Accounting for Variability in the Acquisition of English Articles

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1. Introduction

Studies of the acquisition of L2 English articles generally investigate the pattern of article use by collapsing across speakers of a particular L1 and generalizing the results. This has been the case for Japanese (Chaudron & Parker, 1990, Mizuno, 1999); Mandarin (Goad, White & Steele, 2003); Finnish and Swedish (Jarvis, 2002); Russian and Korean (Ko, Ionin & Wexler, in press); Chinese (Robertson, 2000); Russian and Turkish (Tsimpli, 2003); and, Czech and Slovak (Young, 1995), to name a few of the more recent examples. As well, results are frequently based on highly structured written tasks such as fill-in-the-blanks (Goto Butler, 2002); forced choice elicitation task (Ko, Ionin & Wexler, in press, Snape 2005); multiple choice cloze task (Lu, 2001); and, multiple choice cloze task combined with a multiple choice insertion task (Takahashi,1997). An underlying assumption in much of this work is what we term the "Uniformity Assumption", i.e., learners with the same L1 should display the same acquisition pattern because the L1 exerts a uniform influence on L2 learners. While it is undoubtedly the case that the L1 does tend in many cases to have a predictable effect on L2 patterns, research that collapses across speakers of a particular L1 may hide a significant amount of variability that is worthy of investigation in its own right. Our own informal observations have been that learners with the same L1 often display quite distinct patterns of article usage in L2 English and in this paper we will set about to systematically investigate this intuition.

The paper is structured as follows: in §2, we discuss previous accounts of the particular difficulties that functional categories such as articles have been proposed to derive from; in §3, we discuss relevant properties of Serbian and previous research conducted on the acquisition of the English determiner system by Serbian learners of English. We turn to our own study in §4 and present results and discussion in §5 and §6. Finally, in §7, we will conclude and indicate directions for further research.

2. Previous Research on the Acquisition of Determiners

Researchers have provided a variety of explanations for problems with the acquisition of determiners. We group the results based on what the primary source of difficulty is proposed to be in the research papers. We have divided these results into three primary areas: L1 influence, UG-based explanations, and L2 influence. We recognize that this division, particularly between L1 and UG is somewhat artificial because the L1 will display UG characteristics that may make it difficult to distinguish the source of the difficulty; however, this division allows us to focus on what we see as the primary results and to have a better basis for comparison.

2.1 L1 Influence
2.1.1 Syntactic Deficit

If a language lacks a particular functional category, then one may assume that this could lead to a syntactic deficit in the acquisition of a language that has that category, as proposed by the Failed Functional Features Hypothesis (FFFH) (Hawkins and Chan 1997). Therefore, learners will either completely transfer L1 options or develop a grammar not compatible with either L1 or L2, but which is

still constrained by UG. In the either case, learners may, in fact, only adopt the surface morphophonological forms but have a syntactic representation that is incompatible with the L2. Thus, speakers of languages such as Cantonese (Leung 2005, based on Cheng and Sybesma 1999) or Serbian (e.g. Bošković, 2006; Trenkic, 2003; Zlatić, 1998), which lack the category DP, can be seen as having a syntactic deficit when learning a language such as English. However, Leung (2003, 2005) argues against the FFFH, since the participants in her studies established functional categories, Tense and Agreement, as well as D, although their L1 lacks these categories. In addition, Prévost and White (2000) argue that functional categories are present, but learners may omit them at the surface (the Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis).

2.1.2 Phonological Deficit

Goad, White & Steele (2003) and Goad & White (2004) propose the intriguing hypothesis that difficulties in the acquisition of articles may be the result of problems with prosodic structure. Based on work by Selkirk (1996), they argue that the prosodic structure required for the acquisition of English articles is that of a 'free clitic.' Not all languages have free clitics and, thus, those learners whose first language lacks the structure for free clitics will encounter problems in the acquisition of English articles. This proposal, the Prosodic Transfer Hypothesis, has the advantage that it delinks the acquisition of articles from the requirement that the L1 have the requisite syntactic structure. One imagines that it would be possible to develop the appropriate syntactic representation but fail in the mapping from the syntax to the phonology. The idea that there is a phonological deficit is one that should be explored; however, like other deficit approaches, it says nothing about the variability that one might encounter in looking at L2 learners production of the determiner system.

