Use of English Articles by Korean Students

Minhui Choi
St. Cloud State University

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Use of English Articles by Korean Students

by

Minhui Choi

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
St. Cloud State University
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for the Degree of
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Teaching English as a Second Language

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Thesis Committee:
John Madden, Chairperson
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Abstract

Correct use of English articles is a challenge for many English learners. English learners of various native language backgrounds make frequent mistakes when it comes to choosing appropriate articles to denote definiteness in English. Korean language falls into a language group that lacks an overt article system, which causes many Korean English learners to struggle with English articles. This study investigates the use of English articles by Korean students who are studying in an American college using English as a second language. An oral translation task of a Korean story into English, which involved voice recording, transcribing those recordings and then calculating each English article use, was employed to examine thirty-five Korean participants’ English article use. The results demonstrate a few features in Korean students’ article use:

(1) Korean learners follow the accuracy pattern of the → a/an → zero article in descending order of proficiency; (2) no significant statistical evidence was found between the accuracy of article use and length of stay in English speaking counties; (3) Korean students presented comparatively more accurate article use in definite contexts than in indefinite contexts suggesting that correct article use in indefinite contexts is more problematic for them compared to definite contexts; and (4) when they make mistakes, subjects misused the more than zero article in indefinite contexts where a/an is required, while misusing zero article more than a/an in definite contexts where the is required. Both in definite and indefinite contexts, participants used the the most and a/an the least.
Acknowledgements

I’d like to express my sincere gratitude to all the Korean students who sacrificed their time and energy to participate in my project, which was very challenging to them. Without their contribution, this research would not have been possible. I am also deeply grateful for my thesis committee members: Dr. John Madden, my thesis advisor, for his patience, systematic instructions, and insightful comments throughout this research; Dr. James Robinson for his guidance and encouragement as my academic advisor; and Dr. Kyounghee Seo for introducing me to these wonderful graduate programs at St Cloud State University and for her continuous support. Finally, I would like to thank my family in Korea for their long-distance loving support and my husband and best friend, Benjamin Lambertson, for his limitless support and encouragement throughout my graduate study.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Making errors with article use is one of the most common occurrences when it comes to learning English. For language learners whose native languages do not have articles, finding an appropriate article to use in a certain speaking or writing context can be difficult. There is no article system in many Asian, Slavic, and African languages (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman 1999). Even though English articles take up a small part of English grammar, they are one of the most commonly used words in conversations. English articles are difficult to learn by many English learners. Even a learner who has studied for a long time often struggles to choose an appropriate article to use in conversation.

Not only is learning English articles difficult, but teaching English articles to students whose native language does not include articles can be even more difficult. Yamada and Matsuura (1982) stated that native English teachers found that the way students choose an article to use does not go well with the existing English language system. Many ESL students tend to choose an article arbitrarily. ESL learners commonly omit articles regardless of definite or indefinite contexts, use *a/an* for *the* or vice versa and apply articles in the wrong context when they speak English. According to Ionin, Ko, and Wexler (2004), learners sometimes misinterpret the use of *the* and *a/an* because they apply definiteness or specificity incorrectly.

Korean falls into the group of languages where articles do not exist. Many Korean English speakers have difficulty learning how to use English articles appropriately because it is a new concept for them. According to Myers (1992), Korean learners often make errors in their oral usage of English by omitting proper articles.
The English article functions as a marker to designate the definiteness or indefiniteness of a noun. When *the* is used in front of a noun, the noun is considered definite. *The* can also signal old or previously remarked information. The singular indefinite article *a/an* is followed by a noun which is indefinite and can be used to indicate new information.

Some researchers divide articles into two features: definiteness and specificity. According to Ko, Ionin, and Wexler (2009), the shared understanding between speakers and listeners is referred to as definiteness, and the information that only the speaker knows is referred to as specificity. Even though English article selection is decided by definiteness, Korean English learners tend to choose an article based on specificity as well as definiteness (Ionin, Ko, & Wexler, 2004).

Korean language has its own way to express definiteness or specificity and the people tend to rely upon demonstratives, postpositions, and context rather than articles. Explicit denotation of definiteness or specificity is often unnecessary because they can be imbedded into the context of a sentence. This leads many Korean English learners to miss an article use even when an article is necessary in English. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend what challenges Korean English speakers might have when they try to learn and utilize English articles.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

English Articles

According to Master (1996), English necessitates use of determiners for nouns, so a noun phrase should be comprised of at least a determiner and a following noun. Articles are one of the main determiners in the English grammar system. The English article system has three types of articles: *a/an*, *the* and *the zero article*. The zero article can be symbolized as Ø. Master (1996) stated that articles play two main roles: classification and identification. If someone talks about a random object which belongs to a certain group, an indefinite article *a/an* or Ø is used. If a noun is identified and the hearer and listener understand what the noun designates, the definite article *the* is used.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) proposed that article use essentially depends on the context rather than the structure of a sentence. Choosing an appropriate article for a noun heavily depends on the knowledge shared between interlocutors in conversations. Therefore, the definite article *the* is used for a specific noun which is being argued between the speaker and the listener, and indefinite articles are used for a noun whose identity is not specific to conversation participants (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). It is essential for ESL students to learn getting clues from ‘pragmatic/discourse knowledge’ to use articles appropriately (Park, 2013).

When a noun is introduced to communication, indefinite articles are used since its identity is not specific yet. However, when the speaker mentions the noun again, the speaker and the listener understand which object the speaker is talking about. The identity of the noun is specific now, so the definite article is used for the second mention of the noun. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) called this “first mention → subsequent mention principle” (p. 282).
In most conversation situations, the use of articles is determined by context, not by sentence structure.

In general, indefinite articles are used for nonspecific nouns and the zero articles are employed for plural nouns. Proper nouns like names of people or locations take the zero article with a few exceptions. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) classified the use of *the* into three groups based on how a referent is located by the speaker and listener. They are “a situational-cultural, a textual, and situational basis” (p. 279). According to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999), the situational-cultural basis includes “general cultural use (the sun, the earth), perceptual situational use (Pass me the salt), immediate situational use (Don’t go there. The dog will bite you), local use for general knowledge (the church, the pub), and local use for specific knowledge (in the town of Halifax)” (p. 279). The textual use of *the* has the following subsets: anaphoric use (previous reference), deductive anaphoric use (preceding reference of a schematically-related notion) and cataphoric use (following discussion of something related) (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Situational use of *the* contains usage with post-modifiers (relative clauses, prepositional phrases) and usage with ranking determiners and adjectives (the first and the next) (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

Articles can be decided by two parameters: definiteness and specificity. According to Ionin et al. (2004), definiteness denotes that the speaker and the listener share the meaning of a noun in a context, and specificity means only the speaker knows about a noun which is mentioned. The definitions for definiteness and specificity are described by Ionin et al. (2004) as follows:
1. Definiteness

If a Determiner Phrase (DP) of the form [DNP] is [+definite], then the speaker and hearer presuppose the existence of a unique individual in the set denoted by the NP.

2. Specificity

If a Determiner Phrase (DP) of the form [D NP] is [+specific], then the speaker intends to refer to a unique individual in the set denoted by the NP and considers this individual to possess some noteworthy property (Ionin et al., 2004, p. 5).

English is one of the languages in which articles are selected by definiteness. English articles are divided into two group: definite article *the* and indefinite article *a/an*. According to Ionin et al. (2004), there is no indicator for marking specificity in the English article system. Unlike in English, specificity is a main parameter that decides articles in Samoan language (Ionin et al., 2008). Samoan language has articles *le* for specific contexts and *se* for non-specific contexts but no article to express definiteness. The following tables, Table 1 and Table 2, show the difference of the article system between English and Samoan.

