

Article Choice Parameters in L2

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1. Introduction

Since the early 1980s the question whether Universal Grammar (UG) plays a role in second language acquisition has been extensively debated. Several views can be distinguished. According to Bley-Vroman's (1990) Fundamental Difference Hypothesis, L2 learners do not have access to UG. The Full Access Full Transfer Hypothesis (Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996) states that L2 learners transfer their L1 grammar in the initial state of L2 acquisition, but that their interlanguages can be characterized in terms of UG parameters distinct from those found in L1. According to the Full Access (No Transfer) Hypothesis (Flynn & Martohardjono 1994, Flynn 1996, Epstein et al. 1996, 1998), the initial state of L2 grammars is not L1. According to Platzack's (1996) Initial Hypothesis of Syntax, the initial state of L2 grammars is UG.

Ionin's (2003) study on the acquisition of the English article by Russian and Korean L2 learners is an attempt to show that L2 learners have Full Access to UG. Ionin shows that these learners, who do not have articles in their L1, fluctuate between two parameters in their choice of the article in English: the definiteness parameter (present in the L2 grammar) or the specificity parameter (an UG option present in languages distinct from their L1 or L2). Since these learners base their choice on the specificity parameter in part of the cases, Ionin argues that they still have access to UG.

Russian and Korean learners of English have to reset a parameter and to set a parameter concerning the article. They have to reset the article/no article parameter (and pass through an initial state in which they transfer the no article parameter from their L1) and they have to set the definiteness/specificity parameter. Ionin's study concerns the setting of the last parameter. The Russian and Korean L2 learners of English cannot transfer this parameter from their L1.

In this paper we investigate whether learners who can transfer the setting of the definiteness/specificity parameter from their L1 also fluctuate between the definiteness and the specificity parameter in their choice of the L2 article, which could provide even stronger support for the hypothesis that L2 learners have access to UG. We studied the acquisition by Dutch L2 learners of Arabic, both definiteness-based languages, to see whether their interlanguages presented specificity effects.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we discuss the definiteness and the specificity parameters, and their setting in Dutch and Arabic. In section 3, we present our hypothesis, our research and the results. In section 4, we discuss our results. Finally, in section 5, we summarize the conclusions.

2. The semantics of articles

Ionin (2003) offers a recent view on the second language acquisition (SLA) of the semantics of articles. She proposes the existence of the article choice parameter among article-based languages. Such a parameter has binary values: articles are based either on definiteness or on specificity. On this view, although English, French, and Arabic are different languages that belong to different typological families, Germanic, Romance and Semitic respectively, their articles are lexicalized on the basis of the same semantic property: definiteness. In this section we present Ionin's approach and define the two values of the article choice parameter.

2.1 *The article choice parameter*

According to Ionin (2003), two different settings underlie article-based languages: definiteness, where articles lexicalize a [+definite] distinction, and specificity, where articles lexicalize a [+specific] distinction. For instance English, French, and Arabic are article-based languages where articles are based on definiteness, whereas Samoan, Turkish, and some Creoles are article-based languages where articles are based on specificity.

2.1.1 *Definiteness*

Since Russell (1905), we assign to determiners the property of definiteness. Russell changed the philosophy of language by the introduction of his famous theory on the description of definites and indefinites. According to Russell, a definite description is an expression of the form *the x*, where x is a noun or a nominal phrase which describes a unique individual or object. According to Givon (1978) definite DPs are used if both the speaker and the hearer can identify the referent. Givon defines the notion of definiteness as follows:

“The notions ‘definite’ and ‘indefinite,’ as far as referential nominals are concerned, are used here strictly in their discourse-pragmatic sense, i.e. ‘assumed by the speaker to be uniquely identifiable to the hearer’ v. ‘not so assumed’, respectively”.

(Givon, 1978:296)

Many theories were proposed to give a clear definition of definiteness as a semantic property:

- Definiteness is based on uniqueness/maximality (Russell 1905).
- Definiteness is based on anaphoric properties and on familiarity (Karttunen 1976; Kamp 1981; Heim 1982).
- Definiteness is based on the situational use of the definite DPs (saliency) (Lewis 1979; Egli & Heusinger 1995).

