

Influence of native language and general English proficiency on the use of articles in English

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Abstract

Second language learners face a great difficulty in the use of English articles since their native language does not have an article system which is similar to the target language they learn. Turkish is one of the languages which have an article system marking the semantic features 'definiteness' or 'specificity' in different ways. It encodes these features by using case morphology, word order, stress and tense-aspect modality. Being aware of the fact that this difference and lack of an article system similar to English may cause problems to learners, this study investigates the acquisition of the English articles by Turkish learners. The data used in the study came from a fill-in-the blank task and a cloze test. The former included 20 test-sentences assessing the production of English articles in terms of definiteness and specificity whereas the latter had 20 blanks measuring the proficiency of learners. Thirty-five English major students attending a university in Turkey participated in the study. Following the data collection, the data were analysed to find out the effect of the learners' native language as well as their general English proficiency on the production of English articles. The results provided supporting evidence that the participants had some difficulties in the production of the definite and indefinite articles in English. In view of this finding, this paper discusses both the results and pedagogical implications of the study.

Keywords: English articles, definiteness, specificity, L1 influence, language proficiency

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1. Introduction

The definite article implies the identifiability of referents in discourse, since it involves existence and uniqueness. In other words, as expressed by Ionin (2003, cited in in Guella, Déprez & Sleeman, 2008:59), a noun phrase including a definite article before the head noun indicates an identifiable entity accessible to both hearer and speaker. Considering the identifiability criterion, a noun phrase composed of an indefinite article and a noun has a referent which is known by the speaker, but not by the hearer as shown in the following example:

- (1) I saw a car in front of my house this morning.

In this example, the noun ‘car’ is identifiable by the speaker as the speaker has seen it, but it is unknown by the hearer as the hearer does not have a referent in her/his mind about the car mentioned in the sentence.

As pointed out by Ionin (2003: 87-90, cited in Guella et al. 2008:59-62), English is the language in which definiteness, but not specificity, is important in the use of articles. In a sentence including a noun phrase with the definite article, whether the following noun refers to a specific or non-specific item can be distinguished through context as in the following examples:

- (2) I’ll have a meeting with the director tomorrow.
I’m so stressful, he is a tough man (definite/specific).
- (3) I’ll have a meeting with the director tomorrow.
If the executive committee assigns one of its members as the director (definite/nonspecific).

In Example (2), ‘the director’ refers to a person who is identifiable and unique in discourse. It is also specific as the speaker intends to refer to a particular person in the sentence. However, ‘the director’ in Example (3) does not refer to a certain, particular entity within sentence since it is not certain whether there will be a director to be met. Likewise, the indefinite article can be specific and non-specific in accordance with the entity it refers to:

- (4) Have you seen a mobile phone?
I know I put it on the table (indefinite/specific).
- (5) Have you seen a mobile phone?
You can choose a good one as there are many alternatives (indefinite/non-specific).

Even though both examples are indefinite, the former has a referential meaning as the speaker has a particular mobile phone in her/his mind, but the latter has no referential meaning as the speaker does not talk about a particular mobile phone, that is she/he does not refer to a certain item. In short, the summary of the articles in English as regards the features definiteness and specificity is provided below:

Table 1. The use of articles in English in accordance with meaning

	+Definite	-Definite
+Specific	the	a
-Specific	the	a

1.2 Expressing definiteness and specificity in Turkish

Turkish is presented as an article-based language relying on specificity in Guella, Déprez and Sleeman (2008:58) on the basis of the explanations made in Ionin's study (2003). Although it has no article system marking the semantic features 'definiteness' or 'specificity' in the way English does, it encodes these features through case morphology, word order, sentence stress and tense-aspect modality. It also has an indefinite determiner *bir* which corresponds to the indefinite article *a/n* in English, like Russian and Hebrew in which the numeral one (i.e. *odin* in Russian and *exád* in Hebrew as presented in Ionin 2006) is used with the same function (Underhill 1976, Göksel & Kerlake, 2005).

