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明治大学教養論集　通巻462号
(2011・1) pp. 151-170

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Abstract

Anecdotal evidence tells us that certain L2 linguistic features are more difficult to learn than others. For postcritical period English-as-a-foreign-language Japanese learners, English articles (*Ø*, *some*, *a(n)*, and *the*) are notoriously difficult grammatical features. After providing the reasons why articles are difficult and outlining a range of theoretical claims on L2 use, learning, and instruction that are in line with the current trend in SLA theorizing, this paper proposes two specific ways to assist adult Japanese learners in acquiring the English article system, that is, having learners memorize lexical items and providing rules-of-thumb.

Introduction

English articles (*Ø*, *some*, *a(n)*, and *the*) are, no doubt, notoriously difficult grammatical features. Various attempts have been made to better help L2 learners understand the underlying rules behind article assignments. Peter Master's proposal (Master, 1990) is one such example. He offers a binary system to conceptualize articles according to whether the function of each article assignment is determinable as either *identification* or *classification*. On the other hand, at a broader, theoretical level, more and more SLA researchers have come to view L2 use and learning (especially for adults) as cognitive endeavors rather than language specific affairs (Doughty & Williams, 1998b; Skehan, 1998). What seems to be missing, however, is application of a cognitive

approach to the teaching of distinct linguistic items.

This paper attempts to bridge the gap between practice and theory. Selecting the English article system for adult EFL learners as the target structure, it first establishes where the learning difficulty lies. Next, it reviews a range of cognitively-oriented theoretical claims on L2 use, learning, and instruction. Based on the preceding discussions, it then proposes two pedagogical suggestions to better help this particular population acquire the English article system.

Complications in usage

1. Frequency in input

The inherent difficulty of a grammatical feature can be measured from a number of perspectives. One is in terms of frequency: items, whether grammatical or lexical, that occur frequently in input have a better chance of being learned than less frequent ones. For instance, there is little doubt that the word *often* is learned before its synonym *frequently,* because the former appears more often in daily input. Simply from this perspective, articles should be easy to learn, as almost every English sentence contains article assignments. They are not, however. It is not that articles are hard to acquire because they are not frequent in input. They are. It is, thus, obvious that their difficulty lies elsewhere.

2. Form-function complexity

Another aspect of articles that much more convincingly explains their difficulty is the notorious complexity of the relationships between their formal realizations and functions (Master, 1990, 1994). Linguistically or computationally speaking, the correct assignment of an article entails simultaneous judgments on commonality, countability, and plurality of the head noun[1], and the specificity or definiteness of it. Genericness may also be added to what needs to be considered. Furthermore, once one begins to think in-depth about articles' formal realizations, the superficial identicalness of the null article Ø and zero article

Ø may also appear very confusing, for the former conveys the most definite (e.g., *I was appointed chairperson.*) while the latter the least definite (e.g., *Without water, we couldn't live.*) (Master, 1997). This analysis reveals how complex it is to correctly assign an article. It is doubtful that a post critical period (PCP)L2 learner, if left alone to figure out the whole article system on her or his own, will ever develop even a near nativelike understanding of the system.

3. Idiomaticity or reliability of rules

Adding to the form-function complexity are huge quantities of idiomatic article assignments (which in many cases, also pertain to the countability and plurality of their head nouns). Consider, for example, the slight difference in meaning between *go to school* and *go to the school.* The English language has a great number of rather idiomatic article assignments. A large number of such special or exceptional cases contribute to the decreasing reliability of the systematicity underlying article assignments, thus confusing learners when they are arriving at a systematic understanding.

4. Communicative load or redundancy

One further characteristic of articles that increases their difficulty is that they carry little communicative load, especially during face-to-face communication where language users can rely on a variety of extralinguistic cues and communication strategies. Insofar as spoken discourse is concerned, articles are accorded little importance because communication is rarely hindered by their misuse. For example, as awkward as the phrase *a homework* might sound to the ears of native English speakers, a non-native speaker would be able to deliver her or his intended message with the phrase in spite of the erroneous article assignment. Furthermore, a native English speaking listener who is accustomed to or lenient towards non-native speech, or who prefers a smooth flow of communication rather than the inevitable interruptions that would be necessitated by corrective feedback, would not bother to correct the error. These all suggest that such an error is indeed minor

when the primary goal is to get messages across, which is normally the case.

