

Teaching the Complexities of English Article Use and Choice for Generics to L2 Learners

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1. Introduction

It is acknowledged by many teachers of English that the article system is notoriously difficult to teach. The works by scholars such as Master (1990) have already made many contributions to article instruction. However, second language (L2) learners of English potentially face different challenges, as it is well known that first language (L1) transfer effects may help or hinder acquisition of L2 properties (see White, 2003). Japanese is one language that lacks articles (*the* and *a*) and obligatory plural marking on nouns and therefore poses difficulties for Japanese learners of English. Conversely, English is a language with articles and obligatory plural marking: The definite singular NP has a unique status within the range of definite article functions as Dayal (2004) suggests that the definite singular generic denotes a taxonomic entity whilst bare plurals denote natural kinds. A natural kind represents a single abstract individual such as an animal or plant species by name or by a definite singular / bare plural description. The examples in (1) and (2) are not identical despite both being generic, according to Krifka et al. (1995), as the definite singular and bare plural in (1) are NP-level generics which can refer to natural kinds with a predicate like *be extinct*. The indefinite and bare plural are sentence-level generics as they are compatible with characterizing sentences: they are used to make a general statement, as in example (2).

- (1) Natural kind (NP-level generic)
 - a. The dodo bird is extinct.
 - b. Dodo birds are extinct.

- (2) General statement (sentence-level generic)
 - a. A coat is necessary in winter.
 - b. Coats are necessary in winter.

The definite plural, on the other hand, does not lend itself to a generic interpretation with a kind predicate like *be extinct* in English, hence the use of the symbol * before example (3a) below to

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indicate that it is ungrammatical as generic. Example (3b) is acceptable only under a non-generic interpretation, hence the use of the symbol #. However, it is possible to refer to a specific set of coats within a discourse situation, e.g., The coats (the ones we use when we go skiing) are necessary in winter.

- (3) a. *The dodo birds are extinct.
b. #The coats are necessary in winter.

In contrast, Japanese uses the topic marker *wa* to indicate generic reference (see Kuroda, 1992), as in the following examples (4) and (5).

(4) Natural kind

- a. Kyoryu-wa zetsumetsushi-ta.
 dinosaur-TOP die out-PAST TENSE
 ‘The dinosaur died out.’ / ‘Dinosaurs died out.’
- b. #Aru kyoryu-wa zetsumetsushi-ta.
 a certain type of dinosaur-TOP die out-PAST TENSE
 ‘A certain type of dinosaur died out.’
- c. #Sono kyoryu-wa zetsumetsushi-ta.
 that dinosaur-TOP die out-PAST TENSE
 ‘The/That dinosaur died out.’

(5) General statement

- a. Kōto-wa fuyu-ni hitsuyou desu.
 coat-TOP winter-in necessary is-NON-PAST
 ‘A coat is necessary in winter.’ / ‘Coats are necessary in winter.’
- b. #Aru kōto-wa fuyu-ni hitsuyou desu.
 a certain type of coat(s)-TOP winter-in necessary is-NON-PAST
 ‘A certain type of coat is necessary in winter.’
- c. #Sono kōto-wa fuyu-ni hitsuyou desu.
 that coat-TOP winter-in necessary is-NON-PAST
 ‘The/That coat is necessary in winter.’

Japanese does not make a contrast between NP-level genericity and sentence-level genericity the way English does. Furthermore, there is no number distinction between singular generics and plural generics in Japanese. The brief introduction clearly shows the differences between English and Japanese regarding generic reference. The aim of the current study is to attempt to provide instruction to a group of Japanese L2 learners to see whether participants are able to learn the differences between the definite article and the indefinite article in English. Only the former article can be used to refer to natural kinds and the latter article can only be used for general statements or descriptions. In the case of bare plurals, learners only need to be told that bare plurals can appear as NP-level generics or sentence-level generics. The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of a couple of previous studies that have investigated the L2 acquisition of NP-level and sentence-level genericity. Section 3 focuses on previous intervention studies where groups of L2 learners have participated in instruction sessions to help them learn the English article system. Section 4 gives details about our intervention study. Section 5 presents the discussion and concludes the paper.

2. Previous L2 studies of Generic Reference

There have been a number of studies testing L2 learners' interpretations of NPs/DPs that were used as generic/kind referring (e.g., Ionin & Montrul, 2010; Park, 2013; Snape, García-Mayo & Gürel, 2013; Ionin, Montrul, Kim & Philippov, 2011). Ionin, Montrul, Kim and Philippov (2011) tested the interpretations of NP-level and sentence-level generics in English by Russian- and Korean-speaking learners. Russian lacks definite and indefinite articles but has an obligatory singular-plural distinction. According to Ionin et al. (2011), Russian bare singulars and bare plurals can be used for both NP-level and sentence-level generics. Korean lacks definite and indefinite articles, and it also lacks obligatory plural marking. There is optional plural marking, but, as Ionin et al. (2011) report, bare nouns are preferred as generics. Although both Russian and Korean have NP-level and sentence-level generics, how they are marked morphologically substantially differs from English, in which the definite article is used for NP-level generics and an indefinite article is used for sentence-level generics. Russian and Korean-speaking L2 learners of English, therefore, may be unaware of the differences between NP- and sentence-level genericity. In order to find out if learners could make distinctions between the two types of generics, Ionin et al. (2011) examined the acceptability of sentences administered in an offline acceptability judgement task (AJT). Participants were instructed to read a series of short contexts and then rate five possible continuation sentences for each context. A rating of 4 means the sentence is completely acceptable; a rating of 1 means the sentence is completely unacceptable. If the participants were unsure of the acceptability of a certain sentence, they could choose 2 (less acceptable) or 3 (nearly acceptable). The example in (6) is of a definite singular generic and a bare plural generic. As illustrated in examples (1) and (2) above, there is not one, but there are two possible acceptable continuations as the definite singular (6a) and bare plural (6b) are both completely acceptable continuations. (6c) and (6d) should receive lower ratings as they do not have a kind interpretation. (6e) is completely unacceptable and ungrammatical as there is no article.

