

**SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION OF THE ENGLISH ARTICLE SYSTEM BY  
TURKISH LEARNERS: THE ROLE OF SEMANTIC NOTIONS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION OF THE ENGLISH ARTICLE SYSTEM BY TURKISH LEARNERS: THE ROLE OF SEMANTIC NOTIONS**

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This thesis investigates the second language acquisition of the English article system by Turkish learners in order to find out the role of certain semantic universals of the Universal Grammar during the acquisition process. More specifically, the purpose is to see whether or not L1 Turkish learners of English fluctuate between two semantic notions namely; *specificity* and *definiteness*, and the effect of this fluctuation on acquisition.

120 students from three groups of learners at different proficiency levels (40 elementary, 40 intermediate and 40 upper –intermediate students) were tested. Data collection instrument, a forced-choice elicitation task is used. The task consists of 40 short and contextualized dialogues. The target sentence in each dialogue is missing an article and learners were asked to fill the gap with an appropriate article; *a/an*, *the* or  $\emptyset$  on the bases of their understanding of the proceeding context. Dialogues in the task belong to four different contexts; i.e. definite/specific, definite/non-specific, indefinite/specific and indefinite/non-specific. Each context has 10 dialogues with four different contexts that are randomized. Data were analyzed using SPSS 17 packet program (descriptive analysis and one-way ANOVA).

The results showed that intermediate level learners exhibited fluctuation between definiteness and specificity to a great extent in (+definite/-specific) and (-definite/+specific) contexts. Elementary level learners were more accurate in these contexts exhibiting article omission errors in definite contexts. Overall, despite certain unexpected results, upper intermediate level students were quite successful in article assignment in defined contexts. This revealed that there is a positive correlation between article system acquisition and proficiency.

Keywords: language acquisition, article system, specificity, definiteness, Universal Grammar, semantic notions, fluctuation, proficiency level.

## ÖZ

# İNGİLİZCEYİ İKİNCİ DİL OLARAK EDİNEN TÜRK ÖĞRENCİLERİN İNGİLİZCE' DEKİ TANIMLIKLARI EDİNİM SÜRECİNDE SEMANTİK KAVRAMLARIN ROLÜ

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Bu tez dil edinimi sürecinde Evrensel Dilbilgisine ait bazı semantik nosyonların rolünü bulmak için İngilizce'yi ikinci dil olarak edinen Türk öğrencilerin İngilizce'deki tanımlıkları edinim sürecini incelemektedir. Daha spesifik olarak, amaç İngilizce'yi ikinci dil olarak edinen Türk öğrencilerin Evrensel Dilbilgisinin iki semantik nosyonu; belirlilik ve özgüllük arasında dalgalanma yaşayıp yaşamayacağını ve bu dalgalanmanın edinim sürecine etkisinin ne olacağını görmektir.

Bu çalışmada üç farklı dil seviyesinden toplam 120 (40 basit, 40 orta ve 40 üst seviye öğrenci) öğrenci test edilmiştir. Veri toplama aracı olarak boşluk doldurma testi kullanılmıştır. Test 40 tane kısa ve uygun bağlamlara oturtulmuş diyalogdan oluşmaktadır. Her cümledeki hedef cümlede bir tanımlığın yeri boş bırakılmıştır ve öğrencilerden boşlukları uygun bir tanımlıkla (a/ an / the / Ø) doldurmaları istenmiştir. Testteki diyaloglar 4 farklı bağlama aittir;

(+belirli/+özgöl), (+belirli/-özgöl), (-belirli, + özgöl), (-belirli, - özgöl). Her bağlamda 10 diyalog vardır ve testte dört bağlamdaki diyaloglar rastgele dağıtılmıştır. Toplanan veriler SPSS betimsel analizi ve tek yönlü ANOVA kullanılarak yapılmıştır.

Sonuçlar (+belirli/-özgöl), (-belirli, + özgöl) bağlamlarda orta seviyedeki öğrencilerin belirlilik ve özgüllük arasında büyük oranda dalgalanma olduğunu göstermektedir. Basit seviyedeki öğrenciler bu bağlamlarda daha başarılılardır fakat belirlilik özelliği taşıyan bağlamlarda tanımlılıkları cümleden çıkarmaya ilişkin hatalar yapmışlardır. Üst seviyeye ait öğrenciler ise bazı beklenmedik sonuçlara rağmen genel anlamda belirtilen bağlamlardaki tanımlılık kullanımlarında oldukça başarılıdır. Bu bize tanımlılıkların edinimi ve dil seviyesi arasında pozitif bir korelasyonun olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: dil edinimi, tanımlık, özgüllük, belirlilik, Evrensel Dilbilgisi, semantik nosyonlar, dalgalanma, dil seviyesi

**To My Parents**



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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Presentation**

In this introductory chapter second language acquisition of articles is discussed from a general point view. Following this overall evaluation research questions will be presented.

### **1.2. Introduction**

Acquiring a second language is a mystic process. As well as its mystery, it is also a long, difficult, and painful period. Acquisition of the English article system is one of the biggest challenges in this process, especially for the learners whose native language has no article system. Article choice in English is highly complicated, context-specific and beyond simple rules. They are unstressed function words, hence perceptually non-salient and semantically light-weight (Lu and Fen, 2001: 44). Second language learners, mostly seek one-to-one form-meaning relationship while acquiring the language, so the concepts and the rules become easier to understand and internalize. However, the article system does not have one-to-one form-meaning connection in discourse because it is context dependent and too complex to be identified via simple and one way form-meaning association. Articles in English express highly abstract notions that are extremely hard to infer, implicitly or explicitly, from the input (DeKeyser, 2005: 5). All these reasons make the article system acquisition a nightmare for L2 learners of English. DeKeyser (2005: 5) states that “where the semantic system of the L1 is different from that of the L2, as it is often the case, or where equivalent notions do not get expressed overtly in L1, except through discourse patterns [as in the case of Japanese, Chinese or Korean] the learning problem is serious and persistent” (DeKeyser, 2005: 5).

Then what are these semantic notions which are so distinctive across languages?

*Specificity* and *definiteness* are semantic universals of the UG and represented in some form or another in all languages. In some languages, these universals are expressed through word-order, case markers or discourse patterns. Some languages have lexical denotations to assign those universals and articles are one way of achieving this. Ionin (2003) asserts that “languages use articles to encode either specificity or definiteness” (85). For the languages which have an overt morphology to encode UG governed semantic universals, there are two settings for the representation of articles. It means UG assign two settings on which articles are based, the specificity setting or the definiteness setting. Germanic languages such as German and English instantiate the definiteness setting. In Samoan, articles are distinguished on the basis of specificity (Kim and Lakshmanan, 2009: 91). The next section will provide information about these semantic universals.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

The aim of this study is to investigate the article system acquisition of L1 Turkish learners of English and to seek the effects of semantic universals to this process.

Depending on the purposes, the research questions of this study are;

- 1) What are the systematic errors of L1 Turkish learners on the course of English article system acquisition?
- 2) What are the reasons of these systematic errors observed in L1 Turkish learners' data?
- 3) What are the developmental features of Turkish learners' acquisition of English articles? Does proficiency have an effect in the correct use of articles?
- 4) What kind of pedagogical implications can be drawn from the findings? How do the findings help teaching?

#### **1. 4. Predictions**

This thesis investigates the acquisition process of the article system in English by Turkish learners from a generative point of view. It is mentioned earlier that specificity and definiteness are the two semantic notions of Universal Grammar and they are represented in all languages in certain ways. Some languages have lexical representations to assign these features, but some languages achieve this via word order, case markers and stress. Turkish and English are the extreme cases of this phenomenon. English has the article system to assign specificity and definiteness; however, Turkish has no article system where case markers, word-order and sentence stress are ways of representation of the semantic universals.

I predict that in my study I will find out L1 Turkish learners of English will associate the definite article with specificity. As a result of this, definite article will be overused in -definite / +specific contexts. In the same vein, indefinite article will be overused in +definite/-specific contexts. I expect that fluctuation frequency will differ according to the proficiency level: as learners become more proficient, they will start to set the correct parameter for the article choice and assign the articles of the target language in the desired way. In that sense I predict that upper-intermediate level learners will fluctuate less than intermediate counterparts. Similarly intermediate level students will fluctuate less than elementary level students.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter will give the background information about the semantic universals in concern. These semantic universals have determining effects on article choice as they lead parametric differences among languages. Following these universals, Article Choice Parameter and Fluctuation Hypothesis of Tania Ionin (2004) will be introduced.

#### **2.2. Specificity**

“Specificity is a semantic feature that makes reference to the knowledge state of the speaker concerning a uniquely salient discourse referent” (Ko et al, 2008: 119). It is speaker identifiability and speakers’ intention to refer to a particular entity within the border of the sentence. Specificity is concerned with the speaker’s intention to refer to an entity regardless of hearer’s knowledge about the referent and it only reflects the knowledge state of the speaker. Based on Fodor and Sag’s informal definition “ If a determiner phrase of the form [ D NP] is +specific, then the speaker intends to refer to a unique individual in the set denoted by the NP, and considers this individual to possess some noteworthy property” (Ionin et al 2004: 5). If a NP is specific, it means that “there is a particular object which the speaker is thinking of as motivating the choice of description” (Lyons, 1999:166).

Enç (1991) points out that the most widely accepted view for specificity is that an NP is considered specific if it has wide scope over an operator. She further asserts that “specific NPs need to have wide scope and to construct an analysis of specificity that is

independent of scope relations” (Enç, 1991: 3). The example for the explanations is provided below:

(1) Every woman talked to *a child in a fifth grade*.

This sentence is ambiguous in terms of specificity interpretation of the NP. The NP “a child in the fifth grade” in this sentence can be interpreted both as specific and non-specific. Here are the paraphrases:

- a) For every woman there is some child or other in the fifth grade and that woman talked to the child.
- b) There is a child in the fifth grade and every single woman talked to that child.

The paraphrased sentence in (a) has a wide-scope reading over the subject so it is considered as specific but the sentence in (b) has narrow scope so it is considered as non-specific (Enç, 1991:1).

There is an ongoing debate in literature on the referentiality of definite and indefinite NPs. For instance Enç (1991) asserts that all definites are specific and definite NPs cannot have an unspecific reading (7). Many others argue that specificity is free from definiteness in the sense that both definite and indefinite NPs perfectly can have specific or non-specific reading (Fodor and Sag 1982, Lyons 1999, von Stechow and Kornfilt 2005, Ionin 2003, Ionin and Wexler, 2003; Ionin, Ko and Wexler 2004, among many others). All these studies have revealed the fact that English chooses the definiteness setting to assign articles and the overt morphology is responsible for encoding definiteness. Based upon this, two articles are assigned for (in) definiteness (excluding zero and null article for now) *a* as the indefinite article and *the* as the definite article. An NP occurring with “the” is always definite and *a* is always indefinite regardless of its specificity feature. It means that whether the NP is definite or indefinite, it can be either specific or non-specific. For example Lyons (1999) stated that the semantic relation between the definite and the

indefinite article is achieved via definiteness, not specificity, so an NP can be either specific or non-specific regardless of its definiteness status as in the example:

(2) Peter intends to marry to a merchant banker

a)....even though he doesn't get on at all with her. (indefinite/specific)

b) ....though he hasn't met one yet. (indefinite/non-specific)

(3) Joan wants to present the prize to the winner

a) ....but he doesn't want to receive it from her. (definite/specific)

b) .... So she'll have to wait until the race finishes. (definite/ non-specific)

(Examples are from Lyons 1999:167)

English does not mark specificity feature in its article system. Specificity is assumed to be marked only with adjectives such as “certain” or “particular” (Enç, 1991:18). They are determiner like adjectives which force a specific reading (Haspelmath, 2004: 38). For example:

(4) (Only specific) Nobuko wants to marry a **certain** native speaker of Ainu.

### 2.3. Definiteness

Definiteness “is a semantic feature which makes reference to the knowledge state of both the speaker and the hearer concerning a unique discourse referent” (Ko et al 2008; 118). Based on Fodor and Sag's formal definition (1982) Ionin, Ko and Wexler defines definiteness as in the following:

If a Determiner Phrase (DP) of the form [D NP] is ...

[+ Definite], then the speaker and the hearer presuppose the existence of a unique individual in the set denoted by the NP.

(Ionin et al, 2004: 5)

Trenkic points out that definiteness deals with the identifiability of the referents in

discourse. It means that the given discourse referent is definite “if the speaker intends to refer to it, and expects the referent to be uniquely identifiable to the hearer” (Trenkic, 2009:117). In order for a referent to be uniquely identifiable, so definite, the referent has to exist and be unique in “one of the pragmatically delimited domains” (Trenkic, 2009:117). Lyons (1999) notes that definiteness plays a role in guiding the hearer through the organization of information in discourse. As a result of this, it interacts with other concepts and distinctions in the structure of communication.

### **2.3.1. Heim: Discourse Semantics; *File Change Semantics***

Heim points out that “a definite is used to refer to something that is already familiar at the current stage of the conversation. An indefinite is used to introduce a new referent” (Heim, 2003:223). According to Heim, the use of definite article is possible only when the referent has been previously mentioned or evoked and familiar both for the speaker and the hearer. Heim states that understanding a discourse is like keeping a file and each referent in the discourse is a file card which is numbered (Abbott; 2003, 11). When a new discourse referent is introduced in communication, it is assigned a file card numbered and added to the file. If a previously mentioned discourse referent is entered to the conversation, the hearer goes to the file cards in his/her file and updates the card for the mentioned referent. The role of indefinite article in this representation is to introduce new file cards for the discourse file. This metaphoric phenomenon is called File Change Semantics (Heim, 2003: 226, Lyons, 1999; 270).

As a concept, definiteness is represented in some form in all languages because all languages have demonstratives and personal pronouns which are inherently definite. However, the overt representation of definiteness is not universal; few languages mark definiteness with morpheme type of representations or lexical items. Lyons (1999: 48) states that “marking of simple definiteness is often an areal feature. Most of the languages

which mark definiteness overtly are in Europe and around Mediterranean. Like Spanish, French, Portuguese as well as (different from this areal feature) Arabic and Norwegian, English is one of those which marks definiteness overtly.

In English, various lexical items are used to mark definiteness. Among them, articles or more formally, the English article system “constitutes the prototypical core of definiteness expression in English ... It is via the articles that definiteness is quintessentially realized and it is in analyses of articles that the descriptive problems are most clearly manifested” (Chesterman, 2005: 4). In English, definiteness is encoded with the definite article “**the**” and the notion of indefiniteness is assigned by the indefinite article “**a**”. Here are two examples:

(5) In my birthday, my mother bought me **a** red dress.

(6) In my birthday, my mother bought me **the** red dress which we saw yesterday in ZARA.

In example 5, the underlined NP is assigned as indefinite by the indefinite article. In this sentence, the speaker knows which dress is given as the present, but it is totally vague for the hearer. In example 6, the definite article marks the NP as definite, which means that the referent *red dress* is known both by the speaker and the hearer so the second referent is clear for both parties. The definite NP has a referent which is unambiguously identifiable. The definite article signals that the referent is uniquely identifiable and exist within the shared discourse; whereas the indefinite NP has a referent which is unambiguous just for the speaker, but not for the hearer.

Thus far two semantic universals of the Universal Grammar have been explained and exemplified. In the following sections, a parameter related to these semantic universals and their lexical representation in languages will be introduced and Tania Ionin’s Fluctuation Hypothesis, which is the core of this thesis, will be explained in detail.

## 2.4. Article Choice Parameter

The article system in English poses learning difficulties for all learners of English no matter what their proficiency levels are. Arguably, this problem is even worse for learners whose L1 lack a similar system to encode definiteness and specificity because they cannot find a corresponding structure in their already set and existed native language. Korean, Russian, Japanese, Chinese and Turkish are some of these languages. During the acquisition process of L2 learners of English, certain systematic errors are underlined by many experts (among many others). It is found out in these studies that L2 learners of English tend to overuse the definite and indefinite articles in certain contexts and the errors are not random, *the* flooding in indefinite-specific contexts and *a* flooding in definite – nonspecific contexts are reported (Ekiert 2004; Ionin et al 2003, 2004, 2007; Ionin 2003, Ko et al 2008; Kubota 1994; Lu and Fen 2001, Snape 2005a). Ionin (2003) asserts that there are crosslinguistic differences among languages in terms of their representations of articles and “these differences are captured within a parameterized principle of UG, namely Article Choice Parameter” (Kim and Lakshmanan, 2009: 88).

It is mentioned that specificity and definiteness are two distinct, independent semantic patterns of article choice. This diversion leads Ionin (2003) to propose a parameter governing the article choice. Article Choice Parameter<sup>1</sup> “is a parameter of UG which determines the possible interpretation of articles in languages that have a two-article contrast” (Hawkins et al, 2006; 4). According to this parameter, a language that has two articles distinguishes as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth subsequent reference will be given as ACP

### **Article Choice Parameter**

1. The Definiteness Setting: Articles are distinguished on the basis of definiteness.

2. The Specificity Setting: Articles are distinguished on the basis of specificity.

(Adapted from Ionin et al (2004; 12))

It is proposed that languages with two articles mark either of the semantic universals of the ACP i.e. specificity or definiteness. Some of the article languages choose definiteness setting but some others choose specificity setting. English and Samoan are examples respectively. Ionin (2003) indicates that the term parameter in the Article Choice Parameter refers to constraints on lexical specifications (30). It has been previously mentioned that in every language articles have different lexical representations related to specificity and definiteness. Ionin (2003) proposed in her dissertation that “these differences can be captured via parametric variation, with languages varying on whether they use articles to encode the definite feature, specific feature or both” (30). In the same lines Ionin further argues that ACP is different from other parameters in the sense that it is not related to syntactic properties such as movement, directionality or locality. Its focus is just the lexical representation of articles and their interaction with the discourse (Ionin, 2003: 30). In this parameter, specificity and definiteness are universal cognitive concepts. However more importantly, they are the only discourse-related semantic features (Hawkins et al, 2006; 4). It is therefore fair to assert that ACP is a discourse-based parameter.

Table 1 shows article grouping cross-linguistically for two-article languages.

**Table 1: Article Grouping Cross-Linguistically: Two-Article Languages**

	+DEFINITE	-DEFINITE		+DEFINITE	-DEFINITE
+ SPECIFIC			+ SPECIFIC		
- SPECIFIC			- SPECIFIC		

**Article Grouping by Specificity**

**Article Grouping by Definiteness**

Source: Ionin et al, 2004: 130

Table indicates that languages choose either definiteness or specificity to assign articles. However, no matter what the ground is, both definiteness and specificity features are represented in all languages.

