



Deviations in the use of articles in writing in English as a foreign language in monolingual and bilingual primary school students in Croatia

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This paper presents the findings of a study of the writing skills in monolingual and bilingual primary school students learning English as a foreign language in Croatia (N=128). The monolingualism / bilingualism opposition has been shown in previous studies (see Legac 2008, 2014b, 2021, 2023) as an important characteristic of the individual that has resulted in different achievements in mastering language skills in English as a foreign language. Writing skill was tested by writing a letter in which students were required to include certain information items. For this paper, the author provides an analysis of deviations in the use of articles, concludes that bilingual learners have outperformed their monolingual counterparts, and brings this paper to a close by encouraging parents to raise their children as bilinguals.

Keywords: bilingualism, use of articles in EFL, writing skill in EFL, Italian and Czech national minorities in Croatia

1 Introduction

This paper is a presentation of a study carried out in Croatia. The title mentions three key things that gave impetus to this research: the opposition monolingual-bilingual learners, deviations in the use of articles and writing skills in English as a foreign language (EFL). It is a follow-up study to the three earlier studies by the same author that dealt with the writing skills in monolingual and bilingual learners (Legac 2014a; Legac 2021; Legac 2023). We first look at the opposition monolingual-bilingual, then we look at earlier studies that examined the differences in achievement in EFL between monolingual and bilingual learners of EFL. This is followed by an explanation of the problems of articles for EFL learners and the results of this study with monolingual and bilingual EFL learners.

1.1 Opposition monolingualism / bilingualism

In this paper, bilingualism will be looked at in accordance with Vilke (1991: 138). In her use of the term, it does not refer to what is usually regarded as absolute bilingualism as it was provided in the earliest definitions of bilingualism, e.g. “native-like control of two languages” (Bloomfield 1935: 56), but as “fluent command or ability in two languages that one has learnt either in their family or in the community”. According to Vilke, it also means that there is “no apparent greater preferent towards one of the two languages present in the bilingual speaker”. We should add that in accordance with the divisions of bilingualism provided by Hamers i Blanc (2000: 79), our use of the term and the use by Vilke (1991) refers either to child bilingualism (either simultaneous or successive, whereby the vast majority of the participants in the study will be simultaneous), balanced or bicultural bilingualism. Relatively balanced means that the child is not lagging behind too much in any of the two languages in the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, whereas biculturalism means that the speaker feels like a member of both language groups and both cultures.

Already in their early childhood, bilingual children face challenges to which their monolingual peers are not exposed, such as issues of identity and cultural affiliation and the problems of the acquisition of two languages on all linguistic levels (Jelaska 2005: 38–48; Harding-Esch / Riley 2003, 52–53). Despite

these obstacles, it has been reported in several studies that childhood bilingualism may show academic advantages over monolingualism. When optimal circumstances of learning are provided, academic advantages of bilinguals over monolinguals have been reported to include at least as good or often better performance by bilinguals in language, literacy, and various realms of cognition (Cummins 2000; Oller / Pearson Zurer / Cobo Lewis 2007). This was shown in one specially developed task, called “symbol substitution” (a metalinguistic task of word substitution), (Oller / Pearson Zurer / Cobo Lewis 2007: 194), where bilinguals outperformed their monolingual counterparts. Advanced metalinguistic awareness of bilingual children is also mentioned as the main source of advantage in their language processing and a key element that makes it possible for bilingual students to learn a new foreign language easier than their monolingual counterparts (Jessner 2006: 43–55, 88–112). Research has also suggested that bilingual students reported higher usage of learning strategies than their monolingual counterparts with memory and metacognitive strategies reaching statistically significant levels (Kostić-Bobanović / Bobanović 2011: 45).

1.2. Earlier studies with monolingual and bilingual EFL learners

Research with bilingual children who are members of other national minorities in Croatia (mainly Italian and Czech) has shown that bilingual children can outperform monolingual (Croatian) schoolchildren in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Bilingual children achieved better results in EFL in listening skills (Mihaljević Djigunović / Legac 2008: 341–342), writing skills (Legac 2014a: 230–232; Legac 2021: 138–140; Legac 2023: 51–56) and speaking skills (Legac 2014b: 294–297).