(6) Test condition: NP-level generic

I have been studying biology today and I found out that many species are no longer alive. For example, I found out

a. the dodo bird is extinct.	1	2	3	4
b. dodo birds are extinct.	1	2	3	4
c. a dodo bird is extinct.	1	2	3	4
d. the dodo birds are extinct.	1	2	3	4
e. dodo bird is extinct.	1	2	3	4

Example (7) is an indefinite singular generic and a bare plural generic. (7a) and (7b) are both completely acceptable continuations and are expected to be rated as 4. (7c-e) are not acceptable continuations as they fail to provide a general description of coats. The definite singular and definite plural in (7d-e) have a specific reading where *the coat(s)* is one of many or many amongst a set of coats.

(7) Test condition: Sentence-level generic

I want to go skiing in December. I heard Northern Japan is popular. Of course, it is very cold, Everyone knows, for instance,

a. a coat is necessary in winter.	1	2	3	4
b. coats are necessary in winter.	1	2	3	4
c. coat is necessary in winter.	1	2	3	4
d. the coat is necessary in winter.	1	2	3	4
e. the coats are necessary in winter.	1	2	3	4

Ionin et al. found that both the Russian and Korean L2 learners had difficulty rating the definite singular highly for NP-level generics (a rating of 2.5 or less) to refer to natural kinds, but were better in their ratings of the indefinite for sentence-level generics (a rating of 3 or above). Their experimental

results showed that both Russian and Korean learners were, for the most part, targetlike; however their acceptance rate of definite singulars for NP-level generics was low, showing that these learners had difficulty accepting the definite singular used as a generic for kinds.

Adapting the test material used in Ionin et al. (2011), Snape (2013) tested Japanese- and Spanish-speaking adult L2 learners of English. Japanese is similar to Korean with regard to the absence of definite and indefinite articles as well as the lack of obligatory plural marking.¹ Also, like in Korean, bare singular nouns in Japanese allow NP-level and sentence-level generic interpretations. Spanish, on the other hand, has definite and indefinite articles and bare singulars are prohibited. Spanish definite singulars are used for NP-level generics and indefinite singulars are used for sentence-level generics just like English counterparts. Therefore, unlike Japanese-speaking learners, Spanish learners do not face morphological and semantic differences for definite and indefinite singulars used as generics. It is thus predicted, assuming L1 transfer, that Spanish speakers would have no difficulty with the definite singular used for well-defined kinds. The findings clearly showed that for the Spanish speakers, the mean rating for the definite singular was higher (2.7 out of 4) than the indefinite (1.5 out of 4) for NP-level generics. However, for the Japanese speakers, the mean rating for the definite singular was lower (2.0 out of 4) and equal to the ratings for the indefinite (2.2 out of 4) and the bare singular (2.0 out of 4). These results are consistent with the findings in the Ionin et al. (2011) study as the Russian and Korean speakers performed much like the Japanese speakers in their rating of the definite singular. The findings from Ionin et al. and Snape collectively demonstrate that L2 learners are targetlike in their interpretation of sentence-level generics expressed with the indefinite and bare plural, but they have difficulty with interpreting the definite singular as an NP-level generic. Ionin et al. attribute this finding to L2 learners' difficulty with acquiring the taxonomic denotation associated with the definite singular (Dayal, 2004).

3. Previous Intervention Studies

The effectiveness of explicit instruction has been a matter of great interest for over three decades of L2 acquisition research (see Spada & Tomita, 2010, for a review). According to Spada and Tomita (2010), it is generally agreed among L2 researchers that L2 learners can benefit from explicit instruction. However, what remains to be seen is what type of knowledge L2 learners gain as a result of explicit instruction. It is often assumed, explicitly or implicitly, that explicit instruction has an effect on learners' implicit linguistic knowledge (e.g., White, 1991). However, Schwartz and Gubula-Ryzak (1992), for example, refute this and argue that the only knowledge explicit instruction is able to change is learners' explicit knowledge, not implicit knowledge. However, even if explicit instruction can only change learners' explicit knowledge, it does not mean that L2 learners cannot benefit from it. Ellis (2010) points out that explicit instruction can be looked at from two entirely different points of view. One is to examine whether explicit instruction is effective for developing learners' implicit linguistic knowledge or it is effective for developing learners' explicit knowledge. The present research addresses the latter; that is, whether or not explicit instruction can aid L2 learners to develop their explicit knowledge regarding generic expressions in English and thus lead them to better understand and use English generic expressions.²

As for instruction on articles, there are a few studies that assess the effectiveness of explicit instruction (e.g., Master, 1990; Muranoi, 2000; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008), but to our knowledge, Snape and Yusa's (2013) study is the only one that aimed to instruct L2 learners on English generic expressions using Krifka et al.'s framework. The participants in their study were 14 Japanese speakers whose proficiency level was deemed to be at a high-intermediate level. They were divided into an instruction group and a control group. The instruction period was for three weeks, consisting of explicit instruction on definiteness, specificity and genericity. We will only report on generics in this paper as other semantic properties are out of the scope of the current study. The instruction group was given instruction in English once a week for 70 minutes for 3 weeks. They were instructed on the definite singular used as an NP-level generic, the indefinite used as a sentence-level generic and the bare plural

¹ The Japanese plural marker, *-tachi*, differs from the Korean counterpart as, when it is attached to a noun, the NP cannot have a kind referring reading (Kurafuji, 2004, among others).