5. Perceptual saliency

Another aspect of articles worth mentioning that also contributes to their difficulty is their low perceptual saliency in input. In oral communication, the indefinite *a(n)* and *some* and the definite *the* are in most cases unstressed and thus unhearable, making them hard to notice. The null Ø and zero Ø are even less noticeable simply because they have no surface realization. Moreover, a similar perceptual saliency challenge is there for learners in regards to the surface realization of head nouns; that is, the indefinite *a(n)* comes with a singular count noun which does not end with plural *-s*, but plural *-s* may be as unnoticeable as indefinite *a(n)*. The indefinite *some* is even more problematic because it can take both singular and plural nouns[2]. A similar issue exists for written texts as well. First, there is no visual for the zero Ø and null Ø. And, *a(n)*, *some, the,* and *-s* can all be less noticeable than content words simply because they are comprised of fewer letters. Most likely, then, relying only on natural input is fundamentally insufficient for learners to figure out and eventually acquire the system.

6. Relation to L1

Last, but no less important, is whether the learner's L1 has a counterpart of the linguistic feature in question, and if so how closely related they are. As for the L1 of this paper's target population, the Japanese language, it does not have an article system similar to English — nor does it have noun countability concepts like those in English. Because of the differences, it is challenging for Japanese learners to select the proper article (or determine the countability and plurality of nouns).

Considering all these factors, there is no doubt that articles are indeed very difficult for adult Japanese learners to acquire. It seems obvious that without some support, they are unlikely to figure out and acquire the system on their own. In order to put forth instructional proposals on English articles acquisition, we now refer to what SLA

theory says about L2 use, learning, and instruction.

Theoretical overview

There are a myriad of claims, hypotheses, or theories that deal with second language use, learning, and/or instruction. What follows in this section covers some of those. They are primarily cognitively oriented arguments, which reflects the current trend in the field of SLA.

1. Noticing is necessary for learning.

First, in terms of a general theory of learning, Richard Schmidt's well-known argument for *noticing* (Schmidt, 1990, 1994, 1995; Schmidt & Frota, 1986) has been frequently cited in SLA papers (e.g., Doughty & Williams, 1998b; Skehan, 1998). Schmidt claims that in order for any type of learning to occur, noticing must precede. Noticing can be defined as the mental process of rehearsing some detected information from the input in the working memory. In considering this definition, one crucial distinction has to be kept in mind: detection vs. noticing. What is detected is not necessarily processed for noticing. For example, we are constantly bombarded by objects coming into our path of vision, and the same thing occurs with sounds in relation to our hearing. While we can choose to process the incoming data at a deeper level of awareness (i.e., notice things), a vast majority of such data go unnoticed though detected. Noticing, in other words, is a cognitive process of arriving at or discovering something in the working memory that operates cognitively at a deeper level than does mere perceptual detection. It refers to such situations as when the learner 1) recognizes a detected form as non-existent in her or his current L2 knowledge system (i.e., noticing a form), 2) forms a hypothesis about a detected form, 3) recognizes a particular part of what he or she has said in the L2 is different from what a native speaker of the L2 has said (or would say) (i.e., noticing a gap (Swain, 1995)), 4) rejects an interim rule in her or his L2 representational system (a further process of noticing a gap), 5) modifies a hypothesis that has been contradicted (still a further process

of noticing a gap), 6) identifies that a hypothesis has been confirmed (i.e., rule-strengthening or exemplar generation effect (Skehan, 1998)), and 7) noticing a hole.