For the purpose of this study, we adopt Ionin’s definition of definiteness, which is based on Heim (1982, 1991). We consider that a DP is definite when both the speaker and the hearer presuppose the existence of a unique individual in the context denoted by the NP (Ionin 2003). The definite is used when there is a certainty of the existence and the uniqueness of the individual in the context. This individual has a property, which is noteworthy to mention (Heim 1991). Heim states that the definite “serves to narrow down the range of things that can felicitously be referred to” (1982:231). On the other hand, we use the indefinite when there exists at least one individual which satisfies a precise condition in the context denoted by the NP (Heim 1991).

2.1.2 *Specificity*

The word Specificity was coined first on definite DPs by Givon (1960) by analogy to the category “referentiality” (Quine 1960:30). Donellan (1966) relates specificity and non specificity to referentiality and attributivity respectively. Donellan gives the following example to illustrate this:

- (1) Smith’s murderer must be insane.

In the referential reading Smith’s murderer has an identity. He is for instance Smith’s neighbour. In the attributive reading Smith’s murderer has not been identified yet. Anyone can be the murderer. Indefinite DPs can also have a specific or a non specific reading. ‘A Norwegian’ in (2) can refer to a person that Hillie knows already, for instance Einar, but ‘a Norwegian’ can also refer to anyone who happens to be Norwegian (Lyons 1999):

- (2) Hillie wants to marry a Norwegian.

Ionin (2003) adopts Fodor & Sag's (1982) interpretation of specificity. According to Fodor & Sag, 'a man' in (3) has a specific interpretation, because the speaker refers to a specific individual of whom he has a mental representation. In (4), 'a man' is non-specific because the speaker does not have a specific individual in mind:

- (3) **A man** just proposed to me in the orangery (though I'm much too embarrassed to tell you who it was).
- (4) **A man** is in the women's bathroom (but I haven't dared to go there to see who it is).
(Fodor & Sag 1982:359, ex. (7)-(8))

This is the definition of specificity proposed by Ionin (2003) based on Fodor & Sag (1982) and also in accordance with Heim's (1991) proposal:

"The speaker of the context **c** refers to exactly one individual **xc** in **c**, and there exists a property **y** which the speaker considers noteworthy in **c**, and **xc** is both **x** and **y** in **c**. The specific reading of the DP is characterized by the certainty of the speaker about the identity of the referent or the speaker has the referent in mind"

(Fodor & Sag, 1982; Heim, 1991; Ionin, 2003)

However, Von Heusinger (2002) proposes another definition of specificity. In his definition specificity is somehow different from that proposed by Ionin (2003):

"[...] Specificity indicates that an expression is referentially anchored to another object in the discourse. Referentially anchored means that the referent of the specific NP is functionally dependent on the referent of another expression. Furthermore, I assume that this relation is sentence bound, i.e. a specific NP can only be anchored to discourse items that are explicit in the same sentence (or to the speaker of the sentence)".

(Von Heusinger 2002:268)

Von Heusinger states that specificity reflects a relation between items used in the discourse and not the speaker's intention to refer. The speaker's point of view does not determine whether a DP is specific or not. Von Heusinger gives the following examples to illustrate his ideas:

- (5) George: I met a certain student of his.
- (6) James: George met a certain student of his.

In (5) the specific interpretation of 'student' depends on 'I'. In (6) it does not depend on the speaker, but on 'George'. The speaker's point of view is thus not important in (6).

It should be noticed that the interpretation of the notion of specificity might influence the results of a research on the use of articles. In Ionin's view, 'student' in (6) is non specific if the speaker does not know the student, whereas in Von Heusinger's view it is specific.

In our research we have replicated Ionin's test, which means that we have also replicated her test sentences and have adopted her interpretation of specificity.