Studies have also shown that bilingual students tend to have more positive results involving affective factors. They had lower FL anxiety at all three stages of the FL process (input, processing and output anxiety) (Mihaljević / Legac 2008: 335–340) and in outside classroom situations (Legac 2019: 62), they were less shy (Legac 2008: 469–471), had lower communication apprehension (Legac 2014a: 292–294) and were more motivated to learn EFL than monolingual students of EFL (Legac 2013: 370–371).

1.3 General problems of the use of articles for EFL learners

Some authors emphasise the problem of defining the categories of definiteness and indefiniteness. The difference between them is also complicated (Jespersen 1933: 161; Lyons 1999: 13; Eastwood 2005: 198–212) by the fact that they do not present a simple binary opposition since they represent a kind of combination of semantic, pragmatic, logic and grammatical categories. In some languages, definiteness and indefiniteness are expressed by means of the use of articles (English, German, French, Italian, Swedish).

The meaning of nouns is important, but it is not enough for the student to determine whether an article should precede it or not and whether to use a definite or indefinite article because the use of articles changes with context where pragmatic and logical reasons play an essential role (Quirk and Greenbaum 1973: 67–79). Thus, Quirk and Greenbaum (ibid) emphasise the importance of shared knowledge (knowledge of the world and of the grammar) of the speaker and the listener. The following example can illustrate this: *He is a doctor* (syntax, i.e., grammar, requires the indefinite article because it is a subject complement here). Still, we can have a correct sentence: *He is the doctor* (because we are referring to a person who is the only doctor somewhere – e.g., in a village). Zergollern-Miletetić (2014: 71) also illustrates how the meanings of the nouns and the rules given by grammar books are not enough: *Go to church* (where the noun *church* is used for its primary purpose, i.e., worship service or to pray) is in opposition with: *We walked to the church and there took the bus* (where the noun *church* refers to the only building of the kind in a village or town, or a particular building known to the other interlocutor in the conversation).

Articles present a more serious problem to speakers of languages where they do not exist as parts of speech or where this category has not been grammaticalized (Zergollern Miletetić 2014: 18–61). This does not mean that EFL learners whose native languages have articles as a part of speech do not have problems acquiring articles. Pfenniger (2012: 22–35) has shown that secondary school students from Switzerland with German as their first language had problems with articles in English.

As the participants in our study were speakers of Croatian, Czech and Italian, we will look at where the problems with articles could occur when learning EFL.

1.4 Problems of articles for Croatian EFL learners

The problem stems from the Croatian language's lack of articles as a word class (part of speech). Spalatin (1976: 103–119) claimed that a native speaker of Serbo-Croatian learning EFL must adopt a completely new view of reality. (Spalatin used the term Serbo-Croatian to refer to Croatian because before Croatia gained independence in the early 1990s, Croatian was referred to as the western or Zagreb variety of Serbo-Croatian). Zergollern Miletić (2014: 142) does not agree with Spalatin because Croatian does distinguish between definiteness and indefiniteness. To justify her claim she quotes Wierzbicka (1992: 23) in whose opinion definiteness and indefiniteness belong to categories that are universal to all languages. Zergollern-Miletić adds that in Croatian definiteness and indefiniteness are very often marked in the use of adjectives. The author of this article can illustrate this by giving an example of the difference between indefiniteness and definiteness on the example of the adjective *dobar* ('good'). *Dobar* is the indefinite form and *dobri* is its definite counterpart. We translate both versions of this adjective use in English with the same adjective (*dobar, dobri* = *good* in English). Examples of the different use can be illustrated by the following examples: *Dobar čovjek uvijek nastrada.* (indefinite use) (translation into English: *A good man always gets hurt*). *Ma dobri čovječe što radiš?* (definite use) (translation into English: *Good man, what are you doing?*) Indefinites in Croatian can also be expressed by the use of the numeral *jedan* ('one') as in the following example of a short dialogue: *Tko je došao?* (approximate English equivalent: *Who came?*) – *Ma, došao je jedan čovjek.* (approximate English equivalent: *Well, a man came.*) However, we should warn the international audience reading this paper who are unfamiliar with the Croatian language that the definite use of the adjectives as illustrated by the example of the adjective *dobar* is slowly disappearing in modern Croatian. Young people do not use it in their speech. It is consequently used in writing by the best-educated people whenever a formal register is required.

