



Difficulties In Using Prepositions In The English Language Correctly Among Efl Students At Jordanian Universities

Mohammad Musleh Al-Bawaleez¹, Ahmad Taufik Hidayah Abdullah²

¹Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Terengganu, Malaysia Muslah324@gmail.com

²Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Terengganu, Malaysia
Taufikhidayah@uniza.edu.my

APA Citation:

Al-Bawaleez, M.M., Abdullah, A.T.H., (2023). Difficulties In Using Prepositions In The English Language Correctly Among Efl Students At Jordanian Universities, *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 19(3), 1-11; 2023

Submission Date: 10/07/2023

Acceptance Date: 15/09/2023

ABSTRACT

The process of learning a new language, like education in general, is challenging. However, every learning process has unique conflicts and confrontations of its own. Non-native English speakers have issues and challenges as they acquire the language, which may resemble those faced by other non-native English speakers in some ways. Thus, mastering English prepositions might be challenging for non-native Arabic speakers of the language who are fluent in English. This study aimed to explain the issues that Arabic-speaking students who are studying English encounter when acquiring and learning English prepositions, as well as the causes of these issues. The main language barrier and the learners' Arabic mother tongue impact are shown to be the leading causes of this difficulty in acquiring this crucial linguistic and grammatical component. This paper concludes that students who speak Arabic as their first language highlight the value of contrastive analysis when studying English articles. This is because Arabic speakers who speak their first language in English have a very difficult time using English articles.

Keywords: errors, mother tongue, prepositions, university students in Jordan.

1. Introduction

Prepositions are an integral element of the English language's rules and are frequently used in writing. The Ministry of Education has adopted the fundamentals of the English language as a foreign language rather than a second language, as is the case in the majority of countries around the world. This is why university students struggle with writing, particularly with preposition usage and their diversity of meanings. Numerous studies indicate prepositional difficulties in the English language in the majority of countries around the globe, including those where English is the native language, the sentence under consideration and accurate usage description are components of correct grammar usage (Akhtar, 2017).

Email Id : Muslah324@gmail.com

According to research in the field of second language acquisition, preposition errors are the most prevalent type of error made by English learners of all backgrounds (Monaikul & Di Eugenio, 2020). Linguists have discussed whether complex prepositions should be constituents, but none have provided a dynamic model that can predict what construal a pattern imposes and account for non-spatial readings (Zhao & Fan, 2021). Prepositions are not "empty words" in Eco linguistic terms, the most crucial is that there are arguments to prove that "complex prepositions" are complicated for students but constructions of the type "in + NOUN + of" (Couto, 2016). The issue of writing challenges, particularly in relation to the use of prepositions, constituted a significant challenge this study aimed to investigate a methodology for predicting the usage of prepositions among students, Participants were presented with phrases containing blanks and were required to fill in the spaces without the aid of multiple-choice options. This paper aimed to assess the participants' proficiency in preposition usage and identify any difficulties they had, as well as their understanding of different types of prepositions.

Other research even if it results in less guesswork, a previous study found that the use of guessing has a negative impact on cooperative learning, it seems desirable to increase learning through collaboration and thereby decrease the amount of sheer guesswork (Harianingsih & Jusoh, 2022). According to (Seyoum et al., 2022), the majority of L1 interferences occurred in the use of prepositions and subsequent vocabulary. Participants demonstrated greater transmission when they were making guesses on the meaning of given vocabulary items, phrases or sentences. non-native speakers make prepositional writing errors, it is not uncommon for students to frequently make errors in the usage of prepositions (Arjan et al., 2013). According to statistical data, it has been seen that Jordanian students frequently encounter challenges related to spelling, word order, prepositions, and subject-verb agreement. Furthermore, it has been noted that these students tend to commit grammatical errors in their written work (Al-khasawneh, 2014). Based on the aforementioned findings, researchers have seen a persistent issue associated with this particular strain. As a result, research objectives were established to direct our analysis. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, it has been suggested that EFL teachers could benefit from utilizing paragraph-writing strategies provided by Jordanian university professors. Additionally, it has been recognized that error detection has an impact on education and teaching practices in Jordan.