2.1.3 Grammaticalization of Semantic Features

Other researchers have pointed out that there could be a semantic mismatch between the L1 and the L2 with respect to how notions such as definiteness and/or specificity are encoded in the L1 and the L2. The problem then is for the learners to adjust their L1 semantics (see Huebner, 1983; Snape, 2005; Young, 1995) so as to match the L2. A question around this concerns the role of UG in fixing the mismatch. Clearly, if the L1 has a determiner system in place, there is a strong possibility that there will be some kind of mismatch in how the two determiner systems divide the labour in terms of notions such as definiteness, specificity and partitivity. However, when a language entirely lacks a determiner system, it is not entirely clear what the semantic mismatch would be based on. At least, we would expect it to be at a very abstract level because there could be syntactic or discourse means to indicate these notions that are not related to a determiner system at all. Thus, for an L2 learner whose L1 has no determiners and who is learning an L2 with determiners, it is not necessarily the mismatch that is important. It is the acquisition of an entirely new way of encoding these notions that is relevant for the learner. Namely, definiteness and specificity are not grammaticalized in languages lacking articles, such as Serbian (Trenkic, 2004, following Lyons, 1999). By grammaticalized, we assume, following Trenkic, that "no structural representation in the syntax is formed that would correspond to the grammatical category definiteness" (p.1402). Therefore, we see the problem for the learners not to be a semantic mismatch, but to be grammaticalization of the semantic features associated with the category D.

2.1.4 Topic-Prominent vs. Subject-Prominent Languages

Topic and subject prominence has also been argued to play a role in the acquisition of articles. In more topic-prominent languages (e.g. Mandarin, Russian, Serbian), the topic-comment or theme-rheme organization of a sentence is predominant over the subject-object organization of a sentence. In other words, once a noun is introduced into the discourse in the post-verbal, comment/rheme position, and its existence is established, it will move to the pre-verbal, topic/theme position. Thus, topic position is already semantically marked as definite and there is no need for the grammaticalized feature [definite] to be encoded by an article. Jung (2004) and Jarvis (2002) have both argued that

topic prominence or subject prominence are transferred by L2 learners. Jarvis (2002) compared the acquisition of articles by Finnish and Swedish speakers and concluded that Finnish speakers omit more articles in topic position because Finnish is a topic-prominent language, while Swedish learners, who speak a subject-prominent language, do not display such behaviour. This is at odds with the account of Chaudron and Parker (1990) who concluded, based on their Japanese subjects, that all learners go through a stage of topic prominence. As most topic-prominent languages do not have articles, it is predicted that these learners will encounter some difficulty in the acquisition of a language that is subject prominent and has articles.

2.2 UG-Based Explanations

Several researchers have pointed out that even if the L1 lacks articles, learners will still have access to UG semantic features, such as definiteness, specificity and partitivity (e.g. Ko, Ionin & Wexler, in press; Leung, 2005) and thus must rely on UG in redeploying these features. For example, Tsimpli (2003) argues that features associated with definite articles in Greek are uninterpretable (in the sense of Minimalist Syntax, Chomsky, 1995) and that such features are inaccessible to adult L2 learners. This leads to the prediction that learners must circumvent this difficulty in order to acquire definite articles. Tsimpli posits that learners of Greek who speak languages without a D "assign interpretable features to the definite determiner…in order to 'acquire' [it] in a UG-based fashion". (p. 338). Other researchers in the framework of Minimalist Syntax claim that it is interpretable features that L2 learners have problems with, because they are features at the interfaces (Sorace, 2005), while uninterpretable features, which are purely syntactic in nature, are possible to acquire. The debate, although interesting, is inconclusive. Clearly, more research needs to be done to determine the significance of this debate to L2 acquisition studies.

