The Non-generic Use of the Definite Article *the* in Writing by Turkish Learners of English

İngilizce Genelleyici Olmayan *the* Belirli Tanımlığın Türk Öğrenciler Tarafından Yazılı Olarak Kullanımı

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this study is to analyze the non-generic use of the English definite article *the* in several different written contexts (e.g. cultural, situation, structural, and textual) identified by Liu and Gleason (2002). The study compares 50 intermediate and 50 low-advanced level Turkish learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in terms of overusing the definite article (in null article contexts) and omitting it in the above-mentioned major contexts. The study also determines whether or not the usage of the definite article in each of the contexts is equally problematic for the Turkish learners in different proficiency groups. The data consist of essays written by Turkish learners enrolled in the English Preparatory School of the School of Foreign Languages at Hacettepe University and were analyzed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results show that all learners omitted more definite articles than they overused them. In addition, the intermediate group omitted more definite articles than the low-advanced group suggesting that as learners become proficient in English, their use of the definite article improves. The results also show that the low-advanced group overused more definite articles than the intermediate group but this difference was not significant.

Keywords: Non-generic definite article, second language acquisition, English as a foreign language, definite article categories.

ÖZ: Bu çalışmanın amacı İngilizce'deki genelleyici olmayan (non-generic) *the* belirli tanımlığın (definite article) kullanımını Liu ve Gleason'un (2002) belirlediği birkaç farklı yazılı bağlamda (örn., kültürel, durumsal, yapısal ve metinsel) incelemektir. Bu çalışma İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen orta seviyede bulunan 50 Türk öğrenciyi, ileri seviyede bulunan 50 öğrenciyle, İngilizce belirli tanımlığın aşırı kullanılması (kullanılmaması gereken bağlamlarda) ve kullanılması gereken bağlamlarda kullanılmaması bakımından kıyaslar. Ayrıca bu çalışma, İngilizce belirli tanımlığın bu bağlamlarda kullanılmasının farklı seviyelerde bulunan Türk öğrenciler için eşit oranda zor olup olmadığını da belirler. Veri Hacettepe Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksek Okulu İngilizce Hazırlık Eğitimi Programı'nda İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrenciler tarafından yazılan kompozisyonlardan oluşmuş olup nicel olarak SPSS programı kullanılarak incelenmiştir. Araştırma sonuçları, bütün öğrenciler göz önüne alındığında, belirli tanımlığın kullanılması gereken bağlamlarda daha çok hatanın yapıldığını göstermiştir. Buna ek olarak, orta seviyede bulunan öğrencilerin belirli tanımlığı kullanmaları gereken bağlamlarda ileri seviyede bulunan öğrencilerden daha fazla hata yaptığını göstermiştir. Bu da öğrencilerin seviyeleri yükseldikçe belirli tanımlığı daha doğru bir şekilde kullandıkları anlamına gelmektedir. Ayrıca sonuçlar, ileri seviyede bulunan öğrencilerin belirli tanımlığı kullanmamaları gereken bağlamlarda orta seviyede bulunan öğrencilerden daha fazla kullandıklarını göstermiştir, fakat iki grup arasındaki fark istatistiksel olarak anlamlı değildir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Genelleyici olmayan belirli tanımlık, ikinci dil edinimi, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce, belirli tanımlık kategorileri.

1. INTRODUCTION

The acquisition and usage of the English definite article *the* is a particularly complex issue for nonnative speakers of English who live in a foreign language environment where there is limited exposure to English. The use of the definite article is especially problematic for those whose native languages do not have an article system similar to English. Unlike English, definiteness in Turkish is not expressed with articles but rather expressed by means of tense-

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aspect-modality, stress, word order, and case (Göksel and Kerslake, 2005). Due to the differences in the article system between Turkish and English, Turkish learners of English cannot easily learn how to use the English definite article in appropriate contexts. This difference between Turkish and English makes this feature ideal for studies investigating language acquisition in EFL contexts.

In recent years, numerous studies on the acquisition of the English article system have appeared (Ansarin, 2003; Dikilitaş and Altay, 2011; Isabelli-Garcia and Slough, 2012; Liu and Gleason, 2002; Wong and Quek, 2007). The results of these studies definitely promote our understanding of the acquisition and development of the definite article use in learners of English. However, these studies, while useful in making the point about the acquisition of the non-generic definite article in certain contexts, leaves unattended important issues regarding "students' own spontaneous language production" (Liu and Gleason, 2002, p. 20). What many studies used as an instrument for data collection was a fill-in-the-blanks test (Ekiert, 2007; Dikilitaş and Altay, 2011; Matoba-Bergeron, 2007; Thu, 2005; Kim and Lakshamanan, 2009). The importance of this study lies in the fact that it uncovers patterns that were not studied in earlier works by focusing on the non-generic uses of the English definite article *the* in the written tasks of Turkish learners.

