THE ACQUISITION OF THE ENGLISH ARTICLE SYSTEM BY ADULT NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ARABIC: L1 TRANSFER AT THE LEVEL OF ARTICLE SEMANTICS

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A Project Submitted to the Department of English in Umm Al-Qura University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Master Degree in Applied Linguistics

2011
Abstract

This study investigates the role of L1 transfer in the acquisition of L2 English article system by adult native speakers of Arabic. The main research question is: do adult Arabic-speaking learners of English transfer the definiteness setting of the Article Choice Parameter? Based on the underlying assumptions of two generative hypotheses: the Full Transfer/Full Access hypothesis and the Fluctuation Hypothesis, two particular hypotheses were formulated: 1. H1: Since both Arabic and English have definiteness-based article systems, adult Arabic-speaking learners of English will show accurate use of *the* in all definite categories and accurate use of *a* in all indefinite categories. 2. H2: Since neither Arabic nor English encode specificity in their article systems, adult Arabic-speaking learners of English will show no sensitivity to context specificity in their article choices. To test the study hypotheses, a forced-choice elicitation task was used. The findings reveal that adult Arabic-speaking L2 learners were influenced by their L1 (that is, Arabic) in acquiring L2 English article system; intermediate level Arabic-speaking English learners exhibited relatively native-like use of English articles because the semantic definiteness-based distinction between articles is instantiated in Arabic. However, the study results do not fully confirm the predictions of the Fluctuation Hypothesis concerning the role of context specificity because low-intermediate level Arabic-speaking L2 learners of English were unexpectedly affected by a marginally significant impact of specificity which was manifested in overusing the English definite article *the* in specific indefinite contexts. Hence, the study findings reveal a significant effect of L1 transfer in the acquisition of L2 article system and a potential role of context specificity in causing article misuse. The study undertakes some pedagogical implications and implies some recommendations for future research regarding the underlying assumptions of the Fluctuation Hypothesis and the Article Choice parameter.
خلاصة البحث

بحث هذه الدراسة دور انتقال اللغة الأم (L1 Transfer) في اكتساب الكبار من الناطقين باللغة العربية لنظام أدوات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية. إن سؤال البحث الرئيسي هو: هل ينقل الكبار من الناطقين باللغة العربية الإعداد القائم على التعريف لمتغير اختيار الأداة (the Article Choice Parameter) بناءً على الافتراضات الأساسية لفرضتيتين تأويلتين: (فرضية الانتقال التام والدخول التام) وفرضية التشبب (the Full Transfer/ Full Access hypothesis) تم فرض فرضتيتين محددة:

1. لا تتبع اللغة العربية واللغة الإنجليزية للتحدي عند أنظمة أدوات تقوم على التعريف، فان الكبار من الناطقين باللغة العربية سوف يظهرون عند تعليمهم اللغة الإنجليزية استخداماً دقيقاً لthe أشارت إلى جميع الفئات المعالجة واستخداماً دقيقاً في جميع الفئات النكرة.

2. با ان كل الناطقين باللغة العربية واللغة الإنجليزية لا تمر إلى التخصص (specificity) في أنظمة أدواتها، فإن الكبار من الناطقين باللغة العربية سوف يظهروا عند تعليمهم اللغة الإنجليزية حساسية تخصص السياق في اختيارهم للأدوات.

لاختبار فرضيات الدراسة، تم استخدام أداة استنباط إجبارية الاختبار. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن الكبار من الناطقين باللغة العربية قد تأثروا بلغتهم الأم (أي العربية) عند اكتسابهم نظام أدوات اللغة الإنجليزية، فقد أظهر نمو المستوى المتوسط من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الناطقين باللغة العربية استخداماً مشابهاً نسبياً لاستخدام الناطقين الأصليين و ذلك لأن الفرق الدلالي القائم على التعريف بين الأدوات هو موجود في اللغة العربية، و لكن نتائج الدراسة لم تؤكد بشكل ثام توقعات فرضية الاتجاه فيما يختص بدور التخصص السياق حيث أن ذوي المستوى المتوسط الذين من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الناطقين باللغة العربية أظهروا بشكل غير متوقع تأثيرًا ذو دالة إحصائية طفيفة للتخصص الذي تجلى في المبالغة في استخدام أدوات التعريف الإنجليزية في سياق النكرة المخصصة. و على ذلك، فإن نتائج الدراسة تكشف عن أثر ذي دالة إحصائية للغة الأم في اكتساب نظام أدوات لغة ثانية و عن دور محتمل للتخصيص السياق في النسب بأخطاء في استخدام الأدوات. و تتبني الدراسة تضمنات تربوية وكذلك تطوي على توصيات للبحث المستقبللي فيما يتعلق بالافتراضات الأساسية لفرضية الاتجاه و متغير اختيار الأداة.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am greatly thankful to Allah for the accomplishment of this work and for all his numerous blessings.

Professionally, I would like to express my grateful appreciation to Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Najmi for his valuable comments and guidance throughout his supervision of this work. Thanks are also due to the head and all members of English Department, Faculty of Social Sciences, Umm Al-Qura University for their cooperation. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Khulod Al-Thubaiti and Hunaida Yusuf for facilitating the experiment procedures. My grateful thanks also go to all students who participated in this study at Umm Al-Qura University.

I would like to thank Dr. Jalal Al-Sayad who carried out the statistical analysis of the study data.

Last but not least, my heartfelt gratitude is due to my friend and colleague Amani Abu Reyah whose encouraging words and critical opinions have lit my academic life.

To my beloved parents, my husband, my daughter Arwa, my sisters, my brothers, my father-in-law and my mother-in-law, for their love, support, patience and understanding, to all of them, I dedicate this work.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>خلاصة البحث</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Appendices</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Introduction</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.1 The Full Transfer/ Full Access Hypothesis</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.2 The Article Choice Parameter</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.3 The Fluctuation hypothesis</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Linguistic Background</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.1 Definiteness</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.2 Specificity</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.3 Article Semantics in English and Arabic</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.3.1 Definiteness and the English Article System</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.3.2 Definiteness and the Arabic Article System</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Hypotheses of the Study</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Objectives of the Study</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Significance of the Study</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 32

2.2 Early studies on the Acquisition of L2 Articles, the Bickertonian Approach ...... 33

2.3 Article Semantics and the FH .......................................................................... 36

   2.3.1 The FH and Second Language Acquisition of Articles by Native Speakers of
   [-ART] languages .................................................................................................. 36

   2.3.2 The FH and L1 Transfer ............................................................................ 41

2.4 Summary ............................................................................................................ 48

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 49

3.2 Participants .......................................................................................................... 49

3.3 Research Instruments ......................................................................................... 50

   3.3.1 Background Questionnaire .......................................................................... 50

   3.3.2 English Proficiency Test ............................................................................. 50

   3.3.3 Forced-choice Elicitation Task ................................................................... 51

3.4 Procedures ........................................................................................................... 54

3.5 Data Analysis ..................................................................................................... 54

3.6 Limitations of the Study .................................................................................... 55

3.7 Summary ............................................................................................................ 56

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 57

4.2 Results ................................................................................................................ 57

   4.2.1 Article Choice and Proficiency Level ......................................................... 57

   4.2.2 Effect of Context Specificity ....................................................................... 62

       4.2.2.1 Article Choice and Context Type .............................................................. 62
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction .............................................................................. 73

5.2 Conclusion................................................................................... 73

References......................................................................................... 76

Appendices......................................................................................... 81
List of Tables

Table 1: Article grouping by specificity
Table 2: Article grouping by definiteness
Table 3: Patterns of English article use by speakers of article-less L1s: predictions
Table 4: The reduced Article Choice Parameter
Table 5: Patterns of English article use by speakers of article-less L1s: predictions (revised)
Table 6: Participants in the study
Table 7: Article choices made by the upper-intermediate group in all contexts
Table 8: Article choices made by the low-intermediate group in all contexts
Table 9: Article choices made by the beginner group in all contexts
Table 10: Separate one-way ANOVAs results comparing the three groups on using English articles
Table 11: Results of one-way ANOVA on using the in specific definite contexts
Table 12: Results of one-way ANOVA on using the in nonspecific definite contexts
Table 13: Results of one-way ANOVA on using a in non-specific indefinite contexts
Table 14: Results of one-way ANOVA on using a in specific indefinite contexts
Table 15: Results of the Scheffe -test comparing article choices by the intermediate groups and the beginner group
Table 16: Paired sample t-tests between use of the in specific and non-specific definite contexts
Table 17: Paired sample t-tests between use of a in specific and non-specific definite contexts
Table 18: Paired sample t-tests between use of a in specific and non-specific definite contexts
Table 19: Paired sample t-tests between use of the in specific and non-specific indefinite contexts
Table 20: Results of one-way ANOVA analysis on use of a in specific indefinite contexts
Table 21: Results of the Scheffe – test on use of a in specific indefinite contexts
Table 22: Results of one-way ANOVA test on overusing the in specific indefinite contexts
Table 23: Results of the Scheffe – test on overusing the in specific indefinite contexts
List of Figures

Figure 1. Semantic Classification of Languages with respect to articles
Figure 2. Huebner’ (1983 ) semantic wheel
Figure 3. Means of article choices in the upper-intermediate group
Figure 4. Means of article choices in the low-intermediate group
Figure 5. Means of article choices in the beginner group
List of Appendices

Appendix A: Participants' Background Information
Appendix B: Background Questionnaire
Appendix C: Forced-choice Elicitation Task
Appendix D: Tables
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Adult second language acquisition is a long laborious process which does not always result in attaining a native-like level of proficiency. The desire to unveil the mystery of this process has attracted the attention of many researchers in the realm of second language acquisition (hereafter SLA) research. The influence of the native language on L2 learners (that is, L1 transfer) and age-based factors have been the cornerstones of many proposals that attempt to account for the likely failure of adult L2 learners to attain a native-like level of proficiency (White, 2003a).

The acquisition of L2 article system has recently been the subject of much increasing investigation in SLA research. The English article system, in particular, has been the focus of many studies whose results reveal that the task of acquiring the English article system is challenging for L2 learners. Although, there is no consensus on the source of difficulty, researchers often refer to the complexity of the English article system which lack direct form-meaning relationships (Goto Butler, 2002; Master, 2002; Benjamin White, 2009).

Within the generative framework, much attention has recently been paid to the role of semantic universals, namely definiteness and specificity, in the acquisition of L2 articles. Ionin asserts that 'languages use articles to encode either specificity or definiteness' (2003:85). English and Arabic are examples of languages that divide their articles according to definiteness whereas Samoan has a specificity-based article system. This cross-linguistic variation has led Ionin to propose a semantic parameter of article choice (that is, the Article Choice Parameter). In a series of influential studies, Ionin, Ko and Wexler, among others,
demonstrate that L2 learners’ substitution errors in article use are not random but are UG-constrained. That is, they are the result of some temporary stage of fluctuation between the possible UG parametric values. Following this line of research, an empirical study was conducted to investigate the influence of L1 at the level of article semantics and whether the semantic feature of specificity has a role to play in the acquisition of English articles by adult Arabic-speaking learners.

This chapter provides the necessary theoretical and linguistic background on which the study is based. It also presents the study’s hypotheses and demonstrates its main goals and its significance in the field of SLA research.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The present study attempts to answer the following question: do adult Arabic-speaking learners of English transfer the definiteness setting of the Article Choice Parameter?

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The role of L1 and the accessibility of UG in L2 acquisition have been among the central issues in generative SLA research (White, 2003a). Concentrating on articles acquisition, Ionin (2003) proposes a semantic parameter of article choice and argues that L2 learners’ systematic patterns of article misuse are the results of accessing to the semantic universals of definiteness and specificity. The present study investigates the predictions of the Fluctuation Hypothesis in second language acquisition of articles where L1 transfer is possible as both L1 and L2 have the same setting of the Article Choice Parameter.

1.3.1 The Full Transfer/Full Access Hypothesis

Within the generative framework, there are many approaches concerning the role of UG and L1 in the process of acquiring a second language. Under the Full Transfer/Full Access
hypothesis (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1996), L1/L2 acquisition are assumed to differ with respect to their initial states. It is the absolute L1 grammar (that is, full transfer) that forms L2 learners' initial grammars rather than UG alone. When L1 grammar seems to be incompatible with L2 input, L2 learners are supposed to have recourse to options that are UG-constrained (that is, full access). The Full Transfer/Full Access hypothesis (hereafter FT/FA) does not assume that attaining native-like competence is inevitable but rather it is possible because some properties of L1 may act as a filter, thus preventing the learner from noticing relevant properties of L2 input.

1.3.2 The Article Choice Parameter

According to Lyons (1999), only a limited number of languages have articles whereas the majority of languages are article-less. Ionin, Ko and Wexler claim that specificity and definiteness are semantic features which 'play a role in article specifications cross-linguistically' (2004:3).