### **2.5. Fluctuation Hypothesis**

Accessibility of UG during the second language acquisition process has long been questioned in linguistics and it is widely accepted that UG is on the stage not only during the process of first language acquisition but second language acquisition as well (Epstein 1998; Flynn 1996; Schwartz and Sprouse 1996, 1998; White 2000, 2003 among many others). However, the processes follow different paths for sure. For instance, L1 and L2 acquisition differ in terms of their initial states. The initial state of L2 is the final state of L1. It means that the entirety of L1 grammar with associated “deep” consequences such as parameters, syntactic consequences of functional categories and feature values are all transferred to L2 as the initial state of the new grammar ( White, 2000; 136). However, it is assumed that L2 grammar cannot be generated only by this grammar, that is, the



transferred L1 grammar is sometimes inadequate, so initial state of L2 grammar must be accommodated in the light of L2 input. When the L1 grammar is unable to restructure the L2 input, UG takes the responsibility and in the light of L2 input, restructurings are drawn from the options of UG (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1996; 41). UG places limitations on the form of grammar. Instead of “Full Access” of Schwartz and Sprouse (1996), White uses the term “Full Restriction”. Schwartz and Sprouse (1996) defend the position that UG is wholly available for L2 learners in second language acquisition process (65). It means that L2 learners can access all parameters to set the target structure. However the pace of restructuring is variable. On the course of restructuring, each new stage is an interlanguage grammar and the course of development is determined partially by the initial state and partially by L2 input, UG and learnability conditions.

During the UG constrained and input led second acquisition process, optional adherence to parameter-settings is observed in literature (Ionin 2003; Young 1996; Robertson and Sorace 1999; White 1992). That is, some of the time, learners show evidence of setting I of parameter X, but some of the time setting II (or III-IV etc.) of parameter X. It means L2 learners’ linguistic behavior show adherence to more than one settings of the parameter X at the same time. In other words, L2 learners are fluctuating between the certain settings of the parameters during the course of L2 acquisition. They fluctuate until the input leads them to set the correct parameter. This leads Ionin (2003; 23) to form a hypothesis called *Fluctuation Hypothesis*<sup>2</sup>. The hypothesis is explained below:

#### The Fluctuation Hypothesis

1. L2 learners have full access to UG principles and parameter settings
2. L2 learners fluctuate between different parameter settings until the input leads them to set the parameter to the appropriate value.

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<sup>2</sup> Henceforth, subsequent reference will be given as FH.

Under the FH the state of L2 grammar is UG-constrained, so the errors of the learners are not unsystematic, they all adhere to one of the options within UG (Ionin 2003, 23). Fluctuation Hypothesis further indicates that during the acquisition process, L2 learners can access all of the possible parameter values of UG. However, they cannot decide which value is the desired one. So, they show optional adherence to parameter values until they get enough input to set it.

## **2.6. Fluctuation in L2 English Article Choice**

According to FH, L2 learners are expected to access both settings of the ACP as stated above. It is clear that in the case of “Article System Acquisition” the settings are definiteness and specificity. In the light of these assumptions when the ACP and FH are put together, fluctuation hypothesis for article choice can be formulated as follows:

The FH for L2 English article choice:

1. L2 learners have full access to UG for both of the settings of ACP
2. L2 learners fluctuate between the two settings of the ACP until the input leads them to set the right parameter.

(Adapted from Ionin et al (2004; 17))

FH defends the view that on the way to article system acquisition, L2 learners will fluctuate between definiteness and specificity while trying to set the correct parameter. Some of the time, they will assign articles on the basis of definiteness, but some of the time specificity will be the setting for the article choice. FH does not sustain that L2 learners will vacillate all through the acquisition process. It predicts that with the help of the input, they will be able to set the correct parameter for the articles which the target language seeks.

Based upon the FH certain predictions can be made. FH predicts that during the language acquisition process, errors of L2 learners should be systematic. These systematic

errors are expected to occur whenever L2 learners of English take the specificity setting as the ground for English. In other words, systematic errors are expected to be made when learners divide articles on the basis of specificity rather than definiteness (Ionin, 2003:87).

Table 2 shows the predictions.

**Table 2: Predictions for Article Choice in L2 English**

	<b>DEFINITE (target: the)</b>	<b>INDEFINITE (target: a)</b>
<b>SPECIFIC</b>	Correct use of <i>the</i>	Overuse of <i>the</i>
<b>NONSPECIFIC</b>	Overuse of <i>a</i>	Correct use of <i>the</i>

Source: Ionin et al, 2004:19

Table indicates that wrong choices for the expected settings cause certain overuses in certain contexts; *the* overuse in indefinite specific contexts and *a* overuse in definite nonspecific contexts.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**REPRESENTATIONS OF SEMANTIC UNIVERSALS**  
**IN**  
**ENGLISH AND TURKISH**

**3.1. Introduction**

Languages differ from each other in terms of the features of the article system in their grammar. Although all languages have the features of the semantic notions of the Universal Grammar, the representations are varied. Some languages have overt morpheme type of representations but some of them use a variety of other sources such as word order, case markers or stress. English and Turkish are examples of this situation, respectively. Hawkins (2004) asserts that articles emerge as a result of the loss of case inflection on nouns (84). He further states articles come into being in order to indicate a NP when certain structural changes such as systematic loss of case inflection on nouns affect the efficiency of noun phrase processing. This is exactly the case for English which is an early Germanic language and had case inflection in its earlier forms. Trenkic (2009, 122) suggests that in languages which have no overt article systems, case inflection takes its place preferentially.

Languages which have an overt morphological representation for definiteness or specificity still differ from each other with respect to the setting on which articles are assigned. Some languages choose the definiteness setting like English, but some of them choose the specificity setting like Samoan. In concordance with the purpose of this thesis in this chapter I will just deal with two languages; Turkish and English and explicate the article system in English and its representations in Turkish.

## 3.2. ENGLISH

Specificity and definiteness as semantic universals are the cores of this thesis. As a result definiteness and specificity will be examined in more detail and restated with more examples.

### 3.2.1. Definiteness and the Article System

Languages assign their articles either on the basis of specificity or definiteness. English chooses the definiteness setting for its article choice. Based on this, articles in English are divided into two; definite article and indefinite article. The feature [+definite] receives morphological expression in the English article system through the definite article *the* and [-definite] with *a*. If there is presupposition or previous mention about an entity, definite article is used, but if the necessities of the definite article are not met, the indefinite article *a* is assigned. For example:

(7) I saw **a** cat. I gave **the** cat some milk. (Ionin et al, 2004; 7)

In example 7, in the first mention, the indefinite article *a* is used because of the fact that the entity is currently introduced to the context of the sentence. However, in the second sentence, the definite article is appropriate as the entity has a previous discourse.

In English the definite article indicates that knowledge of the referent is already shared between the speaker and the hearer. It “marks old given or presupposed information while the indefinite article marks new or asserted information (Irwin, Bock and Stanovich, 1982:308 cit. in Kim and Lakshmanan, 2009:89). It is further stated by Trenkic (2009:117) that the definite article regards the identifiability of referents in discourse and the referent is identifiable if the speaker wants to refer to it and assumes hearer to uniquely identify it. The referent can be uniquely identifiable only if it exists and unique in pragmatically confined set shared by speaker and hearer. If these conditions are not met, then, the referent is indefinite. In a similar vein Lyons emphasizes that the definite article involves

existence and uniqueness and “it carries a conventional implicature that there is some pragmatic set accessible to hearer and speaker within which existence and uniqueness is hold” (1999: 264). Then it is fair to say that a definite NP has a referent which is unambiguously identifiable both by the speaker and the hearer but an indefinite NP has a referent which is unambiguous just for the speaker, but not for the hearer. For example:

(8) I came across **a** friend on the road.

In example 8, the NP “girl” is identifiable by the speaker as the speaker knows who she is but it is thoroughly ambiguous for the hearer, s/he does not have a referent in his/her mind about the girl mentioned. As a result in this example the indefinite article is used.

In addition Ionin, Ko and Wexler state that “previous discourse is not always necessary for establishing uniqueness. In some cases, the uniqueness presupposition is satisfied as a result of mutual world knowledge” (Ionin et al, 2004; 7). For example:

(9) The winner of the tournament will receive a prize.

In example 9, mutual world knowledge makes the use of the definite article appropriate because both the hearer and the speaker share the knowledge that all tournaments or competitions have a winner, and that one will also have one.

In English, there are mainly four separate types of articles; a (n) (indefinite article), the (definite article), zero article and null article. Basically a quantifier, “some” is also considered as an article by some experts; however for others this quantifier is not an article and in my paper I will not take this lexical item as an article, too.

Table 3 summarizes the articles in English and their functions in discourse.

Table 3: Articles in English

<u>ARTICLES</u>	<u>FUNCTIONS</u>
<p><b>a(n)(indefinite article)</b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Marks one number of a set. This member may be specific or non-specific.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The hearer does not have a shared familiarity with the speaker when the referent is considered.</p> <p>Ex: I think I should buy <b>a</b> new coat.</p>
<p><b>The( definite article)</b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> All members of a locatable referent set. This basic meaning remains constant, but the extension of the set may vary.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Signals that the entity referred by the Noun Phrase is familiar to both speaker and the hearer.</p> <p>Ex: I bought <b>the</b> coat which we saw yesterday.</p>
<p><b>Zero article</b> (the article of generality) (will be represented as <math>\emptyset</math>)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Names a set</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The extension of its NP is determined pragmatically according to the context.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Special variant of categorical meaning.</p> <p>Ex: <math>\emptyset</math> Foreigners would come up with a solution.</p>
<p><b>Null article</b> (will be represented as <math>\Phi</math>)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not have a separate generic reading</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Refers only to a pragmatically unique onemember set, and there is no higher level genus available</p> <p>Ex: <math>\Phi</math> Saturn is the biggest planet in the universe.</p>

It has been noted in the previous lines that semantic relation between the definite and the indefinite article is achieved via definiteness not specificity, so a NP can be either specific or non-specific regardless of its definiteness status (Lyons, 1999:166). For example:

(10) I'm going to have a lunch with **the president** tomorrow – I'm dreading it, he's such a boring man. (definite/specific)

(11) I'm going to have lunch with **the president** tomorrow – that is, if the election takes place today and we have a president. (definite/nonspecific)

(Lyons, 1999: 168)

In the very first sentence the NP is definite as can be understood by the definite article *the*. In addition, it is obvious from the meaning of the sentence that president is identifiable as it exists and unique in discourse. The NP is also specific in the sense that speaker intends to refer to a particular entity within the border of the sentence. However, the second example is non-specific because of the fact that the NP does not refer to a certain, particular entity within sentence. Followings are the indefinite NPs with referential and quantificational meanings:

(12) Have you found **a watch**? – I'm sure I left it lying here. (indefinite/specific)

(13) Have you found **a watch**? – can't you decide what kind you want to buy?  
(indefinite/non-specific)

(Lyons, 1999: 167-168)

Both examples are indefinite as can be understood; however, example 12 has a referential meaning because the speaker has a particular referent in his/her mind. Whereas in example 13 neither the speaker nor the hearer know about the entity mentioned; the speaker does not have a particular watch in his/her mind while talking about the NP. The watch in the sentence can be any watch; it does not have a certain reference.



### 3.2.1.1. Referential Uses of Definite Article

In English definite article has eight referential uses as explained below. There are examples of each of these referential uses in the data collection instrument applied for this study.

#### 1) Anaphoric Use

Anaphoric use involves the repetition of an NP which has been introduced for the first time earlier in the discourse. (Robertson, 2000: 145). The referent in the anaphoric use is not familiar to the hearer “from the physical situation but from the linguistic situation” (Lyons, 1999:4). For example:

(14)

**A:** An old man, two women and several children were already there when I arrived.

**B:** Did you recognize *the* old man?

#### 2) Immediate Situation Use

“Immediate situation use is identified by the fact that the object referred to is present in the immediate situation and is not visible to both speakers, but its existence is known to both speaker and hearer” ( Robertson, 2000: 145). That is to say, the physical environment which the hearer and the speaker share provides familiarity for the referent’s definiteness.

For example:

(15)

Could you pass me *the* salt, please?

#### 3) Longer Situation Use

In this use, the referent can be identified or the familiarity can be established on the basis of the shared knowledge which the speaker and the hearer have in common. For example:

(16)

Shall we go to *the* pub tonight?

#### 4) **Associative Anaphoric Use**

In the associative use, the mention of a specific reference brings the entire related concept about reference into the speaker's and hearer's mind. In other words, the referent is associated with all the concepts related to it. As a result, the associations can be marked as definite. For example:

(17)

A man drove past our house in a car. *The* exhaust fumes were terrible.

(Exhaust fumes is associated with the car)

#### 5) **Unfamiliar (introductory, first-mention) Use**

For example:

(18)

I remember *the* beginning of the war.

#### 6) **Cataphoric Use**

In the cataphoric use, the NP is referred later. "The identifying information follows the definite article" (Abbott, 2003: 12). For example:

(19)

Would you mind bringing back *the* big bag of potato chips which I left on the bed?

#### 7) **Non-referential Use**

For example:

(20)

John was the chairman.

You really are the limit.

He is always playing the fool.

## 8) Generic Use

In generic use, reference is made to an entire class, or to express generalizations about a class as a whole. For example:

(21)

*The cheetah is the fastest animal in the world.*

### 3.2.1.2. Alternative Ways of Definiteness Marking in English

As well as various uses mentioned above, Lyons (1999) states that marking definiteness cannot be achieved just with its being a feature of NP but it occurs more widely. He points out two more possible uses which also mark definiteness; *tense-aspect distinction* and *structural positions of determiners*. Similar ways of expressing definiteness also present in Turkish, so it will be important to underline this parallelism roughly.

#### 1. *Tense-Aspect Distinction*

According to some grammarians, tense-aspect distinction between past historic or preterit and perfect mark definiteness in a sense that past simple tense assigns a definite time reference. Even if there is no time reference, the hearer locates the event temporarily according to the context. When perfect tense is used there is no implication that the hearer knows or need to know the time reference. So it is indefinite in that sense. Let's have a look at the examples below. For example:

(22) I read that book yesterday.

(23) I have read that book.

In example 22, the exact time of the event is not clear, or possibly not important; however, in example 23, time reference marks definiteness as the time of the event is clear.

#### 2. *Structural Positions of Determiners*

According to the structural positions, determiners like *this and that* may act like degree modifiers such as *as, so, too* etc. in adjective phrases. For example:

(24) Tom is stupid, but not **that** stupid.

(25) The fish I almost caught was **this** big.

These determiners act like the specifiers of APs or heads of functional Phrases containing AP.

### 3.2.2. Specificity in English

As mentioned in section 1.1, English does not mark specificity overtly with any morpheme type of expression but, the context itself tells the reader whether the NP is specific or not. In English, both the definite article and the indefinite NPs can be assigned specificity. A specific indefinite is used if the speaker refers to a particular entity which is inside the restricted set captured by the NP in the sentence (26) (Fodor and Sag, 1982:359). However, in indefinite nonspecific contexts, the speaker also does not have knowledge about the referent in the sentence (27). For example:

(26) **A man** just proposed to me in the orangery –though I am much too embarrassed to tell you who it was. (indefinite /specific)

In example 26, the speaker has a particular entity in her mind but the hearer does not know about it.

(27) **A man** is in the women’s bathroom- but I haven’t dared to go in there to see who it is (indefinite/nonspecific)

In 27, in the indefinite-nonspecific context, neither the speaker nor the hearer knows about the referent. The referent is not a particular entity but it is a quantificational expression.

(Fodor and Sag, 1982:359)

Definite articles can also have specific and non-specific uses as illustrated in the examples below.

(28) I'd like to talk to **the** winner of today's race – she is my best friend!

(definite/specific)

In example 28, the speaker refers to a particular entity. Both the hearer and the speaker know who the winner is, but the speaker provides further information about the winner who is her best friend.

(29) I'd like to talk to **the** winner of today's race – whoever that is; I'm writing a

story about this race for the newspaper. (definite/nonspecific)

(Ionin et al, 2003:8)

In definite/nonspecific context; however, both the speaker and the hearer know who the winner is, as it is mutual world knowledge; races have winners. The speaker does not provide further, elaborative information about the winner. No certain feature of the referent is mentioned. As a result, the sentence has a +def/-spec nature.

### 3.3. TURKISH

Turkish is a language with rich case morphology and without morphological determiners (Lewis, 1967; Underhill, 1976; Erguvanlı, 1984; Kornfilt, 1997; von Heusinger and Kornfilt, 2005; Öztürk, 2005; Göksel and Kerslake, 2005 among many others). It does not overtly grammaticalize definiteness and specificity. Chesterman (2005:3) states that languages lacking article use variety of other sources to express the semantic universals of UG. Determiners, word-order, sentence stress and tense-aspect-modality are other ways of marking definiteness and specificity. Apart from these, more dominantly, case markers are the quintessential expression of specificity and definiteness in Turkish. Öztürk (2005) highlights that in languages like Turkish basically case morphology interacts with the referentiality interpretation of nouns in the absence of articles so case assignment fulfils the function of articles in other languages (17). In the

following lines, alternative ways of definiteness and specificity marking in Turkish will be thoroughly explained and exemplified.

### 3.3.1. Definiteness in Turkish

Turkish does not have an article system to mark definiteness or specificity. It encodes these semantic universals by some other alternative ways such as case morphology, word order, stress and tense aspect-modality. It has an indefinite determiner “bir” which is the counterpart of “a (n)” in English (Underhill 1976, Göksel and Kerslake 2005).

For example:

- (30) Çekmece – de **bir** defter bul –du - k.  
*drawer – LOC a notebook find- PAST- 1PL*

(We found **a** notebook in the drawer.)

(Göksel and Kerslake, 2005:373)

“Bir” in Turkish can be interpreted both as the indefinite determiner or numeral “one”. The position of “bir” in the sentence decides on its interpretation. If the indefinite “bir” follow an adjectival modifier then it is indefinite determiner, but if it is precede an adjectival modifier, it is the numeral “bir” (Johanson and Csato, 1998: 218). Here are the examples:

- (31) Sınıf – ta güzel **bir** kız var.  
*class –LOC beautiful one girl there is*

(There is **a** beautiful girl in the class.)

- (32) Sınıf – ta **bir** güzel kız var.  
*class-LOC one beautiful girl there is.*

(There is **one** beautiful girl in the class.)