2.1.3 *The semantic classification of languages*

Ionin classifies languages according to the use or non-use of the article and a distinction of articles based either on definiteness or on specificity:

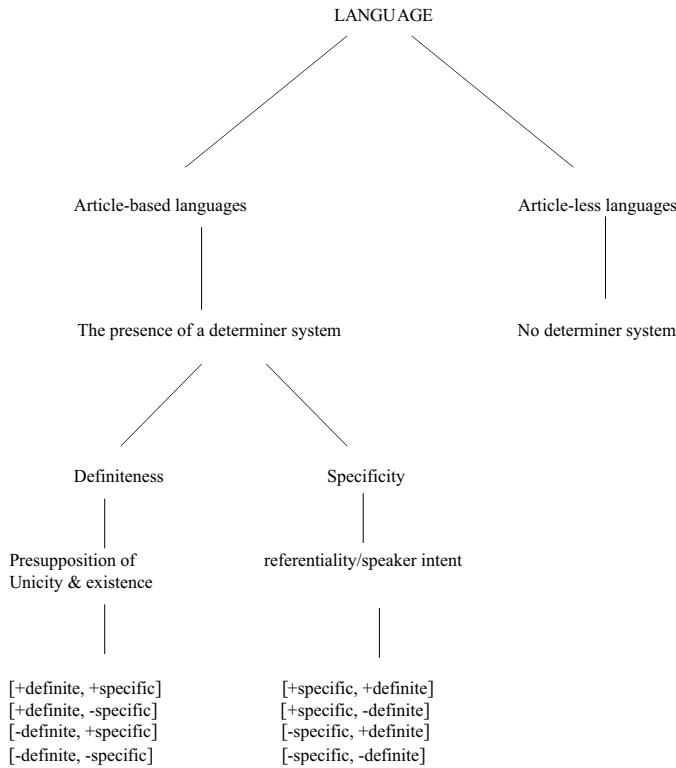


Fig. 1: The Semantic Classification of Languages

For instance in English, articles are based on definiteness, whereas in Samoan, articles are based on specificity (Ionin, 2003:87-90):

	+Definite	-Definite
+Specific	The	A
-Specific		

Table 1: Definiteness in English

	+Definite	-Definite
+Specific	Le	
-Specific	Se	

Table 2: Specificity in Samoan

In Ionin’s study the target language is English, a language in which the distinction between articles is based on definiteness. Ionin (2003:87-90) gives the following sentences taken from her test to illustrate the lexicalization of the four different feature combinations possible in English:

(7) [+Definite, +Specific]

Definite, Wide scope, Speaker knowledge.

At a bookstore

Chris: Well, I've bought everything that I wanted. Are you ready to go?

Mike: Almost. Can you please wait a few minutes? I want to talk to **the owner** of this bookstore. She is my old friend.

(8) [+Definite, -Specific]

Definite, Narrow scope, No speaker knowledge.

At a supermarket

Sales clerk: May I help you, sir?

Customer: Yes! I'm very angry. I bought some meat from this store, but it is completely spoiled! I want to talk to **the owner** of this store. I don't know who he is, but I want to see him right now!

(9) [-Definite, +Specific]

Indefinite, Wide scope, Speaker knowledge.

In an airport, in a crowd of people who are meeting arriving passengers

Man: Excuse me, do you work here?

Security guard: Yes.

Man: In that case, perhaps you could help me. I am trying to find **a red-haired girl**; I think that she flew in on Flight 239.

(10) [-Definite, -Specific]

Indefinite, Narrow scope, No speaker knowledge.

In a children's library

Child: I'd like to get something to read, but I don't know what myself.

Librarian: Well, what are some of your interests? We have books on any subject.

Child: Well, I like all sorts of things that move – cars, trains... I know! I would like to get **a book** about airplanes! I like to read about flying!

In Ionin's view, the semantic classification of languages is part of UG and has the form of two parameters: yes or no articles, and (within the parameter 'yes articles') lexicalization on the basis of specificity or definiteness. Children learning their mother tongue have to fix the parameters on the basis of the input. With her study, Ionin tries to show that adults learning a second language also still have access to the parameters and have to fix them.