Advanced learners, even teachers of EFL and translators and interpreters make serious mistakes in the use of articles in EFL, so it might be the most difficult aspect of mastering the grammar of EFL for Croatian learners (Zergollern-Miletić 2014: 7). Articles cause a lot of frustration for many advanced learners of EFL. Most problems appear with the use of the definite article with abstract nouns (Zergollern-Miletić, 2014: 118). According to Zergollern Miletić, it is difficult for EFL learners to know whether a noun is used generally or in a

particular context (*American brands* or *the American brands*). She further emphasizes that it is difficult for university students studying to become TEFL to use their world knowledge: *I was driving over a / the mountain pass in Colorado*. Even these very advanced learners of EFL tend to forget that there are many mountain passes in Colorado.

1.5 Problems of articles for Czech EFL learners

The author of this paper does not speak Czech, but he agrees with the earlier cited authors (Wierzbicka 1992: 23; Zergollern-Miletić 2014: 142) that articles are a universal category. From the teachers of Czech from some of the schools where he conducted his research and from a reference suggested by one of the informants he learned that Czech as a Slavic language lacks an overt article and that it can be compared with Croatian in that respect. Definiteness is a subcategory of nominal determination. Czech marks definiteness using various discourse-anchored signals, such as word order and intonation. In sentence-initial position, bare noun phrases are definite. For discourse-anchored definite noun phrases in other sentence positions (these include post-rhematic themes as well as retrieved or reevaluated entities from remote discourse) and noun phrases in expressive speech, Czech uses a deictically neutral determiner *ten* ‘this, that; the’ for definite noun phrases. The resultant noun phrase with a determiner may correspond to article or demonstrative-modified noun phrases in article languages. The categories are fluid. In both colloquial and formal language *ten* is developing article-like functions (Cummins 1998: 567).

1.6 Problems of articles for Italian EFL learners

Italian is a language that uses articles. Using them, definiteness and indefiniteness are expressed (Jernej 1990: 11). As in English, the Italian language distinguishes between definite and indefinite articles, and they are used to introduce nouns, and there are occasions where articles are omitted. However, according to the source mentioned above, Italian additionally distinguishes a third type of article, which is called *l'articolo partitivo* (‘partitive article’). According to Jernej (1976: 21–23), in Italian, the definite and the indefinite articles have different forms for masculine and feminine. In

masculine, three forms are used: *il*, *lo* and *l'*. The first introduces nouns beginning with most consonants (e.g., *il libro*) ('the book'). When the same nouns are used in plural, the definite article is *i* (*i libri*). The second one is used before nouns that start with the "impure letter" <s> followed by a consonant (e.g., *lo stato*) ('the state'), as well as before nouns that begin with the letter <z> (e.g., *lo zio*) ('the uncle'). When the same nouns are used in plural, the definite article is *gli* (*gli zii*). The form *l'* is used to introduce masculine nouns beginning with a vowel (e.g., *l'ombrello*) ('the umbrella'). *Gli* is also the corresponding plural form (*gli ombrelli*).

The definite article in the feminine has two forms: *la* introduces those starting with all consonants (e.g., *la tavola* 'the table'), and *l'* is used in front of nouns beginning with a vowel (e.g., *l'isola* 'the island'). The plural form of *la* and *l'* is *le* (*le tavole*; *le isole*). Gender distinction between masculine and feminine nouns is also made in the use of the indefinite article (Jernej 1976: 26–27). *Un* and *uno* are used in the masculine. The first one introduces masculine nouns beginning with vowels (e.g., *un anno* 'a year') and consonants (e.g., *un libro* 'a book'). The second one introduces masculine nouns beginning with the "impure letter" <s> or initial <z> (*uno stato*, *uno zio* 'a state', 'an uncle'). *Una* and *un'* are the corresponding feminine forms of the Italian indefinite article. The first one is put before feminine nouns beginning with a consonant (e.g., *una fabbrica* 'a factory'), and the second one is placed before feminine nouns beginning with a vowel (e.g., *un' amica* 'a female friend'). As in English, the indefinite article is not used in the plural. Unlike English, the Italian language also has a third use of the article that we mentioned earlier, *l'articolo partitivo*. According to Jernej (1990: 11) it is used to mark beings or objects as indefinite with regard to shape or number and illustrates with the following two examples: *Dammi della frutta* (approximate English equivalent would be: *Give me some fruit*) and *Ci sono degli sbagli* (approximate English equivalent would be: *There are some mistakes*). This partitive article cannot be translated with the definite article into English.

