

English Articles and Modals in the Writing of Some Botswana Students*

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What syntactic patterns emerge in students' use of articles and modals? What are the reasons for these patterns? What implications do the findings of the study have for English language instruction in Botswana? Exactly 1556 essays comprising class assignments, written seminar presentations, test papers and examination scripts from 514 randomly selected students of the University of Botswana were analysed. The findings indicate that there were systematic omissions, substitutions and insertion of the definite and indefinite articles as well as recurrent use of the expression *can be able*. Students' indication of different forms of epistemic modality was confined to the use of *could* while complex verb phrases involving negation had their constituents reordered such that the negative operator *not* consistently succeeded the perfective auxiliary. The study shows that the reasons for these errors are both intra- and inter-lingual, namely the complexities of the two grammatical structures, articles and modals, and the influence of L1. Since the Botswana Senior Secondary Assessment Syllabus specifies 'accuracy' in the use of grammatical forms, by demanding high language achievement standards, this paper argues that a return to the teaching of basic grammar in the high school is important for the students' mastery of articles and modals.

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Introduction

Learning and using modals and articles appropriately are challenging tasks for learners of English as a second language. The tasks are made more difficult where the learners' first language lacks equivalent lexical or grammatical items of the L2. Duskova (1983), for instance, observes that the difficulties with English articles encountered by Czech speakers learning English are partly the result of the absence of a similar system in the first language. Platt *et al.* (1984) assert that in many ESL contexts, the use of articles deviates from standard usage largely because of mother tongue interference. Cook (1994: 27) notes that 'the most persistent recurrent problems in terms of slips and minor errors amongst all groups of the most sophisticated users of English as a second language involve confusion with the words *the, a (an)* and their proper necessary non-use'. Pica (2002: 2) also identifies certain sentence modality and modification of nouns with articles as grammatical structures that are very difficult for second language learners. In her view, L2 learners' difficulty with these structures invariably results in 'incomplete or incorrect representations in their interlanguage

development and is manifested in either omission or substitution of incorrect versions for correct ones'. Thompson (2002), identifying with these assertions, reiterates that learning modal auxiliaries is an intricate process 'involving learning how to form these modals correctly, recognising categories of modalities and choosing the appropriate modal for expressing modality'.

In line with the foregoing, this paper examines students' use of articles and modals at the University of Botswana by providing answers to the following questions. What syntactic patterns emerge in students' use of articles and modals? What are some of the reasons for these patterns and what implications do the findings of the study have for English language instruction in Botswana?

Articles which are classified as determiners modify nouns in relation to their referential properties in standard usage. They are used to indicate generally whether or not the speaker believes his addressee(s) can identify the referent of the NP. This identification of the referent may be definite/specific, indefinite/specific or generic (Quirk *et al.*, 1972: 149–150). According to Master (1994: 230), the misuse of articles rarely impedes communication in the spoken form. In written language, however, writers are required to be precise with them because of the absence of extra linguistic cues such as gestures that could facilitate communication. Platt *et al.* (1984: 54) observe that the rules for using articles, definite and indefinite, in the new Englishes are not the same as in the native environment. In many of the new varieties, the emphasis seems to be on 'the particular/non-particular distinction rather than the definite/indefinite or the known/unknown division of the more established Englishes'. This distinction is quite useful in appreciating the conflict that learners face in learning some L2 grammatical forms.

Precision in the use of modals, whether in the spoken or written form, is important because of the shade of meanings (obligation, volition, ability, prediction, permission and probability) they signal. Papafragou (1997) commenting on the intricacies of modal verbs, in English observes that 'complex factors will interact in the acquisition of a system as complicated as the English modal set'. Modal verbs are generally classified as conveying epistemic or non-epistemic (deontic or root) meaning. In their epistemic function, 'speakers use them to comment on the content of the clause' while in their non epistemic function, they are used to intervene in the speech event (Downing & Locke, 2002: 383).

As to the acquisition of the two uses of modal verbs, the consensus in the literature (see Perkins, 1983; Shepherd, 1982; Wellman, 1990; Wells, 1979, 1985) is that first language learners acquire the non-epistemic use of modals much earlier than their epistemic functions. This difference, according to Papafragou (1997), has to do with the 'stronger demands on the human meta-representational device' that epistemic modality makes which also automatically delays the appearance of 'genuine epistemic instances' till the later stages of language development. The experience of second language learners with proficient epistemic use of modal verbs is unlikely to differ significantly because of these 'higher-order meta representational cognitive abilities'.