2. Attentional resources are limited.

We just saw that noticing is necessary for learning to occur. If so, should teachers then attract or direct learner attention to whichever linguistic features they feel important during instruction? The answer is, no, because there is a limitation to the amount of information that learners can handle in a given amount of time (see below on Pienemann's teachability hypothesis). This primarily concerns attentional resources in the working memory. Tomlin and Villa (1994) have suggested that attention consists of three separate but interrelated networks of alertness (i.e., readiness; availability of attentional resources), orientation (i.e., focal attentional allocation), and detection. Attentional resources are first allocated toward important parts of input and output (i.e., meaning). There are accordingly two issues: an inability to spare resources for insignificant linguistic features in natural input comprehension, and few remaining resources that can be directed towards such features in output production.

3. In natural language processing, the priority is meaning.

To discuss language learning requires an understanding of the nature of how language is used or processed. On this issue, VanPatten's processing principle has prevailed in the recent cognitively-oriented SLA literature (VanPatten, 1990, 1993). According to VanPatten, meaning takes priority in language processing. Meaning distracts attention from form (VanPatten, 1990; Skehan, 1998). This line of theorizing is particularly crucial in learning and teaching features such as articles, which are communicatively insignificant.

4. Language use and learning are lexical in nature.

Skehan (1998), citing work by Bolinger (1975), Peters (1983), and Pawley and Syder (1983), offers a framework for language use accord-

ing to which language users fundamentally depend on lexically memorized linguistic chunks in order to comprehend input and produce output while keeping up with real-time, ongoing interaction. According to Skehan, the shift to a more analytic mode in which language users process language much more syntactically and morphologically occurs either when they want to produce more accurate or complex utterances or when readily retrievable lexical chunks are exhausted. In the discussion of L2 learning and teaching, this conceptualization of language use is crucial because teachers need to keep in mind that learners' default mode during normal communication is lexical, which means that the chance is slim that instructional intervention during communication tasks on non-lexical aspects of the target language is appreciated linguistically. This is particularly the case with interactional tasks that involve output production on the learners' part because during these tasks learners are faced with the dual task of conveying their meaning successfully while extracting the meaning of the interlocutor. When their attentional resources are drained for meaning extraction and conveyance only, it is hard to imagine that they will attend to linguistic features as much as the teacher wants them to.

5. Adults are post critical period learners and equipped with general schematic knowledge.

With adults, there is a so-called sensitive or critical period in second language learning (Birdsong, 1999; Long, 1990). That is, for adults learning a second language, the qualitatively different predisposition to language learning that young learners possess is no longer available (Bley-Vroman, 1989). According to Skehan (1998), children learning their L1 go through three stages; that is, *lexicalization, syntacticalization,* and *relexicalization* (p. 90). Lexicalization is a stage where learners store chunks into long-term memory. Syntacticalization is a stage where lexicalized chunks are analyzed and become available as syntactic resources. Lastly, relexicalization is a further learning stage where rather abstract knowledge, which is now available as syntactic data, is applied to normal language processing during which new lexical items are

created and become available as readily accessible data for later use. Skehan claims that post critical period L2 learners, who no longer have access to the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), cannot proceed to the second stage, at least on their own.

There is one other unique characteristic of adult L2 learners. That is, they are so adept at extracting meaning (far better than children) by means of the general schematic knowledge they have acquired through L1 learning and life experience that linguistic features with little communicative load are less likely to be processed linguistically (to the extent that it is noticed, or even detected) than loaded ones[3].

6. L2 learners have developmental constraints.

Manfred Pienemann (1984) proposed the supposed teachability hypothesis in which he claimed that within the processing constraints informing developmental sequences, it is not possible to teach structures that are far beyond the learner's current stage of development. Following Pienemann's hypothesis, teachers may delay treatment on linguistic features that they think are too advanced for their learners' current acquisitional stage. However, Lightbown (1998) argues against the teachability hypothesis on several grounds. Among them are that adults, with schematic knowledge and high general learning and cognitive skills, can learn about rules behind hard-to-control linguistic features, and that the knowledge of such rules (i.e., declarative knowledge) will later help learners process incoming linguistic data, and that it is difficult to deny that learners gain control over rules through applying rules into their production (i.e., practice) (DeKeyser, 1998). Teaching of lexical items, thus, can be justifiable regardless of the complexity of the structures involved. More importantly, arguments in favor of processing constraints and developmental readiness seem to ignore the pervasiveness of lexicalized language use and learning discussed above. Lastly, given the varying developmental stages that learners bring to the classroom, it is hardly possible for the teacher or administration to determine when to start providing grammar instruction on a particular structural feature following developmental sequences informed by the

processing constraints. In other words, developmentally challenging rules should be candidates for instruction with the hope that the knowledge can be called on for later acquisition.

