

L1 Influence on the Distinction Between Definite and Demonstrative Descriptions in L2 English

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1. Introduction

The acquisition of English articles in second language (L2) has been widely investigated, and considerable research has focused on article choice, particularly the contrast between the definite and indefinite articles *the* and *a*, leading to proposals concerning how learners' first language (L1) influences this aspect of acquisition (e.g., Cho, 2017; Huebner, 1983; Ionin et al., 2004; Snape, 2008). However, the distinction between definite and demonstrative descriptions has received comparatively less attention, and it remains unclear how learners' L1 affects acquisition in this domain. This paper replicates Ionin et al.'s (2012) seminal study, which investigated whether L2 learners, specifically L1-Korean speakers, can acquire the distinction between definite and demonstrative descriptions in English. The present study extends this line of inquiry to two previously untested L1s: Japanese, a language without articles, and Spanish, a language with articles. That is, by testing languages that do and do not encode a grammatical distinction between definite and demonstrative descriptions, the study aims to further clarify the role of L1 influence in acquiring this contrast.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 outlines the distinction between definite and demonstrative descriptions and reviews a key previous literature on L2 acquisition of this contrast, Ionin et al. (2012). Section 3 introduces the present study. Sections 4 and 5 describe the methodology and present the results, respectively. Section 6 discusses the findings, and Section 7 concludes the paper.

2. Background

2.1. English definite and demonstrative descriptions

English includes the definite article *the* and demonstratives such as *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those*. Since the current study follows and builds upon the work of Ionin et al. (2012) (to be reviewed in the next subsection), which focuses on the distinction between the definite article *the* and the demonstrative *that* in anaphoric contexts, we adopt the same focus in examining the definite-vs-demonstrative

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contrast. Accordingly, differences between the definite article *the* and other demonstratives fall outside the scope of this study.

In anaphoric contexts, the definite article *the* and the demonstrative *that* share the core semantic feature of uniqueness: the referent must be uniquely identifiable to both the speaker and the hearer (e.g., Hawkins, 1991). For example, in (1), both *the woman* and *that woman* are felicitous because the referent can be uniquely identified as the woman previously mentioned in the discourse (i.e., the woman who came onto the stage). However, note that when uniqueness is established both in the immediately salient context and whole discourse, as in this example, definite descriptions are the unmarked and therefore preferred option, although demonstrative descriptions are still acceptable.

- (1) The curtain rises. A woman came onto the stage. Then {the/that} woman started singing and dancing.
(Ionin et al., 2012, p. 75)

Despite sharing the semantic feature of uniqueness, definite and demonstrative descriptions are subject to different discourse conditions in the way uniqueness is computed (e.g., Hawkins, 1991; Roberts, 2002; Wolter, 2006). Specifically, the domain of uniqueness computation for the definite article *the* spans the whole discourse, whereas for the demonstrative *that*, it is constrained to the immediately salient context. In (2), the definite description, *the woman* is infelicitous as there are two potential referents (i.e., women), which means uniqueness is not established in the whole discourse. In contrast, the demonstrative alternative, *that woman* is felicitous, as it can identify a unique referent (i.e., the woman who entered from stage right) in the immediately preceding sentence (i.e., the immediately salient context).

- (2) A woman entered from stage left. Another woman entered from stage right. {#The/That} woman was carrying a basket of flower.
(Ionin et al., 2012, p. 73)

Conversely, when the referent can be uniquely identified in the whole discourse but not in the immediately salient context, definite NPs are acceptable, whereas demonstrative NPs are not. In (3), the definite description, *the book* sounds natural because it can locate its unique referent within the discourse (i.e., the book mentioned in the second sentence). By contrast, the demonstrative counterpart, *that book* is infelicitous, as there is no uniquely identifiable referent in the immediately salient context.

