
LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 14:2 February 2014
ISSN 1930-2940

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Acquisition of the Non-generic Uses of English Definite Article by the Adult ESL Learners

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Abstract

The non-generic use of the English Definite article the can be divided into four major categories: structural, textual, situational and cultural. This study aims to determine whether these uses pose different levels of challenges for the adult ESL learners and whether they are acquired at the same time. This study also focuses on whether learners' performance in various non-generic uses of the English definite article *the* improves with context support.

The study is conducted with a group of adult learners having attended the Certificate of Proficiency (COP) course at The English and Foreign Languages University, India. Two types of tasks were used for data collection: a) a set of 24 isolated sentences and b) a paragraph with

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:2 February 2014

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blanks. The data analysis reveals that the four non-generic uses pose varied levels of challenge for the adult ESL learners and there exists a natural order of acquisition. The issues related to this order of acquisition are discussed in the study. Besides, the pedagogical implications of the study, which include instructional sequence, task selection and strategies for the various uses of English definite article are discussed.

Key Words: order of acquisition, definite article, non-generic uses, context support

1. Introduction

In English, articles (a/an, the and the zero article) are one of the most commonly used words and EFL/ESL learners start learning these articles at an early stage of their education. Interestingly, it takes a prolonged period of time for the EFL/ESL learners to master over these articles. They continue to make errors in article use even at a higher level of proficiency. The main reason behind it might be the fact that there are too many complex rules for article use in English. These complex rules often make the English article system one of the most difficult grammatical items for the EFL/ESL learners. This study examines the adult ESL learners' acquisition pattern of English definite article. Within the definite article, this study solely focuses on the acquisition of the non-generic uses.

2. Literature review

The English article system has long been a matter of interest for language researchers. Brown (1973 cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008) showed that the English articles are acquired at a later stage than other morphemes in first language acquisition. Krashen (1977 cited in Krashen, 1982) also found that the English articles are acquired at a relatively later stage by the ESL learners. However, Bickerton's (1981) work is the most significant and enlightening one in the field of article acquisition research.

Bickerton argued that the semantic function of the NPs in discourse determine the use of English articles. According to Bickerton, the semantic function of an NP is determined by two binary discourse features: a) whether a noun is a specific referent (+,-SR) and b) whether the hearer knows the referent (+,-HK). Based on Bickerton's analysis we can say that the NPs will

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fall into four major semantic types. Type 1 is (-SR, +HK), also known as *generic use*, where the indefinite (a/an), the definite (the), and if the noun is plural, the *zero article* is used. Type 2 is (+SR, +HK) where the definite article is used. Type 3 is (+SR, -HK) where the indefinite or, if the noun is plural, *zero article* is used. Type 4 is (-SR, -HK) where the indefinite or, if the noun is plural, *zero article* is used.

Huebner (1983) introduced a new area of research in ESL article acquisition by using Bickerton's (1981) noun classification system. He used the two binary features that Bickerton developed and classified the semantic functions of NPs. With this classification of nouns, it became possible to examine the articles that an ESL learner uses with each type. Thus one can understand the learner's use of articles in a semantic context. Another major study in article acquisition was conducted by Hawkins (1978).

Hawkins (1978) developed a comprehensive theory to explain the various non-generic uses of the English definite article *the*. Hawkins's theory is known as the Location Theory. Hawkins identified a total of eight types of non-generic use. These eight types of use are presented here from Hawkins (1978 cited in Liu & Gleason, 2002):

1. Anaphoric use: use of *the* when something is mentioned a second time and subsequently (e.g., *Bill was working at a lathe the other day. All of a sudden the machine stopped working*).
2. Visible situation use: use of *the* with a noun mentioned the first time to refer to something that both the speaker and the listener can see. (e.g., *Pass me the bucket*).
3. Immediate situation use: very similar to type 2, the only difference is that the thing referred to may not be visible (e.g., *Don't go in there, chum. The dog will bite you*).
4. Larger situation use relying on specific knowledge: use of *the* with a first-mention noun because it is known in the community (e.g., *People from the same village talking about the church, the pub and so forth*).
5. Larger situation use relying on general knowledge: use of *the* with something that one can assume people from a country or around the world should know (e.g., *The White House referring to the U.S government*).

6. Associative anaphoric use: it is the same as type 1, the only difference is that the first-mention *the* is used with a noun that is related to a previously mentioned noun, rather than being the same noun (e.g., *We went to a wedding. The bride was very tall*).
7. Unfamiliar use in NPs with explanatory modifiers: use of *the* with a first-mention noun that has an explanatory or identifying modifier in the form of a clause, prepositional phrase, or noun (e.g., *I hate the name Algernon*).
8. Unfamiliar use in NPs with nonexplanatory modifiers: similar to type 7, the only difference being that the modifier does not provide explanatory information (e.g., *My wife and I share the same secrets*).