7. Balance between fluency, accuracy, and complexity is crucial in successful L2 interlanguage development.

As a rather contentious argument, Skehan (1998) argues for nurturing L2 interlanguage in such a way that fluency, accuracy, and complexity are developed in maximum harmony (see also Widdowson, 1989). In other words, he argues for the simultaneous development of the rule-based system and the exemplar-based system. According to Skehan, there exists a tension between form which emphasizes control and conservatism, and form which emphasizes risk-taking and interlanguage change. He claims that excessive development in one of the two systems at the expense of the other will be difficult to recuperate from later. He further posits that ongoing performance may have an impact on the nature of language learning, with the implication being that a biased emphasis on the development of one area (e.g., the exemplar-based representational system) may be at the expense of the other (the rule-based system).

Pedagogical implications

Considering all the issues related to the utilization of articles in L2 use, learning, and instruction, what kind of instructional support should be given to learners? General agreement among SLA researchers and practitioners is that one can only become able to exert fluent, accurate, and complex language performance during natural language use through actually engaging in natural language processing, and thus support should be given in the context where primary language tasks are communicative. This belief is apparent given the shift in trends in L2 teaching practice from audiolingual approaches to communicative language teaching. However, some SLA theorists have recently expressed concern over the inadequacy of purely communication oriented

approaches (Doughty & Williams, 1998a), claiming that not only is *focus-on-formS* (*FonFS*) a non-ideal approach, but also *focus-on-meaning* (*FonM*) has not been particularly successful, and *focus-on-form* (*FonF*) should be implemented in the L2 classroom (Doughty & Williams, 1998a, 1998b; Long, 1989). Long and Robinson (1998) define focus on form as "an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features — by the teacher and/or one or more students — triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production" (p. 23). Doughty and Williams (1998a) distinguish focus-on-form, focus-on-meaning, and focus-on-formS in the following manner: whereas focus on form "entails" a focus on formal elements of language, focus on formS "is limited to" such a focus and focus on meaning "excludes" it (p. 4). While acknowledging the importance of FonF tasks, this paper also claims a role for FonFS tasks when the target feature is the English article system, which is, as previously described, a notoriously difficult linguistic feature. There are three major linguistic, theoretical, and practical reasons for this stance.

The most important reason is that articles are among those features that are the least likely to invite attention. Language users' primary concern is meaning, not form. There is also a high chance that learners' limited attentional resources are depleted by the mental task that is needed to merely extract meaning and respond. Even if there are remaining resources, articles are semantically insignificant and perceptually non-salient, thus not appreciated linguistically. What is even worse, such unnoticeability may also cause misanalysis or lack of analysis of the system by the learners. Moreover, the Japanese language seriously lacks the semantic notion of articles and countability/plurality of nouns, which further decreases the chance for noticing. With all these issues, it is hard to imagine that PCP Japanese learners will go through stages of noticing to figure out the whole article system during primarily communicative tasks including FonF kinds. Communication-oriented tasks just seem to be an inappropriate place for teaching articles as far as adult Japanese learners are concerned.

Secondly, even when articles do capture attention, successful

awareness is unlikely to take place. The underlying system for articles is too complex. Adult learners might still figure out the meaning or somehow get their messages across, but it is likely to be through their general schematic knowledge and communication strategies. Moreover, adults are post critical period learners, and thus according to the theory can no longer analyze language chunks like children; syntacticalization through natural language processing cannot be expected to take place. Moreover, while there is in fact regularity in articles, it is not that reliable; there are a large variety of idiomatic expressions. Therefore, with communicative tasks only, whether they are FonM or FonF ones, adult Japanese learners are unlikely to successfully process article-related phenomena.

