



ACQUISITION SEQUENCE OF FOUR CATEGORIES OF NON-GENERIC USE OF THE ENGLISH DEFINITE ARTICLE *THE* BY TURKISH SPEAKERS

Kenan DİKİLİTAS*
Meryem ALTAY**

Abstract: In all languages there are linguistic forms that seem simple to acquire, but difficulty in their acquisition can be posed by their function, which might be too complex to understand. The definite article *the* in English is one example of this. When learning English as a second language, the acquisition of the functions of the definite article can present problems for speakers of Turkish, a language which does not possess a definite article and in which the function and meaning of *the* is determined by syntactic and pragmatic elements. This study investigates the non-generic use of *the* in four different categories by Turkish speakers at different levels of proficiency in English. Data were collected by administering a questionnaire originally developed by Liu and Gleason (2002), in which respondents were required to supply the definite article where necessary in 91 sentences. The findings indicate that proficiency in article use does not increase in a linear fashion in accordance with an increase in the general level of proficiency, and that the difficulty hierarchy of different categories of use for *the* varies with the proficiency level of participants. As the proficient use and comprehension of the definite article contributes to a fluent and exact expression of meaning, implications can be drawn with reference to instruction of and exposure to English as a foreign language in Turkey.

Keywords: definite article acquisition sequence, definite article categories, difficulty hierarchy

Özet: Bütün dillerde edinilmesi kolay görünen dilsel yapılar vardır, fakat edinimlerindeki zorluk işlevlerinde yatmaktadır, bunun da anlaşılması karmaşık olabilir. İngilizce'deki *the* artikeli bunun bir örneğidir. İkinci dil olarak İngilizce öğrenirken, *the* artikelinin işlevlerinin edinilmesi, Türkçe'de *the* artikelinin karşılığı bulunmaması ve *the* artikelinin anlamı ve işlevinin yapısal ve pragmatik öğelerle belirlenmesinden dolayı, ana dili Türkçe olanlar için problem yaratabilir. Bu çalışma, İngilizce yeterlilikleri farklı seviyelerinde bulunan Türk öğrencilerin genelleyici olmayan (non-generic) *the* artikel kullanımını 4 farklı kategoride araştırmaktadır. Veriler, Liu ve Gleason'un (2002) geliştirdiği anket kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Ankette, öğrencilerden 91 cümlede gerekli yere *the* artikeli yerleştirmesi istenmiştir. Bulgular, *the* artikelinin kullanımında yeterliliğin genel dil seviyesine göre artan bir mod izlemediği ve *the*'nin farklı kullanım kategorilerinin zorluk hiyerarşisinin katılımcıların yeterlilik seviyelerine göre değiştiğini göstermektedir. *The* artikelinin yetkin kullanımı ve anlaşılması, anlamın akıcı ve eksiksiz ifade edilmesine katkıda bulunacağından, Türkiye'de yabancı dil olarak İngilizceye maruz kalma ve İngilizcenin öğretilmesine ilişkin sonuçlar elde edilebilir.

Anahtar sözcükler: belirli tanımlık edinim sırası, belirli tanımlık kategorileri, zorluk hiyerarşisi

Introduction

The variations in the grammatical systems of different languages can present difficulties for learners and users of a second language (L2), especially if there are sharp contrasts between the grammar of the first language (L1) and the L2. One such example concerns differences in the use of articles or other means of indicating definiteness, a situation which can be observed

* Gediz University, İzmir, Turkey, kenandikilitas@gmail.com

** Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Çanakkale, Turkey, maryaltay@hotmail.com

for many pairs of languages. Persian, for example, possesses no bound morpheme equivalent to “*the*” in English. Rather, word order renders a noun phrase (NP) definite or indefinite (Faghih, 1997). Polish is another language which lacks an article system, and makes use of word order, verbal aspects and demonstratives to signal definiteness and indefiniteness (Ekiert, 2007). A further example is Turkish, which likewise has no word similar to “*the*” to express definiteness, but instead employs other mechanisms such as word order, and the characteristics of the NP (whether it is animate or inanimate). This system differs greatly from English and thus seems to lead to difficulties for L1 Turkish learners of English.