² Although this is our goal for the current study, this is not to assert that explicit instruction will not lead to implicit knowledge over time.

used as both types of generic expressions. The instruction on generics was given in the third week of the instruction period. In addition, the instruction group and the control group took a pre-test and a post-test and a delayed post-test, which was administered two weeks after the instruction period ended. The results showed that both the instruction group and the control group performed well on sentence-level generics in their interpretations of the indefinite and bare plural as generics. However, both groups were non-targetlike with the definite singular used as an NP-level generic, and the instruction group continued to be non-targetlike after the instruction period. Thus, they concluded that the explicit instruction given in their study was ineffective with regard to the definite singular generic.

Snape and Yusa speculate that the ineffectiveness of their instruction was due to the fact that the instruction period was too short. Only one 70-minute session was dedicated to English generics. They also note that the content of the instruction might have been too complex to grasp in English. In order to examine further whether explicit instruction can help L2 learners learn generics in English, we conducted a new study with a longer instruction period and instruction given in the learners' native language, Japanese, testing Snape and Yusa's explanations on the ineffectiveness of explicit instruction in their study.

4. Our Intervention Study

4.1. Participants

Participants in our study were recruited at a university in Japan. In total, 37 learners agreed to participate in our study and based on their preferences, 21 participants were placed in an instruction group and 16 were placed in a control group. The participants were all female university students, and they were native speakers of Japanese majoring in English at the time of testing. Their English proficiency level is considered to be between high-intermediate and advanced levels. Their scores from the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) range between 590 and 945, as summarized in Table 1. There was no significant difference between the instruction group and the control group ($p = 0.546$) in their level of English proficiency. In addition to the learner groups, nine native speakers of British English participated as native controls. All participants received remuneration for pre- and post-tests and the instruction group participants received payment for every instruction session they attended.

Table 1. Means and ranges of TOEIC scores of the L2 learners

	TOEIC Scores	
	Mean	Range
Instruction group (n=21)	720.7	590 - 945
Control group (n=16)	740.9	590 - 935

4.2. Acceptability Judgement Task

The pre-test and post-tests are based on Ionin et al.'s (2011) AJT (see examples 6 and 7 above). Several changes were made so that we could include different types of kinds and non-kinds in the task. The AJT consisted of 56 items in total: 16 items were kinds and 16 items were non-kinds, 16 items were related to definiteness and specificity, and 8 items were definite anaphoric singular and definite anaphoric plural fillers. Two versions of the tasks were created as we could then give participants one version for the pre-test and the other version for post-test 1. For post-test 2 and post-test 3 we employed the same pattern. That way, we avoided having the participants repeat the same version of the task for each test session.

4.3. Procedure

Instruction sessions and pre-test and post-tests were administered following the schedule summarized in Table 2. All of the participants in the instruction group took the pre-test a day before the instruction session started.³

³ Most of the participants in the control group also took the pre-test a day before the instruction period started, but two participants from the control group took the pre-test two days after the instruction session started.

Table 2. *Schedule for tests and instruction*

Semester	Instruction (n=21)	Control (n=16)
Week 1	Pre-test	Pre-test
Weeks 1-3	Instruction (generics)	
Week 3	Post-test 1	Post-test 1
Weeks 4-7	Instruction (definiteness and specificity)	
Weeks 8-9	Review (generics, definiteness and specificity)	
Week 10	Post-test 2	Post-test 2
12 weeks later	Post-test 3	Post-test 3

During the 9 sessions, there were four participants who were absent once, and two participants who were absent twice. Although there were a few participants who were not present in every session, we believe that all participants had enough instruction time on generics in English. In the first three weeks of the instruction period, generics were taught, and later in weeks 8 and 9, review sessions were provided. Therefore, they had five weekly sessions for generics, and none of the participants in the instruction group was absent more than once among these five weeks.

4.4. *Instruction*

Instruction was conducted weekly for 60 minutes for 9 weeks. Instruction consisted mainly of metalinguistic explanations where the participants were given opportunities to use what they had learned and produce sentences containing generic expressions. In addition, they were given some drill exercises.

The metalinguistic explanation regarding generics in English was divided into two types; NP-level generics expressed with the definite singular and bare plural, and sentence-level generics expressed with the indefinite and bare plural. For the NP-level generics, the participants were told that for kinds (natural kinds, well-established kinds and kind predicates), a singular noun with the definite article, *the*, can express genericity, as shown in (8-10). In addition, they were told that the bare plural is also acceptable with this type of generic.

Natural kinds

- (8) a. The lion lives in Africa.
b. Lions live in Africa.

Well-established kind

- (9) a. The Coca-Cola bottle has a narrow neck.
b. Coca-Cola bottles have a narrow neck.

Kind predicates⁴

- (10) a. The cell phone was invented in 1973 by Martin Cooper.
b. Cell phones were invented in 1973 by Martin Cooper.

⁴ The instruction group was given a list of kind predicates to memorize, including, *to be widespread*, *to be common*, *to be cultivated*, *to be extinct*, *to be protected*, *to be indigenous*, *to be rare*, *to invent*, and *to be well-known throughout*.

As for sentence-level generics, the participants were told that a singular noun with the indefinite article, *a(n)*, can be interpreted as generic if the sentence describes a general property of an entity which the noun is referring to, as in (11-13). Furthermore, just like NP-level generics, the participants were told that the bare plural is also acceptable for this type of generic.