**Table 1**

**Article-grouping by Definiteness (English)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>context</th>
<th>+definite</th>
<th>-definite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+specific</td>
<td>the</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-specific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Ionin, Zubizarreta, & Maldonado, 2008, p. 558)
According to Ionin et al. (2004), speakers of languages that do not have articles “fluctuate” between definiteness and specificity when choosing English articles. In Kim and Lakshmanan’s (2009) study, Korean English learners who do not have articles in their native language, tend to choose an article based on specificity as well as definiteness even though English article selection is decided by definiteness (Kim & Lakshmanan, 2009).

However, English learners with articles in their native language show a different tendency in their English article use. Researchers attribute this to positive transfer of article use from Spanish to English. According to Schönenberger (2014), ESL learners whose native languages have articles “transfer the parameter value from their L1 (native language) to L2 (second language) English” (p. 77).

The article systems in Spanish and German are based on definiteness as in English. In the study of Ionin et al. (2008), English learners with a Spanish L1 background showed higher accuracy with English article use than Russian English students who do not have an article system in their native language. Schönenberger (2014) reported that German English learners also did not show much difficulty using English articles, compared to Russian students. It seems that students’ native language’s similarity to English leads to positive transfer from L1 to L2.

---

Table 2

**Article-grouping by Specificity (Samoan)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>context</th>
<th>+definite</th>
<th>-definite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+specific</td>
<td>Le</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-specific</td>
<td>Se</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Ionin et al., 2008, p. 559)
The Korean Language

It is essential to discuss some characteristics of the Korean Language system to understand why Korean English learners make frequent errors with use of English articles. Many languages express definiteness or indefiniteness using their own unique system such as articles in English. Languages without a distinct article system like English still have their own methods to denote definiteness. Schönlenberger (2014) argued that in languages which do not have an article system, definiteness is addressed by using ‘the word order,’ the morphological case,’ ‘the aspectual system,’ ‘demonstratives,’ ‘possessives’ or ‘numerals.’

A common misunderstanding about the Korean language is that it does not have a system expressing definiteness or even the concept of definiteness. However, nouns do not solely depend on article systems to express definiteness. Kim (2012) insisted that Korean conveys definiteness and indefiniteness, which is universal across languages, but which does it differently from English. Jun (2013) also stated that the lack of an article system in the Korean language does not mean that it cannot convey definiteness. According to Jun, it is possible to translate English into Korean without damaging this information of definiteness.

In many cases, nouns in Korean do not have explicit determiners associated with them; therefore, it is common to see a noun phrase that has solely a noun. Jun (2013) argued that in Korean, “bare noun phrases” have an immense role in noun phrases because they deliver multiple meanings. According to Jun, a bare noun (i.e. 학생 (hak-saeng)), which means student in English, can deliver four different meanings, such as “a student, the student, students and the students” (p. 2).
According to Ellis (1997), Interlingual/intralingual transfer occurs when someone’s native language does not have a certain feature of a target language. The Korean language does not have an overt article system, which puzzles Korean English learners in choosing an article to use. One might wonder how Koreans deliver the meaning of definiteness in their language. Jun (2013) insisted that the Korean language has its own system to signal those language properties and does not have any trouble with delivering definiteness or specificity between the speaker and listener.

One of the common means Koreans employ to signal definiteness is using demonstratives. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) argued that the definite article the originated from demonstratives such as that. Koreans use a few demonstrative words to indicate definiteness in conversations. The most frequently used demonstratives in Korean are 저 (jeo), 이 (yi) and 그 (gu). According to Kang (2012), 저 (jeo) is used when the object is far from the speaker, 그 (gue) when the object is medial to the speaker, and 이 (yi) for the object which is near to the speaker.

1. 나는 저 곳에 갔습니다. (I went to that place.)

   Na-nun jeo gou-se Gatseumnida.

   I that place-to went

2. 나는 이 곳에 갔습니다. (I went to this place.)

   Na-nun yi gou-se Gatseumnida.

   I this place-to went

In (1), the Korean demonstrative 저 (jeo) means English demonstrative that, and 이 (Yi) in (2) means this in English. In Korean, demonstratives are more actively used because they do
not have articles. The last demonstrative to be discussed is \( \text{그} \) (gue), which is unique, compared to other demonstratives.

3. 나는 그 곳에 갔습니다. (I went to that place.)

Na-nun geu gou-se Gatseumnida.

I the place-to went

In (3), the demonstrative \( \text{그} \) (gue) is used to express definiteness. Even though its meaning is similar to Korean demonstrative \( \text{저} \) (jeo) used in (1), \( \text{그} \) (gue) and \( \text{저} \) (jeo) do not have the same meaning. Kang (2012) argued that \( \text{그} \) (gue) is different from other demonstratives because it acts like the definite article \( \text{the} \) in a certain context. In many cases, English article \text{the} is translated into Korean as \( \text{그} \) (gue.). Therefore, some Korean English speakers tend to overuse \text{the} when they speak English.

According to Jun (2013), as well as \( \text{이} \) (yi), \( \text{그} \) (gue), and \( \text{저} \) (jeo), \( \text{어떤} \) (eoteun) or \( \text{한} \) (han) can denote definiteness/specificity. The meaning of \( \text{어떤} \) (eoteun) or \( \text{한} \) (han) is close to the English word \text{a certain}.

In many cases, Koreans get information on definiteness or indefiniteness from the context of the conversation. According to Lee (1992), “the interpretation of nouns regarding indefiniteness and definiteness largely depends on context in Korean” (p. 328). Jun (2013) also stated that definiteness or specificity in Korean language can be cued from the previous conversation and noun phrases, which if mentioned in the previous context, can be omitted without a problem. This kind of omission is common in Korean conversations, but it does not
confuse communication because a lot of seemingly missing information can be inferred from the context.

Koreans do not rely upon articles to introduce a new referent in a conversation. They rather leave out any markers which denote definiteness or indefiniteness.


Nuga watni? Ayi-ga watseoyo.

Who came? Kid came.

In (4), the word ayi (kid) was used without an article. In this conversation, the speaker and the listener share the information of definiteness through the context. There is no need to use definite or indefinite articles to deliver information in this Korean conversation because definiteness is conferred from the context alone, unlike in English, where definite articles are used.

One of the unique language systems in Korean is postpositions. Postpositions are added to nouns, assigning those nouns cases such as subjects, objects, or complements. One interesting thing about these postpositions is that they can designate definiteness to nouns. According to Jun (2013), postpositions have a critical influence on the meaning of nouns to which they are attached.

5. 고양이는 매우 빨라요. (Cats are very fast.)

Goyangyi-neun maewoo palayo.

Cat very fast
6. 고양이가 매우 빨라요. (The cat is very fast.)

Goyangyi-ga maewoo palayo.

Cat very fast

Both \( \text{는} \) (neun) and \( \text{가} \) (ga) in (5) and (6) are postpositions which assign the subject case to the noun 고양이/Goyangyi (cat). However, the meaning of cat in (5), of which the postposition \( \text{는} \) (neun) is put at the end, is indefinite and it implies the generic meaning of a cat, while the meaning of cat in (6) with the postposition \( \text{가} \) (ga) is definite, and refers to a specific cat that the speaker and the listener understand together. Jun (2013) insisted that it is critical to consider postpositions when discussing the meaning of noun phrases in Korean.

