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L1 Saudi-Arabic Learners' Use of Articles with Count and Mass Nouns in L2 English

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Abstract

English and Arabic differ in the use of the article system about singular, plural and mass nouns. Count and mass nouns take different articles in English. Thus, it would be interesting to investigate the effect of count and mass nouns on first language (L1) Saudi-Arabic learners' use of the article system in second language (L2) English. In English, according to Adger (2003), the use of articles is determined by the nouns due to the c-command relationship; that is, the determiner must agree with the noun with which it is linked. If the nouns are singular and indefinite, the indefinite article must be used; if the nouns are plural or mass with indefinite contexts, 'some' must be used. Regarding definite contexts, the definite article is used with singular, plural and mass nouns, which is like the Arabic language. In this study, I will also investigate generic sentences in which the indefinite article is used in singular contexts and the bare plural that is used in plural and mass contexts, which is also a difference between English and Arabic because Arabic only uses definite articles for generic reference. I will examine that through the Bottleneck Hypothesis by Slabakova (2008) and the Feature Reassembly Hypothesis by Lardiere (2009) to investigate the learners' ability to acquire functional morphology, as well as the mapping process regarding the use of articles with count and mass nouns. The data were collected using a forced choice task involving 67 L1 Saudi-Arabic learners of English. The results revealed that the learners were accurate in their use of the definite article with count and mass nouns and in their use of indefinite articles with singular and plural nouns, but had trouble with generic sentences and indefinite articles in mass contexts. The outcomes support the BH and the FRH, which state that learners might encounter difficulties due to L1 transfer when they need to map and reassemble the functional morphology.

Keywords: Count, Mass Nouns, English, Saudi-Arabic Learners

1. Literature review

As Chierchia (1994) suggested, count and mass nouns differ in relation to definiteness in English. It has been argued that count and mass nouns are derived from two separate semantic domains; count nouns consist of a set of individual items and groups that form this individuality, while mass nouns donate amounts of things and do not consist of individuality as count nouns. Another difference between count and mass nouns is that count nouns can be numbered and take plural forms, while mass nouns cannot. Moreover, the use of nouns with articles will be determined by the c-command relationship. That indicate that the singular nouns as (cat) must be preceded by an indefinite article as English does not accept a bare singular noun. If the noun is plural then "some" is used to indicate indefiniteness.

An example of combinatorial restrictions in the English D system is shown in Example 1.

- | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|--|
| (1) a. the/some boy | a. the/some boys | a. the/some water |
| b. a/every boy | b. *a/every boys | b. *a/every water |
| c. *most/all boy | c. most/all boys | c. most/all water (Chierchia, 2010, p. 109). |

English uses indefinite articles ('a/an') with singular nouns and 'some' with plural and mass nouns. In definite contexts, the definite article ('the') is used in singular, plural and mass contexts. Article use characterises the difference between English and Arabic regarding the use of the article system for count and mass nouns. In English, an indefinite article ('a/an') will be used if the noun is in the singular form, as in Example 2a, while 'some' will be used with plural nouns (Example 2b) and mass nouns (Example 2c).

- (2) a. I would like to get an orange (singular)
 b. I would like some oranges (plural)
 c. I bought some furniture for the living room (mass)

In the definite context in English, the definite article ('the') is used with singular, plural and mass nouns, as in shown in Examples 3a, b and c.

- (3) a. The man is tall (singular)
 b. The men are tall (plural)
 c. The sugar is organic (mass)

Another structure related to count and mass nouns that forms part of generic reference is known as characterising or generic sentences; these refer to generalisations as opposed to definite or particular sentences that refer to specific events or items. Krifka et al. (1995, p. 3) stated that 'much of our knowledge of the world, and many of our beliefs about the world, are couched in terms of characterising sentences.' The articles that are used in generic sentences are indefinite articles in singular contexts and the bare plural in plural contexts.

- (4) a. A potato contains vitamin C, amino acids, protein and thiamine. (Krifka et al., 1995, p. 3)
 b. John smokes a cigar after dinner. (Krifka et al., 1995, p. 3)
 c. Frogs are awake. (Lyons, 1999, p. 189)

Determiner Phrases (DPs) in English comprise a number of features that define the function of the DP, including person, number, and definiteness. These functional features can be classified as either interpretable or uninterpretable.

Interpretable features are related to semantics and contribute to the overall interpretation of the phrase. They cannot be eliminated before being spelled out, which means they must be produced in written or oral form. Examples of interpretable features include the definite article [+definite] and the indefinite article [-definite].

In contrast, uninterpretable features are connected only to the morphosyntactic structure of the sentence. These features must be eliminated before being spelled out. For instance, the nouns that follow the article must be checked for singularity and plurality before they can be produced.