Thirdly, it is hard to implement FonF for articles although designing tasks in such a way that the target will be noticed is incumbent on the teacher. As Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993) have pointed out, it is difficult to contrive *task-essentialness* or even *task-utility* conditions for communicative tasks[4]. This is particularly the case with articles, since once again, they carry little communicative load. For the same reason, errors on articles are the hardest kind for providing negative feedback. There is, thus, a chance that learners misinterpret the absence of corrective feedback as positive confirmation of their utterances and this may result in their erroneous understanding of the system. And, even if a moment arises where a learner brings up some sort of uncertainty about articles, teachers will be at a loss as to what to succinctly point to while maintaining the communicative nature of the task; articles are too complex of a structure and a teacher could not just touch on the surface of an article-related quandary and expect the learner to understand it (see Lightbown, 1998).

For these three reasons, I propose rather FonFS approaches (along with FonF tasks, of course) to help adult Japanese learners acquire articles. But what kind of FonFS should teachers provide for them? Since language development fundamentally occurs during natural language use, a desirable kind of support would be one that will facilitate the natural acquisitional processes. If indeed, as mentioned in the

section on theoretical support, all three areas of accuracy, fluency, and complexity, or both exemplar-based and rule-based systems, need to be harmoniously developed, then, as for articles, the crucial point is to strike a balance between accuracy and fluency. In L2 use and learning, normally, accuracy suffers in fast and fluent processing, while too much attention to accuracy comes with slow operation. In order to overcome this dilemma, this paper proposes a combination of having learners memorize article phrases and familiarizing them with handy, readily usable rules-of-thumb for the article system.

1. Having learners memorize lexical items

Given the inherent difficulty of articles, the first proposal of this paper is to memorize examples. Frequently used combinations are primary candidates for memorization. This paper cannot provide an exhaustive list of such items. Some of those include the following: *at work, day by day, at a loss, make ends meet, go to school, go to the doctor, go to bed, on the radio, in a hurry, all of a sudden, come to an end, for a while, have an appetite, have an eye for, to an extent, in a sense, in a way, on the run, in the morning, in the way, at night, by the way, in the long run, on the contrary, on the one hand, out of the question, on the whole, Japan, the U. S., Jack, a Jack* (as in *A Jack called you this morning.*) and *the Jack* (as in *That's not the Jack I know.*). These phrases are prevalent in everyday English, but less likely to be lexicalized through natural language processing alone than other features that are more simplistic, more reliable in terms of regularity, more semantically significant, more perceptually salient, or closer to the learner's L1.

This approach has at least three benefits for L2 use, learning, and teaching. First of all, having these items stored as readily accessible lexical chunks will help learners process the same material in natural language use readily yet accurately, mitigating the dilemma described above. Secondly, those readily accessible items may help free up attentional resources when they are used during normal language use, and the resulting remaining resources can be devoted to other features as well as possibly to a deeper processing of the very same material in

that particular language context. Lastly, the approach in which idiomatic cases are dealt with during the memorization phase ameliorates the introduction and operation of the other approach that this paper proposes, which we now turn to.

2. Familiarizing learners with readily usable rules-of-thumb

For comprehending input involving articles, this paper proposes having learners become familiarized with the semantic classifications of *Ø, some, a,* and *the* (see Figure 1 below). These classifications can be introduced in a number of ways. One way is to attempt to show the differences in terms of degree of specificity. That is, *Ø* is the least specific (or indefinite) while *the* is the most specific (or definite), with *some* being closer to the least specific end of the continuum and *a* being closer to the other end.

INPUT COMPREHENSION STAGE

If neither LEXICAL nor PROPER, choose from the possibilities below.