2.2 L2 acquisition of the article system

The subjects in Ionin's study, Korean and Russian L2 learners of English, have no article in their mother tongue. In Ionin's view, they have set the yes/no article parameter on 'no'. Learning English, they have to reset the parameter on 'yes', and have to set the definiteness/specificity parameter on 'definiteness'. Ionin (2003) hypothesizes that L2-learners fluctuate between different parameter settings until the input leads them to set the parameter to the appropriate value. This means that she predicts that beginning Korean and Russian learners will sometimes omit the article, and when they use it will lexicalize it on the basis of either definiteness or specificity. The categories [+definite, +specific] and [-definite, -specific] will not pose any problem, because in the first case the speakers will use 'the' and in the second case 'a', whether they base their choice on the definiteness or on the specificity parameter. But for the category [+definite, -specific] they will choose 'the' if they choose on the basis of definiteness and 'a' if they choose on the basis of specificity. For the category [-definite, +specific] they will choose 'a' on the basis of definiteness and 'the' on the basis of specificity. Ionin's fluctuation hypothesis predicts that they will fluctuate between 'the' and 'a' in the latter two cases. Ionin's study shows that Russian and Korean learners overuse the definite article 'the' in indefinite contexts and they overuse the indefinite article 'a' in definite contexts. Ionin noticed that

errors produced by those learners are not random but systematic since they occur only in some contexts:

- The L2 learners use *the* correctly in [+definite, +specific] contexts.
- The L2 learners use *a* (sometimes) wrongly in [+definite, -specific] contexts.
- L2 learners use *the* (sometimes) wrongly in [-definite, +specific] contexts.
- L2 learners use *a* correctly in [-definite, -specific] contexts.

Obviously Russian and Korean L2 learners sometimes use the definite article ‘the’ in [+specific] contexts and use the indefinite article ‘a’ in [-specific] contexts. So they base their choice sometimes on specificity in acquiring the English articles. Snape (2005) shows that Japanese learners of English, who do not have an article in their L1, also fluctuate between a choice based on definiteness and a choice based on specificity, but that Spanish – a definiteness-based language – learners of English are almost target-like in their production of the articles.

In this paper we also investigate the acquisition of articles by learners with a definiteness-based L1 and L2. The goal of our paper is to find an answer to the question how Dutch learners acquire Arabic articles. Do they transfer or can it be shown that they also base their choice on both the definiteness and the specificity setting of the article choice parameter? Before presenting our study, we first discuss the article systems of Dutch and Arabic.

2.3 *The semantic classification of Dutch and Arabic*

2.3.1 *The Dutch determiner system*

Dutch is an article-based language belonging to the Germanic languages. This language uses the definite article *de* for non-neuter singular and for plural nouns, the definite article *het* for neutral singular nouns and the indefinite article *een* with singular nouns. With indefinite plural nouns no article is used. Dutch gender is completely arbitrary since it does not have a direct link with the referent (Van der Velde 2003):

	Definite		Indefinite	
	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular
Neuter nouns	De	Het	∅	Een
Non-neuter nouns	De	De	∅	Een

Table 3: The Dutch determiner system

- (11) a. de tafel
‘the table (non-neuter)’
- b. een tafel
‘a table’
- c. het boek
‘the book (neuter)’
- d. een boek
‘a book’

Hence, Dutch is an article-based language in the same way as English. Articles make the distinction [±definite]:

(12) [+Definite, -Specific]

At a birthday

A: Ik vind dit boek heel interessant.
'I find this book very interesting.'B: Ja, het is een mooi boek. Ik zou graag willen spreken met de vrouw die dit boek
gemaakt heeft.
'Yes, it is a very nice book. I would like to meet the author of this book.'

