EFL Koreans’ Article Choice across Proficiency in Specificity*

Jung-Yun Choi (Konkuk University)


Many studies (Ionin, 2003, etc.) have shown that the semantic feature of specificity plays a significant role in determining articleless Korean ESL (English as a Second Language) learners’ article choice. The aim of this study is to investigate whether this semantic effect holds across Korean EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners’ proficiency groups (High and Low Groups: HG and LG). Fifty three college students of each group were allocated to a task and testing took place in a classroom environment for two days. All participants sufficiently focused on each questionnaire for about thirty minutes. The results of this study indicate that both HG and LG similarly show the overuses of the in indefinite specific contexts and the overuses of a in definite non-specific contexts. However, HG seemed to be more sensitive to semantic features than LG. EFL Koreans’ article choice is not random, but reflects a systematic semantic distinction (i.e., specificity). According to the data analysis, EFL Korean students seemed to generally associate the definite article the with the specificity feature in non-random error patterns. The specificity feature was shown to be responsible for the overuse of the for the HG EFL Koreans. Their errors were traceable to parameter setting (the article choice parameter proposed by Ionin, Ko, & Wexler, 2004), which is not found in their articleless native language (Korean) and the target language (English), but is only available through article semantics in UG (Universal Grammar).

I. INTRODUCTION

The article usage of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Korean students may also have the same pattern as that of ESL (English as a Second

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Language) learners (Ionin, Zubizarreta, Maldonado, & Philippov, 2007). This experiment treats *definiteness* as making reference to the common ground between a speaker and a hearer and *specificity* as making reference to the speaker’s knowledge only. In English, the semantic difference between *the* and *a* corresponds to a definiteness distinction.

For the absence of articles in L1, EFL Korean students have no a priori reason to categorize English articles on the basis of definiteness rather than specificity. For that reason, EFL Korean students will experience a developmental stage of learning English articles, during which they go back and forth between dividing English articles on the basis of definiteness vs. specificity.

The goal of this study is to explore the relationship between linguistic theory (the Fluctuation Hypothesis proposed by Ionin, 2003) and Korean EFL acquisition according to language proficiency in the domain of article semantics. The aim is to examine the issues of UG (Universal Grammar) access and parameter-setting related to *specificity* in EFL Korean students IL (Interlanguage) according to language proficiency levels (e.g., High Group and Low Group) in the domain of article semantics. Ionin et al. (2004) proposed that articles are rule-governed by semantic parameters; that is, the article choice parameter.

To observe a semantic feature that affects article errors, the current experiment asks the following questions:

a. What is the effect between specificity of English article usage in EFL Koreans?
b. What is the difference between proficiency levels?

II. BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

1. Definiteness

Russell (1905) proposed that a definite feature is a description of *the x*. and *x* is a unique noun/nominal phrase. Givon (1978) used definite phrases when both the speaker and the hearer could watch the referent. Lewis (1979) proposed that definiteness expresses saliency, which is the situational

If a DP is [+definite], then the speaker assumes that the hearer shares the presupposition of the existence of a unique individual in the set denoted by a Noun Phrase (NP). When a DP is [+definite], the speaker and the hearer share the presupposition that there is a unique individual in the set denoted by the NP that the determiner takes as its argument.

The article the marks definiteness (i.e., a presupposition of uniqueness), while the article a marks indefiniteness (i.e., the lack of such a presupposition). In terms of features, the and a can be classified as [+definite] and [-definite], respectively. The definite article the can be used in various contexts that satisfy the the uniqueness presupposition.

The can be used to refer back to a previously mentioned DP, as demonstrated in the following sentence: I saw a black dog in the street [...] I brought the black dog home. On the other hand, the indefinite article a is used as a referent. There is no presupposition that a unique black dog exists, so the condition of definiteness has not been met. This condition requires a rather than the. When the same black dog is mentioned again, the definite article the is used, because the previous mention has established the dog’s uniqueness in the discourse. The speaker can reasonably assume that the hearer shares the speaker’s presupposition that there is a unique black dog under discussion (Bloom, 1970; Hawkins, 1978).