Natural kind as a general statement

- (11) a. A potato contains vitamin C, amino acids, protein and thiamine.
b. Potatoes contain vitamin C, amino acids, protein and thiamine.

Non-well-established kind

- (12) a. A chocolate bar is enjoyed by many people.
b. Chocolate bars are enjoyed by many people.

Non-kind-predicates

- (13) a. A cell phone is expensive in Japan.
b. Cell phones are expensive in Japan.

In addition to the examples such as the above, they were also instructed that with non-well-established kinds and non-kind-predicates, the use of a definite singular such as those shown in (14) is inappropriate as generic.

- (14) a. #The chocolate bar is enjoyed by many people.
b. #The cell phone is expensive in Japan.

Finally, they were instructed that bare singular count nouns, exemplified in (15), are ungrammatical.

- (15) a. *Lion lives in Africa.
b. *Coca-Cola bottle has a narrow neck.
c. *Cell phone was invented in 1973 by Martin Cooper.
d. *Potato contains vitamin C, amino acids, protein and thiamine.

4.5. Results

The results in Table 3 from the pre-test show the total number of correct judgements for the acceptable sentences by each participant group for the filler conditions.

Table 3. *Overall mean ratings by text and sentence type (definite anaphoric singulars and plurals)*

	definite anaphoric singular	definite anaphoric plural
Instruction group (n=21)	3.9	3.8
Control group (n=16)	3.9	3.3
Native Controls (n=9)	3.9	3.9

In the case of the definite singular, ratings of the indefinite, definite plural, bare plural and bare noun sentence types were less than 2.1 for both the instruction and control groups and for the definite plural, ratings of the other sentence types were less than 2.5. The ratings of the anaphoric items in Table 3 reveal that the L2 learners in both groups are able to rate the definite anaphoric singular and plural highly. The ratings of kinds by the instruction group are provided in the following set of Figures 1-4 below.

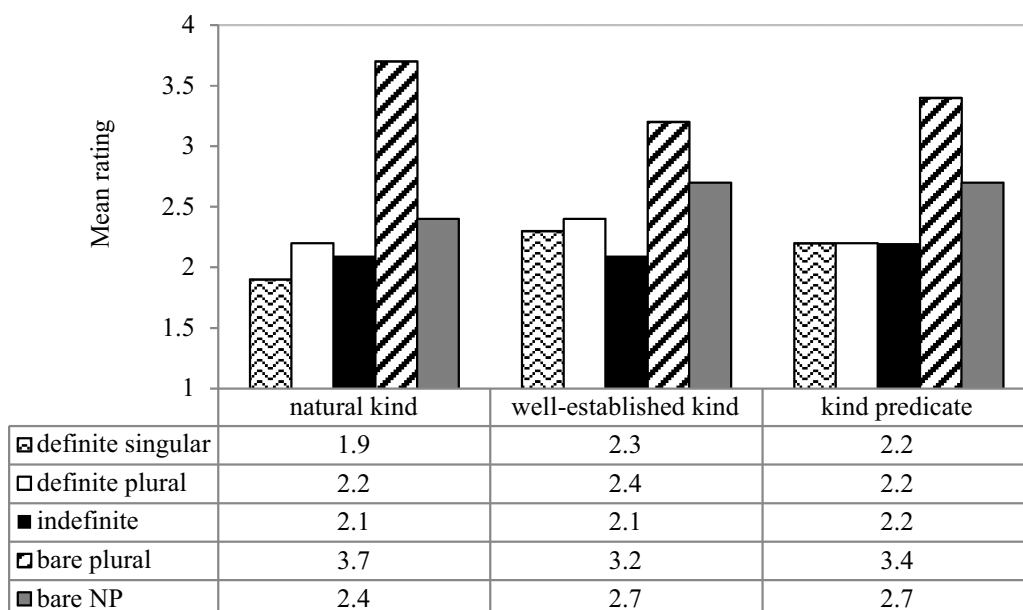


Figure 1. Pre-test results of kinds

The pre-test results in Figure 1 show that the instruction group performed poorly in rating the definite singular as all ratings (natural kind, well-established kind and kind predicate) were lower than 2.3. Ratings for the bare plural are all higher than 3.2.