In Arabic, definiteness is expressed via a bound morpheme that is overtly marked by the suffix '-n' in indefinite contexts, while the definite article is the prefix 'al-' (Fassi Fehri, 2012), as seen in Example 5. Awad (2011) indicated that the indefinite article, which occurs morphologically in the written form of standard Arabic, is not always used in Arabic in the same way as it is in English: 'In formal, standard and classic Arabic, indefiniteness can be (optionally) represented by small, non-morphemic accents suffixed to words' (p. 5).

The indefinite article also only occurs phonologically in Modern Standard Arabic (Abudaljuh, 2016), with speakers of other dialects, except for some Bedouin dialects, tending to drop the indefinite article '-n' (Al-Malki

et al., 2014). This is also true for Saudi-Arabic speakers, who drop the indefinite in the absence of the definite article 'al-' and use bare nouns to indicate indefinite contexts. In dialects such as Syrian Arabic (Sarko, 2009) and Moroccan Arabic (Fassi Fehri, 2012), bare nouns are used for indefinite contexts. Therefore, definiteness in Arabic concerns the use of the prefix 'al-' for definite contexts and bare nouns for indefinite contexts. The definite article, namely the prefix 'al-', is always used in spoken and written forms of the language, as shown in Example 5.

- (5) Qaratuw Kitab-u-n. Al-Kitab-u Momtia.
'I read a book. The book is interesting'.

For singular, plural and mass nouns with indefinite situations, the nouns are used as they are without any additions (bare nouns), which applies to all the indefinite situations in Arabic, as shown in Examples 6a, b and c.

- (6) a. Indefinite singular noun phrases (NPs):

ana abħað řan ragam giasi.
I looking.1sg for record
*'I'm looking for record.'
'I'm looking for a record.'

- b. Indefinite plural NPs:

lagad wada řato malařig řal altawilah.
already put.1sg spoons on the table
'I've already put spoons on the table'

- c. Indefinite mass NPs:

Goan đahab le-yashtri řalib
John gone.3sg to-buy.3sg milk
'John has gone out to buy milk' (Alsowiliem, 2014, p. 31, p. 32)

This is different from English, in which learners must use the word 'some' before indefinite plural and mass nouns. In Arabic, the definite article 'al-' is used in singular, plural and mass contexts, as shown in Examples 7 a, b and c below.

- (7) a. Definite singular NPs:

al-ragol kan motřab
The man.SG was tired
'The man was tired'.

- b. Definite plural NPs:

al- regal kano motřabien
The men.PL were tired
'The men were tired'.

- c. Definite mass NPs:

al-sukar kan řali
The-sugar.MASS was expensive
'The sugar was expensive'. (Alsowiliem, 2014, p. 30)

With regard to generic reference, Arabic only uses the definite article, and does not have generic sentences, unlike English. Example 8 below demonstrates the use of 'al-' with all the nouns in question.

- (8) a. al-dainasour-aat-u mungaridh-at-un.
DEF- dinosaurs-FEM-PLU extinct-FEM-PLU

'The dinosaurs are extinct.'

b. *dainasour-at-u munga

dinosaurs-FEM-PLU extinct-FEM-PLU

'Dinosaurs are extinct.' (Al-Malki et al., 2014, p. 23)

Recent study by Muftah, M. (2023), investigated the accuracy order and acquisition processes of English articles by 45 Arab EFL learners at the undergraduate level. The theoretical framework used is Bickerton's (1981) semantic model, which focuses on the features \pm Specific Referent (\pm SR) and \pm Assumed Known to the Hearer (\pm HK).

The key findings include that the SOC (Supplied in Obligatory Contexts) measure revealed an accuracy order of $a > the > \emptyset$, while the TLU (Target-Like Use) measure revealed an accuracy order of $the > a > \emptyset$ across the learner groups. The UOC (Used in Obligatory Contexts) measure showed that the zero article (\emptyset) goes through a "flooding-then-trickling" process, followed by a U-shaped development marked by an overgeneralization stage. Learners had difficulty distinguishing between [\pm HK] and [\pm Countability] features. Lastly, the most challenging contexts to acquire were [+SR, -HK] and [-SR, +HK], indicating difficulty with the interaction between specificity and assumed knowledge.

Thus, the study provides insights into the accuracy order and underlying acquisition processes of the English article system for Arab EFL learners, highlighting the complex semantic features that pose challenges in article usage.

