

# THE USE OF THE ENGLISH ARTICLE SYSTEM BY POLISH AND TURKISH STUDENTS OF ENGLISH PHILOLOGY

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**04-06.12.2014 CLEaR Conference**

**Trencianske Teplice**

# Introduction

- The English article system is either non-existent or realised differently in two analysed linguistic registers.
- Such features cause a tremendous difficulty for both groups of subjects to sufficiently cope with the use of the English article system on a daily basis.
- It is expected that both analysed groups of subjects will find it problematic to complete the gapped passages with appropriate article.
- In case of Polish as L1 it realises and reacts to the deficits of article via the widespread use of demonstrative pronouns, word order, perfective and imperfective forms.
- In case of Turkish as L1 the deficit of articles is supplemented by highly frequent suffixation process.

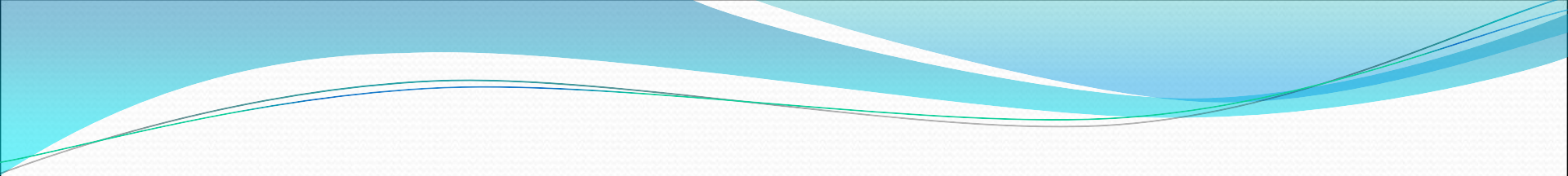
# The English article system and L2 learners

## – a theoretical background

- The English article system, which comprises the indefinite article *a / an*, the definite article *the* and the zero article, is one of the most difficult structural elements for L2 learners to be acquired, causing even the most advanced non-native speakers of English to make errors.
- These errors occur even when other elements of the language seem to have been mastered.
- According to Master (2002), the difficulty results from three principal facts about the article system:
- (a) articles constitute the most frequently occurring function words in English (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999), making continuous rule application difficult over an extended stretch of discourse;
- (b) function words are normally unstressed and consequently are very difficult, if not impossible, for a non-native speaker of English to notice, thus affecting the availability of input in the spoken mode;
- (c) the article system stacks multiple functions onto a single morpheme, or constitutes a considerable burden for the learner, who generally looks for a one-form-one-function correspondence while learning the language until the advanced stages of acquisition.

# Research on articles in the historical perspective

- An extensive research on L2 acquisition and subsequent use of articles, although often fragmentary, concentrating on separate features of the English article system (Chaudron & Parker, 1990; Goto Butler, 2002; Jarvis, 2002; Kharma, 1981; Liu & Gleason, 2002, Mizuno, 1999; Yamada & Matsuura, 1982; Yoon, 1993). Some studies that have brought important findings (Hakuta, 1976; Huebner, 1979, 1983; Tarone, 1985), were not specifically on article acquisition, but on the acquisition of grammatical morphemes in general.
- Only Master (1987), Parrish (1987), Tarone & Parrish (1988), and Thomas (1989) studied the acquisition of articles exclusively. In terms of the terminology specific to article acquisition research, the early studies focused mostly at the presence or absence of articles in obligatory contexts.

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- Huebner (1983) opened a new avenue of research on L2 article acquisition by employing Bickerton's (1981) noun classification system.
  - Huebner did not only look at the presence or absence of articles in obligatory contexts, but he also analysed various types of noun phrases and the articles used with each semantic type, as well as the development of foreign language learners' grasp of the article system.