However, the theoretical framework of this study is chiefly drawn from two studies: one done by Haiyan and Lianrui (2010), and the other, by Liu and Gleason (2002).

Haiyan and Lianrui in their study (2010) investigated the accuracy order and usage pattern of English articles by Chinese learners of English. The research was based on the hypothesis that the definite article, *the* is acquired before *a/an* and the sequence of acquisition is *the*, *a/an* and *zero article* for learners whose native languages have article system. For learners whose native languages do not have article system, the accuracy order is *zero article*, *the* and *a/an*. Chinese language does not have article system. Two methods- tests and interviews were used to collect data for the research. A fill- in-the-blank test and a cloze test were used to determine participants' accuracy rate for article uses. Items that allow two possible options were not included in the test. The subjects of the study were 121 Chinese learners of English and they were divided into three groups according to their level of proficiency. For the convenience of the research, 80 samples were finally selected for analysis. The data analysis included both TLU (Target-Like Use) and UOC (Used in Obligatory Contexts). TLU was applied to measure article accuracy whereas UOC was used to analyze article usage. Percentage scores for correct responses were calculated for each article type and at each proficiency level.

The TLU score suggested that there was a positive relationship between English proficiency level and TLU score i.e., there was a positive relationship between article knowledge and proficiency level. It also found that the accuracy order was *the* > *a/an* > *zero*. It meant that

the use of *the* was more target-like than *a/an* or *zero article*. UOC score, on the other hand, revealed that the overuse of the article *the* decreased as English proficiency level increased whereas overuse of *zero article* increased with English proficiency level. The research also provides support for Liu and Gleason's (2002) finding that the cultural use of definite article poses the greatest challenge for the ESL learners.

Liu and Gleason (2002), in their study, examined the acquisition of the English definite article *the* by the adult ESL learners. They used Hawkins's (1978) eight types of non-generic use of *the* and divided them into four major categories: cultural, situational, structural and textual.

The first is cultural use, where *the* is used with a noun that is a unique and well-known referent in a speech community. The second is situation use, where *the* is used when the referent of a first-mention noun can be sensed directly or indirectly by the interlocutors, or the referent is known by the members in a local community, such as *the bookstore* in a town. The third is structural use, where *the* is used with a first-mention noun that has a modifier. The fourth is textual use, where *the* is used with a noun that has been previously referred to or is related to a previously mentioned noun.

The researchers aimed to find out whether these four uses present different levels of difficulty for ESL learners and whether they are acquired at the same time. They assumed that the four types of use vary considerably in rule complexity, and so they would not be acquired at the same time. 41 low, 49 intermediate and 38 advanced ESL learners served as subjects of the study. The low level learners had a TOFEL score below 500. Their average length of English study was 4.41 years. The intermediate and the advanced learners were undergraduate and graduate students and they all had a TOFEL score of 500 and above. The instrument used for data collection was a set of 91 sentences. In 51 of the sentences, there were a total of 60 deleted obligatory uses of *the*, with some sentences containing one and others containing more. The other 40 sentences were used as distractors.

In the test format, the researchers did not give blanks to fill up rather instructed the subjects to insert *the* wherever they felt necessary. In data analysis, the number of missed

obligatory uses and the number of unnecessary uses were calculated. The researchers included the unexpected uses (use of *the* in unexpected places) as they considered those instances as errors. The analysis of “missed obligatory use of *the*” revealed the fact that there was a hierarchy of difficulty among the four types of usage, and the cultural use was the most difficult one followed in order by textual use, structural use and situational use. The finding was quite surprising as the structural use should have been more difficult than the textual one. The researchers, however, explained that the finding could have been due to a task effect which was not communicative in nature.

The count of “overuse of *the*” showed that in cultural, general, and structural categories the intermediate students overused *the* more than both low-level and the advanced learners. Finally, the research confirms three important things: a) the four non-generic uses of the English definite article *the* present different levels of difficulty for ESL learners and they are not acquired at the same time, b) in the process of acquisition, students’ underuse of obligatory *the* decreases significantly as their English proficiency improves and c) overuse of *the* increases significantly from low to intermediate level but decreases as their proficiency improves from intermediate to advanced level. The reason behind the overuse of *the* is that when students learn the rules of the English definite article use at intermediate level, they tend to overgeneralize those rules. Their overuse of *the* decreases with the improvement in their proficiency because they start getting proper grasp over the rules of definite article use.

