



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH ARTICLES BY L1 ARABIC SPEAKERS**

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By

**MOHAMED TAHA ALI HASSAN**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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*To Fatima, Alwi, and Dan*

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**Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication**

The English article system is acknowledged to be difficult for L2 learners of the English language. Given that articles are among the most frequently used words in the English language, the difficulty increases with L2 English learners whose L1 has no articles and/or the functions of which are realised differently in the L1. The English has the definite article “the”, indefinite article “a/n” and a zero article “Ø”. The Arabic language makes use of a definite article *al* which corresponds to the English definite article superficially. However, the Arabic language has different ways of encoding both the notions of definiteness and indefiniteness. Because of the unique nature by which the English article system functions, many of L1 Arabic speakers have been reported to have much difficulty in acquiring the English articles all over the world (see. e.g. Bataineh 2005). As a result, the researcher has decided to investigate the use of English articles by L1 Arabic speakers.

Using Huebner's (1983) classification system, the present study aims to investigate the extent to which L1 Arabic speakers of L2 English of varying proficiency levels have acquired the definite article *the*, the indefinite article *a/n*, and the zero article  $\emptyset$ . The study also aims to determine the accuracy order of respondents and the nature of their interlanguage and L1 transfer in relation to results obtained by the three groups of L1 Arabic respondents. One hundred and fifty L1 Arabic respondents, drawn from three proficiency levels (advanced, upper-intermediate, and lower intermediate) were selected for the study. The selection was done based on results obtained on a proficiency test that includes the OPT (Oxford Placement Test, Allan, 1992) and the VT (Vocabulary Test, Laufer and Nation, 1999). The respondents attempted a set of study tasks, a fill-in-article test task and a forced-choice elicitation task respectively. The data obtained from the fill-in-article test was analysed quantitatively using the SPSS version18 (Statistical Package for Social Science) programme with respect to descriptive statistics in the form of frequency counts and percentages that were obtained from the analysis. A one way ANOVA was carried out to compare the general mean differences and to determine the significant differences among/between the respondents at the three levels of proficiency. For multiple comparisons, the Tukey's Post Hoc Test was also conducted. The data was analysed in light of Huebner's (1983) classification system and the use of articles in different item environments and with regard to the SOC (Supplied in Obligatory Contexts), TLU (Target Like Use), and UOC (Used in Obligatory Contexts) measures. The data obtained from the forced-choice elicitation were also analysed quantitatively using the SPSS by means of frequency counts and percentage scores.

The results of the study showed that L1 Arabic respondents generally are non native-like in using the English article system. However, they registered their best score in their use of the English indefinite article *a/n* compared to the other two articles. The respondents showed low levels of accuracy with regard to the definite article *the* and the zero article  $\emptyset$ . According to the SOC measure, the L1 respondents registered the accuracy order as follows: *a/n* > zero  $\emptyset$  > *the*, indicating that they had acquired *a/n* first followed by  $\emptyset$  and finally *the*. When considering the single items included in the different item types (type 1 [-SR, +HK], type 2 [+SR, +HK], type 3 [+SR, -HK], type 4 [-SR, -HK] and type 5 idioms and other conventional uses), both of the advanced and upper-intermediate groups reached the native-like level (i.e. the proficiency level of 80% and above) for many items. The findings also show that type 3 Referential indefinite [+SR, -HK] items and type 4 Non-referential [-SR, -HK] items are found to be the easiest types for L1 Arabic speakers. The L1 Arabic speakers had difficulty with type 1 [-SR, +HK] and type 5 items. In addition, the findings show that the proficiency level of respondents has an impact on their acquisition of the English article system. The findings also show that L1 transfer was involved in the acquisition of the English articles. In addition, the different assignments of the articles in both languages seemed to have contributed to the difficulty of article use in English evident in the study.

The study highlights the importance of investigating the acquisition of English articles by L2 learners and provides some pedagogical perspectives for the L2 English instructors as well as points out areas of difficulty that may be encountered by L2 learners as a result of L1 transfer or interlanguage errors. In addition, the study also highlights the importance of the context in which articles are used. The findings of the

study thus contribute to the literature and knowledge in the field of SLA particularly in the Arab-speaking world (e.g. Sudan).