1.1. Definiteness in Turkish

Although specificity and definiteness are universal semantic properties, they are not expressed the same way in all languages (Chesterman, 1991). In languages such as English, definiteness is expressed overtly with articles whereas in languages such as Russian and Japanese definiteness can be expressed via word order and context. In Turkish, which is an agglutinative language with rich case morphology, definiteness is not expressed through separate articles but rather expressed via case, word-order, stress, tense-aspect-modality and determiners (Göksel and Kerslake, 2005). The following explains how definiteness is marked in Turkish.

1.1.1. Tense-Aspect-Modality

"In nominal sentences past tense marking usually excludes the generic interpretation" (Göksel and Kerslake, 2005, p. 336). This can be seen in the following example.

Hanımeli-nin   koku-su   çok güzel-di.

Hanımeli-POSS   smell-GEN   very lovely-P.COP

'The smell of *the honeysuckle* was lovely.'

1.1.2. Stress

In sentences that have plural NPs and a verb, sentence stress has an effect on the definiteness of the NPs. If the stress falls on the verb, then the NP is definite (Göksel and Kerslake, 2005, p. 334).

Rapor-lar yaz-ıl-DI.

Report-PL write-PASSIVE-PAST

'*The reports* were written.'

1.1.3. Word Order

The position of the NPs in a sentence has an effect on its definiteness (von Heusinger and Kornfilt, 2005). If the NP in its bare form takes place at the beginning of a sentence, then it has a definite reading (Göksel and Kerslake, 2005).

Doktor hastane-(y)-e git-ti.

Doctor   hospital-DAT go-PAST

'*The doctor* went to the hospital.'

1.1.4. Case

If the NP in the direct object position is marked with the accusative case marker – (y)I, then the NP is definite (Erguvanlı, 1984; Göksel and Kerslake, 2005; Lewis, 1967; Underhill, 1976).

Adam   araba-(y)-ı eşi-(n)-e   ver-di.

Man   car-ACC   wife-DAT   give-PAST

'The man gave *the car* to his wife.'

According to Göksel and Kerslake (2005, p. 332), "in sentences where a direct object with no determiner has accusative marking, the referential status of the noun phrase is usually definite."

Ayten şapkay-ı seviyor.

Ayten hat-ACC love-PROG

'Ayten loves *the hat*.'

1.2. Definiteness in English

As for the definite article in English, a considerable number of studies have approached it in a variety of ways, ranging from analyzing it in the contexts of specificity and definiteness (Ionin, Ko & Wexler, 2004) through categorizing the uses of it into several types such as *culture, situation, textual, structural, anaphoric, visible situation and unfamiliar* etc. (Hawkins, 1978; Liu & Gleason, 2002). One of the most important frameworks on which many studies were based was Bickerton's (1981) Semantic Wheel Model in which definite and indefinite as well as generic and non-referential usages of articles are explained. In the framework, NPs were semantically marked by the features, [±Specific Referent (±SR)] and [±Assumed Known to the Hearer (±HK)]. Based on this categorization, NPs were divided into four major semantic types. Type 1 is [–SR, +HK] where the definite, indefinite, or, if the noun is plural, the zero article is used. This type is also referred to as "generics", as in "New computers were found in *the basement*." Type 2 [+SR, +HK], which involves the non-generic use of the definite article, requires the definite article and has four subcategories: (1) unique referent or conventionally assumed unique referent, as in "*The moon* is beautiful tonight."; (2) referent physically present, as in "*The door* of my apartment is broken."; (3) referent previously mentioned in the discourse, as in "I borrowed a book from *the*

school library.", "I left *the book* at home."; and (4) specific referent assumed to be known to the hearer as, in "*The movie theatre* in town is under construction."

It is important to realize that Bickerton's framework was an influential contribution to the linguistic aspects of the article system in English. From an applied perspective, the framework may also serve as a guideline for instructors and learners. Thus, many studies (e.g., Geng, 2010; Fen-Chuan, 2001; Kamal, 2013) that investigated the acquisition of the definite article followed Bickerton's approach. I now move on to a review of the studies that examined the usages of the non-generic definite article.