2. Specificity

While the [+definite] feature represents the knowledge of both the speaker and the hearer, a [+specific] feature represents the knowledge and state of mind of only the speaker (Fodor & Sag, 1982; Ionin, Ko, & Wexler, 2004). If a DP is [+specific], then the speaker intends to refer to a unique individual in the set denoted by the NP and considers this individual as possessing a noteworthy property. The feature [+specific] is not marked by the Standard English article system, which encodes only definiteness, so that
the is used in [+definite] contexts, and a in [−definite] contexts, regardless of specificity.

The definiteness feature can be achieved through the previous mention, as in (1a) (there is only one puppy that was previously mentioned) or through modification, as in (1b) (where the hearer can easily accommodate the existence of one relevant puppy). Importantly, the marks the [+definite] feature rather than the [+specific] one; the use of the in (1c) is infelicitous unless the speaker and the hearer already share knowledge of a relevant puppy. It is not enough that the speaker has a particular puppy in mind; the use of the does not correspond to the [+specific] feature, but encodes the [+definite] feature.

(1)

a) I saw a puppy. The puppy started barking.

b) I saw the puppy that Peter got for his birthday.

c) #I saw the puppy outside.

(Acceptable if a puppy was previously mentioned.) (Ionin, 2003)

Conversely, the use of the is felicitous in all definite environments, regardless of whether the conditions of specificity have been satisfied. For instance, in (2a), the speaker intends to refer to a specific individual (her best friend), but in (2b) she does not; only (2a) satisfies the conditions of specificity. However, the is used in both cases, marking the [+definite] feature; both cases in (2) satisfy the conditions of definiteness, since there is a unique winner in the common ground.

(2)

a) I want to talk to the winner of this race—she is my best friend.

b) I want to talk to the winner of this race—whoever that is.

(Ionin, 2003)

The [+definite] feature is expressed by the in English, while the [+specific] feature is expressed by le in Samoan. In English, the is used regardless of whether the context satisfies the conditions of specificity, and
in Samoan, *le* is used regardless of whether the context satisfies the conditions of definiteness. This is represented pictorially in (3).

(3) Article Use Cross–linguistically related to Definiteness and Specificity (Ionin, 2003)

a) English: Definiteness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>+definite</th>
<th>-definite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+specificity</td>
<td><em>the</em></td>
<td><em>a</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-specificity</td>
<td><em>the</em></td>
<td><em>a</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) Samoan: Specificity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>+definite</th>
<th>-definite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+specificity</td>
<td><em>le</em></td>
<td><em>le</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-specificity</td>
<td><em>se</em></td>
<td><em>se</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The examples of specific semantic feature in Samoan are as below:

(4)

a) *Sa i ai se matua=moa ma s=a=na*
   PAST exist ART(nsp.sg.) old=hen and ART(nsp.sg.)=Poss=3.sg.
   *toloai. O l=o latou aiga o lalo o le*
   brood. PRES ART=Poss3pl. family PRES under Poss ART
   *fai.*
   banana=tree
   “Once upon a time there was a hen and her brood. Their home
   was beneath the banana tree.”

b) *Sa i ai le ulugalii o Papa le tane a o*
   PAST exist ART couple PRES Papa ART husband but PRES
   *Eleele le fafine i Manua.*
   *Eleele ART woman LD Manua.*
“There was a couple, Papa, the husband, and Eleele, the wife, who lived in Manua.”
(Mosel and Hovdhaugen 1992:262, ex. 6.51, 6.52)

Samoan is a language using one article in specific contexts and a different article in non-specific contexts.

3. Fluctuation Hypotheses

Articleless EFL Koreans will experience the fluctuation of article choice according to definiteness and specificity, as formulated in (5).

(5) The Fluctuation Hypothesis (FH) for EFL Koreans’ Article Choice (revised by Ionin, 2003)

a) Korean EFL learners have full access to the features that can underlie article choice cross-linguistically: the features are [+definite] and [+specific].

b) Korean EFL learners fluctuate between dividing English articles on the basis of definiteness vs. specificity, until the input leads them to choose the definiteness option.

