Bridging Theory and Practice:
Issues in Teaching L2 English and Italian Articles[*]

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0. Introduction

In this paper, we propose teaching strategies for the treatment of two frequent grammar errors in English and Italian as a second language (L2), previously disregarded in foreign language textbooks and pedagogical grammars. These errors are made by first language (L1) speakers/writers of languages without articles (Serbian, Chinese, and Korean) and are related to the misuse of the definite article (1) and the omission of (both definite and indefinite) articles (2), as illustrated in the sentences from L2 students' writing below: [1,2]

(1)   La metro è piena di gente. No, non è una metro si tratta <u>della stazione</u> […].

        'The subway is full of people. No, it's not a subway, it is <u>the station</u>.'

(2)   Model III provides […] rules for <u>individual players</u> of <u>political game</u>.

In (1), the context is specific indefinite and requires the indefinite article *una* to be used, not the definite one, as in the example. Similarly, in (2), the nominal expressions 'individual players' and 'political game' are deficient in articles (in this case, the context is specific definite, hence the definite article *the* being obligatory). We label these errors as 'a substitution error' (1) and 'an omission error' (2), following the tradition in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research (Trenkic 2007, *i.a.*).

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[1] All the relevant constituents (i.e., the entire nominal expression) are underlined throghout the text in the interest of clarity.

[2] In all the examples excerpted from the students' written compositions, errors related to ortography or other aspects of grammar are left unaltered.

A number of SLA studies have reported the substitution error and the omission error in the acquisition of L2 articles by speakers of L1 article-less languages (Huebner 1983, Parrish 1987, Robertson 2000, Ionin 2003, Ionin, Ko & Wexler 2004, Trenkic 2004, 2007, Ekiert 2007, *i.a*). These errors may arise as a consequence of the very different nature between languages with articles and those lacking them. From a theoretical perspective, the differences between such languages fall into the scope of what has recently been dubbed as the DP/NP Parameter (Bošković 2008). According to this parameter, the two types of languages differ regarding a variety of syntactic and semantic phenomena, all these differences being deduced from a single difference – the presence of the D(eterminer) P(hrase) in languages with articles and the lack thereof in article-less languages. Since DP is a functional projection, the burden on L1 learners to acquire a new functional category becomes quite heavy, as confirmed by the aforementioned studies. Typically, speakers from article-less L1 backgrounds either omit articles or misinterpret them. In addition, Trenkic (2007) notes that the omission of articles occurs even more frequently when the noun is premodified, in Adj(ective) + N(oun) context. She proposes that these learners treat articles as adjectives – hence the chances of dropping the article become higher in more complex nominal expressions, articles and adjectives competing for the same structural position.

In a collaborative research conducted at the University of Belgrade and the University of Connecticut, we further analyze the above errors, focusing on substitution errors with low intermediate L1 Serbian/L2 Italian and omission errors among high intermediate/advanced L1 Chinese and Korean/L2 English.[3] Our findings confirm that the acquisition of nominal expressions in the contexts such as (1) and (2) represents a challenging task for the speakers at stake. Therefore, the teaching of L2 articles should involve adequate strategies, aiming at both writing instructors and student writers.

Partially based on our own teaching experience in L2 classroom, we propose a four-step strategy to facilitate these learners master the use of articles in the above environments. These steps are extension and elaboration of indirect feedback, as presented in Ferris (2005). After receiving indirect feedback on the error, the student writer is supposed to arrive at the correct form through questions provided by the instructor. The last step consists of follow-up exercises,

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[3] Such methodological choice is due to the properties of L2s of the subjects and their use of L2 articles. As for the former, Italian nominal expressions typically involve postnominal modification (N + Adj) – for this reason we were not able to test our prediction about the relevant syntactic condition on the omission of articles (the prediction is based on Trenkic 2004, 2007). Regarding the latter, in the essays of L1 Chinese/Korean subjects, the relevant non-target use of articles mostly included their omission. (cf. Tables 2 and 3 below).

aimed to help the writer reinforce the correct usage. The main purpose of the strategies is to raise the awareness of the problems under discussion, and the ultimate goal is to develop self-editing strategies in the subsequent L2 student writing.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 introduces the problems with article usage, a substitution problem (Section 2.1.) and an omission problem (Section 2.2). In Section 3, we propose teaching strategies for minimizing article errors (Section 3.2), preceded by some background on the tools needed for such error treatment (Section 3.1). Finally, Section 4 concludes the paper.

