The Acquisition of English Articles by Arabic L2-English learners: A Semantic Approach

Majdi Abudalbuh
Department of English Language and Literature
Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

Abstract
The purpose of this study is to examine the acquisition of English articles by Arabic second language (L2) learners of English as a function of different linguistic contexts contrasted based upon two semantic notions: *definiteness* and *specificity*. The participants in this study are 30 adult learners of L2 English whose first language (L1) is Arabic. The data for this study consist of the participants' responses to a forced-choice elicitation task targeting the use of articles in English. The results show that the learners were more accurate in terms of their article usage in definite contexts than in indefinite contexts regardless of specificity. While advanced learners performed native-like and converged to the target system of articles in English in all of the semantic contexts, low proficiency learners and intermediate learners made several errors, the most common of which was article omission in obligatory contexts. Moreover, the results show that the low proficiency learners fluctuated between definiteness and specificity in the two crucial mismatching semantic contexts: [+definite, -specific] and [-definite, +specific], overusing the indefinite article in the former context and overusing the definite article in the latter context. Unlike the low proficiency learners, the intermediate learners did not fluctuate between definiteness and specificity. The study proposes a development model for the acquisition of the English article system by Arabic learners of L2 English incorporating the Fluctuation Hypothesis (FH) and drawing on the available sources of linguistic knowledge in second language acquisition (SLA).
Keywords: Arabic, articles, definiteness, English, fluctuation, specificity