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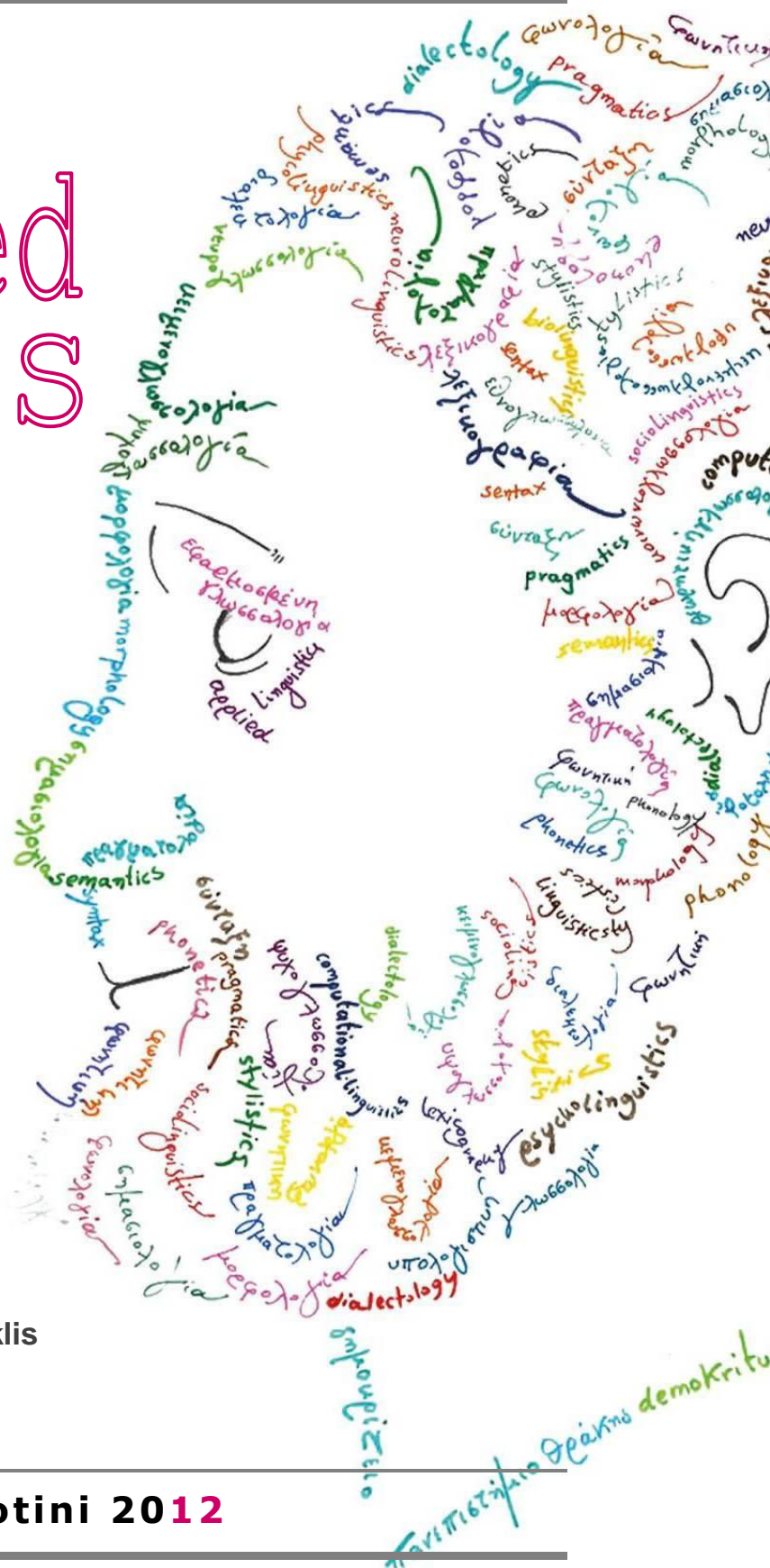
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L2 GREEK DETERMINER SYSTEM: EVIDENCE FROM TURKISH ADULT LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the status of determiners in L2 Greek of Turkish adult learners in view of the 'Interpretability Hypothesis' (Tsimplici 2003, Tsimplici & Dimitrakopoulou 2007). This hypothesis argues that L2 uninterpretable features, when unavailable in L1, are inaccessible to the L2 learner even in advanced L2 development. Our assumption is that mismatching parametric values between Greek and Turkish with respect to (un)interpretable features on determiners might cause learnability problems. Four groups of learners at different proficiency levels were tested. The results indicate that learners could dissociate different article environments and that optionality in article use is not a permanent problem.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Interpretability Theory in L2 grammars

Our analysis is based on the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995, 2005) and on recent theory of L2 development upon the way LF-interpretable and uninterpretable features affect learnability (Tsimplici 2003; Tsimplici & Mastropavlou 2008). Proposals of L2 development (hereon L2A) based on interpretability in correlation with the age factor argue that, if L1 and L2 differ in the values of a particular set of parameters in terms of interpretable and uninterpretable features, or if this set of parameters is absent (not grammaticalised) in the L1, the uninterpretable features will give rise to different developmental patterns even in advanced stages of L2A. This is a version of the 'no access to UG' hypothesis and of the Failed Functional Features Hypothesis (Hawkins & Chan, 1997; Smith & Tsimplici, 1995; Tsimplici & Roussou 1991), namely the Interpretability Hypothesis (Tsimplici 2003; Tsimplici & Dimitrakopoulou 2007). Contrary to 'full access to UG' L2A theories (Lardiere, 1998, 2000; Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996; Haznedar & Schwartz 1997; Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 1996; White, 1989, 2003; a. o.), the Interpretability Hypothesis argues for no access to language particular L2 properties and predicts persistent problems for the L2 learner with respect to L2 parametric values that differ from his L1. And although this is assumed to be the case even in post-critical age L2A, prolonged exposure to L2 input is assumed to lead to progressive targetlike performance. Additionally, given the unavailability of functional features, L2 behaviour is argued to show transfer of L1 parametric values (Tsimplici 1997), optionality/ variability in the use of L2 morphosyntactic elements and also misanalysis of the L2 input, that is, non-target feature specification in terms of production of representations that would diverge both from the L2 native speaker and their L1s (Tsimplici & Mastropavlou 2008).