2. The Feature Reassembly Hypothesis and the Bottleneck Hypothesis

Slabakova's (2008) Bottleneck Hypothesis (BH) is mainly related to functional morphology; Slabakova argued that functional morphology was the most difficult part of a language to acquire because different languages have different morphologies, and morphology is linked to a variety of syntactic and semantic features. Differences between the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) could lead to difficulty with acquisition. According to the BH, once the features have been acquired, learners should be aware of and informed about the semantic consequences, regardless of whether these have been taught explicitly. The acquisition of definiteness is part of the functional morphology in English; thus, it would be interesting to investigate the acquisition of count and mass nouns, as well as their potential impact on the use of the article system in English as in Azaz (2019), Jensen et al. (2020), Momenzade and Youhanaee, (2014) and Cho, (2017).

The BH is consistent with the Feature Reassembly Hypothesis (FRH) by Lardiere (2009), who argued that L2 learners had the ability to remap features from the L1 onto the L2. According to the FRH, learners will go through two stages in the acquisition process. The first stage is the mapping between the L1 and the L2 if the languages have similar features, which may be the case when using definite articles with count and mass nouns in English and in Arabic, as the use is similar. However, if the features are different, as in the case of indefinite articles, learners not only have to map one feature onto another, but also need to perform a second stage that entails the remapping of these features, which might be difficult for the learners and may lead to errors in acquisition. Lardiere (2016) later suggested that definiteness was a functional category and argued that the Determiner (D) and the Number (N) must match; that is, morphosyntactic feature values such as [\pm definite] and [\pm plural] need to match. For example, [-definite] must be matched with [-plural] in English: The morphemes 'a/an' must agree with the lexical item (noun) in terms of being [-plural], as in 'a book,' while a singular noun without the indefinite article would be grammatically incorrect, as in '*book.' The main task for learners is to link the lexical items according to the morphosyntactic features that the languages accept, which necessitates acquiring both the features and the lexical items that match them in order to be able to use them correctly. With regard to definiteness, L2 English learners are required to match the [-definite] and the [-plural] in order to use the features correctly. Thus, the predictions based on the BH and the FRH are that learners will be able to acquire definite articles with singular, plural and mass forms, as these occur in their L1, Arabic, which will make it easy for the learners to map from their L1 onto their L2.

With regard to singular indefinite articles, learners may experience difficulties because there are no equivalent articles in their L1. The learners might also encounter difficulties with indefinite plurals and mass nouns because they will need to use ‘some,’ while Arabic uses bare nouns. Thus, the learners will need to reassemble and map in addition to using the indefinite article and ‘some’ with count and mass nouns.

With regard to generic reference, learners may overuse the definite article because they might only use it in generic reference, and may have problems using the indefinite article and bare noun due to mapping difficulties. In addition, a learnability issue stems from differences in the L1 and in the L2 and the fact that, in English, the generic involves a combination of complex features involving three morphemes (‘a’, ‘the’ and ‘plural-s’) in two different contexts (NPs and generic sentences). The combination of features with which learners are likely to struggle is mapping the [-definite] and [-plural] in generic singular sentences. They also need to map the [-definite] and [+plural] in generic plural sentences. Thus, according to the hypotheses, learners would have difficulty in acquiring indefinite articles for singular indefinite contexts and in singular generic sentences, as well as ‘some’ in indefinite plural contexts and the plural-s in plural generic sentences due to differences in the L1 and the L2. Learners may also have difficulty with mapping the interpretable features [\pm definite] onto the uninterpretable features [\pm plural].

Table 1: Summary of the differences and the predictions

	English	Arabic	BH and FRH
Indefinite singular	a or an	bare noun	Learners might have difficulties with the mapping of interpretable [-definite] and uninterpretable [-plural] features.
Indefinite plural	some	bare noun	Learners might have difficulties with the mapping of interpretable [-definite] and uninterpretable [+plural] features.
Indefinite mass	some	bare noun	Learners might have difficulties with the mapping of interpretable [-definite] and uninterpretable [+plural] features.
Definite singular	the	Al-	Learners will only map the definite articles in their L1 onto their L2.
Definite plural	the	Al-	Learners will only map the definite articles in their L1 onto their L2.
Definite mass	the	Al-	Learners will only map the definite articles in their L1 onto their L2.
Singular generic sentences	a or an	Al-	Learners might have difficulties with the mapping of interpretable [-definite] and uninterpretable [-plural] features.
Plural generic sentences	plural-s	Al-	Learners might have difficulties with the mapping of interpretable [-definite] and uninterpretable [+plural] features.
Mass generic sentences	bare noun	Al-	Learners might have difficulties with the mapping of interpretable [-definite] and uninterpretable [+plural] features.