- Master (1987) was the first to point out that articles seem to be acquired and subsequently used differently, depending on whether or not they occur in the learner's L1.
- The definite article *the* emerges early and *a* later in L2 acquisition (Huebner, 1983; Master, 1997; Parrish, 1987; Thomas, 1989). *The* may be overgeneralized.
- Both Huebner and Master call this phenomenon '*the-flooding*', although neither of them defines the notion, except generally as a dramatic rise in usage.
- The researchers find *the* dominating in [+ SR, + HK], [- SR, + HK] and [+ SR, -HK], ( e.g. referential indefinites and definites as well as generics) contexts.
- Thomas (1989), on the other hand, was of the opinion that the *zero* article overgeneralized across proficiency levels.

- For the learners whose L1s lack articles [-ART], e.g. Polish, researchers (Master, 1997; Parrish, 1987) reported that *zero* dominates in all environments for articles in the early stages of L2 acquisition.

# Classification of noun phrases according to Huebner

- In Huebner's model, the use of English articles is determined by the semantic function of the noun phrase in discourse.
- In accordance with this model, English noun phrases are classified by two discourse features of referentiality – namely, whether a noun is a specific referent [+/- SR], and whether it is assumed as known to the hearer [+/- HR].



- Nouns classified as **Type 1**, [-SR, +HK] are **generics**, and are marked with *a*, *the* and *zero*.
- Nouns classified as **Type 2**, [+SR, +HK] are **referential definites** and are marked with *the*.
- **Type 3**, [+SR, -HK], **referential indefinites**, contains first mention nouns, whose referent is identifiable to the speaker but not to the listener, e.g. nouns that the speaker is entering into the discourse for the first time. These are marked with *a* or *zero*.
- **Type 4** nouns, classified as [-SR, -HK] are **nonreferentials**. This type contains nouns that are nonspecific for both the speaker and the hearer; *a* and *zero* are the relevant articles.
- Except for these four types, **idiomatic expressions and conventional uses** were classified as **Type 5**, based on Goto Butler (2002) and Thomas (1989).

# Research purpose

- To test the use of the English article system by Polish and Turkish philology students, to indicate the differences in article use as well as to analyse the results of empirical research in the tabular form.
- The Turkish students were requested to complete the research task during the researcher's stay at the University of Adana within Erasmus teaching programme in March this year.

# Research method and study participants

- 60 students participated in the research.
- There were 30 Polish and 30 Turkish philology students, who participated in the study.
- All subjects had long-term experience in English (being pre-advanced and advanced students). They were 15 first year and 15 third year Polish students. They were 15 Turkish students in their final year of MA programme and 15 Turkish students in their first year of PhD programme.
- The method was to analyse their performance in gap-completion task and subsequently draw relevant conclusions from the conducted studies.

# Data analysis

- In order to understand the results, the author of the article carried out the analysis of article use: *a/an*, *the* and *zero* article in obligatory contexts.
- In order to understand how the subjects use English articles, the author of the carried out percentage calculations of the correct answers for each semantic article type and for each level the subjects represented.
- In order to indicate the developmental sequences for each semantic article type, the percentage results of the correct answers were demonstrated in the table.

# Test instrument

- The test instrument consisted of fifty sentences (see appendix) adapted from Butler (2002), Liu & Gleason (2002) and Master (1994).
- There were a total of 87 deleted obligatory uses of *a/an, the* or *zero* in 5 semantic types described above.
- The subjects were given the written instruction to correctly complete the test. They had to read the sentences carefully and complete them with an appropriate article.

