sermah, 2009). Society generally accepts New English, a variation of the English language that deviates from the traditional ‘standard’ form. Still, further empirical studies are needed to investigate the linguistic characteristics of Saudi English, the variant of English spoken in KSA (Elyas et al., 2021; Elyas & Mahboob, 2014). Accordingly, the present study is interested in investigating how Saudi learners use the English article system.

The article system is a linguistic feature in specific languages for grammatical or functional purposes. In the English language, the articles a/n, the, and the zero article are commonly used. According to Hassan (2018), utilising these tools poses a surprisingly intricate and challenging task for individuals, regardless of whether they are native or non-native speakers of the language. Alasmari's (2018) study focused on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and the challenges faced by L2 learners when it comes to acquiring the English article system. Notably, her study highlighted the difficulties experienced by learners who still need an article system or determiners in their first language.

The Arabic language is described as [+ART] because it uses the definite article “al” (Hassan, 2018). In order to have an in-depth comprehension of this idea, it is essential to examine the notion of definiteness as it is seen within the context of SE. Aboras (2020) posits that the expression of definiteness in Arabic involves the use of the prefix ‘al-’ in definite contexts, whereas bare nouns are employed in indefinite contexts.

More precisely, Kashgary (2015) summarises the types and functions of the article ‘al-’ asserting that it has many functions in Arabic. She adds that the article ‘al-’ is not a true representative of definiteness as it could be used as a “non-referential definiteness”. In Arabic, the prefix ‘al-’ might have one of three different meanings or purposes. According to Kashgary (2015), it can be: “(a) nominal ‘al-’ (al al-mawṣūla) which functions as a relative noun, (b) an article that means definiteness (al al-ta’rīf) and (c) an augmented al- (al al-zā’ida)” (p. 93). Still, when ‘al-’ is used as a definite article, it may not only indicate complete definiteness, but it can also express a form of linguistic definiteness that is not tied to any particular thing. This idea aligns with what Chesterman (2005) describes as “inclusiveness” when discussing the difference between definite and indefinite. While the prefix 'al-' can function as a definite article in specific situations, it may not always be the case. Using the Arabic article 'al-' to express the definiteness/indefiniteness dichotomy lacks clear-cut distinctions. Thus, Kashgary (2015) concludes that definiteness in Arabic is not a bipolar concept (definite vs. indefinite); it is rather a “scalar concept”. That is, understanding definiteness in Arabic involves considering a range of scales and degrees that vary based on contextual and pragmatic factors.

In the same vein, Jabak (2019) highlights the multiple meanings associated with the prefix 'al-'. These meanings serve purposes beyond definiteness, including the nominal al-, ('al-

'tarif), and the augmented al-. ('al-' al-z'ida). According to his argument, in Arabic, one article is equivalent to the definite article 'the' in English. However, Arabic, in general, and SE, in particular, lacks an equivalent article for the English indefinite articles 'a' and 'an'. This means no specific article indicates that the noun is unspecified, whether singular or plural.

Adult English learners in the KSA frequently need help using articles, often omitting them in definite and indefinite linguistic contexts and making incorrect substitutions. In their study, Mahboob and Elyas (2014) discovered that students often used the indefinite article 'a' incorrectly and unnecessarily when producing English translations. The challenge and complexity of this issue can be attributed to the absence of an Arabic article that functions similarly to the English indefinite articles 'a' and 'an'.

In KSA, adopting the World Englishes Framework faces a challenge with the potential 'nativisation' of English. This occurs when English is heavily influenced by native tongues, leading to complex linguistic patterns such as lexical alteration, code-switching and blending, discourse, and syntactic transformations. Academics in KSA have been cautious about implementing World Englishes in their work, as they face various obstacles in applied linguistics, particularly in pedagogical principles and practices.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study aims to verify Saudi female students' use of the English articles 'the' and 'a' in SE as there are few instances of research in this context. English articles are grouped into definite articles and indefinite ones. 'A' and 'an' are used to express indefiniteness and 'the' is used to express definiteness. 'An' is just a variation of 'a' as it is used in some specific phonetic contexts (i.e., just before nouns that begin with a vowel). Therefore, 'a' could be considered as the rule and 'an' as the exception. Accordingly, most research studies on L2 acquisition of articles (i.e., Butler, 2002; Ekiert, 2004; Ionin, 2003; Zdorenko & Paradis, 2012) have investigated the contrast between the use of 'a' and 'the'. Moreover, the most frequently observed misuse of articles within the selected language context is related to the contrast 'a/the'. Motivated by the aforementioned reasons, the current study deliberately disregarded the English article 'an'. To examine the variations in detail, the following research questions were set out:

1. To what extent do Saudi students misuse English articles 'a' and 'the'?
2. Do years of experience correlate with variations in the use of English articles in the writing of Saudi students?