The word 'bir' in Turkish has two functions. It is used as *the indefinite determiner* when it follows an adjectival modifier and *numeral 'one'* when it comes before an adjectival modifier as seen in the following examples (Johanson & Csato, 1998:218, cited in Atay, 2010:25):

(6) Resim -de güzel bir kız var.
 Photo -LOC beautiful a girl there-PRS-3RD PR SING
 'There is a beautiful girl in the photo'

(7) Resim -de bir güzel kız var.
 Photo -LOC one beautiful girl there-PRS-3RD PR SING
 'There is one beautiful girl in the photo'

As for stress, Erguvanlı (1984:23) writes that the numeral *bir* acts as an indefinite article if it is not stressed:

(8) Bir araba gel-di.
 One car come-PAST-3RD PR SING
 'A car came'

(9) BİR araba gel-di.
 One car come-PAST-3RD PR SING
 'One car came'

The accusative case marker *-ı* in Turkish, which has alternative forms */-i/*, */-u/* and */-ü/* changing in accordance with vowel harmony[†], shows definiteness in a noun phrase. Göksel and Kerlake (2005:323)

[†] Vowel harmony is a feature of Turkish language which requires back vowels to be followed by back vowels and front vowels by front vowels. For example, if a noun ends with a back vowel then the following suffix should start with a back vowel: başarı (success)-lı (-ful), araba (car)-lar (-s)

write that a noun phrase is to be regarded as definite when the noun phrase coming after the verb is definite since it is the direct object of the sentence and in the accusative case:

- (10) Çocuk top-u at-tı.
 Child ball-ACC throw-PAST-3RD PR
 ‘The child threw the ball’

In Example (10) given above, the noun phrase in the subject position is also definite because a noun phrase occurring in its bare form in the subject position is considered definite in Turkish (Göksel & Kerslake, 2005:323).

The following examples show the difference between the definite and indefinite noun phrases clearly:

- (11) Adam şapka-y-ı satın al-dı.
 Man hat-buffer-ACC buy-PAST-3RD PR.SING.
 ‘The man bought the hat’

- (12) Adam şapka satın al-dı.
 Man hat buy-PAST-3RD PR.SING.
 ‘The man bought a hat’

In (11) the bare noun phrase ‘adam’ in the ACTOR or DOER position indicates definiteness. Likewise, the accusative case marker –ı used together with the word ‘şapka’ marks definiteness. However, in (12) the word ‘şapka’ is in its bare form in the object position and hence exemplifies indefiniteness.

Word-order, sentence stress, tense-aspect and modality are other ways of marking definiteness in Turkish. As pointed out by Göksel and Kerslake (2005:333), the position of a noun phrase shows its referential status:

- (13) Sonuç iki gün önce onlar-a ver-il-di.
 Result two day ago them-DAT give-PASSI-PAST-3RD PR.SING
 ‘The result was given to them two days ago’

- (14) İki gün önce onlar-a sonuç ver-il-di.
 Two day ago them-DAT result give-PASSI.-PAST-3RD PR.SING
 ‘A result was given to them two days ago’

The word ‘result’ in the subject position is interpreted as a definite item in its bare form, but it has an indefinite or categorical meaning when it is used in a preverbal position.

To Göksel and Kerslake (2005:334), sentence stress is important in the identification of the definiteness in sentences constructed with a plural noun phrase and a verb. When the stress is on the plural noun phrase, it is not definite as in (15), but it is definite when the stress moves to the verb as in (16).