(13) [-Definite, +Specific]

In a course

A: Meneer Bakker, gaan we met de toets beginnen?
'Mr Bakker, can we start the exam?'B: Nee, ik wacht op een student. Hij is laat.
'No, I am waiting for a student. He is late.'2.3.2 *The Arabic determiner system*

In Standard modern Arabic (SMA henceforth) noun phrases are either definite or indefinite. Noun phrases are definite (a) with the presence of the definite article *él* or (b) with the specification of a noun, i.e., the addition of another substantive to form a possessive construction (*Idafa*) known as the construct state or (c) by the use of a possessive suffix. The definite article *él* precedes the noun and does not share gender and number features with the noun. The use of the definite article involves some phonological rules: when the definite article precedes a noun whose initial vowel is a dental consonant (t, d, l, r, n) or a sibilant (s, ch, j) the *l* of *él* is assimilated to the consonant which follows (Woidich & Heinen-Nasr 2005).

(14) a. fi él mat3ami
in the restaurant
'in the restaurant'

b. kitab-u él walad-i
book-nom def-art boy-gen
'the book of the boy'

c. kitaab-u-h-u
book-nom-his-masc
'his book'

In SMA indefinites bear the morphological marker *n* known as Nunation (*Tanwin*). With the addition of the Case marker the following endings obtain: 'un' (nominative indefinite), 'an' (accusative indefinite), and 'in' (genitive indefinite). However, according to most Arabic linguists, Arabic does not have an 'indefinite article'. The so-called *Tanwin* is not an article, but a morphological marker which is used 'redundantly' in Classical Arabic to show indefiniteness. In general, any Arabic noun in SMA is indefinite as long as it has neither a definite article nor a possessive suffix nor a definite genitive (the construct state). The *Tanwin* in (15a) is redundant and additional only, and this is why one can leave it out with no harm to intelligibility (15b).

(15) a. Jaa-houm dayf-un.
Came-he-to them guest-indefinite
'A guest visited them.'

b. Jaahoum dayf-ø.
Came-he-to them guest-indefinite
'A guest visited them.'

Studies on the semantics of Arabic articles show that some conditions must be fulfilled for using the definite article in Arabic, just as in English (Brustad 2000:21):

- The referent must have been mentioned previously in the discourse.
- It must be a member of a universal set of entities assumed to be known and identified without further specifications (e.g., ‘the sun’).
- The speaker must have good reasons to think that the entity can be known by the listener through knowledge shared by the interlocutors. (Chafe 1976)

According to Ionin’s distinction, SMA is an article-based language and articles lexicalize the distinction [\pm definite], as the examples (16) and (17), based on Ionin’s test sentences, illustrate:

(16) [+Definite, +Specific]

Fii elmadrassa-t-i (in a school)

A: Abii mada taf3él fi hadihi
 Father what do in this
 élmadrassa-t-i?
 the school?

B: Kuntu ouridu an zoura élmoudir-a.
 Was-I want of visit the director.
 Inahu sadik-u-n lii
 Is friend me

A: ‘Daddy, what are we doing in this school?’

B: I Want to visit the director. He is a friend of mine.’

(17) [+Definite, -Specific]

Fi sibaki essayaraati (at a race)

A: Kana essibak-u mouthir-a-n
 Was race impressive
 hél mina élmoumkin an oukabila élfaz
 do of the possible of meet the winner

B: Na3am hada amr-u-n sahl-u-n.
 Yes this thing easy.
 Itba3ni min fadlik.
 Follow of please

A: ‘The race was very impressive. Is it possible to meet the winner?’

B: Yes, this is very easy. Follow me, please.’

(18) [-Definite, +Specific]

Fi mahél (in a shop)

A: Hél tabhathin-a 3én chayi-n ya sayidati
 Do search of thing oh madam

B: Na3ém, inani abhathu 3én
 Yes am I search of
 Ø hakibat-I-n sawda-a taraktouha houn
 Øbag black let-it there

A: ‘Are you searching for something, madam?’

B: Yes, I am searching for a black bag that I left here.’