The role of instruction

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suggest that formal instruction directed at features that are not subject to developmental constraints can succeed'. For example, Pienemann (1984) in a study involving learners of German reports that the learners who were taught the German copula were able to use this structure accurately. Based on this finding, Ellis (1994: 633) suggests that accuracy in the use of simple structures improves with instruction. In their study on pronoun acquisition, Seow and Tay (2004) report that classroom instruction, formal and informal, produced varied outcomes for the two groups of learners. For example, the learners who were instructed formally were generally more competent in pronoun use. They therefore recommend that 'complementing implicit learning with occasional strong doses of explicit teaching of grammar' would be beneficial to ESL learners.

Thus, different factors determine the success or otherwise of instruction in second language acquisition. As already indicated, articles and modals are complex grammatical structures. Pica's (1983, 1985: 214) observation that the acquisition of articles does not seem to be influenced by instruction because of the difficulty of harmonising linguistic and extra linguistic factors essential for understanding articles and gaining competence in their use, reiterates this point. She, however, suggests that 'a more systematic presentation' could produce a significant result. Master (1994: 244) on the other hand correlates significant 'increase in the mean post-test scores of his subjects with the systematic presentation of the articles'. The view held in this paper is that individual learners have differential learning rates and that systematic instruction in the second language environment should accelerate learners' acquisition of modals and articles. This is the view also indirectly expressed by Cook (1994: 28) when he attributes the misuse of the articles, especially in Africa, to poor instruction, which itself is the result of inadequate resources (books) and lack of well-trained ESL teachers.

ESL implications

It is important, at this point, to briefly examine the different approaches to language teaching in view of the implications that these approaches have for learners' proficiency particularly in the ESL context. Larsen-Freeman (2001a: 251-266, 2001b: 34-41) indicates that language teaching has alternated between two major approaches, formal and functional. Early formal grammarians proposed the establishment of grammatical categories based on the distribution of structures in sentences with Chomsky's transformational generative grammar as a major influence. His distinction between competence and performance influenced language learning which was conceived 'as a process where learners abstract the rules of the target language through hypothesis formation and testing' (Larsen-Freeman, 2001b: 35). Thus, the formal approach explains syntactic facts on the basis of formal grammatical properties. The functional approach, which provided the theoretical base for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), on the other hand, emphasises learners' development of communicative ability in the language and the subsequent acquisition of its forms because it is assumed that rules do not just generate grammatical sentences, but that sentences are means of expressing meaning.

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develop knowledge of the structure and form of English as used in a range of situations. In addition, the Botswana Senior Secondary Assessment Syllabus specifies a very high standard by requiring students to write without gross errors, including errors of tense, spelling, punctuation, article and preposition. If the overall goal of English language learning, as specified by the teaching and assessment syllabi is grammatical accuracy, then it is logical to teach the students grammatical forms such as articles and modals in spite of the teaching methodology prescribed in the teaching syllabus. This study is important and relevant, therefore, because it delineates the syntactic patterns characterising students' usage of English articles and modal verbs (central modals), explores some of the reasons for the recurrent patterns of usage, and makes suggestions for effectively teaching these grammatical forms to the learners.

Methodology

The data for the study comprise essays obtained from 514 graduate and undergraduate students in the Department of English at the University of Botswana. There were 100 students each from the first, second and fourth year programmes, and 200 and 14 students, respectively, from the third year and graduate class. The graduate class had the fewest number of students because of the generally low enrolment in the programme. The third year had the largest because, over the period of the study, the researcher had taught at least one course per semester at this level and therefore had more access to students within this group. Except for the graduate group, which constituted a very small class, all the students were randomly selected. For each undergraduate student, three essays: two continuous assessment test papers and one examination paper were examined. In the case of each post graduate student, four essays comprising three seminar presentations and one examination paper were analysed.

The use of graduate and undergraduate students provides information on the students' competencies. For instance, the initial competence of the students in the use of articles and modals is revealed by their writing in the first year while the samples from the second, third and fourth year reveal apparent progress and/or fossilisation tendencies. The essays from the graduate students who are predominantly teachers tend to affirm fossilisation.

All the essays were content analysed and the recurrent patterns of usage of articles and modals were identified and classified. All the errors reported, except the incorrect placement of the negative marker *not*, which is confined to essays from the first year, are widespread in the essays. There were other types of deviant usage in the data but these were ignored as they do not fall within the scope of the study. In the next section of the paper, the findings regarding each question for the study are presented beginning with the patterns of usage.