Due to the linguistic differences between the languages mentioned above, foreign language learners depend on three sources for linguistic knowledge to express definiteness while acquiring the target language: (1) L2-input (which may be naturalistic and/or classroom-based); (2) the structures of their native language (L1); and (3) innate linguistic knowledge not obviously traceable to either L1-transfer or L2-input (Ionin et al., 2008). It is an undeniable fact that the first source, exposure to the target language, plays a key role in the acquisition of definiteness. However, the second and third sources are also important if we consider internalized L1 knowledge to be closely related to the L2 in terms of universal grammar, which then leads to L1 transfer (Dechert and Raupach, 1989; Odlin, 1989; Gass and Selinker, 1992; Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994, 1996; Schwartz, 1998).

It can be understood that this diversity of linguistic sources influencing the process of acquiring a second or foreign language can make the acquisition of some grammatical points hard to achieve, even if greatly desired. Hence, the acquisition of English articles can be an extremely difficult process for L2 learners especially in cases where the mother tongue of the learners lacks an article for definiteness (Ionin et al. 2008). There are many studies that have investigated this with different language pairs (e.g. Larsen-Freeman, 1975; Thomas, 1989; Parodi et al., 1997). A number of further studies found that L2 learners of English make errors in the use of English articles, either by omitting or misusing them (e.g. Huebner, 1983; Master, 1987; Parrish, 1987; Thomas, 1989; Robertson, 2000; Leung, 2001). These studies all have one common hypothesis: speakers of article-less L1s (e.g., Korean, Japanese, Turkish) omit English articles in obligatory contexts to a greater extent than speakers whose L1s do possess articles (e.g., Spanish) (as cited in Ionin et al. 2008). As a consequence, learners will experience difficulty in expressing definiteness in English.

This difficulty in expressing definiteness in English using *the* could have an effect on the information structure of the text where given information is marked with *the*. Such information represents a link with the previous sentence in the text. Therefore, wrong use of *the* may lead to wrong comprehension of the meaning conveyed. However, if the learners are taught what role *the* plays in structuring information, they may exhibit better comprehension. Master (2002), for example, suggests that article accuracy may be improved by teaching canonical information structure to NNSs of English especially if their language does not have an article system, which is also the case for Turkish learners.

Definiteness in Language

In order to understand the difficulties Turkish learners of English face when using the definite article *the*, it is necessary to demonstrate how definiteness is expressed in both languages. The following sections provide a brief overview of this subject.

English possesses an article, *the*, in addition to the demonstratives *this* and *that* and the personal pronouns *my*, *your*, *his*, *her* etc., to indicate definiteness, whereas Turkish has no

such article or indeed any article morpheme, except for demonstratives and pronouns. In Turkish, definiteness, specificity and referentiality of NPs can be understood through different factors from English, including word order, stress, the use of an indefinite determiner and case marking, tense and modality (Dede, 1986). Since Turkish does not have a definite article corresponding to *the* in English, the authors of this study predicted that adult Turkish learners and users of English might overuse, omit or misuse the definite article *the* in English.

Definiteness in Turkish

Turkish is a language that has a flexible word order due to its rich nominal and verbal inflection. However, pragmatic factors such as topic-comment, definiteness, contrastiveness, and givenness are important in determining the word order (Erguvanlı, 1984). The choice of a certain word order influences whether the NPs in the sentences are definite or not. The fact that Turkish lacks a form that corresponds directly to the English definite article *the* leads to other mechanisms being used to govern definiteness in Turkish. Definiteness in Turkish differs in terms of the structural position of **subject and direct object** NPs:

1. Öğrenci saat-i bul-muş.
Student watch-ACC find-PAST-HEAR-3S
'The student found the watch.' (Tura, 1973: 135)

In the example above, both non-case-marked subject (*öğrenci*) and accusative-marked object (*saati*) are definite.

Definite Subject NPs

In Turkish, subjects at the beginning of a sentence are definite unless overtly marked for indefiniteness with an indefinite article *bir*, or quantifiers such as *herhangi bir* (any) (Erguvanlı, 1984).

The following examples from Tura (1973:112) illustrate how word order plays a role in determining definiteness in Turkish.

2. Çocuk yer-de yat-ıyor-du. (Definite)
Child ground-LOC lie-PROG-PAST- 3S
'The child was lying on the ground.' (Tura, 1973: 102-103)

In (3), the subject NP, '*mektup*', is in the sentence-initial position and definite.

3. Mektup dün Ankara'-dan gel-di. (Definite)
Letter yesterday Ankara-ABL come-PAST- 3S
'The letter came from Ankara yesterday.' (Tura, 1973: 113)

Definite Object NPs

Case-marking creates definiteness in direct object NPs in Turkish. For example, in sentence (4), the accusative-marked NP is interpreted as definite.