2.3. L2 Influence

Papp (2000) shows that grammatical aspects of the L2 that are non-robust, i.e., complex, non salient, and ambiguous, display significant variability. Articles in English meet the criteria for non-robustness because their conditions of use are rather complex and they are not salient in the spoken language. Faced with this situation, L2 learners might never acquire this functional category, or might exhibit significant variability in its use. Goto Butler (2002) and Master (2002), in a similar vein, note that English articles, although frequent, are complex, in the sense that they do not consist of a 'one-to-one form-meaning relationship.' Master (2002) also brings perception to bear on the issue, pointing out that articles are difficult to perceive because they are unstressed. As well, he claims that articles may represent an 'unnecessary' burden on processing, because of their high frequency.

3. Serbian Language
3.1. Relevant Properties
3.1.1. Definiteness in Serbian

Serbian has no articles and it has been argued that this reflects the fact that there is no DP (e.g. Bošković, 2006; Trenkic, 2003; Zlatić, 1998). While we remain agnostic on the universality of DP, we do note that Serbian can be characterized as having no (or only marginal) grammaticalized definiteness (Lyons, 1999). An example where the notion of definiteness may be relevant is in topic position, roughly sentence initial NPs. Serbian has been characterized as a topic-prominent language (e.g. Comrie & Corbett, 2002; Li & Thomson, 1976) and these topics are always definite.

Another area of the grammar relevant to the semantics of articles is predicate adjectives. In Serbian, adjectives can, in some circumstances, be marked either indefinite or definite. However, in predicate position, they are obligatorily indefinite, despite the fact that they are modifying a definite noun, as shown in (1) (Zlatić, 1997: 39).

(1) Grad je   jako lep/*lepi.
    town AUX very beautiful-INDEF/*DEF
     'The town is very beautiful.'

3.1.2. Prosodic Structure

According to Selkirk (1996), Serbian prepositional phrases are free clitics, the same structure as English articles, meaning that they are adjoined at the level of the phonological phrase. The Prosodic Transfer Hypothesis (Goad, White & Steele, 2003; Goad & White, 2004) predicts that Serbian learners of English L2 should have no difficulty in acquiring English articles.

3.2 Previous Research on Serbian L1 Speakers

Trenkic (2002; in press) traces difficulties in the acquisition of English articles to Serbian L1. She notes that, as Serbian has no articles, Serbian learners tend to omit articles in L2 English. The acquisition problem is further exacerbated by the similarities in the order of Serbian and English demonstrative/number–noun combinations. Because demonstratives and numbers are adjectives in Serbian, Trenkic claims Serbian learners misanalyze English articles as adjectives. This misanalysis is reinforced by the fact that adjectives in Serbian occupy the same prenominal position that articles occupy in English. As evidence for this analysis, Trenkic notes that articles are omitted more when an adjective is present in the produced NP. She proposes that Serbian acquirers of English do not develop the category DP but instead treat the articles of English as adjectives. One piece of evidence that she adduces in favour of this proposal is that learners do not use articles and adjectives together, i.e., they are in complementary distribution. We see this explanation as problematic as we can find no reason why learners should not be able to produce two adjectives together. It is not the case that in Serbian there is a restriction to a single adjective in the modifier position of the noun phrase. We admit that there is a possibility that adult L2 learners may not be able to acquire new functional categories but we do not see this as evidence in favour of such a hypothesis.

3.3 What needs to be learned?

From the preceding, we can see what the task of Serbian learners of English L2 is. First, since Serbian has no DP, they must develop the syntactic category DP. Second, since the semantic features associated with articles are not grammaticalized in Serbian, learners must discover the appropriate deployment of these features in L2 English, i.e., they must isolate the features and grammaticalize them in the form of articles. Third, since Serbian is largely a topic-prominent language, where pre-verbal NPs are definite and post-verbal NPs are either definite or indefinite, Serbian learners of English must unlearn topic prominence, and acquire subject-prominence. In other words, they have to learn that any NP can be definite or indefinite, regardless of its position in a sentence. Finally, they have to accomplish all these tasks navigating the non-robust and sometimes ambiguous English article system. The only feature of Serbian that might facilitate the acquisition of English articles is the prosodic structure. Of course, we assume that the learner will have some guidance in the form of UG; however, what form this guidance takes is open to research.