(19) [-Definite, -Specific]

Fii elmadrassa-t-i ‘in a school’

A: Hél ta3lém mada kanét
 Do know-you what was

hadiyat-u Sarah?
 gift Sarah?
 B: Naam, kaanét Øhakiba
 Yes, was Ø bag
 walakinani lém ara-ha
 and-but-I not see-it

A: 'Do you know what was Sarah's gift?

B: Yes, it was a bag, but I don't see it.'

Just like in Dutch (and English), the choice of the article in Arabic is based on definiteness. We tested Dutch L2 learners of Arabic in order to investigate whether they transfer the article from Dutch, in their use of Arabic, or whether they fluctuate between a choice based either on definiteness or on specificity.

3. The research

We started from the following hypothesis: if the Dutch language (L1) influences Arabic L2 acquisition, then Dutch learners will not make errors in their choice of Arabic articles since they will transfer automatically the fixed parameter from L1 to L2. On the other hand, if L2 Dutch learners of Arabic have access to Universal Grammar (UG) and if they sometimes choose on the basis of specificity, then the produced errors will not be random but expected in some contexts, in particular we expect an overuse of the indefinite article Ø in [+def, -spec] contexts and an overuse of the definite article *él* in [-def, +spec] contexts. But no errors are expected in [+def, +spec] and [-def, -spec] contexts. This systematic error production, based on specificity, could be explained by access to UG after the critical period.

3.1 Method

We tested eleven Dutch learners of Arabic L2. They were aged from 22 to 29 years old. The subjects followed Arabic lessons at the University of Amsterdam. They had had 100 hours of lessons of SMA and 140 of Egyptian. All the learners were native speakers of Dutch.

We had elaborated a written forced-choice elicitation task consisting of twelve contexts. We elaborated three examples of each context in a randomized presentation. Learners had to complete the target sentence by a missing article. They had to choose either the definite article *él* or the indefinite Ø, basing their choice on the context. All the DPs used were in a singular form. The test was not vocalized so as to not facilitate guessing.

3.2 The Results

Errors produced by L2 Dutch learners are not random: they occurred mostly in [+def, -spec] and [-def, +spec] contexts. In contrast, few errors were noticed in [+def, +spec] and [-def, -spec] contexts. Figure 2, shows that Dutch learners of Arabic articles produce errors in some contexts only. Errors are produced in definite non-specific contexts and in indefinite specific contexts:

	+Definite (target ÉL)		-Definite (target Ø)	
+Specific	9,1% (Ø)	90,90% (él)	36,37% (Ø)	63,63% (él)
-Specific	63,63% (Ø)	36,37% (él)	81,82% (Ø)	18,18% (él)

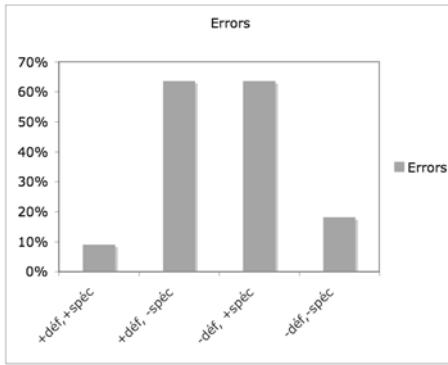


Fig 2: Group results in different contexts

The Dutch learners lexicalize Arabic articles according to specificity instead of definiteness: they overuse \emptyset in [-specific] contexts and overuse *él* in [+specific] contexts.

4. Discussion

Looking at the results in figure 2, we note that Dutch L2 learners of Arabic overuse the indefinite \emptyset in [+definite, -specific] contexts (63,63%) and also overuse the definite article *él* in [-definite, +specific] contexts (63,63%).