3. Aim of the Study

The aim of the present study is to find out whether there is an order of acquisition in the four non-generic types of uses of the English definite article *the*. In addition, this study attempts to examine whether the learners’ performance varies if these four types of uses are contextualized versus when they are used in isolated sentences. Liu and Gleason (2002) tested learners’ performance only in isolated sentences. Therefore, their study does not show what happens when these four types of uses are put in discourse. As we know that the use of definite article depends on the types of NPs that precede them in a text, there is a high possibility that students will perform better if the NPs are semantically connected. The assumption is that

students' performance in the four types of uses of the English definite article *the* will improve to a great extent in discourse, as NPs in discourse are semantically connected, and context provides psychological support for the learners.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research questions

The research questions of this study are:

- a) To what extent do adult ESL learners know that the use of definite article in English is governed by semantic rules?
- b) Is there any evidence of natural order of acquisition in the four types of non-generic uses of English definite article?
- c) How far does learner performance show improvement in contextualized tasks?

4.2 Subject Profile

The study is undertaken with a group of students having attended the Certificate of Proficiency (COP) course at The English and Foreign Languages University, India. This certificate course is part of the non-formal education program run by the university. The subjects of this study belonged to the intermediate level of proficiency and their total number was 23. The level of proficiency was determined by a placement test which each student must take at the time of admission. Most of the subjects of the study were students, while some had different professional backgrounds like teacher, civil servant and businessman. Two of them were housewives. The subjects were heterogeneous in terms of their first language though most of them had Telugu as their first language. One noteworthy point is that none of their first language had any article system like English. The following table shows the details of the subjects with regards to their mother tongue.

Table-1: Number of participants and their first language

First Language	Number of Participants
Telugu	20
Malayalam	1
Hindi	1
Marathi	1

All subjects were adult learners. Their age range varied from a minimum of 22 years to a maximum of 31 years, with an average of 26 years and 8 months. The number of years of exposure to English varied drastically in the group. The subjects had a minimum of 5 years to a maximum of 15 years exposure to English, with an average of 9 years. So, it is clear that different learners were introduced to English at different stages of their life. They came from different socio-economic background and had attended different types of school like English medium school and regional medium school. The following table gives an account of their age range and years of exposure to English.

Table-2: Age range and years of exposure to English

Age Range (Minimum-Maximum)	Average Age	Years of Exposure (Minimum-Maximum)	Average year of Exposure
22 years-31 years	26 years 8months	5 years-15 years	9 years

4.3 Method of Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through two tasks. The first task consisted of isolated sentences and the second one was a cloze test where a paragraph with blanks was given to test the subjects' accuracy in definite article uses. In the first test twenty four sentences were used and the sentences were adopted from Liu and Gleason (2002). The sentences were originally designed to find out the English definite article acquisition pattern by nonnative speakers of English. Six sentences were selected for each category: structural, textual, situational and cultural. In 12 of the sentences there were a total of 17 deleted obligatory uses of *the*, with some sentences containing one and others containing more. The remaining 12 sentences were used as distractors. Some sentences that were conceptually complex or culturally not suitable for the subjects were modified. For example: *Congress meets on Capital Hill* was modified as *Today*

Congress party meets at Janpat Road, New Delhi. The objective behind those modifications was to reduce the thematic and linguistic challenge of the sentences to suit the level of the participants. In the task format no blanks were used for the obligatory use or for the distractors. Participants were asked to read the sentences carefully and insert *the* wherever they felt it necessary.

In the second task, a paragraph with blanks were used and participants were asked to fill them up with *the* wherever they felt it necessary. For blanks that did not require *the*, participants were asked to use mark X. The paragraph was adopted from Haiyan and Lianrui (2010), which was used to test the English article acquisition pattern of Chinese learners of English. Here again, the paragraph was modified to serve the purpose. In the original paragraph the researchers left blanks for both definite and indefinite article uses. Blanks that required the use of indefinite articles (*a/an*) were deleted as the objective of this study was to test the participants' performance in definite article use only. A total of 18 blanks were left. Here, the rationale behind giving blanks was to see how far learners could utilize contextual clues in using definite article *the*. There was no instance for situational use of *the*.

