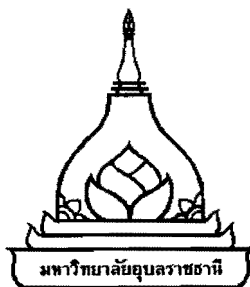


**ARTICLES USED BY ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION FRESHMEN  
AND SENIORS AT THE FACULTY OF LIBERAL ARTS,  
UBON RATCHATHANI UNIVERSITY**

**PATIDA TAESUNGNOEN**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS  
MAJOR IN ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION  
FACULTY OF LIBERAL ARTS  
UBON RATCHATHANI UNIVERSITY  
YEAR 2012  
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THESIS APPROVAL  
UBON RATCHATHANI UNIVERSITY  
MASTER OF ARTS  
MAJOR IN ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION  
FACULTY OF LIBERAL ARTS

**TITLE** ARTICLES USED BY ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION FRESHMEN  
AND SENIORS AT THE FACULTY OF LIBERAL ARTS,  
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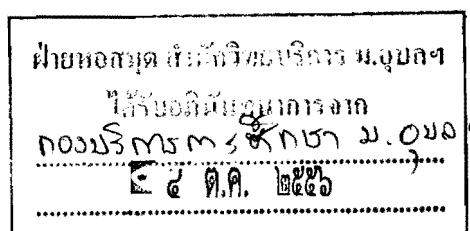
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### บทคัดย่อ

ชื่อเรื่อง : การใช้ Articles โดยนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 1 และ 4 สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ

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ศัพท์สำคัญ : คำนำหน้านาม รูปแบบการใช้คำนำหน้านามของบทเลอร์

นามนับได้และนามนับไม่ได้

การศึกษานี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาว่านักศึกษาปีที่ 1 และปีที่ 4 สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษและการสื่อสาร คณะศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยอุบลราชธานี มีความรู้เรื่องการใช้คำนำหน้านาม (article) มากน้อยแค่ไหน และนักศึกษาทั้งสองชั้นปีใช้คำนำหน้านามแตกต่างกันหรือไม่อย่างไร ตัวอย่างประชากรที่ใช้ในการศึกษานี้คือนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 1 และปีที่ 4 สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษและการสื่อสาร คณะศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยอุบลราชธานี จำนวน 60 คน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการเก็บข้อมูลคือแบบทดสอบวัดความสามารถในการใช้ คำนำหน้านาม ในรูปแบบของการเติมคำในประโยคและเรื่อง 2 เรื่อง จำนวน 57 ข้อ ซึ่งแบบทดสอบสร้างโดยอิงรูปแบบการใช้คำนำหน้านามของ Butler (2002)

ผลการศึกษาพบว่า นักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 4 มีความรู้ในการใช้คำนำหน้านามมากกว่านักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 1 กล่าวคือ นักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 1 มีคะแนนคิดเป็น 58.19% ในขณะที่นักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 4 มีคะแนน 69.88% นอกจากนี้ทั้งสองชั้นปีใช้คำนำหน้านามแตกต่างกันในแต่ละชนิดของชนิดของนามวลีทั้ง 5 ชนิด กล่าวคือ นักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 1 ได้คะแนนมากกว่า 50% ในการใช้คำนำหน้านามกับนามที่ถูกกล่าวถึงโดยทั่วไป นามที่ถูกกล่าวถึงโดยเฉพาะเจาะจง และนามที่ถูกกล่าวถึงเป็นครั้งแรก แต่ได้คะแนนต่ำกว่า 50% ในนามที่ถูกกล่าวถึงโดยไม่เฉพาะเจาะจงและสำนวน ส่วนนักศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 4 ได้คะแนนมากกว่า 50% ในนามทั้ง 4 ชนิดข้างต้น ซึ่งนักศึกษาทั้งสองชั้นปี ทั้งมีคะแนนที่แตกต่างกันอย่างมีนัยสำคัญที่  $P = 0.049, 0.002, 0.005$  และ  $0.000$  ตามลำดับ ทั้งนี้ นักศึกษาทั้งสองชั้นปีได้คะแนนต่ำกว่า 50% ในการใช้คำนำหน้านามกับสำนวน

## ABSTRACT

TITLE : ARTICLES USED BY ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION  
FRESHMEN AND SENIORS AT THE FACULTY OF LIBERAL ARTS,  
UBON RATCHATHANI UNIVERSITY  
BY : PATIDA TAESUNGNOEN  
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KEYWORDS : ARTICLE / BUTLER'S MODEL / NOUN COUNTABILITY

This study aimed to find out the extent to which the first and the fourth-year English majors at Ubon Ratchathani University knew how to use the English articles and whether they used the English articles differently. The subjects of the study were 30 freshmen and 30 seniors majored in English at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University. The instrument of this study was a fill-in-the-blank test requiring the subjects to complete individual sentences and two passages with appropriate articles, totalling 57 blanks, classified according to Butler's model (2002) of article usage.

It was found that the first-year students somewhat knew how to use articles (58.19%) whereas the fourth-year students knew it fairly well (69.88%). Both groups of the subjects used the English articles differently. The first-year students' scores were higher than 50 percent on the NP environments of generics and unspecifiable, the referential definites, the referential indefinites and first mention, but not the nonreferentials. On the contrary, the fourth-year English majors could gain scores of higher than 50 percent on all of the four NP environments, which were significantly better than the first-year students' scores at  $P = 0.049, 0.002, 0.005$  and  $0.000$  respectively. However, both groups scored lower than 50 percent on idioms and conventional uses.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

It is known that English is taught as either a second or a foreign language across the world because it is used as an international language for communication (Tawilpakul, 2100). For example, when people travel to other countries, they can use English to communicate with others because English is the language that most people around the world (over a billion) speak and can understand (Deole, 2006). Even though ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language) learners realize that English plays a role as an international language, most of them still use it incorrectly. Most L2 learners still have competence which falls far behind English native speakers (Tavilapakul, nd). One reason is no two languages have equivalent grammatical rules, which results in grammatical errors (Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007). The most frequent error that the largest number of L2 learners make in the English language concerns English article usage (Butler, 2002). A number of researchers (Butler, 2002 ; Master, 1990 ; Milne & Yoshii, 1998) agree that the English article system is one of the most difficult English grammatical features for many ESL and EFL learners. Most of them have difficulty in using the English article system because their mother tongues use different ways to denote indefiniteness and definiteness. Moreover, its use may be confusing and complicated for many L2 learners. Therefore, it is difficult for them to master the article system as English native speakers do.

An English article is a kind of determiner which is used with a noun. It provides some information about the noun. It is sometimes called a noun marker. Its use affects the meaning of the noun phrase. It can allow us to think of nouns in a specific or a generic way, as shown in the following examples (Crystal, 1995):

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| (1) <u>The /A cat</u> is running.       | (specific) |
| (2) <u>A /The cat/Cats</u> is/are cute. | (generic)  |

The English articles are of two major types: definite and indefinite. The only definite article is “the”. It is normally used to refer to a particular member of a group.

(3) The car that he bought yesterday is expensive.

Indefinite articles are of three forms: a, an and Ø. They are generally used to refer to any member of a group.

(4) A car is expensive.

The zero article is used when an indefinite plural noun (5), an uncountable noun with an indefinite referent (6) or a proper noun (7) is referred to (Swan, 1995: 61-69).

(5) Students like playing games.

(6) She does not provide information for us.

(7) Sandy just left.

Articles are essential in the English language because they lead to an effective communication (Diez-Bedmar & Pap, 2008: 147). Misusing the English articles in some situations can cause misunderstanding between interlocutors (Yoshii & Milne, 1998).

Even though there are many books that talk about the English article usage, many EFL or ESL learners use them inappropriately. As mentioned earlier, the English article system is one of the most difficult tasks of English grammar learning for many ESL and EFL learners because cross-linguistic influences may affect their uses (Butler, 2002 ; Master, 1990 ; Yoshii & Milne, 1998). For example, in the Thai language, which does not have articles, the concept of definiteness is expressed via demonstratives as shown in the following:

- (8) คนคนนี้ไม่ได้เป็นหมอ

(definite)
- khon khon nii maidai pen mor

person Classifier this not be doctor

This person is not a doctor.
- (9) หนังสือนี้มีประโยชน์

(definite)
- Nang-sue nan mee prayode

book that have use

That book is useful.