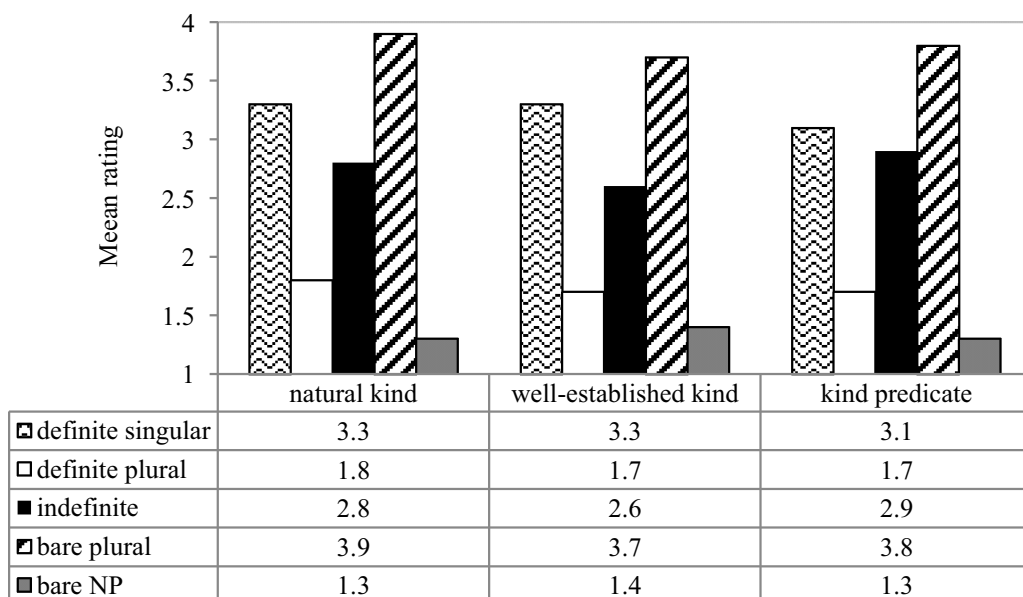


Figure 2. Post-test 1 results of kinds

Post-test 1 results indicate that after 3 weeks of instruction the learners are already better at rating the definite singular compared with the pre-test results. The learners rated the definite singular higher than 3.1 for the three kind categories. Ratings of the other sentence types (apart from bare plural) are lower than 2.9. The bare NP received the lowest ratings overall.

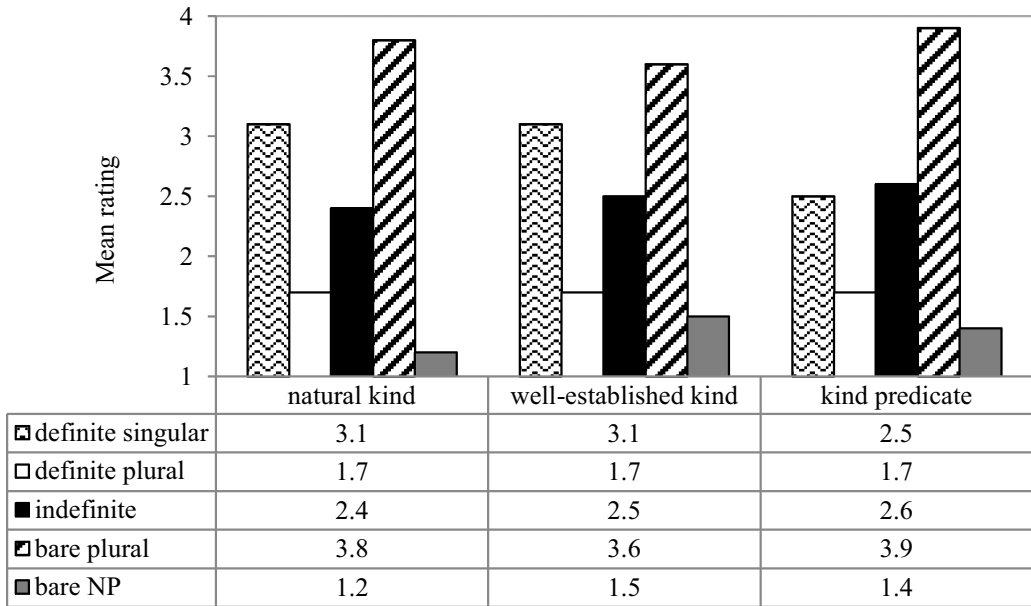


Figure 3. Post-test 2 results of kinds

Post-test 2 was administered after the participants had received all 9 weeks of instruction. The results are similar to the findings obtained in post-test 1 as the definite singular is rated above 3 for two out of the three kind categories. The participants gave a mean rating of 2.5 for the definite singular in the kind predicate category. Ratings of the other sentence types (apart from bare plural) are lower than 2.4. The bare NP and definite plural received the lowest ratings overall.

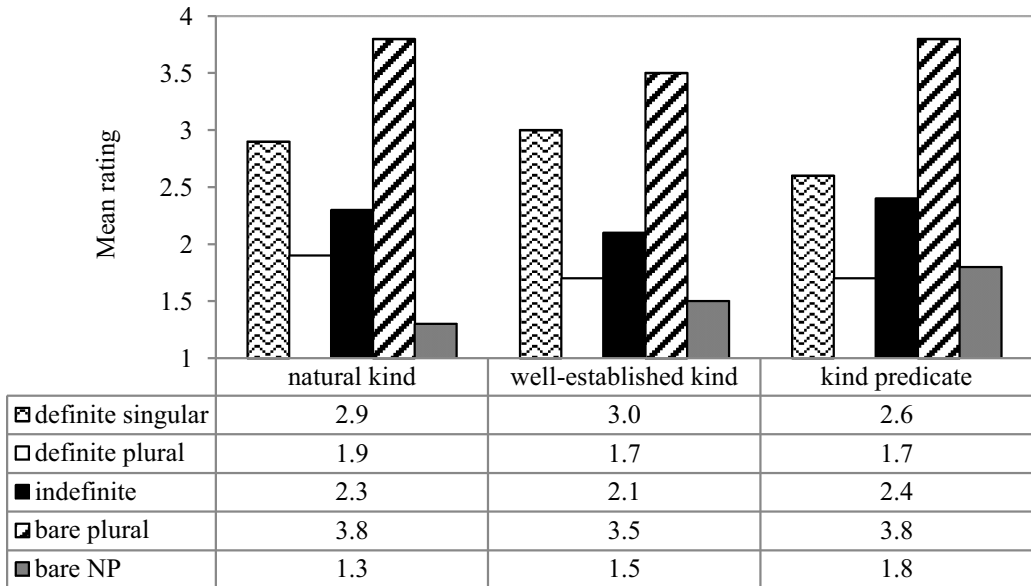


Figure 4. Post-test 3 results of kinds

Post-test 3 was given to all participants after a 12 week break between semesters. The lowest rating for the definite singular is 2.6 for kind predicates, but the other two ratings for natural kinds and well-established kinds are 2.9 and above. Ratings of the other sentence types (apart from bare plural) are lower than 2.4. The bare NP and definite plural received the lowest ratings overall.