The present study attempts to provide further evidence for the Interpretability Hypothesis on the basis of L2 behavior in Greek determiners. More specifically, this paper investigates the Greek article system in Turkish adult speakers by focusing on definite and indefinite DPs. With respect to the L2A of D elements in Greek L2, it is assumed that there should be a distinct pattern of development differentiating the definite from the indefinite article, in which pattern the definite article would be more problematic for L2 learners than the indefinite. Our assumption is based on the fact that, Turkish, being the speakers' L1, has mismatching parametric values with Greek with respect to the features of definiteness and specificity on determiners, and this might cause learnability problems. More clearly, it is argued that the specification of LF-interpretable feature of [-definiteness] on the indefinite article, and absence thereof on the definite article, gives rise to a different learnability pattern in Greek L2 grammars. Finally, it is questioned whether the inaccessibility of uninterpretable features leads to a

misanalysis of the definite article in advanced L2 grammars or gives evidence of real variability/optionality in use.

1.2 Features of the learners' L2 (Greek)

Greek is a language with a morphologically rich determiner system, including a definite and an indefinite article, which inflect for case, number and gender. Agreement is always required between the noun (N), any adjectives appearing in the DP and the determiner (D), as shown below:

DEFINITE NP	INDEFINITE NP
O psilos tixos.	Enas psilos tixos.
the-masc.sing.nom high-masc.sing.nom wall-masc.sing.nom	One-masc.sing.nom high-masc.sing.nom wall-masc.sing.nom
'the high wall'	'a high wall'

Table 1 Agreement in definite and indefinite NPs

The morphological paradigm showing formal features (number, gender, case) on Greek articles is presented in Table 2:

	DEFINITE ARTICLE						INDEFINITE ARTICLE					
	MASC.		FEM.		NEUT.		MASC.		FEM.		NEUT.	
CASE	SING.	PL.	SING.	PL.	SING.	PL.	SING.	PL.	SING.	PL.	SING.	PL.
NOM.	o	i	i	i	to	ta	enas	-	mia	-	ena	-
GEN.	tu	ton	tis	ton	tou	ton	enos	-	mias	-	enos	-
ACC.	to(n)	tus	ti(n)	tis	to	ta	ena(n)	-	mia	-	ena	-

Table 2 The definite and the indefinite articles in Greek

There are also cases where zero article (Clairis, Babiniotis 2005) must be used, i.e. no article is needed. Absence of the article in such cases is not considered as omission. Rather, it serves a specific function, that of generic reference. The sentences below illustrate zero, definite and indefinite article use in association to the function served and Table 3 summarizes the referential status of every article type:

- (i) Ipiame Ø krasi ke faghame Ø kreas. – generic reference
'We drank wine and ate meat.'
- (ii) Ipiame to krasi ke faghame to kreas. – specific reference
'We drank the wine and ate the meat.'
- (iii) Ipiame ena krasi ke faghame ena kreas. – un-specific reference
'We drank some wine and ate some meat.'

	REFERENCE		
ARTICLE TYPE	Generic	Specific	Non specific
Definite article	YES	YES	NO
Indefinite article	YES	NO	YES
Zero article	YES	NO	YES

Table 3 The referential status of Greek articles

Moving to an analysis of Greek articles in Minimalist terms, the analysis proposed by Tsimplici and Stavrakaki (1999) is adopted. It has been argued that the definite article differs from the indefinite one in terms of feature-specification, in that, while the definite article hosts uninterpretable features only (case and *phi*-features), the indefinite article is also intrinsically specified/marked for the interpretable feature of [-definiteness] (Karanassios 1992, Tsimplici and Stavrakaki 1999). Table 4 summarizes the properties of articles in Greek based on their respective feature-specification:

Articles	Interpretable features	Uninterpretable features
Definite article	Ø	[case], [agreement]
Indefinite article	[-definite]	[case], [agreement]

Table 4 Properties of articles in Greek

1.3 Features of the learners' L1 (Turkish)

Coming to Turkish, it is argued to lack a D system in that it does not have a determiner system distinguishing between definite and indefinite articles (Kornfilt 1997). In Turkish, specificity and definiteness depend on other factors, such as case, word order, stress and modality (Göksel & Kerslake 2005, Enç 1991, Kornfilt 1997), as shown in the examples below:

CASE

- (i) Aylin şapka sevir. ('Aylin loves hats.') – non-specific reference
hat-NOM
- (ii) Aylin şapkayı sevir. ('Aylin loves the hat.') – specific reference
hat-ACC

WORD ORDER

- (i) Pencereden hırsız kaçmış. ('A burglar/ Burglars escaped from the window.') - non-specific
- (ii) Hırsız pencereden kaçmış. ('The burglar escaped from the window.') - specific

STRESS

- (i) MektupLAR imzalandı. 'Letters were signed.' – non-specific
- (ii) Mektuplar imzalanDI. 'The letters were signed.' – specific

MODALITY

- (i) Bebek süt iç^{er}.
drink-AOR
'Babies drink milk.'/ 'A baby drinks milk.' - generic
'The baby drinks milk.' - non-specific
- (ii) Bebek süt iç^{iyor}.
drink-PROG
'The baby is drinking (some) milk.' - specific
'The baby drinks milk.' - specific

2. PREDICTIONS

As pointed out earlier, this study aims to investigate the L2A of the Greek article system by Turkish native adult learners and our assumptions are based on the Interpretability hypothesis put forward in Section 1. On the basis of (i) the relationship between feature-interpretability and learnability, (ii) the uninterpretable features on the Greek definite article, and (iii) the absence a definite article in the learners' L1, i.e. Turkish, the following predictions are made:

- 1) Definite article omissions in obligatory contexts are expected due to L1 transfer.
- 2) Indefinite article omissions in obligatory contexts are expected to be less than definite article omissions in the respective definite contexts due to the role of interpretability in developing L2 grammars.
- 3) A distinct pattern of development differentiating the two articles, the definite being more problematic for L2 learners than the indefinite, is expected.
- 4) Zero article contexts are expected to be nativelike due to L1 transfer.
- 5) In interchangeable i) definite/ indefinite/ zero article, ii) definite/ zero article and iii) indefinite/zero article contexts, higher rates of zero article use are expected due to L1 transfer.
- 6) In interchangeable definite/ indefinite article contexts, preference to the indefinite article is expected.
- 7) Correct use of all articles is expected to increase with proficiency but not reach nativelike levels due to age constraints.

