International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies
Volume 7, Issue 4, 2026
Homepage: http://ijlts.org/index.php/ijlts/index
DOI: https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlts.v7i4.754

Misuse of English Articles in ESL Reflective Journal Writing: Error Patterns, Grammatical Contexts, and Contributing Factors

Nurhalid C. Abdul, Noroden A. Abdullah, Shangrela G. Sieras
Mindanao State University, Main Campus, Philippines
abdul.nc74@s.msumain.edu.ph

How to cite:
Abdul, N. C., Abdullah, N. A., & Sieras, S. G. (2026). Misuse of English Articles in ESL Reflective Journal Writing: Error Patterns, Grammatical Contexts, and Contributing Factors. *International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies*, 7(4).119-136. https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlts.v7i4.754

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received: *17/10/2026*
Accepted: 12/11/2026

Keywords:
morphosyntactic errors; English articles; Mëranaw-speaking ESL learners; interlanguage; error analysis; noun phrases

Abstract

English article use remains a persistent challenge for ESL learners whose first languages encode nominal reference differently from English. This study investigated morphosyntactic errors in English article use among Mëranaw-speaking ESL learners, the grammatical structures in which these errors occurred, and their possible linguistic sources. Using a descriptive, corpus-based research design, the study analyzed journal entries written by selected Grade 11 students in Lanao del Sur, Philippines. The corpus was examined through systematic error identification and classification, error frequency and percentage counts, grammatical structure mapping, and error analysis within an interlanguage framework. The analysis revealed 526 article-related morphosyntactic errors, of which omission was the most common type of error, followed by misformation, addition, and misordering. The most common errors were in the noun-phrase structures (particularly simple noun phrases), adjective-modified noun phrases, and complex noun phrases. Both interlingual and intralingual sources were evident, with interlingual errors slightly more frequent, suggesting that learners' L1 influences article use alongside developmental processes common in L2 acquisition. The study concludes that article errors among Mëranaw ESL learners reflect an interplay between L1 transfer and interlanguage development. Pedagogically, ELT instruction should move beyond isolated grammar rules to integrate article usage directly with noun-phrase syntax, definiteness, countability, and discourse context. Finally, future research should include learners from other Philippine L1 backgrounds and use experimental methods to examine the cognitive mechanisms of article selection.

1. INTRODUCTION

Articles, a, an, the, and the zero article (Ø) are an important and small part of the English language and one of the most persistent problems in second language (L2) acquisition of English, which are interpreted on the basis of grammatical, semantic, and discourse-related information. Article selection is more complex than direct vocabulary association because it involves coordinating the meaning of other concepts within the noun phrase, such as definiteness, specificity, identifiability, countability, and generic reference. In SLA research, recent studies have adopted a new approach that shifts the traditional focus from individual grammatical errors in the learner's target language to errors as evidence of interlanguage, cross-

linguistic influence, processing, and learner-corpus perspectives. For instance, Derkach and Alexopoulou (2024) provided evidence for a multifactorial analysis which revealed that interacting linguistic factors such as specificity and prenominal modification can influence the accuracy of articles in the production of L2 learners, and Ahn (2021) showed that even learners whose productions are not consistently target-like can develop increasingly target-like representations of definiteness. These findings align with the contemporary ELT paradigm, which emphasizes that article acquisition is a developmental process and can be accounted for as the gradual incorporation of articles into learners' developing interlanguage competence.

This is particularly true in the Philippines, where English continues to be an integral component of the education system, of academic communication and of professional preparation, and learners speak and learn two languages, English and Filipino, at the same time, as well as several regional languages. The K to 12 English Curriculum Guide by the Department of Education emphasizes communicative competence, which involves using the English language appropriately and accurately in different contexts and for different purposes (Department of Education, 2016), while the MATATAG Curriculum emphasizes communication, multiliteracies, and purposeful language use (DepEd, 2023). These curricula suggest that grammatical correctness, e.g., correct use of articles, should be seen as part of overall communicative competence, not as a set of rules. The problem of article use is also a regular issue that has been identified in research in the Philippines, such as Crosthwaite and Choy (2016), who found that article use is a regular problem among their L2 English learners in the Philippines, and Abdon and Barrios (2024), who attributed L1 Tagalog-speaking learners' tendency to add articles to translation to overgeneralization, countability, specificity, and definiteness. However, many Philippine investigations have focused on specific linguistic communities, and classroom studies that explore the negotiation of English grammatical categories with no direct equivalent in the first language are still needed.

The specific research gap concerns how learners whose first language is Mëranaw negotiate English article marking in extended writing. Existing Philippine studies provide important evidence about Tagalog-speaking learners, but their findings cannot simply be generalized to Mëranaw-speaking learners because the languages organize nominal reference differently. Aragon's (2023b) description of Mëranaw noun phrases identifies the head noun as the obligatory element and describes nominal markers, linkers, adjectives, and other elements that contribute to noun-phrase structure. Aragon's (2023a) account of Mëranaw clause structure further describes the language's predicate-initial organization and the functions of nominal phrases within clauses. These descriptions provide a language-specific basis for examining how learners may map Mëranaw nominal resources onto English determiner requirements. The present study does not assume that these structural differences automatically cause particular errors; rather, it examines whether recurring learner productions are compatible with possible cross-linguistic influence while also considering developmental explanations within the learners' emerging English system. Its contribution is thus a corpus-based, context-sensitive description of article errors among Mëranaw-speaking learners, not a causal demonstration of transfer.