Figure 1: Semantic Classification of Languages with respect to articles (adapted from Guella et al., 2008:60)
Languages that have articles differ with respect to whether they encode the semantic feature of definiteness or the semantic feature of specificity, as shown in Figure 1 above. Most languages in Europe, such as English, German, French and Spanish, have article systems that are definiteness-based while articles in Samoan, Shuswap, Sango and Salish, among others, encode specificity (Mayo and Hawkins, 2009:2; Kim and Lakshmanan, 2009:90).

Ionin (2003) compared English articles to the article system in Samoan. Ionin (2003) reported that the data from Samoan articles were basically based on a work by Mosel and Hovdhaugen (1992) who showed that Samoan has two articles: the article le is used with specific DPs while the other article se is used with non-specific DPs. Ionin demonstrated that “these differences can be captured via parametric variation, with languages varying on whether they use articles to encode the definite feature, specific feature or both” (2003:30). Although acknowledging that the available data from Samoan were relatively limited, Ionin proposed a parameter governing article choices, as shown in (1). She called it the Article Choice Parameter (hereafter ACP).

(1) ACP: A language which has two articles distinguishes them as follows:

Setting I. Articles are distinguished on the basis of specificity.

Setting II. Articles are distinguished on the basis of definiteness. (Ionin, 2003:32)

The parameter provides two possible options for article choice in two-article languages. Although definiteness and specificity are not the only properties that can be expressed by articles cross-linguistically, Ionin et al. (2004: 95, footnote 6) claimed that 'they are the only discourse-related features that underlie article choice'. That is, the ACP is a discourse-based parameter (Atay, 2010:10). As Samoan divides articles on the basis of specificity, it adopts the first setting as shown in Table 1 below. English, on the other hand, is an example of languages whose article systems are definiteness-based, thus adopting the second setting of
the ACP as shown in Table 2 below. It is worth noting that Ionin's proposal is restricted to article use in non-generic environments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>[+def]</th>
<th>[-def]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[+spec]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[-spec]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Article grouping by specificity (Ionin, 2003:80)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>[+def]</th>
<th>[-def]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[+spec]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[-spec]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Article grouping by definiteness (Ionin, 2003:80)

1.3.3 The Fluctuation Hypothesis

Based on two phenomena documented in L2 acquisition literature, Ionin, Ko and Wexler (2003, 2004) proposed the Fluctuation Hypothesis (hereafter FH) for L2-acquisition. Many studies in L2 acquisition show that the interlanguage grammars of L2 learners adopt some parameter settings instantiated in neither L1 nor L2 and that L2 learners show optionality in parameter setting. The FH for L2 acquisition, as stated in (1) below, is an attempt to capture these findings.
(1) The FH for L2 acquisition:

a. L2-learners have full access to UG principles and parameter settings.

b. L2-learners fluctuate between different parameter settings until the input leads them to set the parameter to the appropriate value. (Ionin et al., 2004:20)

Focusing on the acquisition of the article system, Ionin et al. (2003) and Ionin et al. (2004) conducted a series of studies to test the predictions of the FH in the second language acquisition of the English definiteness-based article system by native speakers of [-ART] L1s (that is, languages that lack article systems), namely Russian and Korean. In the absence of L1 transfer, Ionin, Ko and Wexler proposed that L2 learners will have recourse to UG which provides them with the possible options for article semantics. Until sufficient input triggers the target setting of the ACP, L2 learners would be expected to fluctuate between the two settings. That is, they would show optional adherence to the two parameter settings; sometimes treating *the* as marking specificity and at other times treating *the* as marking definiteness. Ionin et al. (2004) proposed a specific version of the FH for L2-English article choice, as stated in (2).

(2) The FH for L2-English article choice:

a. L2-learners have full UG access to the two settings of the Article Choice Parameter.

b. L2-learners fluctuate between the two settings of the Article Choice Parameter until the input leads them to set this parameter to the appropriate value. (Ionin et al., 2004:22)

Under the FH, the use of English articles in specific definite contexts (hereafter [+def, +spec]) and nonspecific indefinite contexts (hereafter [-def, -spec]) would pose no problem to L2 learners because whether L2 learners divide articles on the basis of specificity or on the basis of definiteness, the appropriate article will be used. That is, *the* will be used in [+def,
+spec] and a in [-def, -spec] contexts. When specificity and definiteness are in conflict (that is, in nonspecific definite contexts and specific indefinite contexts), L2 learners are expected to use a and the interchangeably. The predictions of article use by speakers whose L1s are article-less are summarized in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>[+def]: target the</th>
<th>[-def]: target a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[+spec]</td>
<td>Correct use of the</td>
<td>Overuse of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[-spec]</td>
<td>Overuse of a</td>
<td>Correct use of a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Patterns of English article use by speakers of article-less L1s: predictions (Ionin et al., 2004)

In a recent study, Ionin et al. (2009) proposed a modification of article grouping cross-linguistically with respect to definiteness and specificity. The modification has been the result of further data from the Samoan article system. Fuli (2007), as reported in Ionin et al. (2009), has convincingly shown that Samoan marks the specificity distinction with indefiniteness only. Moreover, Tryzna (2009) conducted a field study of Samoan article usage. She has concluded that the article le is used with [-def, +spec] NPs and with all definites, regardless of specificity. Thus, the other article se is restricted to [-def, -spec] contexts. Therefore, Tryzna proposed a reduced ACP, as illustrated in Table 4 below (although she finally questioned the validity of the ACP and suggested to refer to it as a cross-linguistic generalization rather than a UG parameter, for the relevant discussion see Tryzna, 2009).
Ionin et al. (2009) reported that the new data from the Samoan article system where no distinction is made between specific indefinites and definites represent a possible UG option. That is, it is consistent with natural languages data. For example, within the article system, Modern Hebrew as well as Sissala mark morphological specificity distinction with indefinites only. Outside the article system, many languages treat specific indefinites in the same way as definites, such as Spanish dative preposition *a* which is used for marking specific indefinite, definite or animate direct objects (for more details, see Ionin et al., 2009:341-342). Ionin et al. (2009) claimed that the use of articles in [-def, +spec] contexts will be more problematic to L2 learners than in other contexts. Consequently, in L2 English acquisition, overuse of the definite article *the* with specific indefinites is more predicted than overuse of the indefinite article *a* with non-specific definites.

Table 4: The reduced Article Choice Parameter (Tryzna, 2009:72)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DP Type</th>
<th>Specificity Setting (such as Samoan)</th>
<th>Definiteness Setting (such as English)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-spec Indefinite</td>
<td><em>se</em></td>
<td><em>A</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Indefinite</td>
<td><em>le</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definite</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Patterns of English article use by speakers of article-less L1s: predictions (revised).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>[+def]: target <em>the</em></th>
<th>[-def]: target <em>a</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[+spec]</td>
<td>Correct use of <em>the</em></td>
<td>Overuse of <em>the</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[-spec]</td>
<td>Correct use of <em>the</em></td>
<td>Correct use of <em>a</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.4 Linguistic Background

1.4.1 Definiteness

'Definiteness is a universal category of meaning and an element of interpretation in all languages' (Trenkic 2009:117). Different definitions of definiteness have been proposed in the literature. Since Russell (1905), determiners have been assigned the property of definiteness. According to Russell, definiteness is based on uniqueness. That is, a nominal phrase is definite if it describes a unique individual or object. Givon (1978) focused on the pragmatic domain and considered a nominal phrase definite if both the speaker and the hearer can identify its referent. Lyons (1999) considered article-less languages as having semantic/pragmatic definiteness which is expressed through other means than articles, such as topic markers, word order or classifiers. [+ART] languages, on the other hand, have grammatical definiteness according to Lyons (1999). Overt manifestation of definiteness through the use of articles is described by Lyons (1999) as only 'an areal feature' because most [+ART] languages are in Europe and around the Mediterranean.

For the purpose of this paper, the researcher adopts the definition of definiteness proposed by Ionin, Ko and Wexler (2004). Their definition is based on Heim (1991), as stated informally in (1):

(1) If a Determiner Phrase (DP) of the form [D NP] is [+def], then the speaker and hearer presuppose the existence of a unique individual in the set denoted by the NP. (Ionin, et al., 2004:5)

The above definition unifies the two definitions proposed by Russell and Givon because it describes definiteness as 'a semantic feature which makes reference to the knowledge state of both the speaker and the hearer concerning a unique discourse referent' (Ko et al. 2008:2).
In English, when the uniqueness presupposition is satisfied, the definite article *the* must be used. Previous-mention contexts guarantee that the uniqueness presupposition is satisfied, as in (2):

(2) Yesterday, I bought a book and a magazine. Before I went to bed, I started reading *the* book. It was very interesting.

However, the felicitous use of *the* is not restricted to previous-mention contexts. Sometimes, the uniqueness presupposition is satisfied with mutual world knowledge, as in (3):

(3) The moon was fantastically bright, last night.

*The moon* is unique for all speakers. Moreover, ordinal expressions and superlatives must be preceded by *the* because they inherently fulfill the uniqueness presupposition by virtue of their meanings (Ko et al., 2008).

When the presupposition of uniqueness is not satisfied, either the referent does not exist at all, or it exists but it is not unique ‘in a pragmatically delimited domain…[therefore,] the referent is indefinite’ (Trenkic, 2009:117).

1.4.2 Specificity

There has been a considerable debate concerning the concise meaning of specificity. One major point of disagreement is related to the role of scope interactions in determining the specificity of a DP. Lyons (1999) and Ionin (2003) proposed two different views of specificity.
Based on scope interactions, Lyons (1999) divided contexts into two types. First, opaque contexts refer to contexts which involve intensional and modal operators, thereby including scope interactions, as in (1).

(1) Intensional and modal operators
a. You should go to a film at the Odeon tonight – it’s superb. (Lyons, 1999:168)
b. Liz is looking for a business partner – the poor fellow disappeared last month and she suspects he’s been kidnapped. (Lyons, 1999:168)

The second type of contexts is referred to as transparent contexts which do not involve scope interactions, as in (2).

(2) I bought a book.

Consequently, Lyons (1999) differentiated between two types of specificity: grammatical specificity and pragmatic specificity. Grammatical specificity is based on scope. If an article has a wide scope over an intensional or modal verb (as in 1 above), or if it has a wide scope by default due to the absence of scope interactions (as in 2 above), then the relevant DP is specific. The DP has a non-specific reading if the article is under the scope of an intensional or a modal operator, as in (3) below. In (3), the speaker does not have a book about cooking and he wants to get one.

(3) I would like to get a book about cooking.

The other type of specificity is pragmatic-based. In transparent contexts, a DP has a specific reading if it is referential, as in (4), otherwise it is non-specific, as in (5).
Ionin (2003) proposed a somehow different definition of specificity. Her definition is based on Fodor and Sag's (1982) proposal concerning ambiguity of indefiniteness. Fodor and Sag (1982), as reported in Ionin (2003), differentiated between referential (specific) indefinites and quantificational (non-specific) indefinites, as shown in (6) and (7), respectively.

(6) A man just proposed to me in the park though I'm too embarrassed to tell you who it was.  (Referential indefinite)

(7) A supervisor is in the teachers' room but I haven't dared to go in there to see who it is.  (Quantificational indefinite)

In (6), the indefinite *a man* is specific because it refers to a particular individual that the speaker intends to refer to. In (7), the indefinite receives a non-specific reading because the speaker is not referring to a particular supervisor that he has in mind but he is merely asserting the existence of one individual out of a group of people.

Following Fodor and Sag (1982), Ionin's (2003) definition of specificity does not consider specific DPs to be identical to wide scope DPs. That is, Ionin's (2003) view of specificity is
not corresponding to existence in the actual world but it is more restrictive; 'it involves speaker's intent to refer to an individual who exists in the actual world' (Ionin et al., 2004:11).

Ionin (2003) also included the additional concept of noteworthy property in her definition of specificity. That is, the speaker intends to refer to something important about the individual he is talking about (Ionin, 2003:55). The inclusion of this property is due to examining the licensing contexts of the colloquial English this-indefinites which are inherently specific (for more details on noteworthiness and colloquial English this-indefinites, see Ionin, 2003, chapter 2). Ionin informally defines specificity as in (8):

(8) If a DP of the form [D NP] is [+spec], the speaker intends to refer to a unique individual in the set denoted by the NP, and considers this individual to possess some noteworthy property (Ko et al., 2006:2).

Summarizing, “specificity is a semantic feature that makes reference to the knowledge state of the speaker concerning a uniquely salient discourse referent” (Ko et al., 2008: 119). Therefore, a crucial difference between definiteness and specificity is that definiteness refers to shared knowledge of speaker and hearer whereas specificity refers to the knowledge state of speaker alone. For the purpose of this study, Ionin's definition of specificity is adopted.