3. THE STUDY

3.1 Participants

Our data come from forty native Turkish speakers who volunteered to take part in the study. All speakers were, at the time, university students learning Greek as L2 in the Department of Modern Greek Studies in the Istanbul University of Istanbul. No student had any previous knowledge of Greek before entering the specific university, in which both Greek and Turkish are used as means of instruction. For the purposes of our research, the subjects are divided into four groups according to their year of studies (assumed as L2 Greek proficiency level), as is depicted in Table 5:

Subjects (N=40)	L2 Proficiency level
Group 1 (N=13): 1 st year students	1
Group 2 (N=10): 2 nd year students	2
Group 3 (N=3): 3 rd year students	3
Group 4 (N=14): 4 th year students	4

Table 5 Classification of the subjects in terms of L2 proficiency

3.2 Tasks

Data was collected in the period of April–May 2010 and come from spoken production in the form of one-to-one interviews, which were tape-recorded and transcribed by means of the CHILDES program. The interviews consisted of three parts: i) filling-in of and discussion upon a personal questionnaire regarding biographical details relevant to the subjects' exposure to L2, ii) story-telling by means of descriptions of sets of pictures each forming a story that the student had to narrate. Each participant was asked to describe two sets of pictures upon a random selection from a group of eight sets, iii) isolated picture description upon random selection of 12 out of 36 pictures. The interviews lasted 10-15 minutes, depending on the fluency of the participants.

Our study focuses on the errors observed in the spoken production of the Turkish learners with regard to their use of the Greek definite, indefinite and zero articles. Errors are based on obligatory and interchangeable contexts. Thus, a classification of the contexts on which our research was based is shown below:

- i) definite article obligatory contexts
- ii) indefinite article obligatory contexts
- iii) zero article obligatory contexts
- iv) definite, indefinite and zero article interchangeable contexts
- v) definite and zero article interchangeable contexts
- vi) indefinite and zero article interchangeable contexts
- vii) definite and indefinite article interchangeable contexts.

Errors are classified according to one of the three types: i) omission, ii) substitution and iii) overgeneralization. Results are then analyzed comparatively for all groups. The examples below¹ taken from our data illustrate how the learners i) failed to supply the article required (i.e. omission errors), ii) incorrectly substituted one article for another in obligatory contexts (i.e. substitution errors), or iii) overgeneralized one article type in zero article contexts (i.e. overgeneralization errors):

(i) OMISSION ERRORS

a. definite article omission

S1: *(o) idhjos adras ke *(i) ghineka ine sto estiatorio.
 (the) same man and (the) woman are in-the restaurant
 "The same man and the woman are in the restaurant."

(i) b. indefinite article omission

S22: Afti stelni *Ø dhoros *tin mama

¹ Asterisks show problematic contexts, whereas the items in parentheses are not produced by the L2 speaker.

She sends – gift the mum
 “She sends (a) gift (to) (her) mum .”
Correct: Afti stelni ena dhoro stin mama tis.
 she sends a gift to+the mum her
 “She sends a gift to her mum.”

(ii) SUBSTITUTION ERRORS

a. definite article substitution (and omission)

S2: ... stelno *Ø ghrama *ena baba su ke *Ø mama su.
 Send - letter *a dad your and - mum your
Correct: ...stelno (to) ghrama (ston) baba su ke (stin) mama su
 send (the) letter (to-your) daddy and (to-your) mummy
 “I send the letter to your daddy and mummy.”

b. indefinite article substitution

S25: mia ghineka ke *o adras ine mesa (s)to treno.
 a woman and the man are in the train
 “A woman and *the man are in the train.”
Correct: mia ghineka ke enas adras ine mesa sto treno
 a woman and a man are in the train
 “A woman and a man are in the train.”

(iii) OVERGENERALISATION ERRORS

a. overgeneralization of definite article in zero article context

S25: Pai *(se) ena katastima *ton paputsion
 goes to a store of-the shoes
 “He goes to a store of *the shoes”.
Correct: pai se ena katastima Ø paputsion
 goes to a store shoes
 “He goes to a shoe store.”

b. overgeneralization of indefinite article

S2: edho exi *ena pedhja.
 here there-are *a children
 “Here there are *a children.”
Correct: edho exi Ø pedhja.
 here there-are children
 “There are children here.”

(iv) INTERCHANGEABLE CONTEXTS

a. definite/ indefinite article and zero/ definite/ indefinite article interchangeable contexts

o/enas adras pini Ø /ton/ena kafe.
 The/a man drink-3rd.sing Ø /the/a coffee
 “A/The man drinks -/the/a coffee.”

b. zero/ definite/ indefinite article interchangeable context

Aftos dhjavazi Ø/ tin/ mia efimeridha
 He reads Ø /the/a newspaper
 “He is reading -/the/a newspaper.”

4. THE RESULTS - DISCUSSION

In what follows, the results from our research are presented in discussion with the predictions made in Section 2. The results were based on the total number of obligatory and interchangeable contexts for every group of students (see Table 6). Error analysis followed each type of context and statistical analysis was computed to assess the relationship between the groups of students (i.e. year of study/ proficiency level) and their performance.