**Different Perspectives on the Role of Native Languages in SLA**

The influence of native languages on second language acquisition (SLA) has been an incessantly argued topic for a long time in the field of SLA. Even though the degrees of influence that the native language has on second language development are considered to be various, according to different scholars, the position of learners’ first language in second language acquisition is regarded as being quite steadfast.

Behaviorism, which prevailed in 1950s and 1960s, is a psychological learning theory that proposes a strong role of native language in second language acquisition. In behaviorism, language learning is deeply associated with native languages and the influence of native languages on second language learning is called ‘transfer’ (Gass, 2013). Gass defined ‘transfer’ as “the psychological process whereby prior learning is carried over into a new learning
situation” (p. 83). Transfer from learners’ first language can facilitate or hinder their second language learning.

The Hierarchy of Difficulty suggested by Stockwell, Bowen, & Martin (1965) clearly explains how differences between the first language and the second language impact transfer. They categorized the differences between the first and the second languages into five groups: differentiation, new category, absent category, coalescing, and correspondence. Differentiation is regarded as a factor which makes language learning the most difficult and Correspondence language learning the easiest. Gass (2013) presented the following table for the Hierarchy of Difficulty by adapting Stockwell et al.’s (1965) theory.

**Table 3**

**Hierarchy of Difficulty**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>English L1, Italian L2: to know versus sapere/conoscerses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New category</td>
<td>Japanese L1, English L2: article system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absent category</td>
<td>English L1, Japanese L2: article system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalescing</td>
<td>Italian L1, English L2: the verb to know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence</td>
<td>English L1, Italian L2: plurality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Gass, 2013, p. 90)

Table 3 shows that articles are a difficult area for Japanese learners because they do not have articles in their native language. For Japanese, English articles are a ‘new category’ that challenges their language development. In the same way, many language learners such as Korean, Chinese, or Russian who lack articles in their native languages show that they have difficulty with acquisition of English articles (Schönenberger, 2014; Ionin et al., 2004).
While behaviorism strongly supports the influence of native language on SLA, results from some studies on child language acquisition throw doubts on the behavioristic view of native language. Based on investigation on morpheme order of children’s first language acquisition, a number of researchers have proposed that second language acquisition is similar to a child’s native language learning.

Dulay and Burt (1974) examined two different groups of children, 60 Spanish children and 55 Chinese children. Using Bilingual Syntax Measure (BSM), which was devised to elicit English morphemes from participants, they found that these two groups of children, who are from different native language background, have similar developmental acquisition patterns of English morphemes: Pronoun case, Article (a, the), Progressive (-ing), Contractible copula (‘s), Past irregular, Long plural (-es), Possessive (‘s), and 3rd person (-s). With these results, they suggested that universal language acquisition patterns exist, and that the role of learners’ first language is less significant in SLA (Dulay & Burt, 1974).

The universal pattern in acquisition of English morphemes was also found in a study on adult language learners by Bailey, Madden, and Krashen (1974). They performed research on ‘a natural sequence’ of morphemes acquisition, using the same BSM method in Dulay and Burt’s (1974) study, with 33 native Spanish speakers and 40 native speakers of different languages. They proposed that there was a ‘natural sequence’ in adult language acquisition regardless of their native languages (Bailey et al., 1974).

On the other hand, even though above studies on English morpheme order diminished the influence of native language on SLA, the role of first language is still supported by a number of other studies. Luk and Shirai (2009) conducted morpheme studies with a variety of different
language groups comprised of native speakers of Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and Spanish. In their research, only Spanish group turned out to follow the ‘natural order’ of morpheme acquisition while other groups acquired plural-s, articles, and possessive ‘s in a different order, than the predicted natural sequence. This suggests that the learners’ native language may influence SLA.

Research on ESL Students’ English Article Use

Since the misuse of articles is one of the most common mistakes that language learners make when attempting to learn English, there has been much research performed on L-2 learners whose native language have no articles.

Yamada and Matsuura (1982) investigated article use by Japanese students using cloze-type tasks, and found that the difficulty varied by which type of article was used. In their study, both advanced and intermediate group performed well on using definite article the. Even though the intermediate group showed difficulty with appropriate use of zero article, they improved as they advanced. However, they did not show the same improvement when using indefinite articles. Even advanced learners had difficulty using indefinite articles. Yamada and Matsuura’s (1982) study makes it clear that language teachers should be aware that language learners may have more difficulty using certain articles.

Zdorenko and Paradis (2008) performed a longitudinal study of 2 years on article acquisition by children learning a second language. They studied two different groups: one whose native languages do not have articles (Korean, Japanese, and Chinese) and the other whose native languages do have articles (Arabic, Spanish, and Romanian). They used picture books to elicit children’s speech and examined their discourse. In their research, they found that
participants, apart from their native language, used *the* instead of *a/an* in ‘indefinite specific contexts’ and are better at using *the* in definite contexts than using *a/an* in indefinite contexts. Subjects without articles in their native languages made more errors, including omitting articles, but primarily at the beginning stages of language development. With these results, Zdorenko and Paradis (2008) argued that the influence of native language on second language acquisition is not significant.

Ko, Ionin, and Wexler (2009) examined how English articles are acquired by ESL learners whose native language does not have an article system. Their study was focused on learners’ perception of definiteness, specificity and partitivity regarding article use. They used a written elicitation activity with Korean adult students whose native language does not have articles. In their study, learners related the definite article *the* to both specific and partitive meaning, and showed tendency to over-employ *the* for “specific indefinites and partitive indefinites” (p. 23). According to Ko et al. (2009), there is a pattern in learners’ errors with English articles, which could be explained in terms of Universal Grammar.

Haiyan and Lianrui (2010) performed a pseudo-longitudinal study on 121 Chinese English learners to investigate students’ use of articles, using both qualitative and quantitative research. The Chinese students were divided into three groups based on their English competency; Lower-intermediate, Intermediate, and Advanced. In the study, all three groups showed an accuracy order in English article use: *the* → *a/an* → *Ø* (zero article). *Ø* was the most difficult article for them to master. They argued that learners tend to master *the* before *a/an*, and then acquire *Ø*. They also found that *Ø* was overused by the advanced group but underused by
the lower-intermediate and intermediate groups; the lower-intermediate and intermediate groups showed a tendency of overusing *the* and *a/an*.

Schönenberger (2014) examined English article use by Russian and German students. Article choice in the German language depends on definiteness which is the same method used in English, while in Russian, the word order, morphology and aspect denote definiteness (Schönenberger, 2014). The results of the study demonstrate that the German group did not have much difficulty in choosing a correct article whereas Russian groups made a lot of mistakes when choosing the correct English article. Russian students’ accuracy correlated to their level of English learning. One Russian group that had studied English for a long time showed a clear tendency to fluctuate between specificity and definiteness whereas the other Russian group, which had less English knowledge, showed irregular mistakes in English article use. Even though two Russian groups showed different results, Schönenberger’s (2014) study suggests that the correct usage of each article is dependent on the students’ native language’s similarity to English.

Park (2013) studied the acquisition of English articles with 77 Korean English learners as an experimental group and 21 native English speakers as control group to prove the Interface Hypothesis in Korean speakers’ acquisition of English. According to Park, in Interface Hypothesis, it is proposed that “different interfaces pose different levels of difficulties in learning second language properties” (p. 155). Park related generic use of articles to ‘internal interface’ which is associated with semantics, and (in)definiteness to ‘external interface’ which is connected to discourse. In her study, Korean students showed higher scores in using articles for generic meaning compared to articles for (in)definiteness, supporting Interface Hypothesis.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Questions

The research that will be presented in my thesis is designed to obtain a general idea of article use by Korean English speakers, and thereby help EFL/ESL teachers better understand their Korean English students. For this purpose, I addressed the following questions through this research.