The differences between Thai and English in terms of definiteness and indefiniteness expressions are believed to bring about the misuse of the English articles by most Thai learners of English (Thonglow, 2002). According to Sattayatham and Honsa (2007), English article errors made by Thai learners in four medical schools were up to 75 percent of the article use. This shows that Thai students do not realize which article should be used in a particular context, which may lead to misunderstanding or stigmatizing speakers (Yoshii & Milne, 1998). In this respect, this study aims to analyze errors in English articles made by first-year and fourth-year English majors at Ubon Ratchathani University in order to explore the extent to which they know how to correctly use the English article system and whether they use the English articles differently. Studying the first-year and fourth-year English majors at Ubon Ratchathani University also enables us to know whether the latter gain more knowledge about English article usage after their four-year study at Ubon Ratchathani University.

### **1.1 Research Objectives**

Two research objectives in this study are as follows:

- 1.1.1 To find out the extent to which the first-year and fourth-year English majors at Ubon Ratchathani University know how to use the English articles.
- 1.1.2 To find out whether they use the English article system differently and how, if so.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

To serve the objectives above, the two research questions are set as below:

- 1.2.1 To what extent do first-year and fourth-year English majors at Ubon Ratchathani University know the English article system?
- 1.2.2 Do they use the English articles differently? If so, how?

### **1.3 Significance of the study**

This study aims to explore Thai students' competence in the use of English articles. It is useful for many English teachers who teach English as a foreign language in Thailand. The English article errors made by Thai learners found in this study may lead to an appropriate approach to teaching the English article system. Also, this study enables the researcher to know the extent to which the subjects of this study, the first-year and the fourth-year English majors at Ubon Ratchathani University, know how to use the English article system correctly and whether these two groups of subjects use the articles differently. Moreover, this study can show whether or not the fourth-year English students at the Faculty of Liberal Arts Ubon Ratchathani University gain more knowledge about the usage of the English article system after their study at Ubon Ratchathani University, which may be beneficial for the program evaluation.

### **1.4 Definition of key term**

Article use in this study means the use of articles based on Butler's model which focuses on noun countability and two features of referentiality: the specific referent [ $\pm$ SR] and the hearer's knowledge [ $\pm$ HK].

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

What is presented in this chapter is the concepts and the expressions of definiteness and indefiniteness in English and in Thai, the importance of the English articles, the article usages and previous studies.

#### **2.1 Definiteness and indefiniteness**

The expressions of definiteness and indefiniteness vary from language to language (Abbott, 2004). For instance, in English, these two concepts are expressed via determiners including articles and demonstratives while in Thai, the concept of definiteness is expressed only via Thai demonstratives, but the concept of indefiniteness is not represented by any Thai demonstrative marker. The definitions of these two concepts will be provided in the next section.

##### **2.2.1 Definition**

Definiteness is generally defined as identifiability which indicates that an expression's referent is identifiable to both the speaker and the hearer. In other words, the referent is identifiable when the speaker and the hearer have shared knowledge of the referent (Danon, 2010).

Indefiniteness, on the other hand, is an expression indicating that the referent is not presumed to be identifiable by either the speaker or the hearer, or both (Abbott, 2004).

#### **2.2 Definiteness and indefiniteness marking in English**

The markers of definiteness and indefiniteness in English are distinguished by articles as described below:

##### **2.2.1 The definiteness marker in English**

In English, "*the*" is the definite article which is used to express the definiteness. Noun phrases (NPs) which begin with "*the*" (e.g. *the* Queen of England,

---

*the* book) are also called “definite descriptions” (Abbott, 2004). “*The*” is also used with something that is pre-mentioned (1), or the first-mentioned noun that has a modifier (2) (Crystal, 1995).

(1) I saw a pink box in front of my bedroom. My mom told me that there is chocolate candy in *the* box.

(2) *The* idea of visiting a new country is to build good experience.

### 2.2.2 The indefiniteness markers in English

The indefinite articles “*a*, *an*” and “*ø*” (*a* lie, *an* elephant, *ø* water) are used to indicate the indefiniteness of referents which are not identifiable by either a speaker or a hearer, or both (Abbott, 2004). Two types of indefinite articles are described below:

#### 2.2.2.1 *A* and *An*

The indefinite article *a* or *an* is used with a singular countable noun (3).

(3) *A* jaguar runs very fast.

#### 2.2.2.2 Zero article (*ø*)

The zero article is employed with a mass noun (uncountable noun) as in (4) and a plural noun as in (5).

(4) *ø* Chocolate is sweet.

(5) *ø* Dinosaurs ate meat and plants.

However, *the* can also be used to express the indefiniteness in the English language. That is, *the* is used to refer to something that is true of all nouns in a particular group (generic) as in (6).

(6) *The* lion is a dangerous animal.

## 2.3 Definiteness and indefiniteness in Thai

No definite and indefinite articles are used in Thai. Nouns in Thai generally lack syntactic markers. Whether the noun is definite or indefinite is usually figured out through context. This may lead to confusion between the known and the unknown. As a result, the concepts of definiteness and indefiniteness are the most problematic for many Thai learners of English and it is found that L2 learners acquire

these two concepts very late (Luksaneeyanawin, 2005). However, without the existence of definite and indefinite articles in Thai, the concepts of definiteness and indefiniteness can be expressed by demonstratives and a few other determiners. According to Visonyanggoon (2000), four Thai demonstratives which bring about the definite concepts are *nii* (this), *nan* (that), *noon* (yonder), *nuun* (far yonder). The concepts of definiteness and indefiniteness expressed via Thai demonstratives will be discussed in the following sections.

### 2.3.1 Definiteness in Thai

A noun phrase with a demonstrative preceded by a classifier normally conveys the definite interpretation as in the following:

(7) ฉันซื้อรถคันนี้เมื่อวาน

Chan sue rod kan *nii* mua wan

I buy car classifier *this* yesterday.

I bought this car yesterday.

The classifier *kan* and the demonstrative *nii* (this) make the listener know which car the speaker bought. It presents definiteness.

(8) หนังสือเรื่องนี้สนุก

Nhang sam rueng *nan* sanook

Film three classifier *that* fun

Those three films are fun.

The quantified noun followed by the classifier *rueng* and the demonstrative *nan* (that) in this sentence can be interpreted as definite because these two elements can make the referent clearer and specific.

### 2.3.2 Indefiniteness in Thai

There are also so-called “indefinite determiners” in Thai; namely, ใดๆ (any), อื่น (other), ต่างๆ (all), บาง (some) (Piriyawiboon, 2010). A sentence with an indefinite determiner “บาง (some)” is given in (9).

(9) เด็กบางคนไม่ชอบกินผัก

Dek *baang* khon mai chob kin pak.

Child *some* classifier not like eat vegetable.

Some children do not like eating vegetables.



The indefinite determiner *baang* (some) makes the noun phrase indefinite because the speaker does not specify which child does not like vegetables. Another example with a Thai indefinite determiner is in (10) below:

(10) หนังสือเล่มไหนก็ดีหมด

Nang sue lem *nai* kor dee mod

Book classifier *any* good all.

Any book is good.

The indefinite determiner *nai* (whichever) presents the indefinite concept. The noun “book” has a generic referent because it is neither specific nor identifiable by a speaker or a hearer, or both.

In conclusion, there is no article in the Thai language, but there are some Thai markers that can express the concepts of definiteness and indefiniteness like the English language does. They are Thai demonstratives, and other indefinite determiners.