Moreover, the study addresses three questions: (1) What types of morphosyntactic errors involving English articles occur in the learners' reflective journal writing? (2) In which grammatical structures do these errors occur? and (3) What possible interlingual and

intralingual factors may be associated with these errors? By answering these questions, the study provides a localized description of article-related errors and discusses implications for grammar teaching, corrective feedback, and the development of instructional materials for multilingual classrooms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.English Articles as a Complex Morphosyntactic System

The English article system is widely acknowledged as a seemingly simple component of L2 grammar that carries out seemingly simple distinctions realized at grammatical, semantic, and discursive levels. The choice of a/an, the, and the zero article is not governed only by the form of the noun, but also depends on the presence of a referent, its identity, its specificity, its singularity or plurality, its countability or non-countability, its generic or specific meaning (Derkach & Alexopoulou, 2024; Ionin et al., 2022). Pedagogical treatments have therefore been challenged by contemporary research, which has shown that the instruction of articles can be done through rules like *"use a for first, the for second,"* and such rules fail to take into consideration the interplay between specificity, definiteness, discourse status, and noun-phrase structure (Derkach & Alexopoulou, 2024; Park, 2023). For instance, Crosthwaite (2016) found that article accuracy varied across learners in semantic-pragmatic contexts, and that some article functions are mastered while others remain challenging. Recent multi-factor studies also show that several factors, not a single factor, affect article accuracy (Derkach & Alexopoulou, 2024). As a result, English articles are increasingly seen as a sensitive measure of developing morphosyntactic competence, making the systematic study of articles an important area of research in second-language writing.

Competing theories of how articles are learned, such as the interlingual relationship between Universal Grammar (UG), L1 transfer, L2 input, and developing interlanguage representations in the learner, also indicate the theoretical complexity of articles. As for transfer-oriented accounts, earlier ones focused on the learner's L1 lacking articles, while more recent studies indicate that the absence of articles in L1 cannot fully account for article acquisition (Derkach & Alexopoulou, 2024; Ionin et al., 2022). In a simpler model of cross-linguistic transfer, Ionin et al. (2022) studied two groups of L2 learners: Korean and Mandarin learners whose L1s lack articles, and discovered that the learners based on these L1s did not merely transfer the semantic properties of L1 demonstratives and numerals into L2 article interpretation. Even when transfer is not directly or predictably involved, Derkach and Alexopoulou (2024) found that typological difference still negatively affected overall article accuracy for learners with article-less L1s. This apparent tension suggests that cross-linguistic influence should be understood as an interaction between the learner's developing knowledge of English and not as a simple reproduction of L1 structures. In the following, the present study draws on a framework that combines error analysis and interlanguage approaches with cross-linguistic perspectives, so article errors can be analyzed as manifestations of developmental restructuring as well as potential L1 influence.

2.2.Morphosyntactic Error Analysis and Article Use

In applied linguistics, error analysis remains valuable because it can highlight what learners may not have internalized and, crucially, reveal the rules learners seem to be forming. This is now supported by the recent learner-corpus approach, in which errors are viewed as patterned linguistic data that can be classified by form, frequency, context, and developmental

distribution, rather than merely corrected as individual errors (Götz & Mukherjee, 2019; Larsson et al., 2020). In the field of article research, this approach is often used to identify omissions, additions, and misformations or substitutions, and some studies also explore the types of errors that occur with singular and plural count nouns, noncount nouns, modified NPs, and generic expressions (Abdon & Barrios, 2024; Crosthwaite, 2016). For example, Abdon and Barrios (2024) reported that the most common error type among pre-service teachers who speak L1 Tagalog is addition error, followed by omission error and misformation error, indicating that error frequency can reveal systematic preferences in L2 learner interlanguage. If, however, classification is not accompanied by structural analysis, errors of this kind can be confused as the same type, since the same surface form can be produced by different semantic or grammatical conditions. Thus, a morphosyntactic analysis of article errors should go beyond mere frequency analysis of article forms and describe the noun-phrase contexts of frequent error clusters, as well as link error frequency to plausible explanations in the field of learner knowledge.

Another advancement in this literature is the use of a multifactorial, corpus-driven approach to analyze the grammatical structures related to article errors. Derkach and Alexopoulou (2024), with 660 learner scripts from four typologically different L1 backgrounds, showed the differential effects of specificity and prenominal modification on the accuracy of definite and indefinite articles, respectively, indicating that article selection is sensitive, especially at the intersection of semantics and NP structure. They also question the validity of a proficiency-only explanation, as learners may perform relatively well in one structural context but struggle in another. Other evidence from studies on Chinese learners' data also suggests that apparently grammatical article patterns may reflect an incomplete or simplified understanding of the English system, such as local rules that learners develop and that are effective in some contexts but not in others (Jiang, 2015). These results are crucial for the current study because pinpointing which "grammatical structures" lead to the highest error rate can shed light on the specific facets of English article knowledge that are less secure. Therefore, the analysis of article errors should take into account structural categories as well as semantic and discourse aspects, because it is not necessary to assume that all article errors are at the same level of difficulty.

