A Generative Second Language Acquisition-Inspired Syllabus:
An Article Remedial Course for Intermediate Adult ESL Learners

Author’s Name: Suzanne Sutherland
The University of Sheffield

British Council ELT Master’s Dissertation Awards: Commendation
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank the School of English for their departmental full fee waiver to do the 2014-2015 MA course in Applied Linguistics with TESOL. Thank you so much for seriously considering me. I always strove to do my best and then some. The learning curve was hard for me and I am truly amazed I made it this far. Thank you for your faith in my abilities. Thank you also to all the support staff and secretaries within the department.

I also want to thank my cohort. This might be the last time I ever take part in a taught programme. I am so glad that I spent it with such wonderful, lively and intelligent people from all over the world. I was honoured that they chose me to be one of their course reps. I hope they have been happy with my efforts.

A special acknowledgement goes to Mona Hussein Sabir and Elaine Sarah Lopez for letting me have access to their theses before publication. Their input was vital for this dissertation. Many thanks and all the best in your future efforts.

Acknowledgement also goes out to my family and close friends who have supported and cheered me on this year: Duncan, Donald, Ashleigh, Chris, Muriel, Gary, Sheila, Flip, Melvin and Merlin the Cat.

Former students, work colleagues and friends in Korea have written to me and kept in touch throughout the year waiting for my return to Korea. When the course was especially challenging their words also helped keep me on track which gave me the strength to keep going. Fighting!
A Generative Second Language Acquisition-Inspired Syllabus: An Article Remedial Course for Intermediate Adult ESL Learners

September, 2015

Word Count: 15,172
Abstract

Generative SLA research often investigates particular aspects of language in terms of syntax, semantics, morphology, phonology or discourse or a combination of these according to the principles and parameters of Universal Grammar. Some researchers claim that their research can inform pedagogy to make English learning more effective in ways that current textbooks do not. This paper first investigates some of this current GenSLA research looking at it critically through the eyes of an ESL/EFL teacher and syllabus designer. This is a syllabus design dissertation which wants to solve a problem: what kind of syllabus could help a group of intermediate ESL adults who continually have problems using the indefinite and definite article? GenSLA research concerning the semantic and discoursal qualities of articles is discussed and explored more fully to aid in the design of a syllabus. As explicit teaching of the semantic ideas of definiteness and specificity of articles only proves marginally helpful other more implicit and communicative approaches are also explored. The syllabus is a combination of explicit and implicit/communicative approaches. The materials incorporate certain aspects of material design which could also help the students master the complex nature of articles. All materials, the handbook for the teacher and a guide to teaching the selected materials are also provided.
Acknowledgements

[to be included if the application is successful]
Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. 2
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................... 3
1.0 Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 6
2.0 Literature Review ........................................................................................................................... 8
   2.1 Modifiers ................................................................................................................................... 8
   2.2 Verb movement .......................................................................................................................... 11
   2.3 Topic/Focus Structure .............................................................................................................. 13
   2.4 Quantifiers ............................................................................................................................... 16
   2.5 Articles: Definiteness and Specificity ....................................................................................... 18
      2.5.1 Definitions ....................................................................................................................... 19
      2.5.2 Definiteness and Specificity in English ............................................................................ 19
      2.5.3 Research ......................................................................................................................... 21
3.0 Considerations for the Syllabus ...................................................................................................... 24
   3.1 Current textbooks and the teaching of articles ........................................................................ 24
   3.2 Two SLA-informed Approaches to Teaching Articles ............................................................ 26
      3.2.1 Lopez’s study in more detail ............................................................................................ 27
      3.2.2 Sabir’s study in more detail .............................................................................................. 28
   3.3 Further Considerations ............................................................................................................. 30
      3.3.1 Implicit teaching ................................................................................................................ 30
      3.3.2 Communicative Teaching .................................................................................................. 31
      3.3.3 The Use of Oral Feedback ............................................................................................... 32
      3.3.4 Grammaring ..................................................................................................................... 33
      3.3.5 Perception ......................................................................................................................... 34
4.0 A Syllabus for an Article Remedial Course for Intermediate Adult ESL Learners ....................... 36
   4.1 Syllabus Outline ......................................................................................................................... 36
   4.2 The Course ............................................................................................................................... 37
   4.3 Course Content ......................................................................................................................... 38
   4.4 Further Considerations ............................................................................................................. 41
      4.4.1 Materials and Equipment ................................................................................................. 41
      4.4.2 Grading, sequencing and assessment ............................................................................... 42
      4.4.3 The teacher ....................................................................................................................... 43
5.0 Guidebook and Sample Units ......................................................................................................... 44
   5.1 Teacher’s Handbook: Part One and Part Two (Appendix A) .................................................... 44
   5.2 The PowerPoint Presentations (Appendices D) ...................................................................... 46
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1. Lesson One: Definiteness</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2. Lesson Three: Specificity</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3. Lesson Five: Definiteness and Specificity</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Lesson One Materials</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Lesson Three Materials</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Lesson Five Materials</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Lesson Seven</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7 Designed for Impact</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7.1. PowerPoint Presentation Design</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7.2. Worksheets and Hand-outs</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.0 Conclusion</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Teacher’s Handbook - Part One and Part Two</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices B: Part Three – Lesson Guide</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices B1: Lesson One Lesson Plan</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices B2: Lesson Three Lesson Plan</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices B3: Lesson Five Lesson Plan</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices B4: Lesson Seven Lesson Plan</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices C: Worksheets and Hand-outs</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices C1: Lesson 1 – Write me a Story</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices C2: Lesson One – Definiteness Worksheet</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices C3: Lesson 3 – Change the Specificity Worksheet</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices C4: Lesson 5 – True or False? Worksheet</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices C5: Lesson 7 – Post Office Hand-out</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices C6: Lesson 7 – Review Worksheet 1</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices D: PowerPoint Presentations</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices D1-D10: Lesson 1 (Definiteness)</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices D11-D18: Lesson 3 (Specificity)</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices D19-D25: Lesson 5 (Definiteness and Specificity Combined)</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.0 Introduction

Incorporating second language acquisition (SLA) theory into TESOL teaching practice is not a straightforward task. While researchers like Stern (1983) encourage teachers to be informed of second language acquisition theories for their teaching needs, these theories can often conflict with one another. However, TESOL is an “applied field” (Cumming, 2008) which endeavours to teach English in a practical and pragmatic way to people all over the world. So, as an EFL/ESL teacher, I want theories that are going to help me be of as much benefit as I can to my pupils. The idea of heuristics is also of use to me as it involves “theoretically-informed techniques for solving problems” (Cumming, 2008, p 289). In this dissertation, I look to Generative Second Language Acquisition (GenSLA) research that could possibly help me solve a teaching problem and enable me to design a syllabus for a class of ESL intermediate adults.

The basis of generative theory is that human beings seem to have an inborn ability to acquire language (Whong, Gil and Marsden, 2013). Children can acquire language so easily displaying impressive linguistic ability and often without much direct evidence. Generativists claim this development is constrained by a universal grammar (UG) which contains principles and parameters that are activated as a child receives comprehensible input. And this universal grammar could also still be evident in adults attempting to learn another language or other languages. However, with second language acquisition, other factors can come into play, for example, the difficulties of ‘mapping’ (ibid, p 6) the linguistic structures from a first language onto a second language which includes the interplay of syntax with morphological, semantical, phonological and/or discoursal domains.