Figures 1-4 illustrate that from pre-test to post-test 3 the instruction group improved in their ratings of the definite singular in the three categories natural kind, well-established kind and kind predicate. Tables 4-5 provide the results of paired-samples t-tests for the instruction group for the definite singular and bare plural (kinds).

Table 4. *Instruction group: Definite singular (natural, well-established, kind predicate)*

Tests	Std. Deviation	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test – Post-test 1	0.87	-9.637	p<0.05
Post-test 1 – Post-test 2	0.92	2.335	p<0.05
Post-test 2 – Post-test 3	1.13	0.389	No sig. difference
Post-test 2 – Pre-test	1.20	-5.208	p<0.05
Post-test 3 – Pre-test	1.06	-5.281	p<0.05

Table 5. *Instruction group: Bare plural (natural, well-established, kind predicate)*

Tests	Std. Deviation	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test – Post-test 1	0.65	-4.160	p<0.05
Post-test 1 – Post-test 2	0.56	-0.112	No sig. difference
Post-test 2 – Post-test 3	0.81	0.955	No sig. difference
Post-test 2 – Pre-test	0.67	-4.110	p<0.05
Post-test 3 – Pre-test	0.81	-2.118	p<0.05

The dark shaded cells of Tables 4-5 illustrate that there is a significant difference found between the tests. Participants performed better than the previous test. For example, between pre-test and post-test 1 there is a significant difference between the tests as the participants' performance on the AJT was better on post-test 1 than it was on the pre-test. The light shaded cell in Table 4 represents a significant difference between post-test 1 and post-test 2, but the participants performed worse on post-test 2, not better than post-test 1. Tables 6-7 show the results of paired-samples t-tests for the control group (non-instructed group) on kinds.

Table 6. *Control group: Definite singular (natural, well-established, kind predicate)*

Tests	Std. Deviation	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test – Post-test 1	0.85	3.214	p<0.05
Post-test 1 – Post-test 2	0.70	1.532	No sig. difference
Post-test 2 – Post-test 3	1.27	-1.024	No sig. difference
Post-test 2 – Pre-test	0.89	4.282	p<0.05
Post-test 3 – Pre-test	1.18	2.040	p<0.05

Table 7. Control group: Bare plural (natural, well-established, kind predicate)

Tests	Std. Deviation	t value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test – Post-test 1	0.68	1.379	No sig. difference
Post-test 1 – Post-test 2	0.60	-0.478	No sig. difference
Post-test 2 – Post-test 3	1.03	2.457	p<0.05
Post-test 2 – Pre-test	0.72	0.894	No sig. difference
Post-test 3 – Pre-test	1.07	2.555	p<0.05

The light shaded cells of Tables 6-7 illustrate that there is a significant difference found between the tests. Participants performed worse than the previous test. For example, between pre-test and post-test 1 there is a significant difference between the tests as the participants’ performance on the AJT was worse on post-test 1 than it was on the pre-test.

Figures 5-8 provide the results of the general property and non-kind categories for the instruction group.

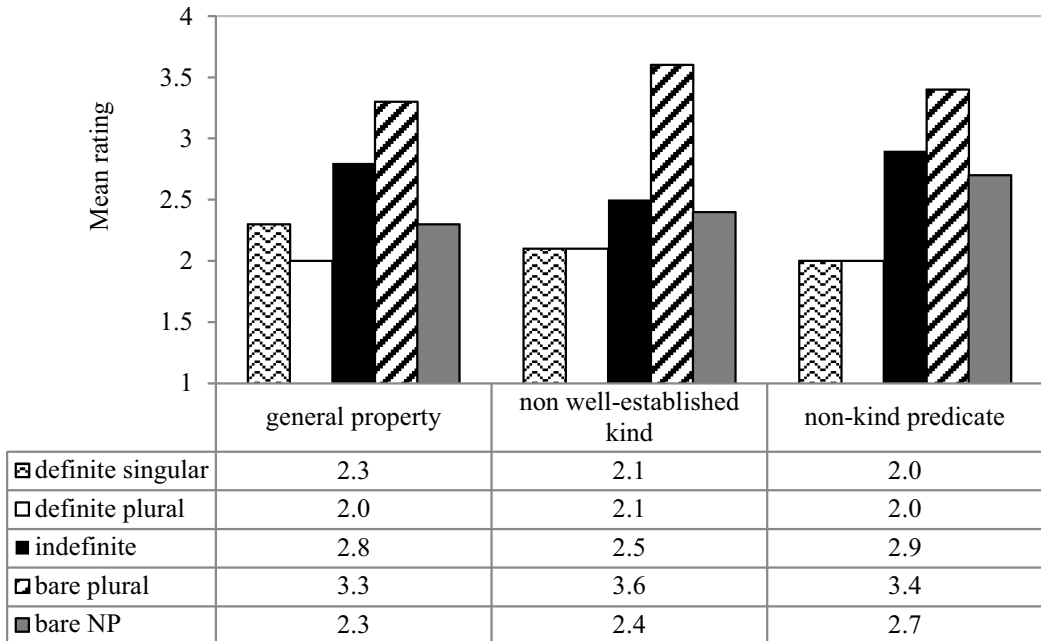


Figure 5. Pre-test results of general property and non-kinds

Pre-test results in Figure 5 reveal that the indefinite is rated higher in each category (general property, non well-established kind and non-kind predicate) than the definite singular. The highest rating the indefinite received was 2.9 and the highest rating the definite singular received was 2.3. The bare plural was rated 3.3 or above and all other sentence types were rated 2.9 or lower.