1. *Ø* → quality
2. *some* → small quantity
3. *a(n)* → "one"
4. *the* → definite

EXCEPTIONS:

1. *some* as "a certain"
2. *a(n)* as "any one"
3. *the* as scientific generic

Figure 1 A general guide for article comprehension

The, which is on the far specific end of the continuum, is probably the most transparent and easiest to learn: its function is to signal that the modified noun's referent is definite. However, learners should be accustomed to the whole range of contexts where the definite article *the* is used. Representative cases include the following: 1) general cultural use (e.g., *the sun*); 2) immediate situational use (e.g., *I don't like that restaurant. The food is terrible.*); 3) perceptual situational use (e.g., *Can you pass me the soy sauce?*); 4) local use (e.g., *the church*); 5) anaphoric

use (i.e., prior mention); 6) deductive anaphoric use (e.g., *I read some interesting book and contacted the author.*); 7) cataphoric use (e.g., *The bottom line is, I just don't like him.*); 8) usage with post-modifiers; and 9) usage with ranking determiners and adjectives (Celce-Murcia & Larsen Freeman, 1998; Hawkins, 1978).

In contrast, indefinite Ø, which is on the other end of the continuum, might be less understandable for learners. This is because it has two possible semantic functions, i.e., indefinite and generic, and its quantitative quality, whether what is modified is a non-countable noun or a plural countable noun, is rather vague. For example, *Ø pens* as in "*I need pens.*" is indefinite, whereas "*Pens have become very cheap.*" is generic. Learners may find it difficult to tell one function from the other. In the chart above, this distinction is intentionally left out, because this difference is indeed miniscule (Master, 1990) and can be neglected in so far as general comprehension is concerned.

In both examples, the quantitative degree of *pens* is vague, too. Indeed, with Ø, quantitative consideration to the noun being modified is not given (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1998). This concept is rather difficult for Japanese learners; actually, this becomes more of an issue when production rather than comprehension is concerned. To clear up this usage, the quantitative vagueness may well be contrasted with the other two quantitative articles, that is, *some* and *a.*

Some and *a* are near the middle of the continuum between indefinite and definite. Unlike Ø and *the,* these two articles do possess quantitative value: *some* signals *a little/few* while *a* means *one. Some* should be placed closer to the indefinite end than *a,* since the range of quantity that it signals is somewhat vague. Like Ø, Japanese learners have difficulty getting accustomed to *some* because, as mentioned, its quantitative volume is to a degree dependent on the context.

Besides the specificity continuum of Ø, *some, a,* and *the,* three extra caveats need to be presented to the learner: scientific generic indicator *the,* representative generic indicator *a,* and *some* meaning *a certain.* As for the first two, it is probably wise to show contrasts between *the, a,* and Ø when they are used to indicate genericness, which should be dealt

with when having learners produce output. On the other hand, *some* meaning *a certain* should be contrasted with *some* meaning *a few/little.*

All the formal-functional complexity described above is daunting to PCP Japanese learners. A solution proposed here is to provide a guiding chart that is as simplistic as possible while encompassing the basic functions of all the articles. Simplicity is important in order to reduce burdens on cognitive operation as best as possible, and comprehensiveness is important in order to provide a means to manage the multitudes of a variety of article cases and foster an accurate understanding of the whole article system.

Turning next to output production, the primary task for the learner is to determine whether the head noun's referent is definite, indefinite, or generic. Again, the definite article *the* is probably the easiest, because it does not require simultaneous processing of the head noun's countability or plurality. That is, once it is determined that the referent is definite, the correct article is always *the* regardless of the head noun (with the exception of the null article case (again, see Master, 1997)).

On the other hand, when either indefinite or generic is the case, a considerable amount of mental processing is required, as there are multiple possibilities. This is precisely where the combination of exemplar-based and rule-based learning can harmoniously help learners acquire the system. Until the learner can successfully carry out the simultaneous processing on a novel noun or a novel combination of a certain article function and a known head noun, the proposal of this paper is that learners be given grammar tasks where they analyze all occurrences of nouns one by one, determining the head noun's countability and plurality and the correct article assignment. This could be done, for example, by requiring learners to first write an essay and later to review the writing in terms of head nouns' semantics and the formal realizations of articles. It is also possible that, by increasing learner awareness towards such areas of the target language, they may become more inclined to ascertain their article assignments for other language tasks even if their teacher does not remind them to.