1. Among the definite, indefinite, and zero article, is there an accuracy order that can be shown in learners’ use of English articles? In Yamada and Matsuura’s (1982) study, Japanese English learners showed decreasing accuracy in the order of the → a/an → Ø (from the easiest to the most difficult) in their article usage. Haiyan and Lianrui (2010) also found the same pattern of the → a/an → Ø (from the easiest to the most difficult) in English article usage of Chinese English speakers. Do Korean English learners show a similar tendency in their article use?

2. How does exposure to English speaking surroundings influence English article acquisition by Korean students? (Participants are grouped based on the length of their stay in English speaking countries.)

3. Between definite contexts and indefinite contexts, in which contexts do Koreans show higher accuracy in using articles? In other words, is there any difference of accuracy in article use between definite contexts and indefinite contexts?

4. What type of errors do Koreans make between a/an and zero article in definite contexts where the is required and also between the and zero article in indefinite contexts where a/an is required?
Participants

Thirty-five Korean students studying at a public university in the upper Midwest area participated in the research. These students were born and raised in Korea and then came to America later to study. I chose Korean university students regardless of age or major, who were native speakers but used English as their second language, as participants. These students are from different majors including engineering, education, economics, English, etc., and their ages range between 19 and 37.

Table 4
Characteristics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>35 Korean Students Learning English as a Second Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>35 (25 female; 10 male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>9 graduate; 26 undergraduate (currently)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td>19-37 (Mean: 23.91; Median: 22; SD: 5.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Spent in English Speaking Countries</td>
<td>4-84 months (Mean: 28.46; Median: 24; SD: 22.36)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of the limitation that the participant must be a Korean studying at a university level and the fact that there are limited numbers of Korean students around the area, finding an ideal sample group with equal number of male and female or graduate and undergraduate students was challenging. Thirty-five students in total, 25 females and 10 males, volunteered to participate in this study. It is a mixed group with nine graduate students and 26 undergraduate students. Time spent in English speaking countries, mostly America, was recorded. A couple of freshman students replied that they have spent 4 months in the United States, which was the least
exposure in an English-speaking country, while the longest recorded exposure in America was 84 months.

To find the relationship between accuracy of article use and length of stay in English speaking countries, participants were divided into three groups based on the length of their stay in an English-speaking country. The first group were students who had lived in an English-speaking country for less than a year. The students whose length of stay in an English-speaking country was more than a year but less than 3 years comprised the second group. The third group of students had lived in an English-speaking country for more than 3 years.

Korean students usually learn English as a foreign language from elementary school or middle school to high school. Students participating in this study have learned EFL in Korea for 6 to 10 years and lived in an English-speaking country for some period of time, from a few months to up to almost 7 years. Participants’ English levels were not evaluated and their official English test scores were not recorded either in the research questionnaire for this research.

Since they are regular students enrolled in college degree programs that are taught in English, participants are expected to have sufficient English competency to be successful in those classes. To enter a college program, either undergraduate or graduate at a university in America, most international students are required to prove some degree of English competency. English proficiency is usually measured by TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and IELTS (International English Language Testing System) scores.

According to admission guidelines of the university in which the participants in this study are enrolled, a TOEFL score of 61 or higher or an IELTS score of 5.5 or higher indicates proficiency for the entrance of an undergraduate program. Graduate students are typically held
to an even higher standard. Therefore, based on this information, it is assumed that the
participants have at least an intermediate level proficiency of English knowledge, which allows
them to live in the U.S. and participate in collegiate lectures.

Most Korean English learners study English as a foreign language and rarely have
exposure to English-speaking surroundings. When they try to learn English in English-speaking
countries they struggle to overcome fossilization of pronunciation and some structure rules that
are different from their native tongue. The subjects chosen for this project were expected to
represent general college level Korean English speakers, learning English as a second language.

**Description of Data Collection Instruments**

The method chosen to investigate the article use of Korean students is discourse analysis.
According to Gee (2011), “discourse analysis is the study of language-in-use” (p. 8). The focus
of discourse analysis is various depending on the purpose of the research. Some might only
observe the content of speech and others put focus on the grammar of language being used in
discourse (Gee, 2011). The discourse analysis which is designed for this study focuses on the
grammar, particularly the English articles.

An oral translation task involving voice recording was employed to elicit a student’s
ability to correctly use English articles in speech. A Korean folk tale, “Gold Ax and Silver Ax”
was used for this activity. The story “Gold Ax and Silver Ax” is a popular folk tale that many
Koreans grew up reading and hearing. Children in Korea may have heard a different version of
this story.

The researcher reconstructed a Korean version of this folk tale “금도끼 은도끼” (Gold Ax
and Silver Ax) using a Korean version (Kim, 2003) and an English version of the story from a
blog post from the Center for English as a Second Language (CESL) (Rina, 2013). I combined them and simplified them and made my own Korean version for this research study.

Using a simple story rather than only using pictures or interview questions is an effective method to draw a discourse from the participants. In this way, speakers do not need to create the content. Because there is a Korean version of the story which is required to be translated as exactly as possible, they will be required to use English articles in the correct context. Contrary to most article studies which use a written forced-choice elicitation task such as a cloze-type test or fill-in-the blank test, this research used an oral-based test which requires participants to create their own sentences, whereby their use of English articles can be judged.

Laufer and Eliasson (1993) found that Swedish learners of English seemed to avoid certain language uses due to the differences between English and Swedish. When learners face a language property of a second language that is foreign to their native language, they have difficulty using it correctly and avoid the property altogether. This is one of the reasons that I chose the oral translation task for my research method. The Korean version of the story does not have any articles because the Korean language does not have articles, but the participants in my research study will decide which articles to use when they translate the written form of the story in Korean into English speech.

Along with the oral translation task, a questionnaire was used to gather general background information about the participants. The questionnaire contained questions such as age, sex, education level, length of stay in English-speaking countries, etc.
Procedures

For the research, each participant received a copy of “Gold Ax and Silver Ax” in Korean and were asked to retell the story in English, translating Korean sentences into English sentences orally. They were given a voice recorder to record their oral translation into English. Three minutes were given to read through the story in Korean before they started their oral translation. It was expected to take about 3-5 minutes for each participant to complete the oral translation task.

Participants were gathered personally by I, the author, and by my acquaintances. Because more than two-thirds of them were recruited by my acquaintances, most of them did not have a personal relationship with the author. Oral translation and voice recording took place primarily at the school library, school café, or student union center during the week days. After finishing their oral translation, a majority of the participants reported that this activity was more challenging than they expected and thought that they had made many grammatical mistakes.

Participants were intentionally not informed that the focus of the research was the use of English articles to avoid participants’ conscious effort to use English articles correctly. However, the participant and the researcher read out loud the IRB-approved debriefing statement together after completion of the translation task, in which the participants were informed of the purpose of the research and that they could withdraw from the research study at any time. Also, they were instructed to leave their email if they wanted to receive the research results after participation. After listening to the instruction from the researcher, each participant pressed the start button on the recorder and started translating. To reduce the participants’ anxiety and self-
consciousness, the researcher stayed about 20 feet away and avoided verbal communication so they could focus on the task of oral translation without distraction.