4. Murat kitab-ı oku-yor. (Definite)
Murat book-ACC read-PROG- 3S
'Murat is reading the book.' (Erguvanlı, 1984:21-22)

If a direct object is accusative case-marked in Turkish, then the word order of the sentence below can be flexible, but if it is not marked, then the object can only be used in a pre-verbal position (Erguvanlı, 1984; Tura, 1973).

5. *Ben *maç* belki izle-r-im.
I match maybe watch-AOR-1S
6. Ben *maç-ı* belki izle-r-im.
I match-ACC maybe watch-AOR-1S
'I may watch the match.'

Such constraints on the use of definite NPs in Turkish contrast with the situation in English, which is discussed in the next section.

Definiteness in English

In English, the definite article can be used for both generic and non-generic purposes. This study is, however, concerned only with non-generic uses. *The* is used when the intended referent is uniquely identifiable but also sometimes as a non-unique referent (Birner & Ward, 1994).

Theoretical Background to Non-generic Uses of *the* in English

Bickerton's Study

The English article system was studied systematically by Bickerton (1981), who suggested that English articles have different interpretations that can be captured in terms of two binary features: whether the article and associated NP refer to a specific entity (\pm specific referent) and whether the article and associated noun phrase are already known to the person who is listening to or reading the sentence (\pm hearer knowledge). Many studies have been carried out based on this approach to the English article system (e.g. Huebner, 1983; Parrish, 1987; Thomas, 1989).

Hawkins' Location Theory

Another theory developed by Hawkins (1987), referred to as the Location Theory, classified the uses of non-generic *the* in English in eight categories, as follows:

(i) Anaphoric use: this involves the repetition of a noun phrase (NP) which has earlier been introduced for the first time in the discourse with an indefinite NP:

- (1) I read a book about Napoleon. The book was really well written.

(ii) Visible situation use: the use of *the* with a noun mentioned the first time to refer to something that both the speaker and the listener can see:

- (2) Can I have the bill, please?

(iii) Immediate situation use: this use is very similar to (ii) but the element referred to may not be visible:

- (3) Don't go there, chum. The dog will bite you (J. Hawkins, p. 112).

(iv) Larger situation use relying on specific knowledge: the use of *the* with a first-mention noun because it is known in the community:

(4) You don't have to leave so early. The bank doesn't open till 9 o'clock.

(v) Larger situation use relying on general knowledge: the use of *the* with something that one can assume people from a country or around the world should know:

(5) The moon does not appear every day.

(vi) Associative anaphoric use: this use is very similar to the one in (i), the only difference being that the first-mention *the* is used with a noun that is related to a previously mentioned noun, rather than being the same noun:

(6) I bought a radio recently, but the device broke down after three days.

(vii) Unfamiliar use: *the* is used with a first-mention noun that has an explanatory or identifying modifier in the form of a clause, prepositional phrase or noun:

(7) The people who have been invited to the party have not turned up yet.

(viii) Unfamiliar use in NPs with non-explanatory modifiers: this use is similar to (vii) and the only difference is that the modifier does not provide explanatory information:

(8) My wife and I share the same secrets.

Liu and Gleason's Study

Liu and Gleason (2002) investigated in their study whether L2 learners experience difficulties while learning the uses of the English definite article *the*. They suggest that the eight categories of Hawkins' (1987) Location Theory can be reduced to four because location theory basically claims that "[...] when an individual uses *the*, he or she invites the listener or reader to locate the referent by using provided or assumed known cultural, situational, or textual information." (Liu & Gleason, 2002:7). The following are the categories of Liu and Gleason's classification of non-generic uses of *the*:

(i) Cultural use: *the* is used with a noun that is a unique and well-known referent in the speech community:

The White House is in Washington.

(ii) Situation use: *the* is used when the referent of a first-mention noun can be sensed directly or indirectly by the interlocutors or the referent is known by the members of the local community (e.g. people from the same village talking about the church or the pub):

Are you coming to the pub for a drink?

(iii) Structural use: *the* is used with a first-mention noun that has a modifier:

The movies that are shown here now are really old-fashioned.

(iv) Textual use: *the* is used with a noun that has been previously referred to:

Fred bought a car on Monday. On Friday he crashed the car.