- (3) Vicky wanted something to read on her trip. So she went to the library, and got out a book and a new magazine, and packed them in her bag. The next day, Vicky got on the train. She found her seat and sat down. Then, she read {the/#that} book.
(Adapted from Ionin et al., 2012, p. 80)

Moreover, it has been argued that the use of a demonstrative description, as opposed to a definite description, implies contrast (Roberts, 2002). In other words, the property attributed to the referent is not shared by other members of the relevant contrast set, namely other unmentioned women in the case of (1). Consequently, the use of a demonstrative description becomes infelicitous in (4), where the contrast involves a woman and a man rather than among multiple possible women, even though uniqueness is established in the immediately salient context.

- (4) The curtain roses. A woman and a man came onto the stage. Then {the/#that} woman started singing.
(Ionin et al., 2012, p. 75)

This study investigates whether L2 learners can acquire the distinction between definite and demonstrative descriptions, focusing specifically on the difference in the domain of uniqueness computation. The following section reviews a key previous study on the L2 acquisition of this property, Ionin et al. (2012), which serves as the foundation for the present investigation.

2.2. Distinction of definite and demonstrative descriptions in L2 English: Ionin et al. (2012)

Ionin et al. (2012) investigated whether L1 Korean learners of L2 English can distinguish between definite and demonstrative descriptions, *the* and *that*. Korean lacks articles but possesses the demonstrative *ku* ('that'), which functions in a similar way to the English definite article *the* in anaphoric contexts. Because *the* in English is frequently translated as *ku* in Korean, Ionin et al. predicted that Korean speakers would incorrectly map their L1 *ku* onto L2 *the*, thereby failing to differentiate between definite and demonstrative descriptions.

Ionin et al. (2012) tested intermediate and advanced English learners using a forced-choice elicitation task, in which participants were asked to select determiners appropriate to the given context. The study found that Korean speakers produced generally native-like responses in contexts where both *the* and *that* are acceptable with *the* preferred as the unmarked option (1), as well as in contexts where *the* is felicitous but *that* is not (3). However, in contexts where uniqueness was established in the immediately salient context but not in the whole discourse, namely contexts in which *that* would be appropriate (2), lower-proficiency learners failed to make the relevant distinction, tending to overuse *the*.

Overall, Ionin et al.'s (2012) results appear to be consistent with their prediction based on L1 lexical transfer, providing evidence for L1 influence in the L2 acquisition of definite and demonstrative descriptions. Nevertheless, because the researchers tested only one L1 group, it remains an open question whether the behaviour observed among the Korean speakers, namely the failure to distinguish

the and *that*, reflects a genuine case of L1 transfer or a more general phenomenon of L2 acquisition. The present study is designed to address this question.

3. The present study

This study aims to replicate Ionin et al. (2012) to extend the research to L2 English learners with different L1s: Japanese, an article-less language with demonstratives but no articles, and Spanish, a language with both demonstratives and articles. With this L1-L2 combination, the following research question is addressed:

- (5) **Research question:** Can L2 learners distinguish English definite and demonstrative descriptions? If they fail to do so, is this difficulty attributable to L1 transfer, or does it reflect a general L2 challenge?

Like Korean, Japanese does not have an article system but have the demonstrative *sono* ('that'), which is commonly used in anaphoric contexts as the Korean demonstrative *ku*. That is, *sono* NPs serve to identify entities introduced in the immediately salient context (e.g., Yoshida, 2005). In Spanish, the demonstrative determiner *ese/esa* ('that') and the definite article *el/los/la/las* ('the') correspond to the English *that* and *the*, respectively (e.g., Zulaica-Hernández, 2009). Specifically, *ese/esa* encodes uniqueness within the immediately salient context, whereas *el/los/la/las* computes uniqueness across the whole discourse. Given these crosslinguistic differences summarised in Table 2, two contrasting predictions can be formulated.

Table 2. Crosslinguistic differences

		[unique] (core meaning)	Uniqueness Computation Domain
English	<i>that</i>	✓	immediately salient context
	<i>the</i>	✓	whole discourse
Japanese	<i>sono</i>	✓	immediately salient context
Spanish	<i>ese/esa</i>	✓	immediately salient context
	<i>el/los/la/las</i>	✓	whole discourse

If Ionin et al.'s (2012) L1 lexical transfer approach is correct, Spanish-speaking learners of English, whose L1 encodes a contrast between definites and demonstratives, should acquire the definite-vs.-demonstrative contrast more easily and faster than Japanese-speaking counterparts, whose L1 lacks the relevant contrast. Alternatively, if the difficulty with this distinction stems from a L2-general factor rather than L1 transfer, Spanish speakers would struggle with it to a similar extent as Japanese speakers. Table 3 summarises these predictions.