Our results might even be stronger than suggested in figure 2. As noted above, Ionin's definition of 'specificity' is not followed unanimously. Consequently, some examples in our sample that are considered -specific under Ionin's view, could fail to be so under Von Heusinger's definition. Sentence (17), for instance, repeated here under (20), is [+Definite, -Specific] on Ionin's view, because the speaker does not know the winner of the race. But since the speaker has seen the race, as witnessed by the first part of the sentence ('the race was very impressive'), and might have seen someone win the race, some anaphoricity to the context makes a +specific interpretation also plausible:

(20) [+Definite, -Specific]

Fi sibaki essayaraati (at a race)

A: Kana essibak-u mouthir-a-n hél
 Was race impressive do
 mina élmoumkin an oukabila él faiz
 of the possible of meet the winner

B: Na3am hada amr-u-n sahl-u-n.
 Yes this thing easy
 Itba3ni min fadlik.
 Follow of please

A: 'The race was very impressive. Is it possible to meet the winner?'

B: 'Yes, this is very easy. Follow me please.'

If this DP 'the winner' had been interpreted as [+Definite, +Specific], use of the definite article *él* was expected. And in fact, eight of the eleven students used the definite article, and only three of them, however, used the indefinite article ' \emptyset '.

The same holds for sentence (19), repeated here as (21) for convenience:

(21) [-Definite, -Specific]

Fii elmadrassa-t-I (in a school)

A: Hél ta3lém mada kanét
 Do know-you what was
 hadiyat-u Sarah?
 gift Sarah?

B: Naam, kaanét Øhakiba
 Yes, was Ø bag
 walakinani lém araha
 but-I not see-it

A: 'Do you know what was Sarah's gift?'

B: 'Yes, it was a bag, but I don't see it.'

The part of the sentence 'but I don't see it' is intended to create a [-specific] context. Yet, since the speaker knows that the gift was a bag, the speaker might have seen the bag, and the subjects might have interpreted the bag as +specific. If this were the case we would expect the learners to have filled in the definite article *él* in this context. Again, eight out of the eleven students did so, and only three out of eleven students used the indefinite article \emptyset , which suggests that the sentence might have been interpreted as [+specific]

The systematic misuse of articles in [=specific] contexts suggests that learners misinterpret the indefinite article ' \emptyset ' as encoding the feature [-specific], and the definite article *él*, as encoding the feature [+specific]. Put differently, Dutch L2 learners interpret the Arabic articles according to the specificity feature, encoding primarily the distinction [\pm specific] and not the distinction [\pm definite]. This choice is in accordance with a possibility offered by UG according to the article choice parameter hypothesis (Ionin 2003).

This result is interesting in that it reflects neither L1 nor L2 settings. Accordingly, a possible interpretation of these results is that this choice is made on the basis of UG. For Ionin (2003), UG offers the article choice parameter that favours either definiteness or specificity. Our learners show to a similar extent as those originally studied by Ionin (2003) a choice favouring the specificity setting of the parameter. On this interpretation of our results, namely as reflecting a UG-based choice, our study can be seen as providing an interesting proof that access to UG is possible in L2 acquisition. This conclusion is in fact potentially stronger here than what had been previously shown in the literature. Ionin, Ko & Wexler (2004a), indeed, had shown recourse to a UG specificity-based choice of determiners in L2 learners that had no article in their L1. Thus, in their study recourse to UG is seen to operate in absence of any L1 setting. In contrast, our results suggest that a specificity-based choice of articles can occur even when the L1 is an article-based language with a lexicalization pattern determined by definiteness. That is, in the case of our Dutch learners, a UG-based choice of the article appears in fact to override an L1-based choice.

We need, however, to be careful in formulating this conclusion.

First, only 11 subjects participated in the experiment, and we only had 12 contexts, exemplifying 3 sets of the four different feature combinations. Although our particular study does not differ greatly in this respect from others in the current literature (see White 2007, with 15 participants) it is clear that a further study with a greater number of speakers and example tokens is desirable.

Second, recent literature on the acquisition of determiners does not unanimously support Ionin's hypothesis. A study on the acquisition of English L2 by Spanish learners, an L1 language based on definiteness (Snape 2005), shows that they do not acquire English articles according to specificity, but use most of the time the correct article. Furthermore, White (2007) shows that the Mandarin speakers acquiring English L2 acquire articles according to definiteness and not specificity. Those learners use the English articles largely in the correct way although their L1 doesn't contain either definite or indefinite articles.