The latter scenario would be ideal. However, in order to guide

learners into such an ideal road to acquisition, the guideline(s) to be presented ought to be as simplistic as possible. By providing for a simplified guideline for correct article assignments together with the stance that "Idioms are idioms; that's the end of the story." learners may indeed be inclined to utilize the guide in a more proactive manner. This paper proposes the following chart (Figure 2) for the output production phase.

OUTPUT PRODUCTION STAGE

If neither LEXICAL nor PROPER, choose from the possibilities below.

		Count N.	Noncount N.
Definite		*the* -(*s*)	*the* -
Indefinite	quality	Ø -*s*	Ø -
	small quantity	*some* -*s*	*some* -
	"one"	*a*(*n*) -	
Generic	quality	Ø -*s*	Ø -
	"any one"	*a*(*n*) -	
	scientific	*the* -	

Figure 2 A general guide for article use

Still, the head noun's attribute presents a very difficult challenge for learners. Related phenomena that should be addressed during instruction include mass count shifts, visible abstract countability[5], and more semantically speaking, dual nouns (e.g., *iron* and *an iron*). In fact, representative cases of these should be candidates for memorization. Yet other distinctions that learners need to be familiarized with are between definiteness and indefiniteness and between different generic cases. These distinctions present a greater challenge for learners in that their use is highly contextually bounded, and thus it is extremely hard to prepare phrasal, decontextualized examples for rote memorization (Pica, 1983, 1985).

Adult Japanese learners of English require some guidelines like these charts. Otherwise, as mentioned repeatedly throughout this paper, they will not be able to inductively work out the whole article

system. Continual application of the charts during communicative tasks will not only help learners process language accurately, but also accelerate the operation through proceduralization (DeKeyser, 1998) and may help add to new and readily retrievable lexicalized exemplars which are accurate as well. These charts will also compensate for the other method's inability to cover even a small percentage of possible article cases, while at the same time nurturing fluency for their simplicity. Most of all, equipped with such generative tools, learners can be expected to broaden the range of language they can produce, which may lead to the development of linguistic complexity.

Conclusion

This paper has suggested that by having learners memorize useful instances of article usage as readily retrievable language chunks and by familiarizing them with rules-of-thumb for the use of articles, all three areas of accuracy, fluency, and complexity concerning the English article system will develop harmoniously during either FonF or FonM communicative language tasks. While this paper never underestimates the fundamental role that they play in facilitating L2 acquisition, it claims a place for FonFS tasks in dealing with difficult linguistic features such as English articles.

Finally, not all teachers are well-versed in helping learners develop all three different areas of L2 ability. In fact, while Japanese experts on English grammar can teach English articles, although often having difficulty using them properly in their own L2 production, native English teachers can, of course, use them correctly and fluently but may not be able to teach the rules *per se*. In this sense, team teaching may be a solution: different teachers can play different roles in nurturing the three different skills. Learners' expectations toward a teacher often differ depending on who the teacher is as well. In conclusion, the acquisition of difficult linguistic elements should be supported not only through the deployment of a variety of creative instructional methods but also by the complementary strengths and weaknesses of different

pedagogical strategies.

Notes

1 Only when the noun is countable, does plurality need to be considered.

2 In the former case, the meaning is *a certain,* and in the latter, *a few/little.*

3 Because of the intervention of general schematic knowledge acquired in their L1, I speculate, as an extension of Skehan's argument on the three stages of language learning, that PCP learners cannot even successfully go through the first stage of their L2 learning, that is, lexicalization.

4 "In task-naturalness, a grammatical construction may arise naturally during the performance of a particular task, but the task can often be performed perfectly well, even quite easily, without it. In the case of task-utility, it is possible to complete a task without the structure, but with the structure, the task becomes easier. The most extreme demand a task can place on a structure is essentialness: the task cannot be successfully performed unless the structure is used (p. 132)."

5 It is important to prevent the erroneous association of uncount nouns with abstract nouns.

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