4.4 Method of Scoring

In scoring the participants, correct and incorrect uses of *the* in both obligatory and nonobligatory contexts were calculated. The participant got 1 for each correct use, and 0 for each incorrect use. It means that they got one for each correct use in both obligatory and nonobligatory contexts. Similarly, they got zero for each incorrect use in both obligatory and nonobligatory contexts. Then the total number of correct and incorrect uses of *the* for each type in both obligatory and nonobligatory contexts was calculated. Finally, the percentage of correct and incorrect uses of *the* in both the tasks and for all four categories were calculated.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Overall Knowledge of Definite Article

The data analysis reveals that the overall correct use of definite article *the* is 58.85% whereas the overall correct use of *zero article* is 37.50%. This finding indicates that the participants knew when to use definite article better than when to drop it. It supports the study of Haiyan and Lianrui (2010), where the researchers found that the definite article *the* is acquired before the *zero article*. The order of acquisition found in that study was *the* > *a/an* > *zero article*. But this study contradicts with the study of Master (1987). Master (1987 cited in Haiyan & Lianrui, 2010) found that learners whose native languages do not have an article system acquire the *zero article* before the definite article *the*. The order of acquisition found in his study was *zero article* > *the* > *a/an*. However, Huebner (1979) found that learners, whose first language does not have an article system, use *zero article* in the place of definite article at an initial stage. This happens because of their first language influence. It does not mean that students have acquired the use of *zero article* in English language.

5.2 Knowledge of Definite Article in Isolated Form

In Task-1, 24 isolated sentences were used to test participants' performance in four sub-types of use of definite article *the* in obligatory and nonobligatory context. Here the overall correct use of definite article *the* is 49.70% whereas the overall correct use of *zero article* is 30%. The following table gives an account of the percentage of definite article and *zero article* uses in Task-1.

Table-3: Percentage of definite article and zero article uses in Test-1

Category	Obligatory context(use of <i>the</i>)	Nonobligatory Context(use of <i>zero article</i>)
	% of correct use	% of correct use
Situational	67%	32%
Textual	47.83%	27.54%
Cultural	46%	27.54%
Structural	38%	33%

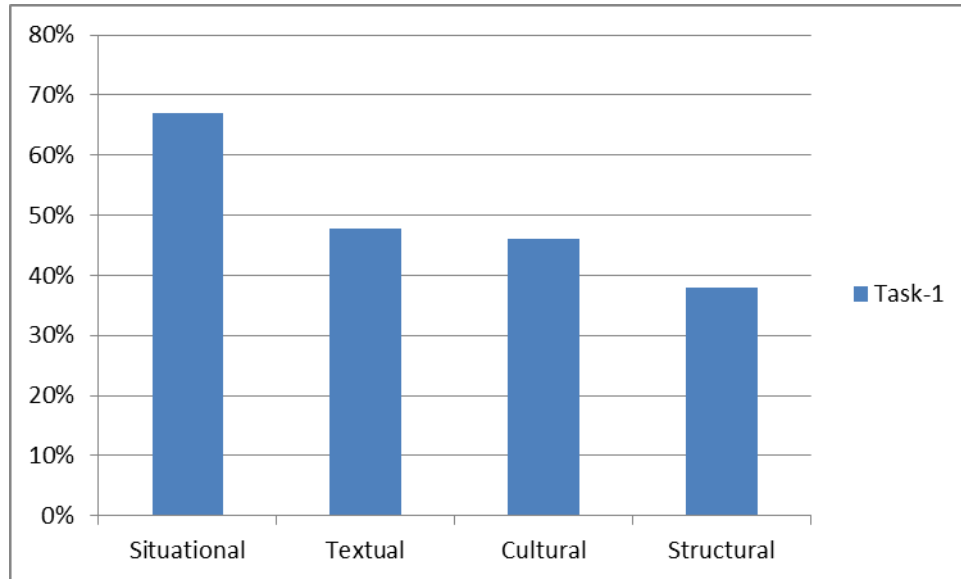
Table 3 shows that the accuracy in situational use is the highest (67%) in obligatory context. The reason behind such a high accuracy rate in situational use is that those instances frequently occur in spoken discourse. As a result, students were familiar with them and they could use definite article more appropriately than the other three categories. This finding also

confirms previous studies that situational use of definite article is the easiest among all four categories: structural, situational, textual and cultural. But when we shift our focus on situational use in nonobligatory context, we find a different picture. Here the percentage of correct use is only 32%. It means the overuse of *the* is 68% which is very high indeed. The reason behind it is that though the participants were quite familiar with situational use, they were not familiar with the exceptions of such use. For example, most of the participants used *the* with *door number one* in sentence, *The game show host says to the contestant, "What's behind door number one?"* and with *chapter twenty* in sentence, *The teacher says to his pupils, "Read Chapter Twenty in your book."* Though both are in situational use, conventional rule suggests that such NPs take *zero article*.

