

**DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLES FOUND IN
THE STUDENT'S ENGLISH DESCRIPTIVE WRITINGS**
(A Study at the English Department of Faculty of Education Bung Hatta University)

THESIS



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ABSTRAK

Ira Primadona I, 2012. “Definite and Indefinite Articles found in the Students’ English Descriptive Writing”. Thesis. Educational English Language Graduate Program. State University of Padang

Penggunaan *definite and indefinite article* *the* dan *a/an* merupakan kelemahan mahasiswa Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris. Masalah yang ditemui adalah mereka melakukan kesalahan penggunaan bentuk dan fungsi *definite and indefinite article* *the* dan *a/an*. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menjelaskan kesalahan penggunaan bentuk dan fungsi *definite and indefinite article* *the* dan *a/an*.

Penelitian deskriptif ini digunakan untuk menganalisa data kebahasaan dengan apa adanya. Populasi adalah mahasiswa Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Bung Hatta. Sementara sampelnya didapatkan melalui tulisan bahasa Inggris. Instrumentasi yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah tulisan deskriptif bahasa Inggris. Pengumpulan data dengan menugaskan masing-masing mahasiswa menulis sebuah tulisan deskriptif bahasa Inggris. Teknik menganalisa data adalah mengorganisasi, membaca, menjelaskan mengklasifikasi data berdasarkan indikator dan subindikator yang telah ditentukan.

Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa bahasa Inggris belum mampu menempatkan pola dan fungsi *definite and in definite articles* di dalam tulisan *descriptive* bahasa Inggris mereka.

Dapat disimpulkan bahwa mahasiswa kelas A masih belum berhasil menggunakan dengan baik kata sandang tentu dan kata sandang tidak tentu di dalam tulisan deskriptif bahasa Inggris mereka. Kegagalan penggunaan *Definite and Indefinite Articles* ini disebabkan oleh ketidaksadaran dan kekurangan pemahaman mereka terhadap bentuk dan fungsi dari kata sandang tentu dan tidak tentu di dalam teks tertulis.

ABSTRACT

Ira Primadona I, 2012. “Definite and Indefinite Articles found in the Students’ English Descriptive Writing”. Thesis. Educational English Language Graduate Program. State University of Padang

The uses of definite and indefinite article “the” and “a/an” have been the English student’s weaknesses. The weaknesses found are they occasionally did mistakes in using the forms and functions of definite and indefinite articles into their English writings. The aim of this research is to explain the student’s mistakes in using the forms and functions of definite and indefinite articles.

This is research a descriptive research which explains the language data as it is. The population is the Bung Hatta University English student study program. The sample is obtained through the English student’s writings. The data collected through assigning the students to do write descriptive writings. The technique of data analysis consist of organizing, reading, explaining, and classifying the data, which are based on the indicators and sub-indicators determined.

This research showed that English department students failed to place the correct forms and the function of definite and indefinite articles into their English descriptive writings.

It can be concluded the most English department students were not able to use the definite and indefinite articles into their English descriptive writings. The inability to use the definite and indefinite articles correctly is mostly by their lack of less understanding on the forms and functions of definite and indefinite articles in their written texts.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Problem

Articles are special modifiers that appear before nouns or noun phrases. Like other adjectives, they help clarify the meaning of the noun in your sentence. There are only two articles in the English language: *the* and *a* (and its variant *an*, used before a word that starts with a vowel sound). A noun may also appear without an article in front of it. If a native speaker, s/he will probably know which article to place in front of a noun without having to think about it.

If, however, English is Indonesian learners' second language, knowing which article to use where can be difficult. Learning and consciously applying a few basic principles can help non-native speakers of English improve your article use significantly. With time and a lot of practice, using articles correctly will become second nature.

English language always employs articles such as common noun, with some exceptions, is expressed with certain definiteness (for instance definite or indefinite), just as many languages express every noun with a certain grammatical number (for example, singular or plural). The article, if any, corresponding to its definiteness and the lack of an article (considered a zero article) must accompany every noun itself specifies a certain definiteness. This is in contrast to other adjectives and determiners,

which are typically optional. This obligatory nature of articles makes them among the most common words in many languages – in English, for example, the most frequent word used is *the* and then *a/an*.