As shown in the summary in Table 1, there are many variations in the use of articles with count and mass nouns in English, and this type of complication is not found in Arabic. Thus, we proposed the following research question:

3. Research question

Would the singular, plural and mass contexts affect the knowledge of L1 Saudi-Arabic learners regarding the article system in L2 English?

4. Participants

The participants were 67 L1 Saudi-Arabic learners of English who were enrolled at Al-baha University, and were in their first year of study in the foreign language department. The participants were all female, and were aged between 20 and 21. Ten L1 English speakers also participated in the study.

5. Methodology

The methodology involved a forced choice task consisting of 54 sentences. As the aim of the study was to investigate the effect of singular, plural and mass nouns on the article system in English, the task was designed to select contexts that included singular, plural and mass nouns with generic references, as well as definite and indefinite articles. There are two types of generic references, namely generic NPs and generic sentences, as discussed above. However, the focus was solely on generic sentences because, according to Snape (2008), there is no definite mass generic relationship in generic NPs in English; thus, generic NPs were excluded. The sentences that were included contained definite and indefinite articles with singular, plural, and mass nouns, as well as count and non-count nouns. These sentences were divided into four categories (generic sentences, indefinite articles and definite articles); each category consisted of six sentences and included singular, plural and mass nouns. Thus, there were six generic singular sentences, six generic plural sentences and six generic mass sentences. The same categorisation was applied to definite (singular, plural and mass) and indefinite (singular, plural and mass) features.

The answer key was based on the effect of singularity and plurality. The learners had a choice of five options, as shown in Example 1, namely 'a', 'an', 'the,' 'some' and 'Ø.' Therefore, in singular contexts, the indefinite article ('a' or 'an') would be used, and 'some' would be used in both plural and mass contexts, as shown in Examples 9 a, b and c below.

(9) Indefinite article

(a) singular

I saw _____ a _____ bird.
a an the some Ø

(b) plural

There are _____ some _____ chairs in the room.
a an the some Ø

(c) mass

Sonya is pulling _____ some _____ luggage
a an the some Ø

With regard to the use of the definite article, the correct selection of the definite article ('the') for the singular, plural and mass conditions in Examples 10 a, b and c were as follows:

(10) Definite article

(a) singular:

_____ The _____ music you like best is rock and roll.

(b) plural

John said he will take care of _____ the _____ cats while you are away.

a an the some Ø

(c) mass

_____ The _____ vocabulary in this exercise is easy.

a an the some Ø

Therefore, the appropriate selection for singular generic sentences would be the indefinite article and the null determiner (Ø) in plural and mass contexts, as shown in Examples 11 a, b and c below:

(11) Generic sentences

(a) singular:

- ___An___ iron is an appliance used to take wrinkles out of cloth.
 a an the some Ø
- (b) plural
 _____ Ø _____ Trees need water to survive.
 a an the some Ø
- (c) mass
 _____ Ø _____ Gold is metal
 a an the some Ø

The learners completed the forced choice task online using the Blackboard system by adding the task to the quiz section and the learners could access the task through their university username and password. Blackboard system is a platform that allow to present different materials to the learners as well as conduct quizzes and test. the platform is provided by Al-Baha university to all the faculty members and students. All the learners have done the task during the lecture time using their own devices.

6. Results

This section presents the results for the Saudi-Arabic learners and the L1 English speakers to answer the research question:

Would the singular, plural and mass contexts affect the knowledge of L1 Saudi-Arabic learners' regarding the article system in L2 English?

The number of correct responses is presented first. For the L1 English speakers, the correct responses are 60 as there were ten participants and six sentences for each category for the learners to select from. As for the Saudi-Arabic learners, there were six sentences in each category as well and 67 participants, the total should be 402. This is followed by the descriptive results and the results of the Friedman test.