1.4.3 Article semantics in English and Arabic

Definiteness and specificity are universal semantic features which are mainly encoded by virtue of articles. In the case of [-ART] languages, a variety of means are used to express these semantic distinctions (Chesterman, 2005). Determiners, stress, word order, case marking and tense-aspect modality are examples of such means (Atay, 2010). Both English and Arabic have article systems which encode definiteness rather than specificity.
1.4.3.1 Definiteness and the English Article System

In English, definiteness is mainly encoded by virtue of the article system. Moreover, Lyons (1999) mentioned two other ways of expressing definiteness in English through tense-aspect distinction and structural position of determiners. Given the scope of this study, the focus here is on the English article system which consists of two overt articles: the and a (and its allophone an). The article the is used to encode definiteness. That is, the is used when the speaker and the hearer have a shared state of knowledge of the existence of a unique individual, as in (1).

(1)

a. Yesterday, I bought a dress and a jacket.

b. Unfortunately, the jacket was the wrong size.

In (1b), the previous mention of the noun jacket satisfies the uniqueness presupposition. The hearer knows that the speaker is referring to the same unique referent which has previously been mentioned in (1a).

When the presupposition of uniqueness is not satisfied, or when there is no shared knowledge of the speaker and the hearer, the noun phrase has an indefinite reading which is morphologically marked through the use of a with singular count nouns or Ø with plural count nouns and mass nouns. Unlike the, the indefinite article in English is sensitive to number and count/mass distinction.

The English article system is not distinguished on the basis of the semantic feature of specificity. However, the specificity distinction cross-cuts the definiteness distinction. It is possible for both definites and indefinites to be either specific or nonspecific.

(2) [+def, +spec]: My father wants to visit the new neighbor. His name is George.
(3) [+def, -spec]: My father wants to visit the new neighbor. I do not know which one it is.

(4) [-def, +spec]: I want to have an interview with a famous actress. Her last movie was impressive.

(5) [-def, -spec]: I want to have an interview with a famous actress. It does not matter who it is.

In both (2) and (3) the speaker and the hearer know that a unique neighbor does exist. With respect to specificity, only (2) is specific because the speaker intends to refer to a particular individual who has the noteworthy property of being a new neighbor and of being called George. The NP famous actress in both (4) and (5) are indefinite because they do not satisfy the condition of the uniqueness presupposition. Since only (4) indicates that the speaker intends to refer to a particular actress who has the noteworthy property of acting in an impressive film, it has a specific interpretation. In (5) famous actress has a non-specific reading.

To sum up, the English article system has two articles which are distinguished on the basis of definiteness rather than specificity.

**1.4.3.2 Definiteness and the Arabic Article System**

According to Ryding (2005), definiteness is morphologically marked in Modern Standard Arabic (hereafter MSA) in three ways. First, it is encoded by prefixing the definite article *al-* , as in (1). Second, a noun can be made definite by the addition of another noun to form a possessive construction 'IDaafa' الإضافة , as in (2). In (2), the first term of the annexation structure becomes definite by virtue of 'the tribes'. Third, suffixing a possessive pronoun to an indefinite noun gives the noun a definite reading, as in (3).
(1) al-xubz

The bread.

(2) zu'amaa'-u l-qaba'a'il-I (Ryding, 2005:60)

leaders-NOM the-tribe-GEN

The leaders of the tribes.

(3) Bada'a mu'tamar-a-hu l-SiHaffiyy-a (Ryding, 2005:161)

begin.3msg.Past. conference-ACCU-3msg. the-press-ACCU

He began his press conference.

Among the three ways of expressing definiteness, only the use of the definite article is relevant for the purpose of this study. *Al-* precedes a noun and it is not inflected for either gender or number. Phonologically, the definite article *al*- assimilates into the initial consonant of the following word when such a word begins with one of a group of letters called the *sun letters*, as in (4). When the following word starts with one of the *moon letters*, no assimilation of *al*- happens, as in (5).

(4) at-tijaara

The commerce

(5) al-'islam

Islam

As for marking indefiniteness in MSA, there have been two opposing views. One view says that Arabic has an overt marker of indefiniteness which is called nunation, or Tanwin as Arabic philologists call it (Ryding 2005, among others). Nunation is attached to the end of
an indefinite. It is written as double vowel signs and pronounced as –un, -an or –in, according to the case of preceding noun whether nominative, accusative or genitive, respectively.

\[(\text{كتاب}) \text{-un} \]  
book-NOM.indef

A book.

\[(\text{كتاب}) \text{-an} \]  
Book-ACCU.indef

A book.

\[(\text{كتاب}) \text{-in} \]  
Book-GEN.indef

A book.

The second and more widespread view is that MSA has a zero article to encode indefiniteness (Kharma, 1981; Thompson-Panos and Thomas-Ružić, 1983; Fassi Fehri, 1993; Faingold, 1995; Lyons, 1999; Guella et al., 2008; Sarko, 2008, among others). Two pieces of evidence support this view. First, nunation can be left out with no harm to intelligibility (Guella et al., 2008). Second, nunation can co-occur with definites, including proper names (Fassi Fehri, 1993; Lyons, 1999). Lyons stated that nunation 'is probably a semantically empty marker of nominality… indirectly indicating indefiniteness' (1999:93). That is, nunation is redundant with respect to signaling indefiniteness. Guella et al. (2008) claimed that any Arabic noun is indefinite if it is not prefixed with \textit{al-}, is not suffixed with a
possessive pronoun or does not have a definite genitive. This view is the one adopted throughout the present study.

Although there is a diglossic situation in the Arab world where people speak a regional variety in addition to MSA, all varieties are similar in having only an overt definite article (Thompson-Panos and Thomas-Ruzic, 1983). Following are four examples, in MSA, representing four contexts in accordance with Ionin's (2003) distinctions of the features [±definite] and [±specific].

(9) [+def, +spec]

A: Abi: mādā taf‘el fī haḍ̣iḥi almadrasa-t-i?
Father what do in this the school?
Daddy, what are you doing in this school?

B: Kuntu ounidu an zoura almoudir-a. inahu Sadiq-u-n li:
Was-I want of visit the director. Is friend me
I want to visit the director. He is a friend of mine.

(10) [+def, -spec]

A: Kana assibaq-u mouhir-a-n. hal mina almoumkin an ouqabila alfa?ez
Was race impressive do of the-possible of meet the winner
The race was very impressive. Is it possible to meet the winner?

B: Na’am haθa amr-u-n sahl-u-n Itha[ni min faDlik.
Yes this thing easy follow of please
Yes, this is easy. Follow me, please.

(11) [-def, +spec]

A: Hal tabHa0in-a ʕén Šayi-n ya sayidati

Do search of thing oh madam

Are you searching for something, madam?

B: Naʕém, inani abHa0u ʕén Haqibat-i-n sawda-a taraktouha houna

Yes am I search of bag black left-it here

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

(12) [-def, -spec]

A: hal taʕlam maỌa kanat hadiyat-u sarah?

Do know-you what was gift sarah?

Do you know what was Sarah’s gift?

B: Naʕam, kaanat Haqiba walakinani lam ara-ha

Yes, was bag and-but-I not see-it

Yes, it was a bag, but I didn’t see it. (Guella et al., 2008:64-65)

Summarizing, the article system in Arabic is definiteness-based. It has two articles; the definite article al- and the phonologically null article Ø which encodes indefiniteness. Specificity is not encoded within the Arabic article system.
1.5 Hypotheses of the Study

The present study investigates the acquisition of English articles by adult Arabic-speaking learners. Adopting the FT/FA hypothesis, the FH and the reduced version of the ACP, the following particular hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Since both Arabic and English have definiteness-based article systems, adult Arabic-speaking learners of English will show accurate use of the in all definite categories and accurate use of a in all indefinite categories.

H2: Since neither Arabic nor English encode specificity in their article systems, adult Arabic-speaking learners of English will show no sensitivity to context specificity in their article choices.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

The study aims at

1. Examining the influence of L1 transfer at the level of article semantics.

2. Investigating the effect of the semantic feature of specificity on the acquisition of the English article system by adult Arabic-speaking English learners.

3. Introducing a developmental picture of how the English article system is acquired by adult Arabic-speaking learners of three proficiency levels: upper-intermediate, low-intermediate and beginner.

4. Providing pedagogical implications for teaching articles in EFL classes for Arabic-speaking learners.

1.7 Significance of the Study

What distinguishes the present study is its focus on the role of semantic universals, namely definiteness and specificity, in the acquisition of articles. This domain has recently captured
the interest of many second language acquisition researchers (e.g. Ionin, 2003; Ionin and Wexler, 2003; Ko et al., 2008).

Another aspect that distinguishes this study is that it tests the predictions of the FH which represents a recent proposal within the generative framework of second language acquisition research. While many studies focus on the second language acquisition of articles by native speakers of [-ART] languages where neither setting of the ACP is instantiated, the interaction between L1 transfer and fluctuation remains an issue that needs further investigation (Ionin, 2003; Ionin et al., 2004). The present study attempts to contribute to filling this gap by testing the predictions of the FH with the possibility of transferring the L1 setting of the ACP.

Examining the acquisition of English articles by L2 learners of three successive levels of proficiency contributes to the significance of this study. The study can provide insights to the developmental sequence in the second language acquisition of English articles by adult Arabic-speaking learners.

Finally, the study aims to demonstrate what aspects of the English article system are particularly difficult for adult Arabic-speaking learners of English in order to provide some pedagogical implications for teaching articles in EFL classes. The focus on article semantics can minimize the traditional lists of rules on article use in classroom instructions.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The acquisition of the article system has been the subject of intensive research in the field of second language acquisition. The syntactic, semantic and pragmatic nature of articles is the reason behind addressing the issue of article system acquisition from different perspectives.

Early studies of L2 learners' use of articles were clearly influenced by Bickerton's (1981) binary classification of types of noun reference according to specificity of reference (that is, [±SR]) and assumed hearer's knowledge, (that is, [±HK]). This line of research focuses on the developmental sequence of article acquisition and attempts to explain patterns of article substitution errors (e.g. Huebner, 1983; Parrish, 1987; Master, 1987; Thomas, 1989).

Most recent studies have replaced the classification scheme of [±SR] and [±HK] with one of the semantic features of definiteness and specificity (e.g. Ionin and Wexler, 2003; Ionin, et al., 2003; Ko et al., 2008; Guella et al., 2008; Sarko, 2009; Snape, 2005). A large body of experimental studies has focused on testing the predictions of Ionin's (2003) FH. Within this body of research, most studies have investigated the acquisition of English articles by L2 learners of [-ART] languages. Only a small number of studies have focused on the interaction between the FH and the possibility of L1 transfer. The strength of this line of research stems from adopting a generative approach in which L2 learner's interlanguage is UG-constrained.

In the first part of the review, some of the important early studies that follow the Bickertonian approach in the acquisition of English articles are briefly reviewed. The second
part reviews some recent studies that explore the role of specificity and test the predictions of the FH in the acquisition of L2 articles.

2.2 Early Studies on the Acquisition of L2 Articles, the Bickertonian Approach

Bickerton (1981) proposed two universals for noun phrase reference: a semantic universal that differentiates a specific referent [+SR] from a non specific referent [-SR], and a discourse universal that distinguishes between a referent that is assumed to be known to the hearer [+HK] and a referent that is not [-HK]. Although Bickerton (1981) did not clearly define the term specific referent, Ionin (2003: 103) states that 'it is usually taken to mean has a referent in the actual world'. The four possible combinations of these universals for NP reference are summarized in Huebner's (1983) semantic wheel, as shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Huebner' (1983) semantic wheel (p.133)

In Huebner's (1983) semantic wheel, the four quarters require different English articles. In [+SR,+HK] (that is, referential definite) the is used. Ø and a are used for marking indefinites which can be either [+SR,-HK] (including first mention nouns) or [-SR,-HK] (that is, non refrentials). The fourth quarter of [-SR,+HK] represents generic reference where either the, a, or Ø can be used.
In a longitudinal study, Huebner (1983) investigated the acquisition of English by an adult Hmong speaker. Huebner (1983) reported that his subject overused the English definite article with all NP types. He called this pattern of overuse *the-flooding*. Gradually, the overuse of *the* disappeared in [-SR, -HK], and finally in [+SR, -HK]. Huebner (1983) concluded that L2 learners associate *the* with the feature [+HK], rather than with [+SR]. His evidence lies in the relatively high rates of *the* in [-SR+HK] (that is, generic) contexts and to the high rates of *the* in [+SR+HK] contexts as well.

Master (1987) studied the use of English articles in the spontaneous speech of 20 learners of four proficiency levels. The subjects belonged to five L1 backgrounds of which two were [+ART] languages and three were [-ART] languages. In the early stages of acquisition, the subjects (particularly those of [-ART] L1s) tended to use *Ø* with all the four environments according to Huebner's (1983) semantic wheel. When the subjects started to use an article, it was almost always *the* in [+SR, +HK] environments. The use of *a* was relatively late and less accurate than that for *the*. Although, there were more instances of using *the* than of using *a* in first-mention [+SR, -HK] contexts in the production of some of his subjects whose L1s lack articles, Master (1987) claimed that *the* floods mostly into [+HK] environments. Thus, he agreed with Huebner (1983) that L2 learners of English initially associate *the* with the feature [+HK]. Master (1987) asserted that the late acquisition of *a* is due to the mass/count distinction which he considered the most persistent problem in English article acquisition.