Research inquiries are created after setting goals. ESL instructors and ELLs in universities and institutions find teaching English abroad difficult, some international classes use old teaching methods. Students who sit, listen, and wait for the teacher to talk about English often end up dissatisfied because teachers forget that students have different learning styles and cultural backgrounds.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Prepositions

Prepositions are short syllables that contribute considerably to the overall meaning of a phrase, they elucidate the connections among entities, persons, and geographical positions. Furthermore, they play a crucial role in establishing the rhythmic pattern of the sentence. Prepositions serve the purpose of establishing connections between nouns and other components of speech within a given phrase. Prepositions play a crucial role in the process of discourse, although they tend to occur in conjunction with other words. Prepositions are a significant category of function words, serving to denote various relationships between their

complements and the preceding constituents of a sentence. Prepositions have the ability to indicate a range of functional links, encompassing temporal, spatial, and directional aspects. The central concept and significance of employing prepositions in the English language, as well as a review of previous research on the challenges students face when learning English prepositions. The process of learning a second language is considered to be complex and fraught with obstacles according to (Alotaibi et al., 2018), learning English prepositions is intricately tied to the acquisition and learning process, as well as the meaning and communicative dimensions, this means that students of English as a Second Language must understand the grammatical norms governing the use of prepositions. Several scholars have cited mother tongue interference as the cause of difficulties in acquiring a foreign language. For instance, (Chen, 2020) asserted that foreign language acquisition is one of the most challenging aspects of learning, as typically students who acquire a second language in a foreign language context often have little exposure to the language outside of the school. One way is to use new technology to improve learning by allowing students to communicate and engage with native speakers that significant number of English prepositions are monosyllabic or have very few syllables, which can make them difficult to identify, especially when speaking (Lorincz & Gordon, 2012). Therefore, the language learners may not be proficient enough to differentiate prepositions in rapid, natural speech. Additionally, the contextual use of prepositions varies from one language to another, frequently resulting in a negative syntactic transfer (Nuri, 2014). In light of this, Rafiq et al., (2021) proposed a new strategy dubbed Cognitive Linguistics to effectively comprehend and employ prepositions. This strategy enables students to form a locative relationship by subconsciously forming mental images for each preposition with a dominant meaning.

2.2 The Preposition Problem

Prepositions represent 14 percent of all words in most languages are prepositions. According to Utami, (2018), there are three categories of prepositional phrase problems: (Incorrect preposition) (Omitted preposition) (Redundant preposition)" Considering the three types of preposition problems, as Bram (2005) notes, the students' problematic dialects, their error rates are reportedly among the highest of all languages. Abolhassani & Mehmandust (2015) analysed a small corpus of advanced-intermediate French as a Second Language (FSL) learners and found that prepositional choice accounted for 17.2% of all errors. Because they are both functions and because words, prepositions, and determiners are frequently processed similarly by automated error detection and correction techniques, are frequently processed similarly. Prepositional errors, on the other hand, are frequently semantically motivated, so a more nuanced approach may be necessary. Determiners, on the other hand, only vary in the register of quantity and are not governed by semantics. Two primary factors contribute to SLLs' prepositional errors. The first type results from ambiguous words in the target language. An L2 writer working in English, for example, might make the error of using the locational preposition "at" when "in" would have been more precise. Kaweera, (2013) found that second-language (L2) prepositions can cause confusion with their native (L1) counterparts. When translating "I go to Montreal" and "I go to Argentina," a student of French as a Second Language may erroneously use "à" when the precise forms are "à Montréal" and "en Argentine," respectively. Keep in mind that the scenario varies significantly between languages.

2.3 Previous study

An investigation of the syntactic and semantic mistakes made by Arabs learning English as a second language was conducted by Obeidat (1986). To gather the data for analysis, 150 students in the English department first- and second-year at Yarmouk University in Jordan submitted written compositions. Syntactic and semantic mistakes were distinguished and split into thirteen types. These difficulties were covered and clarified. The study's findings demonstrated that interference from the mother tongue was a significant cause of errors in students' compositions. The findings of this study also identified additional sources of errors, both linguistic and nonlinguistic.