3.4 Our Hypothesis

Our informal observations indicate that, for Serbian learners of English L2, there is substantial variability in the acquisition patterns and in the final state of the L2 grammar. We hypothesize that the variability has two essential sources. First, the learner may be guided by UG but not select the appropriate L2 option. Secondly, the learner can utilize what is available in the L1, though in the case of Serbian L1, the availability of information relevant to articles is scant. What is meant here is that because the L1 does not have a category equivalent to the English DP, there cannot be direct L1 transfer of the DP category. Because of this, we do not believe that the influence of the L1 will be

uniform across learners, i.e., the learners may use a variety of strategies in order to acquire the article system.

4. The Study

4.1. Participants

To date, we have interviewed 5 participants in our study. All participants are high intermediate/advanced speakers of English. Four of the participants have been residing in Canada in an English-speaking environment for over 5 years, while one of them has never lived in an English-speaking country. All are in their forties and fifties but began learning English in school in Serbia. Some had additional ESL training on arrival in Canada. Information about the participants is given in Table1.

Table 1. The participants

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Age	43	46	53	43	53
Proficiency[1]	high intermediate	advanced	advanced	advanced	advanced
LOR	5	10	0	14	4
AOR	38	36	--	29	49
Formal English Study	8 yrs		12 yrs	8 yrs	10 years
ESL in Canada	none	7 months	none	6 months	4 months

4.2 Task

All participants were given a series of pictures taken from an ESL textbook (Bates, 1997). Each set of pictures made a coherent story. There were twelve possible stories and participants were asked to choose four of the stories and retell them. The story retellings were taped for later analysis. The retellings lasted from 4 to 10 minutes.

4.3 Coding

The stories were transcribed and coded. Each NP was coded for omission, substitution and overuse of the definite and indefinite articles. More specific information about article usage included cases where we found substitution of articles by another determiner, such as *some/one/this/that,* and the distribution of articles on the discourse level, such as in topic position and longer discourse chains. Based on the restrictions found in predicate adjectives in Serbian (noted in §3.1.1), we also looked at NPs after the copula.

5. Results

Overall, the participants show marked differences in patterns of article suppliance, confirming our hypothesis. In the following we will go over the results for the 5 participants. Before moving on to the specific results, we note that there were some general tendencies. First, it appears that the definite article is supplied more regularly than the indefinite article. No participant showed better results for the indefinite article over the definite article (similar results are reported in Trenkic (in press) for Serbian learners, Snape (2005) for Japanese learners and Thomas 1989 for learners of various L1s). We also found that some learners overused determiners such as *some* or *one* in place of the indefinite article.

5.1. Participant 1

The most striking aspect of Participant 1's article use is the omission of definite articles in topic position. Examples of this can be seen in (2).

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[1] Proficiency was measured using a cloze test (Chen, 1996; Slabakova, 1997).

(2) a. *Neighbor* who spotted the kid climbing on a window…
    b. *Dog* can answer the phone.
    c. *Girl* leaves the guy.

However, he does supply articles in non-topic position. The percentages of article omission in topic and non-topic position are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Participant 1 - Omission and suppliance of the definite article.

	Topic Position		Non-Topic Position	
	suppliance	omission	suppliance	omission
the	10% (7/72)	90% (65/72)	61.8% (50/81)	38.2% (31/81)

$chi^2 = 44.1$, $p<.001$

Below we compare P1 to the other 4 participants, none of whom show anything resembling this pattern.