In the same vein, Parrish (1987) observed the spontaneous speech of a Japanese-speaking learner of English for a period of four months. The subject was studying English in an EFL formal setting. The study results showed that accurate use of *the* appeared earlier than that of *a*, thus supporting the developmental pattern observed by Master (1987). With regard to the overuse of *the*, Parrish (1987) reported that the inappropriate use of *the* was limited to [+SR,
-HK] environments. The results also showed a relatively more accurate use of the in [+SR, +HK] contexts and of a in [-SR, -HK] contexts than in other types of contexts.

For the purpose of comparing article acquisition in L1 and in L2, Thomas (1989) conducted an empirical study with 30 adult learners of English. The participants in the study were divided into native speakers of [+ART] languages and [-ART] languages. For data collection, the participants were instructed to tell stories by describing a set of pictures. The study revealed, at least, four important results. First, both the participants of [+ART] and of [-ART] L1s used the more frequently and accurately than a. Second, they used the more accurately in [+SR, +HK] than in [-SR, +HK] contexts. Third, more article omission was produced by native speakers of [-ART] L1s than by the [+ART] group. Finally and most importantly, both groups overused the in [+SR, -HK] contexts more than in [-SR, -HK] contexts (however, the difference in the [+ART] group was not statistically significant due to the small size of the group).

Based on Bickerton's (1981-1984) Linguistic Bioprogram Hypothesis, Cziko (1986) evaluated seven studies on the first language acquisition of English articles, as reported in Thomas (1989). Cziko (1986) claimed that the overuse of the by L1 children was a result of a linguistic semantic reason which is specificity rather than a pragmatic one, namely egocentricity as claimed by Brown (1973) and Maratsos (1974). Thomas (1989) extended Cziko's (1986) proposal to second language acquisition of articles. She claimed that the pattern of the-overuse that the study revealed was the result of that L2 learners initially associate the with the feature [+SR] rather than [+HK]. In other words, Thomas (1989) suggested that L2 learners associate the with wide scope (that is, with assertion of existence). Hence, Thomas (1989) countered the proposal made by Huebner (1983) and Master (1987).
2.3 Article Semantics and the FH

Recent studies by Ionin, Ko, Perovic, and Wexler, among others, have marked a shift in the literature of second language acquisition of articles. While early studies in the field focused on the developmental sequence of articles acquisition, the recent studies by Ionin, Ko and Wexler, among others, have attempted to explain patterns of article (mis)use by L2 learners within the generative framework. The FH, the ACP and the precise definition of specificity as 'speaker intent to refer to an individual who exists in the actual world' (Ionin et al., 2004:12) are the backbone of this recent approach in the domain of article acquisition. Two lines of research can be distinguished within this approach; studies that test the FH by studying the acquisition of English articles by L2 learners of [-ART] L1s (e.g. Ionin and Wexler, 2003; Ionin et al., 2003; Ionin et al., 2004; Ko et al., 2008; Kim and Lakshmanan, 2009) and studies that test the interaction between fluctuation and L1 transfer (e.g. Ionin et al., 2007; Guella et al., 2008; Sarko, 2009; Snape, 2005; Hawkins et al., 2006; Snape et al., 2006).

2.3.1 The FH and Second Language Acquisition of Articles by Speakers of [-ART] L1s

Ionin and Wexler (2003) conducted two studies in order to investigate the acquisition of English articles by native speakers of an article-less language, namely Russian. Although Thomas (1989) referred to the role of specificity in the acquisition of articles, she did not define the term specificity and treated it as an equivalent of wide scope. Ionin and Wexler (2003) examined Thomas's (1989) proposal and followed Ionin's (2003) definition of specificity. Under Ionin's (2003) definition, specific DPs necessarily take wide scope over intensional and modal operators but not all NPs that assert existence are specific (for definition of specificity, see section 1.4.2 above).
12 Russian speakers participated in the first study. The data were collected via a translation task. The main study was carried out by 31 Russian participants who were instructed to complete target sentences with the appropriate articles in 52 short dialogues. The dialogues were particularly designed to elicit articles in three types of singular contexts: [+def, +spec], [-def, +spec] and [-def, -spec]. All the three types of contexts showed different kinds of scope interactions. The two studies showed consistent results. There was no positive correlation between wide scope contexts and overuse of the definite article the in specific indefinite contexts than in non-specific indefinite contexts. Hence, Ionin and Wexler (2003) argued that this pattern of overuse is not random but reflects an access to the semantic universal of specificity. They attributed article (mis)use to the fluctuation between the two settings of the ACP. Moreover, they highlighted the importance of L2 input in triggering the appropriate setting for English articles.

In the same vein, Ionin, Ko and Wexler (2003) further examined the predictions of the FH. In order to avoid any possibility of L1 transfer, two groups of adult English L2 learners whose L1s are article-less participated in the study: 50 L1-Russian and 38 L1-Korean learners of English. The main task was a forced-choice elicitation task consisting of 56 short dialogues. The dialogues included both singular as well as plural target NPs. More types of indefinite contexts were involved. [+def, -spec] contexts were not examined in this study, too. The study findings replicated that of Ionin and Wexler (2003). The two groups showed similar patterns of performance. They overused English articles in [+def, -spec] and [-def, +spec] contexts. In addition, both groups overused the in singular [-def, +spec] and plural [-def, +spec] contexts, too. Ionin et al. (2003) concluded that the similar patterns of the two groups are not a result of L1-transfer but rather of direct access to UG.
For the purpose of providing a stronger piece of evidence for the FH, Ionin, Ko and Wexler (2004) carried out another empirical study. What is significant about this study is that it examined the specific versus non-specific distinction in definite contexts. That is, besides [+def, +spec] contexts, Ionin et al. (2004) investigated article use in [+def, -spec] contexts, too. 30 Russians and 40 Koreans participated in the study. According to their results in the Michigan test of L2 proficiency, each L1-group was divided into three levels of proficiency: beginners, intermediates, and advanced learners of English. Two tools were used in gathering data: a forced-choice elicitation test and a free production task. The first task was used to control the types of contexts concerned and the latter task was used to test the unconscious knowledge of L2 learners when using articles. The results of the forced-choice task indicated that both L1 groups showed similar patterns of performance although the Korean group showed more target-like use of articles (Ionin et al. attributed this to the relatively high level of proficiency of the Korean group when compared to the Russian learners). Examining the results of the two groups confirmed the predictions of the FH; both groups were more accurate with [+def, +spec] NPs and with [-def, -spec] NPs than with other contexts and the participants overused the more with [+spec] indefinites than with [-spec] indefinites and overused a more with [-spec]definites than with [+spec] definites. The results revealed that there was a relationship between proficiency and the ability to set the ACP. Advanced learners tended to be more accurate than intermediate learners in both indefinite specific and definite non-specific contexts which were quite problematic for L2 learners. As for the production task, the results supported that of the forced-choice elicitation task except for one difference; there was almost no overuse of a in the production task. Because of very few instances of [+def, -spec] NPs in the data, the hypothesis that overuse of a stems from non-specificity of contexts could not be tested.
With respect to the systematic nature of article misuse by L2 learners and to its semantic cause, the findings of Ionin and Wexler (2003), Ionin et al. (2003) and Ionin et al. (2004) were replicated in Ko, Perovic, Ionin and Wexler (2008). In addition to specificity and definiteness, Ko et al. (2008) investigated the role of the semantic feature of partitivity in L2 article choice. Ko, Ionin and Wexler used the term *partitivity* to refer to a DP 'that denotes an individual that is a member of a set introduced by previous discourse' (2006:3). The overuse of the definite article *the* in partitive contexts is documented in L1 acquisition literature, such as Maratsos (1976). The primary goal of Ko et al. (2008) was to see whether partitivity has a similar role to play in L2 acquisition of articles because the parallels between L1 and L2 acquisition can reveal aspects of the process of language acquisition that are determined by UG factors independent from L1 transfer and cognitive growth (Ko et al., 2006). As for the experiment, 30 adult Serbian and 20 adult Korean learners of English were recruited. Both Serbian and Korean are [-ART] languages. In addition to exploring the role of partitivity in L2 article choice, the study aimed to examine whether different semantic factors equally contribute to L2 article choice. The experimental data (gathered by a forced-choice elicitation task) replicated the findings of Ko et al. (2006) with respect to the active role of partitivity in the overuse of *the* in indefinite DPs. Both groups showed similar degree of sensitivity to partitive DPs. As for specificity, only the Korean group significantly overused *the* with specific indefinites. Ko et al. (2008) demonstrated that partitivity, specificity and definiteness are independent semantic universals which are accessible to L2 learners and that the difference in their effects can be attributed to difference in L2 proficiency-levels (not to L1-transfer) because the overall proficiency level of the Serbian group was higher than that of the Korean one. Ko et al. (2008) claimed that partitivity effects are more persistent than specificity effects and speculated that this results from the entailment relationship between the different semantic features: definiteness, specificity and partitivity. Definiteness entails
partitivity but it does not entail specificity. In other words, a definite context asserts both that a referent does exist (which is also denoted by partitive contexts) and that such a referent is unique. On the other hand, not all definite NPs are necessarily specific.

Kim and Lakshmanan (2009) investigated the role of the ACP in interpreting English articles. 18 adult L1-Korean speakers and a control group of 14 adult native speakers of English participated in the study. The Korean group was subdivided into two proficiency levels: intermediate learners and advanced learners. What distinguishes this study from previously reviewed studies is that Kim and Lakshmanan (2009) argued that although L1 Korean is an article-less language, it still has other means to encode specificity and definiteness. Kim and Lakshmanan (2009) predicted that the properties of Korean, particularly its demonstrative determiners, together with the L2 input frequency where definites are more often specific than non-specific, would cause the Korean-speaking learners of English to initially adopt the specificity setting of the ACP rather than to show fluctuation. The participants completed two major tasks: a word-by-word, self-paced reading task, and an off-line semantic acceptability-rating task. As for the on-line task, the participants’ performance confirmed the predictions of the study: the native group showed adherence to the target setting of the ACP (that is, definiteness), the intermediate Korean group adopted the specificity setting, while the advanced group showed effects of specificity and definiteness (that is, they showed fluctuation). Kim and Lakshmanan (2009) reported that the results showed a developmental progression in terms of article acquisition in which specificity setting is initially selected and fluctuation between the two settings of the ACP appears at a later stage of development. Another interesting finding of the study was that the participants’ performance was more target-like in the off-line task than in the on-line task. Kim and Lakshmanan explained this inconsistency of performance on the ground that learners had a greater opportunity to depend on consciously learned knowledge in the off-line
task than in the other task. However, Kim and Lakshmanan (2009) considered the participants' performance in the on-line task as a better reflection of the informants' competence.

### 2.3.2 The FH and L1 Transfer

In an attempt to investigate the sources of linguistic knowledge in second language acquisition of English articles, Ionin, Zubizarreta and Maldonado (2007) conducted an experimental study. Ionin et al. (2007) addressed the question of L1 transfer that was left open for further research in their earlier studies. Ionin et al. (2007) investigated the acquisition of the English article system by 23 adult speakers of Russian and 24 adult speakers of Spanish. While Russian is a language that lacks articles, as previously stated, Spanish and English are languages with a definiteness-based article systems. The subjects were subdivided into 3 proficiency-level groups: beginners, intermediates and advanced learners of English. The data were collected through an elicitation task consisting of short dialogues. The study results confirmed the hypothesis that L1 transfer overrides fluctuation. That is, the two groups exhibited two different patterns of performance. By examining both the group results and the individual results, the Russian group exhibited fluctuation but the Spanish speakers showed no effect of specificity and relatively target-like performance in the elicitation task. However, the Spanish group showed unexpectedly lower accuracy rates in specific definite contexts than in non-specific contexts. Ionin et al. (2007) attributed this exceptional behavior which was exclusively reflected by article omission to an L1 effect because in the Spanish equivalent contexts articles are omitted. Ionin et al. (2007) argued that the difference between the two groups is due to L1 transfer rather than to any other factor such as general proficiency or exposure to natural input. If proficiency and exposure to input were the main issue, this would lead to the opposite of the pattern found in the study. That is, the performance of the Russian speakers would be better than that of the Korean group.
because the Russian speakers were living in the U.S.A. and of higher proficiency levels than the Spanish group who were studying English in a classroom setting at a Mexican university.

Ionin et al. (2007) concluded that the second language acquisition of articles is the result of the interaction of three sources of linguistic knowledge: UG, L1 transfer and L2 input. That is, in the absence of L1 transfer, L2 learners have full UG access and at that point L2 input is supposed to take its role in triggering the correct setting of the target language.