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia untuk memenuhi keperluan ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PERMEROLEHAN KATA SANDANG BAHASA INGGERIS OLEH PENUTUR BAHASA ARAB.**

Oleh

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Sistem kata sandang bahasa Inggeris diakui sukar bagi pembelajar bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua (B2). Memandangkan kata sandang adalah antara kata yang paling kerap digunakan dalam bahasa Inggeris, maka kesukaran ini semakin ketara bagi pelajar bahasa Inggeris sebagai B2 sekiranya bahasa pertama (B1) mereka tidak mempunyai kata sandang dan/atau fungsi kata sandangnya diungkapkan secara berbeza. Dalam bahasa Inggeris ada kata sandang pasti “the”, kata sandang tak pasti “a/an”, dan kata sandang sifar “Ø”. Namun, bahasa Arab mempunyai cara yang berbeza untuk pengekodan kata sandang sama ada untuk makna pasti atau makna tak pasti. Keunikan fungsi sistem kata sandang bahasa Inggeris menyebabkan banyak penutur bahasa Arab sebagai B1 di seluruh pelosok dunia mengalami kesukaran untuk menguasai penggunaan kata sandang bahasa Inggeris (lihat contohnya Bataineh, 2005). Lantaran itu, pengkaji memutuskan untuk mengkaji penggunaan kata sandang bahasa Inggeris dalam kalangan penutur bahasa Arab sebagai B1.



Dengan menggunakan sistem klasifikasi Huebner (1983), kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengetahui tahap penguasaan kata sandang pasti *the*, kata sandang tak pasti *a/an*, dan kata sandang sifar  $\emptyset$  dalam kalangan penutur bahasa Arab sebagai B1 yang mempelajari bahasa Inggeris sebagai B2 pada tahap kemahiran yang berbeza. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk menentukan urutan ketepatan penggunaan kata sandang ini dalam kalangan responden serta ciri bahasa Inggeris yang dihasilkan oleh mereka serta gangguan ciri B1 dengan berdasarkan hasil yang diperoleh daripada tiga kumpulan responden penutur bahasa Arab sebagai B1. Sebanyak 150 responden penutur bahasa Arab sebagai B1 daripada tiga tahap kemahiran bahasa Inggeris (lanjutan, pertengahan atas, dan pertengahan bawah) dipilih sebagai responden kajian ini. Pemilihan dilakukan dengan berdasarkan keputusan ujian kecekapan yang merangkumi Ujian Penempatan Oxford (Oxford Placement Test, Allan, 1992) dan Ujian Kosa Kata (Vocabulary Test, Laufer and Nation, 1999). Responden diminta supaya menyempurnakan satu set tugas untuk kajian, iaitu ujian mengisi kata sandang, dan ujian pilihan memadankan kata sandang. Data yang diperoleh daripada ujian mengisi kata sandang dianalisis secara kuantitatif dengan menggunakan program SPSS (*Statistical Package for Social Science*) versi 18 untuk menghuraikan kekerapan dan peratusan yang diperoleh daripada analisis. Teknik ANOVA sehala digunakan untuk membandingkan perbezaan min umum, serta untuk menentukan tahap perbezaan yang signifikan antara responden pada tiga tahap kemahiran. Untuk perbandingan pelbagai, Ujian *Post Hoc Tukey* juga digunakan. Data dianalisis dengan berdasarkan sistem klasifikasi Huebner (1983) dan berdasarkan penggunaan kata sandang dalam konteks yang berbeza yang berlandaskan pengukuran SOC (Supplied in Obligatory Contexts), TLU (Target Like Use), dan UOC (Use in Obligatory Contexts). Data yang diperoleh daripada ujian pilihan pemadanan

juga dianalisis secara kuantitatif dengan menggunakan SPSS untuk mengira skor kekerapan dan peratusan.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa responden penutur bahasa Arab sebagai B1 secara umumnya tidak menggunakan sistem kata sandang bahasa Inggeris sebagaimana penutur natif. Namun, terbukti bahawa mereka memperoleh skor terbaik dalam penggunaan kata sandang tidak pasti bahasa Inggeris *a/an* berbanding dengan dua kata sandang yang lain. Responden menunjukkan menunjukkan tahap ketepatan penggunaan yang rendah bagi kata sandang pasti *the* dan kata sandang sifar  $\emptyset$ . Dengan berdasarkan pengukuran SOC, responden penutur bahasa Arab sebagai B1 menunjukkan urutan ketepatan penggunaan kata sandang seperti yang berikut: *a/an*>sifar  $\emptyset$ >*the*. Ini menunjukkan bahawa mereka terlebih dahulu menguasai kata sandang *a/an*, diikuti dengan kata sandang sifar  $\emptyset$ , dan akhirnya kata sandang *the*. Apabila setiap jenis item dipertimbangkan, termasuk jenis item yang berbeza (jenis 1 [-SR, +HK], jenis 2 [+SR, +HK], jenis 3 [+SR, -HK], jenis 4[-SR, -HK], jenis 5 peribahasa dan penggunaan lazim yang lain), kedua-dua kumpulan, iaitu kumpulan lanjutan dan kumpulan pertengahan atas mencapai tahap penguasaan kata sandang yang menyamai penutur natif (iaitu mencapai tahap kemahiran 80% ke atas) bagi beberapa banyak item. Penemuan ini juga menunjukkan bahawa item Rujukan tidak pasti jenis 3 [+SR, -HK] dan item Bukan-rujukan jenis 4 [-SR, -HK] merupakan jenis yang paling mudah dikuasai oleh penutur bahasa Arab sebagai B1. Penutur bahasa Arab sebagai B1 bermasalah dalam penguasaan kata sandang jenis 1 [-SR, + HK] dan jenis 5. Selain itu, dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa tahap kemahiran bahasa Inggeris responden turut mempengaruhi keupayaan mereka menguasai sistem kata sandang bahasa Inggeris.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa gangguan ciri bahasa pertama turut berlaku semasa pembelajaran kata sandang bahasa Inggeris. Malah, tugas kata sandang yang berbeza dalam kedua-dua bahasa menyebabkan kesukaran penggunaan kata sandang bahasa Inggeris sebagaimana yang terbukti dalam kajian ini.