1. Problems with article usage

1.1. The Substitution Error

One of the major difficulties L2 learners from L1 article-less backgrounds encounter when learning a language with articles is how to supply the appropriate article in the following context:

(3)   Speaker A: How will you get a ticket for the England-France match?
        Speaker B: I have a contact/I have ø contacts.   (Hawkins 2001: 233)

Such context is referred to in the literature as specific indefinite. The term 'specific' conveys the fact that Speaker B, when introducing into the discourse the referent denoted by the noun (i.e., 'a contact/ø contacts'), (s)he intends to refer to someone/something that is known to him/herself exclusively. Nevertheless, given that this knowledge is not shared by the interlocutor, Speaker A, the overall context remains indefinite. For that reason, the proper article to be used is the indefinite one, at least for the languages such as English or Italian, as further illustrated by Italian in (4):

(4)   Parlante A: Come pensi di trovare i biglietti per la partita Inter-Juve?
        Speaker A: 'How do you think you can get tickets for the match Inter-Juve?'
        Parlante B: Ho una conoscenza/Ho delle/ø conoscenze.[4]
        Speaker B: 'I have a contact/contacts.'

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[4] In this particular context, we assume the null article *ø* to be an alternative to the partitive article *delle*. For some pragmatic implications that the choice of one form over another might have in Italian, see Benincà (1980).

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Over the last thirty years, substantial amount of research on the L2 acquisition of articles has demonstrated that learners from article-less L1 backgrounds (such as Russian, Korean, Chinese, Polish) tend to employ the definite article in place of the indefinite one in the above context (Ionin, Ko & Wexler 2004, *i.a*). Therefore, our prediction is that an L1 Serbian/L2 Italian learner may misinterpret the context in (4) and mark it erroneously with the wrong article form, as illustrated by (5).

(5)   Parlante A: Come pensi di trovare i biglietti per la partita Inter-Juve?
        Speaker A: 'How do you think you can get tickets for the match Inter-Juve?'
        Parlante B: Ho la conoscenza/ le conoscenze.
        Speaker B: 'I have the contact/the contacts.'

In order to test this prediction, formulated on the basis of the findings coming primarily from the research of L2 English articles, we created a small corpus of written data from low intermediate L1 Serbian/L2 Italian learners at the University of Belgrade. The corpus is actually part of a larger learner corpus of L2 Italian named VALICO, designed by the University of Torino for the first time in 2003.[5] In 2008, L1 Serbian learners were tested on two tasks, narration and description, and their data were included in VALICO database. For the purposes of the present study, we selected 12 descriptive compositions written by 11 subjects in a timed task, in which L2 writers were asked to describe a picture using more than 100 words.[6] The task assigned to the students is illustrated in Picture 1.

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[5] VALICO corpus was created by VALICO research group, coordinated by Carla Marello and Elisa Corino from the Department of Literary and Philological Sciences at the University of Torino. The corpus can be accessed at www.valico.org. The pictures used in the elicitation data were created by Leonardo Borazio. We thank the research group for allowing us to reproduce one of the drawings in Picture 1.
[6] An in-depth analysis of the use of L2 Italian articles by L1 Serbian learners based on a more extensive collection of data from VALICO corpus is reported in Runić (2012).