In Universal Grammar and the Second Language Classroom (2013), the case is put forward that current GenSLA theories and research can inform classroom practice and pedagogy. However, with the “continuous debate” (p 1) concerning theory in the classroom, there is a potential clash between the practicalities of teaching in the classroom and the way SLA researchers concentrate on a particular aspect of language to formalise a theory. But it is this ability to be able to describe what is going on with a
particular aspect of language that could make understanding and applying SLA theories in the language classroom a valuable and useful aid. GenSLA research could have the potential for showing us what is happening during the language learning process in ways which textbooks and methodologies so far have not.

So, for this dissertation, I would like to investigate the idea of incorporating GenSLA theory into a syllabus design; heuristically using it to solve a recurring problem. In what ways could it help me design a syllabus for a class of intermediate ESL adults who consistently make errors with indefinite and definite articles? What could this syllabus eventually look like? What kind of method could work best for teaching? What kind of exercises or tasks might help them set the parameters for articles in English?

In the next chapter for the literature review, I critically look at a small selection of current GenSLA research – not just the teaching of articles – to find out how this research can inform pedagogy. In chapter 3, I attempt to implement the discussion about articles to help me create a syllabus design for my chosen context of ESL adults. This leads to the design of a syllabus in chapter 4 and a selection of materials from the syllabus is discussed in chapter 5.
2.0 Literature Review

I will be investigating claims that GenSLA research can be of assistance to adult language learners by getting to the heart of a linguistic problem whether it is syntax, morphology, semantics, phonology, pragmatics or a combination of these factors. I shall take a critical look at these claims from my standpoint as an ESL/EFL teacher and syllabus designer. Even though my main emphasis for the dissertation is on articles and the difficulties that adult learners have with them, it is also worth looking at other recent GenSLA research to gain a broader idea of what is going on in the field. Section 2.1 discusses Stringer’s ongoing research concerning adjectival and prepositional modifiers and the way they are usually taught or not taught in textbooks and then considers alternatives which could make pedagogy more efficacious. In section 2.2, the teaching of English to learners with an L1 that has a required verb movement is discussed and whether an explicit or implicit approach to teaching will help them set their verb movement parameters in English. The theory of the interface between syntax/pragmatics and discourse/pragmatics is discussed in relation to the teaching of the more oral device of topicalisation in section 2.3. Section 2.4 considers form and meaning through the study of quantifiers. Quantifiers not only have a very complex syntax but also the syntax does not consistently tally with the meaning they contribute to a sentence. Research reveals advanced learners can eventually distinguish the complexities between form and meaning but explicit teaching of quantifiers had no effect on less proficient learners. The definite and specific qualities of articles are discussed in section 2.5. Early SLA research ranked the and a “as the third most difficult out of eight morphemes in order to acquire” (Snape and Yusa, 2013, p 161). In this section, I discuss some of the research into these complex morphemes. This will lead nicely into chapter 3 concerning the syllabus design for teaching them to adult learners.

2.1 Modifiers

Stringer (2013) discusses research which suggests that there is some kind of universal word order or hierarchy of modifiers which underlies all language. Also, it has been shown that when comparing languages, modifier syntax of adjectives and prepositions is actually quite limited which gives further credence to the idea of a universal grammar.
Currently, English language textbooks concentrate on the teaching of adjectival modifiers of nouns. However, teachers complain that explicit explanation of the rules is not always useful and that students do not always seem to follow the rules anyway. Presentation usually consists of one lesson at any stage of proficiency but then tends to never be discussed again.

There is also the expectation that learners memorise the order of the adjectives like size before depth; age before material or weight before nationality, etc. But most linguists agree that memorising rules does not lead to acquisition.

Research on adjectival modifiers is currently ongoing and results are still being analysed. However, two conclusions so far have been reached. Firstly, adjectival modifiers are not acquired naturally. The only thing that seems to come for free is the distinction between the non-absolute/absolute (or gradable/non-gradable) adjectives in which case this aspect could be a part of UG. But as for the other combinations in binary form (e.g. length/depth, opinion/age, size/age, etc), Stringer suggests that students require more explicit instruction and more access to comprehensible input without having to memorise lists. The instruction should be recycled and repeated throughout the syllabus because the more comprehensible input a student hears the better the chance of acquisition. Secondly, learners seem to share a common knowledge despite having diverse L1 grammars. So, the implication here is that the teaching materials do not need to be tailored to any specific native language. Lastly, he recommends these modifiers be taught at an advanced level.

These implications for pedagogy are interesting but I question that “teaching materials must be developed to advanced students’ knowledge” (p 96). If the students need more access to comprehensible input throughout the course concerning adjectival modifiers surely the teaching could start earlier using a method in which they receive authentic input and have plenty of opportunity to produce output? Perhaps Skinner needs to test his recommendations with a variety of proficiencies before making definite claims. I

---

1 For details of Stringer’s research on adjectival modifiers, refer to Stringer, 2013, p 91-97.
would also like to know if he has any specific ideas about how these binary forms could be exclusively taught.

The results of Stringer’s research with prepositional modifiers\(^2\) (P-modifiers) imply that even if a learner’s L1 does not have the multiple meaning of prepositions, i.e. degree, flow and trajectory, the order is nevertheless there and available in adult learners. After the learners understood the meaning of the modifiers, it was enough to produce reasonably accurate results. This prepositional word order does not have to be explicitly taught. So this suggests that learning materials can concentrate more on the semantics and implications of the modifiers themselves instead of attempting to memorise word order.

Prepositional modifiers are rarely taught but Stringer suggests the implications for his research on P-modifiers could be of interest to help improve the teaching of English in “nonuniversity governmental institutions” (p 78) to train diplomats and the military or in specialist centres funded by universities. Aspects of grammar like this not usually covered in textbooks are becoming a point of interest to these institutions and centres wanting to improve the proficiency of advanced learners.

I am not sure why he limits the teaching of the semantics of P-modifiers to advanced learners. In his research, the learners received instruction about the lexical meaning of the prepositions prior to testing. I do not see this activity as being impossible for an intermediate adult learner. But, again, it would be good if Stringer tested the claims of his recommendations. Also, I would be interested to see how the lexical meanings were taught. What methods were employed? What materials were used?

I also do not understand why he insists that P-modifiers are exclusively taught in a government institution or specialist centre. But maybe it has something to do with “the somewhat dismissive attitude toward pedagogy in generative circles” (ibid, p 98). But if one of the implications of GenSLA research is to inform pedagogy then cooperation and

\(^2\) For the details of Stringer’s research on prepositional modifiers, refer to Stringer, 2013, p 84-91.
collaboration is vital. ESL/EFL teachers can be found all over the world in a variety of situations.

Elitism is not necessarily part of the job and there are those who are open-minded to new ways of teaching and looking at language learning.

2.2 Verb movement

Verb movement, according to generativists, is one parameter of Universal Grammar. Because of possible variations in verb movement between two languages, if the verb movement of a learner’s L1 is set differently to the verb movement of the second language they are learning (L2) then they need to acquire a new syntactic setting. Rankin (2013) discusses how research concerning verb movement in certain L1/L2 combinations found properties which could be problematic for L2 English learners3. If we know where the problems lie, can explicit teaching in these areas be effective?

Not all researchers have agreed with the idea of explicitly teaching grammar. Researchers like Krashen (1982) and Schwartz and Sprouse (1996) maintain negative data is not considered to be effective; explicitly teaching grammar does not necessarily mean that a learner will have acquired it, therefore, only positive evidence is required through a communicative approach.