Chart 1. Comparison of suppliance of definite articles in topic position
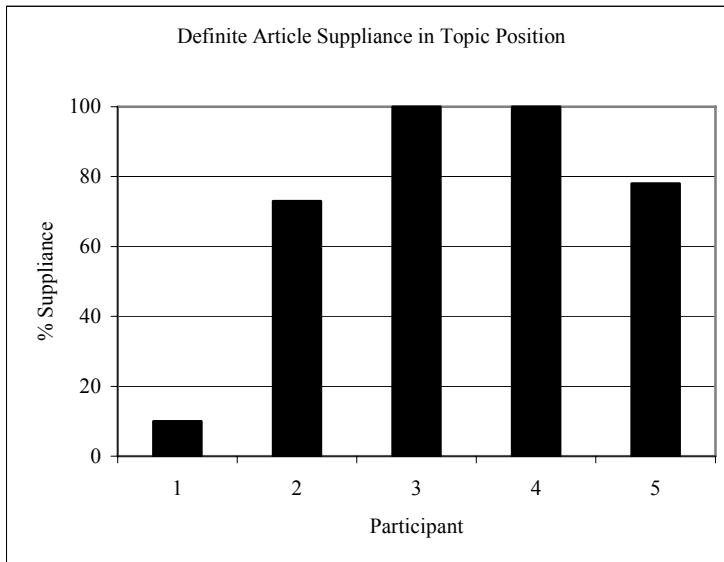
We also find several examples of the substitution of *some* and *one* for the indefinite article.

(3) a. OK next story showing a lady in *some* motorized cart and some people around in front of *some* store.
    b. Next one is showing that *one* guy is hanging on…

Overall, P1 only supplies appropriate indefinite articles in 25% of the contexts for indefinites. These are typical substitutions found in P1's data.

5.2. Participant 2

Participant 2 generally follows the NS pattern, but drops articles in predictable environments. First, she omits the definite article in DP sequences. While she supplies the appropriate article on first, second or third mention, she omits the definite article in subsequent mentions, as seen in (4).

(4) …but in the middle of the wallet there is *a lottery ticket*...
    …he took *the lottery ticket*...
    …He took the money and *the lottery ticket*...
    …he checked *the lottery ticket* ...
    …to give back *lottery ticket*...
    …the original owner of *lottery ticket*
    …he took money and *lottery ticket*...

She also omits articles with co-referring NPs or in an 'echo' context (see also Robertson 2000, who reports similar results). In (5), we see two NPs that refer to the same person in a conjoined structure. Here the second NP has no article.

(5) There is *a mechanic or neighbor*...

Similarly, in an 'echo' context, the second mention of an NP does not have an article. This happens across speakers as in (6), as well as within a narrative, as in (7).

(6) a. E: Looks like *a soldier*, right?
        P2: It's *navy soldier, marine*…
    b. E: How do you call this bike?
        P2 : I don't know.
        E: I don't know either. Double?
        P2: Could be, *double bike*.

(7)   It also has *a star, Communist star.*

A further pattern is indefinite article-drop with predicate nominals, as shown in (8). We assume that the L1 Serbian is having an effect here as discussed in §3.1.1.

(8) a. …he's *honest man*...
     b. It is *church*…

5.3 Participant 3

Participant 3 matches native speaker article use 93% of the time (54/58). Her only errors were in contexts where most of the time she supplied the appropriate article. One case was substitution of *a* for *the*, one is omission of *a* in a predicate nominal context, one is oversuppliance of *the* and the other was omission of *a* in an 'echo' context. However, there is no consistent article misuse even though all of the errors found in her data were found with the other participants as well.
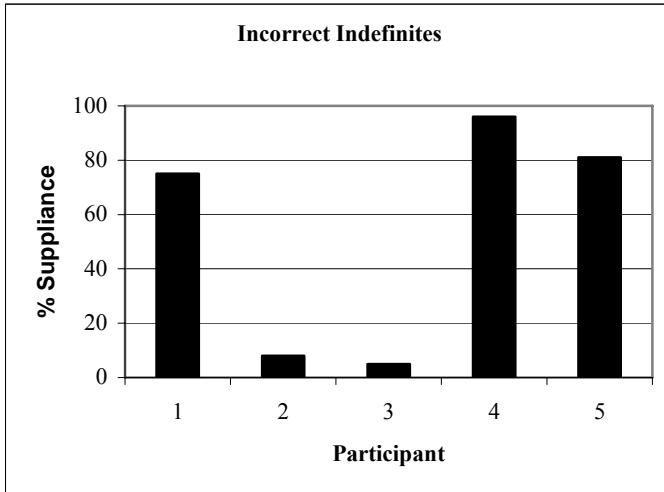
5.4 Participant 4

Participant 4 shows almost complete omission of the indefinite article as well as the substitution of the definite article or other determiners, such as *some* and *one* for the indefinite article.