Al-Sindy (1994) conducted a study to look at the syntactic mistakes made by Saudi first-year students learning English as a second language. To determine which syntactic errors happened more frequently and what factors led to such frequent syntactic errors, these errors were identified and analyzed. The information was gathered by reviewing 40 student writings from Saudi Arabia. He employed contrastive analysis and error analysis as his two methods. The study showed that students transferred their original language, Arabic, into the target language, English, and did so successfully. The findings also demonstrated how learners made a significant amount of mistakes while using particular grammatical structures, including prepositions, articles, copula, and auxiliaries.

Al-Buainain (2007) examined the issue causing students' mistakes in writing classes, particularly Writing I, Writing II, and Advanced Writing at Qatar University's Foreign Languages Department hosted this study there. For the first writing course, data was gathered from 40 exam scripts written by 40 students. The researcher was able to find and classify faults using an error analysis approach. According to the results, improving pupils' writing abilities may depend on identifying and correcting systematic mistakes they made and finding a solution is the duty of the educators.

Köroğlu (2014) studied the grammatical mistakes made by Turkish students studying English as a foreign language at Gazi University in Turkey. 23 fourth-year students comprised the study's sample. Essays that persuade the reader were required of them. The researcher found and categorized flaws in those essays using an error analysis approach. The results showed that participants made a variety of mistakes, including overgeneralization, intralingual errors, negative transfer from mother tongue, and insufficient application of norms. However, the study found that interlingual errors were the primary source of errors.

Yousefi et al., (2014) studied the prepositional mistakes made by Iranian students for those learning English as a second language, prepositions have proven to be a challenge. 35 intermediate students made up the study's sample. A diagnostic test with 35 multiple-choice items was created to evaluate the student's ability in using prepositions. Interlingual and intralingual interferences were shown to be the main sources of these kinds of errors, according to the study's findings.

3. Methodology

In this study, the error was analyzed using a quantitative approach. The students were given a questionnaire with twenty-five questions and were instructed to fill in the blanks without options.

3.1 Participants

The respondents to the study were 384 respondents 128 students from three different public universities in Jordan: AL-Albait University (North of Jordan), University of Jordan (Middle of Jordan), and Muatah University (South of Jordan). The data for the present study were gathered using self-administration participants and face-to-face communications, the participants were chosen randomly from the English department (first-year level 1) and (second-year level 2).

3.2 Data Collection

This investigation employs a quasi-experimental design. The data were gathered from university students from the English department between 2021-2022. As well as the style and effect of the lack of fill-in-the-blank options for the questionnaire, it was assumed that poor preposition comprehension and preposition writing are part of the language. The survey was distributed directly to students in the halls, taking into consideration the public safety conditions resulting from the Corona Covid 19 pandemic and with the approval of the department heads from three Jordanian universities.

3.3 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis Questionnaire prepositions in the selected test, table 1 below shows the backgrounds of the respondents. In this part, including the university, gender, age and year of study. All data analyzed by used SPSS, therefore, according to (Table 1) the respondents from three universities (Al-Bayt University, University of Jordan and Mutah University), which provides presentation and reliability of the data of study because it was collected to check the level of English in Jordanian universities, and the student's reliance on the guessing method in filling in the blanks to answer the questions, table 1 shows the backgrounds of the respondents.

Table 1: The backgrounds of the respondents

Statistics		University	Gender	Age	Year
N	Valid	384	384	384	384
	Missing	0	0	0	0
	Minimum	1	1	1	1
	Maximum	3	2	4	2

Note that more questionnaire was distributed in order not to lose or drop in the sample and to complete the required limit completely to complete the quorum.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mean Comparison of marks and University, when examining the results of the three Jordanian universities, the data shows that the performance of the University of Jordan is higher than the other two universities Al al-Bayt and Mu'tah University. This study is also consistent the effect of teaching methods there is any significant effect of interaction among teaching methods and learning styles on students' learning English achievement (Munir et al., 2019). In this study conducted on two groups with different educational backgrounds, the data shows significant differences between students in the motivations involved in learning English. According to Table 2, there were a total of 384 first- and second-year students who responded to the survey

at Al al-Bayt University, University of Jordan and Mutah University. Each university represents 33% of the total respondents.