## 2.4 Importance of English articles

Not only is the English article an important function word, but it is also a crucial grammatical aspect which can lead to effective communication. According to Fen Chuan’s study (2001), the articles *the*, *a(n)* and *ø* are highly frequent morphemes in English. Since the English article system usually involves many confusing rules and a lot of exceptions, most non-native speakers of English ignore them or use them erroneously, possibly leading to miscommunication between interlocutors because native speakers of English use the English article to specify the referent of a noun phrase. That is, using incorrect articles may affect learners’ performance and the effectiveness of communication mainly due to the lack of clarity (Fujita, 2004). Thus, English as a second or foreign language learners need to study their usage thoroughly in order to use them to communicate effectively (Yoshii & Milne, 1998).

## 2.5 General article usage rules

There are many grammar books that provide a lot of rules of the English article usage (Azar, 1999 ; Swan, 1995 ; Teepapal, 1994). Most of these books divide the English article usage into two sections: definite and indefinite article usages. However, such rules are abundant, difficult to remember, and inconclusive. Some of the rules are shown below.

### 2.5.1 Definite article usage rules

The definite article “*the*” is used with the following nouns:

Common nouns that are unique (only one.)

For example:

*the* sun      *the* universe

*the* moon      *the* world

Proper nouns including names of rivers or canals, seas, oceans, bays, gulfs, straits, or isthmuses, group of islands, mountain ranges, ships, newspapers, magazines, or books, theatres, hotels, organizations or institutions and countries with a modifier.

For example:

*the* Chao Phraya River      *the* Erawan Hotel

*the* Pacific Ocean      *the* Bangkok Bank Ltd.

Adjectives that act as plural nouns in generic sense

For example:

*The* blind cannot see. (The blind = blind people)

*The* rich should help *the* poor. (The rich = rich people, the poor = poor people)

Musical instruments

For example:

He plays *the* piano, *the* guitar, and *the* trumpet.

Nouns that are known to the speaker and the listener

For example:

Could you please open *the* door?

### 2.5.2 Indefinite article usage rules

There are three kinds of indefinite articles including “a”, “an” and “Ø”. “A” and “an” are used with a singular count noun such as *a pen*, *a chair*, *a shirt*, *an eraser* and *an egg* whereas “Ø” is used with a mass or uncountable noun and a plural noun such as *Ø information*, *Ø water*, *Ø shirts*, *Ø skirts*, etc. In the next subsection, the usage of the indefinite articles “a”, “an” and “Ø” will be clarified.

#### 2.5.2.1 When to use “a, an”

“A” and “an” are allomorphs of the same morpheme (Hausser, 1999). Using either “a” or “an” depends on the initial sound of the following word. “An” is used with the following word whose initial letter is pronounced as a vowel, no matter whether the letter is a consonant or a vowel such as *an egg*, *an elephant*, *an apple*, *an orange*, *an F* and *an hour*. Otherwise, the article “a” is used such as *a man*, *a book*, *a pencil*, *a doll*, *a university* and *a useful thing*.

#### 2.5.2.2 Indefinite article “a, an” usage

Some of the “a”, “an” usages include their use with the following nouns:

Singular count nouns that are mentioned for the first time

For example:

I bought *a book* at B2S this morning.

Singular count nouns that are generic

For example:

*A dog* is *an honest animal*.

*An elephant* eats sugar cane.

Some expressions or some phrases that denote quantity

For example:

*a dozen*

*a lot of*

*a large amount of* *a score*

*a good deal of*

*a thousand of*

Illnesses

For example:

He has *a cold*.

He has *a headache*.

She has *a toothache*.

She has *a pain* in her back.

Idiomatic uses and conventional expressions in some sentences

For example:

Don't be in such *a* hurry. It's *a* pity you can't come.

What *a* pretty girl Mary is! It is such *a* beautiful day that

I feel like taking a walk.

#### 2.5.2.3 Indefinite article “Ø”

The following are cases requiring the indefinite article “Ø”.

Plural count nouns that are not specified (generic)

For example:

Ø Books are useful.      Ø Crows are birds.

Mass or abstract nouns that are not specified (generic)

For example:

Ø Honesty is the best policy.

I prefer Ø tea to Ø coffee.

Areas of subject matter

For example:

She studies Ø English.

Ø Mathematics is a difficult subject.

Ø History is my favorite subject.

Proper names including names of continents, countries, towns, streets, capes, lakes, single islands, holidays, universities, colleges, schools, institutions that begin the phrases etc.

For example:

Ø Bangkok is the capital of Ø Thailand.

My mother went to Ø France and bought a house in Ø Paris.

Ø Cape Horn      Ø Lake Geneva

Ø Greenland      Ø Mount Everest

Ø New Year's Day      Ø Christmas Day

Idiomatic uses (If the definite article *the* is used, the meaning is changed.)

For example:

We go to  $\emptyset$  school. (to study)      We go to *the* school.

(to meet someone)

I will go to  $\emptyset$  market. (to buy or sell)      We go to *the* market.

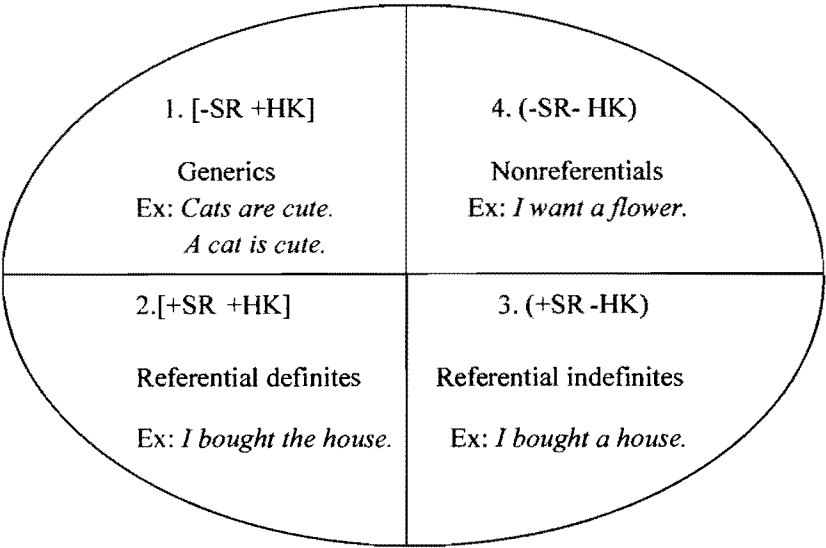
(to look around there)

These usage rules of the English article system found in many grammar books are difficult to remember, especially for people who are not native English speakers. Even though some learners of English can remember these rules, there are a number of exceptions that they have to take much time to master. Moreover, these rules are not appropriate for this study because they are not well categorized. Therefore, this study will be based on Butler's model (2002) which was modified from Bickerton's and Huebner's models (1983 ; 1985) as elaborated in the following sections.

## 2.6 Bickerton's and Huebner's models (1983;1985)

Due to several complicated rules mentioned above, many linguists and researchers have tried to find the concise explanation of the English article usage. An SLA researcher, Huebner, whose most outstanding research concerns the English article acquisition, proposed a model of the English article usage in which referentiality is classified by the binary features of *specific referent* [ $\pm$ SR] and *hearer's knowledge* [ $\pm$ HK]. However, his system or semantic classification was adopted from Bickerton's model entitled "semantic wheel" (Humphrey, 2007). Huebner's classification (1983 ; 1985) is one form of analysis of the article system widely used by many researchers for classifying NP environments in English article acquisition studies (Butler, 2002 : Hansen, 2005).

Using Bickerton's and Huebner's system, researchers "must take the noun into consideration within its context rather than the word by itself" (Hansen, 2005: 3). In other words, researchers must first classify noun phrases according to Bickerton's and Huebner's semantic wheel: type 1 generics, type 2 referential definites, type 3 referential indefinites and type 4 nonreferentials (See figure1 below).