- (15) Misafir-LER gel-di.
 Guest-PLU come-PAST-3RD PR
 ‘Guests came’

- (16) Misafir-ler gel-Dİ.
 Guest-PLU come-PAST-3RD PR
 ‘The guests came’

Tense-aspect-modality affects definiteness, as well. Göksel and Kerslake (2005:334) note that the noun phrases used together with a verb ending with the aorist morphemes $-(a/i)r/-maz$, corresponding to the simple present tense in English, have a generic function. However, the noun phrases occurring together with a verb taking perfective aspect marker $(-dı/-miş)$ or future tense marker $-(y)/-acak$, in a sentence gain a definite interpretation (Erguvanlı, 1984:28):

- (17) Sincap-lar hızlı koş-ar.
 Squirrel-PLU rapidly run-AOR-3RD PR
 ‘Squirrels run rapidly’
- (18) Sincap-lar hızlı koş-tu.
 Squirrel-PLU rapidly run-PAST-3RD PR
 ‘The squirrels ran rapidly’

As expressed before, Turkish has case markers determining the referentiality in sentences. Considering this fact, it is possible to assert that case markers help reader/writer to distinguish noun phrases/nominals as definite-indefinite and specific-non-specific. The Turkish accusative case marker $-ı$, which becomes $-i/u/ü$ depending on the vowel harmony in Turkish, is used to indicate both specificity and definiteness (Lewis, 1967; Underhill, 1976; Erguvanlı, 1984; Göksel and Kerslake, 2005). For example:

- (19) Federasyon spor-cu-yu ödüllendir-i-yor. (+definite/+specific)
 Federation sports-man-buffer-ACC reward-PR.PROG.
 ‘The Federation is rewarding the sportsman’

In (19), the existence of the accusative case marker after the noun phrase ‘sporcu’ indicates definiteness as well as specificity. However, if further explanation is added to the sentence, it can indicate only definiteness as in the following example:

- (20) Federasyon spor-cu-yu ödüllendir-i-yor, sporcunun
 Federation sports-man-buffer-ACC reward-PR.PROG.3RD SING sportsman
 kim olduğuna bakmaksızın. (+def./-spec.)
 who be-AOR.COND. look-without.
 ‘The Federation is rewarding the sportsman without looking at who the sportsman is.’

Göksel and Kerslake (2005:325-328) report that an indefinite noun phrase can have two referential functions: first, the indefinite noun phrase can refer to a specific entity known by the speaker but it is unfamiliar and not identifiable in the discourse as it is currently used; second, it can be related to a non-specific entity which is unknown and unidentifiable even by the speaker. They also note that the Turkish accusative case marker $-ı$ displays the specificity of the indefinite direct object as exemplified in the following sentences:

(21)	Telefon-da Phone-LOC 'I talked with an old friend of mine on the phone'	eski old	bir one	arkadaş-ı-m-la friend-1st PR.ACC.POSS-INST		konuş-tum. (-def./+spec.) talk-PAST-1st.PR.SING.
(22)	Büyük Big PROG.1st.PR.PLU 'We are planning to build a big shopping center'	bir one	alışveriş merkezi shopping center	inşa build	etmeyi planlıyoruz. (-def./-spec.) to-ACC. plan-PRE	

Although the noun phrase taking the accusative case marker is indefinite, it refers to a particular person in (21). Therefore, it is indefinite but specific. As for (22), the indefinite noun phrase does not indicate a specific entity. It refers to any shopping center, so it is non-specific.

Table 25 summarizes all the ways of encoding definiteness and specificity in Turkish in relation with English articles.

Table 2. The use of articles in Turkish in accordance with meaning

	+Definite	-Definite
+Specific	NP+ACC Case marker Bare NP in the subject position	The word <i>bir</i> <i>Bir</i> +NP with ACC Case Marker
-Specific	NP+ACC Case marker Bare NP in the subject position	<i>Bir</i>

1.3 Literature review

A number of studies have been carried out on the production of English articles by second language learners whose native languages lack articles (White 2003; Ionin, Ko and Wexler 2004 and Trenkic 2007, 2008). The main findings of the earlier studies revealed that second language learners omit articles in production and there is a systematic pattern in the context in which they omit articles; for example, if an adjective precedes a noun as a modifier (e.g. *the beautiful girl*), learners show the tendency of omitting articles more compared with the non-modified contexts (e.g. *the girl*) (Goat and White 2009; Sharma 2005; Trenkic 2002, 2004 & 2007).