Erguvanlı further states that “the numeral bir ‘one’ functions as an indefinite article when it is not stressed” (Erguvanlı, 1984: 23).

(33) Bir adam gel – di.

*one man come –PAST*

(A man came)

(34) **Bir** adam gel - di.

*one man come –PAST*

(One man came.)

(Erguvanlı, 1984: 23)

Kerslake and Göksel (2005) indicate that in Turkish the minimal requirements for a noun phrase to be interpreted as definite are (i) the absence of an indefinite determiner (ii) accusative case marking where the NP is functioning as direct object. Many others support this view underlying the fact that in Turkish accusative case morpheme assigns definiteness status to nouns (Lewis, 1967; Underhill, 1976; Erguvanlı, 1984; Kornfilt, 1997; von Heusinger and Kornfilt, 2005; Öztürk, 2005; Göksel and Kerslake, 2005 among many others).

(35) Garson tabak – lar - 1 temizle - di.

*Waiter plate-PL-ACC clean – PAST*

(**The** waiter cleaned **the** plates.)

(Göksel and Kerslake, 2005:371)

In this example both the subject NP and object NP are definite. The NP in the subject position is definite because of the fact that in Turkish if a NP is in its bare form in the subject position it is interpreted as definite. Related to this issue, Kornfilt (1997) states that NPs are understood to be definite by virtue of not being marked as indefinite and by virtue of its freedom to move within its clause in its bare form (273). Supporting Kornfilt, Öztürk

(2005) points out that in Turkish “bare nouns occur in the argument positions and express definiteness in the absence of overt determiners” (18). The NP in the object position is definite because it is marked with the accusative case morpheme – (y) I.

Additional examples showing definiteness and indefiniteness marking are provided below;

- (36) Müdür     **araba -y - ı**     iste- di.  
president   car -ACC   ask for –PAST  
(The president asked for ***the*** car.)

- (37) Müdür     **araba**     iste - di.  
president   car   ask for –PAST  
(The president asked for ***a*** car.)

(Tura, 1973:123)

### 3.3.1.1. Alternative Ways of Definiteness Marking in Turkish

In Turkish definiteness can also be marked via word-order, sentence stress and tense-aspect and modality. In the section each is explained.

#### 1) *Word Order*

A subject noun phrase in a bare form its position in the sentence has a determining effect on its referential status (Kerslake and Göksel 2005, 384; von Heusinger and Kornfilt 2005, 4). If a bare NP is used in a preverbal position it has a categorical or indefinite meaning as in 38. However, if it is used at the very beginning of the sentence, it has a definite interpretation as in 39 (Göksel and Kerslake, 2005: 384).

- (38) Bura –dan   **hırsız**     gir - miş.  
*here – ABL   burglar   get in – PAST*  
(A burglar got in through here. / Burglars got in through here.)



(39) **Hırsız** bura – dan gir - miş.

*burglar here- ABL enter – PAST*

(The burglar got in through here.)

(Göksel and Kerslake, 2005:384)

Tura (1973) has similar examples (102);

(40) **Mektup** dün Ankara' - dan gel - di.

*letter yesterday Ankara – ABL come –PAST*

(The letter came from Ankara yesterday.)

(41) Ankara' –dan dün **mektup** gel - di.

*Ankara –ABL yesterday letter come-PAST*

(A letter came from Ankara yesterday.)

(Tura, 1973 :102)

## 2) *Sentence Stress*

Kerslake and Göksel (2005) underline the fact that in sentences consisting of only verb and plural-marked NPs, sentence stress has a determining effect on the referentiality of the NP. If the stress is on the verb then it has a definite reading (43) but if the stress is on the NP then it is indefinite (42).

(42) Rapor**LAR** yaz –ıl- di.

*Report-PLURAL write-Passive- PAST*

(Reports were written.)

(43) Raporlar yaz – ıl- **DI**.

*Report-PLURAL write-Passive- PAST*

(The reports were written.)

(Göksel and Kerslake, 2005: 385)

### 3) *Tense-Aspect-Modality*

Kerslake and Göksel (2005) assert that the tense-aspect-modality is the most important indicator of referentiality, particularly whether a NP has a definite or generic reading (385). They indicate that a NP has a generic reading if its verb takes the aorist morpheme – (A/I) r/ - mAz because this morpheme expresses permanent or generalized reading which makes statements of a general truth as in the example (44), whereas, NPs whose verbs are with perfective aspect marker (-DI / -mıŝ) or future tense marker -(y) AcAk have definite interpretation as in the example (45) (Erguvanlı, 1984: 28).

(44) Çocuk - lar çabuk yorul- du.

child -PL fast get tired –PAST

(The children got tired fast.)

(45) Çocuk - lar çabuk yorul- ur.

Child -PL fast get tired –AOR

(Children get tired fast.)

(Erguvanlı, 1984:27)

### 3.3.2. Specificity in Turkish

It has been mentioned previously that Turkish does not have an article system so can not overtly mark specificity and definiteness. However, Turkish has also been recognized in literature as a language where overt case morphology has a direct impact on

the referentiality (Öztürk, 2005:26). Depending on this fact it is fair to assert that case inflection plays a role in the interpretations of nominal as -/+ definite or -/+ specific”.

In Turkish, the accusative case suffix -(y)I indicates specificity as well as definiteness (Lewis, 1967; Underhill, 1976; Erguvanlı, 1984; Enç, 1991; Kornfilt, 1997; Johanson and Csato, 1998; von Heusinger and Kornfilt, 2005; Öztürk, 2005; Göksel and Kerslake, 2005 among many others). Enç (1991) asserts that in Turkish definite NPs are always specific (4). This assertion is valid with one exception; if there is no further information in the context which expresses the non-specificity of the NP, it is possible to say that the definite NP is also specific (46). However, if further explanation is given to point out non-specificity, it differs (47).

(46) Hasan dekan-ı arı- yor.

*Hasan dean-ACC look for- PR.PROG.*

(Hasan is looking for **the** dean.)

(47) Hasan dekan -ı arı- yor, dekan kim ol-ur- sa ol-sun.

*Hasan dean-ACC look for-PR.PROG who be-AOR-COND be-OPT*

(Hasan is looking for the dean- whoever the Dean may be.)

(von Heusinger and Kornfilt, 2005:10)

Kerslake and Göksel (2005) states that an indefinite NP can perform two referential functions:

- (i) it can be a specific entity known to the speaker which is unfamiliar and unidentifiable as being currently introduced into the discourse.

(48) Dün sokakta çok eski bir arkadaşım- la karşılaş - tı- m.

*Yesterday street very old one friend-with come across-PAST-1SG*

(Yesterday, I came across a very old friend of mine in the street.)

(indefinite/specific)

(ii) it can be non-specific entity which is unknown and unidentifiable also for the hearer.

(49) Daha geniş bir araba almayı düşün -üyor -uz.

*More large one car to buy think -PROG- 1PL*

(We are thinking of buying a larger car.)

(indefinite/nonspecific)

(Göksel and Kerslake, 2005: 373-374)

Öztürk (2005) asserts that in the case of indefiniteness, the presence or absence of accusative case makes difference in terms of interpretation of the noun as specific or non-specific. Similarly, von Heusinger and Kornfilt (2005: 9) and Enç (1991:4) indicate that Turkish case suffix -(y) I shows the specificity of the indefinite direct object.

(50) Ali bir piyano-**yu** kiralamak ist- i- yor. (indefinite /specific)

*Ali one piano-ACC to rent want-PROG-3SG*

(Ali wants to rent a (certain) piano.)

(51) Ali bir piyano kiralamak ist- i- yor. (indefinite/nonspecific)

*Ali one piano to rent want-PROG-3SG*

(Ali wants to rent a (any) piano.)

(Enç, 1991:4)

In the first sentence the indefinite NP marked with the accusative case refers to a particular piano in Ali's mind. It signifies that Ali's wish is directed toward a certain piano. As a result it is specific. However, in the second sentence, indefinite NP does not refer to a particular entity. It can be any or every piano, so it is non-specific.

In the same vein, Kerslake and Göksel (2005: 375) indicate that if there is ambiguity between a specific and non-specific interpretation, the use of accusative case favors the specific reading;

(52) Gürcistan folkloruyla ilgili bir kitap arı- yor- um.

Georgia folklore about one book look for-PROG-1SG

(I am looking for a book about Georgian folklore.) (indefinite/nonspecific)

(53) Gürcistan folkloruyla ilgili bir kitab-ı arı- yor - um.

Georgia folklore about one book-ACC look for-PROG-1SG

(I am looking for a (particular) book about Georgian folklore.) (indefinite/specific)

(Göksel and Kerslake, 2005: 375)

## CHAPTER 4

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE: L2 ACQUISITION OF ARTICLES

#### 4.1. Introduction

English article system has quite simple forms for articles; “a(n)” for the indefinite expression and “the” for the definite expression. Despite this simplicity, mastering the system is quite challenging for L2 learners; especially for the ones whose L1 is a – ARTICLE language. The reasons of this difficulty have been mentioned in the previous section. Many studies have been devoted to article system acquisition. Many early studies have been carried out in order to examine the article use of L2 learners, see their accuracy rates and find out the acquisition order of articles. Some of other studies focus on the acquisition order and accuracy of the articles but additionally they come up with pedagogical implications for language teachers. Recently, researches have started to examine the process within a generative perspective. Various studies have been carried out with learners from various L1s and the results have been discussed from UG, L1 transfer and L2 input points of view.

This chapter consists of two parts. In the first part, outstanding and worthwhile article system acquisition studies will be overviewed and discussed from various points of views. In the second part, studies related to article pedagogy will be summarized.

## 4.2. Studies of Article System Acquisition

### Butler (2002)

All studies about the article system acquisition start with the same statement that acquisition of the article system in English is very demanding for L2 learners. Taking this commonality as the starting point, I want to start with a very marginal study. In the literature of the article system acquisition, there are not many studies which look over what is inside learners' minds"; that is to say learners' ideas and internal reasoning while using the articles. In that sense, Butler (2002) has an important contribution. In her article, Butler examined the metalinguistic knowledge of L2 learners of English on article system.

In the study, there were a total of 80 participants. Sixty of the participants were divided into three groups according to their levels, from lowest to highest; J1, J2, J3 respectively via a test prepared according to TOEFL. The rest of the 20 participants were students at U.S.A. and were recruited from Stanford University. Their proficiency level was higher than J1, J2, J3.

As the data collection instrument, a fill-in-the-blank test was used where several passages from different English texts were chosen and selected articles were omitted. The learners were asked to insert articles a/the/Ø. Following the test, an interview was hold with the students and they were asked to state the reasons for their choosing that particular article.

The results revealed the fact that there are 4 main reasons for article errors; referentiality, misdetection of countability, non-generalizable or idiosyncratic hypothesis and other reasons. Among them, referentiality has the largest percentage of errors which shows that successful detection of referentiality is problematic across groups. Detection of countability is another serious problem for Japanese learners in the study, which supports the results of Snape (2005), Lu and Fen (2001), Ionin and Wexler (2003), and Bergeron-

Matoba (2007).

The results further shows that students tend to use three hypothesis about the article system; context-intensive hypothesis, hypothesis showing sensitivity to wrong contexts and hypothesis showing sensitivity to a range of relevant contexts.

The first approach is concerned mostly with low level students. Generally, low level students are influenced by the rules which are believed to be taught by their teachers. These rules are stored and used without considering +/- HK (Hearer's Knowledge) & SR (Speaker's Knowledge), or countability factors. Moreover, if the referent NP has a semantic relation with the previous mentions, the students tend to assign definite article for the referent, without considering the specificity factor. Another problem is that if the referent NP has a modifier such as an adjective etc., the learner directly uses a definite article because s/he is taught that those referents are identified as they have modifiers such as terrible, beautiful etc.

The second approach represents *Hypotheses Showing Sensitivity To Wrong Contexts*. According to this hypothesis, the confusion and lack of condense with the article use is another problem for learners. The learners are aware of that their hypotheses about article use do not always work and that there may be violations. The arousing awareness lead learners through a process of confusion. Fluctuation starts at that very moment. The learners start to access definiteness and specificity, but cannot decide on the correct pattern. They are confused so they fluctuate. Mostly, "overuse of the" is observed at intermediate level. In some studies (for instance Ekiert, 2004) beginners are more accurate in their use of the definite article than the intermediate counterparts.

The third approach is the *hypothesis that shows sensitivity to a range of relevant contexts*. According to this approach, the students in time gain the idea and awareness that they should not rely only on structural rules. They realize that they should also consider the



context. To begin with, most of the learners understand that in order to use the definite article, references should be identifiable not only by speaker but also for hearer. It means that +/- HK become a more important entity in determining articles. To sum up, in time, learners rely on more dynamic, context-based concepts of how the elements of HK and SR as well as countability should be taken into consideration. The study concludes that, Japanese learners found it difficult to figure out associations between the notions of HK and definiteness especially at the beginning because of the structural, semantic and pragmatic differences between English and Japanese. They also found it hard to determine which circumstances and conditions make a reference identifiable to the hearer. At the beginning of the acquisition process, definiteness is considered to be the same as specificity. Identifiability and referentiality distinction comes later.

#### **Ekiert (2004, 2007)**

Ekiert (2004) compares the acquisition process of L2 learners in ESL vs. EFL settings. The study investigates whether different language-exposure settings affect the acquisition order.

, the study had twenty-five participants in total: ten adult Polish learners in ESL, ten adult learners in EFL and 5 native English speakers serving as a control group. Their ages ranged from early twenties to late thirties. Each group included three low-ability, three intermediate ability and four high ability learners. Levels of proficiency were determined by means of a grammar placement test.

Data collection instrument consisted of forty-two sentences. In those sentences there were seventy-five deleted obligatory uses of indefinite, definite and zero articles. Participants were asked to insert articles wherever they deemed necessary.

The research has important and helpful findings. First of all, non-referential indefinites and the zero articles are found to have the highest ratio of accuracy in both settings for

each level. Accuracy rates of referential indefinites-accuracy are relatively lower than that of non-referentials but development is observed in time across groups and levels. Furthermore, the analyzed data corpus reveals the-flooding among learners in intermediate level learners and according to Ekiert, this shows us that starting from this level, students start to become aware of the syntactic properties of definiteness and specificity. High ability learners' performance is also a proof for the growing awareness of the definite article.

Ekiert (2007) is a case study where the author questions whether differences in the grammatical treatment of indefiniteness in L1 and L2 correspond with detectable and systematic differences in interlanguage. Shortly, the role of L1 is discussed in the article. The study was carried out with an adult male speaker of Polish. Data were collected over a period of fifteen months.

Data was elicited in the form of free composition and limited and extended context elicitation tasks. In addition, following the extended context elicitation task, an interview was arranged in order to learn the reasons of the learner's article choice in certain situations and elicit the subject's metalinguistic knowledge.

Results revealed the fact that the learner is much more accurate in marking of indefiniteness than definiteness. Furthermore, the-flooding was observed in the results. The learner's interview responses and variable article use seemed to suggest that specificity was the only dimension considered when employing articles. The fluid and dynamic dimension of shared background knowledge was appeared lacking in the learner's use of articles. The participant carried the specificity setting to article choice in English whereas the article choice in English is based on definiteness rather than specificity.

The results of this case study have been supported by many other studies in literature

### **Kubota (1994)**

Chinese and Japanese learners attract the attention of many researchers who study on article system acquisition because Japanese language does not have an article system and does not differentiate between count and mass, which are important determinants in article choice. This absence gives rise to many second language acquisition studies. Kubota (1994) is carried out for the purpose of exploring the acquisition order of English articles. In this study, 141 Japanese learners were applied a fill-in-the-blank test and a composition test in an EFL classroom setting. The data was analyzed statistically and it was found out that the results were mostly similar to the previous findings. According to the results, the definite article was, again, overused in +SR/-HR context because of the fact that learners did not consider hearer's point of view, and associated *the* with specificity.

### **Fen and Lu (2001)**

Another study which has considerable findings is Lu and Fen (2001). The purpose of this study is "to investigate acquisition orders and underlying processes in terms of article accuracy and use by Chinese learners" (Lu and Fen, 2001: 43)

After giving enough theoretical information about articles and related issues, the empirical part of the study is explained. This study was carried out with a total of 55 Mandarin Chinese Speakers. According to the TOEFL test, the participants were divided into three proficiency levels; lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate and advanced. Data collection tool for this study was a multiple-choice cloze test. The measures for the data analysis were SOC, TLU and UOC.

The results are supporting the previous researches; *the* is over generalized in +SR/-HK contexts by intermediate students. Like in Butler (2002) and Ekiert (2004) studies, intermediates are worse in correct use of the definite article rather than beginners and advance level students. The reason of the definite article overgeneralization is the same as

other studies'; *learners associate the definite article with specificity and they do not care the distinction of +/- HK*. It is also found out that while assigning an article, countability is also a problem for Chinese learners because their language does not differentiate between count and mass. As it is known, the subset underlying the choice of "a" and is countability. However, these learners cannot differentiate this from the context so failed to use "a" and "Ø" felicitously.

### **Bergeron-Matoba (2007)**

Related to Lu & Fen's findings, there is another research by Bergeron-Matoba (2007). In his research, it was aimed to be demonstrated that for the acquisition of the English article system, countability and definiteness are crucial factors, but these crucial factors are problematic for learners most of the time. Additionally, it was argued in the article that, although –ART language learners do not have an overt article system in their language, these factors are universal; they are available for learners from –ART languages and encoded in the sentence syntactically. Therefore, the problem for –ART language learners is to map these features onto the felicitous surface forms.

In this research, Japanese EFL students' English article system was examined from the framework of Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis and the writer sought the reasons of students' errors in article use. According to Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis, -ART Language learners also have the necessary subsets (countability & definiteness) to assign the correct article conceptually but they are not represented on surface. If the IL has thought as a system with 2 layers, L2 learners have these concepts in deep layer but the problem is that they cannot carry these concepts to the surface layer.

This study had just 9 participants; 8 Japanese learners and 1 native speaker as the control group. All learners were advanced studying in Australia for approximately 10 months. The data collection instrument for the study was a forced elicitation task. There

were 72 items in the test and all the items were structured in a conversational style and the students were asked to insert a/an/the or Ø wherever they deemed necessary. There were five contexts in which articles are examined; anaphoric, encyclopedic and larger situation for “the” and specific and non-specific indefinite contexts.