**Figure 1** Bickerton’s and Huebner’s semantic wheel or semantic classification

The appropriate article to be used depends on the category of the noun phrase (Ekiert, 2004). In Bickerton’s and Huebner’s semantic wheel, there are two binary features, namely, whether information is known to the hearer [+/-HK] (hearer knowledge) and whether a specific item is being referred to [+/-SR] (specific referent) (Hansen, 2005). According to Parrish (1987), Huebner’s semantic wheel allows us to know we have to choose the article depending on the speaker’s and the hearer’s knowledge. Besides the four NP contexts suggested by Huebner, the fifth type of NP context, proper nouns and idiomatic expressions, was additionally discussed by Thomas (1989). The five different noun phrases are shown in table 1 (cited in Humphrey, 2007: 311)

Table 1 NP environments based on Huebner (1985) ; Thomas (1989)

Noun Phrase Environments	Examples
<b>1 [-SR +HK] generics: [a/an], [the], [ø]</b>	
1.1 [a/an] generic:	<i>A</i> whale is <i>a</i> mammal.
1.2 [the] generic:	<i>The</i> tiger is a dangerous animal.
1.3 [ø] generic:	<i>Ø</i> Dogs make <i>Ø</i> good pets.
<b>2 [+SR +HK] Referential definites [the]</b>	
2.1 [the] Unique in all contexts:	<i>The</i> pope is from Poland.
2.2 [the] Anaphoric reference:	She...debuted with a single called “...”. <i>The</i> single was a success.
2.3 [the] Specific by entailment:	John caught a trout and a salmon. Then he put <i>the</i> fish into a basket.
2.4 [the] Exophoric:	Can I use <i>the</i> car tonight?
2.5 [the] Specific by definition:	Utada climbed to <i>the</i> top.
<b>3 [+SR -HK] Referential indefinites, first mention: [a/an], [ø]</b>	
3.1 [a/an] Referential indefinite:	Christ approached me carrying <i>a</i> dog.
3.2 [ø] Referential indefinite:	I keep sending <i>Ø</i> messages to him.
<b>4 [-SR -HK] Non-referentials: [a/an], [ø]</b>	
4.1 [a/an] Non-specific indefinite:	I guess I should buy <i>a</i> new car.
4.2 [ø] Non-specific indefinite:	What <i>Ø</i> video would you recommend?

**Table 1** NP environments based on Huebner (1985) ; Thomas (1989) (Continued)

Noun Phrase Environments	Examples
<b>5 Strong collocations [a/an], [the], [ø]</b>	
5.1 [a/an] Strong collocations:	Set <i>a</i> record. In <i>the</i> space of <i>a</i> .....
5.2 [the] Strong collocations:	Do you have <i>the</i> time?
5.3 [ø] Strong collocations:	We go to <i>Ø</i> bed. (to sleep)

The semantic environment of NPs proposed by Huebner is well-defined with a small number of noun phrase environments, which enables some L2 learners with sufficient metalinguistic knowledge in the article usage to use articles correctly (Geng, 2010). Nevertheless, though this classification can facilitate English learners’ understanding of the article usage, it is still difficult for some L2 students to comprehend because this classification does not include the noun countability criteria which can help ESL or EFL learners more correctly choose the article. According to Butler (2002), noun countability is a significant component that affects article selection. The first step of choosing the correct article requires the ability to distinguish between countable and uncountable nouns and the next step is to know which noun phrase environment based on the specific referent and the hearer knowledge is. These two steps enable ESL or EFL learners to choose the correct article. Butler’s model is described below.

**2.7 Butler’s model (2002)**

Including the semantic classification of Huebner (1985), Butler’s model (2002) also focuses on the noun countability which is considered as important as the referent specificity and the hearer’s knowledge. That is, Butler employed Huebner’s (1983 : 1985) semantic classification and added the countability component in order to make this classification capture all aspects concerned as presented in table 2 below:



Table 2 Butler’s NP environments

Noun Phrase Environments	Examples
<b>Type 1: [-SR +HK], generics and unspecifiable: [a(n)], [the], [ø]</b>	
1.1. [a(n) [+ count] [+sg]] NP	A cat likes mice.
1.2. [ the [+ count] [+sg]] NP	<i>The</i> whale is a mammal.
The generic form of [the [+count] [-sg]] NP is possible if the NP is followed by a postpositional modifier (Kuno, 1973)	
1.3. [ø [+count] [-sg]] NP or [ø [-count]] NP	<i>ø</i> Dogs are cute. <i>ø</i> Language is a great invention of humankind.
<b>Type 2: [+SR +HK] Referential definites: [the]</b>	
2.1. [the] NP Exophora, Homophora <sup>1</sup>	Pass me <i>the</i> pen.
2.2. [the] NP Cataphora <sup>2</sup>	<i>The</i> idea of coming to the US. was....
2.3. [the] NP Anaphoric reference	When I found <i>a</i> red box in front of my house, it was too late. The box blew up with a terrific explosion.
2.4. [the] NP Connotative reference <sup>3</sup>	This book did not sell well even though <i>the</i> author was a famous writer.
2.5. [the] NP Extended reference <sup>4</sup>	I won a million dollar lottery. <i>The</i> news quickly spread all over town.

<sup>1</sup> It is a visible situation where *the* is used with a noun mentioned the first time to refer to something that both the addresser and addressee can see (e.g. Give me *the* letter).

<sup>2</sup> In linguistics, cataphora (from Greek, forward+carry) is used to describe an expression that co-refers with a later expression in the discourse. That is to say, the earlier expression refers to or describes a forward expression.

<sup>3</sup> Immediate situation use where *the* is used to refer to something not visible but is known to the addresser and addressee (e.g. Don’t put your hand in the box. *The* rodent will bite it.).

<sup>4</sup> Associative anaphoric use, is the same as anaphoric use except that the first mention of *the* is used with a noun that is related to a previously mentioned noun rather than the same noun (e.g. We attended a party. *The* host was very gracious.).

Table 2 Butler’s NP environments (Continued)

Noun Phrase Environments	Examples
2.6. [the] NP Unexplanatory modifiers <sup>5</sup>	<i>The</i> first person to jump into the cold water was my brother.
2.7. [the] NP Unique in all contexts	There are nine planets traveling around <i>the</i> sun.
<b>Type 3: [+SR -HK] Referential indefinites, first mention: [a(n)], [ø]</b>	
3.1. [a(n) [+ count] [+sg]] NP	I saw <i>a</i> strange man standing at the gate.
3.2. [ø [+ count] [-sg]] NP or [ø [- count]] NP	I keep sending <i>ø</i> messages to him.
<b>Type 4: [-SR -HK] Nonreferentials: [a(n)], [ø]</b>	
4.1. [a(n) [+ count] [+sg]] NP	I’m going to buy a new bicycle; He used to be <i>a</i> lawyer.
4.2. [ø [+ count] [- sg]] NP	<i>ø</i> Foreigners would come up with a better solution for this matter.
<b>Type 5: Idioms and other conventional uses (including uses with pronouns): [a(n)],[the, [ø]</b>	
5.1. [a(n) [idiom or other use]]	All of <i>a</i> sudden, he woke up from his coma.
5.2. [the [idiom or other use]]	In <i>the</i> 1960s, there were lots of protests against the Vietnam War.
5.3. [ø [idiom or other use]]	He has been thrown out of work, and his family is now living <i>ø</i> hand to mouth.

<sup>5</sup> It is similar to the extended reference, the only difference being that the modifier does not provide explanatory information (e.g., My wife and I share the same secrets, where the modifier same does not inform us as to what the secrets are but “only points to an identity between the two sets of secrets, my wife’s and my own”

This study will be based on the model which was proposed by Butler (2002) because it is more inclusive than Huebner's and Bickerton's model (1983 ; 1985).

Butler's model covers more aspects which can help ESL or EFL learners choose the correct articles by considering noun phrase types.

## 2.8 Previous studies

According to Master (2002), the English article system is one of the most difficult structural elements for ESL/EFL learners, especially those whose native languages do not have an article system. Also, the English article system seems to be acquired differently, depending on whether or not it occurs in one's language. This is why many researchers have conducted research on the article acquisition process of the learners of English. Some of them want to find out how the English article system is acquired by ESL/EFL learners in order to solve their problems in using the English articles. The research studies to be discussed in this section concern those conducted in other countries and Thailand.