Guella, Deprez and Sleeman (2008) conducted a study with 11 adult Dutch learners of Arabic. Since both Dutch and Arabic have article systems that are based on definiteness, the goal of the study was to see whether Dutch learners of Arabic would show specificity effects like the ones whose L1 are [-ART]. Data were gathered via a written forced-choice elicitation task. The results showed that the learners overused the in [-def, +spec] contexts and a in [+def, -spec] contexts. Only few errors were reported in [+def, +spec] and [-def, -spec] contexts. Despite the similarity between Arabic and Dutch in their article systems, the participants fluctuated between the two settings of the ACP. Hence, the findings of the study provided very strong support for UG accessibility in L2 article acquisition. Guella et al. (2008) reported that although the resort of L2 learners to UG (that is, in the form of fluctuation) instead of transferring the L1 definiteness-setting of the ACP might be relatively unexpected, the study results could be interpreted in three ways. First, the acquisition of articles involves pragmatic-syntax interface. Although both L1 and L2 have the same setting, L2 learners need time to discover whether specificity or definiteness is the one lexicalized through articles in L2. Second, a large body of studies in L1 acquisition shows that a child begins with resorting to specificity distinctions, independently of their L1 setting. Third, a portion of the overuse of the with indefinites by Dutch speakers could be due to another dimension of definiteness, namely maximality which is beyond the scope of the present study.
Sarko (2009) conducted an experimental study with two groups of intermediate and advanced L2 learners of English: French-speaking and Arabic-speaking learners of English. The aim of the study was to investigate the FH when L1 transfer is possible. Although English, French and Arabic lexicalize definiteness, only Arabic does not lexicalize indefiniteness. An interesting point about French is that French requires overt articles in all types of NPs, regardless of their definiteness, accountability or number. Sarko (2009) addressed the interesting question of whether the Arabic indefinite marker is syntactically absent, consequently Arabic is semantically similar to article-less languages with respect to indefiniteness, or the indefinite article is syntactically present but it is represented by a phonological null exponent. Two instruments were used in collecting the data: a forced-choice elicitation task and a free oral production task which was in the form of a story recall task.

The results of the study showed that both L1 groups behaved similarly with regard to definite contexts. They appropriately used the definite article *the* in both [+def, +spec] and [+def, -spec] contexts. However, there were differences between the two groups in indefinite contexts. In non-specific indefinite contexts, both L1 groups showed a target-like use of *a* with singular count NPs and *Ø* with plural count NPs and mass NPs, but in indefinite specific contexts only Arabic learners overused *the*. That is, the Arabic learners apparently fluctuated between definiteness and specificity. Closer scrutiny of the data by examining the structure of the specific indefinite contexts where *the* was overused revealed that the overuse positively correlated with the presence of relative clauses (hereafter RCs) modifying the relevant NPs. Sarko (2009) attributed the overuse of *the* in RC modified NPs to L1 transfer. In Arabic, such contexts always require the definite article. By excluding the RC modified contexts, both L1 groups showed a similar target-like use of English articles in indefinite contexts. Sarko (2009) reported that the findings of the study provides empirical evidence in favor of
the FT/FA hypothesis (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1996). In the story recall task, the Syrian Arabic learners frequently omitted the indefinite article *a* in count singular [-def, -spec] contexts; the intermediate group and the advanced group selected Ø in 22% and 15% of the contexts, respectively. Sarko (2009) explained this variation in the use of the indefinite article on the ground of the Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis (Prevost and White, 2000). Sarko (2009) came to the conclusion that the indefinite article is syntactically present in Arabic but it is not morphologically marked.

Snape (2005) examined the use of articles by L1-Japanese and L1-Spanish learners of English. Japanese is an article-less language. What distinguishes this study is its focus on the difficulty concerning mass nouns in English. The participants were of intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency. For data collection, a gap-filling task was used. It consisted of 92 short dialogues representing nine definite/indefinite contexts.

Contrary to Ionin et al. (2007) and Sarko (2009), the findings of Snape (2005) showed that both L1-groups showed fluctuation, yet the Japanese group fluctuated more than the Spanish counterpart. This finding supports the view that fluctuation is a temporary stage in L2 acquisition and that fluctuation overrides L1 transfer. However, focusing on singular target NPs indicated that the Spanish participants showed a relatively target-like use of articles in [+def, +spec] and [-def, -spec]. As for overusing *the*, the intermediate-level Spanish participants showed the highest percentage of overusing *the* (10%) in [-def, +spec] contexts when compared to other singular contexts.

Moreover, the results of the study showed an effect of L1 transfer with respect to contexts including mass NPs. Although the Spanish learners overused English articles with mass NPs, the Japanese group showed much more persistent problem with mass nouns. Snape's (2005) attributed this difficulty to L1 transfer. His account was based on Chierchia's (1998)
proposal of the Nominal Mapping Parameter which classifies languages into three groups according to their NP types. Japanese is an example of languages that have [+argument, -predicate] NPs and lack articles and number marking on nouns. Spanish is an example of the second type of languages that have [-argument, +predicate] NPs. Spanish requires articles with all types of NPs. English belongs to the third type of languages where NPs are [+argument, +predicate]. In English, singular count nouns are predicates which require an article whereas plurals and mass nouns are arguments which are kind denoting, therefore not requiring an article.

Zdorenko and Paradis (2007) investigated the rate of accuracy and types of errors in the acquisition of English articles by child L2. The goal of the study was to bring insights into L2 acquisition in the absence of 'age-based constraints' (Zdorenko and Paradis, 2007:484). The participants were of two groups: native speakers of [+ART] languages and native speakers of [-ART] languages. Gathering data lasted for a period of two years through elicited narratives in five testing sessions.

The results of the study indicated that the effect of L1 transfer was less important than the context types in determining the participants' use of English articles. Both groups overused the in specific indefinite contexts. The results showed that for L2 English children, fluctuation overrides transfer. However, Zdorenko and Paradis (2007) reported an L1 effect reflected in the omission of articles by the [-ART] group, but this was only statistically significant in the first session. Another interesting finding of the study indicated that L2 learners acquire the definite article before the indefinite article. Mayo (2009) coined the term directionality to refer to this developmental path of acquisition. The participants used the more accurately than a. Consequently, the results replicated those of many studies in both L1 child and L2 adult article acquisition (for a brief overview, see Zdorenko and Paradis, 2007).
Furthermore, Zdorenko and Paradis (2007) reported that directionality in article acquisition could be a general property of L2 acquisition.

In the same line of research, Mayo (2009) conducted an empirical study with two proficiency-level groups of Spanish-speaking L2 learners of English: low-intermediate and advanced learners. The aim of the study was to study the interaction between the FH and L1 transfer and to investigate whether L1-Spanish speakers show the developmental pattern of directionality in English article acquisition. For data collection, Mayo (2009) utilized the same forced-choice elicitation task used in Ionin et al. (2004) but she added two more types of contexts: first-mention indefinites and previous-mention definites.

The findings of the study supported the view that L1 transfer overrides fluctuation because the Spanish learners showed a relatively native-like use of English articles. As for directionality, the low-proficiency group showed clear effects of directionality whereas such effects disappeared in the advanced group.

Although the FH has been the subject of much investigation in the domain of second language acquisition of articles, recent studies do not unanimously support Ionin’s hypothesis. For example, Hawkins et al. (2006), Snape, Leung and Ting (2006) and Tryzna (2009) tested the predictions of the FH and offered alternative proposals for L2 article choices.

Hawkins et al. (2006) investigated the acquisition of L2 English articles by L1-Japanese and L1-Greek learners. Group results confirmed the predictions of the FH; the native speakers of Greek (a language that has a definiteness-based article system) attained a native-like competence in using English articles but the Japanese group fluctuated. However, closer scrutiny of individual results revealed that individual Japanese learners did not fluctuate. Hawkins et al. (2006) offered an alternative account of the individual patterns of L2 article
choices. Similar to the FH, the account of Hawkins et al. (2006) assumed UG-access in L2 acquisition and it is feature-based. Following Lardiere and Schwartz (1997), Lardiere (2000), Prevost and White (2000), White (2003b) and Halle and Marantz (1993), Hwakins et al. (2006) claimed that the insertion of a phonological exponent, that is, an article, of the syntactic category D (that is, determiner) involves feature-matching between the vocabulary item and the terminal node for D. According to Hawkins et al. (2006), the interlanguage grammars of the Japanese speakers may be the result of misdetermining the relevant features for the English article system, such as choosing [+specific] rather than [+definite]. In addition, Hwakins et al. (2006) questioned the validity of the ACP In the light of the Minimalist approach (Chomsky, 1998) which disfavors such a construction-specific parameter.

Following Hankins et al. (2006), Snape et al. (2006) adopted a feature-based account of articles acquisition which is based on the Distributed Morphology model (Halle and Marantz 1993). Snape et al. (2006) compared the findings of two studies: Reid et al. (2006) which investigated the use of English articles by Japanese and Spanish speakers and Ting (2005) which examined the acquisition of articles by Mandarin Chinese and Spanish learners of English. The results of the two studies showed similar behavior of the Spanish learners who did not show fluctuation but rather native-like production of English articles. With regard to the performance of the native speakers of the two article-less languages, the results were not consistent. The L1-Japanese group showed sensitivity to specificity whereas the Chinese learners did not. The Chinese learners were more target-like than the Japanese group. Snape et al. (2006) proposed an account which is based on the process of grammaticalization and L1 transfer. By examining the historical development of the two languages, Snape et al. (2006) claimed that Japanese is still beyond Chinese in the process of grammaticalization of the universal cognitive category of definiteness. That is, Chinese has managed to
grammaticalize indefiniteness through the use of the numeral yi (which means one) and the full grammaticalization of definiteness is on its way through the use of the demonstrative nei (which means that).

2.4 Summary

This section briefly outlines some of the important studies on the second language acquisition of articles. It mainly focuses on studies under two major frameworks: the Bickertonian approach and the FH. Given the nature of the present study, the review particularly highlights the studies that tackle the interaction between the FH and L1 transfer.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the study's methodology. It provides background information about the participants recruited for this study and a description of the research instruments and of the experiment procedures. Then, the statistical methods used in analyzing the data are outlined. Finally, limitations of the study are presented.

3.2 Participants

34 adult native speakers of Arabic participated in the study. All the participants were female Saudi students majoring in English at Umm Al-Qura University. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will consider Saudis as speakers of MSA as the article system is not affected by the diglossic situation in Saudi Arabic. All the participants had no natural exposure to English in native environments. Most of them started studying English at the age of 13 in the intermediate school. According to the Oxford Quick Placement Test (2001) (hereafter OQPT), the participants were of three levels of proficiency: upper-intermediates, low-intermediates and beginners. The upper-intermediate group consisted of 7 students and their mean age was 21.1. The low-intermediate group consisted of 7 participants with the mean age of 21.7. In the beginner group, 20 students were recruited. Their mean age was 19.2. The three groups had been studying English in a classroom setting for a mean of 9.9, 8.7 and 7.45 years, respectively. Table 6 features information about the three groups.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>OQPT Score</th>
<th>Formal English learning (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper-intermediate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20-23</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>39-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-intermediate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21-23</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>31-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>14-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6-15</td>
<td>7.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Participants in the study

3.3 Research Instruments

Three research instruments were implemented in the study: a background questionnaire, OQPT and a written forced-choice elicitation task.

3.3.1 Background Questionnaire

The participants were instructed to fill out a written background questionnaire about some biographical information including age and place and length of formal English learning. The background questionnaire is provided in Appendix B.

3.3.2 English Proficiency Test

Since the present study investigates a developmental pattern of article acquisition, the participants should be divided into different levels according to their English proficiency. Following many studies that targeted the acquisition of English articles, (e.g. Hawkins et al., 2006; Sarko, 2009; Mayo, 2009; Tryzna, 2009), the implemented English proficiency test was OQPT (2001) which is a valid and reliable measure of English proficiency. OQPT (2001) consists of 60 multiple-choice items assessing major areas of English grammar. Compared to other English standardized tests, the small number of the OQPT’s items together
with the short time (which is only thirty minutes) allotted to it contribute to its efficiency as a practical test.

3.3.3 Forced-choice elicitation task

In order to control types of contexts with respect to definiteness and specificity, a forced-choice elicitation task was used. The researcher adapted the forced-choice task used in Ionin et al. (2004) because it served the purposes of the present study, as follows:

- In the task, all the target NPs are singular count NPs. The mass/count and the singular/plural distinctions between *a* and *Ø* are beyond the scope of this paper.
- The task neglects the phonological differences between *a* and *an*.
- It does not include RC modified NPs. In a similar study on the acquisition of L2 English by Syrian Arabic-speakers, Sarko (2009) showed that Arabic learners overuse *the* with RC-modified indefinites and he considered this an effect of L1 transfer rather than an effect of specificity (see section 3.2.3 above).

The forced-choice task consisted of 44 short dialogues. In each dialogue, a target sentence was missing an article. The participants had to choose between three choices: *the*, *a* or (...) which means no article was needed. All the target NPs in the test were always in object position.