Picture 1 Written task assigned to L1 Serbian/L2 Italian learners at the University of Belgrade *Racconta cosa sta succedendo in questa stazione. Usa più di 100 parole.Describe what is going on in this station. Use more than 100 words.*

As an illustration of the substitution error in question, consider a series of examples excerpted from the students' texts.

(6)   a. Nella foto si vede <u>la gente</u> faccendo diverse cose alla stazione ferroviaria.

'In the picture you can see <u>the people</u> doing different things at the railway station.'

b. La metro è piena di gente. No, non è una metro si tratta <u>della stazione</u> perché vedo <u>i passeggeri</u> salire sul treno, portando le valigie con sé.

'The subway is full of people. No, it's not a subway, it is <u>the station</u> because I see <u>the passengers</u> getting on the train, carrying their suitcases.'

c. […] La stazione è sporca – i giornali sono buttati sulla terra, si vedono sporchi tovagli, <u>la roba</u> è rovesciata giù, alla sinistra c'è una signora che non può capire cosa sta succedendo.

'The station is filthy – <u>the newspapers</u> are thrown on the floor, I can see dirty tablecloths, <u>the things</u> have fallen down, on the left there is a lady who cannot understand what is going on.'

In all three examples the underscored context is construed as indefinite specific by native speakers and encoded subsequently by the indefinite article. For the sake of clarity, we repeat the same examples inserting the expected article form.

(7) a. Nella foto si vede <u>della/ø gente</u> che fa diverse cose alla stazione ferroviaria.

'In the picture you can see <u>people</u> doing different things at the railway station.'

b. La metro è piena di gente. No, non è una metro si tratta di <u>una stazione</u> perché vedo <u>dei/ø passeggeri</u> salire sul treno, portando le valigie con sé.

'The subway is full of people. No, it's not a subway, it must be <u>a station</u> because I see <u>passengers</u> getting on the train, carrying their suitcases.'

c. […] La stazione è sporca – per terra sono buttati <u>dei/ø giornali</u>, si vedono tovaglie sporche, è rovesciata giù <u>della/ø roba</u>, alla sinistra c'è una signora che non può capire cosa sta succedendo.

'The station is filthy – there are <u>newspapers</u> thrown on the floor, I can see dirty tablecloths, <u>things</u> have fallen down, on the left there is a lady who cannot understand what is going on.'

The comparison between (6) and (7) shows that the crucial divergence from target use consists of not detecting the relevant context as indefinite. This means that in L2 Italian of learners from L1 Serbian backgrounds specific and definite seem undistinguished. As a result, if a referent denoted by the noun is known (visible in this case) to a learner him/herself, it does not matter whether the one who listens or reads the description is not familiar with the same referent (for instance, the one who reads the description cannot see Picture 1). Thus, we assume that the error in question arises from the fact that the perspective of the hearer/reader is not constantly present in the mental grammars of our subjects.[7]

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[7] Ekiert (2007: 28) draws a similar conclusion upon the data on article substitution errors with specific definites. As illustrated by (i), her subject failed to supply the definite article in the reintroduction of the noun *car*. The first mention of *car* serves to establish the background knowledge with the hearer, and its every subsequent insertion requires that this knowledge be signaled by the use of the definite article. However, in (i) such condition on article usage is ignored, which makes Ekiert conclude that the common background knowledge with the hearer/reader is actually absent.
(i) Fred bought a car on Monday. On Wednesday, he crashed **a** car.

In Table 1 we report the total number of occurrences of indefinite specific and definite contexts as they are marked by L1 Serbian subjects, writers of L2 Italian.