(9) a. *Middle age* man living in Edmonton…
    b. …he do that with *tractor*…

(10) a. It was *one* village, small village…
     b. The guy is in love with one young girl.

In chart 2, we see that three participants have difficulty with indefinites, while two make no errors at all.

Chart 2. Incorrect Suppliance of Indefinite Articles

P4 uses the definite article correctly in 75% of the contexts in which it is required.

5.5 Participant 5

Participant 5 shows no discernible pattern, freely supplying and omitting articles in a seemingly random manner, as shown in (11) and (12).

(11) a. He get out *the lobster* from *package* and *lobster* is alive.
b. …he decided to go once again to *same address* and to find *the person* who is *owner* of *the wallet*…
c. …he told them *the story* about *lobster* and *the girl* who work in *airline company*…

(12) a. This is *a story* about Canadian guy….
b. Is *story* about…
c. This is *story* about honest ticket finder…

In (11a) we see in the same sentence one correct use of the definite article and two omissions. In (11b), we see one omission and two correct uses. In (11c), we see two omissions and two correct uses. In (12) we see that the indefinite article is supplied as in (12a), but not in (12b) or (12c), even though the contexts are almost identical. We could not find a pattern for omission; however, the overall suppliance of the indefinite article was very low, at around 18% (7/38). The definite article was supplied correctly 72% of the time (70/97).

6. Discussion

The data support our hypothesis that we will find variability in the use of articles among Serbian learners of English L2. We believe that the learners are guided by UG and the L1 but consistent with our hypothesis the L1 provides a minimal amount of information to the learner about the properties of the English article system. We will discuss the general findings in the following paragraphs.

Overall the 5 participants display variable patterns of English article use. Some of the patterns appear be the result of the transfer of properties of Serbian. For instance, P1 does not supply definite articles in topic position, consistent with the hypothesis that topics are already marked definite in Serbian, thus supplying a definite article in such a position would lead to a feature conflict. On the other hand, P1 shows differentiation between zero and the definite article in non-topic position. P1 supplies definite articles in a target-like manner 62% of the time in non-topic position. However, no other participant displays this pattern. This could be because this participant is at the earlier stage of acquisition and all other participants have passed that stage or it may reflect a UG option that the

learner has selected. With respect to the latter, Chaudron and Parker (1990) have argued that all learners go through a stage in which NPs in topic position are bare NPs.

We find another unique pattern with P2, where there is article drop in NP sequences. Such article use is clearly not the result of the influence of Serbian L1 nor is it found in the English L2. We speculate that this is a UG option selected by the learner. Such a pattern of article use is found in Hausa (Lyons 1999 citing Jagger 1985), lending some credence to this speculation. Interestingly, a similar pattern of article drop is also reported by Robertson (2000), showing that it is not just an idiosyncratic behaviour of this learner.

In the case of P4, we find yet another pattern, this one showing an almost complete disregard for the indefinite article (96% of the time it is missing). While other participants also have low rates of definite article suppliance, none approaches the almost categorical behaviour of P4. We suggest that this is another UG option, as there are many languages with definite articles and no indefinite articles, such as Arabic or even in some related Slavic languages, such as Bulgarian and Macedonian.

Recall that in our analysis of P5's results we found what appeared to us to be quasi-random use of articles, sometimes supplying an article and sometimes not supplying an article in what appears to be the same context. Borer and Rohrbacher (2002) discuss the L1 acquisition of functional categories stating that the child may acquire a particular category but be unsure about what material needs to be supplied, resulting in a seemingly random pattern. We suggest that this may be the case with P5 to a greater extent than the other 4 subjects who show definite patterns. Rizzi (1993/94) also discusses optional functional categories in L1 claiming that children need to learn when to project them. This could also be an explanation for P5's pattern. Again, we speculate that we are observing the influence of UG. The learner has acquired the category, but is unsure of the semantics of the English article system and often gets it wrong.