In the past years, a great deal of interest has been evoked concerning the non-generic uses of *the*. Perhaps the most comprehensive attempt to explain its uses has been made by Hawkins (1978). Under his Location Theory, he suggested eight categories of non-generic use:

(a) Anaphoric use
(b) Visible situation use
(c) Larger situation use relying on specific knowledge
(d) Larger situation use relying on general knowledge
(e) Associative anaphoric use
(f) Unfamiliar use in NPs with explanatory modifiers
(g) Unfamiliar use

Liu and Gleason (2002) took up Hawkins's categories, refined them and produced a classification system in which they combined some of his categories. They proposed four major categories of non-generic use:

(a) *Cultural*, where *the* is used with a noun that is a unique and well-known referent in a speech community, e.g., "President of the United States lives in *the* White House" (p. 24).

(b) *Situation*, 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, e.g., "a man says to his wife at the breakfast table, "Can you pass me *the* newspaper?" (p. 23).

(c) *Textual*, where *the* is used with a noun that has been previously referred to or is related to a previously mentioned noun e.g., "my mother has a white dog and a black dog. *The* white dog is taller than *the* black one" (p. 22).

(d) *Structural*, where *the* is used with a first-mention noun that has a modifier e.g., "*the* professor who teaches the physics class explains things very well" (p. 23).

1.3. Acquisition of the Non-generic Definite Article

The acquisition of the non-generic definite article by nonnative speakers of English who have different English language proficiencies has been a topic of interest for many researchers. For example, several studies (Huebner, 1983; Master, 1997; Parish, 1987; Thomas, 1989) found the zero article to be dominant in all environments in the early stages of L2 acquisition, and that zero article was acquired first, followed by the definite article. Master (1997) also observed that as learners become proficient, the overuse of the zero article decreases. In addition, Master (1997) and Parish (1987) found that *the* may be overgeneralized, which was referred to as "*the*-flooding" (dramatic rise in usage).

Liu and Gleason (2002), having categorized the non-generic uses of the definite article, conducted a study to find out at what rate nonnative speakers of English who had different proficiencies in English acquired the four types of non-generic uses of the definite article. The researchers gave a 91-item fill-in-the-blanks test to Chinese speakers learning EFL and asked them to insert *the* where they felt necessary. Their results showed that the learners had the most

difficulty with cultural use, followed by textual, structural and situational uses suggesting that acquisition of *the* follows a natural order. The researchers also reported that the use types are not learned at the same time.

Using Liu and Gleason's (2002) model and the same instrument, recent studies have considered whether or not non-generic uses of *the* present different levels of difficulty for English language learners coming from different language backgrounds and whether or not these different uses are acquired at the same time. In a study of 70 university students in Chile, Isabelli-Garcia and Slough (2012), consistent with Liu and Gleason's finding (2002), found that the four non-generic uses of the English article *the* posed different levels of difficulty for the learners, that is, the cultural use was the most difficult to acquire whereas the situational use was the least difficult. The authors attributed the findings to the differences between Chinese and English. Similar results were obtained by Wong and Quek (2007), who tested 50 Chinese and 50 Malay secondary school students with different English language proficiency levels (advanced, intermediate, and low) in Malaysia. The authors found that the acquisition order of the four non-generic uses of *the* followed a natural order and the proficiency levels of the learners had an influence on the accuracy rate of article usage. The more proficient the learners were, the better they were at using the definite article. A study of the 49 Iranian undergraduate and graduate EFL students at the University of Tabriz also gave similar results (Ansarin, 2003).

However, different results were obtained from Dikilitaş and Altay (2011). In their study of 77 Turkish EFL learners of English in Turkey, the learners did not acquire the various non-generic uses of the definite article in the same order as in Liu and Gleason (2002). In addition, the researchers reported that "... proficiency in article use does not increase in a linear fashion in accordance with an increase in the general level of proficiency, and that the difficulty hierarchy of different categories of use for *the* varies with the proficiency level of participants" (Dikilitaş and Altay, 2011, p. 183).

The results of the above-mentioned studies, which mostly focused on one type of instrument, are of essential value but they may not be sufficient to explain the linguistic behavior of English language learners given the fact that learners express themselves through different language skills. For this reason, it is my belief that more studies are needed to determine how the non-generic definite article is used in productive tasks such as writing and speaking. I now turn to describe the present study.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

Taken the sample as a whole, will Turkish learners of English omit more definite articles in English than they overuse them or vice versa?

What are the differences between intermediate and low-advanced Turkish learners of English with respect to omission and overuse of the non-generic definite article in English?