Subjects	Total NPs	Obligatory contexts			Interchangeable contexts
		Def. art NPs	Indef. art NPs	Zero art. NPs	
1 st year	550	162	63	70	255
2 nd year	368	128	27	40	173
3 rd year	172	45	12	33	82
4 th year	458	166	38	52	202
TOTAL	1548	501 (32,4%)	140 (9%)	195 (12,6%)	712 (46%)

Table 6 Definite, Indefinite, Zero article obligatory and interchangeable contexts

With regard to Prediction 1, according to which definite article omissions in obligatory contexts are assumed to be expected due to L1 transfer, we notice high rates of correct use for all groups (see Figure 1), what accounts for learnability of the definite article to a great extent. The results are significant for all groups at the 0.05 level ($F=14,399^a$, $p<.002$) and there is positive correlation between the groups and their performance (Pearson's $r=0.099$, $p=0.026$).

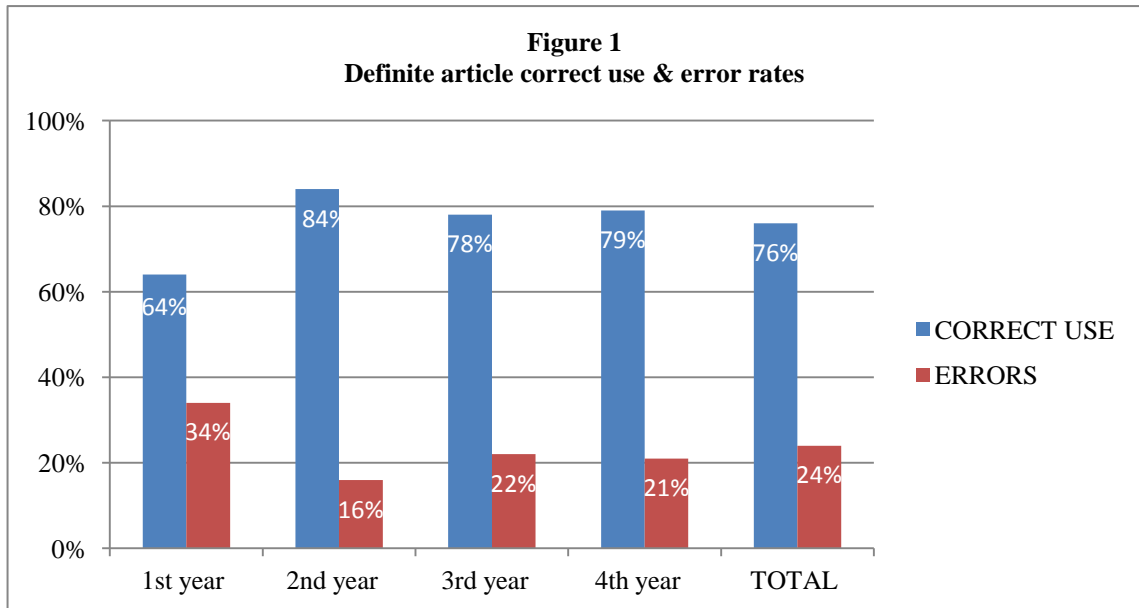


Figure 1 Definite article correct use and error rates in obligatory contexts

Error analysis in the above contexts (see Figure 2) reveals definite article omissions in all groups, which makes Prediction 1 to be confirmed. The results are significant for all groups ($F=29,071$, $p<.000$) and there is positive correlation between the year of study and the errors made in definite article contexts (Pearson's $r=0,198$, $p<.031$).

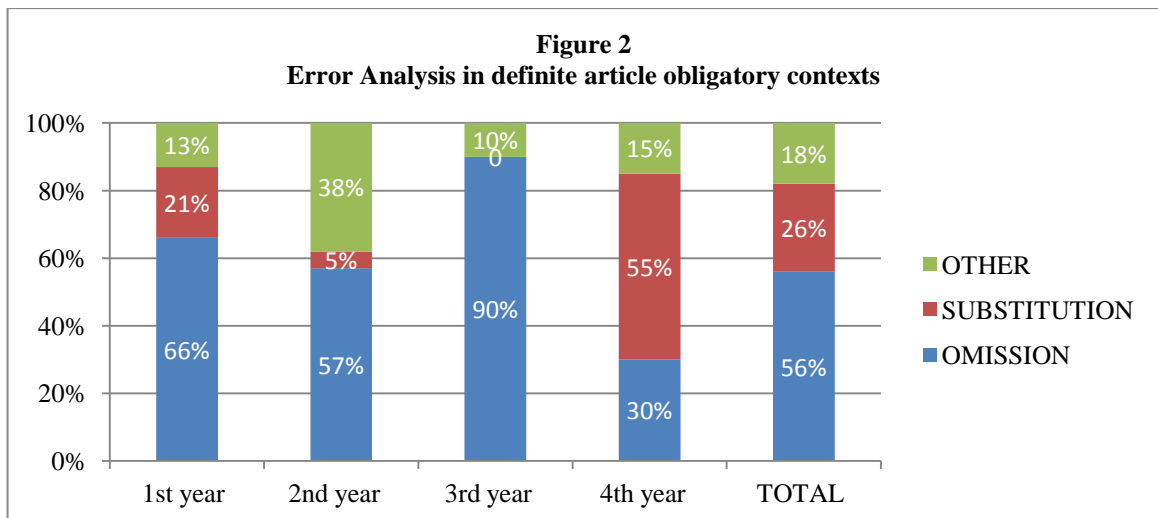


Figure 2 Error analysis in definite article obligatory contexts

Moving to Predictions 2 and 3, we check, first, whether indefinite article omissions are less than definite article ones or not in respective obligatory contexts (Prediction 2), and secondly, whether a distinct pattern of development that differentiates the definite from the indefinite article takes place or not (Prediction 3). Figure 3 below shows that in indefinite article obligatory contexts performance of all groups -with the exception of the 3rd - is slightly better compared to definite contexts, what is in line with our expectations. The results are significant for all groups ($F= 17,182^a$, $p<001$). Moreover the year of study and performance in definite / indefinite article correct use are strongly related and dependent (Pearson's $r = -0,77$, $p < .035$).