# Results

- The article use by Polish and Turkish students is demonstrated in the tables below.
- It contains the results categorised in accordance with types of obligatorily used contexts.
- 
- **Tabular illustration of results –the percent of appropriately used article type**
- **– Table 1**

Philology students	<b>Type 1: Generics</b> [-SR,+HK ] (a, the,0), e.g. <b>0 Fruit flourishes</b> <b>in the valley.</b>	<b>Type 2: Referential</b> <b>definite</b> [+SR, +HK ] (the), e.g. <b>Pass me the pen.</b>	<b>Type 3: Referential</b> <b>indefinites</b> [+SR, -HK] (a, 0), e.g. <b>Chris approached</b> <b>me carrying a dog.</b>	<b>Type 4: Nonreferentials</b> [ -SR, -HK ] (a, 0), e.g. <b>Alice is a dancer.</b>	<b>Type 5: Idioms</b> (a, the,0), e.g. <b>All of a sudden, he</b> <b>belched.</b>
<b>Polish</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>68%</b>
<b>Turkish</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>60%</b>

# Discussion

- The most difficult article type to be used by both groups of subjects was **Type 5 (idiomatic expressions and conventional uses)** – correspondingly **68%** of appropriate uses demonstrated by Polish students and **60%** by their Turkish peers.
- The difficulty related to the use of this article type is due to the fact that the subjects lacked sufficient exposure to this type of article and many expressions and conventional uses are not sufficiently taught during their English courses.



- **Type 1 (generics)** was the article type which caused difficulties for both groups of subjects as well. The similar percentage results (Polish students – 72%, Turkish students – 67%) related to appropriateness of the use of this type of article indicate similar problems with the comprehension of this type of article. The generic meaning of this type of article is really challenging and intricate, which needs further exposure of the students to it.

- **Type 2 (referential definites)** was appropriately used by the two groups of students as well. The slight difference in their performance with respect to this article type reflect good control over the use of referential definite (correspondingly **85%** by Polish students and **91%** of Turkish students).

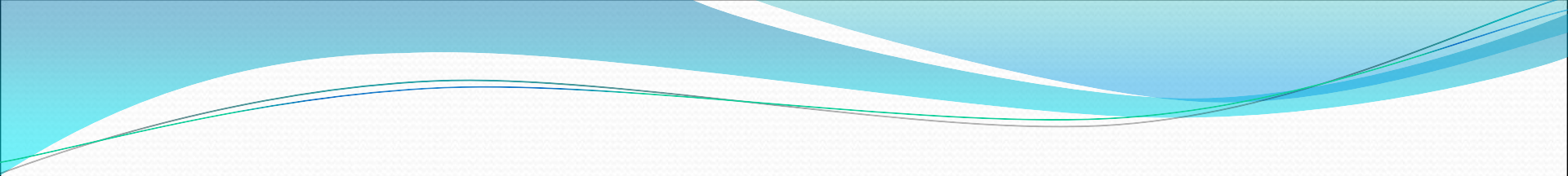
- **Type 4 (nonreferentials)** was used appropriately by most of the subjects participating in our research. Once more the results proved to be highly satisfactory, which points to a stable control of the use of this type of article (**87%** of appropriate uses demonstrated by Polish subjects and **95%** of such uses were observed among Turkish students).

- **Type 3 (referential indefinites)** turned out to be the easiest for both analysed groups of subjects. The percentage results prove best the accurate and stable use of this type of article (correspondingly **92%** by Polish students and **90%** by Turkish students).

# Conclusions and implications for further research

- Both groups of students, Polish and Turkish, demonstrated a highly impressive performance in relation to the use of the afore-mentioned types of articles.
- Both language registers are not equipped with the use of the article system on a daily basis, hence the initial assumptions and expectations of the researcher were profoundly different from the final obtained outcomes.

- Polish needs to compensate for lack of articles replacing their deficit by the use of Polish demonstrative pronouns, word order, perfective and imperfective forms.
- Turkish realises this deficit by the morphological process of suffixation.
- What is apparent is that both groups find it very challenging to overcome the difficulties with initial comprehension when, why and where to use articles properly, as many grammar sources and many methods of teaching point to incomplete use of articles, e.g. forgetting very frequently about explaining the sense of Type 1 of the English article system, namely their generic use.