Subsequently, articles (*a*, *an*, and *the*) often signal that a noun is about to appear, and they either limit or make nouns they modify more precise. It is in this sense that articles are also considered to be adjectives. What is more, as it is known that students encounter few problems with articles; however, to those whose native language is not English, articles are often troublesome, for the rules governing their use are surprisingly complex.

As it is generally known that there are two kinds of articles: indefinite and definite. The indefinite articles, *a* and *an*, denote an unspecific item. The choice between *a* and *an* depends on the sound (not the letter): *a* is used before a consonant sound (a book, a country, a historical event); *an* is used before a vowel sound (an apple, an egg, an honorable person) while The definite article, *the*, denotes a particular item.

However, the articles “*a*”, “*an*”, and “*the*” seem simple but they are still difficult for the students of English to learn and to use properly. Some of the rules that govern article usage are very subtle; it needs better experience with the language used will enable students to understand and apply these rules well. These difficulties are based on some aspects or reasons that make the English students hard to use the articles into their own writings especially in determining the use of its functions.

The first problem of using article is that the students are unable to use *a* (or *an*) with singular count nouns whose specific identity is not known to the reader for examples: “The operator dialed *a* number” instead of “The operator dialed *the* number” or “She is looking for *an* apartment close to the university” instead of “She is looking for *the* apartment close to the university.

The second weakness is that the students who always use *a* (or *an*) to modify non-count nouns, such as water, air, knowledge whereas it does not use *a* (or *an*) to modify non-count nouns for example: “He bought sugar, milk, and wine. (Correct) or “He bought a pound of sugar, a quart of milk, and a bottle of wine. (Correct) instead of “He bought a sugar, a milk, and a wine. (Incorrect)”.

The third difficulty is that the students who tend to use *a* (or *an*) to modify an abstract noun or a noun used in a generalization whereas do not use it to modify the abstract nouns but they still use it for example: “Life is what you make it (Correct)” or “Death is part of life (Correct)” instead of “A life is what you make it (Incorrect)” or “A death is part of life (Incorrect)”.

The fourth obstruction is that the students who do not use *the* with most nouns whose specific identity is known to the reader whereas the definite article is used to identify these nouns clearly to the readers. The students do not understand the use of *the* because noun has been previously mentioned for example: “The operator dialed a number. When the operator dialed the number again, she still did not get any answer”. In addition, it is a phrase or a clause following the noun restricts its identity for instance: “The building on the left of the church is our city library” or “He is talking

to the person whom he met last week”. Then, the article ‘the’ show the superlative degree such as best or most interesting makes the noun's identity specific for example: “John is the tallest person in our school”. It is the noun describes a unique person, place, or thing for example: “People call the moon they see twice a month the blue moon”. It is the context or situation makes the noun's identity clear for example: “Please close the door when you leave the room”

The fifth difficulty is that the students who still use *the* with plural or non-count nouns meaning all or in general. Sixth is that the students who sometimes use *the* with most proper nouns for example: Italy, China, Germany, Wall Street, Harvard University, Whitman College instead of *The* Italy, *the* China, *the* Germany, *the* Wall Street, *the* Harvard University, *the* Whitman College.

The seventh difficulty is that the students who still use both indefinite and definite articles to modify nouns which have been modified by other noun markers, such as possessive nouns, numbers, and pronouns for examples: Possessive nouns: John's friends, Julie's sister, Jane's book instead of *the* John's friends, *a* Julie's sister, *a* Jane's book. And Numbers such as three cars, twelve horses, eight lucky numbers instead of *the* three cars, *the* twelve horses, *the* eight lucky numbers.