However, Schwartz and Sprouse’s model of Full Transfer/Full Access (FT/FA) is interesting to the point that it maintains that “L1 parameter settings transfer at the initial state in L2 acquisition...learners have full access to UG during the course of acquisition,” (Rankin, 2013, p 61).

Other researchers like White (1991) have investigated the role of both positive and negative evidence. For French L2 learners of English, the main acquisition challenge with regard to verb movement is the placement of adverbs: French order is SVAO, English is SAVO - but not always. The conclusions of her investigation showed that parameter

3 For a discussion about verb placement in French, German and English, see Rankin, 2013, p 58-61.
resetting is not simply like an on/off switch as learners had a habit to use both orders optionally. And not all properties associated with verb raising were affected. Learners coped well with negation and questions but not adverbs. Implicit teaching of do-support was not effective but neither did explicit instruction prove to have any long-lasting effect.

FT/FA could account for these results due to the learners’ L1 interacting with something in English that was coming across as ambiguous or very complex. Adverb placement in English can be problematic and it seems adverbs alone do not seem to offer a robust cue for resetting. The placement of adverbs in English seems to vary; it is not just the meaning of the adverb and its placement in the sentence but also with how the adverb is used in the course of interaction and communication.

As can be seen, French learners can find the word order of English adverbs problematic. As simple rules like “it’s SAVO, not SVAO” can lead to overgeneralising, teachers need a pedagogy that takes into consideration that it is very difficult to always give rules about grammar that are both accurate so that a student can make the right choice and simple so that the learner can remember them.

Rankin suggests the idea of “grammaring” put forward by Larsen-Freeman (2003) as a possible solution. Grammaring is considered the fifth skill. If taught sufficiently, it can give learners the ability to analyse problematic grammatical input that does not lend itself to a simple explanation. By empowering students with the skill to analyse, they are more in control of their learning process.

For example, grammaring could potentially be used to deal with the complexities of adverbs in English whereby the teacher asks the students to find sentences with different examples of adverb placement. Then the students can investigate them and draw their own conclusions about the use or discoursal meaning of the various types of distribution. The teacher could then suggest the difference between comment and manner of the adverbs as in the sentences below but have the students figure it out for themselves:

\[\text{My discussion is about French speakers but for a discussion about some of the difficulties that German learners of English face concerning verb movement, see Rankin, 2013, p 67-69.}\]
Of course, *I answered honestly the questions can exist in English but this marked grammar could be discussed with more advanced students.

The placement of adverbs seem to cause French and German English learners a lot of difficulty when it comes to verb movement; the occasional mix of semantics and discourse creates an ambiguity. And it appears that neither the rich input of implicit teaching nor the explicit teaching of grammar are necessarily helping them acquire English verb movement order. Grammaring is put forward as a possible way to help them investigate the grammar themselves and understand what is happening at the discourse level. But then how effective would grammaring really be in helping French and German students master the use of English adverbs? I wait for quantitative evidence of its effectiveness but I remain open-minded. I also discuss grammaring in chapters 3 and 4.

Rankin (2013) mainly discusses French and German but what about speakers of other languages? Is this a very language-specific grammar point? Does Rankin think a teacher should have prior knowledge about a student’s L1 in order to effectively teach them English verb/adverb placement?

2.3 Topic/Focus Structure

Research undertaken by Valenzuela and McCormack (2013) looks into the discourse/pragmatics and syntax/pragmatics interface which is supposedly constrained by UG and how topic/focus structure from this interface can be acquired. Interface properties have been mainly a theoretical issue. However, Valenzuela and McCormack look at how they can be possibly incorporated into pedagogy. They were especially interested in how L1 Spanish and L1 English speakers learn each other’s language with regards to “topic-comment knowledge” (p 101). This kind of discourse is spoken more often than written and is not usually taught in class except for the clitics in Spanish.
Interface properties involve the notion that more than one domain could be working simultaneously in order to produce and process language. The interface of syntax/pragmatics implies that the syntax is either satisfactory or unsatisfactory according to the pragmatics (or discourse) of the context. It is a subtle aspect of grammar that native speakers easily acquire even though the input can sometimes be puzzling. And because these properties are so subtle GenSLA researchers maintain that UG plays a part acting on the input by imposing constraints and rules. These properties can potentially make explicit instruction quite complicated because many domains like form, context and meaning can be interfacing with each other.

Introducing something again already mentioned in a conversation is called topicalisation. The reintroduced noun appears at the beginning of a sentence but still has a connection to the clause from where it came. That which is in the furthest-left position is discourse-related and context-driven by the sentence. The sentence can be seen as the comment about what is at the beginning of the sentence.

**Topicalisation in Spanish: Topic-comment structure**

(1)  
[Context: I have a group of friends that I have known for many years.]  
*Juan*, lo conoci en París cuando era estudiante.  
To Juan, CL I-met in Paris when was student  
‘John, I met in Paris when I was a student.’

From Valenzuela and McCormack, 2013, p 103

Juan also receives a kind of object pronoun called a clitic – ‘lo’ which is connected to the topic of Juan. This kind of topicalisation that has a clitic attached to the topic implies specificity [+specific] because the clitic encodes it.

(2)  
[Context: I eat fruit and vegetables in order to stay healthy.]  
Manzanas, como todos los días.  
Apples, I-eat all the days  
‘Apples, I eat everyday.’

From Valenzuela and McCormack, 2013, p 104
However, not all topic-comment structures in Spanish employ the use of a clitic. When there is no clitic, there is a non-specific [-specific] interpretation.

*Topicalisation in English: Topic-comment structure*

(3)  
[Context: I have a group of friends that I have known for many years.]  
John, I met in Paris when I was a student.

From Valenzuela and McCormack, 2013, p 103

English does not employ the use of clitics but construction is nevertheless non-specific. Topic-comment structures are actually quite complex. In English, there are two notions acting upon the grammar at the same time: syntax and discourse. But in Spanish, there are three: syntax, discourse and semantics (specificity/non-specificity).  

So, for learners, the input could be problematic. An English learner will have to figure out when and when not to use the specific or non-specific form. Conversely, a Spanish learner of English will have to drop the specific form and use the non-specific form in contexts they are not used to.

In research, the Spanish ESL learners had very little difficulty adapting to English topicalisation. However, English SSL learners tended to use the clitic even in non-specific contexts. It seems usual SSL instruction is only concerned about the use of the clitic but no mention is made of the semantic element because it seems pedagogy has not been aware of it before. GenSLA research has pinpointed this specific/non-specific distinction so by informing teachers of this feature, they can explicitly teach it to help their students become more target-like.

The recommendations by Valenzuela and McCormack is that the students receive explicit instruction for both the syntactic and semantic element of Spanish topicalisation. It is also suggested to provide copious examples of authentic input to acquire the meaning and usage of both semantic possibilities. As for discourse, this proved not to be difficult for

---

5 For more detailed discussion of topicalisation in English and Spanish, refer to Valenzuela and McCormack, 2013, p 103-104.
either group. The idea of a topic-comment was successfully transferred from their respective L1s.\footnote{Details of their research can be found in Valenzuela and McCormack, 2013, p 106-111.}

I present this research as it highlights another aspect of recent GenSLA research: the idea of an interface between various domains constrained by UG which affects the process and production of language in a complex way and then attempting to apply it to pedagogy. One could criticise this study as being a typical example of GenSLA research in that in emphasizes such a particular aspect of language but the findings of this research could potentially be implemented in conversational/speaking classes for ESL and SSL classes. And there is the possibility of other language combinations being investigated. However, with the emphasis on explicit instruction, I would like to know if the researchers have any recommendations for teaching the specificity issue of Spanish topicalisation.