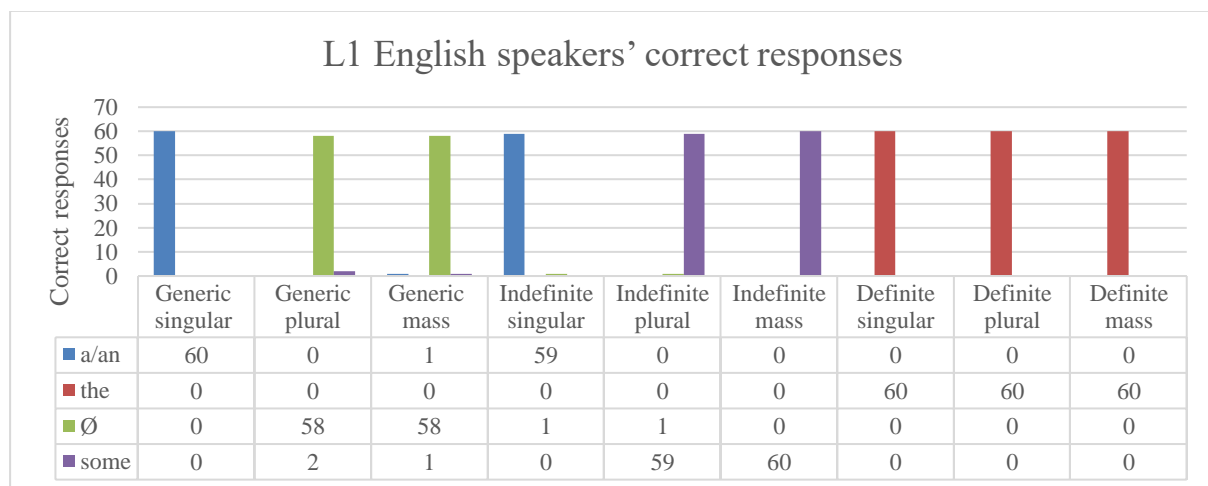


Figure 1: L1 English speakers' correct responses

Figure 1 shows the total responses for all the categories for L1 English speakers, and Figure 2 shows the results for the Saudi-Arabic learners.

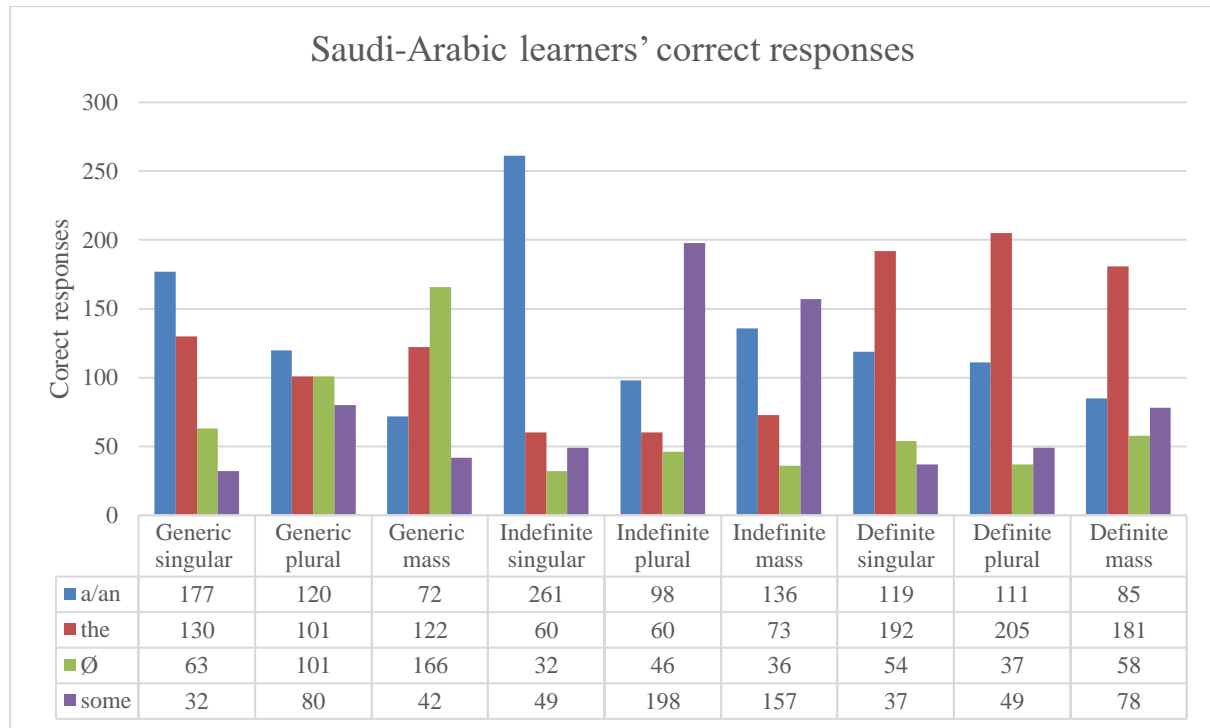


Figure 2: Saudi-Arabic learners' correct responses

According to Figure 2, if the learners had selected only the target article in each category, the sum of the articles in the table should be 402 because there were 67 participants and six sentences in each category. However, as the learners did not only select the target article, the total of 402 was distributed according to the four available options ('a/an,' 'the,' 'Ø' and 'some'). The green boxes in the tables indicate the correct article choice. As the two options for the indefinite article were 'a/an,' I now present a closer investigation of the two categories that had the indefinite article as the target article. These were scored out of 67 as they were individual sentences and not a summary, as in Figure 2 above. The scores are presented in Figure 3 with generic singular and indefinite singular in Figure 4.