According to the previous studies, topic position is an effective factor in the use of articles, as learners exclude articles more in topic than non-topic positions (Huebner 1983; Jarvis 2002; Trenkic 2002, 2004, 2007). Learners drop articles when referring to objects present in the immediate context but use them in other definite contexts (Robertson 2000). Although most studies argue that article production in the second language goes hand in hand with overall proficiency, the patterns concerning the omission of articles can be seen even at high proficiency level (Trenkic 2007). From this point of view, as proposed by Master (1997), the learners can be instructed about articles and this can be done by considering the learners' proficiency levels in a gradual fashion.

Apart from omission errors, article substitution errors have also been reported in the previous studies. Trenkic (2002) identifies patterns for the contexts in which definite article is placed instead of the indefinite article or vice versa. Learners produced the definite article in the context requiring the indefinite article with concrete noun phrases (e.g. *a letter*) more than with abstract noun phrases (e.g. *a disaster*). Ionin, Ko and Wexler (2004) observed a pattern in article substitution, as well. They found that second language learners used the definite article in indefinite contexts such as *a girl from my class* where the speaker identifies the referent (e.g. 'her name is Angela'), but they do not show the same tendency when the speaker does not know the referent. In a later study, Ionin (2006) made an attempt to explain specificity as *noteworthiness* by relying on the views expressed by Fodor and Sag's study in 1982. She also argued that this is used as an indefinite item and it is a specificity marker.

The study carried out by Guella, Déprez, & Sleeman (2008) dealt with Dutch L2 learners of Arabic whose native language possesses definiteness parameter and investigated the influence of this parameter on their choice of article. They tackled the issue in relation with the Article Choice Parameter and the Fluctuation Hypothesis identified by Ionin et al. (2004: 12-17). According to the parameter identified for two-article languages, articles' classification has been based on either definiteness or specificity. As for the Fluctuation Hypothesis in the L2 acquisition of articles, they explained the process of article acquisition in the context of Universal Grammar and argued that 'L2 learners have full access to UG principles and parameter-settings' and 'L2 learners fluctuate between different parameter-settings until the input leads them to set the parameter to the appropriate value.' Their results supported the Full Access Hypothesis as there were specificity effects on the results.

In 2007, Ionin, Zubizarreta and Maldonado compared the acquisition of English articles by two learner groups: Spanish learners who have articles in their native language and Russian learners who have an articleless native language. They concentrated on three sources of knowledge: L1 transfer, L2-input and also Universal Grammar. The results provided evidence that Spanish learners transfer the definiteness parameter existing in their language whereas Russian learners fluctuate between definiteness and specificity through having direct access to semantic universals.

Ionin and Montrul (2010) examined the interpretation of definite plurals in relation with articles and studied Spanish learners whose language has articles and Korean learners whose language lacks articles to find out the effect of the native language. The data were collected by a truth-value judgement task and analysed for the interpretation of plural noun phrases. The results showed that Spanish subjects accepted the generic interpretation more than Korean subjects. They also conducted a follow-up study showing the positive influence of advanced proficiency and increased immersion.

The acquisition of articles by children was investigated by Zdorenko and Paradis (2008) in a longitudinal study. The data were collected from 17 L2 child learners through a narrative corpus. Some of the children were from the languages with articles and some from the languages without articles. The results obtained from the participants showed that the influence of the native language on the process of article acquisition was limited and fluctuation is connected with their developmental process.

Several studies have also been conducted on the Turkish learners' acquisition process of English articles. Yılmaz (2006, cited in Dağdeviren, 2010:244-245) addressed the issue in terms of semantic contexts. The results showed that Turkish learners were aware of the semantic distinctions connected with different contexts as they made the right distinction. Dağdeviren (2010) studied the choice of English articles in accordance with three semantic features: definiteness, specificity and partitivity. A fill-in the blanks test involving six types of sentences in terms of the features included in the study was used as data collection instrument. The results displayed that the students produced the correct answers at a high rate. This study provided evidence for the previous studies based on the same semantic distinctions.