According to the FH, Korean EFL learners’ interlanguage grammar is always constrained by the universal semantic features of definiteness and specificity. Korean learners essentially entertain multiple possible grammar types (an English–like grammar based on definiteness and a Samoan–like grammar based on specificity) at the same time. With sufficient input, Korean EFL learners should eventually be able to choose the right option and divide English articles on the basis of definiteness. Importantly, the FH predicts non-random article use. Korean EFL learners will use the definite article the in the [+definite +specific] context and the indefinite article a in the [−definite−specific] context, whether the learners adopt the division as (3a)
or (3b). There should be a few or no errors in these two context types. On the other hand, fluctuation will result in the interchangeable use of the vs. a in the [+definite−specific] as well as the [−definite +specific] contexts where the two options in (3) are in conflict. This prediction is expressed in (6).

(6) Predictions of Article Choice related to Definiteness and Specificity in Korean EFL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>+definite (target: the)</th>
<th>−definite (target: a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+specific</td>
<td>correct use of the</td>
<td>overuse of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>−specific</td>
<td>overuse of a</td>
<td>correct use of a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III. METHOD

This study was piloted with seven adult L1 Korean speakers who had graduated from universities in Korea. Then, a level test was allocated for 30 minutes after class, and an article perception test was allocated for 30 minutes after class.

Testing took place in a classroom environment for all participants for two days to focus on the questionnaire in a short time. On the first day, they filled out the level test, and on the second day, they performed the piloted article perception test (Appendix B). The investigator who spoke the participants’ L1 Korean asked each participant to fill out a short questionnaire about the participants’ biographical and language backgrounds.

After the experiment, the low-group subjects said that the proficiency level test was slightly difficult, but the perception test was almost answerable, and the high-group subjects said that the proficiency level and perception tests were somewhat easy.

The tasks comprised 30 proficiency level tests extracted from TOEIC, TOEFL, TEPS, and the Civil Service Exam in Korea, and 28 article perception tests were made up of examples from Ionin (2003) and Ko et al. (2006). The three students who received the highest score in each group
were given presents for compensation to obtain more accurate information.

For the analyses of this study, a number of mixed ANOVAs were conducted. Each mixed ANOVA will be detailed in the Results section later. These statistical analyses were tested at alpha = .05 or .01. Post-hoc analyses using Scheffe were also conducted whenever needed.

1. Participants

The participants of this experiment were composed of 137 adult EFL Koreans (undergraduate students) originally. They consisted of 66 college students from a high-level proficiency student group (HG) and 71 college students from a low-level proficiency student group (LG). A proficiency level test was conducted to exclude the students who showed excessively high or low scores in the level test. Specifically, a total of 13 students were excluded from the High proficiency Group (HG), whereas a total of 18 students were removed from the Low proficiency Group (LG). Finally, a total of 106 students were selected for this experiment (53 students from HG vs. 53 students from LG). Each group (HG and LG) was divided by the proficiency level test, and the mean score of the HG was 23.26 and the mean score of the LG was 12.17 among 30 scores from the English test.

2. Tasks

The forced choice task (Appendix B) consisted of 28 short English-language dialogues collected from Ionin’s (2003) and Ko et al.’s (2006) studies. The model target sentence in each dialogue is presented in (7).

(7)

Waiter: Are you ready to order, sir? Or are you waiting for someone?
Client: Can you please come back in about twenty minutes?
You see, I am waiting, I am planning to eat with
(a, the, Ø) colleague from work. She will be here soon.

In this task, the participants were required to mark one of the three article choices (a, the, or Ø—no article) based on their response for the
preceding context. The choice of this format was chosen to allow the investigators maximal control over the contexts and examine the EFL Koreans’ performance in a particular context type. Furthermore, the same test format was employed by Ionin (2003) and Ko et al. (2006).

The stimuli for the forced choice task are presented in (8). There are six types of stimuli in (8). The definite context types were included for balance (to ensure that *the* was elicited as often as *a*). The definite items contained specific and nonspecific definite DPs, as well as other definite contexts involving superlatives and ordinals (Ionin, 2003).

(8) Five Types of Article Perception Tasks related to Specificity and No Article

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Token</th>
<th>Type number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-definite +specific</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11, 13, 20, 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-definite−specific</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12, 14, 21, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+definite +specific</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1, 2, 6, 7, 25, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+definite −specific</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3, 4, 8, 9, 26, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no article (distractor)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10, 19, 5, 24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**IV. RESULTS**

Specificity effect shows the results of *the* overuse in indefinite contexts. That is, the nonspecific effect shows the results of *a* overuses in definite contexts. The specific effect can be seen as the results of *the* and *a* uses in the following four type contexts.