Participants’ oral translations were recorded, saved with identifying numbers, and transcribed using Microsoft word for the analysis. The transcription of each participant was analyzed using TLU methods to find the accuracy pattern of the article use in their speech. Every article use and misuse by learners was calculated and processed through TLU formula. ANOVA was used to calculate a relationship between accuracy of article use and length of stay in an English-speaking country. In addition, use of each article was counted based on definite and indefinite contexts to see in which context learners demonstrated more correct or incorrect use of articles.

The length of voice recordings from this project varied depending on the speech speed of each participant, ranging between 2 minutes 25 seconds and 7 minutes 37 seconds. The average word count was 304 words. The shortest transcript had 259 words while the longest transcript had 455 words with a median of 303 words.

**Data Coding**

Because the instrument story was shortened to fit into the research, there was no need to reduce the participants’ discourse. The original story was reconstructed so that it could provide contexts where all three target articles were needed to translate the story correctly in English. However, the task was not a forced-elicitation test and the number of each article incident was not controlled.

To find the accuracy order in definite, indefinite, and zero articles usage, two types of scoring methods were considered for the analysis of the data. The first calculating method to
count accurate use of grammar was Suppliance in Obligatory Context (SOC), which was introduced by Brown (1973). With this method, the numbers of obligatory contexts in which learners must provide target forms are counted along with whether learners used the target forms correctly or not. The formula is as follows.

\[
\text{SOC} = \frac{\text{number of correct suppliance x 2} + \text{number of misformations}}{\text{total obligatory contexts x 2}}
\]

(Gass, 2013, p. 69)

Even though the SOC method provides scholars with a fine scoring technique to calculate learners’ correct output, Goldschneider and DeKeyser (2001) insisted that SOC can be problematic in two aspects: focusing on accurate use of morphemes can make researchers overlook the “structure of the inter-language” it also fails to notice the “overgeneralization and overuse” of morphemes.

Pica (1983) introduced a different statistical method which is known as Target-Like Use (TLU), in which the problems argued by Goldschneider and DeKeyser (2001) were corrected by calculating the number of the suppliance in obligatory contexts as well as in non-obligatory contexts. The following is the formula for the Target-Like Use.

\[
\text{TLU} = \frac{\text{number of correct suppliance in obligatory contexts}}{(n\text{ obligatory contexts}) + (n\text{ suppliance in non-obligatory contexts})}
\]

(Gass, 2013, p. 70)

I chose to use Target-Like Use (TLU) analysis for this research since it addresses the characteristics of inter-language and it provides information regarding language use in inappropriate contexts. Part of the analysis plan for this research requires counting learners’ article use in [+] article contexts as well as [-] article contexts. Therefore, TLU is the most appropriate for the purpose of this study.
Coding for TLU

To calculate TLU for each article provided by participants, all the articles in each transcript were counted based on obligatory and non-obligatory context. TLU calculation requires three numbers:

1. Number of correct ‘A’ Suppliance in Obligatory Context;
2. Number of obligatory contexts which require ‘A’ suppliance;
3. Number of ‘A’ suppliance in non-obligatory contexts.

The following sentences extracted from subject number 1’s speech show examples of each article that are correctly used in obligatory contexts or overused in non-obligatory contexts.

Counting zero articles can be controversial. Subjects might use a zero article correctly, as in front of plural nouns. Subjects might also omit an article by mistake or avoid using an article because (s)he is not sure. For this study, those different possibilities were not considered and zero articles were simply counted based on obligatory and non-obligatory contexts.

“Once upon a __time, there is a __mountain spirit lives in the __pond.”

___time) a correct use in obligatory context
___mountain) a correct use in obligatory context
___pond) the incorrect use in non-obligatory context

“One night, Ø __wooden man came to a __pond, cut a __tree with Ø __iron ax.”

___wooden man) Ø incorrect use in non-obligatory context
___pond) a incorrect use in non-obligatory context
___tree) a correct use in obligatory context
___iron ax) Ø incorrect use in non-obligatory context
“He dropped his iron ax in the pond.”

(_,pond) \_ the correct use in obligatory context

“He doesn’t have Ø money to buy Ø new one.”

(_,money) Ø correct use in obligatory context

(_,new one) Ø incorrect use in non-obligatory context

Table 5

**Subject #1 TLU Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>n obligatory context</th>
<th>n suppliance in non-obligatory context</th>
<th>n correct suppliance in obligatory contexts</th>
<th>TLU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a/an</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows how subject number 1’s TLU scores were calculated for *the*, *a/an*, and *zero article*. Subject 1 produced 30 contexts in her sentences that required the definite article *the*. She provided 16 *the* correct and one incorrect by overusing it in a non-obligatory context. In her speech, there were 11 contexts that needed *a/an* article. She got five correct and four incorrect with *a/an*. For the contexts where *zero article* was required, she provided three correct usages and 18 incorrect by missing an article where *the* or *a/an* articles were required. As a result, she got her TLU scores as follows: 0.52 for *the*, 0.33 for *a/an* and 0.14 for *zero article*.

**Coding for Article Use in Definite and Indefinite Contexts**

To measure the accuracy of article use between definite and indefinite contexts and analyze the error types of article use in definite and indefinite contexts, the number of articles that subjects provided for the task were counted based on definite and indefinite contexts.
following sentences extracted from some of the subjects’ speech show examples of how they used *the, a/an, zero article* in definite and indefinite contexts. For this study, articles used only in front of common nouns that require an article were counted. Article *the* was expected to be used when a noun had been mentioned previously in the discourse and is considered definite, while the articles *a/an* were expected when a new noun was introduced in the discourse, which is considered indefinite.

Subject #17

“A long time ago, Ø mountain spirit lived in Ø pond.”

(Ø mountain) Ø in indefinite context
(Ø pond) Ø in indefinite context

Subject #34

“A farmer heard the story.”

(A farmer) a in indefinite context
(the story) the in definite context

Subject #5

“So the farmer went back to the pond and purposefully he put the iron ax in the pond.”

(the farmer) the in definite context
(the pond) the in definite context
(the iron ax) the in indefinite context
(the pond) the in definite context
Subject #18

“However, so Ø mountain god appeared in front of Ø farmer and asked him…”

(Ø mountain god) Ø in definite context

(Ø farmer) Ø in definite context

Subject # 21

“As a mountain spirit was going back to the pond that ….and brought up to the gold ax….“

(a mountain spirit) a in definite context

(the pond) the in definite context

(the gold ax) the in indefinite context
Chapter 4: Results and Discussions

Data gathered through this research were analyzed in three ways. First, transcripts of the voice recordings were analyzed to examine the differences of data and their effects on the results. Second, TLU scores for three different articles were calculated and analyzed to discover an accuracy order and the relationship between the length of stay in English speaking countries and correct article use. Finally, article use in each definite and indefinite context was examined to discover a pattern regarding correct or incorrect article use in each definite or indefinite context.

Different Transcripts in Various Lengths

It is noteworthy to see how participants translated the same story from Korean into English in different ways and with various lengths. The average word count was 304 words. The shortest transcript had 259 words and the longest transcript had 455 words with a median of 303 words. In order to examine the relationship between the length of participants’ speech and TLU scores, the scripts of participants numbered 6, 25, and 21 were analyzed. Script 6 showed the median length of script with 303 words, script 25 was the shortest with 259 words, and script 21 was the longest with 455 words.