2.4 Quantifiers

According to research by Gil, Marsden and Whong (2013), quantifiers make worthwhile research for a number of reasons. Across various languages, quantifiers display a substantial variation of properties. So, for SLA researchers this gives them the opportunity to find out more about L1 transfer. When exposed naturally to an L2, the L2 classroom does not necessarily inform learners about all the ways quantifiers can be used in the target language; there is a lack of direct evidence; a poverty of the stimulus, as far as quantifiers are concerned. If learners can somehow acquire an understanding about quantifiers in the L2 despite this deficiency then perhaps this is an example of UG at work. And if this is the case then focussing on form is unnecessary and the teacher can focus more on meaning.

Research has involved investigation of both form and meaning of quantifiers with words such as \textit{how many, everyone} and \textit{any}\footnote{More discussion of this research can be found in Gil, Whong and Marsden, 2013, p 141-152.} in various L1-L2 combinations. Even though there is often not enough explanation of just how widely distributed a quantifier can be (as in the case of \textit{any} in English found in grammars and textbooks) or there is a general lack of
explicit explanation of quantifiers in the L2 classroom, nevertheless, by an advanced level of proficiency learners have acquired “the absence of an interpretation” (p 142) and can discern acceptable sentences from unacceptable ones. But in terms of pedagogy, it is not much help to be told to wait until the students are advanced speakers. The question is can explicit instruction of quantifiers speed up the acquisition process?

The results of explicit instruction\(^8\) revealed that the learners tended to reject *any* in all its contexts in English despite explicit instruction. There was also no big difference between the control group and the group that had received instruction. Explicit teaching involved two lessons. At the end of the first lesson, exercises were provided to practice what they had learned. This also included items which had not been taught in the first lesson. The second lesson included a review and an exercise in which the students were asked to compare quantifiers in their L1. And then there were two post-tests. So, from this it was concluded that explicit teaching basically had very little effect on the instructed learners’ comprehension.

The complexities of quantifiers across certain languages coupled with SLA research has revealed that UG seems to play a part in the acquisition albeit we must wait until the learner is of advanced proficiency to master the interplay between meaning and form. But I question the study attempting to speed up the process with explicit instruction. I am not surprised they had those results. The taught participants were given just two lessons. The exercises in the first lesson contained words that they had not even been taught. And the second lesson was a review with a language comparison exercise. I suggest that this study is done again over a longer time period, maybe 3 or 4 lessons, with materials that cover what is actually taught in class and are more pertinent to the study of English quantifiers.

Because of their results, Gil, Marsden and Whong suggest the adoption of an approach concentrating mainly on meaning in the form of communicative language teaching (CLT) in which copious amounts of rich input can be provided. If form cannot be taught explicitly then maybe focussing on meaning and getting the learners actively involved in

\(^8\) Gil, Whong and Marsden, 2013, p 154-155.
learning might be the better way for them.

While I am not in disagreement about the importance of authentic comprehensible input in the L2 classroom I maintain they really need to do the test again. If a second test yields similar results then it might be the case that quantifiers are one aspect of grammar that just needs time, patience and commitment in order to master. Trying to speed up the process might not be feasible.

But then CLT has been one possible way of teaching for a number of decades so I am puzzled why it is being mentioned here as a possible solution. Does this mean that the researchers are implying that CLT is not being employed enough in language classes, in general? Did they not test any students who had already been taught with CLT? Also, using CLT is only a suggestion so ultimately quantitative testing is required in order to be sure of its effectiveness and ability to quicken the process of learning. However, despite my criticisms and concerns, I think it is worth implementing with students; especially ones who have not had much experience with CLT before to enrich their experience of using English.

2.5 Articles: Definiteness and Specificity

From my own teaching experience, one of the most difficult aspects of English for many students to master is the use of the and a. Much SLA research has been conducted on the subject confirming the difficulty and complexity of acquisition. Learners will either omit an article or overuse the when a should be used and vice versa (Dulay and Burt, 1974; Ionin et al, 2004; Parrish, 1987; Snape and Yusa, 2013; Thomas, 1989; Robertson, 2000).

Sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2 introduce the semantic features of definiteness and specificity while section 2.5.3 discusses a selection of article research.
2.5.1 Definitions

Both terms are discoursal in nature. Linguistically, they are contained in the Determiner Phrase (DP) which is connected to the Noun Phrase (NP) in the form [D NP]. According to Ionin et al (2004) a DP is:

a. [+definite] when both the hearer and speaker already assume “the existence of a unique individual in the set denoted by the NP” (ibid, p 5) and
b. [+specific] when “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.” (ibid)

In English, the and a correlate to [+definite] and [-definite] respectively. There is no marker for specificity in Standard English but there is a case for it in colloquial English which is discussed in 2.5.2.

2.5.2 Definiteness and Specificity in English

Definiteness

In example 1, when it is first mentioned, there is no assumption existing between the hearer and speaker of a unique apple so the indefinite article is used. But when it is mentioned again, the existence of this particular apple – the one that I bought – has been established, hence the definite article in the second sentence.

1. I bought an apple. The apple was delicious.

But it is not always necessary to have some kind of earlier discourse to indicate uniqueness. Sometimes shared common knowledge is all that is needed between the speaker and hearer. In 2, it is assumed that there will be only one loser in the game which in effect establishes definiteness right away.

2. The loser of the match will receive the silver medal.
Specificity: Indefinites and ‘referential this’

The [+specific] [-specific] feature is not available in Standard English. However, in colloquial English, there is a case for specificity with the use of ‘this’; also referred to as the ‘referential this’ (Ionin et al., 2004, p 23) and not normally taught in ESL/EFL classes. Consider examples 3a and 3b:

3a. Sheila intends on buying a/this book – even though she can’t find it at the book store.
3b. Sheila intends on buying a/*this book – but she hasn’t decided which one to buy.

In 3a, the speaker implies that there is a particular book that Sheila wants to buy. From the speaker’s point of view, this book is noteworthy because Sheila knows which one she wants. This satisfies the requirements for [+specificity] above. Either the indefinite *a* or *this* can be used here. This sentence can be considered [-definite, +specific].

However, in 3b, the speaker is not referring to a particular book because Sheila has no specific book in mind to buy. The book, in this case has no noteworthy property according to the speaker and is, therefore [-specific]. *A* is grammatical but *this* is not. This sentence can be considered semantically as [-definite, -specific].

So, it can be seen in a colloquial context that referential *this* can indicate [+specificity] and, conversely, cannot be used grammatically in [-specific] situations. For the rest of this paper, however, I shall only be concerned with the indefinite article ‘*a*’.

Specificity: Definites

Consider these examples:

4a. I’d like to talk to the owner of the car parked across the street – she’s my mother and I have an important message for her.
4b. I’d like to talk to the owner of the car parked across the street – I wonder who it is because they’ve left their lights on.
In 4a, the speaker refers to a certain person – the owner of the car – who is also noteworthy for being the speaker’s mother so semantically the sentence has [+definite, +specific] properties.

However, in 4b, there is no reference to a particular person; the speaker is just looking for the unknown owner of the car, therefore it is [+definite, -specific].

2.5.3 Research

English has its two articles, the and a, set to [+definite] and [-definite], respectively. However, another language like Samoan has two articles, le and se, which are set to [+specific] and [-specific], respectively. This has led Ionin et al (2004) to put forward the Article Choice Parameter when a language has two articles. This parameter determines whether a language is going to base its articles on definiteness or specificity. Although articles have other properties, Ionin et al see definiteness and specificity as the only properties related to discourse/semantics.