For the results involving the indefinite article use, Bataineh's (2005) study on Jordanian Undergraduate EFL Students' Errors in the Use of the Indefinite Article examined the acquisition of the English indefinite articles of Jordanian university students. The subjects of this study were all students of English at Yarmouk University in the second semester of the academic year 2003/2004. The subjects were asked to write about one of the following topics: *Why do you study English?*, *Yarmouk University Campus*, *Violence in Movies*, *Car Accidents* and *My Favorite Author/Story/Poet*. It was found that a large number of subjects made mistakes on the deletion of the indefinite articles where they were needed. This is because in Arabic, there is no distinct marker for indefiniteness and most of the subjects might ignore the grammatical rule of the target language.

The results of Bataineh's study accord with other studies' (Ekiert, 2004 ; Master, 1997 ; Parrish, 1987). That is, for learners whose native languages lack articles, zero article dominates in all environments in the early stages of language learning. Parrish (1987) suggested an order of article acquisition in which the zero

article, the definite article, and the indefinite article are acquired respectively (Ekiert, 2004: 4).

For the acquisition of the definite article, many studies which focus on the acquisition of the article use of the L2 learners of English found that most of these L2 learners overused the definite article “*the*” with almost all nouns. For example, Chaudron & Parker (1990) found that Japanese with low English proficiency overused “*the*”. Also, the study of Ionin and Wexler (2003) concluded that adult L1-Russian learners of English consistently overused “*the*” in referential indefinite contexts where the indefinite article “*a/an*” or zero article should be used. Its overuse of “*the*” was significantly higher in each referential indefinite context than in each non-referential indefinite context.

In Thai EFL context, a research study by Anchalee Sattayatham and Somchoen Honsa (2007) was conducted on the most frequent errors in paragraph writing. The objective of this study was to find out the top-ten errors made by the first year medical students from the medical school at Mahidol University. The subjects were asked to translate sentences and paragraphs from Thai to English and to write an opinion paragraph. The results showed that errors in article use were one of the top-ten errors made by the subjects. The errors in article use were clarified in the form of percentage; that is, for the sentence translation, the error in article use was up to 75.94%, which was the second problem in the subjects’ writing. For the paragraph translation, the errors in article use were ranked at the seventh of the top-ten found errors, up to 28.27%. For the opinion writing, article errors made by all the subjects were up to 64.40%, which was the second rank in the top-ten errors.

In the next chapter, the research methodology will be described.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, the subjects, instrument, procedure of the study, data collection and analysis will be described.

#### **3.1 Subjects**

The subjects of this study were 60 English majors at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University. All the freshmen and the seniors were asked to do the test, and 30 freshmen and 30 seniors were chosen by simple random sampling. The first-year English majors were between 18-19 years old. They had to study English for ten hours a week, including speaking and listening for six hours and reading and writing for four hours. Most of the fourth-year students were 21-22 years old. They had been studying English in Ubon Ratchathani University for 114 credits. Their English subjects are divided into three strands: literature, content and linguistics. They were not taught the English article system directly, but they learned its usage through their experiences during their study in the English and communication program.

#### **3.2 Instruments**

The instrument of this study was a fill-in-the-blank test requiring the subjects to complete 16 individual sentences and two passages with appropriate articles, totalling 57 blanks. These items were categorized according to Butler's model (2002): three items for each type of noun phrase environments. For the fifth type, idioms and conventional uses, what was chosen was based on usefulness and frequency (See appendix A). The test was written by the researcher and checked by native speakers of English. The nature of the test with some examples is illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 3 English Article Test Based on Butler’s Model

Type of Noun Phrase Environment	Number of items	Example
Type 1: [-SR +HK], generics and unspecifiable	12	
1.1 [ <i>a(n)</i> [+ count] [+sg]] NP	3	The owner kept dangerous animals such as <i>a</i> tiger, <i>a</i> bear and <i>a</i> lion.
1.2 [ <i>the</i> [+ count] [+sg]] NP	3	<i>The</i> whale is a mammal.
1.3 [ $\emptyset$ [+count] [-sg]] NP or	3	She said her daughter liked $\emptyset$ dolls.
1.4 [ $\emptyset$ [-count]] NP	3	Her son liked $\emptyset$ food.
Type 2: [+SR +HK] Referential definite	21	
2.1 [ <i>the</i> ] NP Exophora, Homophora	3	Could you please place this mat on <i>the</i> floor?
2.2 [ <i>the</i> ] NP Cataphora	3	<i>The</i> idea of seeing such animals really excited me.
2.3 [ <i>the</i> ] NP Anaphoric reference	3	When I saw a dog coming down the street towards me. <i>The</i> animal barked and chased me.
2.4 [ <i>the</i> ] NP Connotative reference	3	<i>The</i> test tomorrow would be difficult.
2.5 [ <i>the</i> ] NP Extended reference	3	One of them kept reading Harry Potter. I know <i>the</i> author because I also read a lot of her books.
2.6 [ <i>the</i> ] NP Unexplanatory modifiers	3	<i>The</i> only person who could do this was my brother.
2.7 [ <i>the</i> ] NP Unique in all contexts	3	He wanted to know what <i>the</i> equator is.

Table 3 English Article Test Based on Butler’s Model (Continued)

Type of Noun Phrase Environment	Number of items	Example
<b>Type 3: [+SR -HK] Referential indefinites, first mention</b>	<b>9</b>	
3.1 [ <i>a(n)</i> [+count] [+sg]] NP	3	I saw <i>a</i> dog.
3.2 [ $\emptyset$ [+count] [-sg]] NP	3	There were $\emptyset$ firecrackers in that box.
3.3 [ $\emptyset$ [-count]] NP	3	I opened the refrigerator and I drank $\emptyset$ wine.
<b>Type 4: [-SR -HK] Nonreferentials</b>	<b>6</b>	
4.1 [ <i>a(n)</i> [+count] [+sg]] NP	3	He used to be <i>a</i> lawyer.
4.2 [ $\emptyset$ [+count] [-sg]] NP	3	$\emptyset$ Babies are born every second.
<b>Type 5: Idioms and other conventional uses (including uses with pronouns)</b>	<b>9</b>	
5.1 [ <i>a(n)</i> [idiom or other use]]	3	The task really caused me <i>a</i> headache.
5.2 [ <i>the</i> [idiom or other use]]	3	On <i>the</i> contrary, the last animal I want to see are worms.
5.3 [ $\emptyset$ [idiom or other use]]	3	I went to $\emptyset$ bed.

3.3 Procedures

After the instrument of this study had been approved by three qualified English instructors, the researcher asked the first-year and the fourth-year English majors at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University, to take it. They were told one week earlier that they would have the test in order to make them ready for it.

Both groups had to take the test in the classroom. They had an hour to complete it. Then 30 tests of each group were randomly selected. The tests were then graded and the scores tallied according to each NP environment type.

### **3.4 Data collection**

The data was collected from the scores on the 60 tests. Each item was worth one point, totalling 57. Each item was given one point if the correct article was chosen, or 0 if not.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

To answer research question one concerning the extent to which the first-year and the fourth-year English majors at Ubon Ratchathani University knew the English article system, the mean scores of the two groups were considered in order to find out how well they used the English article system.

To answer research question two concerning whether the two groups used the English articles differently, the mean scores of the two groups classified into five types would be compared to find out how different the two groups were in their use of articles. Therefore, the statistics used in this study included mean, percentage and independent sample t-test.



CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The data gathered for this study was analyzed quantitatively. The quantitative analysis focused on differences in the article use by the first year and the fourth year English majors at Ubon Ratchathani University. The results are presented below.

4.1 Answer to research question one

After the two groups of the subjects had completed the article test, their scores were calculated to find out the average score of each group in order to answer the first research question concerning the extent to which the first-year and the fourth-year English majors at UBU knew the English article system. The mean scores of both groups are shown in the following table.