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- As far as implications for further research are concerned, it would be preferable to increase a number of studied subjects, prepare a test instrument comprising both spoken and written form.
  - These forms would apparently expand the article use by the investigated study participants.
  - Incorporating corpora studies to cover the use of the English article system would be advisable to expand the study instruments and obtain more reliable and logical research results.

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# Appendix

- Typology of article use (Version with inserted articles)
  - - Type 1 [-SR, +HK]
    - Generic nouns (*a, the, o*)
      -
- o Language is **a** great invention of o humankind.  
[Type 1] [Type 4] [Type 1]
- **A/the** Favourite food of **the** jaguar is **the/o** wild pig.  
[excluded] [Type 1] [Type 1]
- I like to read **o** books about o philosophy.  
[Type 3] [Type 1]
- **A/The** cat likes **o** mice.  
[Type 1] [Type 4]
- o Love and o hate are **o** two extremes.  
[Type 1] [Type 1] [Type 4]

- Your claim flies in **the** face of [Type 5]
- all **the/o** evidence. [Type 1]
- **A/The** Tiger is a fierce animal.
- [Type 1] [Type 4]
- 
- **A/the** Paper clip comes in handy.
- [Type 1]
- 
- **The** telephone is a very useful invention.
- [Type 1] [Type 4]
- 
- We don't know who invented **the** wheel.
- [Type 1]
- He used to be a lawyer. [Type 1]

- Type 2 [+SR, +HK]
- Referential definites (*the*)
  - Previous mention
  - Specified by entailment
  - Specified by definition

- John bought **a** car on Tuesday. On Wednesday, he crashed **the** car.

- [Type 3]    [Type 2]

- What is **the** sex of your baby? It's **a** boy!

- [Type 2]                            [Type 4]

- There are **n**ine planets travelling around **the** sun.

- [Type 4]    [Type 2]

- In **the** 1960s, there were lots of protests against **the** Vietnam War.            [Type 5]    [Type 2]

- We rented **a** boat last summer at **a/the** lake. Unfortunately, **the** boat hit another boat and sank.
- [Type 3]                  [excluded]                  [Type 2]
- 
- I saw **a** strange man standing at **the** gate.
- [Type 3]                                                  [Type 2]
- 
- **The** French are against **the** war in Iraq.
- [Type 2]                                                  [Type 2]
- 
- Last month we went to **a** wedding.
- **The** **Bride** was beautiful.
- [Type 3]                  [Type 2]
- 
- **The** horse I bet on is still in **o** front.
- [Type 2]                  [Type 5]



- Jane bought **a** ring and **a** necklace for her mother's birthday. Her mother loved **the** ring, but
- [Type 3] [Type 3] [Type 2]
- hated **the** necklace. [Type 2]
- 
- Sally Ride was **the** first American woman in **o** space. [Type 2]  
[Type 5]
- 
- **The** shade on this lamp is really ugly. [Type 2]
- 
- I saw **a** man in **a/the** car across **the** street.
- [Type 3] [excluded] [Type 2]

- I am young; I may be beautiful, handsome, pretty and attractive to the opposite sex. [Type 2]
- 
- Viewing the facts from your teens or twenties, the following suggestions may be made.
- [Type 2] [Type 2]
- 
- This will give them interest and a sense of pride whilst financially they will contribute more
- [Type 5]
- funds to the government to help the non-working population.
- [Type 2] [Type 2]

- Type 3 [+SR, -HK]
- Referential indefinites (a, o)
  - First-mention nouns

- John bought a car on Tuesday. On Wednesday, he crashed **the** car.

- [Type 3]                      [Type 2]

- We rented a boat last summer at **a/the** lake. Unfortunately, **the** boat hit another boat and sank.

- [Type 3] [excluded]                                              [Type 2]

- I saw a strange man standing at **the** gate.

- [Type 3]                                              [Type 2]

- I keep sending **o** messages to him.                      [Type 3]

- I like to read o books about **o** philosophy.