Table 1: The use of articles by L1 Serbian/L2 Italian learners with specific indefinites and definites

CONTEXT	TARGET USE	INDEFINITE (uno, dei, del, ø)[8]	DEFINITE (il)	NULL (ø)
SPECIFIC INDEFINITE	SINGULAR COUNTABLE NOUNS uno (un, una, un')	50/71	16/71 **22,6%**	5/71
	PLURAL NOUNS dei (delle, degli)/Ø	6/13	7/13 **54%**	0/13
	MASS NOUNS del (dello,dell', della)/Ø	1/3	2/3 **67%**	0/3
DEFINITE[9]	il (la, lo, l', i, gli, le)	0/93	88/93 **97%**	5/93

The data presented in Table 1 are consistent with the previous research on L2 acquisition of article semantics for L2 English (Ionin, Ko & Wexler 2004, *i.a*). However, we would like to draw attention to two facts. The first one relates to the non target-like tendency to mark specific indefinites with the definite article. While with singular countable nouns such tendency is relatively weak (16/71 or 22,6%), with plural or mass nouns it becomes strikingly dominant, (7/13 or 54%) and (2/3 or 67%), respectively. The second one concerns the asymmetry between the definite and the indefinite contexts. The data show that we never obtain the reverse pattern with definites (the use of the indefinite article in the definite context). Our subjects mark definites appropriately (88/93 or 97%), and the only non-target-like use results in the omission of articles (5/93). The asymmetry between the two contexts, indefinite and definite, and furthermore, between singular vs. plural/mass nouns within the indefinite context, requests further research.

1.2. The Omission Error

Another common article error pertains to the article usage in the context with premodified nouns. Specifically, adult speakers of L1 article-less languages tend to omit L2 articles before

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[8] Here, the basic article forms stand for all the relevant allomorphs (see the column under the label 'target use').
[9] In the definite context the distinction between countable and mass nouns is not encoded, which means that for both noun types the definite article 'il' and its allomorphs are employed.

premodified nouns, as illustrated in (8), taken from L2 English written production of L1 Korean and Chinese learners:

(8)   a. Model III provides […] rules for <u>individual players</u> of <u>political game</u>.
       b. We need application of <u>three models</u> to <u>Iraq war</u> […].

In all instances of article usage in (8), the specific definite context is provided in the (con)text, the presence of the definite article hence being mandatory. The focus of this section will be on the article usage before premodified nouns, the relevant cases being the underscored examples 'individual players,' 'political game' 'three models,' and 'Iraq war.' For the sake of simplicity, we label such environments as 'Adj +N' contexts for all the cases above even when a noun is premodified with a number or a noun itself, as is the case in (8b).

The omission of articles for L1 article-less speakers has been reported as an acute problem during various stages of L2 proficiency development (Parrish 1987, Robertson 2000, Trenkic 2004, among many others). The rationale behind the frequent omission of articles may lie in the syntax of an article-less language. More precisely, articles are viewed as occupying the head D position of DP, situated on top of NP in languages with articles. Conversely, languages lacking articles are argued to be deficient in projecting a DP, their maximal projection thus being NP (see Bošković 2008).[10] Since D is a functional category, the acquisition of articles is associated with the acquisition of functional categories – and the task of the learner from an article-less L1 background (such as Chinese, Korean, Serbian) consists of learning a new functional (D) category. This, however, may be a quite challenging task.[11]

As far as the Adj+N context is concerned, Trenkic (2004) reports that adult L1 Serbian/L2 English learners omit articles more frequently with premodified nouns. To explain these facts, Trenkic (2007) proposes a Syntactic Misanalysis Account: L1 Serbian learners analyze English

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[10]Admittedly though, the status of DP has remained somewhat controversial. While authors generally agree that article languages project a DP, a consensus has not been achieved with respect to article-less languages (see Progovac 1998 for the claim that Serbo-Croatian has a DP layer and Bošković 2008 for the opposite view). We will assume, however, in line with the majority of theoretical and experimental findings on article-less languages (Trenkic 2004, Bošković 2008, *i.a*), that DP is not projected in languages without articles, the maximal nominal projection hence being NP.
[11] The question whether it is possible and to what extent to acquire a new functional category (in the case of the aforementioned learners, the syntactic category D) in (adult) L2 remains open in research on L2 acquisition (see Clahsen 1988, *i.a.* for No-access theory as opposed to Schwartz and Sprouse 1994, *i.a*. for Full Transfer/Full Access model).

articles as adjectives. She gives empirical evidence for the claim that L2 articles are syntactically lexical categories. In light of the debate on the acquisition of functional categories, this means that learners from L1article-less languages will lack access to the new values of the parameter already instantiated in their first language. They will be unable to project DP if their L1 lacks it, which in turn explains why these learners fail to employ articles in the aforementioned examples.