Table 4 The average scores on the article tests of both groups

	The first-years	The fourth-years	Differences
Sum (out of 1710)	1001	1204	200
Median	33.00	41.50	8.50
Mode	27	43	16
Mean (out of 57)	33.37	40.13	6.76
Percentage	58.19	69.88	11.69
SD	6.58359	6.50588	7.33144
t	-4.004		
P	.000		

The data in table 4 shows that the mean percentage of the correct article use by the first-year English majors was 58.19% while that of the fourth-year students was 69.88 %. This means the first-year students somewhat knew how to use articles whereas the fourth-year students knew it fairly well. Also, the mean score of the first-year English majors (33.37) was statistically lower than that of the fourth-year English majors (40.13) at P= 0.000. This shows that the fourth-year English majors had more competence in using the English article system than the first-year students.

Whether the two groups differed in their article use is shown in the section below.

4.2 Answer to research question two

The answer to research question two regarding how differently the two groups used articles is demonstrated in table 5.

Table 5 Scores for each type of noun phrase environments

Type	The first-years	The fourth-years	Differences	P
1. [-SR +HK], generics and unspecifiable (total= 360)	246 (68.33%)	278 (77.22%)	32	0.049*
2. [+SR +HK] Referential definites (total = 630)	361 (57.30%)	433 (68.73%)	72	0.002*
3. [+SR -HK] Referential indefinites, first mention (total = 270)	195 (72.22%)	242 (89.63%)	47	0.005*
4. [-SR -HK] Nonreferentials (total = 180)	88 (48.89%)	133 (73.89%)	45	0.000*
5. Idioms and other conventional uses (including uses with pronouns) (total = 270)	111 (41.11%)	118 (43.70%)	8	0.552
Total	1001	1204	200	

According to table 5, the total scores of the first four noun phrase environments of the fourth-year English majors were significantly higher than those of the first-year students at  $P = 0.049, 0.002, 0.005$  and  $0.000$  respectively, showing that the fourth-year English majors better knew than the first-years about the article usage in the environments of generics and unspecifiable NPs [-SR +HK], referential definites NPs [+SR +HK], referential indefinites and first mentioned NPs [+SR -HK] and nonreferentials NPs [-SR -HK].

However, there was no significant difference in the scores of both groups of the subjects in the fifth type of NP environment concerning idioms and conventional use. This means that both groups could use articles in idioms and for conventional uses to a similar degree as shown in Table 6.

It happened that the orders of scores of both groups of the subjects showed similar patterns as illustrated in table 6 below:

**Table 6** The order of scores on the five NP environments

The first-year English majors		The fourth-year English majors	
1. The third type: [+SR -HK] Referential indefinites, first mention	(72.22%)	1. The third type: [+SR -HK] Referential indefinites, first mention	(89.63%)
2. The first type: [- SR +HK], generics and unspecifiable	(68.33%)	2. The first type: [- SR +HK], generics and unspecifiable	(77.22%)
3. The second type: [+SR +HK] Referential definites	(57.30%)	3. The fourth type: [-SR -HK] Nonreferentials	(73.89%)
4. The fourth type: [-SR -HK] Nonreferentials	(48.89%)	4. The second type: [+SR +HK] Referential definites	(68.73%)

**Table 6** The order of scores on the five NP environments (Continued)

The first-year English majors		The fourth-year English majors	
5. The fifth type: Idioms and other conventional uses (including uses with pronouns	(41.11%)	5. The fifth type: Idioms and other conventional uses (including uses with pronouns	(43.70%)

Considering the first-year students’ total scores, they gained the highest scores on referential indefinites, first mention NPs [+SR -HK] (72.22%), followed by generics and unspecifiable [-SR +HK] (68.33%), referential definites [+SR +HK] (57.30 %), nonreferentials [-SR -HK] (48.89%) and idioms and other conventional uses (41.11%), respectively. It can, therefore, be concluded that the least problematic NP environment for the first-year English majors was the third type of referential indefinites, first mention and the most problematic one was the fifth type that included idioms and conventional uses because their average score was the lowest.

For the fourth-year students, the highest score was also on referential indefinites, first mention [+SR -HK] (89.63%), followed by generics and unspecifiable [-SR +HK] (77.22%), nonreferentials [-SR -HK] (73.89%), referential definites [+SR +HK] (68.73 %) and the idioms and other conventional uses (43.70%), respectively. This indicates that the fourth-year English majors, like the first-year students, were the best at the third type and had the most difficulty choosing appropriate articles for idioms and other conventional uses as evidenced in their scores being lower than 50 percent.

The next table shows the mean scores of both groups on the sub-types of each NP environment.

**Table 7** The mean scores of both groups on the sub-types of each NP environment

Type	The first-year	The fourth-year	P
1. [-SR +HK], generics and unspecifiable (total = 360)	246 (68.33%)	278 (77.22%)	0.049*
1.1 [ <i>a(n)</i> [+ count] [+sg]] NP	66 (73.33%)	57 (63.33%)	.541
1.2 [ <i>the</i> [+ count] [+sg]] NP	80 (88.89%)	78 (86.67%)	.711
1.3 [ $\emptyset$ [+count] [-sg]] NP or	38 (42.22%)	61 (67.78%)	.003
1.4 [ $\emptyset$ [-count]] NP	56 (62.22%)	73 (81.11%)	.049
Type	The first-year	The fourth-year	P
2. [+SR +HK] Referential definite (total = 630)	361 (57.30%)	433 (68.73%)	0.002*
2.1 [ <i>the</i> ] NP Exophora, Homophora	49 (54.44%)	45 (50.00%)	.506
2.2 [ <i>the</i> ] NP Cataphora	61 (67.78%)	74 (82.22%)	.029
2.3 [ <i>the</i> ] NP Anaphoric reference	58 (64.44%)	78 (86.67%)	.000
2.4 [ <i>the</i> ] NP Connotative reference	45 (50.00%)	48 (53.33%)	.680
2.5 [ <i>the</i> ] NP Extended reference	28 (31.11%)	65 (72.22%)	.000
2.6 [ <i>the</i> ] NP Unexplanatory modifiers	64 (71.11%)	65 (72.22%)	.862
2.7 [ <i>the</i> ] NP Unique in all contexts	56 (62.22%)	58 (64.44%)	.735

**Table 7** The mean scores of both groups on the sub-types of each NP environment  
(Continued)

Type	The first-year	The fourth-year	P
3. [+SR -HK] Referential indefinites, first mention (total = 270)	195 (72.22%)	242 (89.63%)	0.005*
3.1 [ <i>a(n)</i> [+ count] [+sg]] NP	72 (80.00%)	85 (94.44%)	.014
3.2 [∅ [+ count] [-sg]] NP	54 (60.00%)	80 (88.89%)	.002
3.3 [∅ [- count]] NP	69 (76.67%)	77 (85.56%)	.336
4. [-SR -HK] Nonreferentials (total = 180)	88 (48.89%)	133 (73.89%)	0.000*
4.1 [ <i>a(n)</i> [+ count] [+sg]] NP	52 (57.78%)	70 (77.78%)	.002
4.2 [∅ [+ count] [- sg]] NP	36 (40.00%)	63 (70.00%)	.001
5. Idioms and other conventional uses (including uses with pronouns) (total = 270)	111 (41.11%)	118 (43.70%)	0.552
5.1 [ <i>a(n)</i> [idiom or other use]]	36 (40.00%)	40 (44.44%)	.512
5.2 [ <i>the</i> [idiom or other use]]	46 (51.11%)	48 (53.33%)	.747
5.3 [∅ [idiom or other use]]	29 (32.22%)	30 (33.33%)	.878
The total scores	995 (58.19%)	1195 (69.88%)	

Based on table 7, the fourth-year English majors could gain scores of higher than 50 percent on the first to the fourth types of NP environments, which were also significantly better than the first-year students’ scores. On the contrary, the first-year students obtained scores of higher than 50 percent on the first, the second and the third

types of NP environments, but not the fourth type on which their mean score was lower than 50 percent.