Table 3. Predictions: L1 transfer account vs. L2-general account

	L1 Transfer Account	L2-General Account
L1 Japanese	✗ Fail to distinguish def. vs. dem.	✗ Fail to distinguish def. vs. dem.
L1 Spanish	✓ Make target distinction	✗ Fail to distinguish def. vs. dem.

4. Method

4.1. Participants

Forty L1-Japanese and 40 L1-Spanish L2-English learners participated in the study along with 25 native English speakers. The native English and Spanish participants were recruited on *Prolific*. The English speakers were monolinguals residing in the United States or the United Kingdom. The Spanish speakers were resident in Spain, Mexico, Chile or the United States at the time of testing. The Japanese-speaking counterparts were undergraduate and graduate students recruited at a university in the central region of Japan. A multiple-choice cloze test was used to measure English proficiency. Table 4 presents the participants’ information.

Table 4. Participant information

	<i>n</i>	Age of Onset (years)		Length of Study (years)		Cloze Score (out of 42)	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
L1 English (controls)	25	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	38.14	1.38
L1 Japanese	40	10.52	2.95	9.34	4.38	29.62	3.51
L1 Spanish	40	8.83	3.37	25.88	9.67	34.70	3.86

A one-way between-participants ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of L1 on cloze scores ($F(2, 105) = 59.28, p < .001$). Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test showed significant differences between all groups: Native controls vs. L1 Japanese speakers ($M\text{-Diff} = -8.52, 95\% \text{ CI } [-10.42, -6.61], p < .001$); Native controls vs. L1 Spanish speakers ($M\text{-Diff} = -3.44, 95\% \text{ CI } [-5.35, -1.54], p < .001$); and L1 Japanese speakers vs. L1 Spanish speakers ($M\text{-Diff} = 5.08, 95\% \text{ CI } [3.34, 6.81], p < .001$). That is, the native control group scored significantly higher than both L2 learner groups, and within the L2 groups, the L1 Spanish group demonstrated higher English proficiency than the L1 Japanese group. This proficiency difference between the L2 groups will be taken into account in the analysis of the experimental results.

4.2. Forced elicitation task

A forced elicitation task replicated from Ionin et al. (2012) was administered online via *Pavlovian Surveys*. The task consisted of 32 test items, including 12 critical items and 20 fillers or distracters. Each item presented a short narrative in which the penultimate sentence contained a blank followed by a noun. Participants were asked to select the best determiner from four options (*the, that, a, one*) to complete the sentence. The critical items were divided into three conditions (four tokens each). In the ‘unique and salient’ condition (6a), the target NP is unique in the whole discourse as well as in the immediately salient context, hence both *the* and *that* are possible, though native English speakers are expected to prefer *the* as the unmarked option. In the ‘unique and non-salient’ condition (6b), the NP is unique in the whole discourse but not in the immediately salient context due to one or two intervening sentences between the first and second mention of the NP. Here, *the* is felicitous and preferred, whereas *that* is infelicitous because the target NP becomes less salient. Finally, in the ‘non-unique’ context (6c), the NP is unique only in the immediately salient context but not in the whole discourse. In this case, native English speakers are expected to favour *that* over *the*. The target noun following the blank is highlighted in bold, and underlining marks the first mention of the noun. There was no highlighting or underlining in the actual test. The test items were pseudo-randomised for each participant.

- (6) a. *‘Unique and salient’ condition: both ‘the’ and ‘that’ possible but ‘the’ preferred*

Betsy was staying at a hotel, and didn’t have anything to read. It was too early to go to bed. So she went to a bookstore, and bought a magazine. Then she came back to her hotel and read _____ magazine. She enjoyed it a lot.