Findings

Analysis of the student essays showed that there are three major patterns of error in the use of articles, and three others in the use of modals. These are presented, with examples, in Tables 1–5. Thereafter, some of the reasons for the students' usage are provided and the implications of the findings discussed.

Articles

The data show three different error types in students' use of the articles: missing articles *a/an* and *the* (Table 1), substitution of one article for another (Table 2), and redundant use of articles (Table 3).

In Table 1, excerpts from the students' essays across all the levels involving omission of the articles are presented. There are indications from the data that the learners are unable to distinguish between definite/specific, indefinite/specific or even generic referents.

Table 2 shows some examples of sentences involving the substitution of one article for another. The substitution of the indefinite article for the definite was prevalent in all the students' essays irrespective of their level. This implies that the students do not distinguish between using the indefinite article *a(n)* to show that a language user makes no assumption that his addressee(s) can identify the referent of the NP and using the definite article to indicate that his/her

Table 1 Missing articles

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Sentence</i>	<i>Article(s) omitted</i>
1	(*) Name can be used as a referring expression	a
2	(*) Hurricane destroyed all the buildings in (*) Philippines	the
3	Macbeth instead of waiting to attain his destiny in (*) normal way	a
4	According to (*) bible, it says thou shall not kill	the

*Indicates that an article is missing.

Table 2 Substitution of articles

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Sentence</i>	<i>Article(s) substituted</i>
1	This method is good because it gives the students freedom to work and feel really involved. Student get motivated when they feel involved in (a) learning process	'a' substituted for 'the'
2	In English, (a) word 'dog' would mean a dog as an animal but contradictory to the French meaning of a dog.	'a' substituted for 'the'
3	(A) word insult as a verb can not be divided into syllables unless stress marks are used	'a' substituted for 'the'
4	Also when we look at Okonkwo, he ruled his family with (a) hand of a lion	'a' substituted for 'the'

() Indicates article incorrectly used.

Table 3 Redundant use of article

S/N	Sentence	Article inserted
1	Free variation are sounds that contrast with one another without changing (a) meaning	a
2	John drank (a) very hot tea	a
3	A society with women will have (a) good morality because women have qualities that provide a comfortable environment to live in	a
4	The tongue is made is made up of muscles found in the oral tract ... it moves in different positions ... this makes it possible for (the) speech sounds to be produced	the

() indicates redundant use of articles.

addressee(s) can actually identify the referent. The data suggest that in the students' view, there is apparently no difference between the *definite/specific*, *indefinite/specific* and *generic* referents.

Table 3 illustrates students' redundant use of articles. The analysis indicates that redundant use of articles results from using the indefinite article with non-countable nouns as in Examples 2 and 3 (*hot tea*, *good morality*.) It was also observed that the students had difficulty indicating indefinite/specific reference with plural countable nouns which require zero article as in Example 4 (*speech sounds*). In Example 1, the use of 'a' is classified as redundant because the word *meaning* indicates generic reference. If an article is to be used, then 'the' would be more appropriate. The findings in Table 3 therefore support those of Tables 1 and 2. Students are unable to determine when a referent is definite/specific, indefinite/specific or even generic, which may, itself, result from inadequate understanding of count, non-count, mass and abstract, nouns in English.

Modals

There are three observations regarding the use of modals. The first is that students incorrectly order the elements of complex verb phrases, consisting of modal and perfective auxiliaries, by placing the negative marker *not* after the perfective auxiliary. The second is that students depend excessively on *can/could* for the expression of different types of epistemic modalities. These two patterns of usage are confined to the essays from first year students. The third observation is that students systematically use the modal *can* with *be able*. This pattern is widespread.

In Table 4, some examples relating to the incorrect placement of the negative marker as well as the excessive use of *can/could* are presented. Students prefer to place the negative marker *not* after the perfective auxiliary. There is ample evidence to show that the incorrect placement of the negative marker is closely linked with its fixed position within the verb phrase in the learners' L1. The findings also show that the modal, *can/could* is used almost always to express

Table 4 Incorrect placement of the Negative marker with can/could

S/N	Sentences	Remark
1	If they had told Oedipus that they adopted him when he asked them, Oedipus <i>could have not decided</i> to run away from the oracle	use of <i>could</i> for <i>would</i> and incorrect placement of <i>not</i>
2	If only he <i>*(could have left)</i> Oedipus to die, Oedipus <i>would have not encountered</i> this problem	verb phrase word order
3	If they <i>*(could have)</i> told him that then Oedipus wouldn't have fled away so if he did any of these, Oedipus <i>could have not</i> ran away to Thebes where he was destined for incest and patricide	use of <i>could</i> for <i>would</i> or <i>might</i> , and incorrect placement of <i>not</i>
4	If it <i>*(would have not been)</i> for the kgotla, there <i>would have not been</i> a herdman who worked hand in hand with the kgosi	incorrect placement of <i>not</i>

*() indicates that items enclosed may be replaced with lexical verbs.