Considering the P values of all the 19 sub-types, significant differences existed in nine sub-types ( $P < 0.05$ ); namely, Sub-type 1.3: [ $\emptyset$  [+count] [-sg]] NP, Sub-type 1.4: [ $\emptyset$  [-count]] NP, Sub-type 2.2: [*the*] NP Cataphora, Sub-type 2.3: [*the*] NP Anaphoric reference, Sub-type 2.5: [*the*] NP Extended reference, Sub-type 3.1: [*a(n)* [+count] [+sg]] NP, Sub-type 3.2: [ $\emptyset$  [+count] [-sg]] NP, Sub-type 4.1: [*a(n)* [+count] [+sg]] NP and Sub-type 4.2: [ $\emptyset$  [+count] [-sg]] NP. This indicates that the fourth-year students outperformed the first-year students in the sub-types concerned.

The next chapter will discuss the findings presented in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

This chapter discusses the results presented in Chapter 4 concerning the article knowledge of the two groups and why both groups performed differently regarding the article use.

#### **5.1 Discussion**

This section will present the discussions of the answers to both research questions as below.

##### **5.1.1 Answer to research question one**

Concerning research question one about the extent to which the first-year and the fourth-year English majors at Ubon Ratchathani University knew the English articles.

The results showed that the fourth-year English majors knew how to use the English articles fairly well while the first-year students' knowledge of article use is at a moderate level. The fact that both groups could not achieve the high level of knowledge is probably due to the following reasons.

One reason is that both groups are English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. Their native language is Thai, which does not possess the article system. That is, no definite nor indefinite articles are used in Thai. Whether a noun is definite or indefinite is usually figured out through context. This may lead to confusion between the known and the unknown (Luksaneeyanawin, 2005) thus causing the subjects of this study difficulty in the acquisition of articles. It has been found that the concepts of definiteness and indefiniteness are the most problematic for many Thai learners of English and that L2 learners acquire these two concepts rather late (Thonglow, 2002). Therefore, it can be assumed that L1 interference plays a role in their acquisition of articles. Also, Carroll mentioned that the more difficult the structures of the two languages are, the more errors in L2 occur (1964).



Another reason is the English article system is one of the most problematic grammatical elements for ESL and EFL learners (Master, 2002). According to Master (2002), there are several reasons that make the article system difficult for most L2 learners. First, English articles are used as function words which do not carry the meaning of themselves, making their rule application difficult, resulting in their omission or overuse. Second, function words are normally unstressed, thus being considered unimportant. Third, the article system has multiple functions, which is a big burden for many L2 learners who have not mastered it. Worse, there is no conclusive and reliable explanation of how they are used, as stated by Troike (2006: 216):

“Even though articles are the first word encountered and have the highest frequency in the language, there is still no convincing evidence to account for this phenomenon. The only genuinely valid answer, “Because it is,” appeals to grammaticality judgments that are based on a level of intuition which few L2 learners can be expected to attain”.

Concerning the better performance in the article use of the fourth-year English majors than the first-year English majors, this may be because the latter had less experience in using the English articles. According to Ekiert (2004), the English articles are difficult to teach and can be acquired only through exposures. In this case, the most crucial relevant factors seems to be the educational differences, especially in terms of the length of study of the subjects. In other words, the fourth-year students had more exposures to English texts and thus might have learned more, consciously and unconsciously, about how to use the English articles. To conclude, the fourth-year students had been studying English longer; therefore, they had more opportunities to encounter the articles in readings and to use the articles in their written assignments. Moreover, they might have been given feedback on their article use in the writing classes. This probably helped them acquire more knowledge about the English article usage than the first-year students.

#### **5.1.2 Answer to research question two**

This section discusses the answer to research question two regarding how differently both groups of the subjects used the English articles.

In terms of the article use, both groups used the English articles differently as they gained statistically different scores on the first four types of noun phrase environments. The fourth-year students' scores on the first three NP environments were higher than 70 percent. On the contrary, the first-year students scored higher than 70 percent on only one NP environment. Their different performances on the English article use are ranked according to their degree of knowledge below.

**Table 8** Differences in performance on the article use

Ranks	1 <sup>st</sup> year students	4 <sup>th</sup> year students
1	Type 3 [+SR, - HK] (72.22%)	Type 3 [+SR, - HK] (89.63%)
2	Type 1 [-SR, + HK] (68.33%)	Type 1 [-SR, + HK] (77.22%)
3	Type 2 [+SR, +HK] (57.30%)	Type 4 [-SR, - HK] (73.89%)
4	Type 4 [-SR, - HK] (48.89%)	Type 2 [+SR, +HK] (68.73%)

Based on table 8 above, the results will be discussed in terms of the features and noun countability as below.

5.1.2.1 Features

From table 8, it is obviously seen that both groups of the subjects had problems with the two features [SR] and [HK]. It is apparent that they used articles without taking these two features into consideration as there was no systematic pattern found from their article use. Their performances were different from the claim by Ekiert (2004) that the first article acquired by many second language learners was *a* in nonreferential context (Type 4, -SR, - HK ), the second article acquired was *a* in first mention environment (Type 3, +SR, - HK), followed by *zero article* for generics (Type 1, -SR,+ HK), idioms (Type 5) and *the* in referential definites (Type 2, +SR, + HK) respectively; furthermore, it seemed that L2 learners could firstly detect [SR] and then [HK]. Therefore, it cannot be concluded which feature the subjects acquired first or gave priority to. In fact, they lacked the knowledge of these two features as this concept had never been introduced to them

(personal communication). Moreover, their article choice was mainly influenced by a set of rules they had read and learned from many grammar books and had been taught by their instructors (personal communication). For example, when a noun is mentioned for the first time, *a* is used, but when the same noun is mentioned for the second time, *the* is used.

Such a rule is one of the article usage rules normally found in many English grammar books which the subjects of this study made use of. This may be the reason why both groups of the subjects could do best on the third type of noun phrase, referential indefinites and first mention [+SR, - HK] (72.22% for the first-years and 89.63% for the fourth-years).

Concerning the most difficult NP environment, both groups of the subjects gained the lowest scores on the fifth type: idioms and other conventional uses. This is because choosing the appropriate articles for this type of noun phrase required familiarity with the idioms concerned because the use of articles in idioms is generally not subject to the rule due to their unique or special characteristics (Ekiert, 2004). This indicates that both groups of the subjects may not read extensively and thus may not have enough chances to encounter these idioms.

To conclude, the subjects of this study were not aware of the features relevant to the article use. When they chose an article for each noun phrase type, they principally used what they had been taught or had learned from English grammar books.

#### 5.1.2.2 Noun countability

According to Butler (2002), noun countability is an important component in determining which articles to use. Detecting noun countability of a referent was found to be a major problem for some L2 learners (Butler, 2002). Since noun countability affects the use of indefinite articles "*a(n)*" & "*ø*" only, the researcher will discuss only the use of the indefinite articles. Regarding this case, "*a*" and "*an*" are included in the same category as "*an*" is an allomorph of "*a*" (Hausser, 1999). The performances of both groups of the subjects on different kinds of indefinite articles are shown in table 9.

**Table 9** Different performances in the use of the indefinite articles

Type of nouns	Singular countable nouns [ <i>a(n)</i> ]		Mass nouns [ $\emptyset$ ]		Plural countable nouns [ $\emptyset$ ]	
	<i>a/an</i>	$\emptyset$	<i>a/an</i>	$\emptyset$	<i>a/an</i>	$\emptyset$
The first-years	<u>72.19 %</u>	27.81 %	26.89 %	<u>73.11 %</u>	34.37 %	<u>65.63 %</u>
The fourth-years	<u>86.66 %</u>	13.34 %	11.23 %	<u>88.77 %</u>	11.16 %	<u>88.84 %</u>

From table 9, the percentage scores on the correct use of the indefinite articles with the first two kinds of nouns, singular countable nouns and mass nouns, for the first-years were more than 70 %. This indicates that they did not have serious problems in using the indefinite articles with these kinds of nouns. One reason may be that the nouns used on the test were all familiar ones. The words representing mass nouns are food, bread, water, beer, soup and wine, which are familiar words, so it might be an easy task for them to choose the zero article as determiners. From the personal communication, they have been taught how to recognize mass nouns since they were in high school. Also, nouns chosen for singular countable nouns in this study were dog, bone, box, present, nurse, restaurant, tiger, lion, bear, whale and old car. Some of the subjects mentioned that these nouns were basic English singular countable nouns which were restricted to be used with the indefinite article “*a(n)*”. Another reason is that the indefinite article “*a(n)*” is less problematic than other kinds of articles for students who study English as a second language since its use is restricted to singular countable nouns (Miller, 2005). Concerning the use of the correct article for plural countable nouns “ $\emptyset$ ”, their percentage score was 65.63 %. This shows that most of the first-year students somewhat knew how to use the zero article with plural countable nouns. However, some of them (34.37%) still chose “*a(n)*” as a determiner for plural count nouns which were represented by such regular plural nouns as firecrackers, apples, pineapples, mangoes, products, babies, toys, creatures and worms. These errors were not consistently made by a few students, but sparsely made by a number of them. This points to the probability that they were careless and did not take the test seriously.