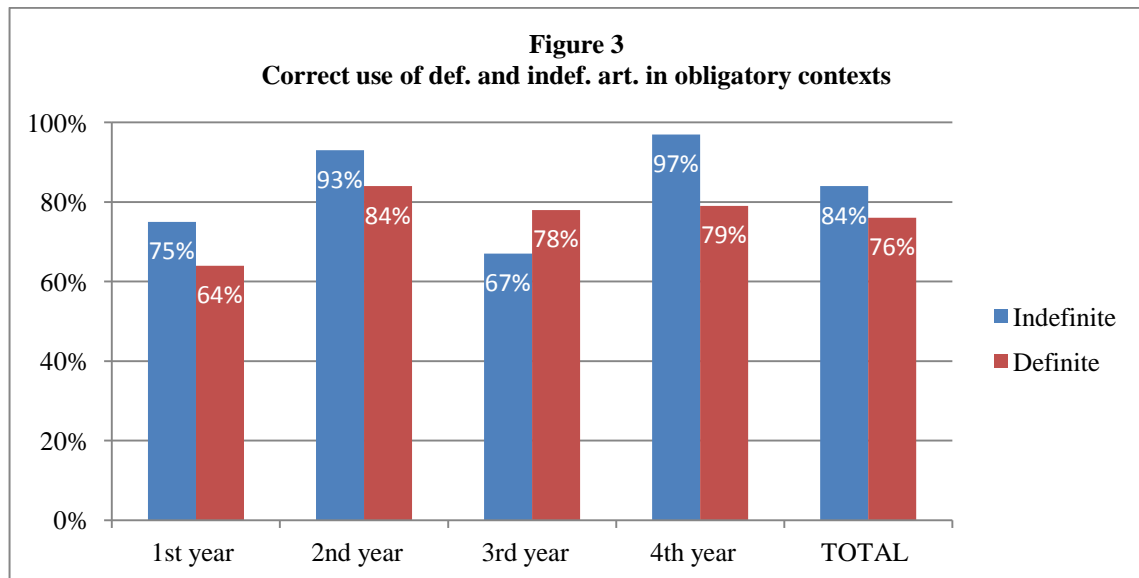


Figure 3 Correct use of definite and indefinite articles in obligatory contexts

With respect to errors (see Figure 4), the results confirm Prediction 2, since all groups omitted definite articles very frequently, whereas indefinite article omissions are observed only in beginners. Therefore, in indefinite contexts native-like performance seems to be achieved with proficiency, what was not the case in definite ones.

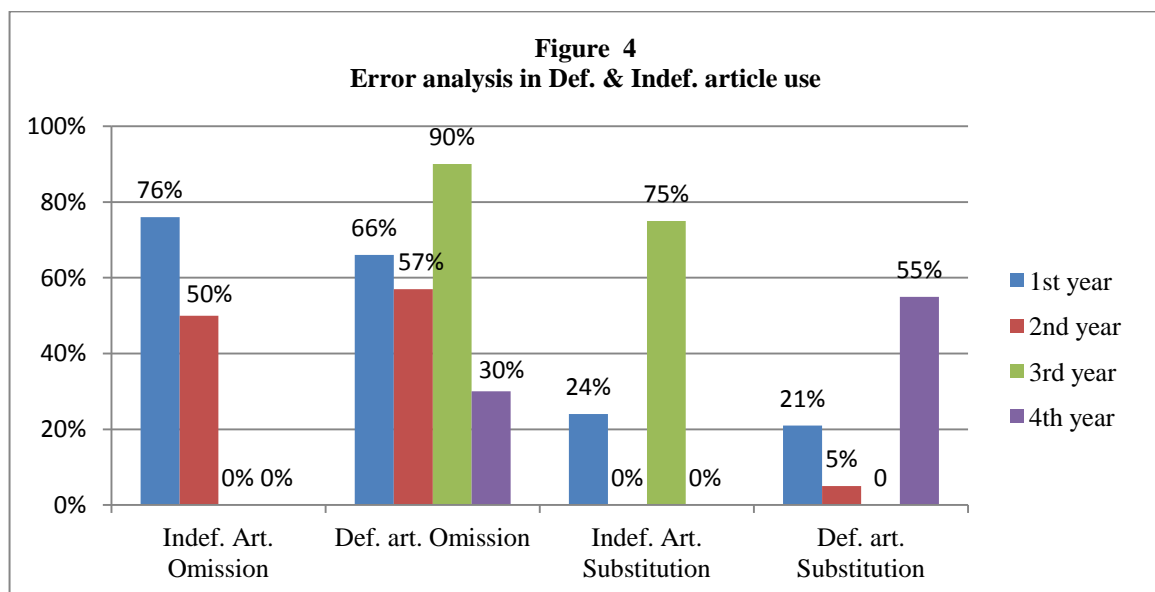


Figure 4 Error analysis in definite and indefinite article obligatory contexts

The results also show that a distinct pattern of development separating the two articles takes place and as such, Prediction 3 is confirmed. However, despite the slight divergence existing in the

development of the two articles, the fact that both are used correctly to a great extent in obligatory contexts shows that definite article development is not that problematic compared to that of the indefinite. Thus, it can be assumed that L2 learners seem to be able to assign the feature of definiteness, existing in their L1, at advanced stages of L2 development. The results are very significant for all groups ($F=46,696^a$, $p<.000$).

Moving to Prediction 4, we should check what the case is in zero article obligatory contexts and whether performance in these contexts is nativelike due to L1 transfer or not. Data from these contexts reveal almost targetlike behaviour for all groups (95%), which goes along to our expectations. Statistical analysis however revealed that the relation between the groups of students (i.e. year of study/ proficiency level) and their performance in these interchangeable contexts is not very strong and the results are not significant, since the correlation coefficient is not very highly significantly different from zero (Pearson's $r=0.062$, $p<0.388$).

At first glance, L1 transfer could account for these results, since Turkish is an articleless language. However, error analysis in these contexts shows overgeneralization of definite (89%) rather than the indefinite (11%) article, which makes L1 transfer accounts sound problematic. Assuming that L1 transfer does play a role in L2A, then it would be expected that students would overgeneralize the indefinite rather than the definite article in these contexts, since in Turkish, lacking itself an indefinite article, the numeral *bir* 'one' is used instead.