2.3.Interlingual and Intralingual Sources of Article Errors

The interlingual/intralingual distinction has gained significance in recent years, as it is easy to see that learners' errors may be attributed to first-language transfer, masking the developmental nature of second-language acquisition. In addition to interlingual influence, which is the influence of the previously acquired language on the L2, intralingual influences can also be found within the L2 system: overgeneralization, analogy, incomplete rule formation, and restructuring. Article acquisition data show that both processes can be active at the same time, and learners sometimes make errors similar to those in their L1, but also errors that arise in their L2 and have no direct equivalent in L1 (Ionin et al., 2022; Sanosi et al., 2023). Building on errors produced by Arab EFL learners, Sanosi et al. (2023) questioned the common interpretation of errors as mainly due to Arabic–English comparisons and showed that developmental and other intralingual factors could explain a significant percentage of the errors observed. Likewise, Abdon and Barrios (2024) found that translation, rule overgeneralization, countability, specificity, and definiteness are interdependent explanations of the article errors

made by Tagalog-speaking learners and concluded that no single explanation is solely responsible for the errors. All these studies contribute to the analytical stance that views errors in articles as the product of the interaction between linguistic resources and the construction of hypotheses about English grammar, rather than as a form of "interference."

The interplay of interlingual and intralingual factors is apparent not only when the learner's L1 lacks an obligatory or highly productive category in L2, but also when the learner's L1 has such a category, and the L2 does not. Article-less language learners will need not only to learn new articles but also new ways of marking reference, which can lead to an extended period of an/a confusion and the use of the and in place of Ø (Crosthwaite, 2016; Ionin et al., 2022). The literature, however, shows that the absence of articles in the L1 does not ensure predictable individual error patterns, since L2 learners can adopt different error patterns based on input, L1 proficiency, semantic interpretation, and access to other grammatical devices (Derkach & Alexopoulou, 2024). However, although the three languages of the participants lack an English-like article system, Crosthwaite (2016) noted differences among Chinese, Korean, and Thai learners, and Ionin et al. (2022) found very similar results between Korean and Mandarin learners in some experimental conditions. These results indicated that the absence of typology does not set a fixed course of acquisition, but instead creates a learning problem. Therefore, error analysis of articles in multilingual classrooms should focus on the learner's L1 rather than blanket norms for "Asian learners" or "article-less languages," because fine-grained typological differences may influence the resources learners have to form English noun phrases.

2.4.Typological Absence of Articles in Mëranaw

This study focuses on the relationship between English article marking and Mëranaw nominal structure. Following Aragon (2023a), the manuscript uses Mëranaw in its own discussion; Maranao is retained only when it appears in the title or terminology of a cited source. Mëranaw does not have a dedicated article system that directly matches the English contrast among a, an, the, and Ø. However, it would be inaccurate to describe Mëranaw as having no nominal marking or no resources for expressing reference. Aragon (2023b) describes the Mëranaw noun phrase as having an obligatory head noun, while a nominal marker may occur before it. The description identifies nominal markers such as so, sa, o, and ko in different grammatical relations, as well as plural markers, linkers, adjectives, and numerals. Importantly, wata is the Mëranaw lexical noun meaning "child"; it is not an article. In Aragon's examples, the form so wata is analyzed as an absolutive nominal marker plus the noun wata, with an English translation "the child." The English translation does not mean that so is equivalent to the English definite article the. Rather, the Mëranaw marker signals a grammatical relation within the nominal system, while English articles encode distinctions associated with definiteness and indefiniteness. This distinction is central to the present study because it identifies a possible cross-linguistic difference without treating the two systems as directly interchangeable.

The comparison must nevertheless be interpreted cautiously. A typological difference between Mëranaw and English does not, by itself, establish that an individual learner error was caused by first-language transfer. Mëranaw nominal markers organize grammatical relations and noun-phrase structure, while English articles participate in the expression of definiteness, specificity, and countability in context. These systems overlap in some translation outcomes but are not functionally identical. Aragon (2023a) describes Mëranaw as a predicate-initial

language whose clauses may contain nominal phrases as arguments, while Aragon (2023b) provides a more detailed account of nominal phrase components and markers. Together, these descriptions offer a relevant linguistic context for interpreting the learner corpus. In this study, therefore, the absence of a direct English-like article contrast in Mëranaw is treated as a possible background condition for cross-linguistic influence, not as a sufficient explanation for all article omissions or substitutions. The analysis also considers intralingual processes, including overgeneralization and incomplete application of English article rules.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1.Research Design

The study used a descriptive, corpus-based research design to analyze the errors committed by Mëranaw-speaking ESL learners in the use of articles in English. A descriptive design was used because the study was designed to identify and describe the patterns of article errors that occur in the writing process without changing the variables or introducing an instructional intervention. In the meantime, the corpus-based approach offered a systematic way of studying the learners' real written language in a set of reflective journal entries. Corpus-based research allows researchers to study naturally occurring language data and to discover common linguistic patterns in their context of use, as Biber (1988, 1998) and Brezina (2018) have discussed. This design was especially appropriate for the present study because the use of articles is a grammatical distinction that occurs within the noun phrase and larger linguistic context. The study was based on the Error Analysis theory of Corder (1967) and the Interlanguage Theory of Selinker (1972), which treated errors as potential systematic evidence of the development of L2 knowledge. Therefore, the descriptive, corpus-based design was suitable for the study of the types of morphosyntactic errors made with the English articles, the grammatical structures in which these errors occurred, and the possible interlingual and intralingual factors associated with these errors.

3.2.Corpora

The study drew 1,280 English journal entries from 80 Senior High School students at MSU-Binidayan Community High School in Lanao del Sur, Philippines. The corpus was collected over a two-month period, when students wrote two journal entries each week as part of their coursework. In contrast to the more isolated and contrived sentences generated for grammatical analysis, the journal tasks asked learners to write personal reflections and narratives on the novel they were reading in the course, providing naturally occurring examples of extended English writing. The minimum number of paragraphs required in each reflective journal was two, which provided enough syntactic and contextual information to identify morphosyntactic patterns related to the articles. The resulting corpus thus contains a large amount of authentic learner-produced English for systematic analysis of patterns of article use and error.