Accordingly, the main hypotheses tested in the present study were (1) whether there is a significant negative correlation between years of experience and the misuse of both articles, (2) whether there is a significant positive correlation between the misuse of 'a' and 'the', (3) whether there is a significant negative correlation between years of experience and the overuse and substitution of both articles, (4) whether there is a significant positive correlation between the overuse and substitution of both articles, (5) whether there is no significant correlation between the omission of both articles and years of experience, (6) whether there is a significant negative correlation between years of experience and the substitution as well as the overuse of 'a' and (7) whether there is a significant negative correlation between years of experience and the substitution as well as the overuse of the article 'the'.

Methodology

Setting & Participants

The data collection for this research was done at a private university in Riyadh, KSA. The participants were Native Saudi Female students in the University Preparatory Programme. The participants were selected using ‘non-probability sampling’ (Dörnyei, 2007). The researchers used a ‘convenience or opportunity sample’ to conduct this study, as all participants were recruited at the researchers’ institution (Dörnyei, 2007). This study had no control or experimental groups. A total of 55 native Saudi female learners ages 18–22 took part in the study. English has been the medium of instruction since their early school years, and they speak English in addition to Arabic (i.e., Saudi Arabic), their mother tongue. The minimum requirement for admission to their university is a score of 5.5 on the IELTS test. This study considered levels 4 and 5 equivalent to CEFR B1–B2 levels. Participants signed an ethical consent before taking part in this study (Appendix A).

Instruments

Previously used tasks were mainly translation tasks (e.g., Jabak, 2019) or textbook analyses (e.g., Mahboob & Elyas, 2014), yet this study used two forced elicitation tasks. In fact, this choice of instrument was motivated by Butler’s (2002) claim that previous studies on L2 acquisition revealed that, in free production tasks, participants deliberately avoid articles that they do not know how to use. Therefore, free production tasks were avoided as they may favour the avoidance strategy and forced elicitation tasks were opted for to avert the avoidance strategy and to urge the current participants to use the articles under investigation.

This study's instruments were tasks that played a pivotal role in evaluating the use of English articles. They were adapted from level-appropriate listening transcripts (LibGuides: Listening Practice: A Library Guide: Conversation & Dialogs, 2023) (see Appendix B).

Data Analysis and Results

The data was then tabulated, and Pearson correlation analyses were conducted using SPSS 23; the results are shown in the subsequent section. Data analysis was carried out systematically and based on English articles' omission, misuse, and substitution. This type of analysis is called "coding." Each use of the article was colour-coded and categorised as follows. The use of the article was scored as correct (‘a’ in indefinite contexts, ‘the’ in definite contexts), substitution (‘the’ in indefinite contexts, ‘a’ in definite contexts), or omission (null article). Table 1 reports the range scores for each variable in this study.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Variables in the Current Study

	Descriptive Statistics		
	N	Minimum	Maximum
Years of Experience	55	1	15
Omission of ‘a’	55	0	7
Omission of ‘the’	55	0	8
Overuse of ‘a’	55	4	32
Overuse of ‘the’	55	2	22
Substitution of A	55	1	22
Substitution of ‘the’	55	4	32
Valid N (listwise)	55		

A closer look at the significant interactions reveals a relationship between years of experience and the three types of article a/the misuse: overuse, substitution, and omission. In other words, Figures 2 and 3 show that for the article ‘a’, overuse is more dominant than the other features of article misuse. However, for the article ‘the’, substitution is more dominant.