In view of the earlier studies, this study aimed to find out whether Turkish learners use the English articles by making the distinction between definiteness and specificity though they do not have an article system in their native language which directly corresponds to the system in the target language. The study included the general English proficiency as a variable affecting the acquisition process to see whether it had any impact on the production of English articles.

2. Design of the Study: Methodology

2.1 Subjects:

The participants of the study were thirty five students attending a state university in Turkey. They were second year students doing their undergraduate degree in the field of English Language and Literature. Their age range was between 19 and 28 though just five students' age was over 20. A cloze test was given to assess the participants' general English proficiency. The cloze test had 20 blanks, but the highest and lowest scores obtained by the students were 15 and 4, in turn. However, there was merely a student obtaining these scores. The average score was 9.74 with a 2.26 standard deviation, which was quite low.

Taking the distribution of the cloze test results into account, the participants of the study were divided into three proficiency groups: the low proficiency students whose cloze test results ranged between 4 and 8, the intermediate proficiency students who had correct answers ranging between 9 and 11, and the high proficiency students who obtained a score between 12 and 15 from the cloze test.

2.2 Materials:

The data of the study were collected with a forced elicitation task assessing the production of English articles in terms of definiteness and specificity and a cloze test measuring the participants' general English proficiency. The forced elicitation task was designed in the form of short dialogues with specific contexts and blanks, and there was a missing article in each dialogue. The students taking part in the study were asked to fill-in the blanks with the definite, indefinite or null article as exemplified below:

Fill in the blanks in the following short exchanges with the appropriate form of the article (definite, indefinite and null):

(In a department store)

A: I can't make up my mind. Which dress do you think I should buy?

B: I think _____ dress with geometric shapes is beautiful. (the)

The reason why short dialogues were given was associated with the restriction of the article types examined in the study. The aim was to figure out whether students were able to use the correct items as regards definiteness and specificity. There were five items to measure each type of articles classified as the definite and specific (Definite+, Specific+), indefinite and specific (Definite-, Specific+), definite and non-specific (Definite+, Specific-) and finally indefinite and nonspecific (Definite-, Specific-) uses of English articles. The task material was piloted with a small group of English major students (i.e. 5 students) in the third year. Subsequent to the pilot study, some modifications were made in the task such as reducing the number of task items, rewriting some sentences, adding some new words and so on.

3. Results and Discussion

Following the data collection, the data were analysed to find out if the Turkish learners of English whose native language makes the distinction of definiteness and specificity with some other ways rather than the use of articles provide the correct English articles while producing utterances in the target sentence. In addition, this study focused on the effect of their general English proficiency on the production of English articles.

In the analysis of the results, firstly, the correct answers provided by the students were counted and the distributions of overall correct answers were found. These results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The overall results

Articles	Number of sentences	Raw scores	%
+Definite the	10	287	82
-Definite a/an	10	257	73.42
Total	20	544	77.71

According to the overall results, there were 544 correct answers provided by the students. The distributions of these correct answers were 257 for the indefinite article *a/n* and 287 for the definite article *the*. Considering the number of correct answers, the results showed that the students produced 77.71 percent of the articles correctly in the task. However, the percentage of the incorrect answers was 22.29 and it was nearly one fourth of all the task items.

Subsequent to the analysis of the overall correct answers, the distributions of all the answers given by the students were found to see the clear picture concerning the alternatives selected by the participants as regards the definiteness and specificity features. These results given in Table 4 displayed that the students were highly successful in producing the correct article when the article was definite and specific because they gave the correct answers to these items most of the times (i.e. 90.3 %). The percentage of the indefinite article *a/an*, which was incorrect, was 4.6 and the rest was null articles (i.e. 5.1%).