Penyelidikan ini jelas membuktikan bahawa kajian penguasaan kata sandang bahasa Inggeris dalam kalangan pelajar B2 sangat penting dan dapat memberikan perspektif pedagogi untuk pengajar bahasa Inggeris sebagai B2, di samping menunjukkan aspek kesukaran yang mungkin dihadapi oleh pembelajar B2 sebagai akibat gangguan ciri B1 atau kesilapan dalam bahasa yang dipelajari. Di samping itu, kajian ini juga menunjukkan peri pentingnya konteks bagi penggunaan kata sandang. Justeru, kajian ini dapat memberikan sumbangan kepada literatur dan pengetahuan untuk bidang pembelajaran bahasa kedua, khususnya di dunia penutur bahasa Arab (misalnya Sudan).

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 1 November 2011 to conduct the final examination of Mohamed Taha Ali on his thesis entitled "Acquisition of English Articles by L1 Arabic Speakers" in accordance with the Universities and University College Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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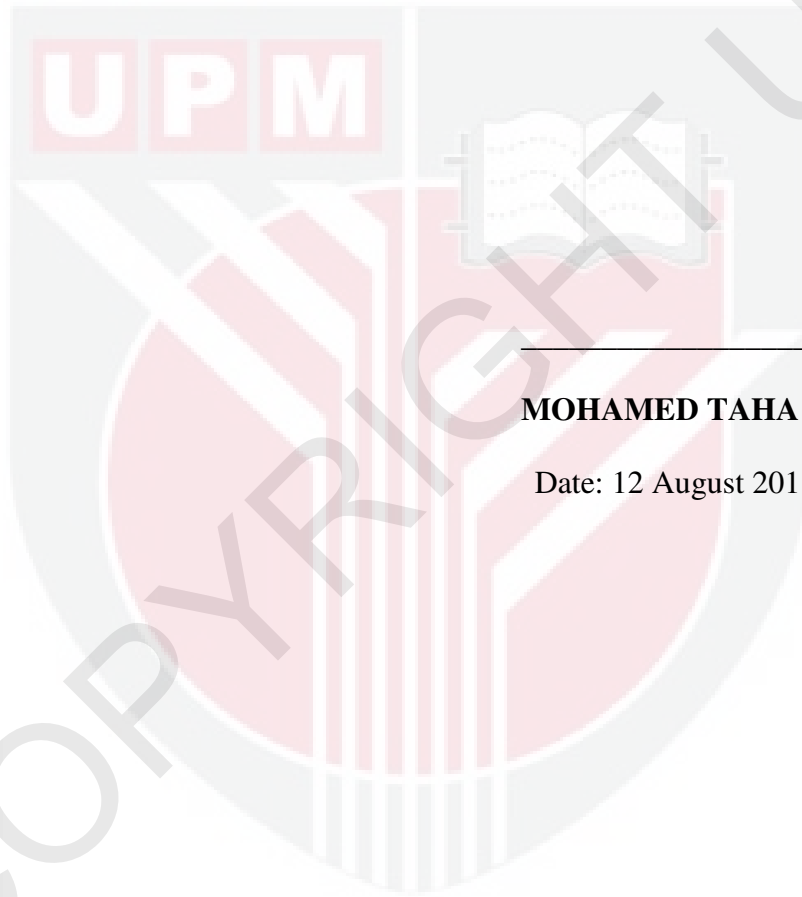
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## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledge. I also declare that it has not been previously, or concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.



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**MOHAMED TAHA ALI HASSAN**

Date: 12 August 2011





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