- b. *‘Unique and non-salient’ condition: ‘the’ preferred over ‘that’*

Vicky was getting ready for a long trip, and she wanted something to read on her trip. So she went to the library, and got out a book and a new magazine, and packed them in her bag. The next day, Vicky got on the train. She found her seat and sat down. Then, she read _____ book. It was really interesting.

- c. *‘Non-unique’ condition: ‘that’ preferred over ‘the’*

Richard went to a bookstore and bought two books to read. One of the books turned out to be long and boring. But the other book had a really exciting storyline. So Richard finished _____ book. He read it in just one night.

(adapted from Ionin et al., 2012, pp.79–80)

5. Results

Figure 1 presents the percentage of times each determiner was selected as the best option for the blank. The native control group exhibited predicted patterns across conditions. Both L1 Japanese and L1 Spanish groups showed native-like preference for *the* in the two unique conditions. However, in the non-unique condition, although L1 Spanish groups exhibited a target-like preference of *that*, the L1-Japanese group did not, choosing *the* and *that* in roughly equal proportions.

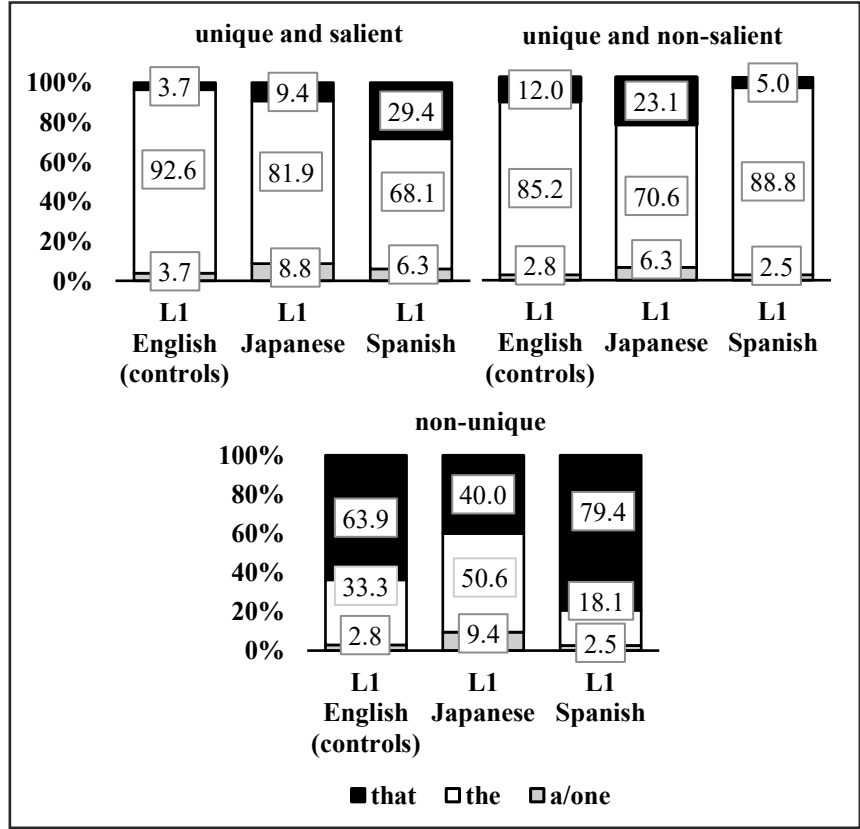


Figure 1. Percentages of each determiner chosen as the best option for each context

For preliminary analysis, one-sample t-tests were conducted to check whether each group’s performance on each condition significantly differ from chance (50 %). If participants do not distinguish the determiners, they should choose them at around 50 % each. The results showed that performance was significantly different for every group in every condition except for the L1-Japanese group in

the non-unique condition ($t(39) = 1.25, p = 0.22$) (Table 5). These results are in line with the earlier observation.

Table 5. Percentage of *the* choices out of all *the* + *that* choices: Mean (SD)

Condition	L1 English (controls)	L1 Japanese	L1 Spanish
Unique and salient	88 (16)*	76 (26) *	69 (32)*
Unique and non-salient	96 (9)*	89 (19) *	93 (14)*
Non-unique	35 (35)*	58 (38)	18 (26)*

Note. * = significantly different from chance (0.5) at $\alpha = .05$.