These reasons mentioned above which make the researcher inspired to further research about definite and indefinite articles into students' English descriptive writings. These weaknesses arise because the students do not have a comprehensive understanding toward the functions of definite and indefinite articles. Therefore, the

uses of articles and their functions are unsuccessful to be applied into their English descriptive writings.

B. Identification of the Problem

Articles are usually characterized as either *definite* or *indefinite*. A few languages with well-developed systems of articles may distinguish additional subtypes. Within each type, languages may have various forms of each article, according to grammatical attributes such as gender, number or case, or according to adjacent sounds. Therefore, the first identification is the students are unable to form definite and indefinite article correctly.

The second identification is the students' inability to function the articles. They cannot function the definite article as it is functioned before a noun of which there is only one, or only one can be understood, before an adjective used as a noun to describe a class of people, before the names of many geographical areas, before the names of musical instruments, in conjunction with a superlative, in a special idiomatic function in connection.

Subsequently, they cannot particularize from the external physical environment, particularize from the verbal context, particularize which occurs within a noun phrases of (1) restrictive modifier follows the noun head, (2) restrictive adjective modifier precedes the noun and specialize grammatical construction of adjectives used as nouns, gerund/abstract nouns, phrases after words expressing quantity, adverbially in older aphoristic constructions, place names, and so forth.

The third is the students are unable to function the indefinite article to Mean the numeral *one*, Signal one specimen that represent a class, use with nouns which are usually considered non-countable and specialize uses such as: *such* or *what*, certain adverbs/adjectives, before noun quantifiers, proper names, most in the sense of *very*, after *so* or *too* + an adjective + a singular noun and *half an hour* / *half hour*.

C. Limitation of the Problem

Articles are special modifiers that appear before nouns or noun phrases. Like other adjectives, they help clarify the meaning of the noun in your sentence. There are only two which must be taken into consideration. The first is definite and indefinite articles *the* and *a* (and its variant *an*, used before a word that starts with a vowel sound) and the functions of definite and indefinite articles.

A noun may also appear without an article in front of it. If students are native speakers, they will probably know which article to place in front of a noun without having to think about it. As English is still foreign language for Indonesians, they will have trouble to use the correct articles. Although they have learnt and consciously applied a few basic principles that can help them improve their article mastery significantly, but there are still found some mistakes in their English writings.

A common question derives from the students of English as a second language is when they use the indefinite articles ‘a/an’ which acts like an indefinite plural article. Then when do they use the definite article ‘the’? Therefore, from this common question, the researcher *limits* her study on the students’ problems in

applying and determining the uses of the forms and functions of the definite and indefinite articles as found in their English descriptive writing.

D. Formulation of the Problems

The problems of the research are formulated as follows:

1. What forms of articles are found in the students' English descriptive writing?
2. What functions of articles are found in the students' English descriptive writing?

E. Purpose of the Research

This research aims at explaining the problems of articles in the uses of forms and functions of articles were found in the English department students in English descriptive writing.

F. Significance of the Research

This research benefits to English lecturer and English department students. Through this research, the English lecturer has to find better English grammar teaching strategy to explain this teaching topic in order the students can understand it well. In addition, English department students are assisted to understand the chief structural and semantic function of articles so that they can place the right forms and function of definite and indefinite articles into their English writings.

G. Definitions of the Key Terms

To keep away from misunderstanding for this research, the definitions of the key term are as follows:

1. *Definite Article* ‘the’ is an article which is used before singular and plural nouns when the noun is particular or specific. “*The*” signals that the noun is definite, that it refers to a *particular* member of a group.
2. *Indefinite Article* ‘a/an’ is articles which modifies indefinite noun, referring to any member of a group. These indefinite articles are used with singular nouns when the noun is general; the corresponding indefinite quantity word some is used for plural general nouns.
3. *Descriptive Writings* are English department students’ descriptive writings which describe a person, place or thing in such a way that a picture is formed in the reader’s mind.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

A. Conclusion

There are two aspects, which can be concluded from this research finding to which the students are unable to correctly make use of forms and functions of definite and indefinite articles.

The first conclusion is the use of the forms of definite and indefinite articles in their English descriptive writings is difficult.

