The use of articles and plurals by Indonesian speakers of English in ELF interactions

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1. Introduction
While it is well established that English as an additional language (EAL) speakers exploit the potential of English with respect to distinctive and innovative lexico-grammatical uses, the degree to which these uses are systematic and shared across both varieties of Englishes and by EAL speakers in English as a lingua franca (ELF) interactions is an area of ongoing research. Within this research paradigm, the use of articles and plurals by speakers of Asian Englishes has been a particular focus, beginning with Platt, et al. (1984) arguing that the distinctive use of articles in Singapore English is due to the primacy of specific/non-specific reference over definite/indefinite reference.

To date, however, little has been reported about the use of articles and plurals by Indonesian speakers of English. Toward addressing this gap, this study investigates the emergent use of articles and plurals by acrolectal Indonesian English (IE) speakers in natural interactions in ELF contexts. It is shown that, although the frequency of distinctive occurrence is relatively low compared with that aligning with Standard L1 English (StEL1) use, the distinctive uses of both articles and plurals in IE occur systematically and are motivated beyond simple grammatical differences between the two languages.

2. Data
The analysis presented here is based on an IE corpus of approximately 15,000 words drawn from a larger 46,000-word corpus of spoken English, which was constructed from nine United Nations press conferences from 2004 – 20101 that were transcribed using the VOICE (Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English) Mark-up Conventions2. The smaller IE corpus contains the spontaneous spoken English contributions of 10 acrolectal IE speakers who were presenters at the press conferences. Two Australian English speakers coded the use of articles and plurals by the IE speakers, with an overall inter-rater reliability of 71.82%.

3. Articles
The results reveal that all 10 IE speakers produced instances of distinctive article use alongside instances that align with StEL1 use. The distinctive uses account for 123 (11%) out of a total of 1,117 instances of article use and can be divided into four categories of occurrence: distinctive absence of the (62 instances), distinctive absence of a (28 instances), distinctive presence of a (17 instances), and distinctive presence of the (16 instances). Thus, it appears that the tendency is for the articles to be

2 Available from http://voice.univie.ac.at.
distinctively absent (with *the* being more commonly absent than *a*), over the articles being distinctively present.

Considering first the most common distinctive use, the absence of the definite article, it appears that definiteness need not be marked with *the* if definiteness, that is, the unique identity, of the NP can be established through another means within the context of occurrence. In the IE data, definiteness is established through two types of means. Firstly, when the NP is a proper noun as in (1), definiteness is inherent and need not be separately marked, as a proper noun refers to an entity or collection of entities.

(1) we count on er: _[the] united nations also to play er a continued positive role on the issue (PC1/S2:318)

Secondly, the unique identity of an NP may be established through direct and indirect anaphoric reference, cataphoric reference, general knowledge, or sporadic reference. In both cases marking definiteness with *the* can be regarded as redundant.

The distinctive absence of *the* has been observed in many other Englishes. Of relevance here, in Malaysian English (Baskaran, 2004) *the* may be absent in predicative position. In this case, as in the IE data, the unique identity of an NP is established through direct anaphoric reference. In Indian South African English (Mesthrie, 2004) *the* can be absent in casual speech when the referent of an NP is understood from the context as, for example, in the case of situational reference and general knowledge. Note that while similar, the absence of *the* in the IE data occurs in a formal, rather than an informal, setting. In ELF settings (Dewey 2006), *the* may be absent with high frequency adjectives and adverbial phrases, which Dewey analyses as being due to communicative redundancy. In Singapore English (Gupta, 1988) the definite article is distinctively absent in highly standard texts, for example, when the communicative load of the definite article is low. Both cases resonate with the IE data, where *the* can be viewed as redundant when the unique identity of the NP can be established through another means within the context of occurrence.

The second most common distinctive use, the absence of *a* may be motivated by substrate influence from Indonesian, where the classifiers *seorang, seekor, sebuah*, which function in a similar manner to the English indefinite article *a*, are optional if it is clear from the context that the NP is singular. The distinctive absence of *a* due to substrate influence has also been shown to occur in Arabic English (Al-Rawi, 2012). In Malaysian English (Baskaran, 2004) the distinctive absence of both the definite and indefinite article are argued to be due to substrate influence. As Indonesian and Malay are closely related and remain mutually intelligible, it would not be surprising if the underlying motivation for the distinctive absence of the definite as well as the indefinite article in IE can also be argued to be due to substrate influence.