Table 4. The distribution of all the results according to the types of English articles

	+Definite target: the	-Definite Target: a
+Specific	90.3 %the 4.6 % a 5.1 % \emptyset	29 %the 69 % a 2 % \emptyset
-Specific	74.8 %the 12.6 % a 12.6 % \emptyset	12 %the 80 % a 8 % \emptyset

The results of the answers provided for the definite and non-specific articles were 74.8 percent for the correct answer *the* and the same percentage (i.e. 12.6 %) for the indefinite and null articles, which were incorrect answers. The percentage of the correct answers went down for this type of articles and parallel to this decrease the incorrect choices concerning the use of the indefinite and null articles were made more.

The results of the correct answers provided for the indefinite and specific articles were the lowest ones since it was 69 percent. Nearly a third of the subjects preferred the definite article over the indefinite one for the sentences assessing the use of the indefinite article. However, only one subject used the null article in the context of this article. In comparison with the indefinite and specific articles' results, the results of the correct answers given to the indefinite and non-specific article were high. That is, the percentage score for the correct article *a* was 80 whereas the incorrect ones were 12 percent for the definite article and 8 percent for the null article.

As for the distribution of the results in terms of proficiency, it was calculated by taking the number of the students at each proficiency level and the number of the sentences in each type. They were multiplied and the percentages were computed according to the total correct answers that should be presented by the participants at each proficiency level.

As presented in Table 5, the results showed that there was a relationship between the general English proficiency and the correct answers given by the students. To put in other words, the percentage of the correct answers provided by the students was 97.5 for the definite and specific article at the high level. The percentages of the intermediate and low level students were lower than this as their results were 89.4 percent and 84 percent, in turn for the same type of article. In the meantime, the use of the indefinite article was 5.9 percent at the intermediate level and 8 percent at the low level whereas the rest was the null article. These results revealed that even though the intermediate and low level students made a few mistakes in the sentences which included the definite and specific article, they did not face a serious problem. They could easily understand the reference made in the sentence and establish a connection between definiteness and specificity.

Table 5. The distribution of the results according to the general English proficiency

Proficiency levels	Low		Intermediate		High	
	+Definite target: the	-Definite target: a	+Definite target: the	-Definite target: a	+Definite target: the	-Definite target: a
+Specific	84 % the 8 % a 8 % ∅	34 % the 66 % a 0 % ∅	89.4 % the 5.9 % a 4.7 % ∅	30.5 % the 63.5 % a 6 % ∅	97.5 % the 0 % a 2.5 % ∅	22.5 % the 77.5 % a 0 % ∅
-Specific	68 % the 10 % a 22 % ∅	20 % the 74 % a 6 % ∅	74.1 % the 17.7 % a 8.2 % ∅	9.4 % the 80 % a 10.6 % ∅	82.5 % the 10 % a 7.5 % ∅	7.5 % the 85 % a 7.5 % ∅

The percentage scores calculated for the indefinite and specific article showed that the participants had more difficulty as their percentages for the correct article *a/n* were low at all proficiency levels: 77.5

percent at the high level, 63.5 percent at the intermediate level and 66 percent at the low level. Surprisingly, the percentage score obtained by the low level students was higher than that obtained by the intermediate level ones though the difference was just 2.5 points. Almost a third of the participants at the low and intermediate levels filled the blanks with the definite article instead of the indefinite one. The null article was used by few intermediate level students (i.e. 6 %) These results implied that the sentences requiring the indefinite article for the nonspecific reference point posed some problems to the students since they made the wrong choice for a third of the items.

The percentage scores computed for the definite and nonspecific items were 68 percent for the low level students, 74.1 percent for the intermediate level students and 82.5 percent for the high level students. These results showed that the students were less successful in the use of the definite article when it was nonspecific. They replaced the definite article with the indefinite article or used the null article at all proficiency levels, but the percentage of replacement was high at the intermediate level (i.e. 17.7%) and also the percentage of the null article use was high at the low level (i.e. 22%).

The percentages for the correct answers for the indefinite and nonspecific articles were 74 percent for the low level students, 80 percent for the intermediate level students and 85 percent for the high level students. Only the low level students replaced the indefinite article with the definite article at the rate of 20 percent whereas the other proficiency groups' replacement was lower than 10 percent. The selection of the null article was 7.5 percent for the high level students and 6 percent for the low level students, and 10.6 percent for the intermediate level students.