Will the Turkish learners' usage of the non-generic definite article improve as their proficiency level in English increases?

2.2. Setting and Participants

The study included a total of 100, 50 intermediate and 50 low-advanced level Turkish learners of English enrolled in the English Preparatory Program of the School of Foreign

Languages at Hacettepe University. The English Preparatory Program is a one-year intensive English program provided to students who plan to continue their academic studies in their departments in English.

The language preparatory program lasts one to four quarters in an academic year. Each quarter consists of 8 weeks. In order to determine the levels of students, the program administers an English language proficiency exam at the beginning of the first quarter. The exam measures grammatical knowledge, and reading and writing skills. In the writing section, learners are required to write an essay about a given topic. Based on the test results, the students are placed according to their levels from elementary to advanced. There are six levels: elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, low-advanced, and advanced. Elementary and pre-Intermediate modules are provided in 200 hours; intermediate, upper-intermediate, low-advanced and advanced modules are provided in 160 hours. The program administers the English proficiency exam at the end of the 2nd and 4th quarters. The students who pass this exam can continue with their academic courses in their departments. The students range in age from 17 to 25.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The present study was approved by the Ethics Commission, the committee for the protection of animals and human subjects at Hacettepe University. Since the study seeks to address the aforementioned weakness in the research literature, it is based upon a written task. Learners were asked to write an opinion essay as a task. Intermediate level students wrote an essay about the advantages and disadvantages of marrying someone of different nationality and advanced level students expressed their opinions on whether or not education is the single most important factor in the development of a country.

The study was carried out within the framework of error analysis (Gass and Selinker 2001). Error analysis is a kind of linguistic analysis that deals with the identification and classification of learners' errors made during the process of learning a second/foreign language. The framework also involves determining the causes of errors. Gass and Selinker (2001) identified two main causes of errors: interlingual and intralingual. Interlingual errors are those that are caused by the interference of the native language (NL) whereas intralingual or developmental errors occur as a result of interference of other structures within the target language (TL). In other words, intralingual errors are those that are caused by the influence of the TL on the NL. The present study, in addition to identifying and classifying the errors found in the learners' essays, also determines the causes of the errors.

In the present study, the essays of 100 participants are analyzed with respect to Liu and Gleason's (2002) classification system which provides a refined and simple analysis of the non-generic uses of *the*. Analyses of the learners' essays involved identifying the non-generic definite article errors, determining them as omission and overuse errors and finally, categorizing them into eight different types of use (see Appendix). Under the omission category, the errors were classified into *cultural, textual, situational and structural* and under overuse, the errors were categorized into *cultural, general reference, structural, and ungrammatical*. Each participant received a score for each error committed in each of the contexts above. Then, the participants' scores were entered into the SPSS program. The first analysis involved calculating the mean and standard deviations of omission and overuse for all Turkish learners (Table 1) followed by an independent samples t-test (Table 2), that compared the two proficiency groups regarding omission and overuse of the definite article.

Next, in a more finely grained treatment, a one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to investigate the differences between intermediate and

low-advanced level groups in terms of the missed obligatory use of *the* and overuse of *the* in a total of eight different contexts (Tables 3 and 4). MANOVA is a statistical test that compares multivariate means of several groups. The independent variables in the present study were the different proficiency groups: intermediate and low-advanced. The dependent variables for the missed obligatory use of *the* were *cultural, situational, structural* and *textual* uses and the dependent variables for overuse of *the* were *cultural, general reference, structural, and ungrammatical.* The following presents the findings of the study.

3. FINDINGS

Let me first consider the mean omission and overuse scores of *the* for all learners.

Table 1: Mean Scores of Omission and Overuse of *the* for All Learners

Use Type	M	SD	N
Omission	1.63	(1.70)	100
Overuse	.62	(1.06)	100

In Table 1, a percentage-point increase from overuse to the omission variable can be observed for all learners who participated in the study.

Table 2: Independent-Samples T-Test

Use Type	Groups	M	SD	N
Omission p < .05	Intermediate	2.30	(1.81)	50
	Low-advanced	.96	(1.27)	50
Overuse	Intermediate	.58	(1.1)	50
	Low-advanced	.66	(1.02)	50

An independent-samples t-test was performed to compare the two proficiency groups in terms of omitting and overusing the definite article. The results showed that the intermediate level learners ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.81$) omitted more definite articles than the low-advanced learners ($M = .96$, $SD = 1.27$), t (98) = 4.27, p < .05, two-tailed.

Omission of *the* in Obligatory Contexts

The table below shows the results of MANOVA regarding the omission of *the* in obligatory contexts, the mean scores and standard deviations for each of the four different types of use.