Slight modifications were made on four test items where the target NPs were modified by adjectives. Since Trenkic (2009) and Goad and White (2004, 2007) demonstrated that L2 learners omit articles more often when a noun is modified by an adjective than in simpler non-modified contexts, these four items were rewritten in a way so as to avoid such a tendency.
The task was made up of 32 test items and 12 filler items. The test items were particularly designed to investigate the effect of specificity in article choice. They were divided into four context types each of which consisted of 8 dialogues: [+def, +spec], [+def, -spec], [-def, +spec] and [-def, -spec]. The specific or non-specific reading of each context was determined by stating the speakers' knowledge or his denial. (1)-(4) give illustrations of dialogues representing each of the four contexts.

(1) [+def, +spec]

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 (a, the, --) owner of this bookstore – she is my old friend. (Expected answer: the)

(2) [+def, -spec]

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 (a/an, the, --) owner of this store – I don’t know who he is, but I want to see him right now! (Expected answer: the)

(3) [-def, +spec]

Meeting on a street

Roberta: Hi, William! It’s nice to see you again. I didn’t know that you were
in Boston.

William: I am here for a week. I am visiting (a, the, --) friend from college – his name is Sam Bolton, and he lives in Cambridge now. (Expected answer: a)

(4) [-def,-spec]

Chris: I need to find your roommate Jonathan right away.

Clara: He is not here – he went to New York.

Chris: Really? In what part of New York is he staying?

Clara: I don’t really know. He is staying with (a, the, --) friend – but he didn’t tell me who that is. He didn’t leave me any phone number or address. (Expected answer: a)

In addition, 12 short dialogues were used as fillers. The target NPs were of five types: universal definites, geographic names, proper names, definite generics and possessive fillers. The fillers were included to distract the participants' attention from the linguistic aspect being investigated. Moreover, the use of possessive fillers, as in (5), gave the participants an indication that articles could be omitted in some contexts.

(5) Julie: What did you do last night?

Peter: Not much. I just worked on (a, the, --) my physics homework. (Expected answer:--)

Test items and filler items were randomized. The full list of the task items is given in Appendix C where the modified items are marked (Modified).
3.4 Procedures

The participants were tested in a single session. Background questionnaires were filled out before both the proficiency test and the forced-choice elicitation task. Given the emphasis of OQPT on English grammatical rules, it was administered last in order to avoid alerting the participants' conscious knowledge of articles because the participants' intuitions about articles were the main focus of the present study. All the participants finished the two tasks in less than 90 minutes. Following Ionin et al. (2004), the forced-elicitation task was accompanied by a vocabulary list in which some words used in the dialogues were translated into the participants' L1 (that is, into Arabic). This was done so that lacking vocabulary knowledge would not influence the participants' responses to the task.

3.5 Data Analysis

The study results were analyzed by means of SPSS program version 16. The test items were classified into four topics according to context type: [+def, +spec], [+def, -spec], [-def, +spec] and [-def, -spec]. The means and standard deviations for the responses of each proficiency-level group in each type of context were calculated. Then, separate one-way ANOVAs were used to determine whether or not the differences between the three groups in accurate article choices were significant. Post-hoc comparisons using the Scheffe –test were made to determine which group pairs caused the significant differences. To examine the effect of context specificity, paired sample t-tests were used. They compared each group's means of responses to test items in [+def, +spec] contexts to its means of responses to items representing [+def, -spec] contexts, on the one hand, and they compared each group's means of responses to test items in [-def, +spec] contexts to its means of responses to items in [-def, -spec] contexts, on the other hand. Finally, separate one-way ANOVAs followed by
comparisons using the Scheffe–test were used to determine whether or not the three groups significantly differed in the use of *a* and in the overuse of *the* in [-def, +spec] contexts.

### 3.6 Limitations of the Study

The number of the participants, the implemented proficiency test and the type of the test task reveal some limitations of the present study. First of all, the number of the recruited participants, particularly those of the upper-intermediate and the lower-intermediate levels of proficiency, was relatively limited. For practical considerations based on the nature of the study as a research project, only 34 participants were tested. For future research, testing a larger number of participants may lead to more conclusive results. Secondly, using a standardized proficiency test such as TOFEL or IELTS would be a more accurate measure of individuals’ proficiency in English. Beside its validity and reliability, the practicality of OQPT was the mean reason for using it in the present study. Thirdly, although the implemented forced-choice task enabled the researcher to control the types of contexts, the number of instances of each contexts were somehow limited. This was also because of practical reasons; this was due to time limit. However, including more instances for each contexts would provide more definite results. In addition, supplementing the forced-choice task with a free production task such as written picture-description tasks or narrative tasks would provide more insights into L2 learners' unconscious knowledge of articles. Since making accurate judgments about specificity and definiteness are context-based, this necessitates interviewing the participants after doing such free production task. Unfortunately, this would require doubled effort from the researcher.

Finally, it is important to point to the lack of a control group in the study due to the unavailability of sufficient number of native speakers. Since the implemented task was the
same one used in Ionin et al. (2004) where a control group was included, this may minimize
the need for a control group in the present study.

3.7 Summary

This chapter presents the methodological design of the study. The recruited participants,
the research instruments, the experimental procedures and the statistical methods used in
analyzing the data are described. The limitations of the study concerning the size of the
experiment sample and the implemented instruments are presented to be considered in
making the study conclusions and in recommending issues for future research.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter consists of two main sections. First, a report of the study results as obtained by the implemented instruments is provided. Then, the study results are discussed in the light of the proposed hypotheses and the findings of relevant studies in the literature.

4.2 Results

To test the study hypotheses and their corresponding predictions concerning L1 transfer and the role of specificity, the participants' responses to test items were analyzed according to: level of proficiency and context type.

4.2.1 Article choice and proficiency level

Based on the assumptions of the FT/FA hypothesis regarding the influence of L1, adult native speakers of Arabic are expected to have no difficulty in acquiring English articles because of the similarity between Arabic and English in their semantic interpretation of articles that is based on definiteness according to the ACP. This implies that all the three proficiency-level groups are expected to exhibit accurate use of English articles in all categories. Accordingly, the results of each group will be presented separately and they will be followed by a cross-level comparison.

Upper-Intermediate Group

The results of the experiment task, as shown in Table 7 and Figure 3 below, indicate that the upper-intermediate group used English articles in a relatively target-like way. This confirms the study predictions.
Table 7: Article choices made by the upper-intermediate group in all contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context type</th>
<th>Target article</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Article choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[+def, +spec]</td>
<td>The</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Upper-intermediate (N=7)</td>
<td>The: 56/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A: 0/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>omission: 0/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+def, -spec]</td>
<td>The</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>54/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[-def, spec]</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>0/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[-def, + spec]</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>56/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0/56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Low-Intermediate Group

Although the low-intermediate group did not use English articles as accurate as the upper-intermediate group, as shown in Table 8 below, they relatively appeared to be native-like in using English articles. This is in line with the study predictions. Figure 4 provides the means of the responses made by the low-intermediate group.
The FT/FA hypothesis is about the initial state in L2 acquisition as it assumes the absolute transfer of L1 grammar to L2. Therefore, the beginner group is expected to show accurate use of English articles. However, the results of the task, as shown in Table 9 and Figure 5, appear to contradict the study predictions. That is, the beginner group made many errors in doing the task.

### Table 8: Article choices made by the low-intermediate group in all contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context Type</th>
<th>Target Article</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Article Choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low-intermediate (N=7)</td>
<td>The</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+def, +spec]</td>
<td>The</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>52/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+def, - spec]</td>
<td>The</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>48/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[-def, - spec]</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[-def, + spec]</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>4/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4: Means of article choices in the low-intermediate group**

**Beginner Group**

The FT/FA hypothesis is about the initial state in L2 acquisition as it assumes the absolute transfer of L1 grammar to L2. Therefore, the beginner group is expected to show accurate use of English articles. However, the results of the task, as shown in Table 9 and Figure 5, appear to contradict the study predictions. That is, the beginner group made many errors in doing the task.
Comparing the Groups' Results

If Arabic-speaking learners of English do transfer the definiteness-setting of the ACP, no significant differences are expected between the three proficiency-level groups. To test this prediction, separate one-way ANOVAs were used to compare the groups on accurate use of English articles in all the four contexts. The results, as shown in Table 10 below, indicate that there were significant differences between the groups. Means, standard deviations and standard errors are provided in Table 11, Table 12, Table 13 and Table 14 in Appendix D.
Table 10: Separate one-way ANOVAs results comparing the three groups on using English articles

To investigate which pairs of groups caused the significant differences, post-hoc comparisons were made using the Scheffe-test which reveals that there were no significant differences between the two intermediate-level groups (p > 0.05). The results also show that the upper-intermediate group significantly used the target articles more than the beginner group in all the four contexts. As for the third pair, the low-intermediate group significantly outperformed the beginner group on using articles in [+def, +spec], [-def, -spec] and in [-def, +spec] contexts. It is only on using *a* with non-specific definites where no statistical difference was found between the last pair. Table 15 below summarizes the results of the comparison between the intermediate groups and the beginner group on article use in all the four contexts. Since both Arabic and English have definiteness-based article systems, the significant differences between the beginner group and the intermediate groups are unexpected. This may imply that Arabic-speaking learners of English did not transfer the L1 setting of the ACP. However, this view will be reconsidered in the discussion section below.
### Table 15: Results of the Scheffe test comparing article choices by the intermediate groups and the beginner group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context Type</th>
<th>Target Article</th>
<th>Groups Pair</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Sig. (p-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[+def, +spec]</td>
<td>The</td>
<td>Upper-intermediate Beginner</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Upper-intermediate Beginner</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[+def, -spec]</td>
<td>The</td>
<td>Upper-intermediate Beginner</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low–intermediate Beginner</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>0.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[-def, -spec]</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>Upper-intermediate Beginner</td>
<td>3.250</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low–intermediate Beginner</td>
<td>2.964</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[-def, +spec]</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>Upper-intermediate Beginner</td>
<td>3.650</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low–intermediate Beginner</td>
<td>2.793</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2 Effect of Context Specificity

To investigate whether adult Arabic-speaking English learners are sensitive to the specificity of context in their interpretation of English articles, comparisons were made between the participants' article choices in specific contexts and in non-specific ones. Furthermore, the effect of specificity was examined by comparing the performance of the three proficiency-level groups to each other.

4.2.2.1 Article Choice and Context Type

**Definite Contexts**

Whether the participants transfer their L1 setting of the ACP or fluctuate between the two settings, the FH predicates that the participants will not show any specificity effect in their article choices in definite contexts according to the reduced version of the ACP.
The study results, as shown in Table 7, Table 8 and Table 9 above, indicate that both the upper-intermediate and the low-intermediate groups used *the* more often with specific definites than with non-specific definites and that both groups overused *a* more often in [+def, -spec] contexts than in [+def, +spec] contexts. On the other hand, the beginner group showed the opposite pattern with respect to both the use of *the* and the use of *a* in definite contexts. However, paired t-tests showed that the differences in article choices (that is, *the* and *a*) by the three groups in the two types of definite contexts are not statistically significant (p > 0.05) (see Table 16 and Table 17 in Appendix D). This confirms the proposal of reducing the ACP and matches the predictions of the present study.

**Indefinite Contexts**

Adopting the reduced version of the ACP, if specificity does influence article choices by L2 learners, [-def, +spec] contexts are expected to be a problematic area. This will be manifested in less accurate use of the indefinite article and more overuse of the definite article in this context when compared to non-specific indefinite contexts. With the exception of the upper-intermediate group where the participants showed a target-like use of the indefinite article *a*, the study results, as shown in Table 7, Table 8 and Table 9 above, reveal that the participants used the indefinite article more accurately in non-specific indefinite contexts than in their specific counterparts and that they also overused *the* more often with specific definites than with non-specific ones.

To determine whether or not the differences between using *a* and overusing *the* in the two indefinite contexts are significant, paired sample t-tests were used. The results indicate that although there were differences in using *a* between the two indefinite contexts, the differences did not reach statistical significance for both the low-intermediate and the beginner group (p > 0.05). As for the upper-intermediate group, the test cannot be performed
because the standard deviations are zeros. The paired t-tests results are provided in Table 18 in Appendix D.