The elicitation tool that I chose was not designed to force participants to speak a certain number of articles or choose specific articles. It only required participants to translate a Korean story into English. Some participants chose longer sentences, producing many words, but some chose shorter sentences with less number of words. As shown in following three transcripts, even the first sentence is different in each transcript.
A long time ago, mountain spirit lived in pond.

Long time ago, mountain spirit lived in the pond.

Long long time ago, the mountain spirit was living in the pond.

Calculating TLU scores requires the number of obligatory contexts where the target article is required, the occurrence of the target article in obligatory contexts, and the number of the target article in non-obligatory contexts. To discover how different numbers of words from participants can impact TLU scores, three subjects’ speech of various length (median, shortest, and longest length) were analyzed in Table 6.

### Table 6

**Word Counts and TLU Scores for Three Selected Subjects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
<th>Article</th>
<th>n Obligatory Context</th>
<th>n Suppliance in non-obligatory context</th>
<th>n correct suppliance in obligatory contexts</th>
<th>TLU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>THE</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A/AN</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ZERO</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>THE</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A/AN</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ZERO</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>THE</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A/AN</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ZERO</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 6, a higher number of words in a participant’s speech did not necessarily positively correlate with TLU scores. Subject 21 spoke the most words among all the
subjects. She produced 41 nouns that required the article *the* and correctly said *the* in 30 obligatory contexts but 10 times in non-obligatory contexts, getting her TLU score for *the* with 0.59. On the other hand, subject 25 used the least number of words and created only 32 contexts that required *the*. She provided *the* in 21 obligatory contexts and only three in non-obligatory contexts. As a result, her TLU score for *the* was higher than subject 21 who spoke the most words. Although subject 21 created a lot of contexts for the article *the*, she also made many mistakes with *the* by misusing it, which occurred 10 times, the highest number of mistakes with the article *the* among the three.

**TLU Scores, Order of Accuracy, and Length of Stay in English Speaking Countries**

To calculate an order of accuracy for participants’ article use of *the, an, and Ø*, the means and TLU scores were calculated and compared for each English proficiency group and for all the students collectively. In Table 7, Group A represents the students who have stayed in an English-speaking country for less than a year. Students who have lived in an English-speaking country for more than 1 year but less than 3 years comprised Group B. Group C students have resided in an English-speaking country for more than 3 years.
Table 7

TLU Scores of Three Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>THE</th>
<th>A/AN</th>
<th>ZERO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(residence less than 1 year)</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1-3 years)</td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(more than 3 years of residence)</td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show all three groups show a similar pattern in their article use. They all demonstrated the highest TLU score with the article *the*. The average TLU score of all the participants for the article *the* is 0.68. The article *a/an* got the second highest score from all three
groups, with the average TLU score of 0.37. All three groups had the lowest TLU score for the zero article usage.

One of the purposes of this research was to see if there is an accuracy order that can be shown in Korean English learners’ English article use. Figure 1 illustrates that all three groups scored the highest with *the*, second highest with *a/an*, and the lowest with *zero article*. This suggests that Korean English learners have the most difficulty with using the zero article among the three articles and *the* is the easiest article for Korean learners to learn compared to other articles. Therefore, based on the results we conclude that Korean learners follow the accuracy pattern of *the* → *a/an* → *zero article* in descending order of proficiency.

**Figure 1**

Three Groups’ TLU Scores for *the*, *a/an*, and *zero article*

This result coincides with an accuracy pattern that Haiyan and Lianrui (2010) found with Chinese English learners. After conducting research on English article use for three groups of learners with various English levels, they proposed that learners acquire *the* first, *a/an* next, and *zero article* last. Earlier in Yamada and Matsuura’s (1982) study, Japanese English learners
showed a similar pattern. According to Yamada (1982), their intermediate group followed $\text{the} \rightarrow a/an \rightarrow \emptyset$ and the advanced group showed $\text{the} \rightarrow \emptyset \rightarrow a/an$. The seems like the easiest among the three articles for Korean, Chinese, and Japanese English learners. Chinese, Japanese, and Korean have no article system as English does. Therefore, for English learners from China, Japan, or Korea, English articles are a new category, which is high in the Hierarchy of Difficulty which Gass (2013) proposed.

Next, the relationship between the length of residence in an English-speaking country and TLU scores were examined to answer the second research question: How does exposure to English speaking surroundings influence English article acquisition by Korean students?

Table 7 shows TLU scores for each group and the composite TLU scores for all participants. When we compare the three groups’ TLU scores for each article usage, Group A’s TLU scores for $\text{the}$ and zero article are lower than the other two groups’ TLU scores for the same articles. Otherwise, the results do not demonstrate significant TLU score differences among my three research groups that have each resided in an English-speaking country of various time.

Before rounding, Group B’s TLU score for the article $\text{the}$ was 0.698448873522187, which is higher than Group C’s TLU score for $\text{the}$ 0.698178379610194. Group B’s TLU score for zero article is higher by 0.12 compared to Group C’s. There is not a significant difference between all three groups’ TLU scores.
Table 8

ANOVA Test Results

ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Squares</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TLU (the)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>1.174</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.243</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLU (a/an)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>1.608</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.613</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLU (zero article)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>1.581</td>
<td>0.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>1.257</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.382</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To calculate a relationship between the length of stay in English-speaking countries and TLU score for each article more precisely, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted. The results with this sample group indicate that the length of stay in English-speaking countries does not have a noteworthy effect on English article accuracy. As exposed in Table 8, analysis of these three groups did not show any statistical significance of TLU scores for all three articles: TLU(the), F=0.93, p=0.405; TLU(a/an), F=0.043, p=0.958; TLU(zero article), F=1.581, p=0.221.
Schönenberger (2014) investigated Russian English learners, whose native language does not have an article system, to examine how prior English study can affect Russian English learners’ article use. There were 4 years of English study gap between two groups of learners and their performance on an English article proficiency test did not show significant difference.

Although, the Korean participants for this research were grouped based on their exposure in English-speaking countries rather than prior English study, staying in English speaking countries for academic purpose is considered a very intense English-learning experience. The English study time difference between the two Russian groups was 4 years. Schönenberger (2014) insisted that knowledge of English articles rather than the length of English study had a more important role on the students’ performance in her research.

**Table 9**

**Average Stay in English Speaking Countries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N: 12</th>
<th>Less than 1 year</th>
<th>Average Stay: 8.83 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group B</td>
<td>N: 11</td>
<td>Between 1-3 years</td>
<td>Average Stay: 22.55 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C</td>
<td>N: 12</td>
<td>More than 3 years</td>
<td>Average Stay: 53.5 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 9, the average time differences among my research groups were about 14 months between Group A and B, 21 months between Group B and C, and 44.67 months between Groups A and C. These time gaps might not be enough to make significant difference on the subjects’ proficiency in article use. Also, the number of participants may not be sufficient to make a reliable conclusion.

The results of this study do not provide significant evidence that the length of residence in English speaking countries affects English article use. Further research is required about the
relationship between exposure to English speaking surroundings and English article use. Enough
time gaps spent in English speaking countries, the purpose of stay, or the age of the participants
during the residence in English speaking countries might need to be controlled for more rigorous
study.

**Article Use in Definite and Indefinite Contexts**

To find out Korean English learners’ article use in definite and indefinite contexts, articles
were counted based on definite and indefinite contexts respectively. The following tables, Table 10 and Table 11, show the number of each article incidences counted from all 35 participants’ speeches. The numbers of articles were calculated in percentage for analysis.