Use of definite article in textual condition comes next in the order with an accuracy of 47.83% in obligatory context. Here the interesting finding is that most participants performed well in anaphoric use. For example, most of them could use *the* appropriately in sentences like *Jane bought a ring and a necklace for her mother's birthday. Her mother loved (the) ring but hated (the) necklace.* They failed miserably in associative anaphoric use in sentence like *I read a book about New Delhi. Author, however, was from Kolkata.* Here the participants could not understand that in associative anaphoric use the NP in consideration is related to the previously mentioned NP though it is not exactly the same.

Now if we consider textual use in nonobligatory context, we find that the overuse of *the* is as high as 72.46%. It indicates that the participants did not have good command over the generic use of definite article as the distractors for textual use were of generic types like *I have read a few science fiction books this semester. Science fiction books are really interesting.* One big reason behind it is that generic use of *the* is not very frequent. So, the analysis of textual use suggests that those participants' acquisition of textual use is in a transitional period and they need to learn more about the rules of exceptions.

Figure-1: Percentage of correct uses in obligatory context



Use of definite article in cultural category comes in the third position with an accuracy of 46% in obligatory context. This finding is quite surprising as former studies have confirmed that cultural use is the most difficult one as it requires very culture specific knowledge. However, the explanation that can be provided for this is that the participants of the study were adult learners, and hence they had more exposure to the world. As a result, they could use their culture specific knowledge in using definite article *the*. Besides, it can also be suggested that those adult learners knew the rules of cultural use and they were quite conscious in using the rules. They knew that names of certain places and rivers require definite article. Another possible reason might be that some NPs like *White House* and *Congress Party* were familiar to them because of their frequency of occurrence in everyday life. But when we consider cultural use in nonobligatory context, the overuse of *the* is similar to the result found in textual use in nonobligatory context. Here again, the percentage of overuse of *the* is 72.46%. The explanation that can be provided for such overuse is that the participants has not yet mastered over the exceptions of cultural use. As a result, almost all of them used *the* before NPs like *Mount Etna* and *Lake Michigan*. They did not know that the names of single lakes and mountains do not take definite article *the*. Therefore, they overgeneralized their limited culture specific knowledge in definite article use.

Finally, the structural use appears to be the most difficult one in the order of acquisition. Here the accuracy of correct use is as low as 38%. Unlike other three types, structural use of *the* requires knowledge of syntax, especially understanding the position of NPs in a sentence. This intra-sentential phenomenon makes structural use different from other three categories. Thus, the low accuracy in structural use reveals that the participants do not have good syntactic knowledge for making judgments on use of definite article for structural reasons. For example, very few participants used *the* correctly in sentence, *(the) Man I met in New Delhi later became my husband* and in sentence, *Do you know (the) house we saw last week was burned down last night*. However, when we consider the participants' performance in nonobligatory context, we find that the conservative use of *the* is the highest (33%). There can be two reasons behind such accuracy: a) frequency of occurrence of the sentences and b) types of knowledge that is required for structural use. First, the sentences that were used as distractors occur quite frequently in different types of texts. Secondly, structural use of *the* does not require any other knowledge except the knowledge of acceptable sentence structure in a particular language. It neither requires culture specific knowledge nor does it require the understanding of the connections between NPs in a text. Once learners acquire the structural knowledge, they do not tend to make similar mistakes. So, the order of acquisition we find is that structural use is the most difficult, followed by cultural use, textual use and situational use. As mentioned earlier, the reason behind cultural use being easier than structural use is that adult learners have more exposure to the world, and they used rules consciously. As a result, they performed better in the cultural use of *the*.

5.3 Knowledge of Definite Article in Context

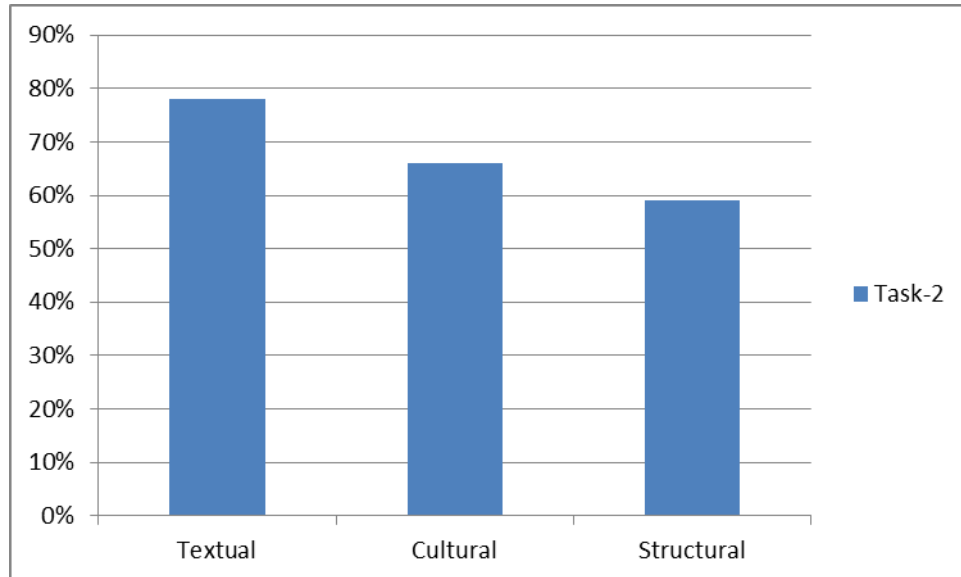
In Task-2, a paragraph was used and there were four instances of cultural use, three instances of textual use and five instances of structural use. There was no instance of situational use as the text was meant for writing and not for spoken context like dialogues. In Task-2, the overall correct use of definite article *the* is 68% and the overall correct use of *zero article* is 45%. It clearly shows that the learners' performance in both definite article use and *zero article* use improved in Task-2. The following table shows three types of uses namely textual, cultural and structural in obligatory context.