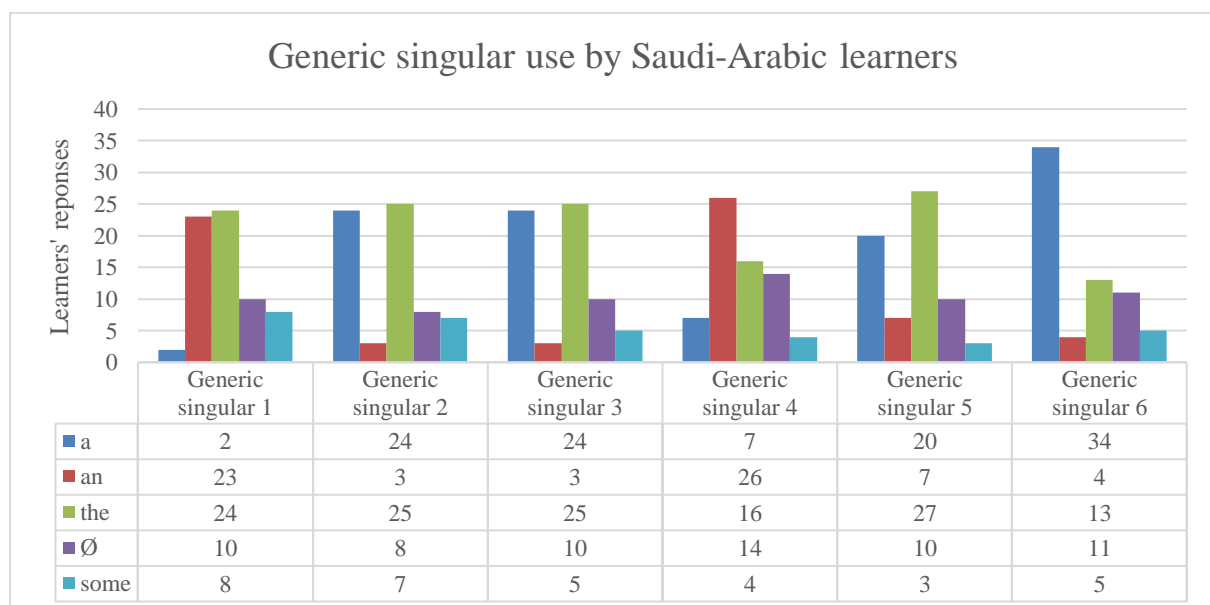


Figure 3: Generic singular use by Saudi-Arabic learners

12. ____an__Orange is green until it ripens.
 a an the some Ø

13. _____ an _____ iron is an appliance used to take wrinkles out of cloth.
 a an the some Ø