For the fourth-year students, their accuracy percentage scores on the indefinite article use were more than 80 % in all the three types of noun. Their percentage scores were higher than the first-year students' scores. This may be because the fourth-year students could better detect noun countability through more experience in writing and reading during their four-year study at Ubon Ratchathani University. The first-year students, on the contrary, did not have much knowledge about using the English articles because they might not have been assigned to write a lot or read abundantly.

The following chapter will present the conclusion of this study.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter presents the conclusion of the study, limitations of the study and recommendations for further studies.

#### **6.1 Conclusion**

The objectives of this study were to find out the extent to which the first-year and fourth-year English majors at Ubon Ratchathani University knew how to use the English articles and whether they used the English article system differently. Thirty subjects of this study were chosen by simple random sampling. The population of the study was the first- and fourth-year English majors at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University. The first-year English majors studied English for ten hours a week: speaking and listening for six hours and reading and writing for four hours. The fourth-year students had been studying English in Ubon Ratchathani University for 114 credits. They were not taught specifically the English article system, but they were supposed to learn their usage through their experience in studying English in the English and communication program.

The instrument of this study was a fill-in-the-blank test requiring the subjects to complete 16 individual sentences and two passages with appropriate articles, totaling 57 blanks. These items were categorized according to Butler's model (2002): three items for each type of noun phrase environments.

It was found that the first-year students somewhat knew how to use articles whereas the fourth-year students knew them fairly well. The mean score of the first-year English majors (58.19%), was significantly lower than that of the fourth-year English majors (69.88%). This showed that the fourth-year English majors had more competence in using the English article system than the first-year students did. The results also revealed that both groups of the subjects used articles differently; that is, the fourth-year English majors better knew than the first-years about the article

use in the environments of generic and unspecifiable NPs [-SR +HK], referential definite NPs [+SR +HK], referential indefinite and first mentioned NPs [+SR -HK], and nonreferential NPs [-SR -HK]. Nonetheless, both groups could use articles to a similar extent in the fifth type: idioms and other conventional uses.

## **6.2 Limitations of the study**

Some limitations exist in this study. The first is that there seem to be too few test items for each sub-type of NP environments. The second is the number of the subjects for this study is rather limited. These two limitations may make it hard for the results to be generalizable. The third is no in-depth interview was done about the English article use or the English knowledge background of the subjects before and after the test.

## **6.3 Recommendations for further study**

To avoid the limitations mentioned above, more test items for each sub-type of NP environments and a larger number of subjects should be used. Moreover, an in-depth interview should be carried out to make sure what determines the subjects' selection of articles. Alternatively, the subjects should be asked about the reasons of their article selection while taking the test by having them write the criteria or reasons on the test.

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## **APPENDIX**

### English Article Test

- ☐ First-year English major  
☐ Fourth-year English major

**Directions:** Fill in each blank with the most appropriate article: a, an, the or ø

#### Part 1: Passages

##### Passage 1

Last week while I was walking home, I saw (1.) \_\_\_\_\_ dog coming down the street towards me. (2.) \_\_\_\_\_ animal barked and chased me. I threw (3.) \_\_\_\_\_ bone to it. It stopped and started to eat (4.) \_\_\_\_\_ bone. When I arrived home, I found (5.) \_\_\_\_\_ red box in front of my house. Suddenly, (6.) \_\_\_\_\_ box blew up because there were (7.) \_\_\_\_\_ firecrackers in that box. It frightened me a lot. Luckily, I did not get hurt. Later, I knew from my mom that (8.) \_\_\_\_\_ only person who could do this was my brother. He said sorry to me about (9.) \_\_\_\_\_ situation. Then, my friend called to remind me that I had to study tonight because (10.) \_\_\_\_\_ test tomorrow would be difficult. After studying, I went to (11.) \_\_\_\_\_ bed.

In the morning, when I woke up, my brother had dropped me (12.) \_\_\_\_\_ line, before leaving, asking me to help him with his science homework. He wanted to know how many planets excluding (13.) \_\_\_\_\_ moon there are in (14.) \_\_\_\_\_ solar system, and what (15.) \_\_\_\_\_ equator is. (16.) \_\_\_\_\_ task really caused me (17.) \_\_\_\_\_ headache. (18.) \_\_\_\_\_ fact that he always depends on me really worried me. In (19.) \_\_\_\_\_ long run, I hope he can study without my help.

##### Passage 2

Yesterday, I went to the supermarket with my friend. I saw two men talking with each other. They were not paying attention in (20.) \_\_\_\_\_ line. One of them kept reading "Harry Potter". I know (21.) \_\_\_\_\_ author because I also have read a lot of her books. All of (22.) \_\_\_\_\_ sudden, I remembered I had to buy (23.) \_\_\_\_\_ present for my sister and (24.) \_\_\_\_\_ toys for my niece and nephew. We then went to (25.) \_\_\_\_\_ fourth floor. I unexpectedly met my neighbor who was (26.) \_\_\_\_\_ nurse. She said her daughter liked (27.) \_\_\_\_\_ dolls whereas her son liked (28.) \_\_\_\_\_ food such as (29.) \_\_\_\_\_ bread (30.) \_\_\_\_\_ soup.

After that, we decided to go to (31.) \_\_\_\_\_ restaurant where (32.) \_\_\_\_\_ owner kept various kinds of dangerous animals. He loves to stay with these animals and he knows a lot about these animals' life. He said that (33.) \_\_\_\_\_ tiger is the largest cat species. (34.) \_\_\_\_\_ lion is the second-largest living cat after tigers. (35.) \_\_\_\_\_ bear is found in North America, South America, Europe and Asia (36.) \_\_\_\_\_ idea of knowing about these animals really excited me. I am not afraid of (37.) \_\_\_\_\_ big creatures. On (38.) \_\_\_\_\_ contrary, (39.) \_\_\_\_\_ last animals I want to see are (40.) \_\_\_\_\_ worms. As I expected, (41.) \_\_\_\_\_ visit was very pleasant.

## Part 2: Sentences

42. \_\_\_\_\_ whale is a mammal.
43. \_\_\_\_\_ babies are born every second.
44. Could you please place this mat on \_\_\_\_\_ floor?
45. Our customers are usually interested in buying \_\_\_\_\_ new products.
46. The answer is in \_\_\_\_\_ air.
47. \_\_\_\_\_ old car is easily broken.
48. Pass me \_\_\_\_\_ pen.
49. \_\_\_\_\_ tiger is a dangerous animal.

Last night, I and my sister were very hungry and thirsty. We opened our refrigerator. There was no food but there were some fruits such as 50. \_\_\_\_\_ apples, and 51. \_\_\_\_\_ mangos and some beverage. We did not want to eat any fruits. So I decided to drink 52. \_\_\_\_\_ beer and 53. \_\_\_\_\_ wine in the freezing compartment instead whereas my sister drank 54. \_\_\_\_\_ water. 55. Please read \_\_\_\_\_ sentence louder. 56. \_\_\_\_\_ fact that the Earth is round came about in the first century AD. 57. Mr. Kevin believes that children should have \_\_\_\_\_ control over their own lives.

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