Table-4: Percentage of three types of definite article uses in Task-2

Category	Obligatory Context (use of <i>the</i>)
	% of correct use
Textual	78%
Cultural	66%
Structural	59%

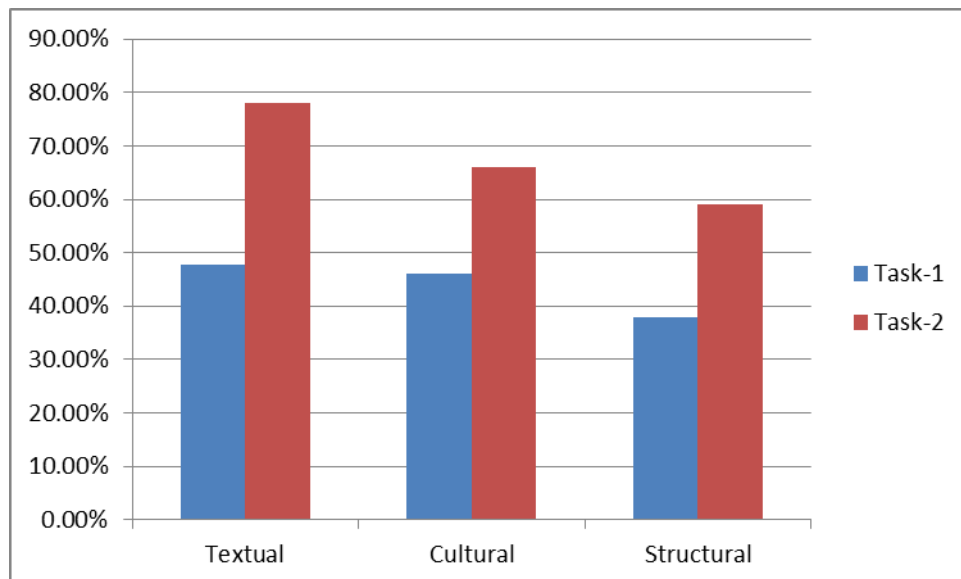
Table 4 shows that the accuracy is the highest (78%) in textual use. We had three instances of textual use in the paragraph. The accuracy indicates that most students performed well in textual use of *the*. The most possible reason behind it is that the paragraph had instances for anaphoric use only. As a result, students could easily find out the direct connections between NPs. Then we find the cultural use in second position in the order. There were four instances of cultural use in the paragraph. Here the accuracy of correct use (66%) shows that those adult learners have quite good culture specific knowledge. Another reason might be that all the NPs in consideration for cultural use were related to particular locations like *North America, United States*. As these NPs are related, the choice and the level of challenge were reduced to a great extent when compared to the first test where all the NPs that required cultural use were not connected with each other. Structural use, like in Task-1, appears to be the most difficult. Though the participants' accuracy in Task-2 improves from 38% to 59%, structural use remains the most difficult one for them. As mentioned in previous discussion, structural use requires the knowledge of syntax or grammar. As a result, even after context support, the participants' performance in structural use could not override other two types: cultural use and textual use.

Figure-2: Percentage of correct uses in obligatory context



So, the order of acquisition found here is the same: structural use is the most difficult type followed by cultural use and textual use. When the participants' performances in both the tests are compared, we get some important findings. The following figure shows subjects' performances in Task-1 and Task-2 in obligatory context.