The results of the study indicated that most of the Japanese learners had a quite good understanding of the English article system; especially in definite article use. Despite this mastery, it is noteworthy to point out that Japanese learners have a real problem with countability which leads them to assign “a” and “an” improperly with mass nouns. In conclusion, the writer argued that the underlying knowledge of definiteness and count-mass distinction which are the necessary elements to assign articles in English are present in learners’ L1; the learners all have this awareness. However, the real problem has nothing to do with awareness, but the problem is mapping (carrying) this knowledge & awareness onto surface structures.

Apart from countability, there are some other important findings in the data. Some lower level students tended to omit articles and associate the definite article with specificity because they used “the” in both [ + def /+ sp] and [ - def /+ sp] contexts, but rarely use it in [ - def /- sp] contexts.

The article ends with a crucial remark. The writer implies that the use of specificity should be taken seriously because it may cause fossilizations. Teachers should be careful with the specificity problem. It is concluded from this last remark that teachers should not formulate the article system as rule patterns like “before the relative clauses, the definite article is used” because article system is beyond simple rule formations. If the article system is taught just as forms of rules, the process will become much more difficult for learners while trying to manage with this notoriously complex system.

### **Kaku (2006)**

It is a common finding in above mentioned studies that at the beginning of their acquisition process, L2 learners associate the definite article with specificity. However, as they become more advanced, they start to set the correct parameter to assign the target article. Presently examined study which is carried out by Kaku (2006) has supporting findings for this common phenomenon. It also has really marginal results which are against the findings of previous studies. The aim of the study is to investigate the role of first language in the acquisition of the English article system.

The participants for this study were three advanced and two intermediate Japanese learners of English. As a control group, two native speakers were included. In the study, an elicitation task and a translation task were applied. In the elicitation task, there were 52 dialogues in 14 different contexts and the sentences were translated into Japanese except for each of the last sentences where participants were asked to choose appropriate articles. The translation task was carried out in order to see if the Japanese demonstrative “ano” shares the same semantic features with “the”.

When the data was analyzed, the results were really amazing and different from other studies. Contrary to Bergeron-Matoba’s (2007) study, Japanese students had quite high accuracy rate in their article choice. Especially with referential indefinites, advanced learners showed 100% accuracy in choosing indefinite article in referential indefinite context which was always problematic for learners whose L1 lack article system. Only intermediate students showed sensitivity to specificity and used *the* instead of *a* which was parallel to Ionin and Wexler’s (2003) result. More strikingly, although Japanese does not have an article system, the zero article choice was not the main choice among the participants which is against Lu & Fen’s (2001) findings.

### **Humphrey (2007)**

Up to now, the studies have all pointed out the fact that definiteness and specificity is used interchangeably by the students; especially by the intermediate level students. As a result, “the” is overused. The fore coming studies focus mostly on the effect of context in article choice. It is known that in order to assign the correct article, it is not enough to have syntactic knowledge; learners must also control over the discourse.

Simon Humphrey (2007) conducted a research in order to explain how Japanese EFL students use English articles and make an attempt to ascertain the deciding factors in students’ choice of articles. The participants of this study were 50 Japanese EFL students at a high school and 52 non-English major freshmen at university. There was also a control group consisted of 15 native speakers of English. The data was collected in a test format.

One the most important finding was that the definite article is over generalized, but not in specific-indefinites but in non-specific indefinites which is quite interesting. Another result to note was that most of the subjects tend to base their choices on the local contextual cues of lexical items appearing immediately before and after the article. In conclusion, it was understood that majority of elementary and intermediate level Japanese EFL students have not mastered discoursed-based article use yet. Their errors were systematic. Most of the time, they searched clues in the sentence such as before and after mentioning of the NP, vowel of the following lexical item, the –est ending in superlative form etc. To sum up with a sentence, “Japanese EFL students are really influenced by local contextual cues in the lexical item” (Humphrey, 2007: 320), and have not been acquired the necessary discourse analysis knowledge to assign the right article yet.

### **Robertson (2000)**

Concerning the role of discourse and content is Robertson’s (2000) carried out a study. It is an important contribution to the field of acquisition as it has marginal results.

Moreover, it is a qualitative research which is very rare in the field.

The aim of the paper was to examine different uses of articles in various contexts by focusing on the omission of articles. According to the writer there is an unsystematic variation in the use of articles by L2 learners. This unsystematicity supports the hypothesis that optionality in using the articles is due to difficulty acquiring the correct mapping from the surface feature of definiteness and referentiality.

The research was carried out with 18 speakers of Chinese learners of English studying in Leicester University in U.K. As the data collection tool, a qualitative task was used. Participants were coupled as speakers and hearers. The speaker had an A4 sheet of paper on which there is a dichromatic diagram and tried to explain the diagram to the hearer to make him draw the diagram on the blank paper. Nine pairs of subjects were tested and each pair took part in four dialogues; two in English and two in their mother tongue. Totally, 1884 NPs were coded from the data in four contexts; definite, indefinite contexts and demonstratives and quantifiers. The data analysis was guided by the assumption that omission of the articles by these learners is systematic.

Very basically, the results tell us that the accuracy rates among groups and across tasks are quite consistent. For the further parts of the analysis, the researcher divide the gathered data into two contexts; linguistic contexts (definite vs. indefinite contexts) and pragmatic context (echo vs. non-echo contexts) and analyzed the data further according to these two distinctions. When the contexts are analyzed, it is found out that in definite echo contexts, where the use of definite article is pragmatically redundant, it is more likely to be omitted. This fact goes hand in hand with “pragmatic recoverability” principle which says “that article may be dropped if the information it encodes is recoverable from the context” (Robertson, 2000: 163). Another principle which is used to explain the omission of articles in the data in echo contexts is that if the article is used within the scope of a determiner



immediately preceding a coreferential NP and there is a familiar socio-pragmatic principle of accommodation in interaction, then the article is likely to be omitted in echo contexts. For non-echo contexts, the analysis of the results revealed the fact that non-suppliance of articles has no systematicity in non-echo context. So, the possible explanation for this phenomenon can be “having difficulty in mapping the surface forms on to the abstract features of DP” (Robertson, 2000: 166). To sum up, this study identified two rationales for article omission with L2 learners who has –ART background; “recoverability principle” and “lexical transfer principle”.

### **Thu (2005)**

The following study is a part of a dissertation submitted by Huong Nguyen Thu in 2005 to Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. This fifth chapter serves for the purpose of underlying the reasons of articles misuses of Vietnamese students and understanding the problems which Vietnamese learners face with when using the English Articles. The research also questions the possibility of L1 transfer as a source of error in EFL context.

For this study, a total of 157 participants were selected. They were intermediate level students. Data collection instrument for the participants was a fill-in-the-blank test.

When the results were examined, the first noteworthy finding was that participants have more problems in using the definite article and zero articles than in indefinite and null article. Moreover it was found out that context depended article choices are the most difficult ones for learners because they cannot fully figure out the contexts and assign the appropriate article. Depending on this fact, the most difficult use is the “Generic Use” because as it is known, generics can be used in various forms to assign the meaning, but the correct form depends on the context (Thu, 2005: 132). It is a well known fact that during the acquisition process, learners of L2 English looks for one-to-one form meaning associations. Such structures are acquired easier than others. More errors are found in cases

where a choice needs to be made based on context.

So far, studies which pinpoint crucial facts about the article system acquisition by L2 learners of English have been examined thoroughly. All these studies come up with two common results; *(a) The* is overused in –definite/+ specific contexts owing to the fact that learners associate the definite article with specificity, rather than definiteness and ignore hearer’s role *(b)* learners experience the biggest difficulty with the discourse related article choices because of the scarcity of pragmatic knowledge and discourse awareness.

The studies in the rest of this chapter support the above mentioned previous results. However, additionally, they analyze the findings from a generative point of view. They question the UG accessibility, L1 transfer and the role of L2 input in the article acquisition process. Findings of the studies in this section form the basis of this thesis. As a result the following studies are forerunners of this thesis.

#### **Ionin, Zubizerrata and Maldonado (2007)**

The very first, basic and quintessential study of this section is carried out by Ionin et al (2007). In the research, the role of L1 transfer, UG and L2 input in article acquisition is analyzed and discussed thoroughly. Ionin et al (2007), seeks, at first, whether there is L1 effect on article choice and then they ask if there is lack of L1 transfer and how L2 learners acquire the target structure. They ask whether form meaning mappings can be deduced from L2 input or an innate knowledge is required.

Before the empirical part of the study the Fluctuation Hypothesis is touched lightly by asserting that in the absence of L1 transfer, L2 learners consult UG and access both specificity and definiteness, but they cannot decide which semantic universal determines the correct article choice in the target language. They fluctuate between these two options. It means that when definiteness and specificity are in conflict (in specific/indefinites and non-specific/definites), learners cannot decide which semantic universal should govern the

article choice, so fluctuate between definiteness and specificity. As a result of this, they use *the* and *a* interchangeably. Keeping L1 transfer of the learners whose L1 is an +ART language in mind and comparing the fact with the FH hypothesis, writers come up with two hypotheses; they suggest that fluctuation overrides transfer or transfer overrides fluctuation. The aim of the paper is to see which hypothesis explains the L1 effect and what the reason of the fluctuation is.

The study was carried out with 23 speakers of Russian (- ART) and 24 speakers of Spanish (+ART). Participants took a cloze test to detect L2 article proficiency and an elicitation test to decide on their article accuracy. The elicitation test consisted of short dialogues designed to elicit certain article uses. There were 60 blanks in total however, not all the blanks require an article. The participants were not given *write either a or the* kind of option, but asked to fill the gaps with any word. Among these 60 blanks, just 36 items were for articles. Cloze test results were analyzed in SPSS via K-means cluster analysis as well as ANOVA. Analysis of the data reveals crucial results. At first, two groups of participants show two different developmental patterns. L1 Russian participants overused *the* in specific-indefinite contexts as guessed and *a* in non-specific definite contexts. L1 Spanish participants were more accurate on non-specific definites than specific definites. The reason of this slight unsuccessfulness is high omission of articles which stems from negative L1 effect as in Spanish where in some contexts the article can be omitted. Except this, participants were quite accurate in article use in English. Statistical results also revealed that in the article choice, Russian participants were affected from both definiteness and specificity, so fluctuated between these two variants which lead to overuses. Their Spanish counterparts were not affected by specificity and mark the correct article by taking definiteness as the ground.

When the results are considered, it is obvious that L1 transfer overrides fluctuation.

From the analysis, it was concluded that both natural and meaningful input and frequency did not have a high impact on accuracy as L1 because of the fact that Russian participants were in ESL context and exposed to input more frequently than their EFL Spanish counterparts who had only classroom instruction to learn English. When these facts are taken into consideration, Russian participants were expected to have higher accuracy but this was not the case because Spanish learners were much better. This phenomenon revealed the fact that L1 overrides both frequency and meaningful input exposure when the acquisition process is considered.

When the data is analyzed from UG point of view, L2 learners have full access to UG and UG provides Russian participants with the necessary semantic universals for the article choice. However, they fluctuate between them. At that point, input is supposed to take its role and input triggers are expected to help the participants to assign the correct setting (definiteness setting for English) to choose the correct article. However, this cannot be achieved because of the fact that input triggers are discourse-based; they do not arise from the syntactic configuration and discourse triggers related to article choice are often ambiguous in the context. It means that learners should evaluate the discourse and find out the input triggers which will lead them to the correct choice. Pragmatics is usually acquired later than the syntax, so eliciting cues from the input to choose the right setting is not easy due to the current level of L2 learners. They have not fully acquired or mastered the pragmatics acquisition yet. This factor causes fluctuation.

### **Ionin and Wexler (2003)**

Studies of Ionin et al (2007) is supported also by Ionin and Wexler (2003). In the same manner, the writers claim in this research that L2 grammar is UG-constrained and the learners of L2 have full access to the semantic features of definiteness and specificity. The purpose of the research is to test article use in various definite, indefinite, referential and

non-referential contexts.

It is noteworthy to state that, there are two studies carried in this article. In the first one, the main purpose is to test various definite & indefinite articles uses and examine de re / de dicto distinction.

There were 12 participants for the first study. All the participants were Russian. Data collection tool for that study was translation. The result of the study was that L2 learners overuse the definite article continuously in referential indefinite context; however, not that much overuse was observed in non-referential indefinite contexts. The reason of this result is the same as many other studies; at the very beginning of their acquisition process, learners fluctuate between definiteness and specificity and mostly associates the definite article use with specificity without considering the hearer knowledge.

The main study was carried by 31 Russian participants. The goal of the study was to test article use in various referential and non-referential contexts to see the effects of two article determinants on students' article choice. For the main study, the task was an elicitation task. Participants were given 52 dialogues and expected to fill the gaps with the appropriate article.

The results of the study support the previous ones. The definite article was overused in specific indefinite contexts. This shows us that, again, learners associate *the* with specificity. According to the writers, this fact reveals the fact that learners fully access their UG but cannot decide which parameter setting (definiteness vs. Specificity) distinguishes *the* from *a* because they are not able to pick up on the relevant trigger to lead them the correct choice in input . As a result, they use these two articles interchangeably. To sum up, they are fluctuating.

### **Ionin, Ko and Wexler (2004)**

Similar results were obtained from Ionin et al (2004). The purpose of this study was to examine L2 learners' ability to acquire a new value for a semantic parameter, the ACP. The study was carried with 70 adult L2 learners of English; 30 Russian and 40 Korean. The participants' ages ranged between 19 and 56. They were all the residents of U.S.A. Most of the learners received English instruction before coming to U.S.A. all Russian participants spoke Russian as their primary language, but some were also fluent in other languages with –ART. All of the Korean learners spoke Korean as their first and primary language. There were fourteen L1 English controls.

For the study, L2 learners were to complete three tasks; a forced-choice elicitation task, a written production task and the written portion of the Michigan test of L2 proficiency. According to the Michigan test, there were 4 beginners, 11 intermediate and 15 advanced L2 learners in Russian group and 1 beginner, 6 intermediate and 33 advanced learners in Korean group. The forced elicitation task consisted of 76 short dialogues. The target sentence in each dialogue was missing an article. The learner was asked to choose between a/the and null article. The production data was collected in a naturalistic way. The participants were asked to write answers to given question and then their uses of articles were analyzed.

The results of the forced-choice elicitation task revealed the fact that both groups showed overuse of “the” in –definite/+specific contexts because of the specificity factor again. Fluctuation between specificity and definiteness was observed in the case of many studies. In addition to this, learners tend to use *a* more frequently in the contexts where uniqueness is obligatory. Further data showed that there was a relationship between proficiency and the ability to set the ACP. Advanced learners tended to be more accurate than intermediate learners in both indefinite specific and definite nonspecific contexts

which are quite problematic for L2 learners. This evidence suggests that as proficiency increases, L2 learners are able to set the ACP.

The results of the production task supported the forced-choice elicitation task except one difference; not overuse of “a” but overuse of “the” is persistent in the data. In conclusion this study replicates the results of Ionin et al (2007) study; UG provides both of the patterns for the article choice; however, learners do not know which specification is appropriate for the target language. Therefore, learners fluctuate between specificity and definiteness and associate the definite article with specificity until the input leads them to set the right parameter. This development takes time because of the fact that input triggers do not arise from the syntactic configuration. It means that in order to reach the input triggers learners need to evaluate the discourse. When the subtle and ambiguous nature of the input triggers and late acquisition of pragmatics are considered, difficulty and delay of article acquisition can be reasoned.

The hypothesis stated above once more supported with another study carried by the Ionin, Ko and Wexler (2003). The study is just the replication of other researches of Ionin (2003), Ionin and Wexler (2003), Ionin et al (2004, and 2007) and Ko et al (2008) both in terms of methodology and results.

#### **Ko, Ionin, Wexler and Perovic (2008)**

Although this study supported previously mentioned studies largely, it also touched upon a distinct issue; partitivity. The purpose of the article was to investigate how definiteness and specificity affected the article choice from different L1 backgrounds. Moreover, they were aimed to check whether partitivity effects hold across learners’ L1. For the study, 30 Serbian and 20 Korean learners were used. Forced choice elicitation task was the data collection instrument.

Partitivity is a sub-type of pre-suppositionality. Pre-suppositionality makes only the

presupposition of a discourse referent. Thus it cannot be represented morphologically by an article (Ko et al, 2008), but can be established in 2 ways; by introducing in the previous discourse a set that the referent of the target DP belongs to and by mutual world knowledge. Partitivity<sup>3</sup> is the first one. Ko et al (2008) assert that L2 learners' overuse of *the* is mostly depends on partitivity; they tend to overuse *the* in +partitive/-definite contexts. The results supported the expectations. Both Serbian and Korean learners overused *the* in +partitive/-definite contexts. ANOVAs showed significant effect of partitivity and specificity and significant interaction between language and specificity. Moreover, data revealed when compared to Koreans Serbian learners were not affected from specificity, but both groups associated *the* with partitivity. Elicited data further stated that semantic universals are not equally persistent. Partitivity errors are overcome later than specificity<sup>4</sup> errors.

#### **Hawkins et al. (2006)**

In a very similar way, Hawkins et al (2006) carried a research with a group of Greek and Japanese learners and replicated the results that learners from article-less languages (Japanese learners) fluctuated between specificity and definiteness whereas Greek learners who are from an +article language were quite accurate with their article selection. This fluctuation was expected to continue till input led them to the correct article choice setting.

#### **Snape (2005a, 2005b)**

Partially supporting Ionin et al (2007, 2004), Ionin (2003), Ko et al (2008) and Ionin and Wexler (2003) , there is a research carried out by Neal Snape in 2005<sup>5</sup>. In this study, Snape took Ionin and Wexler's Fluctuation Hypothesis (explained in the early studies above) as the ground and investigated the article use of Japanese and Spanish learners of

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<sup>3</sup> For example: This pet shop had 5 puppies and 7 kittens. Finally, John chose a puppy (Ko et al, 2008; 121)

<sup>4</sup> Specificity and partitivity are two distinct semantic features. For further information, see Ko et al, 2008; 25.

<sup>5</sup> Henceforth, the reference will be given as (Snape, 2005a)



English within the framework of L1 Transfer and UG access. The study was carried out with 25 participants; 5 intermediate, 5 advanced level Japanese learners, 5 intermediate, 5 advanced level Spanish learners and 5 native speakers as the control group. As the data collection tool, gap filling task was used. Participants were given 92 short conversations and asked to fill the gap with *a*, *an*, *the* or  $\emptyset$ . The results suggested both Spanish learners and their Japanese counterparts fluctuated between specificity and definiteness. However, intermediate and advanced level Japanese learners fluctuated between definiteness and specificity more than their Spanish counterparts. This finding was different from Ionin and Wexler's finding because according to Ionin and Wexler's study, no fluctuation was observed with participants whose L1 has the article system. In their data, those participants solved the problem totally via L1 transfer. Nonetheless, here in this study, Spanish participants were also observed fluctuation despite the L1 transfer. It is important to note that, compared to Spanish advanced learners, the fluctuation lasted longer in Japanese participants as their L1 lacks the article system.