Table 3: Results of MANOVA across Two Proficiency Groups in Four Use Types

Use Type	df	Λ	F
All four	3	.82	7.01*

*p < .01

Use Type	Groups	M	SD	N
Cultural	Intermediate	.16	.42	50
	Low-advanced	.18	.43	50
Situational	Intermediate	.00	.00	50
	Low-advanced	.00	.00	50
Structural	Intermediate	1.56	1.55	50
	Low-advanced	.72	1.01	50
Textual	Intermediate	.58	1.38	50
	Low-advanced	.06	.31	50

Table 3 shows a significant relationship between the two proficiency groups on the combined dependent variables, *F* (3, 96) = 7.01, *p* = .000; Wilks' Lambda = .82; partial eta squared = .18. When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately, only structural *F (1, 98)* = 10.26, *p* = .006, partial eta squared = .095 and textual uses *F (1, 98)* = 6.70, *p* = .000, partial eta squared = .064 were statistically significant. In structural contexts, intermediate level learners (*M* = 1.56, *SD*= 1.55) omitted *the* in obligatory contexts more than the low-advanced learners (*M* = .72 *SD*= 1.01). In textual contexts, intermediate level learners (*M* = .58, *SD*= 1.38) once again omitted *the* in obligatory contexts more than the low-advanced learners (*M* = .06 *SD*= .31). As for the situational use, both groups did not omit any definite articles. Finally, low-advanced learners (*M* = .18, *SD*= .43) omitted definite articles in cultural use slightly more than intermediate learners (*M* = .16, *SD*= .42).

Overuse of *the* in Null Article Contexts

Table 4: Results of MANOVA across Two Proficiency Groups in Four Use Types

Use Type	df	Λ	F	
All four	4	.95	1.48	
Use Type	**Groups**	**M**	**SD**	**N**
Cultural	Intermediate	.10	.36	50
	Low-advanced	.30	.70	50
General	Intermediate	.22	.61	50
	Low-advanced	.10	.30	50
Structural	Intermediate	.00	.00	50
	Low-advanced	.06	.24	50
Ungrammatical	Intermediate	.26	.63	50
	Low-advanced	.20	.63	50

As Table 4 indicates, there was not a significant relationship between the proficiency groups on the combined dependent variables but when I considered the dependent variables separately, I found that the differences regarding the cultural *F (1, 98)* = 3.16, *p* = .001, partial eta squared = .031, general *F (1, 98)* = 1.52, *p* = .011, partial eta squared = .015 and structural types *F (1, 98)* = 3.12, *p* = .000, partial eta squared = .031 are statistically significant between the two groups.

When the mean scores regarding the general use type is taken into consideration, I found that intermediate level learners overused more definite articles in null article contexts *(M* = .22, *SD*= .61) than low-advanced level learners (*M* = .10 *SD* = .30). The intermediate group (*M* = .26 *SD* = .63) also overused more definite articles than the low-advanced group (*M* = .20 *SD* = .63) in ungrammatical use. However, the intermediate group overused fewer definite articles (*M* = .10, *SD*= .36) than the low-advanced group (*M* = .30 *SD* = .70) in cultural use type and they (*M* = .00 *SD* = .00) also used fewer definite articles than low-advanced learners (*M* = .06 *SD* = .24) in structural use types.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study addressed the influence of different proficiency levels on the use of the non-generic definite article in English in a variety of different contexts. The first research question to be addressed in the study was: Taken the sample as a whole, will the Turkish learners of English omit more definite articles in English than they overuse them or vice versa? For this question, first, the omission and overuse rates of the non-generic definite article by the entire

sample were examined. It was found that the entire sample of learners omitted more definite articles than they overused them. The main inference that can be drawn from this finding is that Turkish does not have an article system, and this lack of article system may have influenced the way learners think about the English article system. Thus, omission errors can be considered as interlingual errors.

The second research question was: What are the differences between intermediate and low-advanced learners with respect to omission and overuse of the non-generic definite article in English? A comparison of the two groups with respect to omitting the definite article showed that the intermediate group omitted more definite articles than the low-advanced group. This result was statistically significant. The third research question was: Will the learners' usage of the non-generic definite article improve as their proficiency level in English increases? The finding that the intermediate group omitted more definite articles than the low-advanced group is in line with Liu and Gleason's (2002) result, which suggests that learners' usage of the definite article improves as they become proficient. When the dependent variables were considered separately between the two groups, the difference was significant in only the structural and textual categories. In both categories, the mean scores of omission were higher for intermediate learners. This finding corroborates that of Liu and Gleason (2002). It can be concluded that the usage of the definite article in structural and textual categories significantly improves as learners become proficient in the English language and that the other two types of usage do not show significant improvement.