Figure-3: Comparison between Task-1 & Task-2 in obligatory context



In Task-1, the four types of definite article uses (structural, cultural, situational and textual) were tested through isolated sentences whereas in Task-2, three types of definite article uses were tested through contextualized task. A comparison between two tasks shows that the learners' performance in three types (structural, cultural and textual) improves dramatically in Task-2 when compared to Task-1. Accuracy in structural use increases from 38% to 59% and accuracy in cultural use increases from 46% to 66%. The highest improvement in accuracy is found in textual use: from 47.83% to 78%. Here the context support has played an important role. The context support is the principal reason behind the improvement of the participants' performance in definite article use. Context helps learners to focus on a few NPs which are semantically connected. It helps them to get clues and naturally their performance in definite article use becomes better. This finding supports the hypothesis that learners' accuracy in use of definite article, *the* increases in contextualized tasks.

In case of *zero article* use, the participants' accuracy increases from 30% to 45% in Task-2. It is a clear improvement indeed, but still the high rate of incorrect use should be a matter of discussion. One important thing we should consider is that even after context support the overuse of *zero article* is as high as 55%. It indicates that those intermediate level learners do not have a proper grasp on the *zero article* use. Again, the participants used *the* in most *zero article* contexts in both the tasks. It means that they overgeneralized the use of *the* in those *zero article* contexts. Haiyan and Lianrui (2010), in their study, also stated that their subjects who were at the lower-intermediate and intermediate levels of proficiency overgeneralized the use of *a/an* and *the* in *zero article* contexts. However, the major findings of this study can be summarized in the following points:

- a) Adult ESL learners know that the use of definite article in English is governed by semantic rules and that knowledge of semantic rules varies across four categories of use of English definite article.
- b) There exists an order of acquisition in the four types of non-generic use of the English definite article *the*. Structural use is the most difficult type followed by cultural use, textual use and situational use.

- c) Learners' accuracy in non-generic use of definite article *the* improves in contextualized, communicative task as NPs in contextualized tasks are semantically connected and learners can use contextual clues.
- d) The *zero article* use remains problematic for the intermediate level learners and they tend to overgeneralize the use of definite article *the* in *zero article* contexts.

So the study confirms that the four types of non-generic use of English definite article pose different levels of challenge for the adult ESL learners and they are not acquired at the same time.

6. Pedagogical Implications of the Study

The study has some important pedagogical implications for grammar teaching, especially for teaching the four non-generic uses of English definite article in obligatory and nonobligatory contexts.

First, it is clear from the learners' performance in two different tests that the adult ESL learners' acquisition of non-generic uses of definite article follows a natural order. This order should be taken into consideration in both classroom teaching and material development. The main implication of this study is that understanding this order of acquisition of non-generic uses of English definite article will provide language teachers a better insight into the problems faced by the adult ESL learners. The understanding of the acquisition pattern will also help teachers develop effective strategies to deal with those problems. Besides, it will help teachers understand why learners continue to commit the same grammatical errors in article use even after getting adequate linguistic input. Many teachers, especially teachers in EFL/ ESL context seem to be very intolerant to learners' grammatical errors. If teachers realize that grammatical errors including errors in article use is a sign of natural language learning process, they will be more tolerant to those errors.

Secondly, understanding the order of definite article acquisition will help teachers frame instruction in an effective manner. Moreover, it will also help them to inculcate appropriate

learning strategies in learners. For example, to teach situational use, teachers can create situations for such use of definite article. In the case of structural use, learners should develop the ability to analyze structure to identify necessary information for using definite article *the*. Similarly, textual use will require a close analysis of the text to get clues for such use of *the*. Here understanding the semantic connection between NPs is the most important factor. In cultural use, culture specific knowledge is required. So, cultural use may require memorization of rules as such use depends on the conventions of particular language communities. But memorization is never an effective way of language learning as it does not help learners in the long run. It is also unrealistic to advocate for memorization of rules because there are too many complex and abstract rules, and it is very difficult for any learner to memorize them. So, the suggestion here is to maximize learners' exposure to cultural use of definite article through language use. They will naturally derive rules from language with time and experience.

Thirdly, the study provides guidelines for selecting appropriate materials and developing task for article teaching. The learners' performance, in the study, improved dramatically in contextualized task. As discussed earlier, the main reason behind it is that the NPs in contextualized tasks were semantically connected and learners could use contextual clues in making judgments for definite article use. On the other hand, in Task-1, there was no clue for the learners as the isolated sentences were not semantically connected with each other. So, the language support was minimal. However, as far as *zero article* use is concerned, it will gradually improve with the improvement in their level of proficiency. The study shows that even in *zero article* use, accuracy improved by 15% in contextualized task. It means context support helps in *zero article* use as well. All these evidences lead to the point that grammar teaching should be done in context to achieve desired goals. For Cowen (2008), Grammar teaching in context means following a variety of techniques to achieve certain goals, rather than following a series of prescribed steps.