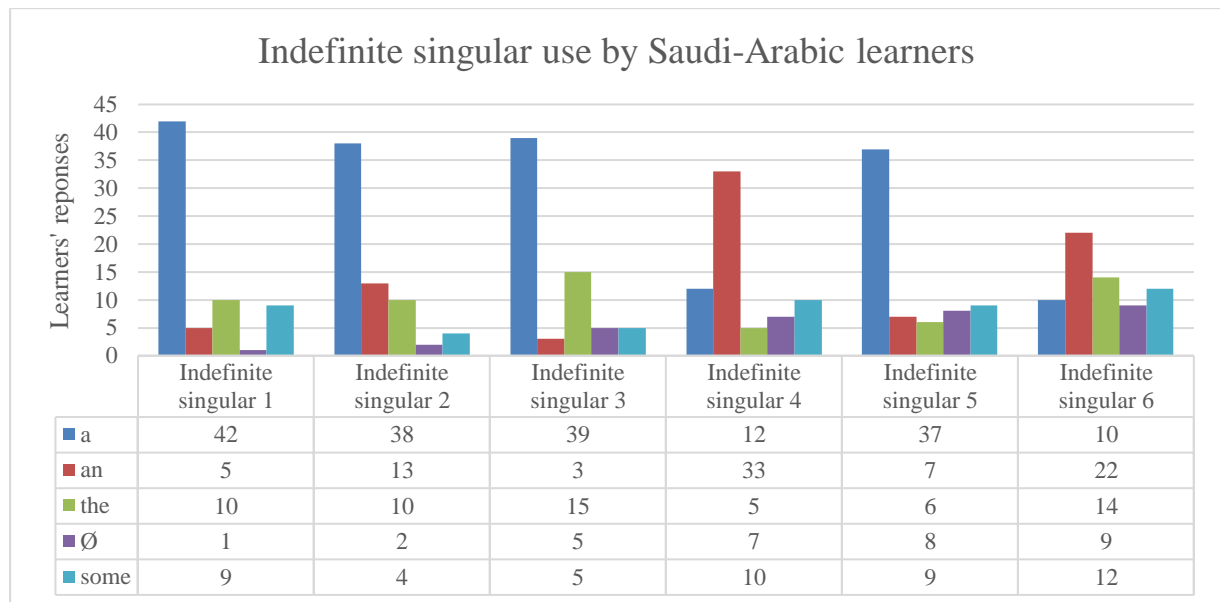


Figure 4: Indefinite singular use by Saudi-Arabic learners

14. The teacher made _____ an _____ announcement
 a an the some
15. The Brooklyn Bridge was designed by _____ an _____ engineer.
 a an the some

The main reason for including both 'a' and 'an' in the options was to clarify that the learners understood the use of these articles and the differences between them; as shown in Figure 3 and 4, the learners selected the correct articles, although the use of the definite article was high in the generic references likely to be L1 transfer, which will be explained in the discussion section.

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk tests are presented in tabular form; as the results were not normally distributed, the Friedman test was then used to identify the significant differences in the categories. Table 2 presents the results for L1 English speakers, and Table 3 shows the results for the Saudi learners.

Table 2: L1 English speakers' Shapiro-Wilk results

	Shapiro-Wilk	<i>p</i> -value
Generic singular	0.345	< .001
Generic plural	0.363	< .001
Generic mass	0.363	< .001
Indefinite singular	0.363	< .001
Indefinite plural	0.357	< .001
Indefinite mass	0.363	< .001
Definite singular	0.345	< .001
Definite plural	0.345	< .001
Definite mass	0.345	< .001

Table 3: Saudi learners' Shapiro-Wilk results

	Shapiro-Wilk	<i>p</i> -value
Generic singular	0.91	< .001
Generic plural	0.775	< .001
Generic mass	0.824	< .001

Indefinite singular	0.913	< .001
Indefinite plural	0.916	< .001
Indefinite mass	0.883	< .001
Definite singular	0.92	< .001
Definite plural	0.89	< .001
Definite mass	0.929	< .001

The mean rankings for the Friedman test are presented below: L1 English speakers' rankings are presented in Table 4, and the Saudi-Arabic learners' rankings in Table 5 below.

Table 4: Mean rankings for L1 English speakers

Generic singular	Generic plural	Generic mass
5.45	4.55	4.55
Indefinite singular	Indefinite plural	Indefinite mass
4.55	5.00	4.55
Definite singular	Definite plural	Definite mass
5.45	5.45	5.45

Table 5: Mean rankings for Saudi learners

Generic singular	Generic plural	Generic mass
4.96	3.37	4.57
Indefinite singular	Indefinite plural	Indefinite mass
6.85	5.27	4.38
Definite singular	Definite plural	Definite mass
5.19	5.54	4.86

In Table 4, the mean ranking was close with the L1 English speakers unlike the Saudi-Arabic learners in Table 5. Table 5 shows a variation in the mean rank as the generic plural is the lower with 3.37 and the indefinite singular is the highest with 6.85 followed by the definite plural with 5.54 and 5.19 with definite singular.

Table 6: Friedman tests for L1 English speakers and for Saudi-Arabic learners

L1 English speakers		Saudi learners	
N	10	N	67
Chi-square	8.727	Chi-square	70.518
df	8	df	8
Asymp. Sig.	.366	Asymp. Sig.	<.001

The results in Table 6 indicate that there were no significant differences in the L1 English speakers' categories, which were generic, indefinite and definite in singular, plural and mass contexts. The case was different for the Saudi-Arabic learners, as the results in Table 6 showed significant differences in the items. Thus, I will present the results of another Friedman test according to the singular, plural and mass conditions across the three categories.

The mean rankings for the singular generic, indefinite and definite contexts are presented in Table 7, together with the plural and mass contexts.

Table 7: Mean rankings for Saudi-Arabic learners for singular, plural and mass contexts

Generic singular	Indefinite singular	Definite singular
1.75	2.39	1.87
Mean Rank		
Generic plural	Indefinite plural	Definite plural
1.51	2.22	2.27
Mean Rank		
Generic mass	Indefinite mass	Definite mass
1.99	1.90	2.11

Table 8: Friedman test for singular, plural and mass contexts

Singular		plural		mass	
N	67	N	67	N	67
Chi-Square	18.679	Chi-Square	29.381	Chi-Square	1.746
df	2	df	2	df	2
Asymp. Sig.	<.001	Asymp. Sig.	<.001	Asymp. Sig.	.418

According to Table 8, there was a significant difference in the generic, indefinite and definite articles in the singular and the plural forms, as the learners demonstrated greater accuracy in the indefinite singular than they did in the generic singular and the definite singular contexts. There was also a significant difference in the plural contexts, as the learners demonstrated greater accuracy in indefinite and definite plural forms compared to generic plural forms. There was no significant difference between the generic, indefinite and definite in mass contexts, as the learners' accuracy in mass contexts was similar.