As far as overusing the definite article in null article contexts is concerned, a significant difference between the two proficiency groups was not found. When the dependent variables were considered separately, a significant difference was found between the two groups regarding the cultural, general, and structural use types. Regarding the general use type, intermediate level learners overused more definite articles in null article contexts than low-advanced level learners. However, the intermediate group overused fewer definite articles than the low-advanced group in cultural use. A plausible explanation might be that the intermediate level learners used the definite article more cautiously and with a higher degree of accuracy than the low-advanced learners because their knowledge and usage of the definite article is not as developed as those of the low-advanced learners.

Some pedagogical implications can also be derived from this study. Research shows that instruction on the use of the article system in English help learners improve their use of the articles. In a study that involved 19 advanced ESL students enrolled in a Master's program in Applied Linguistics, Master (1995) corrected learners' article errors and gave feedback based on their reading summaries and discussed the most frequently occurring errors with them. This resulted in the significant decrease of the number of errors that learners made. In another study, Master (2002) investigated the effect of article pedagogy on learning the article system. The study involved 48 intermediate level ESL learners coming from different language backgrounds. The learners were divided into three groups based on the kind of instruction they received regarding the article system in English. The first group received instruction on information structure, the second group received traditional article instruction, and the third group received no instruction at all. The results showed that the group that received article instruction based on the information structure framework did better than both the traditional group and the group that received no instruction.

Generally, in English classrooms, including the classrooms in Turkey, the teaching and learning of articles can be rule-based. Classroom activities may involve providing the rules for the usage of articles and asking learners to apply the rules in fill-in-the-blanks exercises. Considering the fact that the article system in English is context-dependent, and appropriate article usage depends, to a great extent, on the contexts in which the articles are found (Park, 2008), articles

should therefore be taught in context, not separately. Employing meaningful communicative activities will be particularly effective in helping learners use articles properly in real-life.

Another implication has to do with the treatment of errors. Error feedback given by the teacher is extremely beneficial, and the importance of teacher correction cannot be underestimated. For example, in a study conducted by Bitchener and Knoch (2008) that involved 144 low-intermediate students in the English language department of a university in Auckland in New Zealand, the students who received written corrective feedback in the use of referential indefinite 'a' and referential definite 'the' (for referring to something that has been mentioned before) outperformed those who did not receive written corrective feedback. Corrective feedback, however, is not the only way to treat learners' errors. Learners can also take control and improve their language by developing self-editing skills through receiving strategy training from their teachers (Bates, Lane, & Lange, 1993; Ferris 1995a, 1995b; James, 1998). According to Ferris (2002), strategy training can be achieved by raising student awareness, giving learners training in self-editing strategies, and training learners to focus on texts where they look for specific structures such as definite articles.

The limitations of the study are also worth mentioning. One of the limitations is that the data for the study were based on opinion essays. Different results would have probably been obtained if the learners had written, e.g., narrative essays. Another limitation is the sampling. The study included only Turkish learners and therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other foreign language learners coming from different language backgrounds. These issues can be addressed in further studies.

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APPENDIX

The following sentences, taken from the learners' essays exemplify each of the eight different types of use.

Omission of *the* in Obligatory Contexts

In the following examples, the blanks are obligatory contexts where *the* has to be used. Recall that learners did not make any situational errors and thus the category is not included.

The numbers in the parentheses are learners' identification numbers. ADV stands for advanced level and INT stands for intermediate.

Cultural: "Getting married in ___ future people are careful due to the above reasons" (30ADV).

Structural: "For example in Turkey ____ sister in law and mother in law relationship is very important to be family" (2INT).

Textual: "For example an English woman married a Spanish man and they live together in Spain. But she usually don't understand her husband behavior. Because ____ man said moodly. He wanted cup of tea" (8INT).

Overuse of *the* in Null Article Contexts

Cultural: "Finally in *the* time everything is okey. Two people after congratulated lots of problem. They will different problem for example" (10INT).

General Reference: "In conclusion, when people are get married, they have a lot of problems. This is the most important decision for *the* people's life" (9INT).

Structural: "We know that *the* people who have not good education only become a heavy bag on the back of people who try to take advance" (41ADV).

Ungrammatical: "People travel abroad and they fall in love with *the* different country" (3INT).

Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu çalışmanın genel amacı Hacettepe Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksek Okulu İngilizce Hazırlık Eğitimi Programı'nda İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrencilerin İngilizce yazılı dil becerilerini geliştirmektir. İngilizce Hazırlık Eğitimi Programı'nda öğrenim görmekte olan öğrencilerin iki dönem içerisinde İngilizceyi ileri düzeyde bilmeleri gerektiği göz önüne alındığında dil öğrenme sürecini geliştirmek ve hızlandırmak için gerek öğretim elemanlarını gerekse öğrencileri etkili öğretim ve öğrenim stratejileri hakkında bilgilendirmek büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bu çalışmanın daha dar anlamda amacı İngilizce yeterlilikleri farklı seviyelerde bulunan Türk öğrencilerin İngilizce'deki genelleyici olmayan (non-generic) *the* belirli tanımlığın (definite article) kullanımını iki farklı kategoride araştırmaktır. İngilizce'deki *the* belirli tanımlığının kullanımı özellikle İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen bazı öğrenciler için büyük problem oluşturmaktadır. Belirli tanımlık kavramı öğrencilerin ana dilinde bulunmuyorsa veya İngilizce'deki gibi kullanılmıyorsa bu durum İngilizce öğrenen çoğu öğrenci için daha da büyük öğrenim zorluklarına yol açmaktadır. Belirli tanımlık Türkçe'de, İngilizce'den farklı şekillerde kullanıldığından Türk öğrenciler İngilizce belirli tanımlığı bazı bağlamlarda doğru bir şekilde kullanamamaktadır.

Veri Hacettepe Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksek Okulu İngilizce Hazırlık Eğitimi Programı'nda İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen 100 öğrenciden elde edilmiştir. Yabancı Diller Yüksek Okulu İngilizce Hazırlık Eğitimi Programı'nda üç farklı program yer almaktadır: ING 160, ING 150 ve ING 140. Yüzde yüz İngilizce ile öğretim yapan bölümlerde öğrenim görecek olan öğrenciler ING 160 veya ING 150 programlarına yerleştirilmekte olup %30 İngilizce ile öğretim yapan bölümlerde öğrenim görecek olan öğrenciler ise ING 140 programına yerleştirilmektedir. Öğrencilerin seviyeleri, İngilizce dil bilgisinin yanısıra okuma ve yazma becerilerini de ölçen bir seviye tespit sınavına göre belirlenmektedir. Yazma bölümünde, öğrencilerden verilen bir konu hakkında bir kompozisyon yazmaları istenmektedir. Öğrenciler, bu sınavın sonuçlarına göre başlangıç seviyesinden ileri seviyeye kadar altı ayrı gruba yerleştirilmektedir. Bu çalışma için veri ING 150 programında iki ayrı seviyede (orta ve ileri) öğrenim görmekte olan öğrenci gruplarından elde edilmiştir. Veriyi öğrencilerin dönem sonunda yazmış oldukları kompozisyonlar oluşturmuştur. Veriler, Liu ve Gleason'un (2002) geliştirdiği kategorilere göre sınıflandırılmıştır. Bu sınıflandırma İngilizce *the* belirli tanımlığının *zorunlu olarak kullanılması gereken bağlamlar (kültürel, durumsal, yapısal ve metinsel)* ve *aşırı kullanıldığı bağlamlar (kültürel, genel, yapısal ve dilbilgisi hatası)* olmak üzere iki ayrı kategoriyi kapsamaktadır. Veriler nicel olarak SPSS programı kullanılarak incelenmiştir.

Çalışmanın amaçları doğrultusunda şu sorulara cevap aranmıştır: 1) Çalışmaya katılan bütün öğrenciler göz önüne alındığında öğrenciler İngilizce *the* belirli tanımlığını kullanmaları

gerektiği yerde kullanacaklar mıdır yoksa kullanmaları gerektiği bağlamlarda aşırı bir şekilde mi kullanacaklardır? 2) İngilizce *the* belirli tanımlığını kullanmama ve aşırı kullanma bakımından orta ve ileri seviyede bulunan öğrenciler arasında fark var mıdır? 3) Öğrencilerin dil seviyeleri ilerledikçe İngilizce *the* belirli tanımlığını kullanmaları da olumlu yönde gelişir mi?