Turning now to a discussion of the results in interchangeable contexts (Predictions 5 and 6), we will examine which article students prefer in contexts where one article or the other could be used interchangeably without meaning effects. Figures 5 to 8 below depict schematically the results for all types of interchangeable contexts.

i) Starting with definite/ indefinite/ zero article interchangeable contexts (Figure 5), the results confirm our predictions, since all groups tend to prefer the zero article. Second comes preference to the definite article, although we would expect students to cline to indefinite article use, based both on the feature specification of the two articles in Greek and on the fact that Turkish, as mentioned before, uses the numeral *bir* as an indefinite article. Statistical analysis revealed that the strength of association between the groups of students and their performance in these contexts is not very high and the results are not significant (Pearson's $r=0.041$, $p<0.747$).

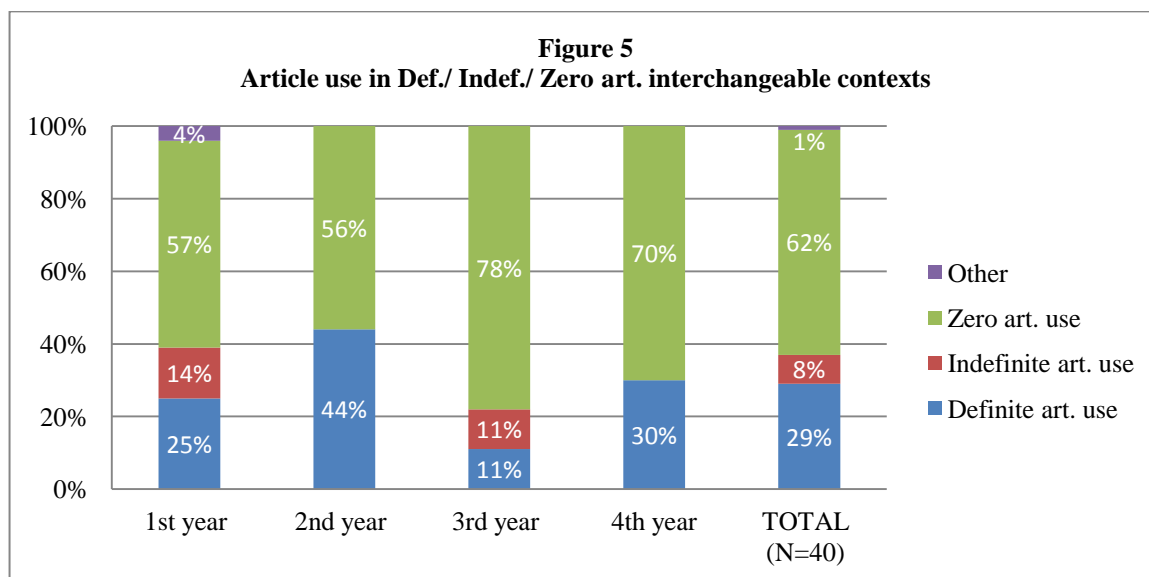


Figure 5 Article distribution in definite/ indefinite/ zero article interchangeable contexts

ii) In interchangeable definite/ zero article contexts (see Figure 6), the results show students' preference to zero article use, not unexpectedly. Both feature-specification and L1 transfer account for the results, although the latter can only partly do so, because there is great intergroup variation. Quite unexpectedly, 2nd year students seem to prefer definite article use and 4th year students show clear optionality in zero and definite article use. This gives precedence to the view that a misanalysis of the definite article does occur in advanced L2 grammars and that L2 learners assign the feature of definiteness (existing in their L1 grammars) to L2 parametric features non-existing in their L1. Statistical analysis revealed that the relationship between the two variables (year of study and

performance in definite/ zero article interchangeable contexts) is not very strong and the results are not significant (Pearson's $r = 0.063$, $p < 0.615$).

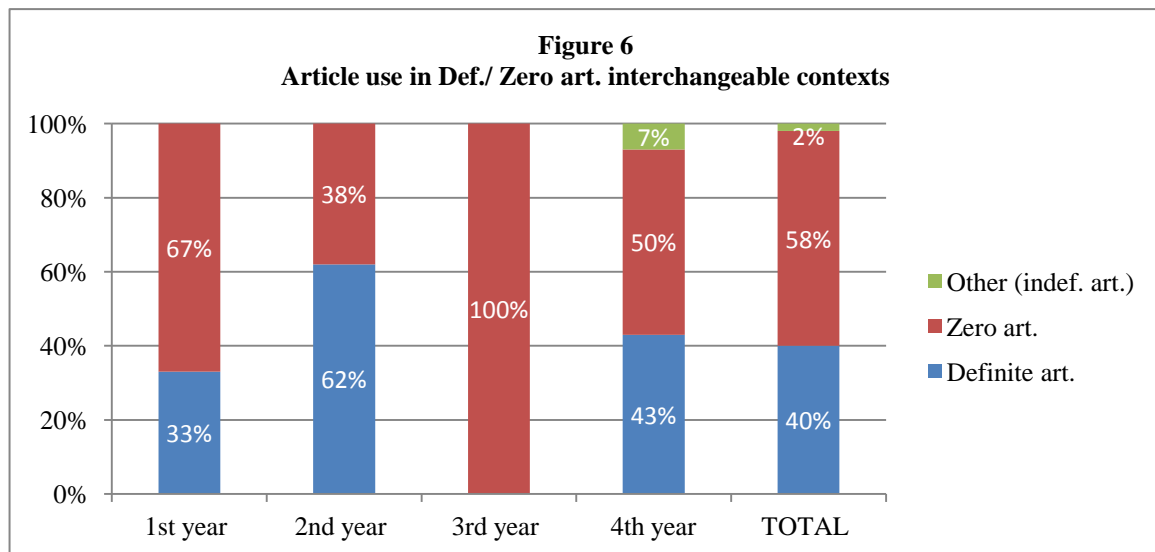


Figure 6 Article distribution in definite/ zero article interchangeable contexts

iii) Article distribution in contexts where indefinite and zero article can be used interchangeably (see Figure 7) shows that all groups tend to show preference to zero article use, what goes along with our predictions. Again the relationship between the groups of students and their performance in indefinite/ zero article interchangeable contexts is not very strong and the results are not significant (Pearson's $r = 0.041$, $p < 0.725$).