The responses were further analysed using a mixed effects logistic regression model within each condition, implemented in the R statistical environment (version 4.4.1) (R Core Team, 2024). The dataset was converted into binary form (*the* vs. *that*) by excluding *a/one* responses, since they are not informative for assessing how participants compute uniqueness. L1 (*English* vs. *Japanese* vs. *Spanish*) was included as a fixed effect. For the random effects, intercepts for participants and items were specified, along with a by-item slope for L1. Helmert-coding was applied to L1: the native group was first compared with the two L2 groups combined, followed by a comparison between the L2 groups. Table 6 summarises the model outputs. Of particular interest is the Japanese-vs.-Spanish contrast, which was significant in the non-unique condition but not in the two unique conditions. This significant difference in the non-unique condition suggests a potential L1 effect between the L2 groups.

Table 6. Mixed effects logistic regression output (within each condition)

Fixed effects	β	SE	z	p
<i>Unique and salient</i>				
L1: native vs. L2	0.741	0.395	1.873	.006*
L1: Japanese vs. Spanish	0.260	0.286	0.911	.362
<i>Unique and non-salient</i>				
L1: native vs. L2	0.305	0.559	0.546	.585
L1: Japanese vs. Spanish	-0.668	0.549	-1.217	.224
<i>Non-unique</i>				
L1: native vs. L2	-0.063	0.385	-0.166	.008*
L1: Japanese vs. Spanish	1.513	0.345	4.391	<.001*

Note. Formula: response $\sim$ L1 + (1 | participant) + (1 + L1 | item). Helmert coding was used for L1 (English = [1.0, 0]; Japanese = [-0.5, 1]; Spanish = [-0.5, -1]).

However, given the generally higher English proficiency of the Spanish speakers (as measured by the cloze score), this difference might plausibly be attributed to proficiency rather than to L1. To disentangle these factors, the data

from L2 learners were further analysed using mixed-effects logistic regression, focusing specifically on the non-unique condition. The fixed effects included proficiency, L1, and their interaction, while the random effects included intercepts for participants and items, as well as by-item slopes for L1, proficiency, and their interaction. The model output (Table 7) revealed no significant effect of proficiency, whereas the effect of L1 remained significant, with no interaction between the two factors. These results indicate that the observed difference between the L2 groups is attributable to L1 rather than to proficiency.

Table 7. Mixed effects logistic regression output: non-unique, L2-only model

Fixed Effects	β	SE	z	p
L1: Spanish	-2.067	0.725	-2.850	.004*
proficiency	-0.194	0.118	-1.639	.101
L1: Spanish $\times$ proficiency	-0.036	0.160	-0.022	.822

Note. Formula: response $\sim$ L1 $\times$ proficiency + (1 | participant) + (1 + L1 $\times$ proficiency | item). Treatment coding was used for L1 with Japanese as the reference level.

6. Discussion

To summarise the results, the analyses are broadly consistent with the L1 lexical transfer account proposed by Ionin et al. (2012). Specifically, in the non-unique condition, L1 Japanese speakers did not show a clear preference between *the* and *that*, whereas L1 Spanish speakers demonstrated a target-like preference for *that*. This pattern, supported by the follow-up statistical analysis, points to L1 influence rather than L2 proficiency effect. Notably, a similar non-target-like response in the non-unique condition, contrasted with target-like performance in the two unique conditions, was also reported by Ionin et al. in their study of L1-Korean L2-English learners. Accordingly, the present study can be said to closely replicate and extend the findings of Ionin et al.¹ Now let us consider these findings in light of the research question, repeated in (7):

- (7) **Research question:** Can L2 learners distinguish English definite and demonstrative descriptions? If they fail to do so, is this difficulty attributable to L1 transfer, or does it reflect a general L2 challenge?