Although much less frequent, most instances (10 out of 17) of the distinctive presence of *a* seem to involve an extension of the limited use of *a* to mark specific reference with non-count nouns in StEL1. While in StEL1 use, the noun refers to a quality, mental state, or other abstraction that is attributed to a person and the noun is pre- and/or post-modified, in the IE data a wider range of abstract non-count nouns is involved and the noun need not be pre- or post-modified.

The distinctive presence of *a* with non-count nouns has been analysed as overgeneralization in Malaysian English (Wong, 1983) and as reclassification in Asian Englishes (Kirkpatrick, 2010). While the instances in the IE data could be
taken as examples of reclassification of the particular non-count nouns as count nouns, they still occur as non-count nouns and so must also retain their non-count classification. However, the frequency of occurrence of the distinctive presence of *a* in the IE portion of the corpus is nowhere near what is suggested to occur in colloquial Malaysian English.

In a smaller number of instances (4 out of 17), the indefinite article occurs distinctively with plural count nouns to introduce a new specific entity in discourse when the unique identity of the entity is assumed to be unfamiliar to the hearer. This can be seen as an extension of StEL1 use with singular count nouns. While the use of the indefinite article has also been reported in Cameroon English (Takam, 2011), there the underlying motivation is analysed as being due to the semantic content of the utterance. The remaining instances (3 out of 17) are individual uses, which may simply be one-off occurrences.

Lastly, the distinctive presence of *the* occurs in the IE corpus with about the same frequency as the distinctive presence of *a*. In 15 of the 16 instances, the distinctive presence of *the* can be analysed as being due to the pragmatic motivation of enhancing prominence (Dewey, 2010; Cogo & Dewey, 2012). Consider (2), for example:

(2) we have thirteen thousand island and two hundred thirty million people. and <m>er:m (1) the [-] nature has been really really generous to us (PC8/S3:51)

Here the topic *nature* already has prominence, but by using *the* in addition the speaker enhances its prominence, further emphasizing all that nature has given to Indonesians.

As in the ICE corpora of Singapore English, Indian English, Irish English, Kenyan English and Jamaican English (Sand, 2004) and in Cogo & Dewey’s (2012) corpus of ELF interactions, this distinctive use occurs predominantly with abstract non-count nouns and plural nouns with generic reference (*progress, society, nature, consensus, people*). However, in the IE data considered in this paper it occurs as well with temporal expressions (*2010, unique moment in time*) and proper nouns (*CNN, Japan*).

Looking at the distinctive presence and absence of the articles as a system in the IE data, the definite and indefinite articles are distinctly absent in precisely those contexts where they are redundant, as the unique identity of the NP, in the case of *the*, and the singularity of the NP, in the case of *a*, can be established through other means within the context of occurrence. On the other hand, *a* is distinctly present with a wider range of abstract non-count nouns than in StEL1 use and with plural count nouns to introduce a new specific entity in discourse, which is also an extension of StEL1 use. Similarly, *the* is distinctly present to enhance topic prominence. There is no real evidence that the specific/non-specific prominent system of article use found by Platt, et al. (1984) to hold in the New Englishes they examined also operates in the IE data. However, there is strong evidence that the distinctive presence and absence of articles in the IE data is pragmatically driven, as Cogo and Dewey (2012) found in their corpus of ELF interactions.

4. Plurals

As with distinctive article use, all 10 IE speakers produced distinctive uses of plural marking, with 84 instances (4%) out of a total of 1,945 instances being distinctive. Of this number, 67 instances (12%) can be analysed as involving the
distinctive non-marking of plural count nouns, and only 17 (1%) as involving the marking of non-count and singular nouns as plural. Thus, it seems there is an inclination for IE speakers to not mark count nouns as plural rather than to mark non-count or singular nouns as plural.

In the non-marking of plural, two broad categories of distinctive use emerge. In the first, which includes 51 of the 67 (76%) distinctive non-plural marked items, the head noun of an NP need not be marked for plurality if an element in the NP or clause, a previous mention in the discourse, or the situational context indicates that the head noun is plural:

(3) they’re already in your hands in the *four page*[s] that been distributed (PC3/S1:10)

In (3), the cardinal numeral *four* indicates that *page* is plural. The non-marking of plural in such cases may be due to substrate influence from Indonesian, where the tendency is to not mark plurality unless explicitness is needed.