Table 5 The use of *can be able* for *is able*

S/N	Sentence
1	After testing, feedback is given so that the learner <i>can be able</i> to gauge her ability and be able to make well informed decisions on whether to continue or look for a job
2	Polysemy is whereby the meaning of a word is included in another word and then that word which its meaning is included <i>can be able</i> to also refer to the initial word
3	Open classes do allow the formation of new meanings as we acquire new technology so that we <i>can be able</i> to name things that were not existing before
4	Thank's God to have a genius friend like myself, because I already had a plan to sneak out during the night so that he <i>can be able</i> to attend the party

different types of commitment to propositions. For instance, Examples 1 and 3, should actually express prediction based on inference instead of possibility. Similarly, *can/could* are used in conditional clauses where lexical verbs would have been more appropriate as in 2, 3 and 4.

In Table 5, examples involving the use of *can be able* for *can* or *is able* are presented. The expression *can be able* which is used to denote ability featured prominently in all the samples, from the first year to the graduate students, and in all the cases, it may be substituted with *be able*. In the next section, the second concern of this paper, the reasons for the patterns observed with respect to the use of articles and modals, is addressed.

Reasons for the Patterns of Usage of Articles and Modals

The patterns of articles and modals usage by the learners in this study, which are at variance with standard usage, may be attributed to two major interrelated reasons: intra-lingual, particularly the difficulties associated with the L2 structures, and interlingual transfer.

English articles and modals

As the literature indicates, articles are extremely difficult for non-native speakers or speakers whose first language is not a romance language for various reasons. First, many of such languages do not have articles and therefore use entirely different systems of marking noun phrases. Second, the rules for using articles, which are complicated, have too many exceptions and these ultimately confuse the learners. For example, the generic/specific distinction respectively in *boys* and *a boy* is straight forward, but the definite/specific and indefinite/specific distinctions are quite challenging tasks for the students. The omission of the articles in the data may be attributed to this dichotomy. For instance, in Example 2, Table 1, *(The) hurricane destroyed all the buildings in the Philippines*, the writer obviously intended to be definite and specific. On the other hand, the writer of the sentence, *(A) name can be used as a referring expression* (Example 1 Table 1) intended to be indefinite but specific. Yet in the two sentences, the articles *the* and *a* are omitted. The redundant use of articles in Table 3, especially with plural countable and mass nouns, which is attributed to the students' lack of distinction between definite/specific and indefinite/specific (that requires zero use of article) also underscores the complexities involved with learning these L2 structures.

Similarly, generic reference appears simple with count nouns, but the rule becomes complicated with concrete, abstract, mass and plural nouns which are used with zero article when the intended reference is generic. The modification of some of the non-countable nouns in the data using the indefinite article, for example, *semantic knowledge* and *good morality* in Table 3, supports this position.

Interlingual effects

While the inability to distinguish between the definite and indefinite forms of determining the noun phrase is largely a product of the numerous rules and exceptions in English, there are obviously interlingual forces at play. This is because the students are used to a totally different system (predominantly Setswana) in which nouns are determined not by the use of articles but by the use of demonstratives and some quantifiers (University of Botswana, 2000: 6).

The examples below illustrate this point:

- (1) The lions roar
Ditau di-a-duma
Lions subject agr-pres.-tense-roar
- (2) A lion roars
Tau e-a-duma
Lion subject agr-pres.tense-roar
- (3) Lions roar
Ditau di-a-duma
Lions subject agr-pres.-tense-roar

- (4) The lion is roaring
 Tau e-a-duma
 Lion subject.agr-pres.-tense-roar
- (5) A lion is roaring
 Tau e-a-duma
 Lion subject.agr-pres.-tense-roar.
- (6) Lions are roaring
 Ditau di-a-duma
 Lions subject.agr-pres.-tense-roar
- (7) The lions are roaring
 Ditau di-a-duma
 Lions subject.agr-pres.-tense-roar
- (8) A boy ran
 Mosimane o-ne-a-taboga.
 Boy subj.agr. past-run
- (9) The boy ran
 Mosimane o-ne-a-taboga.
 Boy subj.agr. past-run
- (10) That boy ran
 Mosimane yole o-ne-a-taboga.
 Boy that subj.agr. past-run

The excerpts above show that specification of the noun in Setswana, except for (10), is essentially the same irrespective of the meaning intended, definite/specific, indefinite/specific or generic, and irrespective of the nouns type, (countable, non-countable or mass).