Overall, it may seem unexpected that learners who have already set the parameter on 'definiteness' in their L1, do not transfer this setting to their L2, but have recourse to UG and fluctuate in the choice between the definiteness and the specificity setting. The primarily pragmatic rather than syntactic nature of the relevant data suggests that there could be another interpretation of these results. Although syntactic knowledge might be innate, the interface between modules, such as the syntactic

expression of the pragmatic notions familiarity and specificity has to be acquired by means of the language to be learned (Bos, Hollebrandse & Sleeman 2004). The interface relations are not the same for all languages. For L2 acquisition this means that learners have to discover that the interface rules relating a part of a module to a part of another module can be different in L2 than in L1. For the article system this means that the learners have to learn the relation between pragmatics and the lexical expression of the article, i.e. the relation between familiarity and the definite article, between non familiarity and the indefinite article, and they have to learn that the indefinite and definite articles can refer to something specific or non specific. The interface rules can be the same as in their L1, but anyhow the L2 learners have to learn that the rules are the same as in their L1. Resort to *specificity*-tied-choices of determiners suggests that when L2 learners learn the Pragmatics-Syntax interface rules, the learners discover that a DP can be [+specific] or [-specific] in the L2 that they are learning and they think erroneously that this distinction is lexicalized in the language they are learning. Later they discover that the specificity distinction is not lexicalized in their L2 and that it is in fact the familiarity feature that is responsible for the form of the article.

There are yet other considerations that may play a role in interpreting the results obtained in the present study. Note in particular that if we take our results at face value, they could be taken to suggest that specificity distinctions are somehow more basic than definiteness ones. Such a conclusion also underlies Givon's typological studies of languages and has been at the source of repeated claims about article distribution in Creole languages (Bickerton, 1981) (although see Déprez 2007, for evidence to the contrary). This could explain why early learners of a language are seen to resort to specificity distinctions, independently of their L1 setting. The difficulty with such explanations, however, is that they raise a further problem, namely, what is the basis of the 'more basic' character of specificity? UG default settings? Learnability 'ease'? Many conjectures are possible, as of yet unanswered.

A final factor to be taken into consideration is based on yet another interesting result from Ko, Ionin & Wexler (2004b). A recent study on the first language acquisition of determiners (Wexler, 2003) has shown that another dimension of definiteness, besides familiarity, namely maximality or uniqueness causes trouble for children's acquisition of determiners and is manifested by an overuse of definite articles in indefinite contexts. Ionin, Ko & Wexler (2004a) have further replicated these results on second language learners showing that second language learners too overuse definite articles in indefinite contexts due to trouble with maximality. Although it is clear that in contrast to children, adults cannot be assumed to have failed to acquire particular pragmatic principles, it is once again plausible to conjecture that the acquisition of the lexical-pragmatic interface is here at fault, although differently than suggested above. As is well known, maximality or uniqueness is, with regards to definite articles, a presupposition. Presuppositions have been assumed to be part of the lexical specification of an item. On this view, L2 adults learners could be conjectured to somehow manifest difficulties in acquiring the full lexical specification of definite articles, more specifically their presupposed aspects. As our present study has not taken into account the maximality dimension, it is possible that a portion of the overuse of the definite article in indefinite contexts by Dutch speakers could be due to this dimension.

5. Conclusion

Ionin (2003) and Ionin, Ko & Wexler (2003, 2004) claim that specificity-tied choices show that adult L2 learners still have access to UG. Snape (2005) argues that the interlanguages of both Japanese and Spanish L2 learners of English support the Full Access Full Transfer Hypothesis (Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996), although the Spanish learners' productions were almost target-like. Our study of the acquisition of the use of the article system of Arabic by Dutch learners seems to provide more evidence for a Full Access Hypothesis than Snape's study of the acquisition of the English article by Spanish adults, because our learners showed specificity effects. If interface rules are not part of UG, however, as we suggested above, our data do not support such a hypothesis.

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