The HG and LG showed a significant difference of article *the* and *a* uses in the [-definite +specific] and the [-definite −specific] contexts, and they did the same in the [+definite +specific] and the [+definite −specific]
contexts. However, only the HG showed more no article (Ø) uses in the specific definite contexts than in the nonspecific definite contexts. Conversely, the LG showed marginally more correct the uses in the [+definite −specific] contexts than in the [+definite +specific] contexts. The LG did not recognize specificity in English article usage, but the HG recognized specificity in English article uses.

Table 1. Mean Ratio of the, a, and Ø Uses in [−definite +specific], [−definite −specific], [+definite +specific], and [+definite −specific] Contexts of Two Groups (HG n=53, LG n=53)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>the</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>Ø</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>− definite + specific</td>
<td>HG</td>
<td>31.13%</td>
<td>63.21%</td>
<td>5.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LG</td>
<td>28.30%</td>
<td>47.17%</td>
<td>24.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29.72%</td>
<td>55.19%</td>
<td>15.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− definite − specific</td>
<td>HG</td>
<td>9.91%</td>
<td>87.74%</td>
<td>2.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LG</td>
<td>43.40%</td>
<td>35.85%</td>
<td>20.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26.65%</td>
<td>61.79%</td>
<td>11.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ definite + specific</td>
<td>HG</td>
<td>79.56%</td>
<td>10.69%</td>
<td>9.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LG</td>
<td>42.77%</td>
<td>37.11%</td>
<td>20.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61.16%</td>
<td>23.90%</td>
<td>14.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ definite − specific</td>
<td>HG</td>
<td>69.50%</td>
<td>25.79%</td>
<td>4.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LG</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>28.62%</td>
<td>21.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59.75%</td>
<td>27.20%</td>
<td>13.05%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of this experiment shoe that the HG was affected by the specificity feature, but the LG did not perceive specific features as robustly as HG. First, both the HG and LG showed similar overuses of the in the [−definite +specific] contexts, $F (1, 104) = .33, p > .05$. However, the LG showed significantly more the overuses than the HG in the [−definite−specific] contexts, $F (1, 104) = 69.68, p < .01$. The HG showed significantly more the overuses in the [−definite +specific] than in the
[-definite–specific] contexts, $F (1, 104) = 20.75$, $p < .01$. Conversely, the LG showed more the overuses in the [-definite–specific] contexts than in the [-definite +specific] contexts, $F (1, 104) = 10.49$, $p < .05$. The HG had access to a parameter setting, and the specific feature affected the overuses in the indefinite contexts. However, the LG did not perceive the specific effect well and conversely identified the nonspecific feature with the definite feature.

Table 2. Means (SDs) for the Overuses in [-definite +specific] and [-definite –specific] Contexts of Two Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of the overuses</th>
<th>HG</th>
<th>LG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-definite +specific</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-definite -specific</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SDs)</td>
<td>(1.175)</td>
<td>(.743)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SDs)</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SDs)</td>
<td>(.810)</td>
<td>(.902)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, the HG showed significantly more correct a uses overall than the LG in the [-definite +specific] contexts, $F (1, 104) = 7.96$, $p < .01$. The HG showed significantly more correct a uses overall than the LG in the [-definite +specific] and the [-definite –specific] contexts, $F (1, 104) = 134.50$, $p < .01$. The HG showed significantly more a correct uses overall in the [-definite +specific] contexts than in the [-definite–specific] contexts due to the nonspecificity feature, $F (1, 104) = 25.25$, $p < .01$. Therefore, the HG seemed to be more sensitive to specificity effects than the LG. Conversely, the LG showed more correct a uses overall in the [-definite +specific] contexts than in the [-definite –specific] contexts, $F (1, 104) = 5.38$, $p < .05$. The LG did not recognize that the nonspecific feature influences more correct a uses in indefinite contexts than in definite contexts.
Table 3. Means (SDs) for a Correct Uses in [−definite +specific] and [−definite −specific] Contexts of Two Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>HG</th>
<th>LG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Types of a correct uses</td>
<td>−definite +specific</td>
<td>−definite −specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SDs)</td>
<td>2.53 (1.234)</td>
<td>3.51 (.750)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Third, the HG showed less a overuses overall than the LG in the [+definite +specific] contexts, \( F (1, 104) = 46.32, p < .01 \). Both the HG and LG similarly showed overuses of a in the [+definite−specific] contexts, \( F (1, 104) = .42, p > .05 \). This showed that the nonspecific feature triggers a overuses. The HG showed more a overuses in the [+definite−specific] contexts than in the [+definite +specific] contexts, \( F (1, 104) = 15.08, p < .01 \). However, the LG showed significantly more a overuses in the [+definite +specific] than in the [+definite−specific] contexts, \( F (1, 104) = 4.77, p < .05 \). The LG did not seem to perceive the specificity feature as the HG did.