Figure 2

Features of Misuse of the Article ‘A’ and Years of Experience

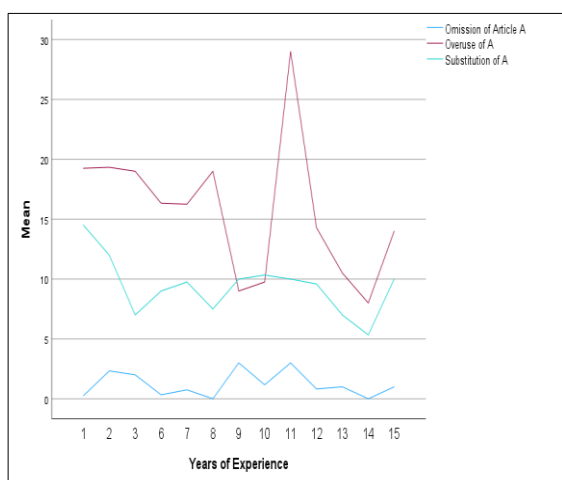
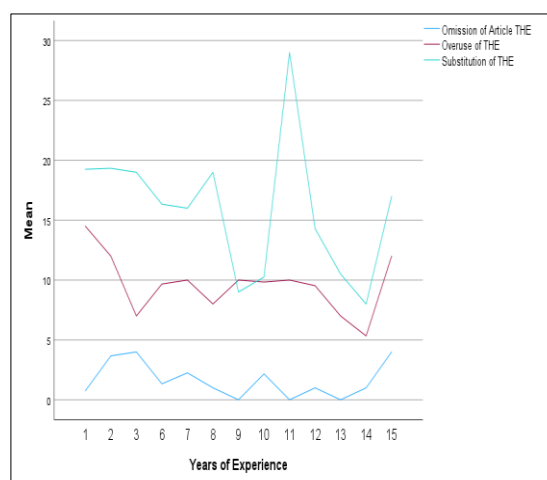


Figure 3

Features of Misuse of the Article ‘the’ and Years of Experience



Pearson correlation analyses were computed on the means for each variable using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 23). All the reported analyses were significant at the .05 alpha level (*p*). The following analyses were based on the earlier stated hypotheses.

Correlation between Years of Experience and Misuse of the Articles ‘a’ and ‘the’

Using Pearson correlation, the first and second hypotheses were confirmed, respectively. That is, Table 2 shows, first, a significant negative correlation between years of experience and the misuse of both articles. In other words, when years of experience increase, misuse decreases, and vice versa. Second, Table 2 displays a significant positive correlation between the misuse of ‘a’ and ‘the’. That is, both variables move in the same direction. An increase in the misuse of ‘a’ leads to an increase in the misuse of ‘the’ and vice versa.

Table 2

Correlation between Years of Experience and the Misuse of Article ‘a’ and ‘the’

		Correlations		
		Years of Experience	Misuse of A	Misuse of THE
Years of Experience	Pearson Correlation	1	-.367**	-.384**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006	.004
	N	55	55	55
Misuse of A	Pearson Correlation	-.367**	1	.968**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006		<.001
	N	55	55	55

** . Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation between Years of Experience and the Overuse, Substitution, and Omission of the Articles ‘a’ and ‘the’

To check which misuse features correlate more with years of experience, further Pearson correlation analyses were conducted between the overuse, substitution, and omission of both articles. The third and fourth hypotheses were confirmed, respectively. Table 3 shows that there is a significant negative correlation between years of experience and the overuse and substitution of both articles. That is, when years of experience increase, these features of misuse decrease, and vice versa. Additionally, Table 3 displays a significant positive correlation between the overuse and substitution of both articles. That is, both variables move in the same direction. An increase in one feature leads to an increase in the other, and vice versa. Finally, the fifth hypothesis was also confirmed, as Table 3 shows no significant correlation between the omission of both articles and years of experience.

Table 3

Correlation between Years of Experience and the Overuse, Substitution, and Omission of the Articles ‘a’ and ‘the’

		Correlations			
		Years of Experience	Overuse of both Articles	Substitution of both Articles	Omission of both Articles
Years of Experience	Pearson Correlation	1	-.366**	-.331*	-.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006	.014	.409
	N	55	55	55	55
Overuse of both Articles (a & the)	Pearson Correlation	-.366**	1	.963**	-.257
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006		<.001	.058
	N	55	55	55	55

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Separate Correlation Analyses between Years of Experience and Overuse, Substitution, and Omission of both Articles ‘a’ and ‘the’

To better understand the previous results, separate Pearson correlation analyses were conducted between overuse, substitution, and omission of ‘a’ and ‘the’.