Previous Studies of Article Use in L1 and L2

A number of studies have been carried out comparing different pairs of languages and learners' use of articles in the target language. In some cases, the learner's native language is a language with articles and the L2 also has a similar article system, whereas in other contexts, the learner's L1 does not have the same article system as the target language. Although it is not possible to make direct comparisons of different pairs of languages with each other, studies performed involving other pairs of languages can provide us with clues on several different perspectives.

One such study was conducted by Ekiert (2007), who compared Polish (a language with no articles) ESL and EFL learners' acquisition of articles to see whether they performed differently. He found that the sequence of L2 article acquisition largely replicates the natural order of article acquisition by L1 speakers; the EFL learners were also found to have a similar performance to the ESL learners in their ability to use articles.

Another study by Ansarin (2003) investigated whether Persian learners of English as a foreign language acquired the four non-generic uses of *the* at different levels, in relation to their proficiency. The study revealed significant differences between the different proficiency levels. The use of structural and situational categories improved in direct relation to the proficiency level, whereas textual and cultural uses were learnt gradually and with varying difficulty. For these two categories there was no difference between the proficiency groups.

Butler (2002) carried out a study into the causes of difficulties in the acquisition of definiteness for Japanese learners and found that the higher the proficiency, the more target-like usage could be achieved; however, there was still a large gap in the use of articles between native speakers of English and advanced Japanese learners.

Ionin et al. (2008) investigated the acquisition of English articles by speakers of Spanish (a language with articles) and Russian (an article-less language) and found that L1 Spanish speakers rely on transfer, as Spanish has a similar article system to that of English, while Russian learners have direct access to semantic universals due to the difference in the definiteness system of English and Russian. Similarly, Garcia Mayo (2008) conducted a study which investigated various uses of the definite article in English by EFL Spanish learners and concluded that there is an important L1 transfer in the acquisition of the definite article.

Liu and Gleason (2002) concluded from their investigation that the four non-generic uses of the English definite article *the* pose different levels of difficulty for ESL students, which suggests that ESL acquisition of the definite article *the* is use-independent and follows a natural order. In addition, they found that the ability to use *the* in obligatory contexts improved significantly along with the proficiency level. What is interesting is that, in this study, the learners' L1 backgrounds were not considered or were not regarded as an important factor in the process of acquisition.

A small number of research studies on the acquisition of definite articles for L2 English have been conducted with Turkish speakers. A case study of an adult native speaker of Turkish in

an immersion setting, carried out by White (2003), although not concerned solely with the acquisition of articles, did reveal a low suppliance of definite and indefinite articles, which could only partly be explained by influence from the L1. Findings from a more recent study by Dağdeviren (2010), also investigating the use of both definite and indefinite articles, indicated that a significant difference was apparent between high and low level proficiency groups with regard to the use of different articles in a variety of sentence types.

Considering that these previous studies conducted in a variety of contexts displayed varying results, with no obvious consensus, it was decided to undertake the current study in order to investigate the case in a Turkish context with Turkish NNSs of English.

The purpose of this paper is to report on a study investigating the use of definite articles by Turkish learners of English as a foreign language. More specifically, it aims to test the hypothesis that speakers of article-less L1s omit English articles in obligatory contexts. In addition, with reference to Master (1995), the study aims to clarify the idea that there could be different levels of difficulty in certain categories of the definite article in English, in this case with regard to the Turkish L1 context.

Methodology

In the light of the discussion above and with the purpose of better understanding the situation with regard to acquisition of articles in an EFL context by native speakers of Turkish, this study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent are speakers with Turkish as a native language able to use the English definite article in obligatory contexts, according to the four categories determined by Liu and Gleason (2002)?

RQ2: To what extent does the level of proficiency in English affect the use of the definite article in the four categories?

RQ3: Can any variation in the difficulty hierarchy of the four categories be observed according to the level of proficiency?

Setting and Participants

This study was carried out amongst academic staff at a medium-sized state university in western Turkey. The university offers programmes in Turkish in a wide range of disciplines, but all students also receive at least some basic English courses, generally provided by a group of English language instructors, many of whom took part in the study. Other academic staff are required to display a certain level of proficiency in a foreign language, most often English, in order to obtain a position to carry out research and teach at the university. In addition, some members of academic staff have completed their post-graduate training at an institution in another country, most often in Europe or the USA.