In order to further test Trenkic's hypothesis, we conducted another pilot study, in which we analyzed two argumentative essays of two high intermediate/advanced L2 English learners whose L1s are Korean and Chinese, both prototypical article-less languages. The essays were collected at the University of Connecticut Writing Center. The data obtained are reported in Tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2: The use of articles by the L1 Korean/L2 English learner

CONTEXT	TARGET USE	INDEFINITE (a, an)	NULL (ø)	DEFINITE (the)
SPECIFIC INDEFINITE	SINGLAR COUNTABLE NOUNS a, an	21/31	9/31 **29%**	1/31
	PLURAL/MASS NOUNS ø	0/30	29/30	1/30
NON-SPECIFIC INDEFINITE	SINGLAR COUNTABLE NOUNS a	36/43	5/43 **12%**	2/43
	PLURAL/MASS NOUNS ø	0/38	37/38	1/38
DEFINITE	the	7/343	120/343 **35%**	216/343
GENERICS (NON-SPECIFIC DEFINITE)	SINGLAR COUNTABLE NOUNS a	1/2	1/2	0/2
	SINGLAR COUNTABLE NOUNS the	0/15	1/15	14/15
	PLURAL/MASS NOUNS ø	0/86	84/86	2/86

Table 3 The use of articles by the L1 Chinese/L2 English learner[12]

CONTEXT	TARGET USE	INDEFINITE (a, an)	NULL (ø)	DEFINITE (the)
NON-SPECIFIC INDEFINITE	SINGULAR COUNTABLE NOUNS a, an	7/13	6/13 **46%**	0/13
	PLURAL/MASS NOUNS ø	2/21	16/21	3/21
DEFINITE	the	0/15	4/15 **27%**	11/15
GENERICS (NON-SPECIFIC DEFINITE)	SINGLAR COUNTABLE NOUNS a	14/16	2/16 **12,5%**	0/16
	SINGLAR COUNTABLE NOUNS the	0/25	7/25 **28%**	18/25
	PLURAL/MASS NOUNS ø	2/86	65/86	19/86

Both L1 Korean and L2 Chinese learners tend to drop articles, no matter whether the context is definite or indefinite, specific or non-specific (Table 2 and Table 3). The L1 Korean learner omits the definite article in more than one third of occurrences (120/343 or 35%) – such tendency is present even in the context of specific indefinites with countable singular nouns (9/31 or 29%). The L1 Chinese learner drop systematically both definite and indefinite articles (see Table 3 and the percentages in the column under the label 'NULL (ø)'). After closer scrutiny of the contexts missing articles, we realized that they always involve some kind of premodification (see the two examples in (8)).

In conclusion, the results reveal that that the semantics of the context involved (either definite or indefinite) plays no role in the omission of articles. Rather, a sort of syntactic deficit should be blamed. Following Trenkic (2007), we propose that in premodified, Adj+N contexts, adjectives and articles compete for the same structural position, hence making the omission of the article more likely to occur. The relevant question then to address is how to help article-less L1ers acquire the article in such environments. This is the task of the following section.

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[12] In this argumentative text no specific indefinite context was identified. For this reason we do not report the use of articles with specific indefinites.