The Correlation between Years of Experience and Overuse of the Article ‘a’

Using Pearson correlation, the sixth hypothesis was then partially confirmed. Table 4 shows a significant negative correlation between years of experience and the overuse of ‘a’. When years of experience increase, the overuse of ‘a’ decreases, and vice versa. Nonetheless, there was no significant correlation between the substitution of article ‘a’ and years of experience. Table 4 also shows no significant correlation between the omission of the article ‘a’ and years of experience, as already seen in section 6.2.

Table 4*Correlation between Years of Experience and the Overuse of Article A*

		Correlations			
		Years of Experience	Omission of Article A	Overuse of A	Substitution of A
Years of Experience	Pearson Correlation	1	-.060	-.325*	-.236
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.663	.016	.083
	N	55	55	55	55

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The Correlation between Years of Experience and Overuse and Substitution of ‘the’

Using Pearson correlation, the seventh hypothesis was then confirmed. Table 5 shows that there is a significant negative correlation between years of experience and the substitution as well as the overuse of the article ‘a’. That is, when years of experience increase, the overuse of ‘a’ decreases, and vice versa. Table 5 also shows a significant positive correlation between the overuse and substitution of ‘the’. That is, both variables move in the same direction. An increase in one feature leads to an increase in the other, and vice versa. Finally, Table 5 shows no correlation between the omission of article ‘the’ and years of experience, as explained in section 6.2.

Table 5*Correlation between Years of Experience and Overuse and Substitution of ‘the’*

		Correlations			
		Years of Experience	Overuse of ‘the’	Substitution of ‘the’	Omission of ‘the’
Years of Experience	Pearson Correlation	1	-.253	-.294*	-.121
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.063	.029	.380
	N	55	55	55	55
Overuse of THE	Pearson Correlation	-.253	1	.300*	-.374**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.063		.026	.005
	N	55	55	55	55

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

The main questions motivating this study were whether the current participants excessively misuse English articles ‘a’ and ‘the’ and whether years of experience correlate with variations in the use of English articles in the writing of Saudi students. To answer these questions, multiple correlation analyses were conducted.

The present results confirmed a significant negative correlation between years of experience and the overuse of the article 'a'. On the other hand, the current results did not confirm such a negative correlation between years of experience and the substitution and omission of the same article 'a'. For the article 'the', the current results confirmed a significant negative correlation between years of experience and the substitution and overuse of the article 'the'. However, it did not confirm such a negative correlation between the omission of 'the' and years of experience. Thus, the present set of results revealed that such features of article misuse, despite their occurrence in SE, could be reduced as experience with English increases.

Previous research studies on the use of English articles by Arab speakers (e.g., Al-Sulaimaan et al., 2018; Abumlhah, 2016; Bataineh, 2005; Crompton, 2011) did endorse the current results as they confirm that Arab speakers, in general, and Saudis, in particular, misuse articles as these participants are mainly influenced by their L1 which is a result supported by studies one on other L2 learners from different linguistic backgrounds (e.g., Ionin et al., 2008; Sermsook et al., 2017; Zdorenko & Paradis, 2012).

It could be suggested that the participants of the present study associate both 'the' and 'a' with definiteness, which results in the overuse of these articles. Two functions stated in Kashgary (2015) could explain our set of results (i.e., the unnecessary 'Al-' or the 'Al-' that refers to indefiniteness). These could explain the overuse and substitution of the articles 'a' and 'the', which display a case of language interference, and this conclusion is in line with Alhaisoni et al. (2016).

These findings are consonant with those of Jabak (2019) who found that their undergraduate students frequently relied on the definite article in their English translations. These students often directly translate from Arabic without considering the grammar rules of the target language. According to Jabak (2019), the previous studies on definiteness and Arab speakers (e.g., Bataineh, 2005; Crompton, 2011) did not overtly explain why Arab students struggle with using indefinite articles in English. Therefore, he provided a two-fold explanation as follows. His participants either lack the linguistic competence to enable them to know where to use the definite article 'the', or they are highly influenced by their mother tongue (i.e., Saudi Arabic) to the point that they follow its grammar rules rather than the grammar rules of English. Both explanations could lead to two-fold explanations: (a) The article misuse is either a 'mistake' as it is a deviation from the norm (i.e., Standard English) or (b) an exhibition of the participants' identity when they deal with English as a non-native language.