To ensure consistency and analytic validity, specific inclusion/exclusion criteria were set before analyzing the corpus. Only entries that were entirely in English and had at least two paragraphs were included, as this enabled the examination of English articles both in complete noun phrases and in wider grammatical constructions within these linguistic structures. Journal entries that included code-switching, Taglish, and translanguaging were omitted because the amount of material in the other language(s) could affect interpretation of article-related errors and make it harder to determine whether the error was linked to multilingual language use or to English morphosyntax. In addition, journals with fewer than two paragraphs were omitted

because they did not provide enough context to identify patterns and draw accurate conclusions about errors. With this, all entries were collected, then systematically coded and analyzed according to these criteria before the final corpus was processed. The aim of the selection process was to guarantee that the corpus included extended and similar samples of the learners' English writing production.

3.3.Data Gathering and Analysis Procedure

The learner corpus data was gathered and analyzed systematically through four phases of data generation and analysis to ensure systematic collection, screening, and preparation of the learner corpus. The procedure aimed to shift from naturally occurring learner texts to identifying, classifying, structuring, and interpreting article-related morphosyntactic errors in context. The data were treated according to predetermined criteria for each phase to ensure consistency in data treatment and alignment with the three research questions. The process also aimed to keep the learners' written production as authentic as possible and to generate a large enough, reliable corpus for linguistic analysis.

Phase I: Collection and Multi-Stage Screening. The process began with collecting the raw corpus, which comprised 1,280 journal entries generated by 80 Grade 11 students enrolled in the Reading and Writing course at the MSU-Binidayan Community High School during the second semester of School Year 2025–2026. Students submitted two journal entries every week from February 1–March 31, 2026, for a total of 16 journal entries for each student during the eight-week collection period. In their Reading and Writing class, students were asked to submit journal assignments involving personal reflections and narratives on the provided novel. After applying the inclusion criteria laid out for the corpus, only 467 journal entries that included at least two paragraphs and were written in full English were included. The remaining 813 entries that contained Taglish, code-switching, and translanguaging, as well as entries with fewer than 2 paragraphs, were not included in the corpus because they did not meet the study's linguistic and structural requirements. Next, the entries were assigned a unique identification code so they could be organized systematically without violating the confidentiality of the student writers. These texts were then converted into standardized plain-text files *(.txt)* for corpus-based processing and structured according to the defined corpus structure. This learner corpus was then analyzed in *AntConc* (Version 4.x) for the definite article the and the indefinite articles a and an, as well as for contexts where the zero article (Ø) was anticipated and/or present.

Phase II: Article-Error Identification, Classification, and Quantification. In the second phase, the errors learners made in the validated learner corpus were identified and classified at the morphosyntactic level of articles. To locate the use of a, an, and the and examine the surrounding linguistic context, the corpus was first examined using the concordance and Key Word in Context (KWIC) functions of *AntConc.* All potential errors were then checked at the sentence level in context to determine whether the article use was a genuine morphosyntactic error in the intended English construction, or a stylistic variation or acceptable alternative. In analyzing the errors, the principles of Error Analysis as developed by Corder (1967) and the descriptive taxonomy used by Dulay et al. (1982) were followed, and four main error categories were identified: omission, addition, misformation or substitution, and misordering. Each error type was documented and coded systematically in an organized *MS Excel* database. The errors in the articles were then identified by frequency and percentage, providing a distribution and relative frequency of each error type to address the first research question.

Phase III: Grammatical-Structure Mapping. The third phase addressed the second research question: the grammatical structures in which article errors occurred. Each identified error was not treated as a lexical error, but as part of the noun phrase and the broader syntactic context. The surrounding context of each error was retrieved using the KWIC concordance function in *AntConc*, and the constructions related to each error were manually coded based on the characteristics of the constructions. The analysis made a distinction between grammatical situations with simple noun phrases (e.g., "*the book"*), adjective-modified noun phrases (e.g., "*the interesting book"*), prepositional phrases following a noun (e.g., "*the book on the table*"), and noun phrases as subjects and direct objects in clauses. Where applicable, phrase-structure representations were used to delineate the article's position within the noun phrase and its relationship to the head noun and modifiers. The frequencies and percentages of the identified structural categories were then calculated to find the environments in which article errors were most likely to occur.

Phase IV: Interpretation of Possible Interlingual and Intralingual Factors. The fourth phase involved qualitative interpretation of the identified error patterns in terms of potential interlingual and intralingual factor(s). This phase drew mainly on Interlanguage Theory (Selinker, 1972) and recent studies on cross-linguistic influence, along with a somewhat limited application of the Contrastive Analysis view to identify possible structural differences between Mëranaw and English that could give rise to L1 influence. In the interlingual dimension, the lack of an English-equivalent article system in Mëranaw was given special consideration, as was the potential role of differences in nominal marking and noun-phrase structure in producing article-less or otherwise non-target-like English noun phrases. Regarding the intralingual dimension, the analysis included patterns that could reasonably be interpreted as related to learners' evolving proficiency in English, such as overgeneralization, incomplete rule application, analogy, and the development of false hypotheses for article selection. Notably, these factors were used to suggest possible contributing factors but were not proven as causes because the corpus itself does not provide evidence of the cognitive processes used to produce each individual error; it only shows the resulting production. Hence, the qualitative interpretations were motivated by recurring linguistic patterns, appropriate grammatical contexts, and the results from previous studies on L2 acquisition of articles in English.