One of the main queries of Ionin et al’s 2004 research was how L2 learners set these parameters to a new language, in particular, when their L1 contains no articles. They formulated the Fluctuation Hypothesis in which they predicted that if the Article Choice Parameter is accessible then the L2 learners will fluctuate between the two, especially when they encounter [+definite, -specific] and [-definite, +specific] sentences.

Results indicated this to basically be the case. When sentences were either [+definite, +specific] or [-definite,-specific], both groups tested quite high. But with [+definite, -specific], the learners tended to overuse a and, likewise, with [-definite, +specific], they tended to overuse the. See Table One for a visual representation. Ionin et al (2004) suggest that the overuse of articles is “systematic” (p 4) and linked to specificity. Ionin et al (2004); Ionin et al (2008) and Ionin et al (2009) all encountered these fluctuating results which suggests that students are not simply making random errors.
However, not all researchers have agreed that specificity is causing the fluctuation. Trenkic (2008) suggests it has to do with a strategy involving explicitly stated knowledge (ESK). When a sentence has ESK, because the referent is considered identifiable, the student overuses the. And, likewise, if the referent is unidentifiable, there is no statement of ESK and the student overuses a. In response, Ionin et al (2009) suggested that learners have innate knowledge of semantic universals through their UG.

Snape and Yusa (2013) considered Ionin et al’s research on articles and investigated what effect explicit instruction would have on a group of higher intermediate Japanese L2 English learners. They found explicit instruction on definiteness and specificity was not effective for these learners but they seemed to benefit from learning about perception which is something I will discuss in section 3.4. They also explicitly taught genericity which likewise proved ineffective but this is outside the scope of this paper.

I cannot comment if specificity/semantic universals or ESK is causing learners so much difficulty. I think this is something that will most likely be debated for quite some time. Ionin et al collected data through things like acceptability judgement and forced-choice elicitation tests. However, Snape and Yusa’s paper was the first, as far as I can ascertain, to introduce a teaching element and this is something I can comment on.

According to their results, Japanese English learners seem to be accessing the [-definite, +specific] context from their UG quite well but have difficulty with [+definite, -specific]. Snape and Yusa explain this could be because of an explicit learning strategy which is in line with Trenkic’s theory. So, they recommend emphasis should be on the definite article.
whether or not the speaker refers to something unique. However, I cannot see evidence of this in their lesson notes (in the appendix, Lesson 1, p 179-180) so I am not sure how this manifested in their explicit teaching. Looking at Lesson 1 as it stands, the way it is presented could be potentially confusing to a learner. In terms of design, the students could have been put off due to the lack of spacing between words and bland presentation. It could have appeared somewhat foreboding or even boring. Did they provide worksheets and/or a chance for the students to practice what they had learned? I also think trying to teach definiteness, specificity, genericity and perception in such a short space of time was unrealistic. But they acknowledge article instruction should be over a longer time period. It would be difficult to gauge how much their teaching materials effected the outcome of the study but I think more effort could have been put into the material design to aid acquisition. This is something I discuss in later chapters.

This literature review has been an exploration of some of the more recent GenSLA research available. Generativists view language as generating from a universal grammar that is present in adults and children. Research into adult SLA continues to find and investigate linguistic properties between two languages that cause difficulty for learners. The implications of this research could aid language teachers develop more targeted and effective teaching strategies. However, while I have found the research very interesting, some of the recommendations are not informative enough. I am still left unsure what these recommendations would involve if I were to put them into practice. However, this might have been outside the scope of their research. I am also not convinced that enough research has been done to warrant teachers implementing certain recommendations (section 2.4 being a case in point). However, as a teacher, I see the potential for GenSLA research to supplement and expand my teaching methodology and I look forward to researchers and ESL/EFL teachers working together. But I, nevertheless, need to be critical and not blindly accept the presented evidence and recommendations.

In the next chapter, I continue, among other things, discussing further papers concerned with the teaching of articles as I begin to formulate ideas for my syllabus design.
3.0 Considerations for the Syllabus

This chapter considers a variety of factors in preparation for designing and implementing the syllabus for the teaching of articles. Section 3.1 considers what is already available in the way of teaching materials. Will they be of any use to the teacher and the students? Is the information they contain about articles informed by SLA research? Researchers like Cumming (2008) and Harwood (2010) suggest when designing a syllabus that designers consult the SLA literature and investigate what researchers have already found out about a particular aspect of grammar. I have started this in section 2.5 and will further investigate in section 3.2 two very recent theses concerning GenSLA research and the explicit teaching of articles. And in light of the conclusions reached that explicit intervention has only a limited effect on L2 learners’ proficiency regarding articles, section 3.3 looks at other possible approaches that could also be considered for the syllabus.

3.1 Current textbooks and the teaching of articles

According to Ionin et al (2004), what is already taught in textbooks concerning articles generally only emphasises definiteness; textbooks and grammars so far make no distinction between definiteness and specificity.

Indeed, words like ‘definite’ and ‘specific’ are often used ambiguously. I know from my own teaching experience I have used the terms interchangeably. Explanations of rules, for example, using ‘the’ with superlatives and ordinals and with nouns previously mentioned, etc, are likewise insufficient to fully explain the usage of articles.

Lopez (2015) investigates five series of English language course books that are generally used in the UK (Cutting Edge, Language Leader, New English File, New Headway and Global) and found that articles are introduced in the early stages. Some of these course books continue article instruction well into the advanced levels. “This approach should allow for the gradual acquisition of articles, with learners being presented with progressively more complex rules” (p 84) however difficulty with articles can continue to persist.
The majority of the course books teach the indefinite article first. This tends to go against the results of research concerning the acquisition of articles as learners tend to get to grips with the definite article first and the indefinite article later.

Course books can also have either a deductive or inductive approach to teaching articles. Ellis (2006) admits that research is mixed considering which approach is best; however, even though *New Headway* employs an inductive approach the learners are not given enough opportunities to practice the grammar. This is despite researchers like Swain (1985) stressing the importance of output to aid acquisition. Ellis (2002) confirms that most course books neither engage in meaning-centered approaches to grammar nor allow students to find out by themselves how grammar works.

Harwood (2005, 2010) gives a possible explanation why textbook developers do not consider SLA research: many well-known developers have gained their reputation because they have “developed an intuition for what kind of book can easily become a commercial success, but who lack theoretical knowledge…” (Dendrinos, 1992 cited in Harwood, 2005, p 151). Other possible reasons include developers tend not to follow SLA research because different researchers can sometimes reach conflicting conclusions. SLA research also tends to stay in journals instead of being shared due to lack of communication between researchers, publishers and writers of materials. However, researchers like Whong, Gil and Marsden (2013) are encouraging more rapport between teachers and GenSLA researchers in terms of pedagogy.

Ionin et al (2004) suggests that for all the various grammar rules and strategies that course books offer, it could be more to do with the fluctuation of the article choice parameter fluctuating in the student’s interlanguage that hinders them from developing accuracy.

Since there seems to be very little consideration of SLA research by material designers, I take the view that using or referring to a standard course book for guidance to create my syllabus design will not be effective for the students in my context. I will have to look elsewhere. I am, in a sense, in uncharted territory. However, in the next section, I
consider two very recent theses and how they approached the teaching of articles. Both are linguistically informed and taught with an explicit approach. This is despite the fact that Snape and Yusa (2013) found explicit teaching had very little effect on learner accuracy. However, from a teaching point of view and looking towards a syllabus design, their justifications as to why they developed their teaching materials and how these eventually manifested are worthy of discussion and consideration.