Going on with the results, in the same vein with other studies, it was encountered that both groups overused the definite article for indefinite specifics which showed that learners associate the definite article with specificity. However, as they became advanced, the overuse was observed too minor to be mentioned. Based upon this finding, Snape (2005a) stated that FH is a temporary property of development.

Snape (2005b) replicated his above mentioned study. The aim of this study was to compare the article accuracy rates of Japanese and Spanish learners of English in count singular and plural contexts. For the study, 13 advanced Japanese, 13 advanced Spanish participants and 13 native controls were used. As the data elicitation task, a test with 92 short dialogues with gaps was used. The result was the same as the previous research and the researches mentioned previously; *the* is overused in –definite/+specific contexts by

both groups. However, the overuse rate of Spanish learners was not significant.

### **Thomas (1989)**

Snape (2005a, 2005b) fall apart from the rest of the studies in the sense that the flooding and fluctuation are observed in learners whose L1s assign articles according to the definiteness setting. Supporting these studies Thomas (1989) carried a research with 30 adult learners from 9 different L1s; German, French, Italian, Spanish and Greek (+ART languages) and Korean, Chinese, Japanese and Finnish (-ART languages). The ages of the participants ranged from 24 to 46. In order to collect data, participants were coupled within each group (-/+ ART languages). Then, they were seated back to back. One was presented 8 pairs of picture and asked to tell whatever s/he sees in the picture as a story to the other partner, so the listener can imagine it. This narration session unconsciously forced the speaker to use articles and the listener to figure out their functions appropriately. Following the story telling, the experimenter provided both the test and distracter photos to the listener and asked to judge which picture was described.

The results of the study revealed the fact that learners from the –ART languages tended to omit articles. In addition to this, regardless of the L1 background, both groups overuse “the” in indefinite specific context as they associate *the* with specificity rather than definiteness.

### **Guella, Deprez and Sleeman (2008)**

Guella et al (2008) conducted a research with 11 Dutch learners of Arabic whose ages ranged from 22 to 29. The purpose of the study was to investigate if learners who can transfer the setting of the definiteness and specificity parameter from their L1 also fluctuate between definiteness and specificity in their article choice. If this is the case, it will provide further support for UG accessibility.

As stated above, the study focused on the acquisition of articles by Dutch learners of

Arabic. Different from other studies, both these languages are definiteness-based languages. The goal was to see whether their ILs show specificity effect like the ones whose L1s are –ART languages.

According to the hypothesis of the study, if Dutch learners transfer the semantic notions of their language (Dutch) to their IL, then, they will not make errors in their article choice and no fluctuation will be observed in -definite/+specific contexts. It is because of the fact that when they transfer the very same parameter setting (definiteness), they will have automatically set the article choice parameter for the target language. However, if they fluctuate between specificity and definiteness like learners whose L1 is –ART, then this will show that L2 learners from a +ART language follows the same way while acquiring English articles. It will further and more strongly support that UG decides on the ACP, regardless of L1. In that case, it will be appropriate to assert that L1 may help only with accuracy rates to some extent, but the real determiner is UG while setting the right parameter.

Data was elicited via a written forced-choice elicitation task and the results revealed the fact that L2 Dutch learners also make errors, but they are systematic. The errors occurred mostly in +definite/-specific and –definite/+specific contexts. Only few errors were noticed in +definite/+specific and –definite/-specific contexts as in the case of the studies whose participants are from –ART languages. Despite their L1, the learners overused *èl* (corresponds to *a*) and  $\emptyset$  (corresponds to *the*) in +definite/-specific and –definite/+specific contexts, respectively.

This research revealed the fact that despite the perfect similarity of their L1 and L2, Dutch learners of Arabic fluctuate between definiteness and specificity like learners who were from article-less languages and had no pre-set ACP in their mental grammar. This was a further and a very strong support for UG accessibility.

The writers suggest three reasons for this result. In the first result, they defend the idea that it is quite natural for L2 learners to fluctuate between these two settings because of the fact that even if the article choice patterns of L1 and L2 are similar, learners should be at first aware of this similarity. Until reaching the awareness of this parallelism, the learners are expected to fluctuate. The second reason may be that “specificity distinctions are somehow more basic than definiteness ones” (Guella et al, 2006; 68). As the last reason, the writers asserted that the results may be due to the trouble with maximality stated in Ionin et al (2004).

### **Mayo (2009)**

Maria Del Pilar Garcia Mayo (2009) conducted a research with 60 adult speakers of Spanish to test FH, investigate the interaction between FH and L1 transfer and examine directionality effects in L2 English article use. As the data collection instrument, forced-choice elicitation task was used. Data was analyzed with descriptive statistic as well as ANOVA. The results indicated that despite very little fluctuation of low-intermediate group in –definite/+specific context, Spanish learners were highly accurate in their article choice on the way of acquisition and they did not fluctuate between definiteness and specificity. In terms of L1 effect, strong empirical evidence for L1 transfer was obtained from the data. As for the directionality, it was found out that directionality effect more clearly observed in low-intermediate group; low-intermediate Spanish learners used the definite article in definite contexts than the indefinite article in indefinite contexts. When they became more advanced, directionality effect no longer existed.

This study is quite important for the field as it supports empirically the FH and show further evidence for L1 effect and directionality.

### **Sarko (2009)**

In literature much article acquisition research has focused on second language learners

from –ART languages such as Korean, Chinese or Japan. However, in order to seek the role of L1 and UG accessibility, more studies are believed to be conducted. Ghissh Sarko's (2009) study takes its place to make up this gap.

In this study the purpose was to see the role of FH, UG and Full Transfer/Full Access in French and Arabic L2 learners' acquisition of English article system. For this purpose 84 participants took part in the study; 54 Arabic, 18 French and 9 native speakers as a control group. In two groups; Arabic and French, learners were divided into two according to their proficiency level; intermediate and advanced.

The study had two main data collection instruments; a story recall task and forced-choice elicitation task. The texts of the dialogues in the forced choice task were in learners' mother tongue except the target sentence. The results of this study showed that Syrian Arabic and French learners of English were observed native like performance while assigning the definite article. No fluctuation was observed in the data. This finding supported Full Transfer/Full Access because both French and Arabic had similar overt article systems. Apart from this, in definite count plural contexts students tended to select  $\emptyset$  instead of *the*. This is an unexpected result when both French and Arabic are thought to have a similar article system like English. When the indefinite contexts were examined overuse of *the* in –definite +specific contexts is underlined. The reason of this choice is that learners tend to use the definite article whenever a relative clause is accompanied to the target structure. Without considering definiteness and specificity, learners tended to put *the* in indefinite/specific contexts where there is a Relative Clause structure. Furthermore, in –definite/-specific contexts both groups showed target-like performance. However, in –definite/+specific contexts there were significant differences in French and Arabic learners' article choices. Arabic learners were observed fluctuation but French counterparts were quite successful. The reason of this finding is that Arabic has no abstract indefinite

article and this leads fluctuation. This result is a further support for full transfer because it shows us the effect of L1 in Arabic learners' article choices.

To sum up, when there is a parallelism between L1 and the target structure no fluctuation is observed in French and Arabic learners' data. This finding is a strong support for Full Transfer. According to Full Transfer hypothesis the entirety of L1 grammar with associated "deep" consequences such as parameters, syntactic consequences of functional categories and feature values are all transferred to L2 as the initial state of the new grammar. As a result no fluctuation is come across.

#### **Kim and Lakshmanan (2009)**

It is obvious that language acquisition is a long process. During this process, alternation and development are inevitable. In literature few studies focus on developmental process of article system acquisition of second language learners. Serving for this purpose, Kim and Lakshmanan (2009) have recently carried a research to investigate the developmental process of learners' article acquisition.

The study was conducted with 19 adult Koreans; 9 advanced and 10 intermediate. In the study various data elicitation tools were used. The participants were applied a written questionnaire and on-line & off-line reading experiment, a cloze test and an article insertion pre-test.

The results shortly revealed the fact that in the on-line task both advance and intermediate level learners associated definite article with specificity and they fluctuated between definiteness and specificity. However, in the off-line task advance learners did not exhibit fluctuation between the semantic universals of UG; they showed native like performance.

#### **Zdorenko and Paradis (2007)**

All above mentioned studies are carried with adult L2 learners of English and they all

give information about the mysteries of adult L2 acquisition of articles. When the nature of second language acquisition and “age” as a variation are considered, an important question arouses in minds; do children follow the same path on the course of the acquisition of English article system as a second language as their adult counterparts do? Actually, article system acquisition in child learners of English has not yet been fully investigated and there is a big gap in literature in that sense. Zdorenko and Paradis are two experts who try to make up this deficit thanks to their studies on child L2 acquisition of English articles.

Zdorenko and Paradis (2007) aims to determine whether child L2 acquisition is also affected from L1 with respect to the articles and to investigate whether children from +ART and –ART languages follow the same acquisition sequence.

In the study there were 16 participants in total; 9 children from +ART L1 background, and 7 children from –ART background. They were all in ESL context. Data was collected qualitatively; in 5 different testing sessions, children were asked to tell stories following two picture books. The narratives were transcribed in CHAT format and analyzed for instances of *a*, *the* and  $\emptyset$  basically with 2 settings; nouns referring to new characters (first mention context) and nouns used to refer to these characters later on in the stories (subsequent mention context).

The results indicated that accuracy rates with the definite article were considerably higher than the indefinite article for both groups. Just as a minor difference, –ART group had lower accuracy with the definite article than the +ART group at the very beginning.

It was also stated that the acquisition order was same both for child L1 and L2 & adult L2 acquisition. However, when the errors were considered, L1 effect attracted attention due to the fact that, in the first two rounds, children from –ART background were observed higher rates of article omission than the +ART learners. The writers’ answer for this phenomenon is that the +ART group transferred their knowledge of articles and the

necessary concepts into their IL. From the third round on, however, the children with -ART background caught up with their +ART counterparts. In addition to these, it is noteworthy to say that in both groups, *the* overuse was observed throughout the research. Overuse rate was higher in -ART learners.

Besides these findings, the results of the data revealed that Fluctuation Hypothesis cannot fully account for the errors because of the fact that two errors were observed in the data; overuse of *the* and article omission. FH fails to explain the occurrence of these two errors at the same time. Moreover, FH cannot explain the overuse of the definite article also in +ART learners' data.

It was concluded from the research that child L2 acquisition has the same features both for learners from -ART and +ART background. *The* overuse is the predominant error type for both processes. However, in both processes, the definite article was the first acquired article. According to the writers, its acquisition is easier than the indefinite article because "semantic conditioning of the indefinite article is more complex than that of the definite article" (Zdorenko and Paradis, 2007: 489).

A very similar study was carried out by the same authors in 2008. The aim of the research was to determine the role of L1 in the acquisition process and to test Fluctuation Hypothesis proposed by Tania Ionin and colleagues. It was also aimed to compare the results with adult L2 acquisition.

In this article Zdorenko and Paradis carried a research on seventeen children whose mean age was 5; 4. Ten of the children were from an article-less language and the rest were from a language with an article system. Data were elicited in narratives in five rounds each of which was carried in every six months. Picture books were used to collect data and children were asked to tell the stories looking at the pictures. Collected data were transcribed in CHAT format.



The results of this study, actually, go hand in hand with the above mentioned research but there are also some differences. It was found out that in all rounds no matter what their L1 is, children were better at using *the* in definite contexts than using *a* in indefinite contexts. Moreover, all children were obtained more accurate results over time.

In terms of fluctuation very important results were revealed. It was observed that regardless of their L1s, all children overused *the* in –definite/+specific contexts so fluctuation was observed in child data. This result also indicated that contrary to adult data in child L2 acquisition of English article fluctuation overrode transfer. Related to this issue, Zdorenko and Paradis (2007b) says that “for young L2 learners...access to Universal Grammar to establish a new, language-specific grammar ...could be more efficient than it is for older L2 learners who rely more on transfer from their L1” (245). It means that on the way of L2 acquisition children rely more on UG but adults rely more on L1 transfer.

Another important finding was that children from –ART languages tend to omit articles in early rounds; however, in time, the omission disappeared. At the end of the fifth round it was observed that both groups had quite accurate results. Depending on this result, it is possible to set forth the assertion that when compared to adult counterparts, child L2 learners converged on the target grammar more rapidly and successfully than adult L2 learners.

#### **4.3. Studies of Article System Pedagogy**

It is a widely known and continuously recurring fact that article system in English is quite complex for L2 learners and it has often been considered as hard grammar (Liu & Gleason, 2002: 2). According to Master (2002) “this difficulty stems from three principle facts about the article system; (a) articles are among the most frequently occurring function words in English, making continuous rule application difficult over an extended stretch of discourse (b) function words are normally unstressed and consequently are very difficult, if

not impossible, for NNS to discern, thus affecting the availability of input in the spoken mode; and (c) the article system stacks multiple functions onto a single morpheme” which makes one-to-one form-function correspondence difficult ( Master, 2002; 332).

Actually, teaching the article system is not a hot debate in the field. Some researchers think that the system is too complex to teach and almost impossible to learn, so it will be just a “waste of time” to try to teach articles. However, some other researchers such as Pica (1983), McEldowney (1977), Whitman (1974) and Master (1986, 1997, 2002) believe that this complex system can be taught via appropriate and coherent grammar design constructed in the light of the results of the studies carried out on the acquisition of the article system.

Many studies have been conducted in the field of second language acquisition and the results have really good implications for pedagogy which can be quite helpful for EFL and ESL teachers. However, despite this, well-qualified studies which have been carried out from pedagogical perspective are considerably few when compared to acquisition studies. The goal of this section of the paper is to analyze some of those qualitative studies and reexamines their contribution to classroom teaching. In this part, too, each study will be examined under the name of its author.

### **Borg (1998)**

Most of the time, teachers of English in ESL and EFL contexts cannot understand why their students use articles almost randomly; so, teaching the article system remains as an evasive goal for them. Taking this burden as a ground for myself, I want to start my examination with a study which deals with teachers’ perspective of teaching grammar in general. Simon Borg (1998) carried out a study which focuses on the cognitive bases of teachers’ instructional decisions in grammar teaching and analyzes the teaching of grammar in an L2 classroom in the light of the teacher’s own perspectives which shape his

instructional decisions in the class.

The participant in this study was a 40-year-old teacher of English who was a native speaker of English and taught in an English language institute in Malta. Data were collected from the teacher in various ways (via observations & interviews) and the whole data collection process had 3 major parts; pre-observation, observation and post-observation. The aim of the pre-observation was to set a profile of teacher's educational background, reasons for becoming a teacher and his opinions about language teaching. The data were collected in this part via an interview and they were transcribed later.

First of all, the analyzed corpus revealed the fact that the teacher used students' errors in each lesson to teach grammar. According to the teacher, the reason of using such a strategy was that errors guide teachers to the point where the teacher should start explaining the subject matter. In this way, a student-centered language program is possible to be applied. Moreover, the teacher thought that errors encourage students to investigate grammar; and this facilitates learning (Borg, 1998; 16).

Another strategy the teacher regularly used in teaching grammar was to encourage students to refer to their L1 and simplify grammatical terminologies and focus on functions while explaining a subject matter. This strategy supports Master's (1997) binary system.

In addition, the teacher did not explain the rules in a formal and sequential way. Instead of this, he facilitated thinking on grammar by initiating a discussion on the subject matter and its function.

The above mentioned study has shed a light on teachers' perspectives on grammar teaching in general and revealed some effective strategies to teach grammar in the class. These strategies are important as they can be applied to article system pedagogy.

### **Master (1990, 1997, 2002)**

Peter Master is one of the experts in the field of article system pedagogy. This part of

the review would be missing without his works.

Peter Master (2002) underlines the reasons for the difficulty of acquiring English article system and comes up with five pedagogical methods to teach articles in his research. The bases of these pedagogical implications are the canonical information structure.

According to Master (2002) articles are difficult to learn because they are so frequent in the discourse and this makes rule application difficult. Secondly, articles are not stressed so it is hard to get efficient input from the spoken data. Lastly, articles are assigned different functions at the same time so this makes one form- one meaning association impossible. After pointing out these difficulties, Master (2002) gives information about the pedagogical systems for teaching the articles and mentions about four systems. These systems are explained in the dissertation submitted by Thu (2007) in a more detailed way, so at that part of the review it is wise to add Thu (2007)'s contributions.

First of all, Whitman (1974) provides a pedagogical system to teach articles in English. He has thought that article system "is a sequence of quantification and determination rather than a choice between specified vs. unspecified" (p.253 cit. in Thu, 2007: 137). He suggests 6 steps for teaching articles (which follows a way from easy to difficult); quantity, generic plurals, noncount nouns, determiners, quantity & determiners and generic articles.

Following Whitman (1974) McEldowney (1977) has generated a pedagogical system to teach articles and she approaches the teaching of the articles in terms of form and content. Based on Whitman (1974)'s view, McEldowney (1977) proposed four stages of learning; classification, plurality, mass or substance, and numbered specific which is linked to three concepts; any (a) to mark choice, special (the) to mark specification and general (-s/a/the) to mark generalization. On the bases of these 3 concepts, McEldowney suggests four-stage teaching approach which can be summarized into 3 main stages.

Stage1: Count nouns used in the sense of "anyone" and "the special one"

Stage 2: Uncountable noun distinguished by “the substance in general” & “the special substance” (mud vs. black mud)

Stage 3: Generalizations conveyed through 3 markers a+N / the + N / the + N + s

As well as those systems, Pica (1983) has come up with some recommendations for article teaching. She argues that article use has more to do with communication than with grammar and suggests the inclusion of discourse-related rules in the presentation of articles in the classroom setting. She has made five recommendations for instruction including teaching the function of the definite article with a qualifying description, not just with a bare N. The other recommendation is that students’ awareness should be raised by using an incorrect article in a piece of discourse and pointing out its importance by this way. This strategy has been supported also by the above mentioned study of Borg.