Across these four stages, the study systematically moved from raw learner writing to a screened corpus, defined error patterns and structural distributions, and provided theoretical analysis. This procedure kept the analysis directly related to the three research questions and preserved the authenticity of learners' naturally occurring written production. The corpus-based procedures also enabled the study to consider the qualitative interpretation of the contexts in which article errors arose, while the manual linguistic analysis provided quantitative evidence, such as frequency and distribution.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section introduces and analyzes the results of the corpus-based analysis of the morphosyntactic errors made by L2 learners with respect to the articles a, an, and the in English. The results are presented in four sections: the types of article errors found, the grammatical structures in which the errors occurred, and the potential intralingual and interlingual factors associated with the errors. The discussion draws on representative examples from the learner

corpus and compares them with previous studies of English article acquisition and learner error analysis, as well as Mëranaw linguistics.

4.1.Types of Article Errors

This section presents the classification of English article errors identified within the learner corpus. The distribution and classification of these errors are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Morphosyntactic Errors of English Articles

Article Error	Frequency	Percentage	Major Typological Trend Within the Corpus
Omission	312	59.3%	*Frequent deletion of required articles before singular count nouns and first-mention referents, e.g., "read first chapter," "find conch shell," and "build shelter."*
Addition	74	14.1%	*Overuse of articles, particularly the, in generic, institutional, or otherwise non-specific contexts, e.g., "go to the school," "in the life," and "at the home."*
Misformation	129	24.5%	*Substitution or incorrect selection of a, an, and the, particularly misuse of the for indefinite reference and a/an in inappropriate contexts, e.g., "a island," "a moon," and "the life is hard."*
Misordering	11	2.1%	*Rare displacement or structural misplacement of articles within noun phrases, e.g., "the boys behavior show" and "the life real is hard."*
Total	**526**	**100.0%**	Omission is the most frequent error type in the corpus.

An omission pattern was especially noticeable for contexts with a singular count noun and newly introduced referents. In the excerpt "Today I read the part where Ralph and Peggy ***find conch shell they*** use it to sell the other boys. I think this moment is important because it is where they begin to try to organize themselves," the verb phrase find conch shell has the noun phrase conch shell as a direct object, but no indefinite article a. This shows how learners form noun phrases without using the determiners required by the standard English syntax. The same is true of the noun phrases "leader of group" (no indefinite article) and "in difficult situation" (no required determiner).

Additions and misformations were found, with learners providing an article that did not match the context of the discourse or grammar. For example, the phrase *"go to the school"* in *"During the first week of Ramadan, I will* ***go to the school*** *while the rainy season continues throughout the week every morning. I woke up early for my meal before fasting. Then I prepare for school from Monday to Friday. I attend my classes, listen to my teachers, and work on my lessons sometimes."* The results suggest that the difficulty of the article was not a single, consistent error type but involved, on the one hand, underproduction and, on the other hand, inappropriate production.

The omission results confirm previous studies of learner groups whose L1 system lacked an article system like English. Crosthwaite (2016) conducted a learner-corpus study on article use in English among L1 speakers of Mandarin, Korean, and Thai and reported that errors in article use were not completely resolved and that accuracy depended on semantic and discourse context. In turn, Derkach and Alexopoulou (2024) noted that article accuracy tended to be low among article-less L1 learners and that article performance depended on factors such as number, countability, specificity, and noun modification.

The present finding also corroborates that of Crosthwaite and Choy (2016), which involved a study of the difficulties encountered by Filipino learners of English in using articles. The amount of misformation and addition, however, indicates that the learners were not simply mimicking the zero-article pattern of their L1; they were building and restructuring an emerging L2 article system. This is in line with Sanosi et al. (2023), who warned against accounting for all types of article errors exclusively as L1 interference and highlighted the importance of developmental processes or intralingual processes.

4.2.Grammatical Structures of Article Errors

This section examines the specific morphosyntactic environments and structural contexts in which English article errors were committed by L2 learners. The distribution and classification of these errors across various grammatical structures are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Article Errors Committed in Grammatical Structures

Morphosyntactic Structure	Error Count	Typical Error Type	Structural Description	Corpus-Based Trend
Simple Noun Phrase (NP: Det + N)	211	Omission	NP → (Det) + N	Missing articles before singular count nouns, e.g., *"read first chapter," "find conch shell."*
Adjective-Modified NP (NP: Det + Adj + N)	96	Omission / Misformation	NP → (Det) + AdjP + N	Observed examples include article errors in modified noun phrases, e.g., "a important moment"; this count does not establish a higher error rate.
Complex NP with Prepositional Phrase (NP: Det + N + PP)	72	Omission / Misformation	NP → (Det) + N + PP	Difficulty marking definiteness in extended noun phrases, e.g., *"leader of group."*
Subject Position (NP as Clause Subject)	51	Omission / Addition	S → NP + VP	Missing or overused articles in sentence-initial noun phrases, e.g., *"boys are starting changing."*
Direct Object Position (NP as Object)	43	Omission	VP → V + NP	Frequent article omission after transitive verbs, e.g., *"build shelter," "make fire."*
Subject Complement (NP after Linking Verb)	28	Misformation	VP → Vcop + NP	Confusion between *a* and *the* in identity or role statements, e.g., *"he is leader."*
Generic / Abstract NP Contexts	25	Addition / Misformation	NP → Det + N	Overuse of *the* with generic or abstract nouns, e.g., *"the life," "the people."*
Total	526			Distribution of observed errors across the coded categories; not a measure of relative difficulty.