In order to use epistemic modals successfully, speakers must necessarily employ their 'meta-logical and meta-cognitive abilities to perform deductive operations on abstract propositions (i.e. on the content of their beliefs) and to arrive at logical conclusions' (Papafragou, 1997). The examples in Table 4 which are from the first year samples show that the students are more inclined to use *could* (possibility) where *would* (prediction) is more appropriate. The nature of the task, to make logical deductions from the events which already took place for example in *King Oedipus* and *Macbeth* demands that the students demonstrate some knowledge of epistemic modality, that is ability to make predictions. Their choice of *could* in place of *would* seems to be a reflection of not correctly determining and stating their commitment or attitude to propositions. This situation is further complicated by the fact that Setswana, like many other Bantu languages, has no modal verbs. In the examples of English sentences translated into Setswana below *could*, *should* *might* and *would* are represented by just one lexical item *kabo*:

- (1) I could not have eaten
 Gagona jaaka ke-kabo ke jele
 Not that subj.agr- could subj.agr-eat
- (2) I should not have eaten
 Ke kabo ke-sa-ja
 subj.agr could subj.ag- not-eat
- (3) I might not have eaten
 Ke kabo ke-sa-ja
 subj.agr could subj-agr- not-eat

- (4) I would not have eaten
 Ke kabo ke-sa-ja
 Subj.agr.could subj.agr. not-eat
- (5) I can not eat any time
 Ga ke-kake kaja ka nako epe
 Not subj.agr-not pres.eat at time any

Furthermore, the fact that the substitution of *would* with *could* is more confined to the first year samples lends credence to the difficulty of the subject itself and suggests that this group of students is still extremely dependent on *can/could*, perhaps the first modal auxiliaries that they acquired to signal invariably various types of commitment to propositions.

The second observation is that the incorrect word order of negative verb phrases consisting of the modal and perfective auxiliaries where the negative operator *not* succeeds, rather than precedes, the perfective auxiliary seems to be closely associated with the structure of the verb phrase in Setswana. It is important to observe that negation in Setswana is much more complex because different items, lexical verbs and particles, [e.g. *gagona* and *sa* in (1) and (2)] may be used to express negation and the particles may be interrupted by other verbal elements as in Example (5) above. In addition, the perfective auxiliary *have* does not have a direct equivalent in Setswana and the position of the negative operator *not* is fixed. It comes just before the main verb as shown in the translated versions of (2), (3) and (4) above. These three factors seem to influence the consistent post perfective auxiliary placement of the negative operator in the first year samples.

The third pattern of usage which features in all the samples is the contraction *can be able*. This is a type of usage which is induced by interlingual factors. The usage is a product of the conflation of two verb forms in Setswana: *ka*, the verb that represents *can* and *kgona* which means *be able*. It is not unusual in Setswana for these two to co-occur as a discourse marker for emphasis, as demonstrated by the following examples:

- (6) O ka kgona go tsamaya
 She *can be able to walk*
- (7) O ka tsamaya
 She *can be able to walk*

Even if *kgona* is omitted, *ka* will still denote *can*. The possibility of the co-occurrence of these two verbs denoting ability in a single verb phrase in the students' L1 seems to be the main reason for the prevalence of this expression in the samples. Notably, Arua (2004) had reckoned this usage as a syntactic feature of Botswana English. This expression is so common and perhaps so ingrained in some students. They can actually identify it as an instance of interlingual error and yet within the same context in their own writing use it.