The second conclusion is that the use of the functions of definite and indefinite articles is difficult for the students. Essentially, the functions of articles to which the students fail to apply them correctly can be seen from the following details.

The first part of this conclusion is about the function of definite article *the*. Basically, *the* generally functions to describe the specific thing or person intended or it does not depend on the number of the noun it describes as contrasted with indefinite article which does not refer to one specific individual or individuals of a noun.

In terms of its function used incorrectly, the students have some difficulties to make use of this definite article into their English descriptive writings. This can be clearly seen from first the function of the particularization from the external physical environment.

The students fail to particularize/specify a noun because they do not have a good understanding that '*the*' actually occurs with names for familiar objects in the manmade environment of the home and the community, or in the natural environment of the geographic terrain, and or the universe. In this function, "*the*" limits a noun to the one specimen they are unfamiliar with or that they do not have something in mind those other specimens in the class may exist.

The second part is the students' inability to function *the* which describe a positive, comparative or even superlative degree of adjective. This failure arises because the students do not have understand as far as it is that the adjectives or adverbs followed by *the* is functioned to express the comparisons of a positive, comparative or even superlative degree.

Third, the students fall through to function *the* as the plural names of all bodies of water, including the ocean. The article *a/an* is meant to show the singularity of a person or thing.

However, the students' weaknesses to function well the articles *a/an* into their English descriptive writings can be seen from the following explanations. First, the students cannot function correctly to signify, mean or signal one object (a thing or a person) as an undifferentiated specimen in a class/group". They are unsuccessful to apply this function correctly because they cannot understand that there is no attempt that is made to distinguish one individual member of a class/group from any other specimen in the same class.

Second, the students are unable to function a class word with modifier acceptably because they do not understand that there is article *a* which often appears with a class word in the predicate after a form of the verb *be* which verb may serve to first *identify* an individual or to indicate that the object belongs to a class word with modifier.

Third, it correspondingly occurs to the function of a noun that can be usually both considered as countable and uncountable noun sense. The students fail to make use of this function properly. This failure turns up into the surface because the students fail to understand and reconsider that there are many nouns, more than are generally realized, have countable as well as a non-countable sense.

B. Implication

The implications of definite and indefinite articles into the teaching and learning process are as follows. First, this can be implicated to the analysis of definite and indefinite articles in the students' English descriptive writings, as the object of the applied linguistic research will be more obvious its usefulness and interest to either in language teaching and or linguistic analysis.

The second implication is that the articles can be a practical usage to improve students' English grammar. Through reference to grammar and grammar teaching, the students can produce comprehensible communicative products, realization of grammar items, which frequently occur in speech and writing. It is as well to enable teaching natural usage of the target language itself.

The last one is that articles *the* and *a/an* can be a bridge to interpret a written text in discourse studies. Discourse analysis is used to define as the act of grasping the meaning to convey the communicative product. It is important to emphasize that clear understanding of writing is reliant on not only what the author put in it, but also on what a reader brings to this process. Furthermore, it is an exacting action to involve recipient's knowledge of the world, experience, ability to infer possible aims of discourse and evaluate the reception of the text.

C. Suggestion

From these conclusions, the researcher suggests that first English lecturer to explain intensely the function of the definite and indefinite articles *the*, and *a/an* to the students to correctly accommodate them into their English writings. By accommodating it, it will open students' insights toward the study of the definite and indefinite articles. When they are able to study and understand them, the results of writing that have been produced will be more scientific.

Second, she suggests the lecturers to provide any strategies to assist students both (reading) and writing in synthesizing the form/function definite and indefinite articles. The third is suggested to provide students with contexts, which will exemplify how native users of language take advantage of articles and other grammar related elements of language, which are particularly useful for proficient writing communication.

In addition, in academic writing course, lecturers are suggested to provide students with exercises, which deal with the forms and the functions of definite and indefinite articles. These exercises will facilitate and enable the students to mull over the the articles into their English academic writing activities.

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