The values in Table 2 are counts of identified errors assigned to each grammatical-structure category. They are not error rates because the total number of obligatory article-use opportunities in each category was not calculated. Simple noun phrases contained the largest number of observed errors (211), followed by adjective-modified noun phrases (96) and complex noun phrases with prepositional phrases (72). Errors were also recorded in noun phrases functioning as subjects (51), direct objects (43), and subject complements (28), as well

as in generic or abstract noun phrases (25). These figures describe how the 526 identified errors were distributed across the coded categories. They cannot establish that one structure was more difficult or had a higher probability of error than another. They indicate only where the errors identified in this corpus were observed most often.

The corpus examples show article errors across noun phrases of varying structural complexity. In simple noun phrases, learners made utterances like *"Today I* ***read first chapter*** *of Lord of Lies, I think about what happened to the boys."* omitting the expected article. Errors were also found in expressions with the introduction of modifiers, for example, in *"This part of Sir by Madeleine Miller shows* ***a important moment*** *in services life where she begins to realize the difference between her and her father Helios..."* which indicates that article selection can become difficult when the noun is preceded by an adjective. In this example, however, the error reflects difficulty applying the phonological distinction between *a* and *an*, rather than showing that adjective modification itself necessarily causes more errors.

For more complex noun phrases, expressions like *"leader of group"* in "*When the coach made a loud sound it's spread a clock across the island because Ralph was the one who blew it. It made him seem like the* ***leader of group."*** illustrate problems in maintaining adequate definiteness marking when there is additional information that follows the noun. Errors in the selection of the article also occurred in the wrong position of the article, which shows that the choice of article was not limited to the use of the article in a particular grammatical function, but was used wherever there was a need to form an NP that needs an article.

The error distribution is concentrated in noun phrases, which aligns with the multifactoriality of article acquisition reported in recent research. Derkach and Alexopoulou (2024) found that article accuracy is significantly affected by noun-phrase characteristics such as number, countability, specificity, syntactic position, and prenominal modification. Their findings give a very relevant account of the present finding, namely that article errors occur across noun phrases with different structural and semantic characteristics. However, the present frequency data alone do not establish that structurally or semantically more complex noun phrases necessarily have a higher error rate, because the analysis is based on the number of errors rather than the number of possible article-use opportunities in each structure.

Similarly, Similarly, Park (2023) demonstrated how corpus analysis can reveal recurring article-use patterns among learners and inform pedagogical decisions. The findings of the present study also corroborate the findings of Crosthwaite (2016), who conducted a corpus-based study and found that the accuracy of articles is dependent on the semantic and discourse context in which the noun phrases are used. The results indicated that it would therefore be inappropriate to teach articles separately from noun-phrase instruction.

4.3.Intralingual Factors Associated with Article Errors

This section examines the internal L2 developmental processes and cognitive factors contributing to the article errors identified in the corpus. The specific intralingual sources of these errors are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Intralingual Factors Associated with Article-Related Morphosyntactic Errors

Potential Intralingual Pattern	Frequency	Percentage of 526 Errors	Representative Corpus Evidence
Overgeneralization	92	17.5%	*"the life," "the people," "the happiness"*
Incomplete Rule Application	78	14.8%	"a important," "a island"
False Hypothesis Formation	42	8.0%	*"the leader"* for first mention; *"a sun"* for a unique referent
Ignorance of Rule Restrictions	27	5.1%	*"the life is hard"* in a generic/abstract context
Total Intralingual Factor	**239**	**45.4%**	**Developmental patterns were evident across the corpus**

Table 3 summarizes 239 errors interpreted as potentially intralingual, representing 45.4% of the 526 identified errors. The most frequent patterns were overgeneralization (92; 17.5%), incomplete rule application (78; 14.8%), false-hypothesis formation (42; 8.0%), and apparent disregard of rule restrictions (27; 5.1%). These labels describe interpretations of recurring forms in the corpus. They suggest that some errors are compatible with learners' developing knowledge of English articles, but they do not establish the cognitive process behind any individual production.

The following are corpus examples of these developmental patterns. The definite article is overgeneralized, as it seems to apply to the whole group instead of individual members. For example, *"the life"* in the statement *"The story teaches that **the life** is unpredictable and true happiness often comes from simple every moment rather than big adventures".* The same pattern is evident in the phrase *"the people"* in the sentence *"Reading about Zeus presides over Olympus and learning about catch of the 12 main gods made me realize how much the storage show what **the people** are really like even though they're about partial immortal beings Zeus as the king is the most powerful, but he isn't perfect."*

On the other hand, the incomplete application of the relationship between the indefinite article and the phonological form of the subsequent word is revealed in forms like *"a important"* and *"a island"*. These examples specifically indicate difficulty applying the *a/an* allomorphic rule based on the sound that follows the article. The expressions *"the leader"* (for a first-mentioned, non-established referent) and *"a sun"* (for a unique referent) further point to a deficient understanding of definiteness and uniqueness. These examples show that students sometimes understood the rules of articles but used them too generally and/or did not take discourse and semantic context into account.