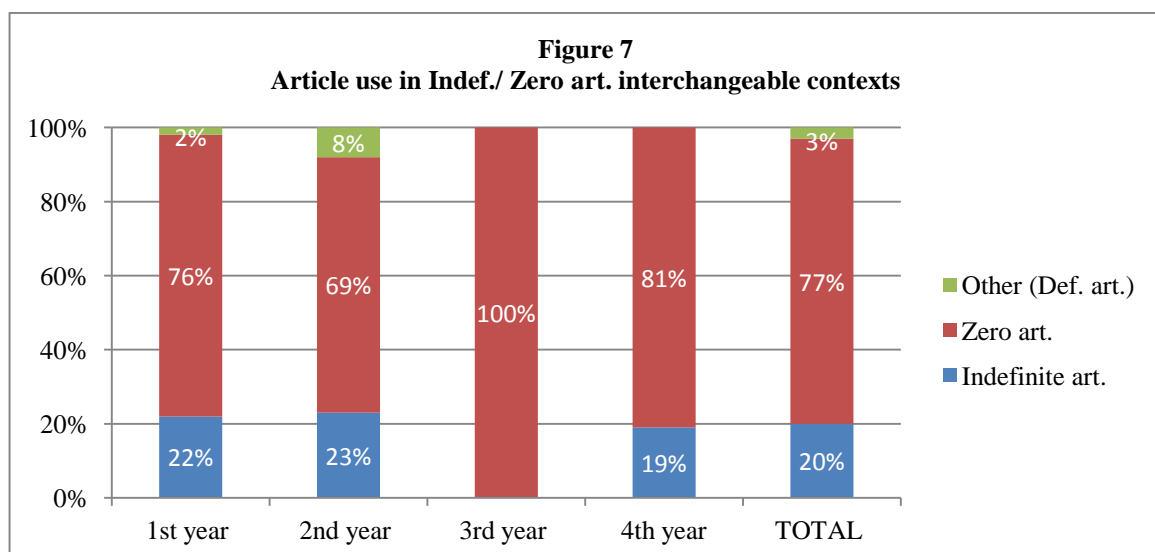


Figure 7 Article distribution in indefinite/ zero article interchangeable contexts

iv) In definite/ indefinite article interchangeable contexts (see Figure 8), most learners tend to use the indefinite rather than the definite article, which is also in line with our expectations. What is also common for all groups in these contexts, is the fact that they all show article omissions (see zero article rates), assumedly, due to L1 transfer. Statistically speaking, the results are not significant (Pearson's $r = 0.005$, $p < 0.932$).

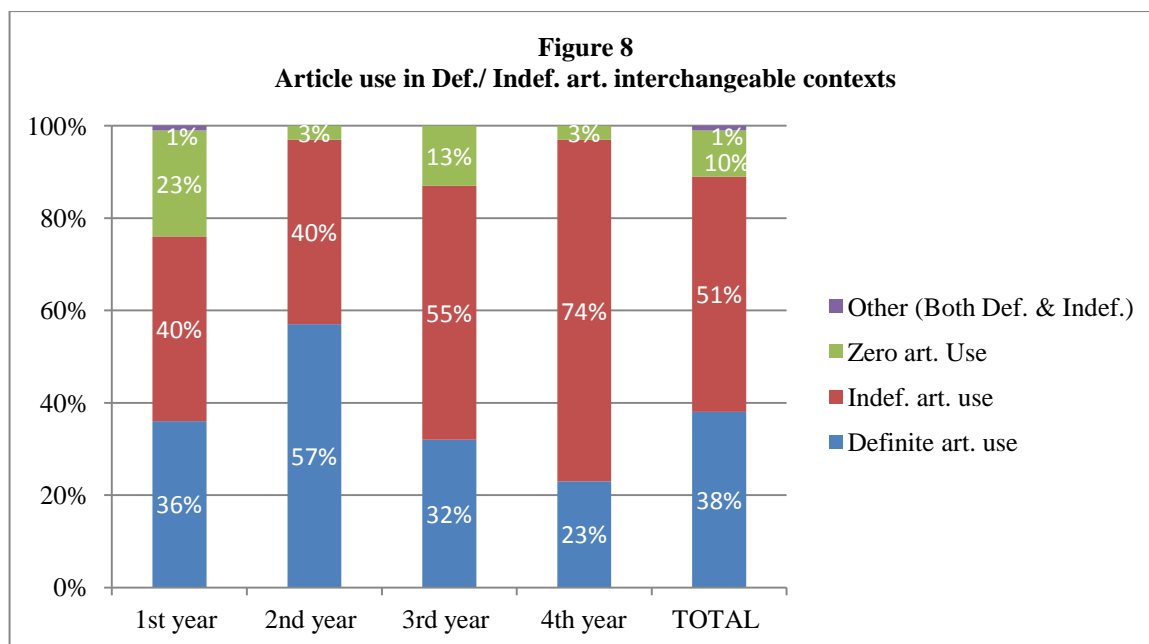


Figure 8 Article distribution in definite/ indefinite article interchangeable contexts

Closing our discussion with Prediction 7 (see Figure 9), it has been assumed that correct use of all articles would increase with proficiency but not reach nativelike levels, due to age constraints. As expected, article use in L2 Greek seems to somehow develop in correlation to L2 proficiency and, as such, Prediction 7 is largely confirmed. Data show that 4th year students outperform all other groups in all article contexts -with the exception of the definite ones, where 2nd year students perform slightly better-. Results also reveal that, with the exception of the 3rd group, proficiency-based development is clearer in definite and indefinite article contexts, whereas in zero article contexts all groups behave almost targetlike. More specifically, definite article development seems to be later compared to that of the indefinite, which in turn is later than that of the zero article. Thus, whereas nativelike performance seems to take place only for the zero and the indefinite articles in general, we can assume that prolonged exposure to input seems to lead to successful production even for the definite article.