Table 2: The number of respondents in three different universities in Jordan

University		Frequency	present	Valid Present	Cumulative present
Valid	AL-Bayt University	128	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Mut'ah University	128	33.3	33.3	66.7
	University of Jordan	128	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	384	100.0	100.0	

As shown in (Table 3) the majority of respondents in the current study are female, with 273 respondents accounting for 71.1 percent of total respondents, while 111 respondents were male, accounting for 28.9 percent of all respondents.

Table 3: The majority of respondents

Gender		Frequency	present	Valid present	Cumulative Present
Valid	Male	111	28.9	28.9	28.9
	Female	273	71.1	71.1	100.0
	Total	384	100.0	100.0	

These statistics confirm that the majority of the respondents are aged 19 years old. Overall, we can conclude that an overwhelming 81.3% of respondents are aged 19 to 20 years that the students in the first year and second year.

Table 4: The distribution of respondents by the year of the study reveals that the 2nd year students

Year		Frequency	Present	Valid present	Cumulative present
Valid	1st year	184	47.9	47.9	47.9
	2nd year	200	52.1	52.1	100.0
	Total	384	100.0	100.0	

Likewise, the distribution of respondents by the year of the study reveals that the 2nd year students have the largest portion, accounting for 52.1 percent with 200 respondents. This is followed by 1st year students which are relatively low than the 2nd year students, (47.9 percent), as shown in Table 4. As presented in table 5, the correlation between Jordanian Universities and their obtained marks in use of Prepositions in the English Language. In this study, the Pearson correlation analysis was used to investigate the relationship between Jordanian Universities and their obtained marks in English special purpose (ESP) programs that

are mandatory for most study majors. The study established a coefficient of correlation (r) as 0.070, this implies that there is a lack of relationship between the variable (Jordanian Universities) and the other variable (obtained marks in English as (ESP)).

Table 5: The correlation between Jordanian Universities and marks

Correlations			
		University	Marks
University	Pearson Correlation	1	.070
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.173
	N	384	384
Marks	Pearson Correlation	.070	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.173	
	N	384	384

Correlation between the year of study and their obtained marks in prepositions in the English Language (Table 6). The results in revealed that the relationship between the year of study and their obtained marks in the English language exam is low (r) as 0.048. This indicated that there is a low correlation between the year of study and their obtained marks in the Prepositions English language.

Table 6: Correlation between the years of study and marks

Correlations			
		Year	Marks
Year	Pearson Correlation	1	.048
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.350
	N	384	384
Marks	Pearson Correlation	.048	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.350	
	N	384	384

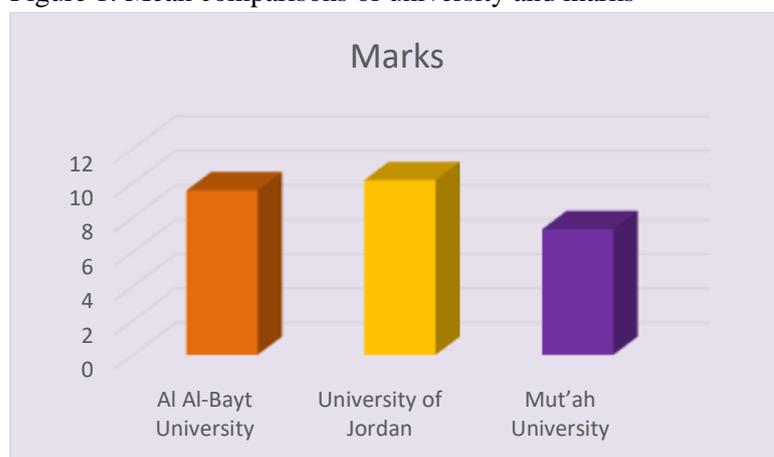
The number of outcomes produced by the multiple regression analysis is shown in Table 7. The R-square of the model is 0.019, whereas the corrected R-square is 0.008, according to the study this result suggests that the independent variable accounts for 1.9% of the marks in Jordanian universities, implying a low level of significance (Pallant, 2005) asserts that the greater the R-square, the stronger the link between the dependent and independent variables, and the smaller the R-square, the weakest the link between the dependent and independent variables. As we discussed previously, the different educational backgrounds and teaching methods, and most of the students there are graduates of private schools. Focusing on studying more, most of the students are residents of the capital, as well as from different countries, and also from different teaching backgrounds.