If we consider materials for article teaching, it is better to use authentic materials for that purpose. Authentic materials provide language that is related to real life situations and learners can easily connect it with their everyday life experience. Tasks should be developed using authentic materials that will provide sufficient opportunity for the learners to use articles in an

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effective manner. The task should be communicative in nature. The objective in language teaching should be developing learners' *communicative competence* so that they can use language appropriately to meet the demands of real life situations and fulfill their communicative needs.

7. Conclusion

The findings of the study provide useful information about the adult ESL learners' acquisition of the four non-generic uses of English definite article. The study helps us to understand that the acquisition of the four non-generic uses follow a natural order. The study also helps us to get an insight into the difficulties that adult ESL learners face in using definite article appropriately. Besides, the study shows the positive effect of context in grammar learning, especially in learning the different types of non-generic uses of definite article. Though it might be difficult to draw generalizable conclusions based on a small scale research, EFL/ESL teachers should take these issues into consideration while teaching the non-generic uses of English definite article.

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Appendix A: Task-1

Personal Details

Kindly furnish some details about yourself against each blank. We assure you that the information you provide here will be kept confidential and will be used only for research purposes.

Name:
Date of Birth:
First language:
Place of Residence (mention state & country).....
Occupation:
Have you studied English before? If yes, how many years?
.....

WORKSHEET I

In English some noun phrases (NP) require the article “THE”.

For example:

a. I know THE girl who came first in class last year.

In the following exercise you will have to insert “THE” in front of some NPs where it is missing.

For example:

b. Do you know pilot who flies this plane?

↓
(the)

So the reworked sentence will look like: c. *Do you know the pilot who flies this plane?*

Therefore to do this exercise you need to pay attention to all the noun phrases (NPs) and then decide if they require “THE” or not. In cases where you feel “THE” is not required leave those places blank.

For example:

d. *I like to watch movies during evenings.*

In (d) the noun phrase ‘movies’ do not need the article “THE”.

Correct the following sentences by inserting “THE” wherever necessary.

1. I watched several old movies last weekend. I enjoy watching old movies.

2. Jane bought a ring and a necklace for her mother’s birthday. Her mother loved ring but hated necklace.

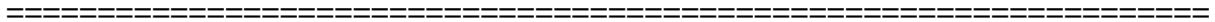
Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:2 February 2014

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3. At dinner, the guest says to the host, "Could you please pass salt?"
4. Man I met in New Delhi later became my husband.
5. Do you know house we saw last week was burned down last night?
6. The teacher says to her students, "The meeting will not be held until next week."
7. I read a book about New Delhi. Author, however, was from Kolkata.
8. I've heard of parents who don't give their children enough to eat.
9. President of the United States lives in White House.
10. The game show host says to the contestant, "What's behind door number one?"
11. Mississippi river runs through Louisiana.
12. She is only Indian woman to have run for vice-president's post.
13. At bedtime, the mother said to the children, "Turn off television."
14. We got a new television for our house. I enjoy watching some programs, but in general I think that we should not spend time watching a lot of television.
15. While driving in their car to work, the husband asks his wife, "Could you open window please?"
16. Things of beauty always bring great joy.
17. Today Congress party meets at Janpat Road, New Delhi.
18. The boss says to his employees, "I'm not happy with your work. Things are really going to have to change around here."
19. John's wife died of cancer in 1996.
20. I look after a little girl and a little boy on Saturdays. Little girl is smart but boy isn't.
21. Mount Etna in Sicily is still an active volcano.
22. I have read a few science fiction books this semester. Science fiction books are really interesting.
23. The teacher says to his pupils, "Read Chapter Twenty in your book."

24. Lake Michigan is a large lake in North America.



Appendix B: Task-2

WORKSHEET II

In this exercise you will read a paragraph with some blanks. The blanks either need the article “THE” or no article. In cases where you do not need to use any article use the mark [X].

Read the paragraph carefully and fill in the blanks with “THE” as necessary.

The Jaguar and the Wild Pig

When hunters visit _____ south-western part of _____ United States, they often find _____ large, catlike tracks along _____ ground. These tracks are made by _____ spotted jaguar, _____ greatest hunter of all _____ North American animals and _____ largest member of _____ cat family on _____ American continent. _____ most animals have a favorite food. _____ favorite food of jaguar is wild pig. _____ wild pigs move in _____ bands of fifteen to twenty. They have _____ great courage and strength in a group. I once read a story about _____ courage and strength of these wild pigs. _____ story pointed out that these pigs sometimes even attack _____ human hunters.

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