Implications for English Language Instruction

The discussions so far indicate that students' use of articles and modals is largely conditioned by two factors: the complexity of some grammatical structures in the English language itself and the pressure exerted on the students by

the grammatical structure of their first language. In this section of the paper, the major implications of the findings are highlighted and suggestions for improving the use of the grammatical structures discussed.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the approach used in teaching English language in the secondary schools in Botswana. While this approach is lauded for its versatility, it obviously has its short comings especially in the second language environment where teaching of grammatical structures is essential for the learners to build their linguistic competence in the target language. As Seow and Tay (2004: 11) argue, 'the informal classroom learning environment is highly desirable', but 'explicitly taught grammatical knowledge seems to play a part to help learners notice and retain the organised linguistic systems that, in turn, facilitate the acquisition of grammatical accuracy'. Without formal instruction in the rudiments of grammar, the learner's task is made extremely difficult since he is being required to apply the rules of a language that are completely inaccessible to him. There is, therefore, the need at the high school to modify the implementation of the CLT to ensure that students are exposed to the fundamentals of English grammar.

Cook (1994: 32), earlier referred to, asserts that the rejection of traditional grammar at some point is one of the reasons for 'ESL learners' poor understanding of English determiners'. In spite of the criticisms of traditional grammar, it is still the one form of grammar that provides second language learners the solid foundation required for a good understanding of the 'mystique of English'. It is therefore important for policy decisions in Botswana to incorporate the teaching of the rudiments of grammar in the high school. In addition, the grammar instruction would be more beneficial to these learners if it proceeds from what the learners know and are familiar with, the forms of specification and modality in Setswana, to the new, what they are expected to learn, in this case, English articles and modals. Furthermore, the instruction should draw attention systematically to the structural differences between the learners' first language and the target language, so that the learners may become aware of the problems that could arise when they substitute L1 with L2 structures.

The second implication which derives from the first is the education language policy in Botswana where English as the official language coexists with Setswana, the national language. In a number of domains including the English language classroom, both languages interact and perhaps compete. Even though the education language policy stipulates that the medium of instruction from standard three is English, this is rarely the case in practice, as 'children are taught in Setswana throughout their elementary school' (Bagwasi, 2003: 214). The ancillary to this scenario is the standard set by the Botswana Senior

Secondary Assessment Syllabus in English language which requires students to 'demonstrate their ability to handle spelling, punctuation and grammar accurately' (Ministry of Education, 1999: 3). In fact, the details of the assessment for writing stipulate the 'use of appropriate grammatical structures in writing' with the specific objective of using 'articles correctly' (Ministry of Education, 1999: 11). Obviously the type of correctness prescribed by the assessment syllabus requires that the learners have many more and varied opportunities to practise the language.

Finally, the fact that the population for the study came from the Department of English in the University has far reaching implications for the teaching of English in Botswana mainly because a large percentage of the graduates from the department are employed as teachers in the high schools. The prescribed variety in Botswana secondary schools is Standard English. For example one of the specific objectives of the assessment syllabus is that students should be able to 'adapt speech for different purposes and audiences' and therefore 'use Standard English in official or formal situations' (Ministry of Education, 1999: 9). A recent study (Arua, 2005) to establish the variety of English taught in Botswana schools, revealed that the teachers did not demonstrate enough awareness of some cross-linguistic structures (such as *can be able*) peculiar to Botswana though they claim that they teach Standard English. These two related observations seem to be indicative of some connection between students' mastery of the grammatical structures and teachers' level of awareness. This subject would however be more appropriate for future research.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine the recurrent syntactic patterns in students' usage of articles and modals, discuss the reasons for the patterns and the implications of the findings for English language teaching in Botswana. Using essays from undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Botswana, the findings reveal that articles are regularly omitted, mixed up, or used redundantly; and that the students are more inclined to express different types of modality using only *can/could*. In addition, the negative marker *not*, consistently succeeds the perfective auxiliary instead of preceding it within the verb phrase. The study also shows that the complexities involved with articles and modals make them difficult to explain to the students, especially as the grammatical system of their L1 differs significantly from that of the target language. In terms of the implications of the findings, the paper argues that the educational language policy, which stipulates Setswana as the medium of instruction from standard 1–3 and the requirements of the Botswana Senior Secondary Assessment Syllabus apparently conflict. Furthermore, the teaching methodology, CLT, in the secondary schools does not provide the forum for adequate instruction in grammar and that the variety of English that is taught in schools does not seem to focus on the accuracy of the use of these structures.

The paper recommends a reconsideration of the implementation of the teaching approach used in secondary schools such that the importance of grammar instruction for the learners is recognised. It also proposes that teachers raise their level of awareness so that they can provide the type of highly structured classroom tasks which will systematically draw learners' attention to the differences between L1 and L2 structures. Finally, streamlining the educational language policy in order to provide more opportunities for the learners to use English would be of great benefit to them.

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