Table 7: The R-square of the model

Model Summary										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error the Estimate	An in Change	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1										

.136 .019 .008 3.425 .019 1.797 4 379 .129

Figure 1: Mean comparisons of university and marks



As it is presented in Figure 1, there is a convergence between Al Al-Bayt University (9.56) University of Jordan (10.15) and Mut'ah University (7.3). Al Al-Bayt University is located in the north of Jordan, and students from central and northern Jordan are accepted there, as the students are often graduates of private schools, this study agrees in principle with the research found rather than focusing on the development of enduring strategies. English language education appears to be teacher-centred and tied to other issues, such as teaching the textbook (Nabah et al., 2009). The mean comparison of marks and years of the study is presented in table 8 the 2nd-year students received higher grades than 1st-year students as shown in the table 8.

Table 8: The mean comparison of marks and years of the study

Marks * Year			
Marks			
Year	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1st year	8.83	184	3.361
2nd year	9.16	200	3.509
Total	9.00	384	3.439

In this study, it was found that the second-year students had a development in the use of prepositions, but not significantly and would not be better than the first-year students. Prepositions due to not knowing them effectively showed the existence of a transfer from the mother tongue and the lack of realization that there are many different types in meaning and structure, where this study agrees with (Al-Yaari et al., 2013) that most Arab EFL university students cannot recognize and produce such prepositions they also don't understand such prepositions' meanings, and most grammar books don't list them.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, the researchers conclude several factors that have an impact on the use of prepositions in the English language, including teaching methods, transfer from the mother tongue, and the use of the guessing method. In the types of prepositions and their use, it was found that they did not know the majority of the students are in the presence of compound prepositions, and they cannot differentiate between them in use in the context of the sentence. According to the results, it was proved that academic background has an impact on learning the English language at the University of Jordan and the teaching methods adopted in Jordanian universities. There was also a development in the use of prepositions in the English language between the first year and the second year among students at the University of Jordan, but there is still a very noticeable weakness in errors made in using prepositions as a type of writing style.

Acknowledgement

We sincerely thank Dr. Kefah Alomoush (Al-albeit University), Dr. Alrushdan (Mutah University), and Dr. Anas Al-Bawareed (University of Jordan). Without their support, this research would be impossible. Additionally, we thank all the participants for their valuable contributions to our study. We are truly grateful for their collaboration and support.

References

- Abolhassani, Z., & Mehmandust, S. (2015). Inflection Of Prepositions In Italian Language And Its Effects Iranian Language Learners. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 192, 226–233. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.06.032>
- Akhtar, S. (2017). An Analysis of Preposition (Idiomatic Phrases, Prepositional Phrases and Zero Prepositions) Detection Errors in the Writing of Graduate ESL Learners of Pakistan. *An International Peer-Reviewed Journal*, 32, 24–42. www.iiste.org
- Al-Buainian, H. (2007). Researching Types and Causes of Errors in Arabic Speakers' Writings. (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Qatar). Retrieved from http://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/001054/current.pdf?_s=2T4QTm6TxlAhRR8
- Al-khasawneh, F. M. (2014). Error analysis of written English paragraphs by Jordanian undergraduate students: A case study. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, 11(8), 85–100. <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Fadi>
- Al-Sindy, H. A. (1994). Analysis of Syntactic Interference Errors in the Writing of English by Saudi Adult Students. (Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Order No. 9428053).
- Al-Yaari, S. A. S., AL-Hammadi, F. S., & ALyami, S. A. (2013). Oral Grammatical Errors of Arabic as Second Language (ASL) Learners: An Applied Linguistic Approach. *International Journal of English Language Education*, 1(2), 54–90. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijelev.v1i2.3060>
- Alotaibi, A., Wu, S., & Alrabah, S. (2018). Challenges in Learning English Prepositions by Kuwaiti EFL Learners: A Call for Bridging the Gap in Kuwait's New English Language Curriculum. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 5(11), 516–530. <https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.511.5659>