Besides those names, Lindstromberg (1986) and Berry (1991) have also formulated some systems for article pedagogy (cit. in Thu, 2007: 138)

The last pedagogical system is Master’s (1990) binary system. Master’s pedagogical solution bases on the approach of *givenness*, which is the distinction between given information and new information is discussed. He suggests that “students can be shown initially that NPs occurring to the left of the verb are marked with the definite article; whereas noun phrases occurring on the right of the verb are marked with the indefinite article” (Master, 2002: 340). According to him, this generalization can be practiced with exercises in which blanks can be filled by using this canonical structure. He accepts that there are exceptions in the use of this system but he asserts that this system will work well with L2 learners especially who have –ART backgrounds.

Master contributes to the field of article pedagogy with one more study. In his study, Master (1997) aimed to link the acquisition and function of English articles to a rationale for a pedagogical sequence of presentation.

Peter Master (1997) indicates that at the lowest level, there is no need to focus on rules of article use in language classrooms because low level students neither fully understand the rules nor internalize them to use again because their L2 mental lexicon has not fully developed (Master, 1997: 226). Instead of formal grammar teaching, Master suggested to present articles while teaching vocabulary to form the concept of articles in learners' mind. For the intermediate level students, Master thinks that instruction works well with this level, so more cognitive methods of teaching the article system can be utilized. Moreover he asserts that "successful learning is most likely to occur if sufficient time is spent on practicing a single distinction at a time until students feel relatively comfortable" (Master 1997: 226).

For advance learners, Master's suggestion is to use lexical instead of syntactical approach to article pedagogy because it is found out in his research *Consciousness Raising and Article Pedagogy* (1995 cit. in Master, 1997: 227) that L2 learners of English who are from –ART language learns articles best as lexical items.

These studies are enriched by another research of Peter Master (1990). Master (1990) argues that "there are comparatively few attempts in the literature to provide a coherent grammar for teaching the articles as a system" (p.461). In his article, Master (1990) mentioned about the previous attempts to construct a settled system to teach articles. Following this, he presented his Binary Schema. The aim of this binary schema was to simplify article choice by reducing the number of features required to assign the appropriate article. At first, 6 questions which were in a hierarchical sequence in this schema were presented. In this study there were two groups; controlled group and experimental group. At the beginning of the study, those groups were applied a pre-administration. Then, experimental group was given a 6-week-instruction according to the Binary Schema and the control group were exposed any instruction. At the end of the 6

week, a post administration has been carried out with the groups. The results have revealed the fact that improvement has observed in controlled group's article use.

In conclusion, some advantages of Binary Schema were outlined. According to Master (1990) Binary Schema provided a framework in which indefinite and the zero/null article have a distinct role from *the*. Another advantage of Binary Schema is that there is no need to present for generics and specificity which are confusing terms for L2 learners of English. Lastly, the notion of vagueness takes on a more principled application. Master (1997) states that despite those advantages, there is a weakness with the Binary Schema; that is proper nouns and idioms should be dealt with separately.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

So far many studies have been examined and some common results have been obtained. The results drawn from the studies are listed below;

- L2 learners of English tend to overuse *the* in specific/indefinite contexts.
- L2 learners of English tend to associate the definite article with specificity which causes fluctuation between two settings; *definiteness* and *specificity* while trying to set the correct parameter for the article choice.
- This fluctuation lasts until the input triggers which are so subtle, ambiguous and context-dependent so difficult to realize eventually lead the L2 learners to choose the right setting for the article choice.
- In certain studies, L1 overrides fluctuation; whereas some other researches argue that UG is the dominant force in ACP setting, no matter what the L1 is. This result provides further and much stronger support for UG accessibility.

This thesis is expected to support these common results and stand as a further contribution for the field.

## CHAPTER 5

### METHODOLOGY

#### 5.1. Introduction

It is indicated that many research have been carried out in literature and some common results have been drawn from the studies. In the light of these findings, the aim of my study is to examine the second language acquisition of the English article system by Turkish learners in order to search for the role of certain semantic universals of UG during the acquisition process. More specifically, in the present study, I will investigate the role that definiteness and specificity play in the acquisition of English articles by L1 Turkish learners. The data will also be analyzed to find out the role of proficiency level on the course of article system acquisition. For this purpose, three different learner groups from 3 different proficiency levels were tested. Depending on the purposes, the research questions of the study are repeated below:

- 1) What are the systematic errors of L1 Turkish learners on the course of English article system acquisition?
- 2) What are the reasons of these systematic errors observed in L1 Turkish learners' data?
- 3) What are the developmental features of Turkish learners' acquisition of English articles? Does proficiency have an effect in the correct use of articles?
- 4) What kind of pedagogical implications can be drawn from the findings? How do the findings help teaching?

This part of the thesis is about the study which has been carried out to examine the English article system acquisition process of Turkish learners. In this chapter, first, the predictions



based on the research questions will be outlined and the participants will be presented. Following the participants, data collection instruments will be introduced. Lastly, data analysis process will be elaborated and the chapter will be finished.

## **5.2. Participants**

The participants for this study were all METU Basic English Department preparatory class students. At the beginning of the term, they had METU proficiency test and according to the results of the test their proficiency levels were determined. Their ages ranged from 18-20. The participants were in EFL context and none of the students were bilingual. For the study, learners from three different levels were tested; 40 elementary students, 40 intermediate level students and 40 upper-intermediate level students.

Participants were all tested in the classroom by the researcher's herself who was accompanied by the instructor. They were given half an hour to complete the task, which is composed of 40 contextualized mini-dialogues. Most of the students finished the questionnaire earlier.

The questionnaire was piloted with fifteen participants from TOBB University of Economics and Technology. They were from different proficiency levels: 5 from elementary, 5 from intermediate and 5 from upper-intermediate level. At the end of the pilot survey, no problematic task item was found.

Lastly in order to test the validity of the data collection instrument, task was applied to a test group. The test group was 5 adult native speakers of English living in Nottingham, England. They were students at Nottingham Trent University. The test group was accessed via e-mail. The elicitation task was sent back via e-mail, again.

**Table4: Distribution of Participants**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Elementary Level Subjects	40
Intermediate Level Subjects	40
Upper-intermediate Level Subjects	40
Piloted Group	15
Control Group	5

### **5.3. Data Collection Instrument**

#### **5.3.1. Forced-Choice Elicitation Task**

In most of the studies in the literature fill-in-the gaps tasks are utilized to collect data from learners. This format of testing allows the investigator to control over the contexts and elicit answers from various contexts. In that way, students' accuracy in each context can be observed and evaluated. Based on the predictions, learner responses in defined contexts need to be controlled and carefully examined. The forced choice elicitation task provides this.

Considering all these advantages and being inspired from Ionin (2003), I decided to utilize a forced choice elicitation task to elicit data. The task consists of 40 contextualized mini dialogues<sup>6</sup> which belong to four different contexts. The contexts are definite-specific, indefinite-specific, definite-nonspecific and indefinite-nonspecific. Each context has 10 mini dialogues and in total there were 40 conversations. The order of the items in the task was truly random. In the task, in each dialogue, the target sentence was missing an article. The learners were asked to choose among the articles given (*a /an /the /Ø*) basing their responses on the proceeding context. All the task items were contextualized because it is

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix A

known that the interpretation of nouns or NPs (hence the required article) may change depending on the contexts. Some slots might have been filled in with more than one article. In order to avoid such ambiguity, dialogues were contextualized so that the participants could understand the situations clearly. Data collection instrument was prepared by me. Although I inspired by Ionin and Wexler (2003), I wrote them one by one on my own in a unique way. To test the reliability KR-21 test were applied and all task items were proved as reliable. To test the content validity and be sure about the reliability the task had been applied to a test group. To ensure about the face validity task items were applied to a piloting group. More details about these groups are presented in 5.2.

Before the task was distributed, the participants were informed that the purpose is not to test their accuracy but their intuitions about the article choice. So they were asked to choose the article which first comes to their mind and not to change their answers.

Here are example dialogues from each context;

(54)

*Definite/specific*

**At a restaurant**

A: Hey! Did you see \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) waiter?

B: Yes, but what's so surprising about him?

A: He is my sister's fiancé.

(55)

*Definite/non-specific*

**Two friends are chatting**

A: Did you hear what happened? Someone broke into Mrs. Romney's flat and stole her jewelry.

B: Oh! Did the police catch \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) thief?

A: Not yet, they have no idea about his / her identity, but they are investigating

(56)

*Indefinite/specific*

**Phone conversation between siblings**

Julia: Hi! It's Julia. How are you doing?

Gary: Good Julia thanks but this is the wrong time to call. I must go now because I'm going to meet \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) friend who is *very special* Sorry!

(57)

*Indefinite/non-specific*

**Mother and son are chatting in the kitchen**

Mother: How was the birthday party?

Son: Everything was marvelous, mum. Alan's girlfriend, Catharine, told us that Alan's father bought him \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) expensive sports car.

**5.4. Data Analysis**

For this research two different analysis techniques have been performed. The first one is the descriptive analysis of the SPSS 17.0 packet program. This analysis shows us at what percentages learners assign the target article and make errors. The second technique is one way ANOVA. This technique is applied in order to compare the means of participants from different levels and to see how significant the participants' mean scores are in four different contexts with respect to their proficiency levels. In order to see the significance of the findings, Tukey and Post Hoc tests have been examined.

One way ANOVA requires one numeric dependent variable and one categorical independent variable with more than two sub levels. In this study students' scores in the Forced Choice Elicitation Task Items are numerical dependent variables. Students' proficiency levels are categorical independent variable with more than two levels (elementary, intermediate, upper intermediate). ANOVA has been calculated for each

section (sub test) separately. Moreover ANOVA requires univariate normality. For that purpose Q-Q plots have been examined to test the normality. Results have showed that scores are disturbed normality. Moreover Levene's test has been calculated to test homogeneity of variance and it has been found insignificant which means that variances are homogeneous. ANOVA has been calculated via SPSS 17.0 packet program and Tukey test has been performed for significant ANOVA results. In order to find out exactly which means are significantly different from which other ones, Post Hoc tests have been calculated.

## **5.5. RESULTS**

### **5.5.1 Introduction**

In this section the overall findings of the research will be presented. The results from two different analyses will be dwelled on in the light of research questions context by context.

### **5.5.2. Results of the Statistical Analysis**

In this section the results of the statistical analysis of data will be presented. The results are summarized in tables and charts. The findings will form the background for the discussion part.

#### **5.5.2.1. +Definite/+Specific Context**

Table 5 gives one way ANOVA scores for + definite / + specific contexts according to proficiency level. The results show that upper intermediate level students' mean score in "+ definite / + specific" contexts ( $\bar{X} = 9,300$ ) is respectively higher than intermediate level ( $\bar{X} = 8,0750$ ) and elementary level ( $\bar{X} = 7,2500$ ) students' mean scores. Stated differences among mean scores are statistically significant;  $F(2-117) = 31.381$   $p < .001$

**Table 5: One Way ANOVA Scores for “+Definite / + Specific” Context****According to Proficiency Level**

	<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	$\bar{X}$	<b>SD</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Significant Differences</b>
<b>+ Definite/ +Specific</b>	<b>Elementary (E)</b>	<b>40</b>	7,2500	1,31559	<b>2- 117</b>	<b>31.381</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>E-I I-U E-U</b>
	<b>Intermediate (I)</b>	<b>40</b>	8,0750	1,32795				
	<b>Upper intermediate (U)</b>	<b>40</b>	9,3000	,75786				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	8,2083	1,43132				

The findings indicate that students’ achievement in + definite / + specific contexts change according to proficiency level. In order to find out exactly which means are significantly different from which other ones, Post Hoc tests have been calculated and examined. To see the scores, please see appendix. According to the Tukey test, mean differences between all groups are statistically significant ( $F(2-117) = 31.381$   $p < .001$ ). This means that students’ achievement on “+ definite / + specific” contexts increases, while their proficiency in English language improves.

Following the ANOVA, descriptive analysis has also been carried out to see the article choice percentages of L1 Turkish learners of English in definite specific contexts. When the data is analyzed for the +definite/+specific context it is found out that Turkish learners assign the target item correctly at a considerably high percentage. The upper-intermediate group’s performance is significantly better than that of intermediate and elementary level. They are able to supply *the* correctly at a rate of 93, 0%, while intermediate and elementary level learners fall behind with 80,8 % and 72,5 %, respectively. Table 5 illustrates overall results of the analysis for the +definite/+specific context.

**Table 6: Article Choice Percentages in +Definite/+Specific Context**

			+definite/+specific			Total
			∅	a/an	the	
level	Elementary	Count	69	41	290	400
		% within level	17,3%	10,3%	72,5%	100,0%
	Intermediate	Count	39	38	323	400
		% within level	9,8%	9,5%	80,8%	100,0%
	Upper Intermediate	Count	24	4	372	400
		% within level	6,0%	1,0%	93,0%	100,0%
Total		Count	132	83	985	1200
		% within level	11,0%	6,9%	82,1%	100,0%

Another significant finding is that L1 Turkish learners of English tend to omit articles in certain items of this context. Especially elementary level students has high rates for article omission when compared to intermediate and upper-intermediate counterparts (17, 3 % = elementary, 9, 8 %= intermediate, 6, 0 %= upper-intermediate). The rates of article omission are given in Table 5. Looking at the results it is fair to state that there is an inverse proportion between the proficiency level and article omission. Article omission rate in the elementary group is noteworthy with a rate 17.3 %; however in intermediate and upper-intermediate groups omission rates are not that much significant.

#### **5.5.2.2. - Definite/+Specific Context**

Table 7 gives one way ANOVA scores for - Definite / + Specific contexts according to the proficiency level.

**Table 7: One Way ANOVA Scores for “- Definite / + Specific” Context****According to Proficiency Level**

	<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	$\bar{X}$	<b>SD</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Significant Differences</b>
<b>- Definite/ +Specific</b>	<b>Elementary (E)</b>	<b>40</b>	7,5750	1,78149	<b>2-117</b>	<b>51,746</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>E-I I-U E-U</b>
	<b>Intermediate (I)</b>	<b>40</b>	5,7500	2,12132				
	<b>Upper intermediate (U)</b>	<b>40</b>	8,8750	1,15886				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	7,4000	2,14750				

According to the results upper intermediate level students’ mean score in - definite / + specific contexts ( $\bar{X} = 8, 8750$ ) has a higher proportion than that of the intermediate level ( $\bar{X} = 5, 7500$ ) and that of the elementary level ( $\bar{X} = 7, 5750$ ) students. Interestingly, however, elementary level students’ mean score is higher than intermediate level students’ ( $\bar{X} = 7, 5750$  vs.  $\bar{X} = 5, 7500$  respectively). Differences among mean scores are statistically significant  $F(2-117) = 51,746$   $p < ,001$ . The findings show that students’ achievement in - definite / + specific contexts changes according to proficiency level.

The results of the descriptive statistics indicated that in –definite/+specific context Turkish learners are observed *the overuse*.

Table 8 displays the overall results for this context.



**Table 8: Article Choice Percentages in -Definite/+Specific Contexts**

			-definite/+specific			Total
			∅	a/an	the	
level	Elementary	Count	37	303	60	400
		% within level	9,3%	75,8%	15,0%	100,0%
	Intermediate	Count	25	230	145	400
		% within level	6,3%	57,5%	36,3%	100,0%
	Upper Intermediate	Count	1	355	44	400
		% within level	,3%	88,8%	11,0%	100,0%
Total		Count	63	888	249	1200
		% within level	5,3%	74,0%	20,8%	100,0%

The table reveals the fact that parallel to expectations in indefinite specific context particularly the intermediate group fails to assign the correct article. The group use *the* instead of *a* in -definite/+specific contexts at a rate of %36, 3 which is a considerably high percentage. Interestingly however, contrary to my predictions elementary level learners perform significantly better than intermediate counterparts with the 15, 0 % rate of substitution. This rate still shows that they are observed *the* overuse; however compared to upper-intermediate group whose substitution rate is 11, 0 %, elementary group's performance is undeniably good. With respect to upper-intermediate level learners, it is fair to assert that although they have the least overuse rate among groups (11, 0 %), they still demonstrate significant percentage of systematic substitution error. Compared to +definite/+specific context, upper-intermediates are less successful in assigning correct article in –definite/+specific context.

In this context there is an item which is formed with the relative clause structure. In this

item the target article is *a* because the item is –definite/+specific. However, relative clause structure leads learners to confusion because they are taught that before the relative clause structure definite article must be used. As a result most of the learners use definite article without considering the context's itself. 62.5 % of intermediate level students assign definite article in this item instead of the indefinite one. This problematic item is given below:

(58)

3. Phone conversation between siblings

Julia: Hi! It's Julia. How are you doing?

Gary: Good Julia, thanks but this is the wrong time to call. I must go now because I'm going to meet \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) friend who is *very special* Sorry!

In terms of article omission, elementary level Turkish learners have the highest ratio with the rate of 9, 3%. For intermediate and upper –intermediate groups, article omission rate is not significant; 6, 3% and 0, 3% respectively.

### 5.5.2.3. + Definite / - Specific Context

Overall ANOVA results for definite nonspecific contexts are given in Table 9.

**Table 9: One Way ANOVA Scores for “+Definite / - Specific” Contexts**

**According to Proficiency Level**

	<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	$\bar{X}$	<b>SD</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Significant Differences</b>
<b>+Definite/ - Specific</b>	<b>Elementary (E)</b>	<b>40</b>	7,2500	1,67562	<b>2-117</b>	<b>32,798</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>E-I I-U E-U</b>
	<b>Intermediate (I)</b>	<b>40</b>	5,8750	1,97663				
	<b>Upper intermediate (U)</b>	<b>40</b>	9,4000	,77790				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	7,5083	2,12625				

The results in the table show that in + definite / - specific context upper intermediate level students' mean score ( $\bar{X} = 9,4000$ ) has the highest ratio. Interestingly again in this context elementary group has a higher mean score ( $\bar{X} = 5,8750$ ) than intermediate group ( $\bar{X} = 7.2500$ ). Differences between mean scores are statistically significant  $F(2-117) = 32,798$   $p < .001$ . This significance points out that students' achievement on + definite / - specific contexts change according to proficiency level. The data analysis clearly shows us that the upper-intermediate level is, again, the most successful group in assigning the correct article in the +definite/-specific context. In the same vein with the above mentioned section, however, it is not the intermediate group which follows that upper-intermediates but the elementary group. This finding tells us that elementary level students are more successful in article use than intermediate level students in definite / - specific context.