In general, the results of the indefinite items were lower than those of definite ones though the correct answers given to the sentences including indefinite but non-specific articles were twelve points higher than those given to the sentences with indefinite but specific ones. These results were striking as the correct answers offered to the indefinite and specific articles were quite low when compared with the results of the definite and specific ones, but the percentage of correct answers for the indefinite and nonspecific articles was higher than the corresponding definite ones. That is to say, the results of the definite and nonspecific article were the lowest when taking all the types of articles into account.

The detailed analysis of the answers revealed that the students filled in the blanks with the definite articles for these sentences rather than the null article. This choice might be related to the overgeneralization of the definite article because Turkish students of English usually tend to replace the indefinite article with the definite article. The reason why they do this might be associated with the use of a separate word 'bir' for the indefinite article *a/n* beside the use of accusative case markers 'ı/i/u/ü' for indicating the indefinite but specific use of articles. This might be confusing as the definite article is marked with accusative case marker as well and hence they might have produced the definite article instead of the indefinite article *a/n*.

The results concerning the alternatives used by the students supported the point made by Ionin et al (2004) and Ionin (2006) for the indefinite article which is specific and the definite article which is nonspecific. As a reminder, in these studies it was reported that L2 learners showed the tendency of overusing the definite article in indefinite contexts referring to a specific item and overusing the indefinite article in definite contexts having no specific referent. Although the lack of an article system and no influence of the native language are the prerequisites for this article choice, the results of this study provided supporting evidence for this finding.

As explained in Section 1.2, the students' native language, Turkish has a complex system for expressing definiteness and specificity and this makes the parameter-setting and resetting very difficult for the students. The languages involving similar article systems to English have a facilitative effect in the acquisition process whereas the languages involving no article system corresponding to the one in the

target language, such as Russian, Korean, Japanese, etc., have an impediment, or at least a delay, in this process, due to the negative effect of the native language. The complex systems used to give the meaning expressed with the articles put extra burden on students since they have to map the existing system in the native language into the new structures in the target language. However, as seen in the earlier studies and the present study there is a similar pattern for the alternatives selected and they are the expected alternatives in accordance with the fluctuation hypothesis. If the effect of the native language is ignored due to the existence of some other ways for expressing the articles, the pattern presented in the fluctuation hypothesis is supported by the results of this study as well.

As seen on Table 5, the students forming the high level group had better results than the intermediate and low level learners for all types of the articles. Similarly, the intermediate level students' results were higher than the low level learners' for all types, except for the sentences referring to the indefinite but specific use of articles as its percentage was lower than the percentage of the correct answers provided by the low level students (i.e. 63.5 percent for the intermediate level students versus 66 percent for the low level students).

The results implied that there was a positive effect of proficiency on the correct use of articles and showed that the students' proficiency of English articles goes hand in hand with their general English proficiency but it was unknown whether these differences were statistically significant. For that reason, a nonparametric procedure Kruskal-Wallis test was used for finding out whether there was a significant relationship between proficiency and different types. MINITAB.17 statistical programme was used for the statistical calculations. The results of these calculations were not significant at the level $p < 0.05$ as all the H-values were below the critical value.

4. Conclusion

The main concern of this study was to examine the acquisition of English articles by Turkish learners of English whose native language uses various ways such as case morphology, stress structure, the word 'bir', etc. to express definiteness and specificity. The impact of the general proficiency in the target language on the correct use of English articles was also looked at. The results provided supporting evidence that the participants had some difficulties in the production of the definite and indefinite articles in English probably due to the negative impact of their native language and incomplete knowledge about English articles as they encountered some problems in choosing the accurate article. As for the influence of the general English proficiency, the conclusion drawn from the results was that even though the article mistakes continued even at the high level, there was a positive influence of the proficiency on the acquisition the articles in English.

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