**Table 10**

**Article Use in Indefinite Context**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indefinite Context (target a)</th>
<th>Correct a</th>
<th>Incorrect the</th>
<th>Incorrect zero article</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>132</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21.26%</td>
<td>47.18%</td>
<td>31.56%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 11**

**Article Use in Definite Context**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definite Context (target the)</th>
<th>Incorrect a</th>
<th>Correct the</th>
<th>Incorrect zero article</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>95</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.46%</td>
<td>68.88%</td>
<td>19.66%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were 621 indefinite contexts from the speech of all participants where an indefinite article *a/an* was required and 829 definite contexts in which subjects must put the definite article
the in front of a noun. Since I counted only common nouns that needed either an indefinite or definite article in front of the nouns, all the zero articles counted in the above table are considered as incorrect use.

As aligned with the accuracy order that we discussed in the previous page, the percentage of correct use of the in definite contexts is higher than the percentage of correct use of a/an in indefinite contexts. Correct the in definite contexts was 68.88% while correct a/an in indefinite contexts was only 21.26%. Subjects show comparatively more accurate article use in definite contexts than in indefinite contexts. To Korean English learners, it is more difficult to use articles correctly in indefinite contexts compared to definite contexts.

The above results allow me to answer my third research question: Is there any difference of accuracy in article use between definite contexts and indefinite contexts? The findings from this study demonstrate that Korean English learners show higher accuracy with definite contexts than with indefinite contexts in their English article use.

This is consistent with Zdorenko and Paradis’s (2008) study in which they investigated two groups of children, one group whose native language had an article system and the other group whose native language did not. They stated that both groups demonstrated more accurate article use with definite context than with indefinite context (Zdorenko & Paradis, 2008). It is suggested that English learners acquire the before other articles.
Figure 2 shows the three groups’ correct use of *a/an* in indefinite contexts and correct use of *the* in definite contexts. All three groups utilized *the* more accurately. Group C students, who have resided in an English-speaking country for more than 3 years, show high accuracy with definite articles and score 80%. Group A students, who have stayed in an English-speaking country less than one year, demonstrated poor proficiency with using *a/an* in indefinite contexts with a score of only 3.09%.

Next, misuses of *the* or *zero article* in indefinite contexts and *a/an* or *zero article* in definite contexts were analyzed to find out which article utilization mistake Korean learners are more prone to make. The results show that in indefinite contexts, misuse of *the* is more common than the misuse of *zero article*. In indefinite contexts, incorrect incidence of *the* was 47.18% whereas the incorrect incidence of *zero article* was 31.56%.
Figure 3 presents all three groups’ article misuse of the and zero article in indefinite contexts. The percentage of Group A’s incorrect use of the in indefinite contexts is 66.29%, which is very high. Considering Group A’s correct use of the in definite contexts was only 26.57%, this group of students seem to fluctuate between the and a/an when they speak English. Group B students utilized zero article incorrectly 42.86% of their opportunities, which was far more than the percentage of the, at only 11.9% in indefinite contexts. However, the other groups used the more than zero article. In general, misuse of the is more common than misuse of zero article in indefinite contexts.
Figure 4

Incorrect Use of *a/an* and *zero article* in Definite Contexts

The three groups’ misuse of articles *a/an* and *zero article* in definite contexts were analyzed in Figure 4. Group A demonstrated a high percentage of article misuse in definite contexts with *a/an* (39.86%) and *zero article* (33.57%). Taking into consideration the percentage of Group A’s use of *the* in definite contexts was only 26.57%, they used *a/an* or *zero article* more than *the* in definite contexts. Except Group A, all other groups chose to use *zero article* more than *a/an* in definite contexts, which means when they made an article mistake in definite contexts, they omitted an article more frequently than they used *a/an*. 
Figure 5 demonstrates the percentage of each article use from all 35 students’ speeches. It is interesting that in indefinite contexts where *a/an* is necessary, participants chose incorrectly to use *the* or *zero article* far more frequently than *a/an*. On the other hand, in definite contexts, students used *the* significantly more than *a/an* or *zero article* showing high accuracy with using the article *the*. *A/an* was the article that learners used the least in definite contexts. Therefore, both in definite and indefinite contexts, participants used *the* the most and *a/an* the least.

The last research question asked what type of errors Koreans make between *a/an* and *zero article* in definite contexts where *the* is required and between *the* and *zero article* in indefinite contexts where *a/an* is required. As explained in the above discussions, participants misused *the* more than *zero article* in indefinite contexts, while they misused *zero article* more than *a/an* in definite contexts. In indefinite contexts, where *a/an* is required, students chose to *the*, at 47.18%, far more than *a/an* at 21.26%. It seems that not only Korean English learners...
show high accuracy with the when it is required but they also show high inaccuracy with the when it is not required.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

In order to investigate English article use by Korean English learners, an oral translation assignment was given to 35 Korean students studying at a university in the upper Midwest of the United States. Participants were expected to demonstrate their English article proficiency by orally translating a short Korean story into English. Their translation was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for the research.

To discover if there is an accuracy order in Korean English learners’ article use among the, a/an, and zero article, each article in the participants’ speech was counted and calculated using TLU (Target-Like-Use). The results show a decreasing accuracy order with using the → a/an → zero article (most proficient → least proficient) which aligns with Yamada and Matsuura’s (1982) study involving Japanese English learners and Haiyan and Lianrui’s study (2010) involving Chinese English learners. This suggests that Korean English learners master the article the first while zero article is the most challenging to them.

I also intended to discover a causal relationship, if any, between the length of exposure to English speaking surroundings and accuracy of English article use. It was not shown through this research that the length of stay in an English-speaking country had positive effect on correct English article use by Korean learners. The difference in the three groups’ accuracy for each article use was not significant. This might be because the gap in each group’s length of stay was not large enough or the sample size was not sufficiently large. The participants’ age when they were immersed in English speaking surroundings or the purpose of residence in an English-speaking country could be critical factors that impact the results. Also, the English proficiency
of each participant should be controlled in the future along with the length of stay in English-speaking countries for further research.

Next, it was analyzed with which contexts, between definite and indefinite contexts, Korean English learners are more prone to show correct article use. As participants showed more accurate use with *the* (average TLU score of 0.68) compared to *a/an* (average TLU 0.37), the analysis of article use in definite and indefinite contexts demonstrated that for Korean students, article use in indefinite contexts is more challenging than in definite contexts. For all research participants, the percentage of correct *the* in definite contexts was 68.88%, whereas the percentage of correct *a/an* in indefinite contexts was only 21.26%. Korean English learners, as suggested in Zdorenko and Paradis’s (2008) study, seem to master the ability to use *the* correctly before other articles.

Finally, it was investigated what types of errors Korean English learners are more inclined to make in definite contexts where *the* is required and in indefinite contexts where *a/an* is required. The analysis of article misuse in definite and indefinite contexts demonstrates that students misused *the* more than *zero article* in indefinite contexts, while they misused *zero article* more than *a/an* in definite contexts.

The results show that in both definite and indefinite contexts, participants used the article *the* the most and *a/an* the least. It is noteworthy that students utilized *the* most frequently, not only in definite contexts but also in indefinite contexts in which using *the* is erroneous. Further study is required to find out whether the high accuracy rate with *the* is simply because students use *the* most frequently without knowledge of definiteness or indefiniteness.
It was discussed earlier that Korean language does not have an article system and Koreans rely on other methods such as demonstratives, postpositions, and contexts to express definiteness. It is assumed that the lack of article system in their native language causes Korean students to struggle with correct article use. In this study, incorrect article use by Korean students is shown in various ways such as omitting an article (zero article) when either *a/an* or *the* is required, using *a/an* for *the* or *the* for *a/an*, or overusing *the*. This supports Ellis’s (1997) statement that interlingual/intralingual transfer occurs when someone’s native language does not have a certain feature of a target language.