Paired sample t-tests were also used to determine the significance of the differences in overusing *the* between specific and non-specific indefinite contexts. The results, as shown in Table 19 below, indicate that the upper-intermediate group was not sensitive to the specificity of the target NP because they used *a* in a native-like way. Moreover, since the P-value for the low-intermediate group is very near to 0.05, this means that the difference was marginally significant ($P = 0.078$). As for the beginner group, the difference was statistically significant ($t (19) = -2.292, p < 0.05$). So the results, again, are in line with the proposal of reducing the ACP but they appear not to confirm the particular predictions of this study concerning L1 transfer and specificity effect. This will be elaborated in the discussion section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Contexts</th>
<th>Paired Sample Statistics</th>
<th>Paired Differences (test)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper-intermediate</td>
<td><em>the</em> in [-d, -s]</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>the</em> in [-d, +s]</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-intermediate</td>
<td><em>the</em> in [-d, -s]</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>the</em> in [-d, +s]</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td><em>the</em> in [-d, -s]</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>the</em> in [-d, +s]</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19: Paired sample t-tests between use of *the* in specific and non-specific indefinite contexts
4.2.2.2 Specificity and proficiency level

Both the FT/FA hypothesis and the FH highlight the active role of L2 input in triggering the appropriate settings of parameters in L2 acquisition. Assuming that the beginner group has received less L2 input than the intermediate-level groups, they are expected to be more sensitive to specificity than the other two groups.

Focusing on article choices in specific indefinite contexts where the specificity effect is more expected, separate one-way ANOVAs were used to determine whether the three groups significantly differ in their sensitivity to context specificity. As for the accurate use of a in specific indefinite contexts, the results, as shown in Table 20 below, indicate that the difference is statistically significant (P < 0.001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig. (p-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[-def , + spec]</td>
<td>Upper-intermediate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>12.704</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low – intermediate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 20: Results of one-way ANOVA analysis on use of a in specific indefinite contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups Pair</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Sig. (p-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper- intermediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low – intermediate</td>
<td>0.857</td>
<td>0.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper- intermediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>3.650</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low – intermediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>2.793</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21: Results of the Scheffe – test on use of a in specific indefinite contexts
To investigate which pair caused this significant difference, the Scheffe – test was used.

The results, as shown in Table 21 above, indicate that the beginner group used a significantly less often with specific indefinites than both the upper-intermediate group and the Low-intermediate group (p < 0.05, for each of the two pairs).

The results obtained by one-way ANOVAs, provided in Table 22 below, show that the difference between the three groups in overusing the was statistically significant (P < 0.01).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig. (p-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[-def, + spec]</td>
<td>Upper-intermediate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>7.120</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low-intermediate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 22: Results of one-way ANOVA test on overusing the in specific indefinite contexts

Post-hoc comparisons using the Scheffe - test, as shown in Table 23 below, reveal that the beginner group significantly overused the with specific indefinites more often than the other two groups (p < 0.05, for each of the two pairs). So the results seem not to conform to the study’s predictions regarding the role of specificity. This view will be considered in the discussion section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups Pair</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Sig. (p-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper- intermediate</td>
<td>-0.571</td>
<td>0.836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low – intermediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>-2.600</td>
<td>0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper- intermediate</td>
<td>-2.029</td>
<td>0.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low – intermediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23: Results of the Scheffe – test on overusing the in specific indefinite contexts
4.3 Discussion

The present study aims at investigating L2 acquisition of English articles by adult native speakers of Arabic. It basically tests the predictions of the FH with the possibility of transferring L1 setting of the ACP. Adopting the assumptions underlying the FT/FA hypothesis and the FH, the following two hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Since both Arabic and English have definiteness-based article systems, adult Arabic-speaking learners of English will show accurate use of the in all definite categories and accurate use of a in all indefinite categories.

H2: Since neither Arabic nor English encode specificity in their article systems, adult Arabic-speaking learners of English will show no sensitivity to context specificity in their article choices.

The study results do not fully confirm the FH predictions regarding the role of L1 transfer and the impact of context specificity. When L1 and L2 have definiteness-based article systems, there are only two conflicting possibilities under the FH and each possibility implies complementary roles of L1 transfer and specificity on article choice. The first possibility is that L1 transfer does happen and in that case no effect of specificity is expected. Assuming no influence of L1 on the semantic interpretation of L2 articles, the second possibility predicts target-like use of articles in both [+def, +spec] contexts and [-def, -spec] contexts accompanied by significant overuse of the definite article with specific indefinite NPs. The participants’ article choices did fully conform to neither the first possibility nor the second one.

Concerning the role of L1 transfer, the three groups were expected to make accurate choices of English articles due to the similarity between their L1 and L2 according to the
ACP. As for the intermediate groups, the results show that there were no significant
differences between the two groups as they exhibited a relatively accurate use of English
articles in all contexts. Unexpectedly, the beginner-level group used English articles
significantly less accurately than the upper-intermediate group in all the four contexts and
significantly less accurately than the low-intermediate group in three contexts. Although the
results appear to support the view that L1 does not influence L2 acquisition of articles, there
are some pieces of evidence arguing in favor of the active role of L1. First, a well-
documented phenomenon in the literature is that acquisition of L2 articles represents a
challenge for native speakers of [-ART] L1s and that they take longer time to acquire the article
system than native speakers of [+ART] L1s (e.g. Master, 1997; Thomas, 1989). Although none
of the participants in the present study was of an advanced-level of English proficiency, the
intermediate-level groups showed a relatively target-like use of articles. The study results
replicate that of Mayo (2009) and Sarko (2009) where advanced and intermediate-level L2
learners of English whose L1s morphologically mark definiteness through articles showed a
native-like use of articles. On the other hand, Ionin et al. (2004) and Ionin et al. (2007)
(among others) reported that even when native speakers of [-ART] L1s were of advanced
proficiency-level in English they still showed instances of fluctuation. Therefore, one
conclusion can be drawn from these studies that L2 learners of [-ART] L1s and those of L1s
that have articles are likely to differ in their rate of acquiring articles. This implies that the
presence of articles in L1 can somehow facilitate the acquisition of L2 articles.

Assuming that the participants were influenced by their L1, so how can the low
performance of the beginner group be accounted for? Ionin (2003) claims that the difficulty
of L2 acquisition of articles stems from the discourse-based nature of the triggers of the ACP.
She considers that the ACP triggers are 'particularly difficult from the standpoint of L2
acquisition because they do not arise (at least not obviously) from the syntactic configuration'
Evaluating the interlocutors' knowledge required relatively accurate comprehension of the test dialogues. Providing the beginner-level group with a vocabulary list including the most likely unfamiliar words may be helpful but comprehending the whole context is still not an easy task. Moreover, Schwartz and Sprouse (1996) demonstrate that in early stages of L2 acquisition the performance of L2 learners may not reflect their competence. This implies that although the beginner-level group did not make article choices as accurate as the intermediate groups, their errors may be due to their inability to handle the experiment task. For this reason, Mayo (2009) and Sarko (2009) did not include any beginners in their empirical studies. As for Ionin et al. (2007), the percentages of article choices made by the Spanish group which was relatively native-like were calculated for the group as a whole. Ionin et al. (2007) reported that there was a positive correlation between accuracy in article choices and proficiency but no details were provided about article choices for each of the three proficiency-level groups separately. The general results in Ionin et al. (2007) could conceal important specific details about the beginner group which might show non-target-like use of articles.

Interestingly enough, the low performance of beginners can be partially accounted for by referring to L1 transfer. Examining the test items reveals that a large number of items involve of-phrases following the target NPs. Of-phrases are the English equivalent of 'iDaafa' in Arabic (Kharma, 1981). In an analysis of the errors committed by Arab university students in Kuwait, Kharma (1981) demonstrated that using the English definite article with nouns preceding of-phrases was problematic for the participants and he attributed this to the interference of L1 due to the differing patterns of definiteness for the nouns in genitive constructions in Arabic.

Closer scrutiny of individual results demonstrates another interesting point regarding L1 transfer. 20% of the beginner group (that is, four participants: S15, S17, S18 and S24, see
Appendix A) were relatively native-like in their article choices as they made errors in only 9% of the test items (each made only 3 errors). Their errors were almost limited to items where the target NPs were followed by an of-phrase (7 out of 12 choice errors) and to items targeting using the indefinite article in specific contexts (3 out of 12). Since some beginner-level participants used English articles appropriately, this gives further evidence that Arabic-speaking learners of English are aided in L2 acquisition of English articles by the presence of articles in their L1.

With respect to the role of specificity, the study results do not fully confirm its hypothesis. The findings of this experiment provide empirical evidence that context specificity may have an impact on article choices by Arabic-speaking learners of English. The effect of specificity is manifested in the significant overuse of the English definite article *the* with specific indefinites by the beginner-level group. The study findings partially conform to the predictions of the FH that for L2 learners, specific indefinite contexts are problematic when using articles. It is in specific indefinite contexts where most cases of article overuse occurred and where appropriate articles least used. This finding is important when relating to L1 transfer because the FH does not expect to be any significant effect of specificity on article choices if Arabic-speaking learners of English are influenced by an L1 impact, which is argued above to be the case. The study results concerning the upper-intermediate group are consistent with the predictions of the FH because the responses of the upper-intermediate group indicate that they appropriately interpreted *the* as encoding definiteness and *a* as encoding indefiniteness regardless of context specificity but the same is not true for the low-intermediate group or the beginner group. The beginner group significantly overused *the* in specific indefinite contexts more than in non-specific indefinite ones. As for the low-intermediate group (which was relatively native-like in their use of English articles), *the* was also overused in specific contexts more than in non-specific ones, yet the difference was only
marginally significant (perhaps due to the small size of the group). Comparing the performance of the three groups reveals that specificity effect significantly decreases as proficiency increases.

The study results concerning the effect of specificity cannot be interpreted under the FH. Excluding the results of the beginner group due to the possibility of task difficulty, the performance of the low-intermediate group where the effect of specificity was marginally significant was unexpected. According to the FH, the relatively target-like use of articles in the low-intermediate group was an indication of transferring the definiteness setting of the ACP. Since the overuse of the in specific indefinite context was not accompanied by an exceptionally target-like use of articles in [+def, +spec] contexts (93%) and in [-def, -spec] contexts (96%) when compared to [+def, -spec] (86%) and to [-def, +spec] (89%), the effect of specificity cannot be attributed to a temporary stage of fluctuation between the two settings of the ACP. Hence, the study results may cast doubt on the underlying assumptions of the FH and the ACP because the tendency to overuse the definite article with specific indefinites could be the result of an independent factor that cannot be captured by proposing specificity as one setting of the ACP. Some researchers of SLA has questioned the validity of the FH and the reality of the ACP, such as Hawkins et al. (2006), Snape et al. (2006) and Tryzna (2009). However, definite conclusions cannot be inferred on the basis of the performance of the beginner group alone since it is assumed above that the task might be too difficult for them or on the basis of the performance of the low-intermediate group because sensitivity to context specificity was only marginally significant.

Although the study results cannot fully be captured under the FH and although neither Arabic nor English use the definite article in specific indefinite contexts, similar cases are reported in SLA literature regarding other linguistic properties beyond article systems. For example, Eubank, Bischof, Huffstutler, Leek and West (1997), as reported in Ionin (2003),
demonstrated that Chinese-speaking learners of English allowed English verbs to be raised by placing them before adverbs. Verbs are raised in languages such as French but neither English nor Chinese allow verb raising. The overuse of *the* in specific indefinite contexts is also consistent with natural language data. In some languages, no distinction is made between specific indefinites and definites (see section 1.3.2 above). Moreover, many studies on child L1 acquisition indicated that overusing *the* with specific indefinites is very common in the speech of English-speaking children, such as Brown (1973) and Schaeffer and Matthewson (2005).
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the study by summarizing the study findings and proposing some pedagogical implications. Finally, the study’s contribution to the field of SLA research is stated and some issues are recommended for further research.

5.2 Conclusion

The present study addressed the issue of L1 transfer at the level of article semantics and the effect of context specificity on article choices by adult Arabic-speaking English learners. According to the ACP, Arabic and English have definiteness-based article systems. This leads to contradicting possibilities under the FH: fluctuation will override L1 transfer or transfer will override fluctuation. Based on the underlying assumptions of the FT/FA hypothesis and the FH, the following two hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Since both Arabic and English have definiteness-based article systems, Adult Arabic-speaking learners of English will show accurate use of the in all definite categories and accurate use of a in all indefinite categories.

H2: Since neither Arabic nor English encode specificity in their article systems, Adult Arabic-speaking learners of English will show no sensitivity to context specificity in their article choices.

The findings of this study confirm the first hypothesis but do not fully confirm the second one. The study results provide empirical evidence for the role of L1 in the acquisition of L2 articles but not in the same way as expected under the FH. The results indicate that the similarities between the article systems in Arabic and English do aid the acquisition of L2
articles and that the differences impede acquisition as they prevent the learner from noticing relevant properties of L2 input. Although specificity is encoded in the article system of neither Arabic nor English, the study results reveal that specificity is a likely factor in causing many errors made by adult Arabic-speaking learners of English.