In line with the above, Sanosi et al. (2023) found that many errors in EFL learners' article use were not easily accounted for by L1 interference, but rather by developmental processes in learners' L2 interlanguages. Similarly, Abdon and Barrios (2024) found overgeneralization,

countability, translation, specificity, and definiteness to be relevant to errors in article production by Filipino students of English. The findings in the present study corroborate the above by showing that errors such as "a important" and "the life" can arise and signal difficulties even among learners who have mastered the general meaning that English nouns might require an article. Thus, the results support the idea that article acquisition is a process of gradual restructuring of an interlanguage system, whereby learners shift from simplified or overgeneralized rules to more contextually sensitive article choices.

4.4.Interlingual Factors Associated with Article Errors

This section examines the cross-linguistic influences stemming from the learners' native language, Mëranaw, that contribute to article errors in English. The breakdown of these interlingual factors is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Interlingual Factors Associated with Article-Related Morphosyntactic Errors

Potential Interlingual Pattern	Frequency	Percentage of 526 Errors	Representative Corpus Evidence
Zero-Article Transfer	164	31.2%	*"read first chapter," "find conch shell," "build shelter"*
Bare Noun Phrase Pattern	71	13.5%	Persistent article omission across simple and modified NPs
Reduced/Non-equivalent Definiteness Marking	52	9.9%	Failure to overtly distinguish new and established referents
Total Interlingual Factors	**287**	**54.6%**	**Interlingual patterns slightly exceeded intralingual patterns**

Table 4 summarizes 287 errors (54.6%) interpreted as potentially interlingual, compared with 239 errors (45.4%) interpreted as potentially intralingual. Within the interlingual category, zero-article patterns were most frequent (164; 31.2%), followed by bare noun phrase patterns (71; 13.5%) and reduced or non-equivalent definiteness marking (52; 9.9%). These figures represent the researchers' qualitative classification of observed errors, not independently verified causes.

However, classifying these patterns as interlingual does not mean every individual error was directly caused by Mëranaw. Errors were classified as potentially interlingual when their form matched the absence or non-equivalent encoding of article-related functions in the learners' L1, particularly recurrent bare-noun constructions in contexts where English requires an overt article. Because learner errors may have multiple sources, these patterns are interpreted as evidence of possible L1 influence rather than definitive proof of transfer. This distinction is important because article omission can also result from developmental simplification within the L2 system.

This interpretation is particularly evident in the corpus evidence where bare noun phrases like "**shelter**" occur repeatedly following transitive verbs. For instance, in the excerpt "Simone

stand[s] out as a kind and helpful character even when other[s] avoid work, he helped rough, build shelter and stay calm. This show[s] that even in [a] difficult situation[s] some people still choose to do what[’s] right,” the transitive verb “build” takes the bare noun phrase “shelter” without the necessary indefinite article a. There are also similar omissions in prepositional phrases, for example, “**in difficult situation**” in “And [in] this part, Ralph and Peggy find the conch shell they use it **to the call** the other boys[,] it shows that even in [a] difficult situation, they still try to work together and organize themselves.” In this passage, the learner constructs the prepositional phrase in difficult situation without an overt determiner, and also makes an addition error by adding an unnecessary article in the infinitive verb structure “to the call”. The following combined examples show that learners produce the general lexical and syntactic structure of a phrase, but have difficulties with the distribution of the standard articles in noun and prepositional phrases, resulting in the omission of articles in noun phrases and the addition of articles in non-nominal contexts.

The comparison with previous research also requires attention to the specific linguistic background of each learner group. Crosthwaite and Choy (2016) examined Tagalog-speaking learners and discussed how ANG, NG, and SA can express distinctions relevant to reference and may provide partial positive transfer in English article use. Abdon and Barrios (2024) examined Tagalog-speaking pre-service teachers and used stimulated-recall interviews to explore the explanations learners gave for their article choices; addition was their most frequent error type. These studies demonstrate that Philippine languages should not all be treated as having the same nominal system or producing the same article-error profile. In the present study, Aragon’s (2023b) description is particularly relevant because it identifies Mëranaw nominal markers, including so, sa, o, and ko, and explains their grammatical functions. The lexical noun wata means “child”; it is not an article, and the marker so in so wata is analyzed as an absolutive nominal marker rather than as a direct equivalent of the English article the. This distinction supports a cautious account of possible cross-linguistic influence: Mëranaw and English organize nominal reference differently, but the present corpus cannot prove that this difference caused any specific error. The observed patterns may also reflect learners’ developing English article system.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the morphosyntactic errors in the usage of articles in English, especially in the context of ESL learners whose L1 is Mëranaw, to determine the types of errors, to map the grammatical structures of these errors, and to analyze the intralingual and interlingual factors involved in them. The study successfully illustrated that article selection difficulty is a systematic phenomenon that is multi-faceted and influenced by the interaction between the native language influence and the second language acquisition processes in L1 Mëranaw learners, through the corpus-based analysis of extended student journal writing.

First, as far as error types are concerned, the article omission errors, which were much more prevalent than the other types of errors (such as misformation and addition), suggest that learners’ problems are not just in deciding on the correct form of the article (a, an, or the), but they also have difficulties in recognizing contexts in which English syntax requires an overt article. Language instruction pedagogically should not be limited to error correction and should have students learn the functional necessity of determiners in English noun phrases.

Second, with respect to grammatical structures, the largest number of errors occurred in simple noun phrases (211), followed by adjective-modified noun phrases (96) and complex noun phrases with prepositional phrases (72). These are counts of observed errors, not error rates. Because the study did not calculate the total number of obligatory article-use opportunities in each category, the findings cannot establish that one structure was more difficult than another or that structural complexity was associated with lower accuracy. The results instead show that errors appeared across several noun-phrase forms and syntactic functions. Teaching may therefore integrate article selection with noun-phrase analysis, including head nouns, modifiers, countability, and discourse context, without assuming a demonstrated complexity effect.