A total of 77 members of academic staff participated in the study, both male and female and from all age groups between 25 and 60. They came from a wide range of disciplines and included representatives of all levels of staff, from instructors to research assistants to professors. Some were still engaged in post-graduate studies, others concentrated on teaching while still others were also focused on research. Some had undertaken post-graduate training in another country, though not always necessarily in an English-speaking environment. All had, however, studied English for a longer or shorter period, generally beginning at primary or, more often, secondary school, and all had passed a state-run foreign language proficiency exam or equivalent in order to be employed at the university.

For the purposes of this investigation, the English proficiency level of the participants was determined according to the reported scores obtained in the state-run Public-service Personnel Foreign Language Examination (or the equivalent from other comparable exams, according to the conversion table provided by the Turkish Higher Education Council (YÖK, no date) available at <http://www.yok.gov.tr/en/content/view/707/>). The three levels are here labeled “Upper Intermediate”, “Advanced” and “Proficient”.

Data Collection

Data was collected by administering the questionnaire developed by Liu and Gleason (2002), as shown in the Appendix, and which had already been tested for validity and reliability by its authors, as reported in their study. Participants were contacted personally or by e-mail by the researchers and requested to complete the questionnaire. Obviously, since the questionnaire was completed individually by participants in their own time, no time limit was set, but respondents were instructed to complete it without referring to any other materials.

The questionnaire consists of 91 items including an equal number of examples of the four categories of use for the definite article. Some of the sentences contained more than one example of the definite article. There are also a number of distracters for each type, to ascertain whether the respondents can discriminate between uses of the definite article and the zero article. The respondents were instructed that *the* was missing from some of the sentences and they were to ‘insert the article “the” wherever you believe it is necessary or possible’. There was no indication of the number or type of missing articles, or where they should or could be inserted.

Participants completed the questionnaire by hand or using a computer, according to preference, and returned it to the researchers in the same manner. A total of 77 completed responses were received. Of these, 20 participants were at upper intermediate level, 27 at advanced level and 30 respondents had a proficient level of English, according to the scores they reported receiving in the national Public-service Personnel Foreign Language Examination, or equivalent.

Although the participants were also asked to indicate the number of years they had studied English, whether and how long they had stayed in an English speaking country and whether they taught in English, these items were not subsequently included in the data analysis, since some of them were incomplete or unreliable e.g. some respondents calculated the time since they began studying English at school, which may have been 30 years ago. However, it was thought unlikely that the participant had actually been studying English for the whole of the previous 30 years.

Data Analysis

The questionnaires were examined to find the number and type of correct uses of the definite article by participants, both when the article was necessary or in cases of zero usage. Instances in which *the* was misused were eliminated from the analysis.

Data was analysed using the SPSS statistics programme to obtain descriptive statistics for the mean number of correct responses according to the category of use and the proficiency level of participants. Following this, a MANOVA test was conducted on the correct uses of the definite article across the three proficiency levels for the four categories. Finally, the

difficulty hierarchy of the four categories for the different proficiency levels was calculated, to determine in which categories participants with differing levels of proficiency had used *the* most accurately and whether the results appeared to indicate that acquisition of the definite article in different categories was affected by the proficiency level. The results and discussion of the statistical analysis are presented in the following section.

Findings and Discussion

Correct Use of Definite Article

Data was first analyzed to obtain descriptive statistics for all the correct answers per category of use and level of proficiency, as well as overall correct use of the definite article. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of correct answers according to category

Group	n	Descriptive	Use type				Total
			Cultural	Situational	Structural	Textual	
Upper Intermediate	20	M	14.05	16.00	17.45	13.55	60.75
		SD	1.93	3.09	3.88	3.31	9.85
Advanced	27	M	13.70	14.78	17.37	13.33	58.78
		SD	3.42	3.01	3.49	3.95	9.74
Proficient	30	M	17.07	19.40	24.67	18.70	78.43
		SD	2.54	3.06	2.83	2.26	13.36

It can be seen that the number of correct answers varied between the lowest mean score of 13.33 (textual, advanced level) and the highest mean of 24.67 for the structural category at proficient level.

Considering each proficiency level separately, the results indicate a lack of uniformity amongst the types of use for the definite article. At the upper intermediate level, the lowest mean score is for the textual category (13.55) and the highest for structural (17.45), with the scores for cultural and structural use coming between (14.05 and 16.00 respectively). This shows that at this proficiency level, participants performed best in the structural category.

The same can be said for participants in the advanced category, who exhibited an identical order of mean scores for the four categories, with the lowest at 13.33 (textual), followed by cultural (13.70), situational (14.78) and structural (17.37) in ascending order of correctness. Once again, the largest number of correct answers was found in the structural type of use of the article.