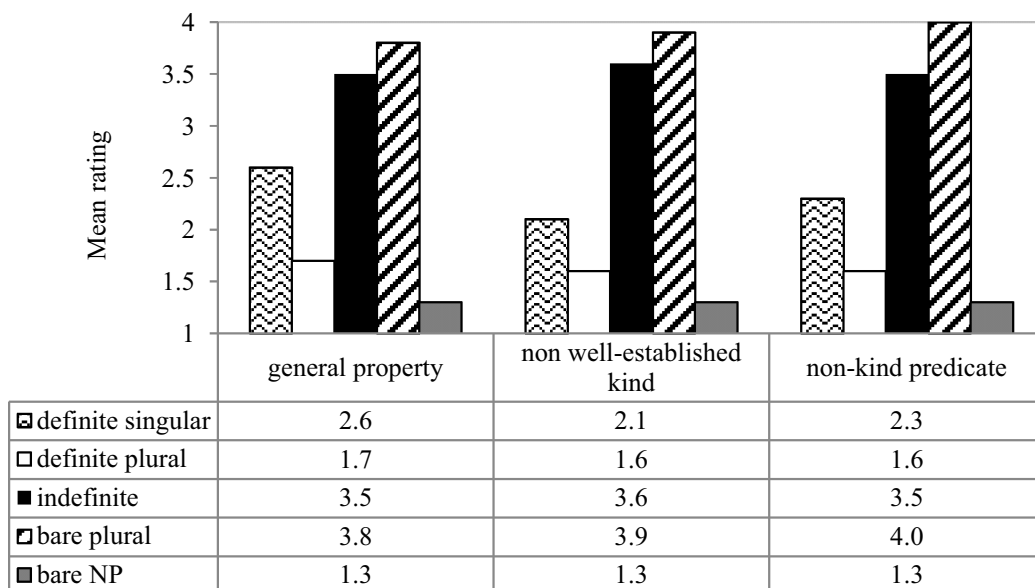


Figure 6. Post-test 1 results of general property and non-kinds

Post-test 1 results in Figure 6 show that the indefinite and bare plural continue to be rated higher (3.5 and above) than the other three sentence types (2.6 or lower).

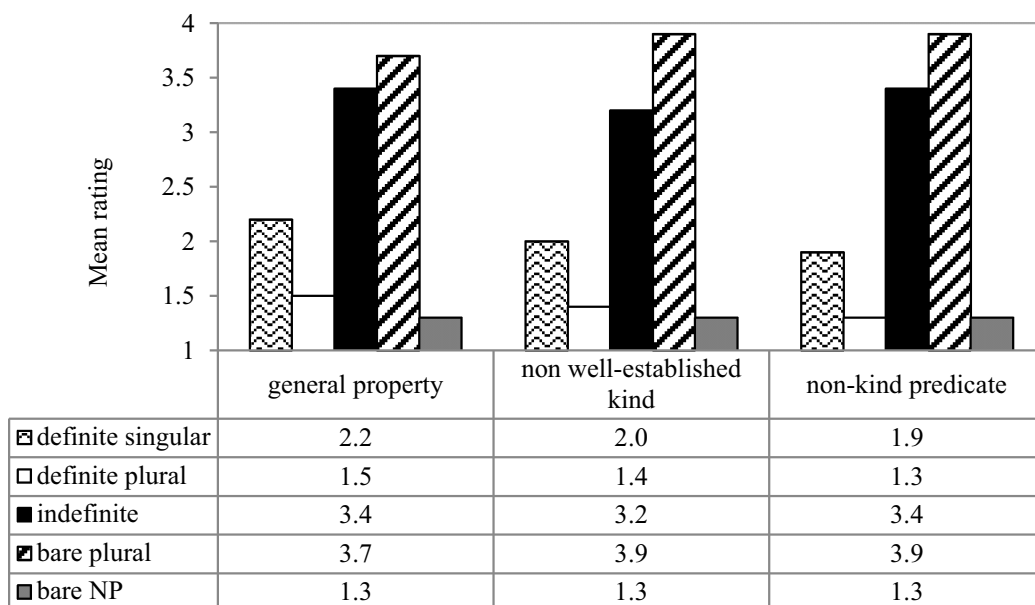


Figure 7. Post-test 2 results of general property and non-kinds

The results of post-test 2 in Figure 7 reveal similar findings to post-test 1 in that the indefinite and bare plural are rated higher (3.2 or above) than the other three sentence types (2.2 or lower).