We can assume that the existence of articles helps Italian EFL learners to make fewer mistakes in the use of articles in English when compared with those EFL learners who are familiar only with Croatian, or with Czech or with Croatian and with Czech, but they are probably a bit confused when noticing that there is no gender distinction in the use of articles in English. The Italian EFL learners probably get confused when learning that the partitive article

cannot be translated with the definite article into English: e.g. that the equivalent of the Italian partitive article *dei* is not of *the* in English. The Italian EFL learners are probably helped by the fact that to some extent the rules for the uses of definite and indefinite articles overlap in English and Italian. However, there are some rules that are significantly different, which is why Italians speaking in English can also get their articles wrong. The rules for the use of Italian were taken from Jernej (1976: 49–51, 251–253 & 256–259). In English the indefinite article is obligatory in subject complements: e.g. *I am a student*, *Mike is a writer*, whereas in Italian it can be used or omitted: *Io sono (uno) student*, *Mike e (uno) scrittore*.

Sometimes the rules about the use of articles are different in Italian from English: in Italian the definite article is used with the names of continents (e.g. *l'Europa*, *l'Africa*), whereas in English there is no article (e.g. *Europe*, *Africa*). In English it is only used if the name of the continent is in the plural: *the Americas*, but *America*. In Italian the definite article is used with the names of mountain peaks (e.g., *il Cervino*), whereas it is not used with the same names in English (*Snowdon*). In Italian the definite article is used with the name of countries (*l'Italia*, *la Russia*), and in English they are used with the zero article. (*France*, *Portugal*). In English, the names of countries are preceded by the definite article when they are in plural (*the Netherlands*) or when used with a common noun (*the Russian Federation*). There is also a difference in the use of family names with female persons in Italian (*la Deledda*, *la Duse*, *la Serao*). In English, the definite article is used to refer to a married couple or to the whole family (*the Browns*). Confusion for native speakers of Italian can be rooted in the use of the adjective *tutto* followed by another word (*tutta la mattina*). The English equivalent would typically be *all morning*.

2 Aim of study, hypotheses, and their justification

The main aim of this study is to identify possible differences between monolingual and bilingual (Czech-Croatian and Italian-Croatian) EFL learners' use of articles in a task of writing a letter with prescribed elements: the receiver of the letter had to be an English-speaking friend, the letter writer had to thank that friend for their visit mentioning three things which they had particularly enjoyed during their stay which had lasted for a few days, there was a word

limit of 100 words. The beginning of the letter “Dear ____” and the first line “I arrived home safely last night after a good journey” were printed on the test.

Based on this aim, we can formulate our research questions as follows:

- R1: Are there any differences between monolingual and bilingual EFL learners in the use of articles in English when writing a short letter?
- R2: Will the correlation coefficients between the number of deviations in the use of articles and the achievement in writing skills in EFL be negative in both researched groups?

The author’s starting hypotheses for this study were the following:

- H1 - Bilingual learners of EFL will be better at using articles in EFL than their monolingual counterparts.
- H2 – There will be a negative relationship between the number of deviations in the use of articles and the achievement in writing skills in the number of points given by three independent graders.