7. Discussion

The research question that I aimed to answer was as follows:

Would the singular, plural and mass contexts affect the knowledge of L1 Saudi-Arabic learners' regarding the article system in L2 English?

The Saudi-Arabic learners had different levels of accuracy for generic sentences, indefinite and definite articles across the singular, plural and mass contexts.

The results revealed that the learners were accurate in their use of the definite article due to the effect of L1 transfer, which was similar to Köylü's (2023) finding that Arabic learners were more accurate in the use of the definite article than were Turkish and Chinese learners, which the author attributed to transfer from the L1.

The results also showed that the learners had less accuracy in generic sentences, which may have been due to L1 transfer. The learners had the least accuracy in generic plural sentences compared to generic singular and mass sentences, as they used the indefinite article more often than the bare plural, which was the correct response. The accuracy for the singular and mass contexts was also low, as the learners tended to use the definite article in both contexts more often than was warranted, which may have been due to the effect of their L1, Arabic. As discussed above, Arabic only uses the definite article for generic references. This result was similar to the findings of Hermas (2020a), who showed that L1 Moroccan Arabic learners of L3 English had difficulty with the indefinite article in singular sentences and with the bare plural in plural sentences.

It was surprising that the Saudi -learners had high levels of accuracy when using indefinite articles. As the BH suggests, learners would be able to acquire a feature even if it did not occur in their L1, which was borne out by the results of this research. The learners demonstrated higher levels of accuracy in singular and plural contexts compared to mass contexts, which may have been due to the complicated article system in English. As Alhaysony (2012) argued, the source of errors in the use of definite and indefinite articles for L1 Saudi-Arabic learners who were acquiring English was not only interlingual (arising from the transfer of L1 features), but also intralingual (arising from the English language), particularly with regard to the process of learning articles in the L2. The types of errors that were caused by the target language were due to overgeneralisation, incomplete understanding of the rules and ignorance of the rules' restrictions.

The participants were in their first year of studying English at university, and had received a significant amount of input regarding the use of definite and indefinite articles, which may have caused them to be more aware of the use of the indefinite article. The learners were more accurate in their use of the indefinite article in singular contexts than they were in plural and mass contexts.

The accuracy of the use of the indefinite article with singular plurals, as Köylü (2023) argued, could have been due to the learners being able to recover from L1 transfer if they had high levels of proficiency. This outcome was similar to the findings of Ionin et al. (2011), Ionin

et al. (2013) and Hermas (2020a, b), who stated that learners with high levels of proficiency were more accurate in their use of the English article system.

According to the results presented above, the learners demonstrated a high degree of accuracy in the use of the definite article in singular, plural and mass contexts. However, as seen in Figure 2, the learners selected the indefinite article more than what they have showed. The correct response for the mass nouns was 'some,' which the learners selected 157 times. However, the indefinite article was selected 136 times for mass nouns, which was quite high; this may have been due to generalisation because the learners had recently acquired the indefinite article and tended to overuse it.

As mentioned previously, the learners had just started at the university and were in their first year; thus, they may have recently noticed the indefinite article and started to generalise it. The overuse of the indefinite article occurred in singular and plural contexts, but not in mass contexts.

The results revealed that the use of articles affected singular, plural and mass contexts. The learners have shown high accuracy with singular context with generic, indefinite and definite articles. However, the learners showed different accuracy with plural and mass, particularly with generic and indefinite articles. The learners' accuracy with plural and mass with generic and indefinite articles was lower compared to the singular contexts. With regard to the definite article, the learners were accurate in their use in singular, plural and mass contexts, which may have been due to the similarities in the use of the definite article in the L1 and in the L2.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, I demonstrated that Saudi-Arabic learners had different degrees of accuracy when using definite articles in singular, plural and mass contexts. The generic sentence references were the least accurate, followed by the use of the indefinite article in mass contexts. This may have been due to L1 transfer. The learners used the definite singular, plural, mass and indefinite singular and plural accurately. Although indefinite articles are not used in their L1, the learners were able to map and reassemble the feature, which supports the BH and the FRH.

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