Nonetheless, this finding does not align with Jabak's (2019) finding about article omission. He explained that his participants tend to omit articles in English translation because of the lack of indefinite articles in Arabic. The current findings are not also fully congruent with Bataineh (2005), as her study revealed that students tend to omit indefinite articles as they do not exist in their L1 grammar system. These findings support previous findings on Arab speakers' use of English articles (e.g., Al-Sulaimaan et al., 2018; Abumlhah, 2016; Crompton, 2011; Jabak, 2019) where participants tend to overuse and misuse the definite article 'the'.

As already elaborated, Kashgary's (2015) explanations could hold here. That is, the current participants' tendency to overuse articles rather than to omit them could be explained in Kashgary (2015). Accordingly, the present participants might overuse articles for the following reason. These participants are used to one single article 'the'; therefore, they might

have treated both articles in English ‘a’ and ‘the’ as their already known Arabic equivalent ‘the’. According to Kashgary (2015), ‘al-’ could be used to mean definiteness and could be used as (1) an augmented article, which means that it is unnecessary, and sometimes (2) it could be used to indicate indefiniteness surprisingly. This could also be congruent with Zdorenko and Paradis (2012), who claim that Arabic speakers who are learners of English fail in “the transfer of the mapping of the feature [-definite] onto indefinite article forms” as their language has only one feature which [+definite] (p. 38).

Thus, these studies, including the current one, confirm that participants are influenced by the article system of their native languages when they speak or write in English. Researchers (e.g., Brown, 2014; James, 2013; Richards, 1974) grouped L2 errors into interlingual errors and intralingual errors. While interlingual errors are the result of L1 interference, intralingual errors could be called developmental errors. They are similar to a child’s errors while he/she is learning his/her L1 (Al-Sobhi, 2019).

Based on Richards’ (1974) conceptualisation intralingual errors, these types of errors could be the result of ignorance of rule restriction and incomplete application of rules, which could be the case for the current participants. They might have still relied on their L1 knowledge of articles and still failed to grasp that indefiniteness in English has a separate article that should not be confused with the definite one. This is also in line with Lardiere’s (2004) suggestion that L2 learners find it easier to acquire ‘the’ as it has simpler features than indefinite articles do.

The current findings are also congruent with Zdorenko and Paradis (2012) who found a similar pattern in children. That is, the errors made by the current L2 participants were similar to L1 developmental errors. They also asserted that “the acquisition of the article system displays an interplay of various patterns, both developmental and L1 transfer-based; however, the predominant trends were developmental” (Zdorenko & Paradis, 2012, p.39). Therefore, these errors could be interlingual initially and transformed into intralingual later. This explanation is at the heart of interlanguage as described in Lightbown’s (1985) Hypotheses (Brown, 2014). Therefore, the misuse of English articles is part of the current participants’ interlanguage, and this interlanguage could persist for a more extended period, which is a claim supported by Zdorenko and Paradis (2012). They argue that “adult L2 acquisition studies have reported that learners of English often have consistent difficulty in the use of articles until very late stages of acquisition” (p. 38).

Based on the current results which confirm that L2 learners’ features of misuse decrease with experience, it can be inferred that features of misuse decrease when proficiency increases. If we map years of experience to proficiency, the current findings are constant with those of Butler (2002). In fact, he found that “learners’ performance on the fill-in-the-article test showed that the higher their proficiency levels were, the more target like usage they could achieve” (p. 472).

The current results could also be discussed considering the World English Approach. Mahboob and Elyas (2014) argue that the grammatical features (e.g., variation in use of articles, tense markers, and subject verb agreement) in SE that differ from English norms are not considered mistakes. Alasmari (2018) supports such idea explaining that these “features are not random mistakes but rather ‘rule-governed’ variations of an emerging Saudi English” (p.

88). Accordingly, the aforementioned studies argue for the idea that these deviations are not mere mistakes. They are instead forms of creating their own local identity in SE, which is against a “Westernized worldview” of English (Alasmari, 2018, p.88).