The author justified his first hypothesis primarily on the results of some well-known above mentioned international studies that dealt with bilingualism (Cummins 2000; Oller / Pearson Zurer / Cobo Lewis 2007) as well as on the results of his own earlier studies (Legac 2008; 2014a; 2014b) comparing monolingual and bilingual EFL learners. According to the three international studies, bilinguals can have better performance over monolinguals in language, literacy, and cognition. If optimal learning circumstances are provided, academic advantages of bilinguals over monolinguals have been reported to include at least as good or often better performance by bilinguals in language, literacy, and various realms of cognition. The results of the author’s own studies indicated potential advantages of bilingual students in learning FLs; bilingual students of EFL had higher achievement in mastering writing (Legac 2021: 134–135; Legac 2023: 50–56), listening (Mihaljević Djigunović & Legac 2008) and speaking skills in EFL (Legac 2014b), made fewer mistakes in the use of tenses on a writing task (Legac 2021: 138–140) and proved to be better in some affective factors: they had lower FL anxiety, (Mihaljević Djigunović &

Legac 2008), lower writing anxiety (Legac 2014a), lower communication apprehension (Legac 2014b) and higher intensity of motivation (Legac 2013: 370–371) as well as higher willingness to communicate (Legac 2015: 345–246).

The second hypothesis is justified on the basis of results of studies by Zergollern-Miletić (2014: 164–174) and Martinović & Balenović (2019: 95–112) in Croatia that showed that Croatian EFL learners have serious problems with learning the correct use of articles in English.

3 Description of study: Writing task, sample & procedure

The writing task was based on writing tasks from Cambridge Preliminary English Test (Fried-Booth 1996; Naylor / Haggard 2004). Written instructions for the task were given in English. Participants in the study were asked to finish a letter to an English-speaking friend using 100 words. They had to thank that friend for their visit. They were supposed to mention three of the things which they had particularly enjoyed during their stay which had lasted for a few days. The beginning of the letter “*Dear _____*” and the first line “*I arrived home safely last night after a good journey*” were printed on the test. The students were also given an additional sheet of paper for any rough work.

This study was conducted in five Croatian counties (Međimurje County, Varaždin County, Bjelovar-Bilogora County, Krapina-Zagorje County and Primorje-Gorski Kotar County). The sample included a total of 128 Croatian EFL learners from seven primary schools in urban areas. At the time of data collection (before Covid-19 pandemic restrictions in Croatia), they were all about 14 years old and were finishing Grade 7. Until the day of our study, our respondents had the same total number of hours in English as a foreign language during their primary school education. Exposure to the English language through terrestrial, cable and satellite television, as well as videos, DVDs and smartphones is present in all our respondents. Regarding their proficiency level, they were supposed to have reached the B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The participants were assigned to one of two groups: monolingual (71 learners) and bilingual (57 learners). The learners were considered monolingual if Croatian was the only and exclusive language of communication in the child’s home environment. The criterion of assigning a learner to the bilingual group was the knowledge of two languages (Croatian and an additional one; in this

case Czech or Italian), provided the child had learned the two languages at home, or one language at home and the other at school as a minority language. The bilingual group consisted of 12 male and 15 female learners with Czech and Croatian as their language combination and 14 male and 16 female students with the Italian-Croatian language combination. According to the data from school authorities, all the respondents had been bilinguals since their early childhood. The vast majority of the participants were simultaneous bilinguals, and some were consecutive bilinguals where a second language was added in early childhood.

Members of national minorities¹ in Croatia can exercise their constitutional right to upbringing and education through three basic models and special forms of schooling.

Model A, according to which the entire teaching is conducted in the language and script of the national minority, with mandatory learning of the Croatian language for the same number of hours as the language of the minority. Students have the right and obligation to learn additional content important for the minority community. This teaching model is conducted in a special institution, but it is possible to conduct it in institutions with classes in the Croatian language in special departments with classes in the language and script of the minority.

Model B, according to which teaching is conducted bilingually. The natural group of subjects is taught in the Croatian language, and the social group of subjects is taught in the language of the national minority. Classes are conducted in an institution with classes in the Croatian language but in separate departments.

Model C, according to which classes are conducted in the Croatian language with an additional two to five school hours intended for learning (cultivating) the language and culture of the national minority. An additional lesson lasting five school hours per week includes learning the language and literature of the national minority, as well as geography, history, music and fine arts.

Many members of the Italian and the Czech national minorities in Croatia use this right and according to our sources in the institutions where this study

1 <https://mzo.gov.hr/istaknute-teme/odgoj-i-obrazovanje/obrazovanje-nacionalnih-manjina/571>

was conducted all the students that were considered as bilinguals were educated according to Model A.