The results of this study provide ESL/EFL educators teaching Korean students some insight into their students’ English learning. The accuracy order that all 35 participants demonstrated with English article use illustrates they master the article *the* before other articles while *zero article* may be the last one they master. ESL/EFL educators should understand that students will have more difficulty mastering one article compared to another.

The students participating in this research showed higher accuracy with using *the* over the other articles. However, this might lead them to overuse *the* in indefinite contexts or contexts where *the* is not required. As the analysis of article misuse in definite and indefinite contexts demonstrated, students showed good performance with using *the* correctly while also overusing *the* often in indefinite contexts. Korean English learners ought to be taught the difference between definite and indefinite contexts to have a clearer understanding of when to use *the* or *a/an*.

Korean students should be aware of the difference between English and Korean regarding how definiteness and indefiniteness is expressed. Although the English article system is initially
unfamiliar to Korean students, learning how definiteness and indefiniteness is communicated in their native language might help them to approach the English article system semantically. Eventually, foreign language education should ideally be intertwined with better education of his or her own native language.

**Limitations and Further Research**

This study has some limitations. Because of the restriction of recruiting only Korean participants at only one local university, some important factors such as sex or major that might affect the research results were not controlled. Also, the number of participants (35) may not have been large enough to draw conclusions on the relationship between the length of stay in English speaking countries and accurate article use. The difference of average lengths of stay between groups; about 14 months between Group A and B, 21 months between Group B and C, and 44.7 months between Groups A and C, may have not been enough to demonstrate statistical difference in correct article use among groups.

Some factors to consider in the future for a more rigorous study may include the following: a larger sample group, greater difference in average length of stay in English speaking countries, the age of the participants when they arrived in an English-speaking country, proportional group of male and female participants, stratification by choice of major, and how to better control for the English proficiency of each participant.

This research was designed to investigate Korean students’ article use particularly in an oral context. It is possible that the students’ proficiency with article use differs when they speak compared to when they write. Even when English learners speak English, they spend less time second-guessing their grammar, so our participants may have made mistakes with grammar that
they are otherwise proficient in. A study with a written translation task could be performed in the future to provide further information about Korean English learners’ English article use.

Also, the translation task which was used in this study to elicit Korean students’ article use can be used for other ESL research with different intents such as investigating Chinese students’ use of English tenses or Spanish-speaking students’ use of English possessive -s. Other ESL researchers should expect profitable research answers to their varieties of questions, whether they use an oral or written translation activity.
References


Kim, S. S. (2003), *금도끼 은도끼 (Gold Ax and Silver Ax).* Samsung Press.


Appendix A: The “Gold Ax and Silver Ax” Folk Tale

I designed the research tool using both an English version from a CESL (Center for English as a Second Language) blog on the internet (Rina 2013) and a Korean version of the story from Kim’s (2003) story book, “금도끼 은도끼” (Gold Ax and Silver Ax). I followed the story line from the English version because it was appropriate length for a research tool and used simple English phrases, which made translation to Korean an easier task. I also adopted key words from Kim’s (2003) story book such as 산신령 (mountain spirit) and 연못 (pond) because Kim’s (2003) story was written in words that most Koreans were familiar with. In summary, I combined two versions of one Korean folk tale, simplified them and made my own Korean version for this research study.

Korean Version of the Folktale

금도끼, 은도끼

옛날에 산신령이 연못에 살았어요. 어느 날 저녁에 나무꾼이 연못에 와서 철도끼로 나무를 잘랐어요. 그는 연못에 철도끼를 빼뜨리고 말았어요. 그는 다른 도끼가 없었기 때문에 울었어요. 그는 새 도끼를 살 돈이 없었어요.


금도끼를 들고 나무꾼 앞에 나타났어요. 하지만 이 금도끼는 그의 도끼가 아니었어요.
그래서 산신령은 연못으로 다시 들어갔다가 그의 도끼를 들고 나타났어요. 그제서야
나무꾼은 말했어요. "그것이 제 것 입니다."
산신령이 말했어요. "너는 거짓말을 하지 않았도다. 그래서 나는 이 세 도끼를 다 네게
주겠다. 너의 도끼, 금도끼 그리고 은도끼까지 주겠다." 나중에 나무꾼은 많은 돈을 받고
도끼를 팔았어요. 그는 부자가 되었어요.
한 농부가 이 이야기를 들었어요. 그도 금도끼, 은도끼를 갖고 싶었어요. 그래서 농부는
연못으로 가서 일부러 철도끼를 떨어뜨리고는 우는 척을 했어요. 그러자 산신령이 농부
앞에서 나타나서 물었어요. "너는 왜 울고 있느냐?" 농부가 대답했어요. "제 도끼를
잃어버렸어요."
산신령은 연못으로 들어갔다가 금도끼를 들고 나타났어요. 그는 물었지요. "이것이 내
것이냐?" 농부가 대답했어요. "예" 그러자 산신령은 즉시 사라져 버렸어요. 농부는 아무
것도 얻지 못했어요. 심지어 그의 도끼조차도요.
Appendix B: English Version of the Folk Tale

Gold Ax and Silver Ax

Once upon a time, a mountain spirit lived in a pond. One night, a woodcutter came to the pond and cut a tree with an iron ax. He dropped the iron ax in the pond. He cried because he didn’t have an extra ax. He didn’t have money to buy a new one.

He cried by the pond. At that moment, the mountain spirit appeared and said, “Why are you crying?” The woodcutter said, “I dropped my iron ax in the pond.” Then, the mountain spirit disappeared into the pond.

A while later, the mountain spirit showed up with a silver ax and asked, “Is this yours?” The woodcutter answered, “It’s not mine.” The mountain spirit went back into the pond and then showed up before the woodcutter with a gold ax. However, this gold ax was not his, so the mountain spirit went into the pond again and appeared with the iron ax. Only then, the woodcutter said, “It’s mine.”

The mountain spirit said, “You didn’t lie, so I will give you all three axes, your ax and the gold and the silver ax.” Later, the woodcutter sold those three axes for a lot of money. He became a rich person.

A farmer heard this story. He wanted a gold ax and silver ax. So, the farmer went to the pond and dropped his iron ax deliberately and then he pretended to cry. The mountain spirit appeared in front of the farmer, and he asked, “Why are you crying?” The farmer answered, “I lost my ax.”
The mountain spirit went into the pond and showed up with a gold ax. He asked, “Is this yours?” The farmer answered, “Yes”. And then the mountain spirit vanished right away. The farmer got nothing, not even his ax.
Appendix C: Background Questionnaire

1. How old are you?  
   __________________

2. What is your gender?  
   1) Female  2) Male

3. What is your educational level?  
   1) High school diploma  
   2) Still in university/college (specify your grade by indication one of the below)  
   3) Bachelor’s Degree  
   4) Graduate student  
   5) Master’s Degree  
   6) Graduate student in Ph.D.  
   7) Ph.D.

4. In what level of school did you start to learn English?  
   1) Elementary school  
   2) Middle school  
   3) High school  
   4) University/College

5. How long have you been studying English?  
   __________________

6. How long have you been in an English-speaking country?  
   __________________