The results of the descriptive statistics support ANOVA results. Results go hand in hand with the expectations. As foreseen, in the +definite/-specific context intermediate level students substitute the target item with the indefinite article *a* and *a overuse* is observed

with the rate of 30, 3%. Interestingly again, elementary level learners are more accurate in their target article choice when compared to intermediates. Their rate of article substitution falls behind the intermediate group with the rate 16, 0%. The predictions were that upper-intermediate students will be the most successful group because proficiency will help learners in time. As expected it is obvious in the results that upper-intermediate students have very slight misuse; their substitution rate is 0,8 %. Overall results are illustrated in the table 10.

**Table 10: Article Choice Percentages in +Definite/-Specific Contexts**

			+definite/-specific			Total
			∅	a/an	the	
level	Elementary	Count	46	64	290	400
		% within level	11,5%	16,0%	72,5%	100,0%
	Intermediate	Count	44	121	235	400
		% within level	11,0%	30,3%	58,8%	100,0%
	Upper Intermediate	Count	21	3	376	400
		% within level	5,3%	,8%	94,0%	100,0%
Total	Count	111	188	901	1200	
	% within level	9,3%	15,7%	75,1%	100,0%	

Considering the article omission rates, elementary and intermediate level learners tend to omit articles at the rate 11, 5 % and 11, 0 % respectively. When compared to the omission rates in the -definite / + specific context tendency to omit articles is higher in + definite / - specific context. This suggests that Turkish learners tend to omit articles more in definite contexts rather than indefinite contexts. That is to say, article omission for

Turkish learners is definiteness-sensitive rather than specificity. Here is the +definite/-specific item which most of the learners omit articles:

(59)

36. A phone conversation

Susan: Hi, Mrs. Shepherd. Can I talk to Alice?

Mrs. Shepherd: Sorry Susan, but Alice is out. She went to \_\_\_\_ ( $\emptyset$  / a/ an / the) school library to work on her project.

#### 5.5.2.4. - Definite/-Specific Context

ANOVA results of –definite / -specific contexts are summarized in table 11.

**Table 11: One Way ANOVA Scores for “-Definite / - Specific” Contexts**

**According to Proficiency Level**

	<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	$\bar{X}$	<b>SD</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Significant Differences</b>
<b>- Definite/ - Specific</b>	<b>Elementary (E)</b>	<b>40</b>	8,8750	,91111	<b>2-117</b>	<b>18,986</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>E-I I-U E-U</b>
	<b>Intermediate (I)</b>	<b>40</b>	8,3000	1,38119				
	<b>Upper intermediate (U)</b>	<b>40</b>	9,6750	,52563				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	8,9500	1,14385				

The mean score of the upper intermediate level group ( $\bar{X} = 9,6750$ ) is higher than the elementary and intermediate groups. ( $\bar{X} = 8,8750$  and  $\bar{X} = 8,3000$  respectively). Differences between mean scores are statistically significant  $F(2-117) = 18,986$   $p < .001$ . It means that students' achievement on + definite / - specific contexts change according to the proficiency level.

Results of the descriptive statistics for indefinite non-specific contexts tell us that all groups perform better than other contexts (88, 8 %= elementary, 83, 0 % intermediate, 96, 8 % upper-intermediate). Elementary level learners supply the target article at the rate 88, 8 % which is quite a satisfactory percentage for this level. article substitution is observed only at the rate of 4, 5 % . Their article omission rate is a little higher than article substitution rate but the percentage (6, 8 %) is too low to consider it as important.

Table 12 illustrates the results for the –definite/-specific contexts.

**Table 12: Article Choice Percentages in -Definite/-Specific Contexts**

			-definite/-specific			Total
			∅	a/an	the	
level	elementary	Count	27	355	18	400
		% within level	6,8%	88,8%	4,5%	100,0%
	intermediate	Count	26	332	42	400
		% within level	6,5%	83,0%	10,5%	100,0%
	upper intermediate	Count	6	387	7	400
		% within level	1,5%	96,8%	1,8%	100,0%
Total		Count	59	1074	67	1200
		% within level	4,9%	89,5%	5,6%	100,0%

As for the intermediate level learners the results reveal the fact that with the 83,0% accuracy rate they again fall behind the elementary group whose accuracy rate is 88,8 % contrary to my expectation. In terms of article omission intermediate group is not remarkably better. They tend to omit articles at the rate of 6, 5 % which is quite close to the elementary group; 6, 8 % . Example 60 illustrates the –definite/-specific item in which L1 Turkish learners of English mostly omit the article.

(60)

9. Mother and father are talking in the kitchen just before the dinner

Mother: Jane will not be with us tonight, honey.

Father: Why not?

Mother: She told me that she is going to wait for \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) client.

More important than the article omission rate of the intermediate group the substitution rate is quite high for this context. They tend to use *the* instead of *a* at the rate 10, 5%.

As expected upper the intermediate group is the most successful group. They are able to assign the target article at a considerably high rate; 96, 8 %. This percentage shows us that the upper intermediate group shows native like performance in article selection in the indefinite nonspecific context. With respect to substitution and omission errors the upper-intermediate group's error rates are remarkably low. They tend to omit articles at the rate 4, 9 % and use *the* instead of *a* at the rate 1, 8.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### 6.1. Introduction

In this section overall results which are obtained from the data analysis will be discussed in the light of research questions under certain sub-titles. The reasons and results of the findings will be questioned from various points of views. Then the overall picture will be depicted. Following this, all the study will be summarized. Following the summary, results will be underlined in an overall sense and the conclusions are drawn from the results. Then, limitations for further studies will be mentioned. Lastly, implications will be stated and the chapter will end.

#### 6.2. Discussion of the Results

This study yielded quite important findings related to the acquisition of English Article System by Turkish learners. The results find considerable support from literature and this strengthens my study.

First of all, in this study article choices of learners from three different proficiency levels were examined and effects of definiteness and specificity to their article choice were investigated. My predictions for this study have been largely confirmed. I predicted that Turkish learners will associate the definite article with specificity, so they will fluctuate. As a result of this fluctuation, they will overuse definite article in –definite/+specific contexts and indefinite article in +definite/-specific context. It was also predicted that fluctuation frequency will differ according to the proficiency level and a negative correlation will be observed. These predictions and research questions found their supports largely from the results which are discussed under the subtitles below.



### 6.2.1. Overuses and Fluctuation

First research question was about the systematic errors of Turkish learners on the course of English article system acquisition. As an answer for this question the most important finding in the study is that L1 Turkish learners overused certain articles in certain contexts. In +definite/-specific and –definite/+specific contexts especially intermediate level learners overused the indefinite article *a* and definite article *the* respectively. Overuses were observed in many studies in literature as well (Butler, 2002; Ekiert, 2004, 2007; Kubota, 1994; Lu and Fen, 2001; Kaku, 2006; Kim and Lakshmanan, 2009; Ionin et al, 2008; Ionin and Wexler, 2003; Ionin et al, 2003, 2004; Snape, 2005a, 2005b; Zdorenko and Paradis, 2007a, 2007b among many others). All these studies support my results.

As well as the results itself, the reason is crucial. The reasons of the observed overuses are the answer of my second research question. Taking related literature and theoretical knowledge as the background I argue that like other L2 learners of English from *article-less* languages, L1 Turkish learners of English associate the definite article with specificity instead of definiteness. The reason of this association is that specificity distinctions are more basic than definiteness distinctions in the sentence. Moreover, according to Kim and Lakshmanan (2009), the selection of specificity setting for the definite article may also be triggered by the input (92). It means that definiteness is less transparent in the input; it is hard to infer the meaning of definiteness and definites are more frequently specific in the input. As a result of the frequency bias in the input, L2 learners of English associate the definite article with specificity. When the context is specific, they perceive it as definite. This misinterpretation causes overuses in the contexts where definiteness and specificity have contrastive values (when one of them is (+) the other is (-)). In +definite/-specific contexts learners tend to use the indefinite article because the specificity feature has (-) value and in –definite/+specific contexts they use the definite article as the context has (+)

specific value. Ionin (2003) formalized these overuses. In Chapter 1 Ionin's Article Choice Parameter and Fluctuation Hypothesis in Article Choice has been explained in detail. According to this parameter and the hypothesis on the way of language acquisition, L2 learners of English have full access to UG. UG provides learners with both of the settings of the ACP. However, L2 learners do not know which setting is the correct one for the target language so they show optional adherence to both settings of UG; definiteness and specificity. It means they fluctuate between these two values. Some of the time they assign articles on the basis of specificity but some of the time definiteness is the setting for the article choice. This fluctuation lasts until the input leads them to set the right parameter for the article choice in the target language. However, setting the right parameter takes time because input triggers are discourse based and discourse and pragmatics are acquired quite late and through experience. This factor makes the article system acquisition process quite challenging for learners. However, once the learners have control over the discourse and reach the input triggers, they start to master the article system.

In my third research question was about the developmental features of the English article system acquisition process of Turkish learners and I asked whether the proficiency have an effect on the process or not. Obtained results clearly answered these questions. In my data, the highest fluctuation is observed in –definite/+specific contexts and the highest fluctuation percentage belongs to the intermediate group. This finding is contrary to my predictions. I expected that elementary level learners would be more confused in these contexts with contrasting values and be less accurate in assigning the target article. This unexpected result finds support from literature (Butler, 2002; Ekiert, 2004; Lu and Fen, 2001). The possible reason of this unexpected accuracy might be that at this stage of acquisition learners start to become aware of the syntactic properties of definiteness and indefiniteness in English, so they are confused and fluctuate between definiteness and

specificity. Butler (2002) explains the reason of this inconsistency with her hypotheses. She argues that article choice of lower proficiency level learners is influenced by the rules taught by their teachers and written in their text books. These rules are stored and used without clear understanding of definiteness or specificity. As there is rules and formulas in their minds, there is no confusion, or let's say no fluctuation. When they become intermediate, they recognize their errors. This effect of recognition leads learners to confusion in their article choice. They start to assign articles with their newly acquired awareness and it brings learners to adopt a number of temporary, ad hoc hypotheses for choosing articles (Butler, 2002:467). As they improve in terms of their language proficiency reliance on rule-based hypotheses decrease and learners realize that they should also consider speaker-hearer knowledge and the context in which the given article is used. It means that in time they set the parameter for the article choice appropriately. The results of this study largely support this assertion because upper-intermediate level learners' fluctuation rates are quite minor both in –definite/+specific and +definite/-specific contexts in my data. However, they still do not show native-like performance in these contexts. This finding takes us to the fact that the acquisition of the article system in English is a difficult process which requires quite a long time. It takes time because in order to choose the correct article, learners should evaluate the discourse and find out the input triggers which will lead them to the correct choice. However, input triggers are discourse based and discourse and pragmatics are acquired quite late and through experience. So eliciting cues from the input to choose the right setting is not possible due to the current level of L2 learners. As learners have not fully acquired or mastered the acquisition of discourse and pragmatics yet, they manifest fluctuation.

### 6.2.2. Omission Errors

As well as overuses and fluctuation, article omission errors are also observed in the gathered data. All groups tend to omit articles in [+definite/+specific] context at considerable rates. However, the biggest rate of omission belongs to the elementary group. Omissions are also observed in +definite/-specific and -definite/-specific contexts. Results related to omissions are in line with previous researches (Bergeron and Matoba, 2007; Heubner, 1983; Master, 1987; Parrish, 1987; Robertson, 2000; Sarko, 2009; Snape, 2005b; Thomas, 1989; White, 2003; Zdorenko and Paradis, 2007b).

When these omissions are observed item by item, some consequences and results can be deduced. First of all, it is important to state that omissions are mostly observed in definite contexts whether it is specific or not. There are two items from the +definite/+specific context which most of the learners show a tendency to choose *no article* option. For the first example which is the 17<sup>th</sup> item in the task<sup>7</sup> largely elementary and intermediate level learners chose *no article* option to a large extent. The reason of the omission might be that elementary and intermediate level learners could not notice the reduced relative clause in the sentence which requires the target article. I argue that this is a strong reason because upper-intermediates did quite well in this item. Upper-intermediates' doing much less substitution and omission errors stand for the fact that proficiency level positively affect article choice on the way of article system acquisition. It means that proficiency help fluctuation and omission errors and participants do better in time. This result goes hand in hand with the expectations and is the answer of my third research question.

For the next +definite/+specific item, which is the 18<sup>th</sup> one in the task, the reason of omission finds its support from literature. Here, the definite article is on the scene as an example for the *cultural use of the*. In Liu and Gleason (2002) the authors argued that the

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<sup>7</sup> See appendix

definite article in English have four nongeneric uses and these four uses pose different levels of difficulty for ESL learners and are acquired in different times. The results indicate that the last acquired use of *the* is *cultural use* and our 18<sup>th</sup> item is a quintessence example of this late acquired cultural use. Because of this, learners from all levels face with difficulty while trying to assign an article for this item and, at last, chose *no article* option.

Similarly, the 36<sup>th</sup> item in the task is yielded a high rate of article omission. In this item the possible reason might be that the NP (*library*) just before the target article is modified by the word *school* so a compound word is formed; *school library*. Trenkic (2009) indicates her study that L2 English speakers show a tendency to omit articles in premodified contexts (132). She argues that L2 learners take definite article use to be “based on a pragmatic principle akin to Grice’s maxim of quantity; use a referential form that is sufficiently informative for your purpose but not more informative than necessary” (128).), Robertson (2000) also states that if the use of definite article is pragmatically redundant, it is more likely to be omitted. The situation in this item might be an example for these explanations. L1 Turkish learners of English might have thought that the NP, *library*, had already been modified by the modifier *school* and there is no need for *the* to be more informative.

Apart from the findings related to omission and fluctuation, the study has revealed the fact that in the - definite/- specific context proved to be the most successful context for all learners whatever their proficiency level is. This result has been reported in earlier studies (Ekiert, 2007; Thu, 2005). However, there are some other studies which found that learners from article-less languages show better results in definite article marking when compared to indefinite article marking (P.G. Mayo, 2009; Bergeron and Matoba, 2007; Zdorenko and Paradis, 2007a) . The reason why L1 Turkish learners are better in the indefinite nonspecific context is that in Turkish, there is an indefinite article; *bir*. As a result, Turkish

learners have transferred their already existing parameter values to their interlanguage and this transferred knowledge has helped them to assign the target article successfully.

### **6.3. Summary of the Discussion**

To sum up, the results of the study largely supported my expectations. The intermediate level fluctuated between definiteness and specificity as foreseen because they associate definite article with specificity. As a result of this, overuses were observed in the data in – definite/+specific and +definite/-specific contexts at considerable rates. Contrary to my predictions; however, elementary level learners fell behind the intermediates in these problematic contexts and they did not fluctuate between definiteness and specificity as much as their intermediate counterparts. This does not necessarily display the elementary level learners' mastery over article system. The reason of this temporary success is that at this level students are not confused as they have not reached the awareness of the underlying target language parameters ; they just assigned articles according to the rules they are taught. So they did not show fluctuation at considerable rates but still made errors. One of the most striking errors was the omission error. Elementary level learners tended to omit articles to a high extent in the +definite/+specific context. In definite contexts, other learners also showed omission errors. Finally, L1 Turkish learners of English were better in assigning the indefinite article when compared to the definite article. The reason of this mastery is that Turkish has an indefinite article and there is a way for learners to transfer their already existing parameter values related to the indefinite article to their interlanguage. So they could show mastery over this context.

### **6.4. Conclusion**

In the overall sense the aim of my study is to contribute to the literature of English Article System acquisition by Turkish learners and widen the spectrum of the researches. At a specific level the purpose is to examine the second language acquisition of the English

article system by Turkish learners and investigate the role of definiteness and specificity during the acquisition process. It is also aimed to find out the role of the proficiency level on the course of article system acquisition. The data for the thesis was collected from the preparatory class students at M.E.T.U. Students were from 3 different learner groups from 3 different proficiency levels were tested. Before the data collection, the elicitation task was piloted with a group of preparatory class students at TOBB University of Economics and Technology. They were from different proficiency levels; 5 from elementary, 5 from intermediate and 5 from upper-intermediate. In addition to the test group, there was also a control group for the task. They were 5 native speakers of English. The soft version of the task was sent to them as an e-mail. . The elicitation task was sent back via e-mail, again. As the data collection instrument, a forced choice elicitation task was prepared. This task consisted of 40 short dialogues which depended on four different contexts; +definite/+specific, +definite/-specific, -definite/+specific, -definite/-specific. Collected data was analyzed by means of SPSS 17 package program using the descriptive analysis and ANOVA techniques. The results of the study were mostly in line with the predictions. It was expected that especially elementary and intermediate level learners would fluctuate between definiteness and specificity in +definite/-specific, -definite/+specific contexts because they would associate the definite article with specificity instead of definiteness. This fluctuation would last until they became proficient enough and input led them to assign the right article. As expected, intermediate level learners fluctuated between definiteness and specificity and overused “a” and “the” in [+definite/-specific], [-definite/+specific] contexts. However, contrary to my predictions, elementary level learners performed better than intermediate counterparts. From upper-intermediates’ side the results were quite satisfactory; they did well nearly in all contexts. It proved that proficiency level helps article system acquisition and learners can perform better in time on

the course of English Article System acquisition.

As well as fluctuation, omission errors were also observed. Especially elementary level learners tended to omit articles in [+definite/+specific] context. Articles omission rates mostly observed in definite contexts. In general all learners were better in [-definite/-specific] context and worse in [+definite/-specific] and [+definite/+specific] contexts. The reason might be that Turkish has an indefinite article and learners might have transferred this already existing parameter to their interlanguage so performed better.

### **6.5. Limitations of the Study**

The current study has some limitations in itself. First of all, it is important to note that in this research, developmental features of Turkish learners on the way of article system acquisition were aimed to be seen. For that purpose learners from three different proficiency levels have been investigated. My research groups consisted of elementary, intermediate and upper-intermediate level students. For further researches beginner level learners instead of elementary level might be tested in order to see the development in a better way.

Another limitation for this study is related to the data collection instrument. In the research additional elicitation techniques could have been fostered instead of just using forced choice elicitation task. For instance, a questionnaire or some written elicitation tasks could have been added.

### **6.6. Implications**

The present study yielded important results related to the acquisition of English articles by Turkish learners and in the light of these results it is possible to come up with certain implications to help teachers.

In order to achieve efficient teaching of articles, firstly, learners should be aware of the underlying reasons of their article choices. It means that they should know according to



what they are expected to assign articles in that target language. In that sense, learners should be informed about semantic universals of UG; specificity and definiteness. The logic behind their article choice should be explained to them. Fluctuation and specificity should be taken seriously because it may cause fossilization.