3.2 Two SLA-informed Approaches to Teaching Articles

The explicit teaching of articles is considered from linguistically-informed research by both Lopez (2015) and Sabir (2015). An important aspect to their investigations was if linguistically informed explicit teaching would improve the accuracy of L2 learners’ use of articles.

Sabir and Lopez justify their explicit approaches by giving examples of various studies which concluded that there seems to be a positive role in explicit instruction of grammar through negative and positive evidence and grammar correction. This includes research on the effect of explicit instruction on the brain (Snape and Yusa, 2013) and the positive effect of metalinguistic instruction (Carroll and Swain, 1993).

Research is divided whether complex structures require explicit teaching and simple structures require implicit teaching or vice versa. However, Sabir rationalizes that while certain aspects of an L2 do not require explicit instruction, there are others that do require it when a “form/meaning mapping difference between learners’ L1 and L2” (Sabir, 2015, p 48) is involved.

Further reasoning came from the study by Norris and Ortega (2000) which investigated form-focused instruction to find out which type was better: Focus on Form or Focus on FormS. The former is meaning-based instruction while the latter is teaching grammar forms in isolation. The study concluded that “a formal statement of the rules or negative feedback” (Lopez, 2015, p 72) was better than an implicit approach to instruction.
Both Sabir and Lopez presented a well-reasoned case informed of SLA research. What else can a closer investigation of their papers reveal?

### 3.2.1 Lopez’s study in more detail

Chinese speakers participated in Lopez’s research. They were already on an EAP pre-sessional course for 10 weeks at the time and were considered of low-intermediate English ability. Split into three groups, I consider the group that was explicitly taught definiteness and specificity (the Specificity Group). They received instruction for a total of 4.5 hours in total over 3 weeks. The rest of the time was spent on testing.

The results showed that the Specificity Group did not overall increase their accuracy of articles after receiving explicit instruction. In fact, this group did not necessarily score higher linguistically than the two other groups and any slight improvement was only short-lived.

Considering implications for teaching, this study still supported the idea that many students needed form-focused (i.e. Focus on FormS) instruction to help fill the gaps in their acquired knowledge.

Lopez also made an interesting point that maybe the reason why learners can have a problem with articles is because they are being taught a grammar point that they are not yet ready to acquire (Bruhn de Garavito, 2013; Pienemann; 1989). But I am not sure what she is implying here. Does she feel that these low-intermediate level students were not yet ready to acquire the English article system?

Another factor which could have affected the results was that these students most likely had received instruction on articles and had knowledge of the general rules concerning definite and indefinite articles. The mix of prior instruction and newness of specificity could have caused them to “overthink their responses” (p 204).

Lopez put a lot of thought into her materials which she provides in the appendices. She provides detailed lesson plans and uses PowerPoint presentations to teach about
definiteness and specificity. I wonder if some of her explanations could have been a bit more simplified but I appreciate that her context was a pre-sessional EAP course. She utilised the 4.5 hours to blend the teaching of articles with tasks associated with an EAP course (e.g. error correction) but maybe more time could have been spent on the teaching of articles instead. She acknowledges that the students would have benefitted from more teaching time.

I particularly like her worksheets intended for group work during the specificity lesson. Students have to discuss which sentence is specific or non-specific and the intended meaning. They also had an opportunity to produce output. I wonder if they were able to speak English most of the time as I know from my own experience low-intermediate learners still struggle with expressing themselves. Did she employ the use of some kind of oral corrective feedback to help them? I discuss this later in section 3.3.3.

3.2.2 Sabir’s study in more detail

Sabir’s participants were Hejazi Arabic-speaking undergraduates studying English at a Saudi Arabic university. I will only concentrate on the results of her intermediate group which comprised of both lower and higher levels of intermediate proficiency as the students in my context will also be at a similar level.

Her course was 10 weeks long and within a university teaching time frame. Only three hours of teaching time were devoted to definiteness and specificity with the rest of the time given to testing. From their pre-test scores in the Article Elicitation Task, the intermediate learners were quite target-like in most contexts but many had difficulty with [-definite, +specific] which is notable.

In a previous study, Ionin et al (2008) found that Spanish speakers did not fluctuate and were able to transfer the semantic meaning of their articles into English. Arabic and Spanish are both languages that have a two-article system based on definiteness, like English. Lopez’s Chinese participants also had difficulty especially with the [-definite, +specific] context which, incidentally, was opposite to what Snape and Yusa (2013) found
with their Japanese learners. Any number of factors could be affecting all of their results: the participants’ language proficiency, a specific language-to-language mapping difficulty or perhaps a fault in the testing.

Sabir also wanted to investigate if explicit instruction would improve accuracy compared to implicit instruction. The results found that neither method had much effect on the participant’s use of articles which contradicts the claims that explicit meta-linguistic explanation can be more effective than the implicit approach (Norris and Ortega, 2000).

The question was also considered if explicit instruction would promote long-lasting retention but this did not seem to be the case. The delayed test results showed a regression compared to the pre and immediate post-tests. She suggested that “what is learned quickly is forgotten equally fast” (p 196).

Even though explicit instruction was not supported by this research, Sabir argues that linguistically informed teaching might still help learners with issues involving misuse of the articles, e.g. using ‘a when it should be the and vice versa. But there are a number of factors which could affect explicit teaching; for example, the length of a course, the characteristics of the grammar item and learner proficiency.

Sabir recommends definiteness and specificity are taught separately and then combined together with exercises, examples and pictures. I can only find the Powerpoint presentations in her appendices that she used to teach the explicitly-taught intermediate group. I like her straightforward simplified explanations. They seem very suitable for the learners to understand but I would have liked to have seen some worksheets or some evidence that the learners had an opportunity to practice what they had learned.

I appreciate that Lopez and Sabir often had great difficulty arranging times, suitable classes and participants but having only 3 or 4.5 hours to teach such difficult ideas seems to defeat the purpose. However, both were aware of that fact. Sabir also noted the need for more longitudinal research.
It can often be the case that SLA researchers cannot agree on an issue which problematizes things further (R. Ellis, 2006); for example, the aforementioned views about specificity causing the problem of acquiring the semantic nature of articles or not. And both papers discussed that researchers really have not totally agreed on definitions for definiteness and specificity. Nevertheless, I can now make informed choices concerning my syllabus. I will be incorporating some of their ideas and recommendations in the next chapters and I feel a little less in uncharted territory now.

But I am concerned that explicit teaching did not yield up more encouraging results. This makes an impact on my syllabus design because I cannot rely wholly on an explicit approach. Perhaps in future more research with longitudinal design will prove that explicit teaching is more effective but all I have now is the evidence provided here. And I feel that I want to explore other avenues. The next section discusses implicit teaching and the possibility of adding communicative tasks.

3.3 Further Considerations

Sabir and Lopez incorporated an explicit approach to their teaching method because they argued that positive and negative evidence would be more effective than implicit teaching, however, it was concluded that explicit intervention had only a limited effect. They gave their recommendations that explicit teaching can be used to help some semantic contexts of articles so I will still consider using it up to a point.

But I still look elsewhere for further ideas for my syllabus design. In section 2.4 I discussed research on quantifiers by Gil, Whong and Marsden (2013). They also concluded that explicit teaching did not improve L2 learner accuracy of the word any. It was suggested that a communicative approach rich in input and focusing on meaning be employed. This section will consider implicit teaching and the communicative approach: what are their characteristics and what does the literature have to say about them?