¹ Descriptively, the Spanish-speaking group exhibited less native-like behaviour than the Japanese-speaking group in the unique and salient condition (Figure 1), although the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant. While potentially noteworthy, this descriptive difference lies beyond the scope of the present paper, as no clear explanation can be offered and no supporting statistical evidence is available.

The results indicate that, although L2 learners with Japanese as their L1 produced target-like responses in certain conditions, they did not consistently distinguish between English definite and demonstrative descriptions in contexts where the latter is more appropriate. In contrast, learners with Spanish as their L1 demonstrated more target-like performance, suggesting that the difficulty stems from L1 transfer rather than from a general challenge of L2 acquisition. An important question remains, however: why are some conditions more challenging than others for L1-Japanese speakers? Specifically, while they showed a target-like preference for *the* in the two unique conditions ('unique and salient' and 'unique and non-salient'), they did not do so in the 'non-unique' condition. This discrepancy warrants further explanation.

With this issue in mind, the following discussion outlines developmental patterns for each L1 group within the framework of the Feature Reassembly Hypothesis (FRH; Lardiere, 2008, 2009). Although both the FRH and Ionin et al.'s (2012) lexical L1-transfer approach yield similar broad predictions, the FRH offers a more fine-grained account by specifying not only what transfers, but also which particular aspects of L1-driven L2-representation are problematic, thereby providing a richer explanation of the observed variation.

According to the FRH, L2 learners are predicted to engage in two main acquisition tasks: initial feature mapping and feature reassembly. In the initial mapping stage, learners map L1 morphemes' features onto perceived equivalents in the L2, based on semantic and functional similarities. When the L1-based feature set does not align with the target L2-representation, learners must reconfigure their feature mappings, a process referred to as feature reassembly. L2 acquisition becomes more challenging when feature reassembly is required than when it is not. Lardiere (2008, 2009) further emphasizes that successful reassembly depends on sufficient exposure to input that triggers feature reassembly; without such evidence, reconfiguration may be delayed or even blocked. Applying these assumptions to the present context, given the similarity between the L1 and L2 determiners (i.e., definite articles and demonstratives), specifically their shared core semantic feature of uniqueness in anaphoric contexts, L2 learners are expected to initially map the features of L1 determiners onto corresponding L2 forms. Table 8 summarises the predicted acquisition tasks for each L1 group in terms of the FRH.²

² In this paper, the domain of uniqueness computation is treated as [salient] and [discourse] features. These features can be understood in terms of what Lardiere (2008) refers to as "conditioning features", namely discourse conditions that determine whether a given feature, in this case, [unique], is expressed.

Table 8. L2 acquisition tasks: a feature reassembly account

	Initial Feature Mapping	Feature Reassembly
L1 Japanese	[unique, salient] (L1: <i>sono</i> => L2: <i>that</i>)	not necessary
	[unique, salient] (L1: <i>sono</i> => L2: <i>the</i>)	[unique, discourse] ([salient] → [discourse])
	[unique, salient] (L1: <i>ese/esa</i> => L2: <i>that</i>)	not necessary
L1 Spanish	[unique, discourse] (L1: <i>el/los/la/las</i> => L2: <i>the</i>)	not necessary

Note. [salient] = uniqueness computed in the immediately salient context;
[discourse] = uniqueness computed across the whole discourse.

For Japanese speakers, the absence of a definite article in the L1 leads the feature set of the L1 demonstrative *sono* ([unique, salient]) to be mapped onto both the L2 definite and demonstrative determiners, *the* and *that*. As a result, feature reassembly is required to attain the target-like feature configuration for *the* (from [salient] to [discourse]), whereas such reassembly is not necessary for *that*. On the other hand, Spanish speakers are expected to map the L1 demonstrative (*ese/esa*) and definite article (*el/los/la/las*) onto their English counterparts, owing to the close semantic and functional correspondence between Spanish and English in the determiner system. Once these feature mappings are completed, feature reassembly is not required. Therefore, the basic prediction is that, due to the need for feature reassembly, L1 Japanese speakers will encounter greater difficulty than L1 Spanish speakers in learning to distinguish between English *the* and *that*. Furthermore, considering the relationship between acquisition difficulty and the availability of input that triggers feature reassembly, more fine-grained, L1-specific developmental trajectories on a condition-by-condition basis can be formulated, grounded in the experimental data.