Table 4. Means (SDs) for a Overuses in [+definite +specific] and [+definite −specific] Contexts of Two Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>HG</th>
<th>LG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Types of a overuses</td>
<td>+definite +specific</td>
<td>+definite −specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SDs)</td>
<td>.64 (1.076)</td>
<td>1.55 (1.488)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fourth, the HG showed more correct the uses than the LG in the [+definite +specific] contexts, \( F (1, 104) = 90.56, p < .01 \). The HG also showed more correct the uses than the LG in the [+definite−specific] contexts, \( F (1, 104) = 18.00, p < .01 \). The HG showed more correct the uses in the [+definite +specific] contexts than in the [+definite−specific] contexts, \( F (1, 104) = 6.25, p < .05 \). The HG might have associated the with the speaker’s specific referent (specificity). However, the LG conversely indicated marginally more correct the uses in the
[+definite-specific] than in the [+definite +specific] contexts. $F(1, 104) = 3.23, p > 0.05$. The LG did not recognize the specific features with the definite contexts as well as the HG and conversely identified the nonspecific feature with the definite feature.

**Table 5. Means (SDs) for the Correct Uses in [-definite +specific] and [-definite -specific] Contexts of Two Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>HG</th>
<th>LG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Types of the correct uses</td>
<td>+definite +specific</td>
<td>+definite -specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SDs)</td>
<td>4.77 (1.203)</td>
<td>4.17 (1.566)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to Ionin et al. (2004), this survey showed a overuses in [+definite +specific] and the [+definite–specific] contexts. The HG showed more a overuses in the [+definite–specific] contexts than in the [+definite +specific] contexts. However, the LG showed significantly more a overuses in the [+definite +specific] than in the [+definite –specific] contexts. The LG seemed to perceive the specificity feature in contrast to the HG.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The HG of this experiment, which was affected by the specificity feature, showed more the overuses in the [-definite +specific] contexts than in the [-definite–specific] contexts, but the LG, which was conversely affected by the specificity feature, showed more the overuses in the [-definite –specific] contexts than in the [-definite +specific] contexts.

English article acquisition is linked with learning that *the* requires “common ground between speaker and hearer,” which is also implied in the definiteness condition. In this case, learners can show the specificity effect that relies on the “speaker’s ground only.” That is, the learners can show *the* overuses in indefinite specific contexts. Additionally, they can show a
overuses in definite nonspecific contexts in the default of the specificity effect.

The HG seemed to make the same type of article errors as ESL learners, as discussed by Ionin et al. (2004). However, we further observed that the LG showed the opposite pattern of the HG in that the LG overused the in the [−specific] feature in the definite contexts. There are two possible explanations of these results: (i) We may conclude that specificity features cannot be a decisive semantic factor for overuses of the for EFL Koreans; or (ii) specificity features hold for the valid semantic factor to select an article; however, for some reason LG is not mature enough to access semantic features that may activate overuses of the. Thus, it seems that the LG’s English proficiency is not good enough to access to the UG-set of semantic features for article choice. Korean is an articleless language, so their L1 is of no help in conducting the article selection process. Therefore, the LG randomly selects articles, and contradicting results may occur, namely, the overuse of the in [−specific] contexts.

The HG and LG EFL Koreans presented contrasting results concerning the incorrect overuses of the in specific and nonspecific indefinite contexts. While EFL Koreans choose to adhere to only one semantic feature in universal grammar, HG EFL Koreans seem to be akin to ESL learners, as observed by Ionin et al. (2004) in that they fall into the full specificity pattern, while LG EFL Koreans do not yet fall into the specificity pattern due to their lack of basic proficiency that is required in the development or maturation stage of the article-acquiring system.