In the data it was found out that Turkish learners of English showed sensitivity to local contextual clues. They directly assigned the definite article for items which has a relative clause structure. Relative clause structure leads learners to a confusion because they had been taught that before the relative clause structure definite article must be used. As a result most of the learners used definite article without considering the context's itself. Keeping this in mind, it is possible to suggest that while introducing the article system, formulaic and rigid rules should be avoided. Articles should be taught in context, not separately. Moreover classroom activities should be more meaning-based rather than rule-based. Article system is too complex and detailed to be explained via simple formal rules and assigning the correct article depends on discourse.

In language acquisition, the role of comprehensible input cannot be denied. During the article system acquisition process, students should be provided as much comprehensible input as possible because input triggers have a crucial role in discourse analysis, so in assigning the correct article. For that purpose, it is possible to use communicative activities in the class while explaining the article system because communicative activities are the best way to provide students with real life comprehensible input with a real discourse.

Another important point is that studies in literature have revealed that there is a natural order in article system acquisition. The indefinite article is acquired later than the definite article because its semantic conditioning is more complex than the definite article. While teaching the article system, teachers should bear this order in mind. Following this order may help classroom teaching.

Lastly, acquisition of the English article system is a long, difficult and painful process so learners need time to master over articles in English. As a result teachers should be patient during the process.

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## APPENDIX

### A) Forced Choice Elicitation Task

#### FORCED-CHOICE ELICITATION TASK ITEMS

1. At a restaurant

A: Hey! Did you see \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) waiter?

B: Yes, but what's so surprising about him?

A: He is my sister's fiancé.

2. Two friends come across each other in the street

Hilda: Hi, William! It's nice to see you. What's up?

William: I've just visited \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) friend from collage, Jack. He called me yesterday and told that he moved to this area.

3. Phone conversation between siblings

Julia: Hi! It's Julia. How are you doing?

Gary: Good Julia, thanks but this is the wrong time to call. I must go now because I'm going to meet \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) friend who is *very special* Sorry!

4. Two university friends are talking

Mike: Hi, Angela. Did you take the 319-Linguistics course?

Angela: I didn't take the course but, as far as I heard, \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) instructor has high expectations from his students. I don't have the slightest idea about him but everybody says so.

5. Two friends are chatting

A: Did you hear what happened? Someone broke into Mrs. Romney's flat and stole her jewelry.

B: Oh! Did the police catch \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) thief?

A: Not yet, they have no idea about his / her identity, but they are investigating.

6. Two friends are chatting

Susan: Have you decided on Nina's birthday present?

Amy: Well, I've chosen a red skirt or a purple dress, but I think, I'll buy \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) dress.

7. In a dormitory, roommates are talking

Rose: Roberta, last week, you showed us \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) dress. Can I borrow that dress for tomorrow?

Roberta: Sure, you can.

8. Mother and son are chatting in the kitchen

Mother: How was the birthday party?

Son: Everything was marvelous, mum. Alan's girlfriend, Catharine, told us that Alan's father bought him \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) expensive sports car.

9. Mother and father are talking in the kitchen just before the dinner

Mother: Jane will not be with us tonight, honey.

Father: Why not?

Mother: She told me that she is going to wait for \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) client.

10. Mother's calling up to her daughter who is upstairs

Mother: Ann! Could you please close \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) windows up there? It's getting cold outside!

Ann: Ok mum!

11. Two friends are chatting

Jacob: How is your new job, Amanda?

Amanda: It's great, Jacob. You know I love travelling and this job give me the opportunity. I travel all over \_\_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) Middle East at the company's expense.

12. A couple is talking about their marriage

Christina: Rob, I think we need some professional help. I have found \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) good marriage therapist. I know her, she is a real specialist.

Rob: Ok, Let's see if it works.

13. A student is talking to a students' affairs officer

Student: Hi! I have some health problems so I have to get permission to be absent for this term. What are the procedures?

Officer: First, you need to bring me a formal letter from \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) head of your department.

14. Two airline hostesses are talking before a flight

Judy: Everybody is talking about the plane which made an emergency landing yesterday.

Ralph: Yes, it's a miracle. I don't know who he is but \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) pilot must be a real expert. He landed the plane without any loss of life.

15. At a souvenir shop

Shop Assistant: Good afternoon, Miss. May I help you?

Customer: Yes, please. I want to buy \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) present for my dad as it's his birthday tomorrow but I don't know what to buy.

16. Amanda comes to Karen's house to ask about her house mate

Amanda: Hi Karen. Is your house mate at home? I need to talk to her.

Karen: Sorry Amanda. Jenny went to Washington where she is going to have a meeting with \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) politician.

17. Two friends, while chatting

Linda: I don't like \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) cream cakes sold in the local bakery.

Amanda: Really? I always buy them. They are quite delicious in my opinion.

18. Two friends, while chatting

Karen: Addy, where did you go in the summer holiday?

Addy: We went to Vienna. We visited the Cathedral, Hofburg, Karlsplatz, and Schönbrunn. We also went climbing in \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) Alps.

19. Daughter and dad are talking

Dad: Is your mum at home, honey?

Daughter: No, dad. She is eating dinner with \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) colleague, she didn't say who.

20. Two friends are chatting

Mike: Angela, listen, my dad must have a heart operation and we are looking for a good surgeon.

Angela: I know \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) very successful heart surgeon. I can find his phone number for you if you like, Mike.

21. Paul is talking to Jane's mother in front of Jane's house

Paul: Hello, Mrs. Atkinson! Can I talk to Jane?

Mrs. Atkinson: Hey, Paul. Sure you can. She is at home, reading \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) book you gave her on her birthday.

22. Two friends are chatting

Calvin: Did you hear about the accident that happened at this corner yesterday?

Frank: Oh, yes. A car hit a young boy and \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) driver drove off. Nobody recognized him.

23. Husband and wife are on the phone

Wife: Honey, I'll be late for tonight because I 'm going to meet \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) friend from my last job, Jessica.

Husband: Ok sweetheart.

24. Two friends are talking about a piece of literature

A: I like this poem very much; *The Red Haired Lady*. Do you know \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) poet?

B: No, I don't but obviously she or he is a very emotional person.

25. Mum and daughter are in the kitchen

Mum: Oh my god! What a mess!

Daughter: Sorry, mum. I forget to tell you. I invited \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) friend from my class and I am trying to make a cake for him.

26. Two friends are on their way to a trip

Anne: Tom, can you lend me something to read during the trip? It's a long journey, you know.

Tom: Sure, Anne. Look at my bookshelf and just take \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) book.

27. A husband and wife are talking about their daughter

Mathilda: Nora is very happy with that young man.

Mathilda: I have no idea about him but \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) boy must be very fond of Nora. She's always smiling.

28. Two friends are chatting

Jeremy: How was your weekend, Betsy?

Betsy: Awful! It was rainy and I was at home. I started \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) new book and spent all weekend reading it.

29. In a lawyers' office

Jeremy: Are you still working?

Amanda: Yes. I have to talk to \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) client. She's a poor woman who's been beaten by her husband. The trial's next week and I need to learn each and every detail of the case.

30. Two friends are talking on the phone

Jack: Why is Susanna crying?

Paul: Because \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) coach didn't choose Susanna for the school basketball team. She's very upset.

31. Two girls are gossiping about one of their friends

Juliet: Hey, did you see Jennifer? Jessica told me that Jennifer was waiting in front of the dorm wearing a very nice dress. Then \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) expensive car arrived and took her.

Ashley: Wow! Lucky her!

32. At the office

Mr. Widmore: Do you know where Paul is George?

George: I am sorry, Mr. Widmore. I haven't seen him since \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) meeting yesterday.

33. After a football match

Bill: What an awful match!! The best players were in our team but we couldn't win.



Rick: It was not the players' fault. I don't know about \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) referee but he was biased.

34. Two students come across at the university

Clara: Hi, Ethan. What are you doing, here?

Ethan: I'm waiting for Prof. Austen. There is \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) student in her office and I am waiting for him to go.

35. At a shop, talking to the seller in the shop

Seller: Good morning, Madam. May I help you?

Customer: Can I talk to \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) customer service representative, Mr. Sanders, please.

Seller: Of course.

36. A phone conversation

Susan: Hi, Mrs. Shepherd. Can I talk to Alice?

Mrs. Shepherd: Sorry Susan, but Alice is out. She went to \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) school library to work on her project.

37. In lost and found

A: May I help you, miss?

B: Yes, please. Has anyone found \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) green wallet with a cherry design on it? We were in "My Best Friend's Wedding", in Hall B. I think I left it on my seat.

38. Two friends are chatting at the office

Rose: What will you wear in Sarah's wedding?

Judy: Well, I am planning to wear \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) dress, but I don't know what kind of a dress it's going to be.

39. Two friends are talking at the office

James: Shall we go out for dinner tonight Amanda?

Amanda: Oh, James, I'm sorry. I am going to have dinner with our new client. You know him, he is \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) manager of Privilege Furniture LTD, Mr. Patterson.

40. In a book store

Shop assistant: May I help you, sir?

Customer: Yes please. I am looking for \_\_\_\_ (Ø / a/ an / the) book. It's a classic by D.H. Lawrence. It's called "Sons and Lovers".

## B) POST-HOC RESULTS

**Table 13: Post Hoc Results for “+Definite/+Specific” Context**

Dependent Variable	(I) level	(J) level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
<b>+ Definite / + Specific Context</b>	Elementary	Intermediate	-,82500 <sup>*</sup>	,26040	<b>,008</b>	-1,4706	-,1794
		Upper intermediate	-2,05000 <sup>*</sup>	,26040	<b>,000</b>	-2,6956	-1,4044
	Intermediate	Elementary	,82500 <sup>*</sup>	,26040	<b>,008</b>	,1794	1,4706
		Upper intermediate	-1,22500 <sup>*</sup>	,26040	<b>,000</b>	-1,8706	-,5794
	Upper intermediate	Elementary	2,05000 <sup>*</sup>	,26040	<b>,000</b>	1,4044	2,6956
		Intermediate	1,22500 <sup>*</sup>	,26040	<b>,000</b>	,5794	1,8706

**Table 14: Post Hoc Results for “-Definite/+Specific” Context**

Dependent Variable	(I) level	(J) level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
<b>- Definite/ +Specific</b>	Elementary	Intermediate	1,82500 <sup>*</sup>	,38766	<b>,000</b>	,8638	2,7862
		Upper Intermediate	-1,30000 <sup>*</sup>	,38766	<b>,005</b>	-2,2612	-,3388
	Intermediate	Elementary	-1,82500 <sup>*</sup>	,38766	<b>,000</b>	-2,7862	-,8638
		Upper Intermediate	-3,12500 <sup>*</sup>	,38766	<b>,000</b>	-4,0862	-2,1638
	Upper Intermediate	Elementary	1,30000 <sup>*</sup>	,38766	<b>,005</b>	,3388	2,2612
		Intermediate	3,12500 <sup>*</sup>	,38766	<b>,000</b>	2,1638	4,0862

**Table 15: Post Hoc Results for “-Definite/+Specific” Context**

Dependent Variable	(I) level	(J) level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
- Definite /+Specific	Elementary	Intermediate	1,37500 <sup>*</sup>	,34928	,001	,5090	2,2410
		Upper Intermediate	-2,15000 <sup>*</sup>	,34928	,000	-3,0160	-1,2840
	Intermediate	Elementary	-1,37500 <sup>*</sup>	,34928	,001	-2,2410	-,5090
		Upper Intermediate	-3,52500 <sup>*</sup>	,34928	,000	-4,3910	-2,6590
	Upper Intermediate	Elementary	2,15000 <sup>*</sup>	,34928	,000	1,2840	3,0160
		Intermediate	3,52500 <sup>*</sup>	,34928	,000	2,6590	4,3910

**Table 16: Post Hoc Results for “-Definite/ -Specific” Context**

Dependent Variable	(I) level	(J) level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
- Definite / - Specific	Elementary	Intermediate	,57500 <sup>*</sup>	,22413	,041	,0193	2,2410
		Upper Intermediate	-,80000 <sup>*</sup>	,22413	,002	-1,3557	-1,2840
	Intermediate	Elementary	-,57500 <sup>*</sup>	,22413	,041	-1,1307	-,5090
		Upper Intermediate	-1,37500 <sup>*</sup>	,22413	,000	-1,9307	-2,6590
	Upper Intermediate	Elementary	,80000 <sup>*</sup>	,22413	,002	,2443	3,0160
		Intermediate	1,37500 <sup>*</sup>	,22413	,000	,8193	4,3910

### C) BAR CHARTS OF THE STATISTICS

Chart 1: Article Choices of L1 Turkish Learners in +Definite/+Specific Context

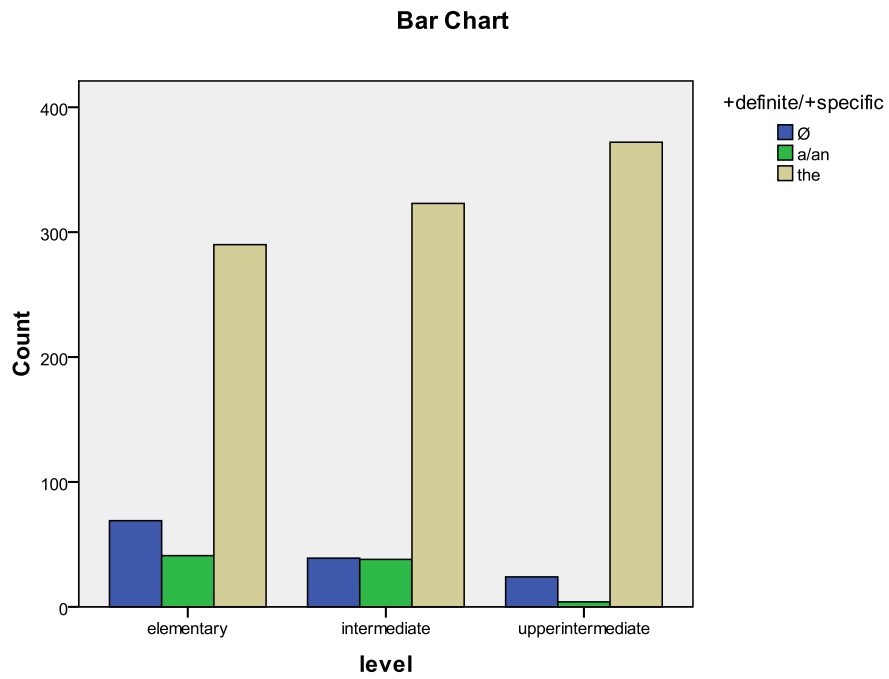
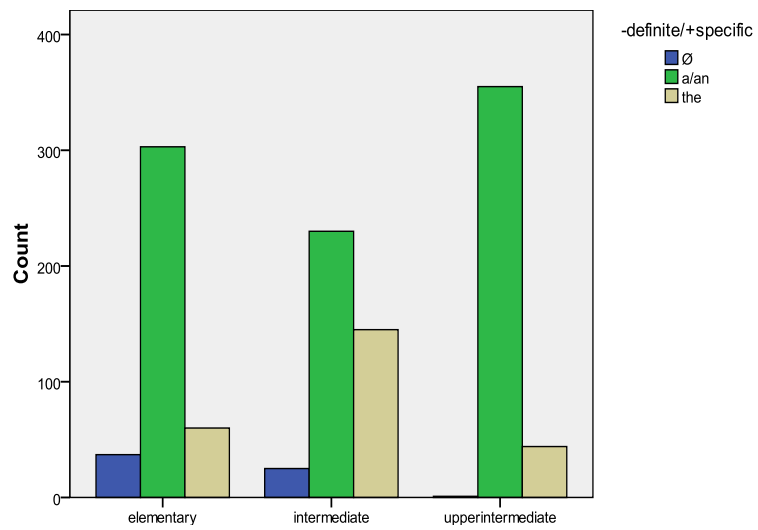
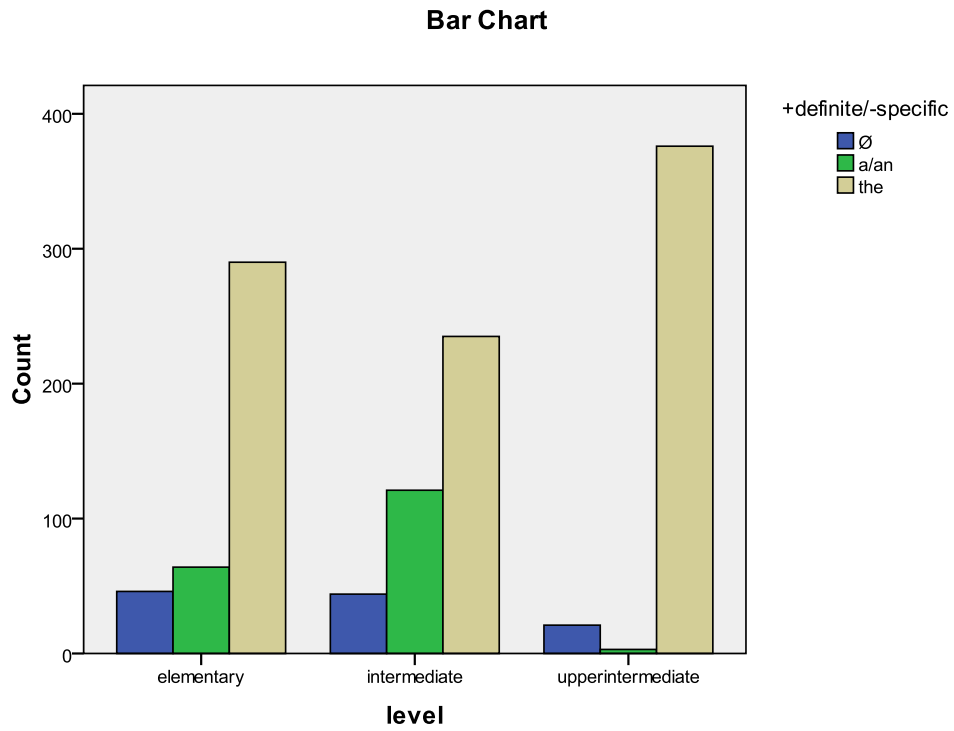


Chart 2: Article Choices of L1 Turkish Learners in -Definite/+Specific Context



**Chart 3: Article Choices of L1 Turkish Learners in + Definite /- Specific Context**



**Chart 4: Article Choices of L1 Turkish Learners in - Definite /- Specific Context**

