

AN ANALYSIS OF ARTICLE ERRORS  
IN THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COMPOSITION



Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Arts Degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language  
at Srinakharinwirot University

May 2011

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Ratchanee Nopjirapong. (2010). *An Analysis of Article Errors in Thai University*

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Project Advisor: Dr. Somsak Kaewnuch.

The aim of this study was to analyze and describe errors of English articles. The researcher studied and analyzed twenty essays written by 20 second-year English major students who enrolled in EN331 (Composition I) in the first semester of the academic year 2010 at Srinakharinwirot University. Twenty essays from twenty students were examined in order to identify and categorize article errors. Nineteen article error categories adapted from Richards (1971) and Chakorn (2005)'s error categories were used for analyzing the data. The results exhibited mother tongue interference as the main factor that caused the participants to commit article usage errors. Of all 19 categories, the highest frequency of article errors was the omission of "the" before nouns made particular in context, comprising 28 percent of the article errors found in the analysis. The study also investigated the causes of article usage errors in written English from interviews. The interview results confirmed a correlation between mother tongue interference and the omission of articles. The findings of this study revealed the need for the development of teaching techniques and materials to reduce common errors of article usage.

Keywords: error analysis, interlingual and intralingual error, mother tongue interference

การวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดของการใช้ Articles ในงานเขียนของนิสิตมหาวิทยาลัยไทย



เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษา  
ตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ

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กรุงเทพฯ: บัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ. อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาสารนิพนธ์:

อาจารย์ ดร. สมศักดิ์ แก้วนุช.

งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อวิเคราะห์และบรรยายการใช้ articles ผิดพลาด ผู้วิจัยได้ศึกษาและวิเคราะห์งานเขียนเรียงความของนิสิตชั้นปีที่ 2 จำนวน 20 คน วิชาเอกอังกฤษซึ่งลงทะเบียนเรียนในวิชา EN331 (Composition I) ในภาคการศึกษาที่ 1/2553 ณ มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ งานเขียนเรียงความ 20 ชิ้น จากนิสิต 20 คน ได้รับการตรวจเพื่อแยกแยะและจัดประเภทข้อผิดพลาดการใช้ articles โดยใช้รูปแบบข้อผิดพลาดการใช้ articles 19 ประเภทซึ่งดัดแปลงมาจากประเภทข้อผิดพลาดการใช้ articles ของริชาร์ด (Richards, 1971) และชาคร (Chakorn, 2005) มาวิเคราะห์ ผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่าการแทรกแซงของภาษาแม่เป็นปัจจัยหลักที่ทำให้กลุ่มประชากรใช้ articles ผิดพลาดในจำนวน 19 ประเภท อัตราการปรากฏการใช้ articles ผิดพลาดสูงสุดคือ การละ “the” หน้าคำนามซึ่งเจาะจงในบริบท ซึ่งคิดเป็น 28 เปอร์เซ็นต์ของการใช้ articles ผิดพลาดที่ค้นพบในการวิเคราะห์งานวิจัยนี้ค้นหาสาเหตุของการใช้ articles ผิดพลาดในงานเขียนภาษาอังกฤษจากการสัมภาษณ์ด้วย ผลการสัมภาษณ์ยืนยันความสัมพันธ์ที่เกี่ยวข้องกันระหว่างภาษาแม่แทรกแซงและการละ articles ผลการวิจัยนี้แสดงให้เห็นความถึงความจำเป็นที่จะต้องพัฒนาเทคนิคการสอนและอุปกรณ์การสอนเพื่อให้การใช้ articles ผิดพลาดลดลงโดยเฉพาะในส่วนของ การแทรกแซงของภาษาแม่

The Master's Project Advisor, Chair of Teaching English as a Foreign Language, and Oral Defense Committee have approved this master's project *An Analysis of Article Errors in Thai University Students' Composition* by Miss Ratchanee Nopjirapong as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language of Srinakharinwirot University.

Master's Project Advisor

.....  
(Dr. Somsak Kaewnuch)

Chair of Teaching English as a Foreign Language

.....  
(Dr. Anchanlee Jansem)

Oral Defense Committee

..... Chair  
(Dr. Somsak Kaewnuch)

..... Committee  
(Dr. Prapaipan Aimchoo)

..... Committee  
(Dr. Walaiporn Chaya)

The Master's Project has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language of Srinakharinwirot University.

*Wanee Aujsatid*  
.....  
(Dr. Wanee Aujsatid)

May 27, 2011

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

There are three articles in the English language (a, an, and the), but the rules and the exceptions to the rules that define correct article usage are numerous and complex. In the process of acquiring English, second language (L2) learners usually take longer to acquire articles than other forms of English grammar (Kim & Lakshmanan, 2007). They may never completely acquire this functional category in English grammar at all (Avery & Radišić, 2007). Master (as cited in Chuang, 2005) illustrates the difficulty for foreign-born learners to understand and use English articles properly.

For decades, linguists have been trying to determine what exactly accounts for the article errors made by L2 learners. Even advanced learners who demonstrate a high level of proficiency in spoken and written English are still not perfect in article use (Kim & Lakshmanan, 2007). Some L2 learners may reach a stage of fossilization in their mother tongue and thus cannot understand the senses of articles and are not aware when they make English article errors. Geranpayeh (2002), who studied errors made by native speakers of Persian, commented that he was intrigued by the difficulties the English article system posed for anyone who is not a native English speaker. A learners' first language (L1) may have some effect on the acquisition of a second language. To exemplify, Kim (2006) explained that Korean noun phrases appear in a "bare form" without any markers, whereas English noun phrases can have an article as a marker. Therefore, when Korean students write in English, they may make errors by not using articles in front of noun phrases.

Despite the general notion that incorrect use of articles does not impede the readers' understanding, the imperfect knowledge of articles use is apparent and might cause some distraction on the reader's part. Deviation from the standard use of articles and a lack of accuracy when writing may cause readers to prejudge the writer unfavorably (Chuang, 2005). This is particularly crucial when learners plan to pursue advanced education in English speaking countries; therefore, learners need to address and minimize the defects in their English. Otherwise, they could be viewed negatively as readers may think that foreign writers are incompetent due to a perceived lack of a basic understanding of proper article usage.

Thai EFL learners, together with their Chinese, Korean and Japanese counterparts, all face a similarly uphill battle to gain a proper understanding of English articles and how to use them correctly (Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007; Chuang, 2005; Kim & Lakshmanan, 2007; Kaku, 2006). The language that Thai learners have grown up with and speak daily carries no articles or grammatical morphemes that behave in the same way as English articles.

However, studies concerning English article errors conducted by Thai learners are still rare. There are few articles that reveal in good detail how Thai students acquire the sense of articles, how they misuse articles, and what factors are involved in the misuse of articles, e.g. cognitive deficiency in relation to language competence. Many researchers (Porton, 1978, Chun et al., 1982, O'Grady, 2000, Darus & Subramaniam, 2009, among others) tend to look at what are seen as more pressing problems which impede effective communication, such as the more predictable use of verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, word choice, direct and indirect object, rather than focusing on the issue of articles. It seems that the misuse of articles does not motivate teachers to polish their students'

general writing skills. The fact is that articles are a difficult concept for Thai learners, as well as an important concept to master in order to use the language effectively.

### **The Importance of Articles**

Sattayatham and Honsa (2007), Chalongsong, et al. (2004), Banlomchon (2005), and Boonyavanich (2002) point out that errors in articles are among the top five major language problems for Thai learners. This section provides an overview of some of the difficulties that Thai students may have when deciding whether or not to use an article. The example below is from one of the participants in the research.

*December 15, 2009, I had a class in the morning but I had free time in the afternoon. It was convenient for us to go to Bangkok School for the Blind. When we finished the class, we went to the Victory Monument by BTS. Then, we caught the bus number eight to go to Bangkok School for the Blind; the money keeper and the driver are very kind because they stopped the bus at the front of Bangkok School for the Blind.*

The use of the article “a” before the word “class” in line 1 is optional; it is correct without the article. However, Thai students are taught that they should use “a” in front of a first-mentioned singular noun, as in “I have two pets: a dog and a cat.” As a result, Thai students may use “a” with a singular noun where it is not required, especially when it concerns culture, as in “We will have dinner together some time” and “Tim went to bed immediately after work.” Having dinner, sleeping, and working are cultural ways of life but when we use “dinner,” “bed,” and “work” in a specific way, or think of them as countable, we must use an article, as in “Can you treat me a dinner tonight?” Next, the use of “the” before “class” in line 3 is also optional, but Thai students tend to use it because they are taught to use “the” with a noun that is mentioned for the second time.

Finally, what about the use of “the” in front of “bus number eight,” “money keeper,” and “driver?” The student used “money keeper” instead of “money conductor”. “The bus number eight,” here, is not a second mention but is used to refer to all buses with the number eight. The use of “the” instead of “a” with “money keeper” and “driver” is compulsory, although “money keeper” and “driver” have not been mentioned before in the passage. The use of “the” specifies that it is “the money keeper and the driver” of the bus that the students took.

These are some of the difficulties associated with article usage for Thai students. It is interesting to investigate how Thai students cope with articles; how they decide whether to use an article or not, what kinds of article errors they make, what the most difficult rules are, and what causes errors.

Some students may have problems concerning cognition or intelligence, while other students cannot understand or do not remember the rules of articles. This confusion regarding the proper use of articles may be as simple as not using an article before a noun, or using “a” with a plural noun, as in the following examples.

Examples:

*I found a new friends who were the pupils of my aunt.*

*There are many activities such as played game with friends, read book and watch movie in the library.*

However, the reasons behind the improper usage of articles may be more complex and require deeper analysis. For example, some students may not understand how definite and indefinite articles create different meanings. For instance, to say “a tree in front of my house” implies that there is not just one tree, while “the tree in front of my house” indicates there is only one tree.

There are many other problems related to cognitive or mental abilities that theorists may classify differently. For example, some students have problems understanding the use of articles in texts. In other words, some students can use articles correctly when they write a short paragraph, but they produce errors in larger texts. In the following example, the writer does not consider how the audience will perceive the text. The student uses the definite article “the” where the indefinite articles “a” and “an” are required. The writer thinks of the Coke can, the bus, and the event as specific nouns and one reason might be that he witnessed the event himself.

*Global Warming: Stop Rubbish for the Next Generation*

*In a big city like Bangkok, we see a lot of rubbish being thrown from households, buses, trains, or into canals. I was driving my car. Suddenly a child threw the Coke can out from the bus and it hit my car. How would you feel in such the event?*

The objective of this study is to classify article errors that students make in long texts. From the example above, we may have “writer-reader connection” as a category of error. The researcher hopes to categorize article errors in long texts, that is, in paragraphs or essays.

Finally, it is interesting and useful to think of the causes of errors in article use. One of the most mentioned causes is mother tongue interference. Bennui (2008) points out that when ESL/EFL students write in English, they translate directly from L1 into English.

Below is an example of mother tongue interference:

*When my friend Nida studied at high school, she fell in love with a guy in same class.*

In this example, there should be the article “the” before “same” because there is a sense of specificity in the sentence. Due to the direct translation from Thai into English, the student left out the article “the” in front of “same.” Hashim (as cited in Bennui 2008) notes the problems arising from language transfer related errors when he said, “Mother tongue interference with regard to the terms ‘cross-linguistic and language transfer’ refers to the influence of native language structures on students’ performance and development in the target language” (p.73).

Above are some explanations concerning the difficulties and problems that Thai students have with English articles. The researcher hopes to explore those difficulties and problems and then categorize them. As few intensive studies have focused specifically on article errors made by Thai students, this study aims to deliver findings that are useful for both teachers and students who are interested in identifying, understanding, and avoiding the most common errors in article usage.

To study English articles in depth, the researcher would like to do as Bartholomae (1980) suggests. Bartholomae, a key theorist in composition studies, advises that teachers should evaluate students’ writing through “close reading, and paying attention to the language of a text in order to determine not only what a writer says, but how he locates and articulates meaning” (p. 254). In other words, the theorist suggests that we analyze the text carefully. He further suggests that we ask students why certain articles were used so as to really understand the reason the wrong article was chosen. From looking at texts and interviewing students, teachers and researchers can investigate these wrong choices of articles to better understand how the articles used relate to the writing context and the reasons behind their use.

In this study, the researcher examined errors in articles in English compositions made by 20 second-year English major students at Srinakharinwirot University in the first

semester of 2010. The papers were written by students who took the EN 331 (Composition I) course. It is hoped that this study can help the researcher to identify ways that students commonly produce article errors. The discussions concerning the common errors will be beneficial for English teachers, students, and anyone who wants to “decipher” English articles.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study attempted to achieve the following goals:

1. To classify article errors made by Thai students
2. To investigate how mother tongue interference causes learners to produce English article errors
3. To identify other causes, apart from mother tongue interference, of the English article errors made by Thai students
4. To describe and discuss possible factors in relation to the act of writing regarding article usage errors among Thai students

### **Significance of the Study**

This study aims to investigate, analyze, and describe article errors that students made in their essays. The significance of the study lies in a deep analysis of article errors which can lead to understanding students’ difficulties and the causes of their errors. A better understanding of how students make article errors will also benefit teachers. It may help them to decide what to emphasize when teaching English articles. The research findings can serve as a useful source for developing instructional techniques and materials for teaching articles to Thai learners.

### **Research Questions**

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the types of article errors made by Thai students?
2. How does mother tongue interference affect the use of articles by Thai students? How does it cause article errors?
3. What are other causes of article errors, apart from mother tongue interference?
4. What are possible factors involved in the act of writing regarding article usage errors among Thai students?

### **Scope of the Study**

This study proposed to do the following:

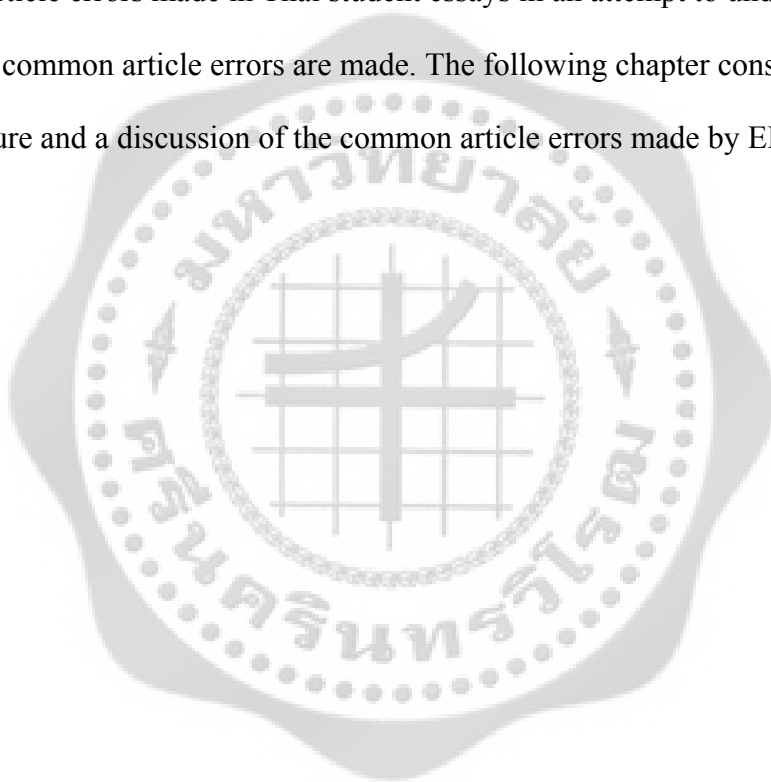
1. Analyzing twenty written pieces from twenty second-year students who enrolled in EN331 (Composition I) at Faculty of Humanities, Srinakharinwirot University, in the first semester of 2010
2. Classifying errors found in the twenty texts, and
3. Interviewing the writers of the texts to find out the reasons behind their errors.

### **Definition of Term**

*An article error* refers to both using an incorrect article or not using an article when it is required as defined by 19 article error categories adapted from Richards (1971) and Chakorn (2005).

## Summary

This chapter consists of two sections: background of the study, and the importance of articles. English articles are one of the most difficult problems for EFL/ESL learners, particularly learners whose mother tongue does not have articles. Consequently, they make article errors in their spoken and written communications. Article usage errors are one of the major problems for Thai students. This study aimed to provide an in-depth analysis of article errors made in Thai student essays in an attempt to understand the reasons why common article errors are made. The following chapter consists of a review of the literature and a discussion of the common article errors made by EFL/ESL students.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter explores four topics and discusses how EFL/ESL students may make article errors. The main purpose of this chapter is to give readers greater insight into articles and how errors in article usage might be made. The five topics include error analysis, article usage, problems with article usage, English articles and the Thai language, and related studies.

#### **Error Analysis**

Brown (1980) defines error analysis as the process of observing, analyzing, and classifying the deviations from the rules of the L2 and then revealing the systems within which learners operate. We are able to discuss and present new knowledge about errors of article usage made by EFL/ESL students through the methodology of error analysis. Through this method, in which the researcher observes, analyzes, and classifies data, the researcher may illustrate some common types of errors. According to Gass and Selinker (2001), a comparison can be made between the errors a learner makes and the learner's target language (TL) and this can lead to two types of error: interlingual and intralingual. Interlingual errors are the result of the influence of the native language (NL) while intralingual errors involve the language being learned, and are independent of the NL. Thus, we can group article errors as either interlingual or intralingual.

The steps in the methodology of error analysis recommended by Gass and Selinker (2001) are data collection, error identification, error classification, error quantification, and analysis and discussion of the findings. The methodology of error analysis and the way in which the raw data is tackled is similar to that of qualitative

research. The data analysis in this kind of research begins with the analysis of raw data, which, in this research, is the students' paper. At this stage, words, phrases, and ideas that reflect concepts such as mother tongue interference, and differences between the mother tongue and the target language, are categorized and labeled (Goulding, 2000). This strategy is called "open coding." Broadly speaking, at this stage, raw data are broken into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The words, letters or acronyms used to refer to the concept are discovered (e.g. MTI for mother tongue interference) and can be called "code words" (Merriam et al., 2002). Cross-examinations within raw data during the open coding stage fracture the raw data and help the researcher to come up with as many code words as possible. One may come up with as many as 100 code words in reference to topic article errors. These will be used later in discussions about phenomena related to article errors.

Pongpairoj's (2007) study notes that many researchers employed error analysis to investigate errors of articles made by L2 learners. These include: Kuribara, 1999; Robertson, 2000; Trenkic, 2000, 2002, 2007; Leung, 2001, 2005; Ionin and Wexler, 2003; White, 2003a; Goad and White, 2004; and Ionin, Ko, and Wexler, 2004. To illustrate, Ionin et al. (2004) examined article choices in the L2-English of adult speakers of Russian and Korean and found that both groups overused *the* with [+specific] indefinites, and overused *a* with [-specific] definites. Ionin et al. (2007) compared L2 learners whose L1 has articles (Spanish) with L2 learners from an article-less L1 (Russian) background. The results indicated that the Spanish learners transferred article semantics from their L1 to their L2, and they distinguished between *the* and *a* on the basis of definiteness. On the other hand, the Russian speakers, in the absence of L1 transfer, were less accurate than the Spanish speakers, as they use 'the' and 'a' interchangeably.

Bartholomae (1980), in his essay “The Study of Error,” discussed at length the relationship between basic writing, errors, and error analysis. He mentions that errors should be seen as “(1) necessary stages of individual development and (2) data that provide insight into the idiosyncratic strategies of a particular language user at a particular point in his acquisition of a target language” (p. 256). In the latter case, the errors were common for an individual EFL/ESL writer.

To sum up, error analysis is an invaluable source of information (Corder, 1981). It provides information on students’ errors. When analyzing errors that students have made, the researcher will understand the nature of the errors and it will become apparent what kind of remedial work is necessary for EFL/ESL students to avoid these errors.

### Article Usage

There are three English articles: *a*, *an*, and *the* (Keene & Adams, 2002). Catford et al. (1974) identify one more article, that is,  $\emptyset$  (zero). Although there are only three of them, articles account for almost ten percent in terms of word frequency in most texts (Yule, 1998). Warriner and Graham (1977) define an article as a demonstrative adjective that precedes and modifies a noun. On the other hand, Leech and Svartvik (1975), Farmer et al. (1985), Klammer and Schulz (1992), Kolln (1994), and Watson (1995) define articles as a subclass of determiners. Therefore, some researchers refer to articles as adjectives while others describe them as a kind of determiner.

Eckersley and Eckersley (1960) categorize articles as indefinite and definite. Most article usage revolve around these two kinds, although most usage can be explained using these two types, the writer often finds it difficult to explain why he uses and does not use an article. In fact, the biggest problem seems to be whether we should or should not use an article. For example, in “This work will be part of our future success,” there

may be the article “a” in front of the word “part,” but the word is almost always used without the article, so one may wonder if it is used as an uncountable noun. Next, the word “understanding” is uncountable, as in “You need some good understanding” and “Mutual understanding is important.” However, one can say “An understanding” or “A good understanding.” Despite English having two types of articles, the rules for their use are both subtle and complex. General explanations in grammar books are insufficient to explain difficult article usage. For example, we do not use an article with either a cultural place or with an abstract noun.

Since difficult article usage has not yet been clearly explained, it is necessary that a review of definite and indefinite articles be provided here for the discussions in Chapter four. The following section is an explanation of the rules of article usage, as outlined by Eckersley & Eckersley (1960, pp. 58-60) in *A Comprehensive English Grammar for Foreign Students*. They note that most rules are so specific. Therefore, the rules require memorization.

**The Definite Article Is Not Used:**

1. With an abstract noun which is used in a general sense

Finance is the basis of business.

Freedom and liberty are basic human rights.

However, “the” is used before nouns that are specific or qualified, e.g.

He got approval for the project, but he couldn’t get the finance.

People should have the freedom to choose their own career.

2. Before names of materials used in a general sense, e.g.

Cheese is made from milk (not “the cheese”... “the milk”)

Rice is grown in Thailand.

3. Before names of meals used in a general sense, e.g.

Would you like to have dinner/lunch/ tea with me?

However, there is an exception to this rule when the meals are used in a specific sense.

Did you enjoy *the dinner* that you had in London last week?

4. Before most proper nouns, e.g.

I walked in Benjasiri Park (not “the Benjasiri Park”)

Do you know Sukhumwit Road?

Millicent comes from Belgium.

5. Before the names of lakes, capes, and mountains

Lake Ontario, Cape Canaveral, Mount Fuji

However, there is an exception to this rule when “of” is used, e.g.

the Lake of Innisfree; the Cape of Stranglethorn, the Mount of Mercy.

6. Before titles followed by a proper noun, e.g.

King Albert; Doctor Smith; Professor Potter; President Obama.

7. With the names of languages, e.g. She speaks Dutch.

8. With buildings like school, church, prison, when the concept expressed concerns the cultural use of the building, e.g.

The children have gone to school (to study).

He goes to church every Sunday (to worship).

However, there is an exception to this rule.

They went to the school on First Avenue. (a specific place).

They are getting married in the church just now (a specific place).

9. Before names of seasons and festivals, e.g.

Summer is the best time for sport.

I am taking my holidays in summer/at Easter/on Mother Day.

10. With professions such as doctor, nurse, and teacher when they have the meaning “our doctor/teacher”

Doctor asked you to take this medicine three times a day.

Teacher was very angry today.

These words function as names, so it is natural to omit the article.

11. Sometimes before predicative superlatives, e.g.

The weather is wettest from June to November.

He is busiest during the summer.

12. In various stock phrases:

He exhibited great bravery during the attack.

Instead of lamb we ate goat.

We are far from land.

Size matters.

The state of the nation is beyond hope.

In case of emergency, ring 911.

At sunrise/sunset/dawn.

There is also an idiomatic use of the definite article with comparative adjectives or adverbs, e.g.

The bigger they are, the harder they fall.

The more you try, the harder it is.

Second, Rosen and Behrens (2000, pp. 746-747) in *The Allyn & Bacon Handbook* state that articles are the most important class of words used in English to show whether

nouns are being used as countable or uncountable nouns, or as specific or generic nouns. They classify two rules of article usage.

### 1. Nouns Sometimes Take The Indefinite Articles “A” and “An”

The indefinite articles “a” and “an” are grammatically the same. They are singular indefinite articles that mean “one (of many),” and they are used only with singular countable nouns. The article “a” precedes a noun beginning with a consonant or a consonant sound such as a box, a hospital, a user, etc. The article “an” precedes a noun beginning with a vowel or vowel sound such as an umbrella, an ostrich, an envelope, etc.

The article “a” is sometimes used with the quantifiers “little” and “few.” Note the differences in the following examples.

Example	Meaning
a little, a few	a small amount of something
a few tomatoes	
a little salt	
little, few	a less-than-expected amount of something
few tomatoes	
little salt	

### 2. Nouns Sometimes Take The Definite Article “The”

Use “the” with specific singular and plural countable nouns and with uncountable nouns.

#### specific nouns.

I need *the* hammer and *the* nails. (one singular and one plural nouns)

I need *the* equipment. (a uncountable noun)

I need *the* spanner on *the* bottom shelf. (a modifier clause that make the noun specific)

I need *the* biggest spanner in *that* set. (a modifier phrase that make the noun specific)

### **generic nouns.**

The article “the” is used in context when it is the second time it has been mentioned, or where the writer and the reader both know the particular object or person being referred to.

I saw a beautiful woman walking down the street. The woman was wearing an expensive diamond necklace.

I saw a car crash into a wall. The driver of the car was not hurt.

It is the first time the driver is mentioned, but the second time for the car. As there is only one driver in a car, “the” is used for the driver.

Third, Keene and Adams (2002, pp. 327-335) in *Easy Access: The Reference Handbook for Writers* discuss how to use the three articles, “a,” “an,” and “the” with proper nouns, common nouns, countable and uncountable nouns as well as general and specific nouns.

### **A. Proper Nouns and Articles**

Proper nouns begin with a capital letter, and they name a unique person, animal, event, or object:

Susan      Michigan State University      Lake Eyre      Wednesday  
November

Most proper nouns are used with no article: Susan left on Sunday to visit Ethiopia and Uganda. There are, however, some exceptions, which are shown below.

Exception: Proper nouns used with “the”

Although most proper nouns appear without an article, there are some exceptions.

The following types of proper nouns are used with “the.”

- Noun phrases that include “of”: the Fifth of May, the Treaty of Versailles, the Statute of Liberty, the University of Iowa.
- Part of the globe: the South Pole, the Equator, the West, the East, the Northern Hemisphere, the Yucatan Peninsula
- Names of countries that indicate a united group or plural: the United Kingdom, the United States, the Philippines, the Bahamas, the United Arab Emirates
- Oceans, seas, gulfs, and rivers: the Atlantic Ocean, the South China Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Nile River (Lakes, however, do not appear with “the:” Lake Saskatchewan, Lake Ontario.)
- Mountain ranges and deserts: the Rocky Mountains, the Ural Mountains, the Sahara Desert (Individual mountains, however, do not appear with “the:” Mount St. Helens, Mount Kilimanjaro.)
- Historical periods and events: the Dark Ages, the French Revolution, the Spanish Inquisition
- Highway names (not numbers) and trails: the I 55, the Long Island Expressway (but Route 45 or Interstate 18), the Onondaga trail, the Adirondack trail
- Buildings and hotels: the Chevrolet Building, the World Trade Center, the Alamo, the Taj Mahal, the Sheraton
- Museums: the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim.
- Web terms: the World Wide Web, the Web, the Internet, the Net, the information Superhighway

Note: The article “the” is not capitalized when it is used with these proper nouns.

## B. Common Nouns and Articles

Unlike proper nouns, common nouns do not name a unique person, animal, place, or thing such as author, cat, lake, university, day, month, etc. To decide on the appropriate article to use with common nouns, we need to consider two more characteristics of these nouns: countable or uncountable and general or specific.

The next section explains the four rules for using the three articles with common nouns which govern the choice of the indefinite article, the definite article, or no article in English sentences.

### **Rule one: No article before general, uncountable nouns.**

If a noun is both general and uncountable, do not add an article.

Examples: Charlie is going to study Ø physics.

Nancy went to buy Ø milk.

The government has always made Ø education a priority.

### **Rule two: No article before general, countable, plural nouns.**

If a noun in a sentence is both general and countable, we should decide whether it is singular or plural. If the noun is plural, it is not preceded by an article:

Examples: Fabio is fascinated by computers.

Oranges grow in Florida.

Frank is more worried about grades than I am.

### **Rule three: Use “a” or “an” before general, countable, singular nouns.**

If a noun is general, countable, and singular, add “a” or “an.” If a noun begins with a consonant sound, uses “an” If it begins with a vowel sound, us “an.”

Examples: Susan saw *a* duck in front of the dorm.

Last week we read *an* article about the economic crisis.

**Rule four: Use “the” before specific nouns.**

Specific nouns—words that clearly refer to one or more specific things—take “the” for an article. For example, Sally shut the window and locked it. The word “window” clearly refers to one specific window that is known to the reader; thus “window” is preceded by “the.” The plural, windows, also be used with “the” as the following example.

Sally shut the windows and locked them.

Fourth, Murphy (2004, pp. 144-152) in *English Grammar in Use: A Self-Study Reference and Practice Book for Intermediate Students of English with Answers* explains when we use articles; particularly article *the* in several cases as the following:

A. We use *the* when we are thinking of a specific thing. Compares *a/an* and *the*:

- Bob sat down on *a* chair. (one of many chair in the room)
- Bob sat down on *the* chair nearest the door. (a specific chair)
- Francis is looking for *a* job. (not a specific job)
- Did Francis get the job he applied for? (a specific job)

B. We use *the* when it is clear in the situation which thing or person we mean. For example, In a room we talk about *the* light / *the* floor / *the* ceiling / *the* door / *the* carpet etc. :

- Can you open *the* door, please? (the door in this room)
- I took a taxi to *the* airport. (the airport in that town)
- (in a shop) I would like to speak to *the* manager, please (the manager of this shop)

In the same way, we say (go to) *the bank, the post office*:

- I have to go to *the bank* and then I'm going to *the post office*. (The speaker is usually thinking of a specific bank or post office.)

We also say (go to) the doctor / *the dentist*:

- Jackson is really sick. He's gone to *the doctor*. (her usual doctor)
- I don't like going to *the dentist*.

Compare *the* and *a*:

- I have to go to *the bank* today.  
Is there *a bank* near here? (any bank?)
- I don't like going to *the dentist*.  
My mother is *a dentist*.

C. We say 'once *a week* / three times *a day* / £ 1.50 *a kilo*' etc. :

- How often do you go to the cinema? 'About once *a month*.'
- How much are those apples? '£ 1.50 *a kilo*.'
- Peter works eight hours *a day*, five days *a week*.

D. We use *the* when there is only one of something:

- What is the highest mountain in *the* world? (there is only one highest mountain)
- The earth takes approximately 365 days to go round the sun.
- Singapore lies on *the* equator?
- I'm going abroad at *the* end of this month.

With capital cities

- Paris is the capital of France. (not Paris is capital of ...)

But we use *a/an* to say what kind of thing something is. Compare *the* and *a*:

- Gruyere is a cheese made in Switzerland. (one of many cheeses.)
- The restaurant we went to was an excellent restaurant.

E. We say: *the sky, the sea, the ground, the country, the environment*.

- The stars in sky shone brightly. (not in sky)
- Have you ever lived in *the country*? (not in a country)
- *The environment* is under threat due to global industrialization. (the natural world around us)

But we say space (without the) when we mean 'space in the universe'.

Compare:

- *Space* is infinite. (not the space)
- I tried to put my bag in the overhead locker, but *the space* was too small.

F. We use *the* before *same* (the same):

- Your sweater is *the same* color as mine. (not is same color)
- 'Are these coins *the same*?' 'No, they're different.'

G. We use the + adjective (without a noun) to talk about groups of people, especially:

the young	the rich	the sick	the blind	the injured
the old	the poor	the disabled	the deaf	the dead
the elderly	the homeless	the unemployed		

*The young* = young people, *the rich* = rich people etc.:

- Do you think *the poor* should pay lower taxes?
- The government has pledged more money to help *the disabled*.

These expressions are always plural in meaning. For example, we cannot say ‘a rich or the injured’ for one person. We must say ‘*a rich person*’, ‘*the injured woman*’ etc. Note that we say ‘the poor’ (not the poors, ‘the young’ (not the youngs etc.)

#### H. We use *the* + nationality

We can use *the* + nationality adjectives that end in –ch or –sh (*the French* / *the Spanish* etc.) The meaning is ‘the people of that country’:

- *The French* are famous for their romanticism. (the people of France)

*The French* / *the English* etc. are plural in meaning. We do not say ‘a French / an English’. We have to say *a Frenchman* / *an Englishwoman* etc.

We can also use *the* + nationality words ending in –ese (*the Chinese* / *the Sudanese* / *the Japanese* etc.):

- *The Chinese* invented golf.

But these words can also be singular (a Japanese, a Sudanese etc.).

Also *a Swiss* (singular) and *the Swiss* (the people of Switzerland)

With other nationalities, the plural noun ends in –s. For example:

an Italian → Italians    a Mexican → Mexicans    a Turk → Turks

With these words (Italians etc.), we do not normally use *the* to talk about the people in general.

In brief, the rules for the correct use of articles in English are complex, due not only to the number of specific uses, but also because of the exceptions to these rules. Indeed, a high level of specialized knowledge is required even by native language

speakers to understand both the complexity of the rules as well as their exceptions (Catford et al., 1974).

Therefore, English article systems are difficult for non-native learners of English. Errors arise because there has not been enough effort by the learners, or not enough explanation or practice has been given by the teacher (Corder, 1981). Suitable teaching techniques will prevent recurring errors and allow learners to recognize the distinct features of English articles.

### **Problems with Article Usage**

From the two sections above, it is clear that English articles are difficult for EFL/ESL learners, particularly for those whose native languages do not have articles (Bataineh, 2005). L2 learners, who grew up in a country whose language has no equivalent to English articles, may find it hard to understand an article system that is characterized by novelty and abstractness. Celce-Mercia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) point out the article system is mostly troublesome to teachers of English as a second language or a foreign language. As a result, some English teachers do not want to devote classroom time to teaching article usage. English teachers prefer to spend more time tackling other aspects of grammar and areas perceived to be more communicatively important (Chuang, 2005).

Master (as cited in Bataineh, 2005) notes three reasons why L2 learners have difficulty comprehending the small particles *a*, *an*, and *the* systems: “(a) Articles are among the most frequent function words in English, making constant rule application difficult over an extended stretch of discourse; (b) function words are normally unstressed and consequently are very difficult for non-native speakers to discern, which affects the availability of input in the spoken mode; and (c) the article system stacks multiple

functions onto a single morpheme, which constitutes a considerable burden for the learner who usually looks for a one-to-one correspondence between form and function, especially in the early stages of language learning” (p. 2).

In addition to the complex rules and exceptions of usage, Norris (1992) stated that Japanese students of English are burdened with the fact that there is no grammatical equivalent to articles in their own native language. In a study of structural errors found in 632 English compositions written by Japanese students in American high schools and junior colleges, Kimizuka (as cited in Norris, 1992) found more mistakes in article usage than in any other structural categories and explained this phenomenon as follows:

*“Japanese has no part of speech equivalent to English articles...that article usage constitutes one of the greatest problems for the Japanese learner is vividly revealed in the high frequency of mistakes, the highest of all the structural items. The Japanese student must not only learn the numerous rules for the usage with as many exceptions, but he must also practice them by drill. It is comparatively simple to learn the rules, but it is not equally simple to apply the rules to actual situations” (pp. 78-79).*

Regarding EFL Japanese students, Mizuno (as cited in Huong, 2005) identified five types of their errors in article usage. They are “(1) juxtaposition of articles and other determiners, (2) inversion of the order of articles and succeeding adjectives, (3) omission of articles (underextension), (4) use of articles instead of zero, and (5) substitution (i.e. the indefinite article is used instead of the definite article and vice versa)” (p. 93).

Next, Avery and Radišić (2007) and Bataineh (2005) indicated that if an L2 learners’ native language has some type of determiner system, they probably face a problem of “mismatch” between the two systems on definitions, and on functions of determiners such as definiteness, specificity, or concepts of countable and uncountable nouns.

The speakers understanding about parts of speech may also cause article errors. Trenkic (2008) discovered that some L2 learners make errors in article usage because

they misinterpret articles as adjectives instead of determiners. As such, they do not use an article seeing that the definiteness of the noun in question is contextually clear. Thus, Trenkic's study notes that rule-oriented students may not be successful, and that students should absorb the understanding about articles naturally, not by rote.

Huong (2005) points out that since English articles have high frequency use in written works, their presence in a given discourse must be something meaningful. Huong states, "One function that the articles contribute to discourse is to create cohesion for stretches of language" (p. 5). This function is usually found in the definite article "the." Huong goes on explaining how articles "stretch" a particular discourse, using the sentence below.

*Ninke lost a valuable watch yesterday and Bill is wearing the valuable watch this morning.*

In this sentence, the noun phrase "the valuable watch" refers back to the noun phrase "a valuable watch" via the article "the." In this context, the definite article "the" refers to something that has been previously mentioned. Therefore, the reader can assume that Bill is probably the one who took the watch or who found it but did not return it to its owner.

Huong (2005) concludes that the function that articles have in discourses concerning cohesion reveals their potential role in maintaining successful communication. If this is the case, the mastery of article use is a critical issue that L2 learners cannot ignore. Thus, one of the problems that Thai students may have is using articles to create cohesion in their text, especially in long discourse.

Another study was by Bataineh (2005), who enumerated errors in writing samples by some students in a university in Jordan. He discovered such problems as deletion of an indefinite article, use of an indefinite article with marked and unmarked plurals

(hypercorrection), use of an indefinite article with uncountable nouns, probably due to structural similarity, and use of an indefinite article with adjectives (overgeneralization).

The errors mentioned above are similar to what Chuang (2005) found in her study of Chinese students. She identified four major errors: omitting the definite article, bare singular count noun for plural, redundant definite article, and omitting “a/an.” Moreover, Morton (as cited in Chuang, 2005) revealed five error types from his study of Hong Kong university students: singular noun for plural, zero for indefinite article, indefinite article for zero, definite article for zero, and definite article for indefinite article.

Richards (1971, p. 187) also categorized article errors as follows:

1. Omission of “the”
  - (a) before unique nouns
  - (b) before nouns of nationality
  - (c) before nouns made particular in context
  - (d) before a noun modified by a participle
  - (e) before superlatives
  - (f) before a noun modified by an of-phrase
2. “the used instead of Ø (zero article)
  - (a) before proper names
  - (b) before abstract nouns
  - (c) before nouns behaving like abstract nouns
  - (d) before plural nouns
  - (e) before “some”
3. “a” used instead of “the”
  - (a) before superlatives
  - (b) before unique nouns

4. “a” instead of Ø (zero article)
  - (a) before a plural noun qualified by an adjective
  - (b) before uncountable nouns
  - (c) before an adjective
5. Omission of “a” before class nouns defined by an adjective

Finally, Huong (2005, p. 29) provides a summary of all the error types of English articles done by L2 learners from various parts of the world. The errors are as follows:

- Omission of a/the/-s

*Put book [a/the book] on table.*

*He is in difficult [a difficult] position.*

*He has three book [books].*

- Wrong use of a/the/-s

*It was the[a] very hard work.*

*He lives in the [-] Manchester.*

*He bought a big oranges [orange].*

- Confusion of a/the/-s

*This is a [the] man I was telling you about. (when referring to a specific occasion).*

*The meters are the units [meter is a unit] of length. (in a general context).*

In conclusion, English articles are difficult for the learners whose native language have no articles as well as L2 speakers with a native determiners system who are liable to mismatch their usage of articles. An instrument for tracing article errors in this study adapted from Richards (1971 and Chakorn (2005)’s types of article errors. The article errors indicate the means by which instructions may focus errors while recognizing the need for further reinforcement of use.

### English Articles and the Thai Language

Errors involving the misuse or omission of articles in English are probably more prevalent than any other grammatical errors for Thai students because Thai has no articles whereas every common noun in English is preceded by an article, a (an), the, or Ø (Catford et al., 1974, p. 102).

For example:

1. I have a book.
2. I have the book.
3. I have Ø books.

Since Thai is one of the article-free languages, Thai students have a great deal of difficulty mastering the correct usage of articles in English. In the Thai language, words that signal definiteness or specificity are placed after the noun, and when a Thai noun phrase conveying definiteness is translated into English, the definite article “the” must be placed before the noun. For example, Khao Khue Khon Thee Chan Pob Mua Wan is translated as “He is the man whom I met yesterday. Khon is man. However, the modifying clause does not always give a specific sense, and thus an indefinite article, “a” or “an,” is required. Khao Pen Poo Chai Khon Nueng Thee Puag Rao Khuan Khao Rop could be translated as “He is a man who we should respect.” These examples show that even though there are no articles in Thai, there are two verbs to be in Thai, /khue/ and /pen/ which are used to signal the difference between definite and indefinite nouns in Thai, just as “a” and “the” are used to signal the difference between definite and indefinite nouns in English. The verb /khue/ is used where English native speakers normally use Be + the + Noun, whereas the verb /pen/ is used where English native speakers normally use Be + a + Noun (Catford et al., 1974, p. 100).

There are some words, too, that help make the identification clear in the Thai language. For example, there are equivalents to the demonstrative pronouns in English. In Thai, “this” is “nee,” “that” is “nan,” “these” is “lao nee,” and “those” is “lao nan.” However, the equivalents are again placed after the noun. At least for quite a number of students, the different placing of words of specificity determiners causes a problem.

However, as Pongpaioj (2007) notes, the biggest problem is the omission of an article before a noun because the native language does not have articles. Chakorn (2005) attributed the omission incident to the incompatibility between Thai and English languages; the former has no such system of articles while the latter is rich with them.

To sum up, the studies examined have found that Thai learners created errors in using English articles because of mother tongue interference. Since Thai has no article, Thai students often neglect them. Moreover, their weakness competence of definite and indefinite articles cause mismatching among these two types of articles.

### **Related Studies**

This section provides research findings in which Thai researchers investigate English article usage errors made by Thai participants in a variety of studies.

Pongpaioj (2007, p. 104) listed the researchers that study article usage errors made by Thai students specifically include Lekawatana, 1968; Oller and Redding, 1971; Ubol, 1988; Srioutai, 2001; and Pongpaioj, 2002, 2004. In her research, Pongpaioj (2007) compared the causes of English article omissions made by Thai learners with those of L1 French/L2 English speakers. It was found that the Thai participants, because of the absence of the determiner category in Thai, often did not use articles and often made use of determiner-like elements in the Thai language in their English article production. In addition, the Thai participants were noticed to rely more on general cognition in article

production than on syntax. On the other hand, article production by the L1 French/L2 English speakers was assumed to be syntactically triggered due to the fact that French has a determiner category.

The study of Sattayatham and Honsa (2007) focused on 237 Thai first-year medical students' errors found in their translation (Thai to English and vice versa) pieces and short paragraphs on medical ethics. The article use errors, mostly omissions of the definite article, were prevalent in the sentence level translation (78%) and the opinion paragraph writing (62%). The researchers reasoned once again that the problems originated from the non-existence of the equivalent of the English articles in Thai language.

Another study investigates errors in Thai students' translation papers. Boonyavanich (2002) analyzed some structural problems and types of errors in Thai-English translation made by 50 third-year English major students. The researcher used 61 Thai sentences with the embedded focused structures. The students were asked to translate the 61 sentences into English. Five sentences were designed to test articles. The findings were as expected that the students dropped the article "the" from their English sentences most of the time while putting the definite article in place of the indefinite one. The study concluded that the article errors found might arise from the L1 interference and from a lack of knowledge on the part of the students of how and when to use the definite article.

Likitrattanaporn (2001) found that English sentences directly translated from Thai are a factor in L1 syntactic interference, a similar result to the previously mentioned study. She reported that the majority of written work of the third year students majoring in accounting and marketing at Faculty of Social Sciences, Srinakharinwirot University, is

full of direct translation from Thai into English sentences. Since articles are not found in Thai, a typical example of a sentence reads, “I want to buy car” instead of “I want to buy a car.”

Next, Bennui (2008) analyses features of L1 interference in paragraph writing of 28 third year English-minor students who enrolled in the Basic Writing course at Thaksin University. He found that literal translation of Thai words into English mainly represented features of L1 lexical interference in the students’ written English. Moreover, structural borrowing from Thai language such as word order, subject-verb agreement, and noun determiners indicated features of L1 syntactic interference.

Noisaengsri (1993) investigates the usage and errors of English article application in the written English summaries of fourth year English-major students enrolled in the advanced course of English writing in the Faculty of Humanities at Ramkhamhaeng University. The participants are 500 students sitting for the exam of EN 405 course. The researcher found that most of the students incorrectly use all the articles (a, an, the) or no article in the précis. Moreover, the students’ education level backgrounds such as secondary school, vocational school, and tertiary education do not affect the correct applications of the English articles.

Chakorn (2005) conducted an analysis of lexico-grammatical errors made by Thai businesspeople in their English business correspondence, studying the correctness of one hundred and nine authentic business correspondences. Two hundred and nine errors were identified and divided into 14 main categories. Errors in determiners, to which the articles “a, an, the” belong, came third with 16% of errors, while the first and second were verbs (22%) and prepositions (19%). In the determiner category specially, Chakorn added seven additional subcategories, six of which relate to the articles: omission of necessary determiners, indefinite for definite articles, definite for indefinite articles, first person plural possessive determiners for definite articles, definite articles for

the term used, and overmarking of the articles. Out of seven subcategories, the omission of necessary determiners ranked the highest with 71% of all article related errors.

Finally, Banlomchon (2005) studied 50 Matthayomsuksa 6 (equivalent to grade 12) students' errors found in their free English composition. There were grammatical and lexical errors. The research tools included 10 writing topics, five picture stories and a scheme classification of twenty-five type of errors. A hundred free composition writings were obtained and analyzed. The errors were classified as grammatical errors (57%), lexical errors (25%) and mechanical errors (17%). Out of the grammatical errors, determiners were identified as the most prevalent errors, followed by wrong choice of words, and verb forms, agreements, to name a few. The researcher pointed out that the article-free Thai language might contribute to these determiner errors. In their writing, the students tended to omit articles and if they did use them, they used the wrong one, i.e. substituting the indefinite article with the definite one, or vice versa.

### **Summary**

In the review of the literature, the first part dealt with error analysis. This method consists of observing, analyzing, and classifying the errors made by EFL/ESL students. The error analysis provides information for teachers or researchers to understand causes of errors. The second part explained article usage, which included the rules of definite and indefinite article usage, the exceptions to these rules as explained by four scholars and how the rules and exceptions to the rules of article usage can contribute to students' article errors. The third part discussed general problems in using articles. English articles are difficult for EFL/ESL students, particularly those whose native languages have no articles. The fourth part discussed how Thai learners created errors when using English articles. The studies concluded that Thai students made article errors because of mother

tongue interference. The fifth part, related studies, provided research findings from Thai researchers who investigated English article usage errors made by Thai students. The eight studies indicate that Thai students made errors in article usage due to L1 interference. As Bennui (2008) points out, Thai learners are likely to think in Thai and then translate into English. In this way, Thai grammatical structures are transferred into their English writing. In other words, the errors occur because of the differences between Thai and English syntax. The next chapter illustrates the research methodology used in this study.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate and classify article errors found in English composition by Thai students. The essays examined were assignments done by second-year English major students at Srinakharinwirot University. The secondary purpose was to explore the sources of the misuse of articles. This chapter provides information about the research participants, instruments, data collection procedure, and data analysis

#### **Participants**

The 20 participants of this study were selected using purposive sampling. They were second-year undergraduate students majoring in English who were enrolled in EN331 (Composition I) in the first semester of the 2010 academic year at Srinakharinwirot University. This course was taught by a Thai lecturer. The researcher collected third drafts, written on any topic, from each participant, so there were twenty drafts altogether. Although the students had revised their writing twice, their third drafts still contained errors. The average number of words per essay was 808. Ten of these participants were chosen randomly to be interviewed in order to find out how they made article errors and what caused them to make the errors. The researcher could not interview all twenty participants because the participants felt uncomfortable about discussing their errors.

## **Instruments**

The instruments used in this study were as follows:

### **1. Article Error Categories**

There are 19 article error categories which were adapted from Richards (1971) and Chakorn (2005). These categories were used by three assessors (two native speakers of English and the researcher) to investigate article errors in the participants' papers.

The 19 article error categories consist of two kinds of errors: omissions and substitution of articles, such as omission of "the" before unique nouns, "the" used instead of Ø before abstract nouns, etc. (see Appendix A).

### **2. Interview Questions**

Interview questions were constructed by the researcher to explore the reasons behind the students' misuse of English articles. The interview was conducted in Thai. There were 20 questions based on Norrish (as cited in Hasyim, 2002) and Richards (as cited in Sanal, 2008) regarding the causes of errors. The objectives of these interview questions was to determine the participants' knowledge of English article usage and to study whether errors were due to mother tongue interference, carelessness, the difficulty of English articles, or teacher-induced errors (see Appendix C). Questions 1 through 5 investigated the students' knowledge of correct English article usage. Questions 6 and 7 were specifically concerned with mother tongue interference. This study included seven questions to assess the participants' level of carelessness, questions 8 through 16. Questions 17 and 18 were intended to establish which aspects of article usage caused the most difficulty for learners. These questions also elicited responses regarding the difficulties they face with correct article usage. Questions 19 and 20 were concerned with the influence of teacher-induced errors.

### Data Collection Procedures

There were six steps in this study, which can be divided into three stages: gathering research materials, collecting data from the research material, and a discussion of the findings. The six steps were as follows:

1. Contacting the lecturer in charge of the EN331 (Composition I) course and requesting copies of writing samples by the twenty second-year students enrolled in the course in the first semester of the 2010 academic year
2. Collecting the third draft of a written assignment from each participant at the end of the semester. The copies collected did not have the lecturer's comments and corrections
3. Writing code words from the categories of article errors which were adapted from Richards (1971) and Chakorn (2005) such as "otun" which stands for omission of "the" before unique nouns, "aiad" which means "a" instead of Ø before an adjective, etc. (see Appendix A).
4. Using the code words to analyze the essays (This was done by all three assessors. See Appendix B for the meaning and explanation of the code words.)
5. Tallying article errors from each student's writing (This was done by all three assessors working together.)
6. Randomly selecting ten students who had written essays and inviting them to have an interview with the researcher. The researcher interviewed each participant individually and the conversation was recorded and then transcribed. The aim of the interview was to explore the causes of the errors. The participants were asked to re-read their writing silently, make any necessary changes or corrections to their writing, and answer the questions asked by the researcher.

## **Data Analysis**

There were two types of data, obtained from the participants' essays and interview data. The researcher first analyzed the context of 20 essays to locate article errors. The article errors were then analyzed based on the 19 article error categories (Richards, 1971, and Chakorn, 2005). The number of errors of each type were counted for frequency and calculated into the percentage. To investigate the causes of errors in depth, the researcher randomly selected ten participants and interviewed them by using 20 interview questions. The objective of these interview questions was to explore the participants' knowledge of English article usage, mother tongue interference, carelessness, the difficulty of English articles, and teacher-induced errors. The data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Then the findings were reported and discussed qualitatively.

### **Summary**

This study collected third drafts of twenty essays from twenty students who enrolled in EN 331 (Composition I) in the first semester of the 2010 academic year at Srinakharinwirot University. There were two research instruments. First, the 19 article error categories were used to trace article errors in students' essays by three assessors. Second, the 20 interview questions were used to explore the causes of article errors in depth. The two data from students' essays and interviews were analyzed and discussed. The following chapter provides the research findings.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

This chapter presents the research findings regarding the four objectives of the study. These are to: (1) classify article errors made by Thai students, (2) investigate how mother tongue interference causes learners to produce English article errors, (3) identify other causes, apart from mother tongue interference, of English article errors made by Thai students, and (4) describe possible factors involved with article usage among Thai students. In other words, the findings answer the four research questions about the types of article errors made by Thai students, the effects of mother tongue interference on the causes of article errors, the causes of article errors aside from mother tongue interference, and possible factors involved with article usage among Thai students. Finally, the findings also reveal the causes of article errors discovered during the interviews with the students.

#### **Types of Article Errors Made by Thai Students**

The first research objective was aimed to classify the types of article errors made by twenty second-year students enrolled in EN331 (Composition I) at the Faculty of Humanities, Srinakharinwirot University. Nineteen categories of article errors were adapted from Richards (1971) and Chakorn (2005) and were used to trace article errors in the participants' essays. The findings are shown in two tables. Table 1 exhibits the categories of article errors and their frequency. Table 2 identifies the three most frequent article errors.

**Table 1***Categories of Article Errors in Students' Essays*

Categories	Frequency of Errors	Percentage
1. omission of "the" before unique nouns	21	5%
2. omission of "the" before nouns defined by adjectives of nationality	6	1%
3. omission of "the" before nouns made particular in context	115	28%
4. omission of "the" before a noun modified by a participle	1	0%
5. omission of "the" before superlatives	0%	0%
6. omission of "the" before a noun modified by an of-phrase	32	8%
7. omission of "a" before nouns	23	6%
8. omission of "a" before singular nouns defined by adjectives	45	12%
9. "the" used instead of Ø before proper names	5	1%
10. "the" used instead of Ø before abstract nouns	32	8%
11. "the" used instead of Ø before nouns behaving like abstract nouns	4	1%
12. "the" used instead of Ø before plural nouns	42	10%
13. "the" instead of "a"	35	8%
14. "a" used instead of "the" before unique nouns	2	1%
15. "a" instead of Ø before a plural noun	1	0%
16. "a" instead of Ø before uncountable nouns	3	1%
17. "a" instead of Ø before adjective	6	1%
18. "a" instead of "the"	10	2%
19. possessive determiners instead of "the"	20	5%

Table 1 shows two kinds of errors: omissions (categories 1-8), and substitutions of articles (categories 9-19). The findings indicate that the omission of articles was the most frequent error. The students omitted "the" before nouns made particular in context most frequently; 115 errors were identified, comprising 28 % of all errors. The omission of

“the” before superlatives was not found in this study. Next, Table 2 shows the top three most frequent article errors.

**Table 2**

*Top Three Most Frequent Article Errors*

Categories	Frequency	Percentage of Errors
1. omission of “the” before nouns made particular in context	115	28%
2. omission of “a” before singular nouns defined by adjectives	45	12%
3. “the” used instead of Ø before plural nouns	42	10%

The top three most frequent article errors in the participants’ essays were omissions of “the” before nouns made particular in context (28%), omissions of “a” before nouns defined by adjectives (12%), and use of “the” instead of Ø before plural nouns (10%).

**Mother Tongue Interference in the Production of English Article Errors**

The second objective was to investigate how mother tongue interference causes learners to produce English article errors and to identify the types of article errors which are caused by mother tongue interference. The results are exhibited in Table 3.

**Table 3***Ranks of Article Errors Caused by Mother Tongue Interference*

Categories	Frequency	Percentage of Errors
1. omission of “the” before nouns made particular in context	115	28%
2. omission of “a” before singular nouns defined by adjectives	45	12%
3. omission of “the” before a noun modified by an of-phrase	32	8%
4. omission of “a” before nouns	23	6%
5. omission of “the” before unique nouns	21	5%
6. omission of “the” before nouns defined by adjectives of nationality	6	1%
7. omission of “the” before a noun modified by a participle	1	0%

The data from Table 3 show seven types of article errors caused by mother tongue interference. The top three most frequent article error types are omissions of “the” before nouns made particular in context (28%), omissions of “a” before nouns defined by an adjective (12%) and omissions of “the” before a noun modified by an of-phrase (8%).

#### **Causes of English Article Errors Made by Thai Students**

Apart from mother tongue interference, the target language also creates difficulties in using English articles correctly. Errors caused by difficulties with the target language are called intralingual errors (James, 1998). In this study 11 types of intralingual errors were found. Table 4 shows the ranks of the types of intralingual errors made by the students.

**Table 4***Ranks of Intralingual Errors*

Categories	Frequency of Errors	Percentage
1. “the” used instead of Ø before plural nouns	42	10%
2. “the” instead of “a”	35	8%
3. “the” used instead of Ø before abstract nouns	32	8%
4. possessive determiners instead of “the”	20	5%
5. “a” instead of “the”	10	2%
6. “a” instead of Ø before adjective	6	1%
7. “the” used instead of Ø before proper names	5	1%
8. “the” used instead of Ø before nouns behaving like abstract nouns	4	1%
9. “a” instead of Ø before uncountable nouns	3	1%
10. “a” used instead of “the” before unique nouns	2	1%
11. “a” instead of Ø before a plural noun	1	0%

The top three intralingual errors from Table 4 were the uses of “the” instead of Ø before plural nouns (10%), “the” instead of “a” (8%), and “the” instead of Ø before abstract nouns (8%).

#### **Possible Factors Involved with Article Usage Errors among Thai Students**

The researcher wrote 20 interview questions and aimed to explore possible factors involved with article errors. The interview questions were concerned with the five possible factors that cause article errors. These are: (1) knowledge of English article usage; (2) mother tongue interference; (3) carelessness; (4) the difficulties regarding English articles; and (5) teacher-induced errors. These factors were adapted from Norrish

(as cited in Hasyim, 2002) and Richards (as cited in Sanal, 2008). The data below show the five factors might affect how the students use articles.

### **Knowledge of English Article Usage**

There are five interview questions to investigate the ten interviewees' knowledge of English article usage from their English compositions. The researcher pointed out an article in a sentence in each student's essay and asked the writer of the essay the first question, why they chose to use this article in front of this noun. For example, the sentence "The human brain has two parts, right and left." Six students gave incorrect answers and four students gave correct answers. Before they were asked the second question, students were asked to locate an article error in a sentence. Then they were asked to provide reasons why they thought it was the wrong article to use in that sentence. Examples of sentences that the students wrote include the following: "No one can get the jobs because of speaking rudely." and "I saw saline solution bag hang on the corner of a patient room." Four students gave correct answers and six gave incorrect answers to the second question. The third question concerned why they chose to omit an article in a sentence. Examples of sentences that the students wrote included the following: "Unfortunately, again, all of people do not dare to..." and "When I pay piano, I must control..." All ten students gave the correct answer to the third question. The fourth question was concerned with why students chose to use the article "the" in a given sentence. Examples of sentences that the students wrote include the following: "You can go to the gym to exercise, run around the Ongkharak..." and "Cortisol has been termed the stress hormone..." Three students gave correct answers and seven gave incorrect answers to the fourth question. The fifth and final question was about why they chose to use "a" and not "the" in a given sentence. Examples of sentences that the students wrote

include the following: “It is a a very big place.” and “Playing music is a good choice for them.” Eight students answered the last question correctly and two gave incorrect answers to this question.

### **Mother Tongue Interference**

The researcher asked two questions to explore mother tongue interference. The first question put to the participants was if they thought in Thai and translated the idea into English when they composed their essays. All ten participants said that they thought in Thai and translated it into English to construct English sentences in their essays. The second question put to the students was whether or not they were concerned about correct article usage while they were constructing Thai sentences into English. All ten participants said that were not concerned about the correct usage of articles in front of nouns. The answers to both questions reveal that there are a number of ways in which the mother tongue can interfere with the target language.

### **Carelessness**

The researcher asked the students nine questions to study how carelessness causes the students to make errors. The responses to each question were reported. The eighth question was concerned with how long the students spent writing their essays. As the teacher gave them one week for each draft, they all took three weeks to complete the essay. The ninth question was concerned with how many times the students revised their essays before submitting them. Two students revised five times, five students revised three times and three students revised only once before submission. The tenth question was concerned with whether or not the participants felt that they should have paid more attention to revision after re-reading their essays. All ten students agreed that they should have paid more attention to revision after looking at their essays again. They all also

agreed that they should have paid more attention to revision, because they still found multiple errors after reading their essays a second time. The eleventh question was concerned with whether or not the participants felt that they used common sense when trying to decide whether or not they were using an article correctly. All ten students felt that they used common sense when deciding whether or not they were using an article correctly. The twelfth question was concerned with whether or not the participants felt that they used common sense to check whether or not they were using an article correctly. Three students said they used common sense to determine whether or not they were using an article correctly and seven said that they did not. The thirteenth question was concerned with whether or not students felt they could eliminate their confusion about correct article usage. All ten students claimed that they had tried to eliminate their confusion about correct article usage. The fourteenth question was concerned with how the participants eliminated their confusion regarding article usage. Six students said they asked friends, two students said they consulted grammar textbooks, and two students said they asked the teacher who taught their writing classes. The fifteenth question was concerned with whether or not the students consulted grammar textbooks if they were unsure about an exception to the rule in article usage. Two out of the ten students admitted that they consulted a grammar textbook when they were unsure exceptions to rules of article usage. The sixteenth and final question was concerned with whether or not students had tried to eliminate the common article errors that their teacher had identified for them. All ten students said that they had tried to eliminate common article errors, but claimed that despite the feedback provided by their teacher, common article errors were still found in their essays.

### **Difficulties Regarding English Articles**

The following two questions investigated the difficulties with English articles which caused the participants to make article errors. The seventeenth question was concerned with which aspect of article usage that they found to be the most confusing and why they felt this way. All ten students claimed that the rules regarding the correct usage of the article “the” was the most confusing aspect of article usage. They agreed that this was because this article could be used in many ways and that there were so many possibilities regarding its use or its omission.

The eighteenth question was concerned with exceptions to the rules of article usage. The students were asked if exceptions to the rules of correct article usage contributed to the errors they made in their essays and why they felt this way. All ten students said that the exceptions to the rules of article usage were responsible for the multiple errors in their essays. There were also several exceptions to the rules that they were unable to recognize.

### **Teacher-induced Errors**

The researcher asked the students two questions to investigate teacher-induced errors. The nineteenth question was concerned with whether or not some of the article rules that the students learned were incorrect. All ten students agreed that none of them had been taught incorrect article rules. The twentieth question was concerned with whether or not some of the incorrect rules of article usage that they learned from their teachers had remained and caused them to use articles incorrectly in their essays. Since none of the students said that they had been taught incorrect article rules, the researcher did not ask this question. The findings reveal that teacher-induced errors did not cause any of the participants to use articles erroneously.

## Summary

This chapter presents four findings: (1) types of article errors made by Thai students; (2) mother tongue interference in the production of English article errors; (3) causes of English article errors made by Thai students; and (4) possible factors involved with article usage errors among Thai students. The findings are as follows:

First, there are 19 types of article errors, as adapted from Richards (1971) and Chakorn (2005). The participants made 18 out of the 19 types of article errors. They omitted “the” before nouns made particular in context most frequently (28%). This study found that none of the students omitted “the” before superlatives in their essays.

Second, there are seven types of article errors caused by mother tongue interference. The omission of “the” before nouns made particular in context occurred most frequently (28%).

Third, there were eleven causes of article errors found in the papers, which are the result of the target language difficulties, also called intralingual errors (James, 1998). The most frequent error is the use of “the” instead of Ø before plural nouns (10%).

Fourth, possible factors involved in the acts of using articles were investigated by interviewing the ten participants. The 20 interview questions aimed to investigate the participants’ knowledge of English article usage, mother tongue interference, carelessness, the difficulties regarding English articles, and teacher-induced errors. The findings are as follows:

Five questions were put to the students in order to explore their knowledge of English article usage. Eight out of ten students could explain why they had to use "a" and not "the" in a sentence, revealing their ability to use the article "a" correctly. On the other

hand, seven out of ten students showed poor knowledge of correct article usage, specifically the article "the" and their reasons for using it in a sentence.

The findings concerning mother tongue interference showed that all ten participants were affected by mother tongue interference. They made article errors mostly because they directly translated Thai into English. The factor of carelessness shows that three students revised their essays only once before submission. All ten participants agreed that they should have paid more attention during revision. As for common practice regarding article usage among students, all participants claimed that they used common sense when making a decision regarding article usage. Six of the students said they asked friends when they wanted to clear up their confusion about using articles. However, only two out of ten students said that they consulted grammar textbooks when they were unsure about the exceptions to the rules of article usage.

This study found that the students had difficulties in using the rules for article "the" and the exceptions to the rules. They stated that the rules and exceptions were both numerous and complex. The last factor, teacher-induced errors, was not found in this study. The next chapter presents the conclusion and discussion of the research.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter summarizes the study, summarizes the findings, and discusses the research findings. Then the pedagogical implications, limitations of this study, and suggestions for further studies are stated.

#### **Summary of the Study**

The study examined English article errors in twenty students' essays. The participants in this study were second-year undergraduate students majoring in English who enrolled in EN331 (Composition I) in the first semester of the 2010 academic year at Srinakharinwirot University. The researcher collected twenty third drafts that were written on a variety of topics. English article errors in these twenty essays were noted by three examiners, two native English speakers and the Thai researcher. To classify English article errors, this study employed 19 article error categories which were adapted from Richards (1971) and Chakorn (2005). Code words were used to represent 19 article error categories. The three assessors used the code words when they assessed article errors in the participants' essays. The article errors were counted in all twenty essays. This study also explored the causes of articles errors in their written papers through interviews. Finally, the number of each type of article error and the causes of these errors were reported and analyzed.

## **Summary of the Findings**

Four findings are discussed in this section. The first finding concerns the types of article errors made by Thai students. The second finding examines how mother tongue interference produces English article errors. The third finding is about the intralingual errors that students make when using articles. The fourth finding identifies possible factors involved with article usage errors among Thai students.

### **Types of Article Errors Made by Thai Students**

The 19 types of article errors were tested for frequency in the students' papers. Eighteen out of nineteen types were found in their essays. These errors are classified into two distinct types: interlingual and intralingual. The data supports the findings of Gass and Selinker, (2001) who state that the errors made by EFL students conform to these two types. A more detailed discussion of interlingual and intralingual errors is included in the next two sections, entitled mother tongue interference, and intralingual errors when using articles, respectively.

### **Mother Tongue Interference**

The findings from this study revealed that students experience mother tongue interference when using articles. The highest ranked error was the omission of "the" before nouns made particular in context (28%). Similarly, findings by Sattayatham and Honsa (2007) indicate that 237 Thai students mostly omitted the definite article in their Thai to English translations. This kind of error is caused by first language interference; Richards and Schmidt (2002) classified errors of omission of "the" before nouns as interlingual errors.

The top three most frequent article errors in the participants' essays were omissions of the articles. Furthermore, the data supports Pongpairoj (2007) who states that the omission of an article before a noun is the biggest problem for Thai students because their native language does not have articles. Interlingual errors are made by transferring the native language to the target language. One example demonstrates how mother tongue interference affects the use of articles by Thai students and thus causes article errors. We say in Thai "*Por chan pen kru,*" in which "*kru*" means "teacher" and does not have an article before it. Therefore, when Thai students translate this sentence, they are likely to write "My father is teacher," not "My father is a teacher." Many omissions of articles made by the participants in their written papers were caused by mother tongue interference.

In conclusion, mother tongue interference plays a significant role in causing Thai learners to produce article errors. The findings show that the omissions of English articles were the most frequent error in the participants' composition. These errors result from transferring the native language to the target language.

### **Intralingual Errors in Using Articles**

Erdoğan (2005) notes that "intralingual errors occur as a result of learners' attempt to build up concepts and hypotheses about the target language from their limited experience with it" (p. 266). In this study eleven types of intralingual errors were found. The top three types of intralingual errors were "the" instead of Ø before plural nouns; "the" instead of "a," and "the" instead of Ø before abstract nouns. The findings reveal that intralingual errors are caused by an incomplete application of the rules, ignorance of the rules, hypotheses based on false concepts, and overgeneralizations. These four types of errors were adapted from Jack C. Richards (as cited in Hasyim, 2002). The following explanations illustrate these errors:

1. Hypotheses based on false concepts and overgeneralizations are similar. For example, some students had learned that they should use “the” in an “of” phrase, as in “One of *the* boys got an accident.” so they used “the” in “of” phrases, as in “The Institute of *the* Lung Cancer,” which is an error because Lung Cancer is a proper noun that needs no articles.

2. An inaccurate application of a rule results from a lack of understanding of how to use an article. For example, one participant used “the” instead of “a” in a general sense, “The next trip, I will be not the (a) new traveler.”

3. Ignorance of rules refers to failing to apply the rules of article usage. For example in, “I went to the Lumpini Park,” the article “the” should not be used before Lumpini Park, as Lumpini Park is a proper noun.

One conclusion that can be made from these findings is that there is widespread confusion among students regarding the rules and the exceptions to the rules of article usage. The students had difficulty deciding between using “a,” “the” or the zero article. This phenomenon was also experienced by the three examiners in this study. Due to the complexity of article usage, articles can be used in several contexts, according to each person’s interpretation of them, in a particular context. This issue is supported by Catford et al. (1974) which noted that the rules in correcting English article usage are complex. Understanding the complexity and exceptions of article rules requires a high level of specialized knowledge, even for native English speakers.

In brief, intralingual errors are based on difficulties with the target language. In this study, the errors made by the participants were due to an inaccurate application of rules, ignorance of these rules, and overgeneralization. Some students found it difficult to use the definite article correctly, due to the number of rules and subtle variations in meaning based on context, and the numerous exceptions to the rules.

### **Possible Factors Involved with Article Usage Errors among Thai Students**

In order to investigate possible factors related to making article errors, the researcher interviewed ten participants. The interview contained 20 questions (see Appendix C). The questions were based on the classification of article errors by Norrish (as cited in Hasyim, 2002) and Richards (as cited in Sanal, 2008). The questions were aimed at determining the participants' knowledge of English article usage, mother tongue interference, carelessness, the difficulties regarding English articles, and teacher-induced errors.

Firstly, students were asked five questions about English article usage in order to assess their knowledge of English article usage. The findings from Question 1 "Why did you use this article in front of this noun?" Question 2 "Why do you think it is wrong to use this article here?," and Question 4 "Why did you put the article 'the' here?," indicate that most of the participants had poor or basic knowledge of English article usage. Definite and indefinite articles can be used in a number of ways, but most of the participants knew only that the definite article is used in a specific sense and the indefinite article is used when they mention a common noun for the first time or when they want to say that there is only "one." For example, when asked why he used "a" in "... some work you need to have *a* good speech." Student 7 answered that he used it for the first mentioning of the noun "speech." He did not know that "speech" is an uncountable noun, and "a" is not used before uncountable nouns. Therefore, the student showed lack of knowledge of article usage.

The data from Question 5 showed that eight participants had a good knowledge of using the article "a." Moreover, the answers to Question 3 reveal that all interviewees can

explain correctly why they omitted the articles. They said that they omitted the articles because of their carelessness.

Second, mother tongue interference is contained two interview questions, “When you compose your essay, do you think in Thai, translate into English, and construct English sentences?” and another question, “ While you are constructing Thai sentences into English, are you concerned about using English articles?” The findings reveal all of the interviewees translated from Thai to English when they wrote their essays and they were not concerned about using English articles in front of nouns because the Thai language does not have articles. Consequently, the translation transfers the lack of articles in Thai grammar to their English writing. Altunkaya (as cited in Sanal, 2008) points out the EFL/ESL learners transfer their old habits to the target language. This study also supports the findings of Sattayatham and Honsa (2007), Boonyavanich (2002), Likitrattanaporn (2001), and Bennui (2008), who noted that translation from Thai to English caused the omission of the English articles in the students’ written English.

To support this statement, the participants gave some reasons:

Student 2 says:

*“I always think in Thai and translate it into English when I compose English essays and I am not concerned about using English articles so it causes me to omit the articles in my English sentences. This translation results in many errors in English essays. The Thai lecturers who taught English often made comments about this issue. I’m trying to solve this problem.”*

Student 4 says

*“I was trying to think in English in order to write English essays but it took me a long time to do so. Then I had to think in Thai and translate to English because it helped me get the essay done faster. I wasn’t concerned about using English articles on my first draft. I was going to check them on the second draft but I still omitted them.”*

Furthermore, Student 7 says,

*“I can’t think in English while I’m composing an essay because it’s difficult for me. I have to think in Thai and translate to English. I know the translation causes me to make errors and I have to be aware of using articles in English essays because I mostly omit them when I think in Thai because of the absence of articles.”*

Student 7 supported Bennui’s (2008) statement that “thinking in English when writing in English is very difficult for Thai students (p. 73).” The reason why students think in Thai might be that most English classes from elementary to university levels are taught in Thai rather than in English. Hence, the students pick up the habit of translating from Thai to English as a result of the popularity of the grammar translation method in Thai educational institutions. Zainuddin et al. (2002) pointed out that as the name suggests, grammar translation focuses on the use of translation as a means of ascertaining comprehension. What happens for most students learning a foreign language is that they keep translating from the mother tongue to the target language, which causes many errors. Translation is the most common cause of errors. For instance, the sentence “They went rafting and stayed in (a) floating house on (the) river” showed that the student omitted the articles “a” and “the” because this student translated from Thai to English without considering the English articles. Spratt et al. (2005) concluded that students do not learn a foreign language most effectively through the grammar translation method.

This study found that all of the participants still used the habit of translating as they wrote, even though this Composition class was taught in English by a Thai lecturer. This is the result of Thai students learning English in a Thai context. The students rarely had a chance to communicate in English with foreigners outside the classroom. Therefore, interlingual errors occur widely in their written English.

Third, eleven interview questions traced the students’ carelessness. The findings show that all of the ten interviewees were careless when they wrote their essays. This is

proved by their ability to find common errors when they were asked to re-read their essays. Student 4 pointed out that in the sentence, “First character of Hokkaido is winter.” she should have added “the” before “first” because “first” is an ordinal number that is normally preceded by “the.” She said this error was due to carelessness, and she also found several other errors because of her carelessness. All of the interviewees mentioned that if they had paid more attention to their revisions, these common errors would not have occurred.

Carelessness was a significant factor of error production for all the participants. This became clear when the participants were asked to re-read their essays and it was found that they could correct common mistakes by themselves. This is the reason why many EFL/ESL students’ written papers contain avoidable errors and careless mistakes. Therefore, error analysis investigates not only errors, but also the types of mistakes that EFL/ESL learners typically make. Ellis (as cited in Erdoğan, 2005) distinguishes between an error and mistake. Mistakes can be self-corrected when attention is called to them, whereas an error is made when the learner does not know what is correct, and thus it cannot be self-corrected. For instance, Student 6 could see a mistake he made in the sentence “There is a steak café in doctors’ dorm.” He knew that he needed the article “the” before “doctor dorm” because there is a sense of specificity in the sentence. The correct sentence is “There is a steak café in the doctors’ dorm.” On the other hand, Student 2 did not know it is wrong to use “a” in the sentence “They did not have a racial discrimination.” She explained that the article “a” was used in front of “racial discrimination” because the sentence carries a general sense. In fact, this sentence does not need “a” because “discrimination” is an abstract noun. The correct sentence is “They did not have racial discrimination.” It is an error to use the wrong article or to use an article when it is not required.

Most of the mistakes that the participants made in this study were caused by their carelessness. They indicated that their carelessness occurred as the result of memory lapses and time limitation. It can be concluded that mistakes are made by learners because they do not apply the rules that they actually know. Richards et al. (as cited in Hasyim, 2002), however, states that learners make mistakes in the process of learning a foreign language. Braidi (1999) concludes that foreign language learning is adapted from first language acquisition. Children learn their native language by making plenty of mistakes. As they get feedback from adults, they learn how to produce grammatically and semantically acceptable sentences in their native language. This is how the EFL/ESL learners learn a foreign language. It is the same process as a child acquiring their first language (Erdoğan, 2005). Thai students acquire English article systems through their teachers' feedback. Once their errors became mistakes, this means that the students are in the process of acquiring English article usage when they are able to correct their own mistakes.

Fourth, to study the difficulties of articles, the participants were asked two questions, "Which rule of article usage confuses you most? Why?," and "Do exceptions to the rules of article usage cause many errors? Why?" The findings show that all of the ten interviewees had difficulties in using the article "the." They mentioned that the use of "the" involves several exceptions which caused them a lot of confusion. For example, Student 8 explained that he used "the" in front of the noun "nature" in the sentence, "You have to join the club and touch the nature by yourself" because he thought it carried a sense of specificity. In fact, in this sentence the noun "nature" is an abstract noun in a general sense, and so it does not require an article. An article is not used before nouns used in a general sense, it is one of the exceptions explained in Eckersley and Eckersley (1960). The most common error in this research involved the use of "the" which

illustrates the complexity of the rules, particularly for students whose first language does not have articles. This supports Master (as cited in Bataineh, 2005) who mentions that the EFL/ESL learners have difficulty comprehending the English articles because the article system has multiple functions. The errors occur when the learners look for a one-to-one correspondence between form and function. In fact, there are several rules and exceptions. These errors result from difficulty with the target language or intralingual errors (Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

Finally, the findings do not indicate that teacher-induced errors cause the interviewees to use articles erroneously in their papers. All ten interviewees stated that their teacher did not cause them to make errors and they noted that the cause of most article errors was a result of memory lapses regarding article rules, and not their teachers. However, Student 5 pointed out that her high school teachers did not explain article usage clearly, which caused her to misunderstand how to use articles and that caused her to make article errors. Moreover, she believed that her teachers did not pay sufficient attention to English articles because they did not understand them well enough themselves. This case supports Corder (1981) who notes that errors occur because there has not been enough explanation or practice on the part of the teacher. Moreover, Celce-Mercia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) mention that the article system is troublesome to ESL and EFL teachers.

In conclusion, the findings from the students' essays and the interviews are strongly related. The problems faced by Thai students using English articles were related to mother tongue interference, incomplete application of rules, and ignorance of rules. In addition, the participants were careless in their application of articles.

### Pedagogical Implications

Errors are a natural result of the learning process, which will eventually have a direct impact on the improvement of language teaching material and methods, in remedial teaching as well as in ordinary teaching (Corder, 1981). A deep analysis of errors can lead to understanding students' difficulties and causes of their errors.

This study found that most of the students' errors were omitted articles. Accordingly, as one solution, teachers can ask students to translate Thai phrases into English ones. Through this method, students can probably distinguish more easily between the general and specific senses. Also, learning these two senses in phrases should be easier than in long or complete sentences. Additional information in a complete sentence can divert the student's attention from correct article usage. In addition, students can focus easily on short phrases. For example, in translating "*Poo Chai Khon Thee Khun Hen*" (Thai), students can sense the specificity of the noun "*Poo Chai*" easily, so they translate the phrase into "The man whom you saw." This suggests that the teacher should focus primarily on mother tongue interference. Since Thai does not have articles and students translate from Thai to English, teachers should emphasize the use of articles in front of nouns and give an explanation when a noun does not need articles.

Using the article "the" was problematic for all students in this study. Most of them used the article "the" intuitively and did not consult grammar texts. They pointed out in the interviews that English grammar textbooks are not clear with regard to articles. In this respect, if the teacher can provide a guide on what errors most of them make in their essays and provide handouts on the usage of "the" which contain clear explanations, their errors can be reduced. Krashen (as cited in Zainuddin et. al, 2002 p. 78) claims that "people acquire a second language when they obtain comprehensible input and when their

affective filters are low enough to allow the input in” but the fact is that learners do not immediately learn on their first exposure. Hence, the teacher has to give several assignments for his students to practice using articles in quizzes, essays, and other forms. The more assignments the students complete, the more effectively they will be able to use “the” and avoid common errors.

The last implication of this study is the importance of knowing the difference between mistakes and errors. To eliminate mistakes, the teacher should warn students to pay attention to their mistakes of intuition, which result from their carelessness. This may include identifying mistakes and errors in their English essays, or peer review and revision, as a part of the writing process (Sokolik as cited in Nunan, 2003). If students are more careful, they will make fewer mistakes. As a result, students will improve their performance in language learning. In relation to students who commit errors rather than mistakes, teachers must promote the transition from error to mistake by designing appropriate instruction and teaching materials

To sum up, this type of error analysis is a useful tool for language teachers. The errors that learners make will provide good feedback for teachers to design teaching materials and techniques in order to improve students’ understanding of the rules of articles. The best way for EFL/ESL learners to acquire the target language is to use it both inside and outside the classroom (Spratt et al., 2005).

## Summary

The contents of this chapter include a brief introduction, a summary of the study, and summary of the findings.

Firstly, the participants are described as 20 second-year undergraduate students majoring in English who enrolled in EN331 (Composition 1) in the first semester of the 2010 academic year at Srinakharinwirot University. The research traced article errors in the students' essays by using 19 article error categories. The number of each type of article error and causes of errors were reported, analyzed, and discussed.

Secondly, a summary of the findings and a discussion of the four findings, these are: (1) types of article errors made by Thai students; (2) mother tongue interference causes learners to produce English article errors; (3) intralingual errors in using articles, and (4) possible factors involved in the act of writing with regard to article usage among Thai students.

There were 18 out of 19 types of article errors made by the 20 participants. The errors were caused by interlingual errors or mother tongue interference, and another kind of error, intralingual errors.

Mother tongue interference was the most frequent cause of article errors in this study as the students translated from Thai to English. Consequently, they omitted articles in front of nouns, a result of the absence of articles in the Thai grammar. The intralingual errors that the participants made were caused by three types of errors: overgeneralizations, inaccurate applications of the rules, and ignorance of the rules.

Five possible factors which cause the participants to make articles errors are identified. These are: (1) knowledge of English article usage; (2) mother tongue

interference; (3) carelessness; (4) difficulties of English articles; and (4) teacher-induced errors. These factors are in 20 interview questions.

The findings about the students' knowledge of article usage reveal that they had only basic knowledge in using definite and indefinite articles. They understand how to use articles in either a specific sense or a general sense. All of the ten interviewees said that they thought in Thai and translated into English when they wrote their essays. These habits caused them to omit articles in front of English nouns which are a result of mother tongue interference. Carelessness is another factor that causes article errors usage. The findings reveal that the students found many mistakes when they paid attention while revising their essays. They can correct their own common mistakes easily. Their carelessness is result of memory lapses and time limitations. These difficulties in English article usage stems from the complexity of article rules and the exceptions to those rules, which caused the students to use articles erroneously, particularly the article "the." The students faced difficulties deciding which articles to use in the right context. Although no indication of teacher-induced errors was found, one student did mention that her high school teacher did not explain article usage clearly.

The last part, pedagogical implications consist of three significant issues. These are the omission of articles by students; how to deal with the problem of using the article "the"; and how to eliminate mistakes. The researcher suggests that students who tend to omit articles to practice translating Thai phrases into English. This will help students to understand the senses of general and specific article usage. As a result, they will be able to use definite and indefinite articles correctly. The teacher should provide a guide on most frequent errors of the article "the" and provide handouts with clear explanation of using the article "the." The last suggestion is to eliminate mistakes caused by their

carelessness. The teacher should warn students to pay attention to their mistakes, and ask them to do peer reviews which focus on common mistakes.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Some limitations of this study are as follows:

1. There was only one group of students participating in this study. Therefore, this research could not apply a two-group design in order to make comparisons for reliability.
2. The process of analyzing and discussing data was time consuming as some contexts are fluid in their complexity. The discussions raised many suggestions about the different article error analyses among the three examiners.
3. Students were timid and uncomfortable discussing their errors and it took a lot of time to elicit the causes of the students' errors.
4. The ten students who were interviewed for this study do not fully represent the total number of 20 participants who submitted essays for this study.

### **Suggestions for Further Studies**

1. This study only investigated a sample class of second-year English majors. There should be a study of all English composition classes as English composition is a core course offered for first, second, and third-year students who are majoring in English. The findings will represent a broader article error analysis than this group of students.
2. The process of analyzing data by three assessors took a lot of time to complete. Software should be used to speed up and enhance the process of error analysis.



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**APPENDIX A**

**ARTICLE ERROR CATEGORIES**

Article error categories	Code words
1. omission of “the” before unique nouns	otun
2. omission of “the” before nouns defined by adjectives of nationality	otna
3. omission of “the” before nouns made particular in context	otpc
4. omission of “the” before a noun modified by a participle	otpa
5. omission of “the” before superlatives	otsu
6. omission of “the” before a noun modified by an of-phrase	otop
7. omission of “a” before nouns	oabn
8. omission of “a” before nouns defined by adjectives	oaba
9. “the” used instead of Ø before proper names	tipn
10. “the” used instead of Ø before abstract nouns	tiab
11. “the” used instead of Ø before nouns behaving like abstract nouns	tiba
12. “the” used instead of Ø before plural nouns	tipl
13. “the” instead of “a”	tioa
14. “a” used instead of “the” before unique nouns	aiun
15. “a” instead of Ø before a plural noun qualified by an adjective	aipa
16. “a” instead of Ø before uncountable nouns	aiuc
17. “a” instead of Ø before adjective	aiad
18. “a” instead of “the”	aiot
19. possessive determiners instead of “the”	pdit

## APPENDIX B

### MEANING AND EXPLANATION OF CODE WORDS

Code Words	Example	Explanation
1. otun	(The) Sun rises in the east and sets in the west.	Omission of “the” before a unique noun (sun)
2. otna	(The) English language has played a very important role in the world.	Omission of “the” before a noun defined by an adjective of nationality (English)
3. otpc	There are five girls in the room. I know only two of them. I want to play with (the) other girls.	Omission of “the” before a noun made particular in context
4. otpa	You should go to (the) floating market.	Omission of “the” before a noun (market) modified by a participle (floating)
5. otsu	(The) Richest people should help the poor people.	Omission of “the” before a superlative (richest)
6. otop	We are one of (the) students who can solve this problem.	Omission of “the” before a noun (students) which is modified by an of-phrase
7. oabn	It is (a) reward from nature.	Omission of “a” before a singular noun (reward) in a general sense
8. oaba	He was (a) good boy.	Omission of “a” before a singular noun defined by an adjective in a general sense
9. tipn	I know the direction to the (Ø) Wireless Road.	“The” used instead of Ø before a proper noun (Wireless Road)
10. tiab	It is called (the) music therapy.	“The” used instead of Ø before an abstract noun (therapy)
11. tiba	The (Ø) goodness is a quality that everyone must have.	“The” used instead of Ø before a noun (goodness) which behaves like an abstract noun
12. tipl	They said that the (Ø) rude speakers should be notified softly three times because anyone can make a mistake.	“The” used instead of Ø before a plural noun (speakers) in a general sense
13. tioa	She felt like she was in the (a) small box because she could not move to anywhere.	“The” used instead of “a” in a general sense
14. aiun	A (The) sun becomes red.	“A” used instead of “the” before a unique noun (sun)

Code Words	Example	Explanation
15. aipa	You should have a (Ø) good language skills because the national language is used in the interview.	“A” used instead of Ø before a plural noun (skills) qualified by an adjective
16. aiuc	I don’t like to eat a (Ø) fish.	“A” used instead of Ø before an uncountable noun (fish)
17. aiad	I felt a (Ø) very comfortable.	“A” used instead of Ø before an adjective (comfortable)
18. aiot	I didn’t see a (the) man whom you talked about.	“A” used instead of “the” in a specific sense.
19. pdit	These are the examples of the symptoms of my (the) interviewees	A possessive determiner, “my” used instead of “the” before a noun (interviewees)



## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did you use this article in front of this noun?
2. Why do you think it is wrong to use this article.... here?
3. Why did you omit an article here?
4. Why did you put the article “the” here?
5. Why did you use “a” here and not “the”?
6. When you compose your essay, do you think in Thai, translate into English, and construct English sentences?
7. While you are constructing Thai sentences into English, are you concerned about using English articles?
8. How long does it take you to write your essay?
9. How many times do you revise it?
10. When you look at your essay again, do you think you should pay more attention to your revision?
11. Do you use your common sense in deciding which article usage to use?
12. Do you check if your common sense in article usage is correct?
13. Do you get eliminate your confusion regarding article usage?
14. How do you eliminate your confusion with article usage?
15. Do you consult grammar textbooks if you are not sure about an exceptions?
16. Do you try to eliminate the common article errors that your teacher identifies for you?
17. Which rule of article usage confuses you most? Why?

18. Do exceptions to the rules of article usage cause many errors? Why?
19. Have you found that some article usage rules you learned from some teachers are incorrect?
20. Do incorrect rules of article usage that you learned from some teachers still remain and cause you to make errors?

Note: The interview was conducted in Thai.



## APPENDIX C

### คำถามสัมภาษณ์นิสิต

1. ทำไมใช้ article ตัวนี้หน้าคำนามตัวนี้
2. ทำไมนิสิตคิดว่ามันผิดที่ใช้ article ตัวนี้ ตรงนี้
3. ทำไมนิสิตไม่ใช้ article ตรงนี้
4. ทำไมนิสิตใส่ article “the” ตรงนี้
5. ทำไมนิสิตใช้ “a” ตรงนี้ และไม่ใช้ “the”
6. เมื่อนิสิตแต่งเรียงความ นิสิตคิดเป็นภาษาไทยแล้วแปลเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ และแต่งประโยคเป็นภาษาอังกฤษใช่ไหม
7. ขณะที่แต่งประโยคภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ นิสิตคำนึงถึงการใส่ article หรือไม่
8. นิสิตใช้เวลาเท่าไรในการเขียนเรียงความ
9. นิสิตแก้ไขกี่ครั้ง
10. เมื่อนิสิตดูงานเขียนของนิสิตอีกครั้ง นิสิตคิดว่านิสิตควรจะให้ความสำคัญกับการแก้ไขมากกว่านี้หรือไม่
11. นิสิตใช้สามัญสำนึกของนิสิตในการตัดสินใจใส่ article ใช่หรือไม่
12. นิสิตได้ตรวจสอบสามัญสำนึกของนิสิตหรือไม่ว่าใช้ถูกต้อง article หรือไม่
13. นิสิตได้ขจัดความสับสนในการใช้ article หรือไม่
14. นิสิตขจัดความสับสนเกี่ยวกับการใช้ article อย่างไร
15. หากไม่แน่ใจเกี่ยวกับข้อยกเว้นการใช้ article นิสิตได้กลับไปอ่านหนังสือไวยากรณ์หรือไม่
16. นิสิตพยายามขจัดความผิดพลาดในการใช้ article ที่พบบ่อยครั้งซึ่งครูได้ชี้แนะให้แล้วหรือไม่
17. กฎการใช้ article กฎไหนที่ทำให้นิสิตสับสนมากที่สุด ทำไม
18. กฎข้อยกเว้นการใช้ article ทำให้นิสิตใช้ article ผิดมากหรือไม่ ทำไม
19. นิสิตเคยเจอหรือไม่ที่นิสิตได้เคยเรียนการใช้ article แบบผิด ๆ จากครูบางคน
20. การใช้ article แบบผิด ๆ ที่นิสิตได้เรียนจากครูบางคนทำให้นิสิตใช้ article ผิดหรือไม่



## VITAE

Name: Miss Ratchanee Nopjirapong  
Date of birth: 10 April 1962  
Place of birth: Bangkok  
Address: 131/1083 Rama II Road, Bangkhunthien District,  
Bangkok10150

### Educational Background

1995 Bachelor of Education (English)  
Chadrasakem Rajabhat University

2007 Graduate Certificate  
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages  
Illinois State University

2011 Master of Arts  
(Teaching English as a Foreign Language)  
Srinakharinwirot University