- [Type 3]                      [Type 1]

- My computer has **a** new sound card. [Type 3]
- Last month we went to **a** wedding.
- **The** Bride was beautiful.
- [Type 3] [Type 2]
- 
- I look after **a** little girl and **a** little boy on Saturdays.
- [Type 3] [Type 3]
- 
- Jane bought **a** ring and **a** necklace for her mother's birthday. Her mother loved **the** ring, but
- [Type 3] [Type 3]
- [Type 2] hated **the** necklace. [Type 2]

• There is **an** orange in that bowl. [Type 3]

•

• I ordered **a** bottle of wine for us. [Type 3]

•

• I`m in **the** mood to eat a hamburger.

• [Type 5] [Type 3]

•

• I saw a man in **a/the** car across **the** street.

• [Type 3] [excluded] [Type 2]

- Type 4 [-SR, -HK] - *a*, *o*
- Nonreferential nouns
- Attributive indefinites
- Nonspecific indefinites

- 
- What is **the** sex of your baby? It's a boy!  
[Type 2] [Type 4]
- 
- *o* Language is a great invention of *o* humankind.  
[Type 1] [Type 4] [Type 1]
- 
- There are *o* nine planets travelling around **the** sun.  
[Type 4] [Type 2]
- 
- **A/The** cat likes *o* mice. [Type 1] [Type 4]
- 
- I'm going to buy a new bicycle. [Type 4]
- 
- *o* Love and *o* hate are *o* two extremes.  
[Type 1] [Type 1] [Type 4]

- **A/the** Tiger is **a fierce animal**.  
[Type 1] [Type 4]
- 
- I don't have **a** car.  
[Type 4]
- 
- Richard's wedding is in **o two weeks** and he is getting **o** cold feet.  
[Type 4] [Type 5]
- 
- This room has **a** length of 12 metres. [Type 4]
- Writing **o letters** is **a** pain in **the** neck for me.  
[Type 4] [Type 5] [Type 5]
- 
- I would like **a cup of coffee**, please. [Type 4]

- **The** telephone is **a** very useful invention.
- [Type 1] [Type 4]
- 
- He is as poor as **a** mouse. [Type 4]
- 
- Do you have **a** pen? [Type 4]
- 
- There may be **a** job for you. [Type 4]
- 
- You will find **a** partner to love and marry. [Type 4]
- 
- Even **a** child with little knowledge of mathematics would understand our country`s problem. [Type 4]
- 
- To become **a** nurse is **a** wonderfully rewarding career.
- [Type 4] [Type 4]
-



- Type 5 - *a, the, o*
  - Idioms
- Other conventional uses.

- 
- In **the** 1960s, there were lots of protests against **the** Vietnam War.
- [Type 5] [Type 2]
- 
- He has been thrown out of **o** work, and his family is now living **o** hand to **o** mouth.
- [Type 5] [Type 5] [Type 5]
- 
- All of **a** sudden, he woke up from his coma. [Type 5]
- 
- Your claim flies in **the** face of all **the/o** evidence.
- [Type 5] [Type 1]
- 
- **The** horse I bet on is still in **o** front.
- [Type 2] [Type 5]

- Washington says that Saddam Hussein is playing another game of o cat and o mouse.
- [Type 5] [Type 5]
- 
- Richard`s wedding is in o two weeks and he is getting o cold feet.
- [Type 4] [Type 5]

- Sally Ride was **the** first American woman in o space. [Type 2]  
[Type 5]
- 
- Writing o letters is a pain in the neck for me. [Type 4] [Type 5] [Type 5]
- 
- I'm in the mood to eat **a** hamburger.  
[Type 5] [Type 3]
- 
- To sum up, we are faced in Poland, as in **the** rest of Europe with more older and less younger people. [Type 5]
- 
- This will give them interest and a sense of pride whilst financially they will contribute more [Type 5] funds to **the** government to help **the** non-working population.  
[Type 2] [Type 2]

# The end

Thank you for you attention!!!



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