In sum, the variation in EFL Koreans’ article choice is related to EFL proficiency. In particular, HG EFL Koreans are more sensitive to the specific feature than LG EFL Koreans, and this contrast has nothing to do with the status of the specificity feature per se as a semantic category affecting article selection, but rather the degree or limitation of accessibility to the specificity semantic feature related to L2-proficiency in general.

VI. PEDAGOGICAL SUGGESTIONS

English articles are more difficult than any others in English acquisition for
EFL learners. This study will make a suggestion to EFL teachers according to the effect of specificity. This study proposed that specificity creates the errors in indefinite specific contexts. Therefore, EFL learners should learn, acquire, and teach the difference between specificity and definiteness. The [+definite] feature represents the knowledge of both the speaker and the hearer, but the [+specific] feature represents the knowledge and state of mind of only the speaker. To achieve this, many meaning-focused activities and mini lessons, along with group work, should be enacted. From high-level and low-level EFL learners’ article choices, we could make unique article learning, acquisition, and teaching patterns according to the errors of high- and low-level EFL learners.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

![Graph showing mean ratio of the, a, and Ø uses in different contexts]

**FIGURE 1.** Mean Ratio of the, a, and Ø uses in [definite +specific], [definite -specific], [+definite +specific], and [+definite -specific] Contexts of Two Groups (%)

APPENDIX B

The Article Perception Test (The Forced Choice Task)

1. Chris: Well, I’ve bought everything that I wanted. Are you ready to go?
   Mike: Almost. Can you please wait a few minutes? I want to talk to (a, the, --) owner of this bookstore – she is my old friend.
2. Laura: Are you ready to leave?
Betsy: No, not yet.
   First, I need to talk to (a, the, --) winner of this tournament
   - she is my good friend, and I want to congratulate her!
3. Reporter: Excuse me! Can you please let me in?
   Guard: What do you need?
   Reporter: I am a reporter.
       I need to talk to (a, the, --) winner of this race
       - I don’t know who she is, so can you please help me?
4. Sarah: Do you see that beautiful landscape painting?
   Mary: Yes, it’s wonderful.
   Sarah: I would like to meet (a, the, --) author of that painting
       - unfortunately, I have no idea who it is,
       since the painting is not signed.
5. W: Tom! You’re always late. Why don’t you get up early?
   M: I’m really sorry. I’ll try.
   W: Good! You have to be in (a, the, --) class by 8:10.
       Don’t be late tomorrow.
   M: I won’t be late again.
6. Paul: Do you have time for lunch?
   Sheila: No, I’m very busy.
       I am meeting with (a, the, --) president of our university
       - Dr. McKinley; it’s an important meeting.
7. Andrew: Hi, Nora. What are you doing here in Chicago?
       Are you here for work?
   Nora: No, for family reasons.
       I am visiting (a, the, --) father of my fiance.
       - he is really nice, and he is paying for our wedding!
8. Bill: I’m looking for Erik. Is he home?
   Rick: Yes, but he’s on the phone. It’s an important business matter.
       He is talking to (a, the, --) owner of his company!
       I don’t know who that person is
       - but I know that this conversation is important to Erik.
9. Rose: Let’s go out to dinner with your brother Samuel tonight.
   Alex: No, he is busy.
He is having dinner with (a, the, --) manager of his office.
- I don't know who that is, but I'm sure that Samuel can't cancel this dinner.

10. W: Do you like to watch TV?
   M: Yes. I like to watch the news. Sometimes I enjoy watching sitcoms.
   W: How about you?
   M: Sometimes I enjoy watching quiz shows.
   W: Guessing the answers is a lot of fun.

11. Waiter: Are you ready to order, sir? Or are you waiting for someone?
    Client: Can you please come back in about twenty minutes?
    You see, I am waiting.
    I am planning to eat with (a, the, --) colleague from work.
    She will be here soon.

12. Clerk: May I help you?
    Customer: Yes, please!
    I've rummaged through every stall, without any success.
    I am looking for (a, the, --) warm hat.
    It's getting rather cold outside.