Starting with L1-Japanese L2-English learners, given their target-like preference of *the* in the unique and salient condition, it appears they have learnt to prefer *the* over *that*. This learning is arguably achievable thorough positive input, especially when English speakers provide relatively clear cues (i.e., their clear preference of *the*) that may facilitate the acquisition of the relevant distinction (Figure 1). However, this performance alone does not offer conclusive evidence that the Japanese speakers have successfully completed the feature reassembly of the discourse conditioning feature (i.e., [salient] → [discourse]).

Turning to the unique and non-salient condition, their target-like preference for *the* suggests that they have learnt that *the* can refer beyond the immediate salient context, which may likewise be learnable through positive input. Yet, this response remains insufficient to claim that full feature reassembly has occurred. Indeed, the non-target-like responses in the ‘non-unique’ condition suggest that learners still have trouble consistently using the whole discourse as the domain

for uniqueness computation. In other words, feature reassembly remains incomplete. Taken together, these response patterns indicate that Japanese-speaking learners are at a developmental stage where they recognise that *the* can refer beyond immediate salience, but do not yet consistently compute uniqueness across the whole discourse context. That is, they seem to treat the uniqueness of *the* as computable anywhere in the context. This suggests that acquiring the discourse-level constraint may be particularly challenging through input alone, as it likely requires some form of negative evidence, namely evidence that *the* is infelicitous when uniqueness is not established across the whole discourse. Such evidence is unlikely to be available either in naturalistic input or in typical L2 instructional contexts. Consequently, the non-unique condition appears to pose greater difficulty for Japanese learners than the other two conditions.

In contrast, L1 Spanish speakers, who do not require feature reassembly, are predicted to acquire the distinction of *the* and *that* across conditions at approximately the same time. The target-like responses observed in the L1 Spanish group across all conditions in the present study are consistent with this prediction. Table 9 summarises the condition-based developmental patterns discussed above for each L1 group.

Table 9. L1-based development patterns

	Acquisition Difficulty Order between Conditions
L1 Japanese	unique and salient = unique and non-salient → non-unique
L1 Spanish	unique and salient = unique and non-salient = non-unique

Note. “A = B” means that the two conditions do not differ in difficulty. “A → B” means that Condition B is more difficult than Condition A.

Note that this account of developmental patterns for Japanese speakers within the FRH framework is also applicable to Korean speakers, whose L1, like Japanese, lacks a distinction between definite and demonstrative determiners and who exhibited similar response patterns in Ionin et al. (2012).³ However, the acquisition order for Japanese speakers between the ‘unique and salient’ and ‘unique and non-salient’ conditions remains unclear because at present there is no compelling reason or empirical evidence to claim that one condition is inherently easier or more difficult to acquire than the other. Therefore, the developmental scenario proposed here should be regarded as provisional. Future research with less proficient learners would be particularly informative in further examining the difference between these conditions.

³ Given the similarity between Japanese and Korean in the determiner system, equivalent learning tasks are predicted in terms of the FRH for Korean speakers. Specifically, Korean speakers are expected to map the features of their L1 demonstrative (*ku*) onto both *that* and *the*, in a manner parallel to Japanese speakers. Consequently, feature reassembly is required with the acquisition of the target feature configuration of *the* (i.e., [salient] → [discourse]).

7. Conclusion

The present study has demonstrated that L1-Japanese L2-English learners have trouble distinguishing between English definite and demonstrative descriptions, a pattern also observed among Korean-speaking learners in Ionin et al. (2012), which the current study replicates. In the light of the more target-like responses of Spanish-speaking learners, this difficulty seems to be attributable to L1 influence rather than to a general challenge in acquiring L2 English. This L1-driven difference, along with the variation in acquisition success across conditions within Japanese-speaking learners, can be accounted for within the framework of the FRH, which predicts acquisition difficulty and developmental trajectories based on the necessity of feature reconfiguration and the availability of input that triggers such restructuring.

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