In contrast to the other two groups, the mean scores for the proficient level group of participants exhibited a different order. While once again the highest mean score was for the structural category, at 24.67, the lowest score was for cultural use (17.07), with situational at 19.40 and textual at 18.70. This indicates that correct use of situational and textual categories has increased more than that for the cultural type at this level.

The total scores for the three proficiency levels present an interesting picture. For the lowest level, upper intermediate, the overall mean score is 60.75, whereas for the advanced level group of participants, the score has fallen to 58.78, a somewhat surprising drop, as it may be expected that participants with a higher level of overall proficiency would also be able to use the definite article correctly in more situations. It can also be seen that the scores at the advanced level for all four categories are lower than those at the upper intermediate level.

Although the difference in the total scores between the two groups is not very large, this discrepancy may be attributable to a number of factors. It may be that learners have begun to focus more on other elements of the language to the detriment of article usage, or there may not be such an emphasis on this feature at this stage, with the result that learners may have forgotten some uses of *the*. These results seem to reflect findings of other studies into second language acquisition (e.g. Sato, 1984; Abrahamsson, 2003), in which a U-shaped pattern of development has been discerned for some linguistic features, a fact also mentioned by Liu & Gleason (2002), with lower level learners exhibiting fewer errors than those who are a stage further in their language development, followed by a higher level of proficiency at a later stage. This is believed to occur because learners use or overuse morphemes with less awareness at earlier stages, gradually decreasing use or overgeneralising as they become more aware of correct usage, resulting in a larger number of errors, and finally acquiring the correct forms and consciously using them proficiently (Ellis, 2008).

Effect of Proficiency Level

Table 2 shows the results of a MANOVA analysis of the correct uses of the definite article by participants at different levels across the four categories. The most significant difference was found to be with the structural category ($F=42.65$), in which there was a big gap in the number of correct answers between those at the highest level of proficiency and the other levels, as can also be seen in Table 1. This indicates a large rise in the correct use of *the* in this category as proficiency increases.

Table 2. Results of MANOVA on the correct uses of *the* across three levels in four categories

Use type	df	SS	MS	F*
Cultural	2	190.72	95.36	12.50
Situational	2	325.30	162.65	17.44
Structural	2	956.87	482.94	42.65
Textual	2	509.97	254.98	24.72

* $p<0.001$

It may be concluded that the structural use of the definite article is the one which not only shows the most improvement by proficient speakers but has also been the most successfully acquired by the participants in this study. This finding differs from that of Liu & Gleason's (2002) study, in which learners were most successful in the use of the situation category. The second most significant difference found is for the textual category ($F=24.27$), indicating a larger variation for this type of use between the levels than for the other categories, and hence also a large improvement in this type by proficient users. The smallest difference is observed for the cultural category, in which there seems to be the least improvement with increased proficiency.

The level of proficiency attained by learners or users of the language seems to affect their performance with regard to the successful use of the definite article in English, although this study is not able to explain the reasons why this should be so. It may be, at least partly, due to more extensive instruction on this feature at later stages of learning, although Grannis (1972) believes this to be a difficult task as descriptions of English do not adequately account for the complex use of the definite article. It may also be supposed that more advanced learners will exhibit an increased capacity for noticing and internalizing such details of linguistic knowledge as their exposure to the language increases.

Difficulty Hierarchy of Four Categories

Table 3. Difficulty hierarchy of the categories according to three proficiency levels

Hierarchy	Proficiency levels					
	Upper	%	Advanced	%	Proficient	%
1	Situational	69.60	Situational	64.30	Structural	85.07
2	Textual	61.60	Textual	60.60	Textual	85.00
3	Structural	60.20	Structural	59.90	Situational	84.30
4	Cultural	54.04	Cultural	52.70	Cultural	65.60

When the difficulty hierarchy of the four categories is considered with reference to the three levels of proficiency and the number of correct answers in which the use of *the* is required, as presented in Table 3, it can be seen that there is a variation in the order. Those at the upper intermediate and advanced levels performed in a manner similar to the participants in other studies (Liu and Gleason, 2002; Garcia Mayo, 2008), with a difficulty hierarchy of situational – textual – structural – cultural. However, at the proficient level, this order has changed to structural – textual – situational – cultural, with little difference in the success rate between the first three categories, but a much poorer performance in the cultural category.