Araştırma kapsamında toplanan verilerin analizinde, öncelikle çalışmaya katılan bütün öğrenciler için İngilizce *the* belirli tanımlığını kullanma ve aşırı kullanma kategorilerinin ortalama oranı hesaplanmış ardından iki öğrenci grubu arasında bu kategoriler bakımından anlamlı bir fark olup olmadığını tespit etmek için bağımsız iki grup t-testi (Independent samples t-test) kullanılmıştır. Buna ek olarak İngilizce *the* belirli tanımlığının zorunlu olarak kullanılması gereken bağlamlar ve aşırı kullanıldığı bağlamlarda incelenebilmesi için çok değişkenli varyans analizi (MANOVA) kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre, çalışmaya katılan bütün öğrenciler göz önüne alındığında, belirli tanımlığın kullanılması gereken bağlamlarda kullanılmamasının ortalama oranı belirli tanımlığın aşırı kullanımının ortalama oranından istatiksel olarak anlamlı bir şekilde daha yüksektir. Bu sonucun Türkçe'de belirli tanımlığın İngilizce'deki gibi kullanılmamasından kaynaklandığı tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca orta seviyede bulunan öğrenciler ile ileri seviyede bulunan öğrenciler karşılaştırıldığında orta seviyede bulunan öğrencilerin belirli tanımlığı kullanmaları gereken bağlamlarda ileri seviyedeki öğrencilerden yine istatiksel olarak anlamlı bir şekilde daha az kullandıkları tespit edilmiştir. Çok değişkenli varyans analizinin (MANOVA) sonuçlarına göre ise öğrencilerin dil seviyeleri ileri düzeye geldikçe belirli tanımlığın kullanılması gereken bağlamlarda kullanılması sadece yapısal ve metinsel kategorilerde istatiksel olarak anlamlı bir şekilde daha iyiye gitmiştir. Belirli tanımlığın aşırı kullanılması ise öğrencilerin dil seviyeleri ileri düzeye geldikçe sadece genel kategoride gelişme göstermiştir.

Çalışmanın bulguları İngilizce dil becerilerinin geliştirilmesi ve hali hazırda kullanılmakta olan müfredatın geliştirilmesi bakımından öğretim elemanlarına öneriler sunmaktadır. Araştırmalar İngilizce'deki belirli tanımlığın öğretiminin belirli tanımlığın kullanımında önemli bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir. Master (1995) Uygulamalı Dilbilim alanında yüksek lisans yapan 19 öğrenciyi kapsayan çalışmasında öğrencilerin belirli tanımlık ile ilgili olan hatalarını düzeltmiş, yazdıkları özetler hakkında dönütler vermiş ve onlara en sık yapılan hatalar hakkında bilgi vermiştir. Bu da öğrencilerin yaptıkları hataların önemli ölçüde azalmasını sağlamıştır. Master (2000) orta seviyede bulunan 48 öğrenci ile yaptığı başka bir çalışmada ise benzer sonuçlar almıştır.

Türkiye'deki İngilizce dersler dahil Dünya'nın birçok yerinde İngilizce belirli tanımlığın öğretimi ve öğrenimi çoğu kez kurallarla yapılmaktadır. Öğrencilere öncelikle belirli tanımlığın kullanıldığı yerlerle ilgili kurallar anlatılır ve daha sonra öğrencilerden bu kuralları bağlamdan bağımsız boşluk doldurma alıştırmalarında uygulanması beklenir. İngilizce belirli tanımlığın kullanılması büyük ölçüde bağlama bağlı olduğundan (Park, 2008), belirli tanımlığın bağlam içinde anlatılması ve öğrencilere verilecek olan alıştırmaların anlamlı bir şekilde bağlam içinde verilmesi büyük önem taşımaktadır. İngilizce belirli tanımlığın öğreniminin kolaylaştırılması için diğer bir etkili yol ise hataların geri bildirimidir. Öğretmen tarafından öğrencilere verilen geri bildirim azımsanmayacak kadar önemlidir. Örneğin 2008 yılında Bitchener and Knoch tarafından yapılan ve İngilizce orta seviyede yer alan 144 öğrenciyi kapsayan çalışmada belirli tanımlığın kullanılması ile ilgili yazılı geri bildirim alan öğrenciler geri bildirim almayan öğrencilere göre belirli tanımlığı daha doğru bir şekilde kullanmıştır.

Bu çalışma sadece belli bir kompozisyon türüne dayandığından ve sadece Türk öğrencileri kapsadığından çalışmanın sonuçları hakkında bir genelleme yapmak mümkün olmamaktadır. Gelecekte yapılması planlanan çalışmalarda farklı türde yazılan kompozisyonlar ve ana dili farklı olan öğrenci grupları ele alınacaktır.

Citation Information