This study was completely voluntary for the students, anonymous and in line with the Code of Ethics in Croatia. The researcher was introduced to the students either by school principals, school psychologists or one of the teachers from the schools. He explained the purpose of the study. Students were given codes so that anonymity could be granted. The writing task lasted for half an hour (30 minutes).

4. Results and discussion

The data were analysed using the free statistical package PSPP for Windows version 0.10.4-g50f7b7. In our analysis of the deviations in the use of articles we first looked at the proportion of mistakes in the use of articles in the total number of grammar mistakes. We then moved on to the analysis of articles by searching for very serious mistakes. This was followed by the analysis of the types of mistakes in the use of articles in an EFL writing task.

4.1 Analysis of the use of articles in the total number of grammar mistakes

In the monolingual group, mistakes in the use of articles constituted 5% and in the bilingual group 4% of the total number of grammar mistakes. For comparison, it should be mentioned that mistakes with articles constituted a much smaller proportion than the mistakes in the use of tenses in the total number of grammar mistakes for the same sample of participants (Legac 2021: 139). We can conclude that from this point of view, both groups were almost equally good and that there were not too many grammar mistakes resulting from students' unfamiliarity with the use of articles in English. In other words, students in both groups have mastered this field of grammar better than many other aspects of grammar.

4.2 Analysis of the very serious mistakes in the use of articles

These are mistakes resulting from the fact that the student has not even mastered the form of articles: mistakes like *we will be a friends* (example from

the bilingual group); where the student used the indefinite article *a* (normally used with single countable nouns) followed by the ending -s (normally indicating plural of nouns) or *We ate a apple* (example from the monolingual group) where the student used the indefinite article *a* before a noun beginning with vowel instead of *an*. The results showed that in both groups (monolingual and bilingual) such mistakes constituted less than 1% of the mistakes belonging to the articles.

4.3 Analysis of the deviations in the use of articles in a writing task for EFL learners according to the types of mistakes in the use of articles

Here we proceeded to the analysis of the use of articles according to the grammar books that have usually been prescribed as obligatory materials in linguistic courses for prospective teachers of EFL during the last 50 years in Croatia and the neighbouring countries that used to be part of the common country (Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). These grammars include Frank (1972), Karlovčan (1980), Swan (1980), Eastwood (2005) and Quirk / Greenbaum (2012) and they were the means by which the teachers of our respondents learnt English grammar at universities and colleges.

A) Definiteness resulting from being mentioned for a second time and anaphoric use. Monolingual students made four mistakes, while bilinguals did not make a single mistake of this kind.

We saw a train. A train was very long.

He drove in a Mercedes. A car was expensive.

We saw a pigeon. A pigeon flew very fast.

There was a picture. A picture was nice.

B) Definiteness resulting from the so-called reason of locality, i.e., it can represent only one particular thing, because there is only one floor in that room, or only one door, one window, etc., and it is clear what object we are referring to. Monolingual students made six mistakes:

It was on floor.

We were swimming in pool.

I will tell you all about journey.
We were in house.
There was nobody in train.
Your Mom was in kitchen.

As can be seen, students from the monolingual group dropped the definite article here and bilingual students did not make a single mistake of this kind again.

C) Wrong use of the definite article in sentences where it is supposed to be omitted because buildings are used for their primary purpose, e.g. *We go to school as students or teachers, people serve sentences in prison; churches are meant to be used for prayers and worship services*, etc. Monolingual students made five mistakes:

His mother works in the school.
We went to the bed (meaning: 'to sleep').
His younger sister does not go to the school.
She never go to the school in the afternoon (additional mistake with the form of the verb).
She likes to go to the school.

Bilinguals made two mistakes:

We did not want to go to the bed.
Jean did not have to go to the school on my last day.

Participants in our study used the definite article here instead of dropping it. The author of this paper knows from his long experience of teaching prospective EFL teachers that advanced learners have serious difficulties distinguishing between the primary and non-primary purpose of these institutions: *He goes to school* (to learn because he is a student); *Our polling station was in the school* (there is only one school in our village and we voted in that building).