2. Strategies

2.1. Background: Grammar Error Teaching in L2 Classroom

Formal grammar instruction in L2 classroom has been subject to painstaking debate among L2 writing specialists and SLA theorists. Thus, while one venue of research claims that grammar error correction is necessary for successful L2 student writing development (Ferris 1999, *i.a.*), other line of research rejects grammar instruction as a necessary component during L2 proficiency development, including L2 writing (Truscott 1996, 1999). Nevertheless, no matter how wide this disagreement may be, researchers generally agree that L2 student writers can still benefit from appropriate feedback provided by language instructors.[13] In this respect, it is worth mentioning that results from a number of studies show that indirect teacher's feedback in the long run has been proven superior over direct feedback due to more demanding cognitive involvement (Lalande 1982, *i.a*). Direct feedback is a type of feedback in which the instructor provides a student with a correct language form. Indirect feedback, on the other hand, gives a student just information that an error has been committed (in a coded or uncoded manner), leaving it to the student to detect a more specific type of error and correct it accordingly (see Ferris 2005 for the details on providing indirect feedback and developing self-editing awareness). In the remainder of this paper, we acknowledge the superiority and benefits of indirect feedback, hence putting it as a cornerstone for the strategies to be proposed.

The following question to address is whether the article errors discussed in Section 2 are manageable to correct and, if so, what would be the most appropriate way to treat such errors. We will assume that L2 student writers can rely on explicit knowledge on article use and that both types of errors emerged in the corpora are to be regarded as treatable error in the spirit of Ferris (2005).[14] According to Ferris (2005: 23), "A treatable error is related to a linguistic structure that occurs in a rule-governed way." Given that articles are ruled-governed both structurally and semantically, article-related errors thus should be considered as treatable. We elaborate on this in the following section, by proposing a number of strategies and follow-up activities.

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[13] For an overview of written corrective feedback in SLA and L2 writing within different theoretical approaches and frameworks, see Bitchener & Ferris (2012).

[14] Ferris (1999) introduced the distinction between treatable and untreatable errors as a pedagogical tool in response to Truscott (1996), who rejects explicit grammar instruction as a necessary component in L2 classroom. In addition to articles, treatable errors may be related to verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, sentence fragments, and the like. Untreatable errors mostly include word choice errors (see Ferris 2005 for discussion).

2.2. The Core Proposal: Strategies for Teaching Articles

In this section, we propose strategies aimed at assisting learners from article-less L1s to use appropriate articles in the specific indefinite context and to employ articles in Adj + N contexts. We formulate our proposal on the basis of the results outlined in Section 2 as well as our own L2 teaching experience. For the first type of article errors, we propose to draw L2 writer's attention to the reader. For the second error type, for its part, learners should consider the purpose of the article independently of the presence of adjectives. Below we explicate two strategies for the writing instructor step by step.

STEP 1 – *Discover the error and label it (indirect feedback)*
Start raising awareness of the student writer by providing indirect coded feedback. You should indicate what kind of error the student has commited – in this case, you should label the mistake as 'article choice' or 'context.'[15]

Original student text:
La metro è piena di gente. No, non è una metro si tratta della stazione perché vedo i passeggeri salire sul treno, portando le valigie con sé.
'The subway is full of people. No, it's not a subway, it is the station because I see the passengers getting on the train, carrying their suitcases.'

Teacher correction:

art. c. [article choice]   art. c. [article choice]
La metro è piena di gente. No, non è una metro si tratta <u>della stazione</u> perché vedo <u>i passeggeri</u> salire sul treno, portando le valigie con sé.

STEP 2 – *Elaborate on the feedback by asking questions*
Help the student become fully acquainted with the meaning conveyed by the context. You should elicit the correct form in the text by posing a number of questions, such as:
Does the person who reads the text see the station you describe?

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[15] For the set of error codes and their symbols, as well as on other ways of providing indirect feedback (such as appropriate correction symbols or verbal cues), see Ferris (2005: 69-70).

Does he see the same scenery: passengers, luggage, etc.?

What should you do if you describe what you see to someone who cannot see the same scene?