3.3.1 Implicit teaching

R. Ellis (1997) explains that with implicit teaching, students are not just deliberately
learning a grammar form but are also engaging “in meaning-focused communication” (p 85). The difference between explicit and implicit teaching can be seen like a continuum according to the amount of overt instruction the students receive about the form. Research concerning the effectiveness of both methods is divided. I have already mentioned this in section 3.2 about whether relatively simpler grammar points should be taught explicitly and more complex rules taught implicitly or the other way around. Also, in section 2.2, Schwartz and Sprouse (1996) considered implicit teaching the acceptable way because it provides necessary positive evidence. But according to R. Ellis, a teacher actually “frequently incorporates” (1997, p 85) both forms of teaching.

Implicit teaching of grammar often revolves around production in that it gives the students the chance to practice the grammar forms as activities in order “to stimulate active language use” (Ellis, 1997, p. 87). But implicit grammar can also involve input (Ellis 1997, 2006) in which students concentrate on the grammar forms in order to understand meaning. For example, students listen to a sentence containing the target language and then have to interpret the meaning by choosing a correct picture. Focussing on input may be more beneficial, at least in the early stages of learning, because “it is not clear how learners are supposed to learn new structures through production” (Ellis, 1997, p 88).

There are also activities involving output, for instance, text-creation and text-manipulation. With the former, the students create sentences of their choosing with the grammar form. Unlike a communicative task, it is a chance to practise, not a chance to communicate. Text-manipulation involves showing the learners the type of sentences to make but asking them to alter them in a particular way like substituting a word or changing a particular word in some way.

3.3.2 Communicative Teaching

The origins of the communicative approach come from Krashen (1982) in which he maintained that L2 acquisition is similar to L1 acquisition; therefore, all a student needs is positive evidence in order for their interlanguage to develop. But as can be seen in section 3.2, for example, this aspect of his theory has been disputed. Nevertheless, the
communicative approach involves providing a linguistic setting for the learner which resembles the L2’s communicative setting as much as possible and one in which learners “help to create and shape” (Ellis, 1982, p 75). There is also an emphasis on acquisition so that the language is presented in a natural way like a native speaker would say it.

The communicative approach is marked by the fact that the emphasis is on the message; what the learners is saying, not how. There is often an information-gap aspect to an activity so one learner does not know what the other one will say so both are negotiating and adapting throughout their communication. Language becomes a social event.

The teacher is seen as a facilitator and even an onlooker; however, harking back to Krashen, a teacher can employ a variety of techniques that a parent uses when speaking to their child like repetition, prompting and expanding to keep the flow of communication going.

3.3.3 The Use of Oral Feedback

A teacher might employ the use of corrective feedback because the learner either does not have enough linguistic ability at this stage or the teacher may think it is a good opportunity to consider a particular form. When this happens, the process of communication is stopped and there is an incidental focus on form because the teacher needs “to repair communication” (Ellis et al, 2001, p 283).

If I am going to employ some form of communicative teaching, I want to consider providing feedback. Besides Krashen’s idea of parental techniques, what else might be effective according to research?

R. Ellis (2006) states feedback comes in two forms: implicit or explicit. With implicit feedback, the response to a learner’s mistake is disguised in some way in the form of a recast or clarification. While explicit feedback can involve metalinguistic explanation or a direct correction.
Corrective feedback can also be thought of in terms of uptake (Ellis et al, 2001; Lyster and Ranta, 1997). Uptake can involve the student’s reaction and utterance after a teacher has provided some kind of feedback due to the prior utterance. And, perhaps more effectively according to Ellis et al (2001), it can also involve the student stopping the flow of the activity to ask the teacher a question about the language due to a gap in their understanding and knowledge.

If the student shows they can use the language correctly then the uptake was successful. Uptake can also give the learner a chance to ask specific questions pertinent to their level of understanding and then to practice and perhaps make the language item automatic. In other words, uptake can potentially facilitate acquisition but there is no guarantee.

Written feedback will be discussed in chapter 5.

3.3.4 Grammaring

This is a technique first mentioned in section 2.2 where it was a suggested way to help students understand the meaning and positioning of adverbs in English. Larsen-Freeman (2003) explains that grammaring is “a skill” (p 13). With grammaring, the learner is not merely storing rules in their head so that they might accurately speak a language; they are also engaging with the grammar developing the skill to understand the meaning and use of it.

While Larsen-Freeman’s book does not attempt to be prescriptive, the use of metaphor in various places throughout is not useful considering that it is part of a series for teacher development. I want to know more in practical terms how grammaring is being used during a lesson (or a series of lessons). But from what I can gather, there are a variety of suggestions for using grammaring. The most applicable for my situation could involve being a form of consciousness-raising in which learners can use grammaring to concentrate just on a grammar form itself or investigate the form in context with the words and collocations surrounding it. Or, grammaring could be considered an implicit form of teaching where the emphasis is on investigating grammar and how it effects the
meaning of a sentence.

I will consider using grammaring as part of a lesson to the point that it encourages noticing and consciousness-raising and encourages the learners to engage with the grammar in which they have to do a lot of the thinking for themselves. I discuss the lesson in section 4.2. It is my interpretation of Larsen-Freeman’s suggestions for implementing grammaring.

3.3.5 Perception

And lastly, perception has to do with the difficulty learners could have when hearing articles being spoken. This is due to do when speaking, the articles are unaccented and the sound is reduced often to a schwa /ə/ sound.

In Snape and Yusa (2013), while explicit instruction of definiteness and specificity did not prove to be very effective, there were some improvements in learner perception of articles. They suggest that perception be taught and that “a number of ways could be used” (p. 168) but there is no suggestion as to what those ways are. Their testing involved a transcription activity which I might consider.

However, I would also like to make it part of the teacher’s notes that when the teacher says an article that they reduce it less and emphasise it more and encourage the students to do the same. If this makes their (both the student’s and the teacher’s) speech slower I consider that a good thing especially for the early stages of the course.

In sum, some researchers find it is acceptable for a teacher to offer help and advice on grammar during a communicative task even though this was not part of Krashen’s original idea about acquisition. But using recast or clarification need not necessarily interrupt the flow of the conversation. In fact, allowing a student to ask a question about a language item during a communicative activity could actually aid their acquisition.

Communicative teaching seems a form of implicit teaching to the point that it is
production-based and gives the learners the opportunity to actively use the L2. Implicit teaching can also involve other kinds of activities some of which look potentially interesting. Grammaring seems a kind of inductive approach in that the learners have to investigate for themselves what is going on with an aspect of language but is more than just learning about rules; it serves as a useful tool to understand use and meaning which might prove helpful to understand the discoursal concepts of definiteness and specificity.

I am aware that intermediate students probably have already learned some general rules about articles so my concern is that this new approach of definiteness and specificity could be confusing for them. Lopez mentions that the learners’ prior knowledge of articles could have affected the results of her research. However, after investigating explicit form-focused instruction of articles in section 3.2 and considering implicit teaching approaches, I would like to design a syllabus using both explicit and implicit methods. If they are used effectively the students will hopefully get the opportunity to have plenty of chances to produce output and not just learn rules. The use of feedback and developing an awareness of perception will also be included in the teacher’s notes. The next chapter introduces my syllabus outline and discusses specifics and practical concerns regarding the teaching of it.
4.0 A Syllabus for an Article Remedial Course for Intermediate Adult ESL Learners

I have honed in on recent article research and have identified that articles have two semantic/discoursal domains, definiteness and specificity, and that specificity could be the more challenging concept for learners to grasp. The attempt to explicitly explain definiteness and specificity has not been proven by a number of researchers to be greatly effective for learners. It has been suggested that a more communicative approach could be helpful. I have also looked into other areas like implicit teaching, feedback, grammaring and perception as possible inclusions in my syllabus design.