- Arjan, A., Abdullah, N. H., & Roslim, N. (2013). A corpus-based study on english prepositions of place, in and on. *English Language Teaching*, 6(12), 167–174. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n12p167>
- Chen, C. (2020). A study on positive transfer of native language and second language teaching methods. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 10(3), 306–312. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1003.06>
- Couto, H. (2016). on the So-Called Complex Prepositions in Kriol. *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique*, 54(7), 279–294.
- Harianingsih, I., & Jusoh, Z. (2022). A Review of Studies on Cooperative Learning in Language Classroom seen from Students' attitudes. *International Journal of English and Applied Linguistics (IJEAL)*, 2(1), 62–74. <https://doi.org/10.47709/ijeal.v2i1.1423>
- Kaweera, C. (2013). Writing error: A review of interlingual and intralingual interference in EFL context. *English Language Teaching*, 6(7), 9–18. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n7p9>
- Köroğlu, Z. Ç. (2014). An analysis on grammatical errors of Turkish EFL students' written texts. *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 9(12), 101–101.
- Lorincz, K., & Gordon, R. (2012). Difficulties in Learning Prepositions and Possible Solutions. *Linguistic Portfolios*, 1(1), 1–5. http://repository.stcloudstate.edu/stcloud_ling%0Ahttp://repository.stcloudstate.edu/stcloud_ling/vol1/iss1/14
- Monaikul, N., & Di Eugenio, B. (2020). Detecting preposition errors to target interlingual errors in second language writing. *Proceedings of the 33rd International Florida Artificial Intelligence Research Society Conference, FLAIRS 2020*, 290–293.
- Munir, S., Emzir, E., & Rahmat, A. (2019). The Effect of Teaching Methods and Learning Styles on Students' English Achievement (An Experimental Study at Junior High School 1 Pasangkayu). *JETL (Journal Of Education, Teaching and Learning)*, 2(2), 233. <https://doi.org/10.26737/jetl.v2i2.292>
- Nabah, A. A., Hussain, J., Al-Omari, A., & Shdeifat, S. (2009). The effect of computer assisted language learning in teaching English grammar on the achievement of secondary students in Jordan. *International Arab Journal of Information Technology*, 6(4), 431–439.
- Nuri, A. (2014). An Analysis on Students' Errors in Using Preposition of Time and Place. A Case Study at the Second Grade Students of SMP YMJ Ciputat), 20(1), 87–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14768320500230185>
- Rafiq, K. R. M., Hashim, H., & Yunus, M. M. (2021). Sustaining education with mobile learning for english for specific purposes (Esp): A systematic review (2012–2021). *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 13(17). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13179768>
- Seyoum, W. M., Yigzaw, A., & Bewuketu, H. K. (2022). Students' Attitudes and Problems on Question-based Argumentative Essay Writing Instruction. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning (JELTL)*, 3(2), 58–63.

- Utami, D. N. (2018). Prepositional Phrase in Javanese. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 166, 66–71. <https://doi.org/10.2991/prasasti-18.2018.12>
- Yousefi, S., Soori, A., & Janfaza, A. (2014). Common preposition errors committed by iranian students. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 3(3), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.3n.3p.1>
- Zhao, H., & Fan, J. (2021). Modeling Input Factors in Second Language Acquisition of the English Article Construction. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12(4), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.653258>