Although L2 learners may manage to communicate in the target language without mastering its article system, Master (2002) states that pedagogic intervention is particularly necessary for using L2 for academic purposes because the L2 learners' rhetorical creditability may be destroyed by article misuse. Pedagogically, the findings of this study reveal some problematic issues for L2 learners of English. First of all, the discourse-based nature of articles necessitates drawing learners' attention to discourse context, especially the perspectives of the interlocutors (the speaker and the hearer). Using authentic contexts that involve simple syntactic structures and non-ambiguous semantic elements would be very effective in teaching articles in EFL classes, especially for beginner level students. In addition, the study results indicate that the difference between 'iDaafa' constructions in Arabic and English of-phrases with respect to definiteness needs a pedagogical intervention (whether explicit or implicit). Finally, the findings reveal the likelihood of a potential role of context specificity in L2 article misuse. Teaching articles in EFL classes is usually based on a list of separate rules that specify each article environments. With the exception of using articles with proper names, in idiomatic expressions and for generic reference, focusing on article semantics can be fruitful and effort-saving in teaching articles, particularly for intermediate and advanced L2 learners.

The present study is an attempt to widen the spectrum of SLA research on the domain of articles by particularly focusing on article semantics and the role of L1 as predicted under the FH and the FT/FA hypothesis. The study results reveal an active role of L1 transfer. The role of specificity in acquisition of L2 articles where both L1 and L2 have article systems
encoding definiteness needs further research in order to explore whether L2 learners make systematic errors in article choices due to context specificity in the same way as expected under the FH. A larger number of participants together with the implement of free production tasks are recommended for future research to get more conclusive results. Further research is also needed to address the question of whether or not definiteness has a role to play in second language acquisition of a specificity-based article system by native speakers of [-ART] L1s in order to further test the predictions of the FH. If the findings of such future research do not reveal an impact of definiteness, this may shake the underlying proposals of the FH.
References


http://sls.msu.edu/soslap/journal/index.php/sls/article/download/3/1


Appendix A

Participants' Background Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>OQPT Score</th>
<th>Formal English Learning (years)</th>
<th>Age of Starting Studying English</th>
<th>Place of Starting Studying English</th>
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<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tr>
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<td>S3</td>
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<td>upper-intermediate</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
</tr>
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<td>S4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>upper-intermediate</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
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<tr>
<td>S5</td>
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<td>upper-intermediate</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
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<td>upper-intermediate</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
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<td>S7</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
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Appendix B

Background Questionnaire

Please fill in the following questionnaire which will only be used for research purposes.

Name (optional): …………………………..

Age: ……………………………………..

When did you start studying English? And Where?

Have you ever studied English abroad? If yes, where?
Appendix C

Forced-choice Elicitation Task

Instructions: This test consists of 44 short English dialogues. One of the last sentences in each dialogue is missing an article. A choice of possible articles is given in parentheses: it always looks like (a, the, --). The dash (--) means no article is needed. Your job is to decide which of the three choices in the parentheses is most appropriate in the given context. The choice of article depends on the context, so please carefully read the entire dialogue. You may sometimes feel that more than one of the choices provided is appropriate in the given context; in that case, please choose the variant that sounds best in the given context. It is important that you provide only one answer for each item. Please circle your answer.

If you come across unfamiliar words, please refer to the list of English words and corresponding translations on the enclosed vocabulary sheet. Please do not use your own dictionary.

Please do not go back to or change your earlier answers.

Test Items:

Specific Definite Contexts

(1) Conversation between two police officers
Police officer Clark: I haven’t seen you in a long time. You must be very busy.
Police officer Smith: Yes. Did you hear about Miss Sarah Andrews, a famous lawyer who was murdered several weeks ago? We are trying to find (a, the, --) murderer of Miss Andrews – his name is Roger Williams, and he is a well-known criminal.

(2) 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 (a, the, --) owner of this bookstore – she is my old friend.

(3) At the end of a chess tournament
Laura: Are you ready to leave?
Betsy: No, not yet. First, I need to talk to (a, the, --) winner of this tournament – she is my good friend, and I want to congratulate her!

(4) Eric: I really liked that book you gave for my birthday. It was very interesting!
Laura: Thanks! I like it too. I would like to meet (a, the, --) author of that book some day – I saw an interview with her on TV, and I really liked her!

(5) Paul: Do you have time for lunch?
Sheila: No, I’m very busy. I am meeting with (a, the, --) president of our university – Dr. McKinley; it’s an important meeting.

(6) Meeting in a park
Andrew: Hi, Nora. What are you doing here in Chicago? Are you here for
work?
Nora: No, for family reasons. I am visiting (a, the, --) father of my fiancé — he is really nice, and he is paying for our wedding!

(7) Reporter 1: Guess what? I finally got an important assignment!
Reporter 2: Great! What is it?
Reporter 2: This week, I am interviewing (a, the, --) governor of Massachusetts — Mitt Romney. I’m very excited!

(8) Kathy: My daughter Jeannie loves that new comic strip about Super Mouse.
Elise: Well, she is in luck! Tomorrow, I’m having lunch with (a, the, --) creator of this comic strip — he is an old friend of mine. So I can get his autograph for Jeannie!

Non-Specific Definite Contexts

(9) Conversation between a police officer and a reporter
Reporter: Several days ago, Mr. James Peterson, a famous politician, was murdered! Are you investigating his murder?
Police officer: Yes. We are trying to find (a, the, --) murderer of Mr. Peterson — but we still don’t know who he is.

(10) 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 (a, the, --) owner of this store — I don’t know who he is, but I want to see him right now!

(11) After a women’s running race
Reporter: Excuse me! Can you please let me in?
Guard: What do you need?
Reporter: I am a reporter. I need to talk to (a, the, --) winner of this race — I don’t know who she is, so can you please help me?

(12) At a gallery
Sarah: Do you see that beautiful landscape painting?
Mary: Yes, it’s wonderful.
Sarah: I would like to meet (a, the, --) author of that painting — unfortunately, I have no idea who it is, since the painting is not signed.

(13) Bill: I’m looking for Erik. Is he home?
Rick: Yes, but he’s on the phone. It’s an important business matter. He is talking to (a, the, --) owner of his company! I don’t know who that person is — but I know that this conversation is important to Erik.

(14) Phone conversation
Mathilda: Hi, Sam. Is your roommate Laurie there?
Sam: No, she went to San Francisco for this week-end.
Mathilda: I see. I really need to talk to her — how can I reach her in San Francisco?
Sam: I don’t know. She is staying with (a, the, --) mother of her best friend — I’m afraid I don’t know who she is, and I don’t have her phone number.
(15) Mike: Guess what? You remember my friend Jessie, who is a reporter?
Angela: Yes, what about her?
Mike: She has a really important job right now, with a big newspaper.
Today, she is interviewing (a, the, --) governor of Arizona! I don’t remember who
that is… but this is a really important assignment for Jessie!

(16) Rose: Let’s go out to dinner with your brother Samuel tonight.
Alex: No, he is busy. He is having dinner with (a, the, --) manager of his office –
I don’t know who that is… but this is a really important assi-

(17) 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, the, --) book about airplanes! I like to read about flying!

(18) In a school
Student: I am new in this school. This is my first day.
Teacher: Welcome! Are you going to be at the school party tonight?
Student: Yes. I’d like to get to know my classmates. I am hoping to find
(a, the, --) new good friend! I don’t like being all alone.

(19) In a clothing store (Modified)
Clerk: May I help you?
Customer: Yes, please! I’ve rummaged through every stall, without any
success. I am looking for (a, the, --) hat. It’s getting rather cold outside.

(20) Sam: I’m having some difficulties with my citizenship application.
Julie: What are you going to do?
Sam: Well, I need some advice. I am trying to find (a, the, --) lawyer with lots of
experience. I think that’s the right thing to do.

(21) At a university
Professor Clark: I’m looking for Professor Anne Peterson.
Secretary: I’m afraid she is busy. She has office hours right now.
Professor Clark: What is she doing?
Secretary: She is meeting with (a, the, --) student, but I don’t know
who it is.

(22) Karen: Where’s Beth? Is she coming home for dinner?
Anne: No. She is eating dinner with (a, the, --) colleague; she didn’t tell me who
it is.

(23) Chris: I need to find your roommate Jonathan right away.
Clara: He is not here – he went to New York.
Chris: Really? In what part of New York is he staying?
Clara: I don’t really know. He is staying with (a, the, --) friend – but he didn’t tell
me who that is. He didn’t leave me any phone number or address.

Richard: That’s great. What’s she doing there?
Gertrude: She is doing some interviews for her newspaper. She is interviewing (a, the, --) politician; I’m afraid I don’t know who, exactly. I’ll find out when I read her article!

Specific Indefinite Contexts

(25) In an airport, in a crowd of people who are meeting arriving passengers (Modified)
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, the, --) girl; she is red-haired. I think that she flew in on Flight 239.

(26) In a restaurant
Waiter: Are you ready to order, sir? Or are you waiting for someone?
Client: Can you please come back in about twenty minutes? You see, I am waiting. I am planning to eat with (a, the, --) colleague from work. She will be here soon.

(27) In a “Lost and Found” (Modified)
Clerk: Can I help you? Are you looking for something you lost?
Customer: Yes… I realize you have a lot of things here, but maybe you have what I need. You see, I am looking for (a, the, --) scarf. It is a green one with purple stripes. I think that I lost it here last week.

(28) Phone conversation (Modified)
Jeweler: Hello, this is Robertson’s Jewelry. What can I do for you, ma’am? Are you looking for some new jewelry?
Client: Not quite – I heard that you also buy back people’s old jewelry.
Jeweler: That is correct.
Client: In that case, I would like to sell you (a, the, --) necklace. It is very valuable – it has been in my family for 100 years!

(29) Reporter 1: Hi! I haven’t seen you in weeks. Do you have time for lunch?
Reporter 2: Sorry, no. I’m busy with a story about local medicine. Today, I am interviewing (a, the, --) doctor from Bright Star Children’s Hospital – he is a very famous pediatrician, and he doesn’t have much time for interviews. So I should run!

(30) Gary: I heard that you just started college. How do you like it?
Melissa: It’s great! My classes are very interesting.
Gary: That’s wonderful. And do you have fun outside of class?
Melissa: Yes. In fact, today I’m having dinner with (a, the, --) girl from my class – her name is Angela, and she is really nice!

(31) Phone conversation
Christina: Hello, you’ve reached Christina Jones’s office.
Rob: Hi, Christina. This is Rob. Do you have time to talk?
Christina: Not right now. I’m sorry, but I’m busy. I am meeting with (a, the, - -) student from my English class – he needs help with his homework, and it’s important.

(32) Meeting on a street
Roberta: Hi, William! It’s nice to see you again. I didn’t know that you were in Boston.
William: I am here for a week. I am visiting a (a, the, --) friend from college – his name is Sam Bolton, and he lives in Cambridge now.

Fillers:

**Universal Definites**

(33) Andrea: I went for a walk last night - I really enjoyed it.
Jodi: Were you scared walking when it was so dark?
Andrea: It wasn't dark! I saw (a, the, "--) moon.

(34) Child: Can you please give me a blue pencil?
Mother: Here you go. What are you drawing?
Child: I am drawing (a, the, --) sky.

**Geographic Names**

(35) Rick: I haven't seen your sister Clara in a long time.
Marilyn: That's because she is away. She is doing research in South America. She is "living near (a, the, --) Amazon River. She studies birds that live in that area.

(36) Teacher: Tell me about London.
Student: London is in (a, the, --) United Kingdom. It's a very big city.

**Proper Names**

(37) Louise: I just saw a movie about a ship that was hit by an iceberg, a long time ago. But I can't remember what this ship was called!
Betsy: It was called (a, the, --) Titanic. It was very famous!

(38) Leo: My grandfather is a veteran.
Chris: In what war did he fight?
Leo: He fought in (a, the, --) Second World War. He fought for four years!

**Definite Generics**

(39) Angela: How was your dinner with your aunt and uncle last night?
Charles: Quite boring. They are very nice people, but we don't have much to talk about. So we talked about (a, the, --) weather. And about my uncle's health.

(40) Sam: Hi, Ben. I didn't know that you were in Boston! How did you get here?
Ben: I drove here from my home in Virginia.
Sam: That's a long way! Were you bored?
Ben: A little. I listened to (a, the, --) radio while I drove. That made my trip more exciting.

**Possessive Fillers**

(41) Julie: What did you do last night?
Peter: Not much. I just worked on (a, the, --) my physics homework.
(42) Sam: What's wrong?
Ed: I'm so sorry. I broke (a, the, --) your favorite teacup.

(43) Louise: I tried to call you yesterday, but the line was busy.
Angela: My husband was talking to (a, the, --) his mother.

(44) Ron: Where is your little daughter?
Janine: She is playing with (a, the, --) her dolls.
## Appendix D

### Tables

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Table 11: Results of one-way ANOVA on using *the* in specific definite contexts

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Table 12: Results of one-way ANOVA on using *the* in nonspecific definite contexts

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Table 13: Results of one-way ANOVA on using *a* in non-specific indefinite contexts

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Table 14: Results of one-way ANOVA on using *a* in specific indefinite contexts
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### Table 18: Paired sample t-tests between use of *a* in specific and non-specific definite contexts

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