D) Wrong use of the definite article where it cannot be used. It was used with *most* when it was used as an adverb. Monolinguals made two mistakes of that kind:

He liked it the most.
We like it the most.

Bilinguals made one mistake of that sort:

I liked it the most when we went to the swimming pool.

They probably used the definite article because they knew that it has to be used with superlatives of adjectives and they did not distinguish between the lexeme *most* used as an adjective and as an adverb.

E) Wrong use of the definite article with abstract nouns instead of its omission. There were three occurrences of that kind recorded among monolinguals:

Her grandpa is full of the wisdom.
London is full of the beauty.
It was a day of the happiness.

No mistake of that sort was recorded in the bilingual group. Here students tend to think that this abstract noun is used in a concrete sense and that the use of the definite article is obligatory.

F) Wrong droppings of the indefinite article *a, an* (in subject complements). Monolinguals made four mistakes of that kind. They were found in the following sentences:

You are very nice person.
Bubi is sweet dog.
I was happy person there.
London is expensive city.

There was one such occurrence in the bilingual group:

It's such beautiful city. (it refers to London)

G) Use of the numeral *one* where native speakers of English would prefer the indefinite article. Monolingual students made one mistake:

We saw one dog.

There was no mistake of that kind in the letters written by bilingual learners.

The root of the wrong use of the numeral *one* instead of the indefinite article *a* or *an* is most probably the result of the interference with Croatian on the part of the monolingual learners because Croatian grammar requires the use of the numeral and students forget that the indefinite article in English also means *one*.

H) Wrong dropping of the definite article before musical instruments. Only two mistakes of that kind were recorded in the monolingual group:

Jack plays piano.

We sang and played guitar.

These students have not learnt the rule or have mixed it with the rule of German that they were also learning at the time of testing for this study (*Er spielt Gitarre*). Bilingual learners made no mistake of that kind.

I) Deviations in the use of articles in fixed expressions, geographical names, names of buildings, streets, etc. Monolingual learners made 16 mistakes:

We had great time (omission of the indefinite article *a*). The same mistake was repeated by two students.

It's pity (omission of the indefinite article *a*). This mistake was repeated several times

I liked to be in Netherlands (omission of the definite article *the*).

Thank you for taking me to the Downing Street (wrong use of the definite article instead of zero article).

I liked Tower of London (wrong omission of the definite article *the*)

Thank you for inviting me to United Kingdom (wrong omission of the definite article *the*)

Bilinguals made 12 mistakes:

I had great time (students dropped the indefinite article *a* – the expression *to have a great time* was wrongly used several times).

What shame? (a couple of students dropped the indefinite article *a*)

I liked fish and the chips (instead of *fish and chips*).

I missed Adriatic Sea (several students dropped the definite article *the*)

I was sad when I saw Alps from the plane again (this student forgot to put the definite article here).

The problem with the above examples is that they have to be individually learnt if they are part of fixed expressions or students remember the general rule that you do not use articles with geographical names (*France, Sweden, Italy*) and they forget that a definite article has to be used with plural names of countries (*the Netherlands*) or when a common noun (*kingdom*) is a part of the full name of the country (*the United Kingdom*). Sometimes students tend to use the rule about articles that is applied to one of the other foreign languages that they learn at the same time or that they have previously learnt, so they use the definite article with names of streets in English because it is used in German (*die Ludwigsstraße*).

4.4 Analysis of the frequency of deviations, analysis of t-test and correlations quotients between the two researched groups of participants

The analysis of the frequency of deviations in the use of articles revealed that there were 95 students (74.2% or almost three quarters) in the whole sample who did not make a single mistake in the use of articles. Their number in the monolingual group was 46 or 64.79% and 49 or 85.96% in the bilingual group. This indicates a better performance of the bilingual EFL learners, but the results were quite satisfactory for both groups if we take into consideration the fact that articles present a very difficult area for EFL learners in Croatia (Zergollern-Miletić 2014: 7)

The analysis of the frequency of deviations in the use of articles revealed that their sum for monolinguals was 42, and for bilinguals 16. This means that the sum in monolinguals was more than 2.5 times higher than in bilinguals. This is another indication of the better achievement of the bilingual students.