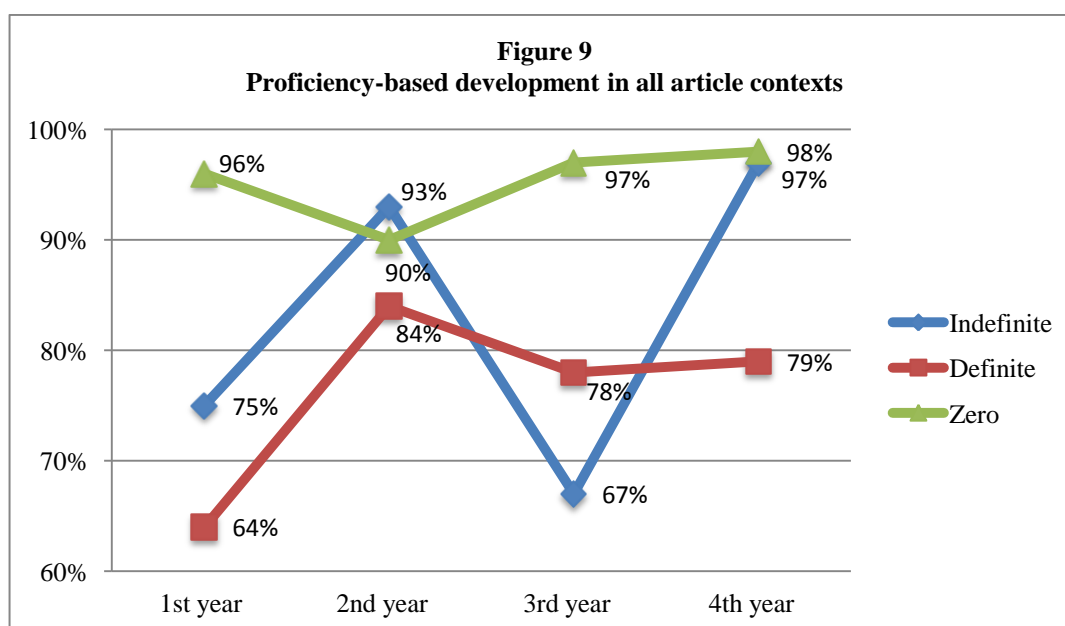


Figure 9 Development with proficiency in definite, indefinite and zero article obligatory contexts

The first reason to account for this non-native behavior in definite article development is non-target feature-specification of determiners in the L2. A second reason is the age factor. However, we would

expect the development taking place to be even more minimal in degree, since all participants were adult L2 learners who, having exceeded critical age for L2A, are supposed to have reached a steady state in the development of certain L2 parameters non-existing in their L1. This goes along with L2A theory which argues that uninterpretable features are subject to critical period constraints and therefore inaccessible to L2 learners, whereas interpretable features are always accessible (Tsimpili 2003). If this hypothesis is correct, then we would expect indefinite article use to be by far targetlike and definite article use to be problematic due to its non-target feature-specification in the L2 lexicon. Contrary to our assumptions, in this study the definite article appears to somehow develop even in adult L2 grammars. We can thus assume that, in many respects, our learners can impose interpretable features such as [referentiality] or [specificity], existing in their L1, on the Greek article and that, as such, L2 use resists age constraints but does not become nativelike.

5. CONCLUSIONS - IMPLICATIONS

The discussion in this paper is based on the interpretability distinction on articles in L2 Greek. It has been argued that the definite and the indefinite articles should pattern differently, since they are differently specified in terms of interpretability, in that, whereas the former is not inherently specified for definiteness, the latter is intrinsically marked as [- definite]. Our data come from four groups of adult L2 learners with diverse L2 proficiency levels. The learnability theory we follow suggests that all groups should show evidence for differential performance in interpretable versus uninterpretable features on the grounds that the latter are difficult to access in any developmental process other than normal L1 development.

The study yielded several findings concerning L2A of Greek articles. With respect to obligatory contexts, the findings suggest that all groups of learners were able to dissociate different article environments by supplying the required article at a higher rate than other articles. Thus, learners seem to have an understanding of the Greek article system and attempt to use articles correctly instead of using them randomly.

Moreover, our learners show some predicted differences in article use. With respect to the definite article, although no group performs targetlike, results show that prolonged exposure to input can lead to successful production in non-natural contexts. Coming to the indefinite article, our Turkish learners seem to be able to distinguish indefinite earlier than definite contexts, since performance in the former is comparatively better than in the latter. Thus, although there is evidence for acquisition of both articles, that of the definite seems to be somehow more delayed. Delayed and problematic behavior in definite article use is argued to stem both from L1 transfer and inaccessibility of uninterpretable features. However, results show proficiency-based development for all articles, which suggests, on the one hand, that even the definite article can be sufficiently acquired with proficiency and as such, uninterpretable features are accessible to the advanced L2 grammar, and on the second, that becoming more proficient helped learners eliminate potential L1 effects. As for optionality in article use, some fluctuation between the definite and the indefinite article in obligatory contexts is observed even in advanced groups.

With respect to interchangeable contexts, that is, cases where one article or the other could be used interchangeably in the same context with no communication effect, results, although interesting, are not significant based on the statistical analysis and thus generalisations are not to be made. Analytically, in all such contexts where zero article use could be an option, all groups of learners show preference to zero article, not unexpectedly. On the other hand, in definite/ indefinite article interchangeable contexts, L2 learners seem to fluctuate between the two articles showing some preference to the indefinite rather than the definite article.

To sum up, in line with what was supported in previous L2 research, the learners of this study are able to distinguish between [+/- definite] features that govern the article use in L2 Greek despite the absence of an article system in L1 Turkish. In addition, although the learners' accuracy in the use of articles increased with L2 proficiency, perfect mastery of the Greek article system does not seem to be an easy case for them. Our conclusions suggest that learners' variable performance does not reflect a potential underlying grammar deficit. Rather, they seem to misanalyze the Greek definite article as an element bearing a specificity feature in order to partly regulate its distribution.

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