13. Roberta: Hi, William! It's nice to see you again.
    I didn't know that you were in Boston.
    William: I am here for a week.
    I am visiting (a, the, --) friend from college
    -his name is Sam Bolton, and he lives in Cambridge now.

    Anne: No. She is eating dinner with (a, the, --) colleague;
    She didn't tell me who it is.

15. Elissa: How is your niece Amy doing?
    Robert: Great!
    Her parents finally allowed her to get a pet at the local pet shop.
    Amy knows that this pet shop has five puppies and six kittens.
    Elissa: Oh, so which one of these animals is she going to buy?
    Robert: She has not quite decided yet. But she definitely wants to buy (a, the, --) puppy.
    She is going to the pet shop on Friday.
16. Jane: Your friend Lucy looks really excited. What’s going on?
   Mary: Well, last Sunday was a really a big day for her.
   She went to the airport to see her mother off,
   and ran into the Boston Red Sox team.
   You know what? She was very lucky
   - she got an autograph from (a, the, --) player.
   And afterwards, she met some friends at the airport! What a day!
17. Mary: I heard that it was your son Roger’s birthday last week.
   Roger: Yes! It was great. He got lots of gifts – books, toys.
   And best of all – he got (a, the, --) puppy!
18. Visitor: Excuse me – can you help me?
   I’m looking for Professor James Smith.
   Secretary: I’m afraid she is out right now.
   Visitor: Is he out today?
   Secretary: No, he was here this morning.
   He met with (a, the, --) student...
   but I don’t know where Professor Smith is right now.
19. W: What’s your favorite food?
   M: I like(a, the, --) pizza. It’s really delicious.
   M: Me too!
20. Molly: So what did your guest Mr. Svenson do over the weekend?
   Jamie: Well, he went to see our local softball team play.
   He had a good time.
   Afterwards, he met (a, the, --) player
   - she was very nice and friendly. And she played really well!
21. Ben: I just saw Tom, and he looked really excited. Do you know why?
   Melissa: Yes – he was able to see the Boston Red Sox team
   while they were practicing.
   And he is a huge fan!
   He even got a signature from (a, the, --) player
   - I have no idea which one. Tom was really excited!
22. Jennifer: Hello, Helen? This is Jennifer!
   Helen: Hi, Jennifer! It’s wonderful to hear from you.
I suppose you want to talk to my sister?
Jennifer: Yes, I haven’t spoken to her in years!
I’d like to talk to her now if possible.
Helen: I’m very sorry, but she doesn’t have time to talk right now.
She is meeting with (a, the, --) very important client from Seattle. He is quite rich, and she really wants to get his business for our company! She’ll call you back later.

23. Wife: Where is Peter? I haven’t seen him all evening.
Husband: He is on the phone – he has been on it for hours.
Wife: That’s not like Peter at all – he almost never uses the phone.
Husband: But this time, he is talking to (a, the, --) girl – I have no idea who it is, but it’s an important conversation to Peter.

24. W: Where are you going?
M: I’m going to play (a, the, --) table tennis.
   Do you know that a Korean table tennis player won the gold medal?
   He won it at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games!

25. Betsy: What are you going to study when you go to college?
Kendra: I will study Italian and Spanish films. I especially want to study (a, the, --) most wonderful director in Italy – Federico Fellini.

26. Sarah: I want to know what the meaning of life is.
Julie: How can you find out?
Sarah: I want to talk to (a, the, --) most intelligent person on Earth!
   Unfortunately, I don’t know who that is...

27. Jerry: What are you going to do this week-end?
Lucy: I am going to read! I plan to read (a, the, --) third book about Harry Potter – “Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban.”

28. Manager: How can I help you?
Client: I’d like to rent an apartment in this building.
   I want to live on (a, the, --) fourth floor of this building
   – I don’t know what it looks like, but I like living up high!
### APPENDIX C

Table 6. Means Comparison for \(a\), \(the\), and \(Ø\) Uses in \([-\text{definite+specific}]\) Contexts of Two Groups

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Table 7. Means Comparison for \(a\), \(the\), and \(Ø\) Uses in \([-\text{definite–specific}]\) Contexts of Two Groups

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable levels: Tertiary
Key words: EFL Koreans, article choice, proficiency, systematic, semantic feature, definite, specificity

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