The remaining 16 out of the 67 instances fall in the second broad category, which involves the non-marking of plural with seven individual lexical items. Here there are various language specific motivations, such as reanalysing a singular invariable noun as having a plural inflection (*the United Nation*), analogy with another noun in the discourse (*NGO*), using a singular form for the plural sense (*in terms of, fund*), and using a count noun as a non-count noun denoting unity (*Muslim*). Equally for six of the seven lexical items, accounting for 11 of the 16 instances, substrate influence may be a motivation: for *the United Nation, NGO, grass root, fund,* and *Muslim* plurality may not be marked due to the tendency in Indonesian to not mark plurality unless explicitness is needed, whilst for *in term of* plurality may not be marked due to constraints in Indonesian on word-final consonant clusters. As well, five of the instances may simply involve an idiosyncratic use (*NGO*) or a one-off occurrence (*in the lights of, grass root and Muslim*) by an individual speaker.

When substrate influence is considered across both categories of distinctive non-marking of plural, the results are quite startling: it appears that Indonesian substrate influence is a potential motivation for 66 of the 67 instances of distinctive non-plural marking. In terms of type of substrate influence, for 62 of the 66 items, the motivation may be due to the tendency in Indonesian to not mark plurality unless explicitness is needed; whilst for the other four items, the motivation may be due to constraints in Indonesian on word-final consonant clusters.

The non-marking of plurals in relation to cardinal numerals and other determiners such as quantifiers and types of measurements has been frequently noted in varieties in the Inner Circle, including dialects in the North of England (Beal, 2004), English dialects of East Anglia (Trudgill, 2004), various non-standard dialects in the British Isles (Greenbaum, 1996), and varieties in Southeast America and urban AAVE (Wolfram, 2004a, 2004b). However, in most of these cases it is not clear what motivation contributes to the distinctive non-marking of plural. In the Outer Circle, the tendency to not mark plural nouns after numerals is also common, such as in East African English (Schmied, 2004), Singapore English, Indian English, Philippine English, Sri Lankan English, and Malaysian English (Platt, et al., 1984). Substrate influence is discussed as a motivation in some of these varieties. In Singapore English, for example, Hokkien substrate influence is considered to be the motivation for the non-marking of plural nouns as plurality in Hokkien is largely understood from the context. This is similar to the predominant type of substrate
influence found in the IE corpus. The secondary type of substrate influence in the IE data concerns constraints on word-final consonant clusters. This type of substrate influence has also been noted among educated speakers of Singapore English and Indian English (Platt, et al., 1984).

Turning to the marking of non-count and singular nouns as plural (17 instances), four categories emerge: mismatch in number agreement (13 instances), reclassification of non-count nouns as count nouns (two instances), count interpretation (one instance), and different singular and plural meaning (one instance). While the items in the later three categories appear to be one off occurrences by individual speakers, the 13 items in the first category may have a language specific motivation. In this category of mismatch in number agreement, a count noun is marked as plural, yet the verb or another element such as the indefinite article a indicates that the noun is singular. However, this distinctive use is largely attributed to two IE speakers, who together produced 10 of the 13 items. The use of plural forms with singular agreement is also observable in StEL1 use. For example, politics occurs with singular concord when it refers to the science of government (as in Politics is said to be the art of the impossible.) but with plural concord when it refers to one's political views (as in His politics are rather conservative.) (Quirk, et al., 1985:299). On the one hand, the items produced by the IE speakers in this category of mismatch in agreement may be viewed as simply being idiosyncratic uses by two speakers and on-off occurrences by other individual speakers. However, the fact that this type of mismatch in number agreement also exists in StEL1 use may be the motivation for the occurrence of mismatches in number agreement by IE speakers with other lexical items and in other contexts. Thus, the distinctive plural marking of non-count and singular nouns that gives rise to a mismatch in number agreement may be due to analogy with other mismatches in number agreement in StEL1 use.

Lastly, looking at the second category of reclassification of non-count nouns as count nouns, it is interesting to note that even though reclassification is commonly observed in Inner, Outer and Expanding Circle Englishes only two instances occurred in the IE data. In these two instances, it appears that the underlying motivation for the reclassification is that the IE speakers viewed the nouns as referring to separate individual entities or an example of a specific item: for instance, using progresses or a progress to refer to the progress on separate individual parts of the rebuilding process or to a particular instance of progress being achieved.

5. Conclusion

Although the corpus size is relatively small and the results show only a small percentage of distinctive uses of articles and plurals by the acrolectal IE speakers, the findings systematically demonstrate that in these ELF interactions there are emergent distinctive uses, and, moreover, there are coherent underlying motivations for the emergence of these distinctive uses. It remains to be determined whether the features become sedimented as common features of an IE variety.

Overall, this study contributes to the field of ELF from a practice-based perspective, not only in terms of our understanding of the systematic distinctive uses of articles and plurals in ELF interactions, but also in terms of the extent to which these systematic differences are shared across other Asian Englishes.
References


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