Alasmari (2018) asserts that even though it is acknowledged that there is an emerging SE, there is resistance to teaching this variety. She contends that the arguments that education specialists (i.e., teachers and decision makers) behind such resistance rely on the fact that SE is only a “localised variety” that does not have the same status as the highly recognised varieties (i.e., the native ones such as British English and American English). Thus, she argues that English in expanding circle countries such as KSA should be taught within the World Englishes Approach. Alasmari (2018) argues that this pluralistic approach (i.e., the World Englishes Approach) “contradicts the common view of the superiority of the inner circle varieties and speakers over the outer circle ones” (p.84). This view was already adopted by Al-Asmari and Khan (2014), who previously argued for a World Englishes Approach. They explained that “the infusion of World Englishes into TESOL programs can encourage the future teachers of English to learn and evaluate with utmost zeal how this language is used in various parts of the world” (Al-Asmari & Khan, 2014, p. 320).

Conclusion

This study pioneered in the investigation of the relationship between the misuse of English articles and years of experience in the Saudi context. It explored the English article use of L2 learners whose L1 background is Saudi Arabic. Even though such a relationship (i.e., years of experience and misuse) has not been investigated in the current context, this set of results is still congruent with previous research studies investigating definiteness in Saudi Students of English following different methodologies (e.g., Aboras, 2020; Jabak, 2019; Al-Mohanna, 2014).

The current results have implications for teaching English in the Saudi context. Finding that experience with English reduces article misuse could mean that effective instruction could solve such issues for those convinced that the English produced by Saudi students should conform to the norms of the native varieties. An instruction based on explicitly explaining the differences between article use in Saudi Arabic and English could be a solution. Teachers could raise awareness among their students that definiteness is treated differently in both language systems. However, for those who argue for the existence of a SE variety and are aware of the sociolinguistic nature of language teaching (e.g., Alasmari, 2018; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014), such features could be accepted as an exhibition of identity when dealing with a non-native language, which is English in this case.

Ultimately, the ELF approach should dominate English language instruction in such a globalised world. What is deviant from the norm could be accepted if it does not hinder communication. However, in academic writing settings (i.e., writing scientific papers, personal statements, and applications to universities), sticking to a norm could spare non-native speakers many problems that could hinder their academic reputation. Therefore, the results and discussion of this paper could inspire teachers of English in the sense that it could broaden their perspective on dealing with such features of SE that could be perceived as article misuse. Based

on their students' needs, they could tailor their instruction and shape their discussion about definiteness in their classrooms.

Including World Englishes in TESOL programmes might inspire aspiring English instructors to research and analyse with the utmost zeal how this language is utilised around the globe. For them, it may open a new world of learning where they discover other kinds besides learning about various teaching models and pedagogical approaches (Brown, 1993). Finally, it will enable aspiring English instructors to add more languages to their knowledge base.

Further studies should be done to assist future English teachers who can use innovative ways and strategies to enhance the universal distinctness of their varieties of English. Therefore, incorporating World Englishes into TESOL programmes in KSA will undoubtedly be a significant step (Al-Shumaimeri, 1999). Accordingly, the investigation of teachers' perceptions and practices of the World Englishes approach along with learners' cognitive processes of the use of articles in the Saudi context could be an interesting addition to the literature. To do so, using paced self-reading to tap more into the cognitive processes of the use of English articles in the Saudi context is highly recommended. Additionally, this could be coupled with the investigation of Saudi participants' metalinguistic knowledge following Bulter's (2002) lead when she investigated the metalinguistic knowledge used by Japanese students in acquiring the English article system.

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Authors' Contribution

The order of authors reveals the amount of their contribution to this paper as described in the CRediT authorship contribution statement. That is, Maria Zaheer and Marwa Mekni Toujani equally contributed to the paper, followed by Oshin Danish, and then Lamia Barakat.

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Marwa Mekni Toujani: Methodology, Data Curation, Formal analysis, Validation, Project administration, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Oshin Danish: Data curation, Writing – original draft (methodology and literature review parts)

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Appendix A

Participant Consent Form & Biodata

Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies

YES **NO**

1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me.

2. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point.

3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study within the time limits outlined in the Information Sheet, without giving a reason for my withdrawal or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study without any consequences to my future treatment by the researcher.

4. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the Information Sheet.

5. I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

6. I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study, once anonymised (so that I cannot be identified), to be used for any other research purposes.

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Contact details:

Please fill in the required information before you processed with the tasks:

Name:

Age:

Class/course:

Your native language:

Number of years you have studied English: