

CII 04 Raising consciousness about the use of articles in learners of English as a second language: special focus on the second year (Humanities) undergraduates of the University of Ruhuna

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Articles – “a(n)”, “the” and “zero article” (that determine definiteness, indefiniteness, and idiomatic use) - form one of the most frequently encountered structural aspects of the English language. Parallel to the frequency in their occurrence in discourse, they pose a great challenge to the L2 learners in maintaining accuracy in their use. Errors in the use of articles in both oral and written forms of discourse tend to remain unresolved even when the L2 learners have gained considerable control over the other elements of the language. Although the articles do not obstruct communication, they affect the accurate and appropriate flow of the language. This compels us to think that the usage of articles needs to be taught specifically because they help not only to carry meaning but also to prevent misunderstanding and confusion. It is obvious that the learners at the early stages of learning look for the L1 equivalents of certain elements in the L2. Like in any other language the notion of definiteness, indefiniteness, idiomatic treatment of the concepts being addressed in discourse is found in the Sinhala language. But what the articles achieve in establishing definiteness and indefiniteness in English is basically effected in Sinhala by means of suffixes. Therefore, with regard to articles, the Sinhala learners of English are faced with the problem of conceptualizing a set of structural norms totally absent in their language. The present piece of research examines whether confusion committed in the use of articles by Sinhala learners of English hinders their mastery of the language in general. Moreover, the errors they make are highly varied and the quantity of research done on the use of articles in English in a Sri Lankan context is quite inadequate and therefore the problems concerning articles need analysis.

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