Real proof for the outperformance of bilingual EFL learners over their monolingual counterparts was found in the results of the t-test. It can be clearly seen (see Table 1) that the difference between the two means in this variable (monolingual students 0.62; bilingual students 0.28) is statistically significant ($t = 2.12, p < 0.05$).

Table 1. t-test results for number of deviations in the use of articles.

	number of students	mean	S.D.	t	p
monolingual students	71	0.62	0.99	2.12	0.36
bilingual students	57	0.28	0.82		

These results thus confirm our first starting hypothesis. It stated that bilingual EFL learners would be better at the use of articles in EFL than their monolingual counterparts.

In order to test our second starting hypothesis, we also looked at the correlations between the number of deviations in the use of articles and the achievement in the form of points given by three independent graders (they did not know each other, they were specially trained and their assessments and evaluations are used by college and university institutions and the Ministry of Education and Sports and the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education for the state graduation exams) for the writing task (see Table 2 below). They were negative and statistically significant for both groups (monolinguals – $r = -0.436, p < 0.01$).

Table 2. Correlation coefficients between the number of deviations in the use of articles and the achievement in writing skills in EFL.

	achievement in writing skills in EFL	
number of deviations in the use of articles	monolingual learners	bilingual learners
	-0.436*	-0.456*

*correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

The second hypothesis has also been confirmed. It stated there would be a negative relationship between the number of deviations in the use of articles

and the achievement in writing skills in the number of points given by three independent graders.

5 Conclusion

In the past, the author of this paper has conducted studies in Croatia where he compared the achievement in EFL between monolingual and bilingual EFL learners in various language skills (listening, speaking and writing). He has also researched the differences between monolingual and bilingual EFL learners in affective factors and creativity. The results of those studies suggested that bilingual learners had better results. Recently he started to compare the differences between these two groups of individuals in various aspects of grammar. Since correct usage of articles is a very difficult area of grammar for Croatian EFL learners (Zergollern-Miletić [2014] claims that advanced learners and interpreters have serious problems in mastering their correct usage), the author wanted to compare the deviations in the use of articles in EFL in writing EFL on a task of writing a letter to a friend with several prescribed elements. He had two starting hypotheses:

H1 - Bilingual learners of EFL will be better at using articles in EFL than their monolingual counterparts.

H2 – There will be a negative relationship between the number of deviations in the use of articles and the achievement in writing skills in the number of points given by three independent graders.

Both hypotheses of this study have been confirmed. The results of a t-test analysis have shown that the differences between the means of the two researched groups were statistically significant and have thus confirmed the first hypothesis: Bilingual EFL learners are better at using articles in EFL than their monolingual counterparts. The results of the correlation analysis have confirmed the second starting hypothesis, so it has been concluded that there is a negative relationship between the number of deviations in the use of articles and the achievement in writing measured by the number of points given by three independent graders. The author points out here that deviations in the use of articles have constituted a tiny proportion of all grammar

mistakes in both research groups of participants. Students often used them correctly in both researched groups, so our congratulations go to both students and their teachers.

However, these results should be treated with caution. Although students in the sample did not make many mistakes in using articles, it does not mean they have mastered using articles completely. There is an essential limitation to this study: Students had to complete a letter, and it was easier for them to keep their writing under control as students are taught by their EFL teachers how to avoid mistakes whenever they are in doubt. If the students had been given a test with translation from Croatian, Czech or Italian into English, it might have given not-so-good results. Since the results of this study imply that bilingual learners of EFL can have better results in one aspect of the achievement in writing skills in EFL and as other studies by the author and other authors conducted in Croatia have shown similar results, we suggest that parents of minority languages in Croatia should be encouraged to raise their children as bilinguals. With bilingual communities, there is always a danger that they could start using only one language (in our case, only Croatian), as using it as the sole language of communication would be enough for them to have fairly successful communication at home and in their environment as everybody understands Croatian. We cannot be sure, however, that this better performance is due to children's bilinguality. To draw more conclusions about the differences between monolingual and bilingual learners of EFL, further research in this area seems necessary both in Croatia and abroad.

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