The two participants who were closest to native use of the article display rather interesting errors that we believe reflect what Sorace (2005) terms 'residual optionality.' Sorace observes that very advanced learners may continue to make errors with interpretable features or what she terms 'soft constraints' i.e., features at the interfaces. Since features related to articles are at the interface of syntax, semantics and discourse, L2 learners of English are likely to exhibit residual optionality with articles. In other words, although they may get the syntax of articles right and develop and project the DP when it is appropriate, when it comes to semantics, L2 learners will display a certain amount of variable article use. Both P2 and P3 display examples of article drop in predicate position. This may reflect L1 semantics, as Serbian predicate nominals are obligatorily marked indefinite. Thus, supplying any article in this position would result in a feature conflict similar to the type discussed for P1 in topic position.

As seen in Chart 2, three of the five participants appear to have made little progress in the acquisition of indefinite articles, despite the fact that all five learners were at a relatively advanced level. As we can see, the acquisition of the indefinite article lags behind the definite article, a finding also reported in Thomas (1989) and Master (1987). One possible reason for this is that different functional categories need to be acquired for the two articles: CardP for *a* and DP[2] for *the* (Lyons 1999). Between these two, DP is easier to acquire because it directly indicates definiteness, while CardP only indirectly indicates indefiniteness. Thus, there is no overt marker of indefiniteness in the grammar. Even if we reject this characterization of NP organization, we note that *the* can be both [specific] and [definite] and occurs with both singular and plural nouns. On the other hand, the indefinite article signifies singularity and is also implicated in the mass noun vs. count noun distinction. Furthermore, in plural contexts, a zero article or the determiner *some* can be used. Thus, learning the functions of the indefinite article seems to be more complex than the definite article.

We have not discussed the role that prosodic transfer may be playing in the acquisition of the article system. The learners in our study appear to have had little problem in acquiring a DP and this could be related to the presence of free clitics in both Serbian and English. However, prosodic transfer cannot explain the different patterns found among the learners nor can it explain the asymmetry between the definite and indefinite article. Having free clitics may provide the conditions under which target-like use is developed.

We believe that our data are not consistent with the Failed Functional Features Hypothesis. Learners who do not have a functional category projected in the L1 appear to have little difficulty in

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[2] CardP = Cardinality Phrase, DP = Definiteness Phrase (these terms are due to Lyons 1999)

projecting the category. Of course, this does not mean that it is fully acquired or that there are no barriers to the acquisition of the category, but there is no syntactic deficit.

7. Conclusion

Clearly our data indicate that there is variability in the acquisition of L2 English articles by L1 Serbian speakers. We have argued that this variability is constrained by UG and the L1. For example, P1 shows effects of L1 constraints in topic position. On the other hand, P2 and P4 display UG options not instantiated in either the L1 or the L2, but which, nevertheless, are options exercised in other languages. We thus conclude that our data are compatible with a Full Transfer/ Full Access model (Schwartz & Sprouse 1996).

The inter-learner variability in the L2 acquisition of functional categories shows the importance of studying individual learners rather than collapsing across learners who happen to speak the same L1. Although we do not deny that there is influence from the L1, it does not appear that this influence is uniform across learners, especially in the case of a category not present in the L1. Similarly, it does not appear that all learners select the same UG options. This seems to mark a clear difference between L1 and L2 acquisition as it is not the case that L1 learners are free to choose from a variety of UG options. The reasons why L2 learners are not inexorably led to the appropriate L2 grammar could be diverse. However, one speculation is that settings of UG options operate stochastically in the sense of Yang (2002) and that L2 learners have impaired access to the input, which may be shaped by L1 phonological filters.

It is our intention to expand this research in several ways. First, we will interview more participants, as expanding the number of participants discussed in this paper may form the basis for more reliable conclusions. Secondly, we hope to re-interview the original subjects in our study after 18 months in order to determine whether they are at the stable end-state. Thirdly, we would also like to look at beginning learners in order to see what type of variability surfaces in the beginning stages of L2 acquisition.

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