Liu and Gleason (2002) posited that there was a natural order to the acquisition of the various uses of the definite article, a point of view which seems to be only partly corroborated by the findings of this study. It is true that at two levels the hierarchy order of difficulty is similar to that found by Liu & Gleason; however, at the most advanced stage the radical change in the order of difficulty cannot be explained by this assertion. It may be that this theory holds true up to a certain level of acquisition, or that the natural order changes above a certain proficiency level, or that there is in fact no natural order but that the order of acquisition is determined by other factors. It should also be borne in mind that this study did not include any very low level learners, in which case the findings may have been different. It does, however, seem to be the case that at all levels and in contexts involving learners from different language backgrounds – both with and without definite articles - the acquisition of the cultural category seems to pose the most difficulty for learners, suggesting that the mother tongue does not exert a strong influence in this category, at least.

Conclusion

With reference to the research questions posed above, the results of this study show that Turkish speakers make use of the definite article in English with varying degrees of success in the four categories of non-generic use under discussion here. It cannot be said that even very proficient users are extremely successful, as there still seems to be some room for improvement overall, although performance varies according to the category of use. However, the participants' level of proficiency affects their performance, with a U-shaped pattern of development emerging, rather than a linear progression. There is also a variation in the difficulty hierarchy of the four categories according to the level of proficiency, with the two lower levels exhibiting an identical order of difficulty, but the highest level presenting quite a different order. The findings, thus, only partly overlap with the findings from other studies, and do not confirm that there is necessarily a natural order of acquisition for these features, although further research may yield findings which can explain these discrepancies. This study is cross-sectional in nature and does not investigate any low-level learners or the same participants at an earlier stage of their linguistic development. In addition, no data for spontaneous language production was included in the study. Further investigations, possibly

longitudinal or including data from learner-produced language, may yield findings which can throw more light on how and why learners in a Turkish context use the definite article in these four non-generic categories and on the influence of the diverse linguistic sources available to learners, as mentioned in the introduction, possibly resulting in implications for instructing learners on the use of the definite article.

One finding from this present study is that learners seem to experience particular difficulty with the cultural category, suggesting that this use could be addressed more specifically in teaching, in order to improve learners' understanding and performance. Another result is that the acquisition of the definite article requires learners to understand how *the* as a form functions in use, which presents problems particularly for intermediate and advanced students. The functions of this article can better be learnt if the learner is exposed to English in a setting where English is also the language for communication and where the utterances communicated have real meanings for the interlocutors. Learners will also be provided with better opportunities to process forms, meanings and functions together and thus be able to produce the article or comprehend how it can be used. The limits to mastery of the use of this article among foreign language learners may also be related to the variety of linguistic resources required by this word. To be able to use *the* appropriately and accurately, learners need to develop ability to use syntactic knowledge (as in the structural type), discourse knowledge (as in the textual type), pragmatic knowledge (as in the situational type), and awareness of the cultural aspects of the target community (as in the cultural type). One reason for the low scores for cultural use by all levels may be the limited knowledge learners have of how native speakers perceive the world and talk about it through language as language is influenced or shaped by the cultural practices in the society. This leads us to recommend that awareness of the target language culture or cultures should be increased in general to improve learners' use of this function of the definite article.

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APPENDIX:

QUESTIONNAIRE

In some of the following sentences, the definite article “the” is missing. Please read the following sentences carefully and insert the article “the” wherever you believe it is necessary or possible.

1. Fred bought a car on Monday. On Wednesday, he crashed car.
2. I look after a little girl and a little boy on Saturdays. Little girl is smart but boy isn't.
3. I read a book about New York. Author, however, was from Arizona.
4. Jane bought a ring and a necklace for her mother's birthday. Her mother loved ring but hated necklace.
5. Rocket ships are launched from Cape Canaveral in Florida.
6. We rented a boat last summer at a lake. Unfortunately, boat hit another boat and sank.
7. My mother has a white dog and a black dog. White dog is taller than black one.
8. The mother says to her children, “Come on, it's time to go to Grandma's house.”
9. I watched several old movies last weekend. I enjoy watching old movies.
10. I have read a few science fiction books this semester. Science fiction books are really interesting.
11. Congress meets on Capitol Hill.
12. At the zoo I saw several tigers. I think that tigers are beautiful animals.
13. While driving in their car to work, the husband asks his wife, “Could you open window please?”
14. Our office got some new computers last week. Someday, I really think that computers will replace people everywhere.
15. Before the examination begins, the teacher says to the students, “Write your answers in blanks.”
16. I saw a man in a car across the street. At first I wasn't sure, but then I realized that man driving car was a friend of mine.
17. Handle of that cup was broken.
18. When I grow up, I want to be a doctor. Medicine is a widely respected profession.
19. Austin is capital of Texas.
20. Do you know pilot who flies this airplane?
21. Man I met in New York later became my husband.
22. Blue car across the road is very suspicious.
23. Did you hear house we saw last week was burned down last night?