STEP 3 – *Have the student make self-correction*

Ask the student to correct him/herself on the basis of the elicitation strategy provided in Step 2. If another error arises, repeat the procedure starting from Step 1 – discuss and analyze it together with the student, using the hints outlined in the above two steps.[16]

STEP 4 – *Provide follow-up activities*

Help the student put into practice what (s)he has learned by introducing a series of exercises where you state explicitly the perspective of the hearer/writer. For example, you can suggest the following task (which is adequate starting from the early stages of L2 writing, such as a high beginner or low intermediate levels):

Imagine the following scenario:

You and your friend decided to find a place to live together. Initially, both of you were supposed to have a close look at it before making a final decision. However, your friend had to take an urgent business trip. Meanwhile, you find an ideal house and you have to reach a decision immediately.

TASK:

Write an email to your friend describing the place you have found in detail.

In relation to the second article problem (the omission error), we suggest a similar procedure.

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[16] To illustrate, in case the student writes a wrong article form, (e.g., *un* instead of *una*) you should indicate such error by writing 'art.f. [article form]' above it. Next, you should provide the student with indirect feedback by proposing nouns preceded by the same article form.

STEP 1 – *Discover the error and label it (indirect feedback)*

Original student text:

Model III provides [...] rules for individual players of political game.

Teacher correction:

$$\text{art [article]} \qquad\qquad \text{art [article]}$$

Model III provides [...] rules for <u>individual players</u>   of <u>political game</u>.

STEP 2 – *Elaborate on the feedback by asking questions*

Guide the student in discovering the 'defectiveness' of the context if the article is missing. You can attempt questions such as:

What kind of individual players? Do you know which players? Does the reader know which players you are writing about?

What kind of political game? Is it any political game or a more specific political game? Does the reader know which political game you are writing about?

STEP 3 – *Have the student make self-correction*

Have the student introduce the article by him/herself.   If another error occurs, repeat the procedure suggested in Step 2 above.

STEP 4 – *Provide follow-up activities*

For the omission error, you may propose the writing task bellow (note, however, that this task is adequate for high intermediate and advanced L2 writers, since it presupposes handling argumentative texts).

Imagine the following scenario:

The association you work for organizes a panel on the ongoing conflicts in the world and you are a discussant. The participants are supposed to argue for or against the relevance of the Great Powers' involvement in these conflicts.

TASK:

Submit a report to your supervisor in which you describe all the participants' thesis and argumentation. In addition, discuss the topic from your own perspective using a separate sheet of paper.

3. Conclusion

In this paper, we have proposed teaching strategies for dealing with two persistent grammar errors related to article usage, typically made by speakers/writers of languages whose L1 lacks articles. These errors are the substitution error – the use of the definite article with specific indefinites, and the omission error – the lack of articles before premodified nouns (in Adj + N contexts). In line with current theoretical and experimental findings on the syntax and semantics of articles (Trenkic 2007, Bošković 2008, *i.a*), we assume that learners from L1 article-less backgrounds commit such errors due to the absence of the functional category D in their L2 grammar. To support this assumption, we tested no-D hypothesis by conducting two studies, one for each type of error. We examined L1 Serbian/L2 Italian writing to test substitution errors, and L1 Chinese and Korean/L2 English writing to test omission errors. Our findings confirm that these two errors frequently occur in written compositions of subjects with article-less L1 backgrounds. As a response, we have formulated two four-step teaching strategies consisting of indirect feedback, eliciting responses from the student, self-correction and follow-up activities. We argue that L2 writers can minimize substitution errors if instructors insist on reinforcing the perspective of the hearer/reader. Similarly, we claim that the omission error can be reduced if instructors remind the writer that the nominal expression is inadequately defined without articles. Overall, with our proposal we would like to increase the awareness of such errors among L2 student writers, which, we believe, may lead them to better self-editing strategies and L2 writing development.

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