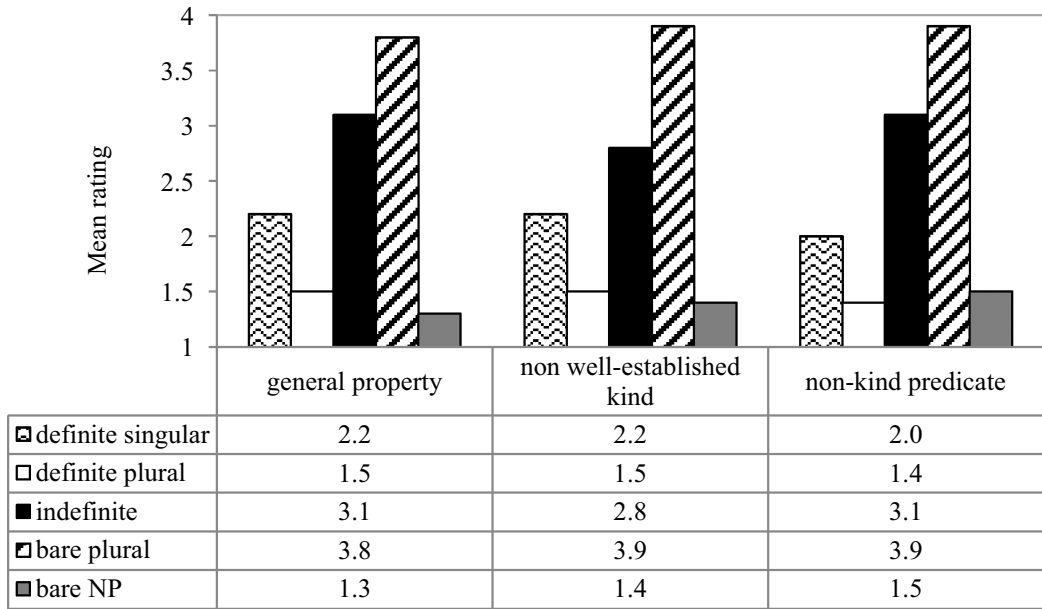


Figure 8. Post-test 3 results of general property and non-kinds

The final set of results from post-test 3, illustrated in Figure 8, reveal that even after a 12 week gap between post-test 2 and post-test 3, the indefinite and bare plural are rated higher (2.8 or higher) than the other three sentence types (2.2 or lower). The indefinite and bare plural did not cause any difficulties for the instruction and control groups from pre- to post-test 3.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of our study was to see whether L2 learners from an article-less L1 (Japanese) could benefit from explicit instruction in generics. Our intervention study included two groups, an instruction group and a control group. The instruction group received 9 weeks of instruction in articles in which some of the instruction comprised of focusing on generics, namely NP-level and sentence-level generics (Krifka et al., 1995). The instruction and control groups participated in the pre- and post-tests but the control group did not receive any explicit instruction. None of the participants had been instructed on the use of generics before. All participants demonstrated little to no understanding of the definite singular (to refer to kinds) in the pre-test results. Participants were better at recognizing that the indefinite can be used to provide a general description (sentence-level generics). All participants rated the bare plural as acceptable on the AJT for NP-level and sentence-level generics. Thus, it seems that the definite singular generic poses a particular difficulty for Japanese learners of English. After 3 weeks of instruction, the instruction group significantly improved in their ratings of the definite singular between the pre-test and post-test 1. After 9 weeks of instruction, post-test 2 revealed that the participants performed significantly worse than on post-test 1. We believe that their poor performance on post-test 2 is likely due to the other instruction they received during the 9 weeks as some of the instruction focused on definiteness and specificity. No difference was found between post-test 2 and post-test 3. However, statistically significant differences were found between 1.) post-test 2 and the pre-test and 2.) post-test 3 and the pre-test. We argue that our findings clearly show that explicit instruction in the meaning of articles can be of benefit to L2 learners, especially when the L1 lacks an article system and plural marking. In comparison to the participants in the Snape and Yusa (2013) study, the participants from both studies strongly accept the indefinite for sentence-level generics and the bare plural for sentence-level and NP-level generics. In the current study the participants are much better at accepting the definite singular for NP-level generics than the participants in the Snape and Yusa study. We suggest three reasons for the instruction group's improvement between the pre- and post-tests: (1) the participants received instruction in the L1, Japanese, rather than in the L2, English, (2) 9 weeks of

instruction was provided, 60 minutes each lesson, rather than one 70 minute class, (3) clear explanations were offered during instruction with examples on how the definite singular can be used to refer to kinds and how the indefinite refers to general properties and non-kinds. Our findings are consistent with other intervention studies such as Trahey and White (1993), VanPatten and Cadierno (1993), and White (1991) as they have all shown that instruction can be of benefit to L2 learners. Nonetheless, there are some remaining issues that need to be addressed. For instance, the instruction group performed well on the post-tests across the three kind categories but the kind predicate category remained more problematic than the natural kind and well-established kind categories (see Figures 3-4 above). One possible reason that would explain the L2 learners' difficulties with kind predicates is the mixed input they potentially receive. For example, as we have discussed above, *the dodo bird is extinct* is generic, but *a dodo bird is extinct* is not possible. However, it is also possible to have examples like *a lion is dangerous / the lion is dangerous* where both the indefinite and definite singular are acceptable as generics. *The lion* is an NP-level generic that combines with a general statement or description about the lion, i.e., it is dangerous: *A lion is dangerous* is a general statement about lions. Thus, the input can be ambiguous, with L2 learners unlikely receiving negative evidence (correction from a teacher) in the classroom; indirect negative evidence is further likely to cause confusion for learners because the absence of a structure may lead learners to assume that *a dodo bird is extinct* is possible even if they have never seen or heard it before. Another potential reason for why L2 learners fail to identify *the* as being generic is to do with the definite article itself since a restriction on the definite singular NP is English-particular. The restriction, according to Farkas and de Swart (2007) is the following:

- i) Do not use the definite article unless the article refers to what is familiar.
- ii) The definite article can refer to the maximality of the N in [the N].
- iii) In English i) has priority over ii).

In other words, the definite article suggests something familiar rather than something maximal or typical in English. In the case of L2 learners, the use of the definite singular NP as generic is rarely, if ever, mentioned in ESL books.

To conclude, our study shows that explicit instruction in article use and choice for generics can be advantageous to L2 learners provided that the length of instruction is adequate enough for participants to be given chances to create their own sentences using generics in the classroom. We found that in comparison with Snape and Yusa's (2013) study where English was the medium of instruction, instruction in Japanese helped the learners develop a clearer understanding of the concepts NP-level generic and sentence-level generic. As a result, we demonstrated, through the use of tests, that L2 learners are able to recognize that the definite singular (NP-level) generic refers to kinds, not individuals.

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