24. I know man who runs this university.
25. Can you turn on light on top of that table?
26. In his office, the boss says to her secretary, "Turn on computer."
27. Children growing up with both parents are healthier than those growing up with only one parent.
28. Mary is not tall but she plays basketball very well. Usually short women aren't so good at playing basketball.
29. I've heard of parents who don't give their children enough to eat.
30. People from around the world are meeting here today.
31. We went to a basketball game on Saturday. Players at game were all very tall.
32. Shade on this lamp is really ugly.
33. Things of beauty always bring great joy.
34. We went hiking in Lake District last autumn.
35. She is only American woman to have run for vice-president.
36. I generally don't read newspaper articles from low-class papers.
37. Sally Ride was first woman in space.
38. Professor who teaches the physics class explains things very well.
39. A woman, with her hands full, says to a man standing in front of the office, "Open door for me, would you?"
40. Water in this glass is dirty.
41. A man says to his wife at the breakfast table, "Can you pass me newspaper?"
42. While driving in their car to work, the father says to his son, "Please turn on radio."
43. Tom and his friend are playing basketball. Tom says loudly to his friends, "Pass me ball."
44. Shoes in department stores tend to be expensive.
45. We went to a wedding. Bride was beautiful and groom was handsome.
46. The manager asks her secretary, "Could you please check schedule for me?"
47. I like to read books about philosophy.
48. Pacific Ocean is the largest in world.
49. Sun is shining. It's a beautiful day.
50. Moon is full tonight.
51. We got a new television for our house. I enjoy watching some programs, but in general I think that we shouldn't watch television so much.
52. Do you think we can move car that's blocking my driveway?
53. At dinner, the mother reminds her children, "Keep your elbows off table."
54. Who is leader of your club?
55. President of the United States lives in White House.
56. My mother likes to have salads at dinner because salads are very healthy.
57. Ladies of the night is a euphemism (an indirect word) for prostitutes.
58. Bill caught malaria (a disease) while traveling in Africa.
59. In a bright sunny room, the woman asks the man "Could you close curtains, it's too bright in here."
60. I like to watch movies that are black and white.
61. The teacher says to his pupils, "Read Chapter Twenty in your book."
62. There are very poor people who are living in this community.
63. The wife hears a noise, then tells her husband "Doorbell is ringing. Answer door."
64. Mississippi river runs through Louisiana.
65. There has been a great deal of effort to clean up Chesapeake Bay.
66. A woman says to her friend "Why don't you come over for dinner tonight?"
67. Jim made a salad to go with dinner. Lettuce and tomatoes are always delicious in salad.
68. Lake Michigan is a large lake in North America.

69. The teacher says to her students, “Don’t forget that your papers are due next week.”
70. I start back to work on Monday.
71. The man says to his friend “I’m off on vacation tomorrow.”
72. The teacher says to her students, “The meeting will not be held until next week.”
73. The man says to his date, “I’ll see you at eight o’clock.”
74. A lot of people died of plague (a disease) in the 17th century.
75. Mojave Desert is in California.
76. New York Times is a very well known paper.
77. The mother asks the father, “Is baby sleeping?”
78. A plane crashed in Florida Everglades.
79. I’m sick. I’ve come down with flu.
80. The boss says to his employees, “I’m not happy with your work. Things are really going to have to change around here.”
81. At dinner, the guest says to the host, “Could you please pass salt?”
82. England is part of United Kingdom.
83. Jill had polio (a disabling disease) when she was a little girl.
84. The daughter says to the mother, “I’ll come and visit you in June.”
85. Yellowstone Park is in Wyoming.
86. John’s wife died of cancer in 1996.
87. The wife says to her husband, who is hanging a picture in the room, “Picture isn’t straight.”
88. Salt Lake City is in Utah.
89. The game show host says to the contestant, “What’s behind door number one?”
90. Mount Etna in Sicily is still an active volcano.
91. In their living room at bedtime, the mother says to the children, “Turn off television.”