Third, the evidence of overgeneralization, Incomplete rule application, and false hypothesis formation from intralingual factors suggests that L2 learners are actively developing their interlanguages in which they are constantly testing and reworking rules for definiteness, uniqueness, and phonological constraints in English. It is important that corrective feedback focuses on conceptual underlying rules (e.g., uniqueness vs. genericness, a vs. an allomorphy) so as to lead learners through natural developmental stages and not just as careless errors.

A further 287 errors (54.6%) were classified as potentially interlingual, compared with 239 (45.4%) classified as potentially intralingual. The discussion of Mëranaw grammar suggests a possible linguistic context for these patterns: Mëranaw nominal markers and English articles do not perform identical grammatical functions. In particular, wata is a lexical noun meaning "child," while so in so wata is a nominal marker, not an English-like article. These structural differences may be relevant to learners' developing English article use, but the present corpus does not demonstrate direct transfer or establish causation. The findings should be interpreted as evidence of patterns compatible with possible cross-linguistic influence alongside intralingual development.

This study is limited by its reliance on written journal entries from Grade 11 learners in one institutional setting. The corpus makes it possible to examine naturally produced writing, but it does not provide direct evidence of learners' real-time decisions or the causes of individual errors. In addition, because the total number of obligatory article-use opportunities was not counted for each grammatical structure, structure-specific error rates and comparisons of relative difficulty could not be calculated. Future research could combine learner corpora with stimulated-recall interviews, elicited production tasks, or longitudinal data to investigate article selection more directly. Comparative studies involving Mëranaw-speaking learners and learners from other Philippine language backgrounds, including Tagalog and Cebuano-speaking groups, could also clarify which patterns are language-specific and which are shared across learner populations.

REFERENCES

Abdon, M. M., & Barrios, A. (2024). Exploring cross-linguistic influence from L1 Tagalog to L2 English in article use. *AsTEN Journal of Teacher Education, 8*. https://doi.org/10.56278/asten.v8i.2778

Ahn, H. (2021). From interlanguage grammar to target grammar in L2 processing of definiteness as uniqueness. *Second Language Research, 37*(1), 87–113. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267658319868003

Aragon, A. V. (2023a). Clause structure and types in Mëranaw. *Modern Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics, 2*(1), 8–17. https://jhkpress.com/index.php/mlll/article/view/82

Aragon, A. V. (2023b). A grammar of Mëranaw language. *Journal of Social Work and Science Education, 4*(1), 198–213. https://doi.org/10.52690/jswse.v4i1.364

Biber, D. (1988). *Variation across speech and writing*. Cambridge University Press.

Biber, D., Conrad, S., & Reppen, R. (1998). *Corpus linguistics: Investigating language structure and use*. Cambridge University Press.

Brezina, V. (2018). *Statistics in corpus linguistics: A practical guide*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316410899

Corder, S. P. (1967). The significance of learners' errors. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 5*(1–4), 161–170. https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1967.5.1-4.161

Crosthwaite, P. (2016). L2 English article use by L1 speakers of article-less languages: A learner corpus study. *International Journal of Learner Corpus Research, 2*(1), 68–100. https://doi.org/10.1075/ijlcr.2.1.03cro

Crosthwaite, P., & Choy, L. L. Y. (2016). A learner corpus investigation of Filipino L2 English article use: The way forward for language teachers. *Asian EFL Journal: Professional Teaching Articles, 93*, 4–23. https://hub.hku.hk/handle/10722/225766

Department of Education. (2016). *K to 12 basic education curriculum: English curriculum guide*. https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/English-CG.pdf

Department of Education. (2023). *MATATAG K to 10 curriculum: English curriculum guide*. https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/MATATAG-ENGLISH-CG-G4-and-7.pdf

Derkach, K., & Alexopoulou, T. (2024). Definite and indefinite article accuracy in learner English: A multifactorial analysis. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 46*(3), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263123000463

Dulay, H. C., Burt, M. K., & Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Language two*. Oxford University Press.

Götz, S., & Mukherjee, J. (Eds.). (2019). *Learner corpora and language teaching*. John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/scl.92

Ionin, T., Choi, S. H., & Liu, Q. (2022). What transfers (or doesn't) in the second language acquisition of English articles by learners from article-less native languages? *Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism, 12*(2), 133–162. https://doi.org/10.1075/lab.19057.ion

Jiang, L. (2015). The effectiveness of the continuation task on second language learning of English articles. *English Language Teaching, 8*(11), 79–89. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v8n11p79

Larsson, T., Paquot, M., & Plonsky, L. (2020). Inter-rater reliability in learner corpus research: Insights from a collaborative study on adverb placement. *International Journal of Learner Corpus Research*. https://doi.org/10.1075/ijlcr.20001.lar

Park, S. (2023). Corpus analysis of L2 English article usage patterns & pedagogical implications. *Cogent Education, 10*(1), Article 2197662. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2197662

Sanosi, A. B., Khan, A. A., & Duddu, P. R. (2023). Reconsidering Arab EFL learners' article errors: A corpus-based study. *International Journal of Modern Education, 25*(2), 607–623. https://www.ijmejournal.org/ijme/index.php/ijme/article/view/v25-2-42.html

Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 10*(1–4), 209–231. https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1972.10.1-4.209