So, I now consider the design of the syllabus itself. This chapter is the practical application of previous chapters and it is where I present and analyse my design and discuss practical considerations in order for it to be implemented. Section 4.1 introduces the syllabus outline. Section 4.2 considers the particulars of the course in which the syllabus will be used and the syllabus itself is discussed at great length in section 4.3. Further considerations about materials, grading, assessment and the teacher are to be found in section 4.4.

4.1 Syllabus Outline

*Lesson 1 – Introduction to Definiteness (explicit)
   Exercise – Text creation (implicit)

Lesson 2 – Definiteness review (explicit)
   Information Gap activity: ‘At the Bookstore’ (Communicative)

*Lesson 3 – Introduction to Specificity (explicit)
   Exercise – Text manipulation (implicit)

Lesson 4 – Specificity reviewed (explicit)
   Information Gap: ‘Ordering Food by Phone’ (Communicative)

*Lesson 5 – Definiteness and Specificity (explicit)
   Meaning-focused worksheet (implicit)

Lesson 6 – Quick Review (explicit)
   Grammaring exercise
Overall, this is an intensive grammar/remedial course which incorporates an initial focus-on-forms by explicitly explaining definiteness and specificity. It also has opportunities to focus on form and meaning in which the grammar of articles is integrated into communicative and implicit tasks and, thereby, can hopefully aid understanding of the semantic/discoursal implications of articles.

It is now time to analyse how this syllabus could be implemented in my context.

4.2 The Course

This syllabus is intended for a group of adults coming mainly from linguistic backgrounds that have no article system (e.g. Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Polish, Russian, and Lithuanian). They are at an intermediate level of English in the UK and attend an English language teaching centre for at least 20 hours per week. All the classes are taught in English.

In this context, I am in a position to design a syllabus in an attempt to solve a problem that the students share: they all have problems with ‘a’ and ‘the’ in their speaking and writing. This is a 10 week course and each lesson is approximately one hour long. The students are already enrolled in the language centre and will receive instruction in
reading, writing, listening, speaking and grammar alongside this remedial one. This means the course is 10 hours long but as there will be very little testing during the course, they will be receiving more instruction than those students in the research discussed in sections 2.5 and 3.2.

The class size will be approximately 10-12 intermediate ESL students so the teacher can effectively help these students; for example, when facilitating the communicative tasks she can make note of inaccurate use of the articles and either give on the spot feedback or discuss it later in class. This will be discussed later in chapter 5.

The students receiving this course have already been tested and considered to be at an intermediate level and have some general knowledge of articles and mass/uncountable nouns. How they were tested and how results were reached are outwith this dissertation.

The students attend 5 days a week and come to the centre 4 hours each day. They will attend this remedial course near the beginning of the week when they are hopefully feeling more refreshed after the weekend and in a good frame of mind to concentrate and apply themselves.

4.3 Course Content

Lesson 1 and 2 are devoted to the subject of definiteness. Lesson 1: the students receive explicit instruction incorporating a PowerPoint presentation. The last third of class time is an implicit output activity called text-creation. They will be directed to create sentences and attempt to use the definite and indefinite article as best they can. They will also be given a worksheet which they will do as homework. Lesson 1 will be further discussed in chapter 5.

Lesson 2: starts with a brief explicit revision of definiteness. The rest of the time is an information gap/communicative activity ‘At the Bookstore’. There will be a discussion of helpful vocabulary and full explanation of directions before people are put into pairs to
do the activity. To make the activity more realistic, the room will be set-up like a bookstore.

Lessons 3 and 4 concentrate on specificity. The explicit instruction will be conducted in the same way as in week one. Lesson 3: the last third of the class will be another implicit output activity called text manipulation. Lesson 3 is also discussed further in chapter 5.

Lesson 4: starts with a recap of specificity. The communicative activity is ordering food by phone which could prove entertaining. Each pair will be given a phone as a prop. Vocabulary and rules will be discussed beforehand.

The remaining lessons bring together definiteness and specificity employing a variety of activities to give the students a chance to both practise what they have learned and receive more authentic input from the teacher.

Lesson 5: begins with explicit instruction of putting the two together and is delivered again by Powerpoint. The last third of the class is a meaning-focused implicit activity called True or False. Lesson 5 is also featured in chapter 5.

Lesson 6: is a recap of definiteness and specificity. This week’s exercise is grammaring. I hope to engage the students with a different type of pair work. Various types of magazines and books will be brought in and the students will work together to find sentences from these authentic materials. They will write down 10 sentences they have found. Each sentence needs to contain at least one form of article. Once that is done, they will be asked to look at each article to determine its definiteness and specificity (i.e. definite or indefinite and specific or non-specific). I will also ask them to try and note down the implication of each one as well (e.g. the lady wants to buy a book but doesn’t know which one to buy). Full instructions will be given. This can be finished as homework.

Lesson 7: is a review of definiteness and specificity followed by a communicative activity ‘At the Post Office’ where one person is behind the counter and the other is a customer. Useful vocabulary will be discussed beforehand and a full set of instructions will be given.
As post offices in the UK are also like stationery and card shops, props will be provided. They will take home a gap-fill worksheet. This lesson will also be discussed in chapter 5 in greater detail.

Lesson 8: starts with a quick review and the students are paired to do an information-gap activity in which they have to describe a symbol or a shape to their partner. They will have to sit back to back because the person listening has to try and draw it. A selection of interesting shapes and symbols will be provided (either an actual object or a laminated picture). This activity was mentioned in Ellis (1982) and comes from an early communicative course book from the 70s. As Ellis explains, “the focus is on the message throughout” (p 76) and there could potentially be much negotiating if the message is not clear enough.

Lesson 9: after a quick review, there are two communicative activities involving pictures. In the first one, pairs take turns discussing the differences between two pictures. The second activity is a picture dictation. Dictation is not necessarily considered a communicative activity but it could prove useful especially as this syllabus will be trying to develop perception awareness when someone says a/an or the. Still in pairs, each learner chooses a picture and writes 5 sentences describing it with the only stipulation that each sentence must contain at least one article. Then each student must dictate their sentences to their partner and they each compare what each other has written (see section 3.3.5 concerning perception). These are not necessarily information gap activities but there is a sense of communication and interaction.

Lesson 10: the class starts off with a worksheet which must be completed in class. While this is not to be considered a test, the worksheet will nevertheless give an indication of whether learners have improved from earlier worksheets which will have all been kept. The last activity ends on a high note. The running dictation\(^9\) involves pair work in which one person reads a piece of text, tries to memorise as much of it as possible and then runs back and dictates it to their partner who then writes it all down. The slight twist I want to put on this activity is that the text will be jumbled up with the sentences taped to

---

\(^9\) This idea comes from http://www.learnenglish.de/teachers/rundictation.html (accessed on 03/09/15)
the wall in various places in and outside the classroom. After all the sentences have been written down, they have to be put them in order. As this is a running dictation, this is considered a race so there will be prizes for first, second and third place. First place will be awarded to the pair who finish the quickest with the most accurate dictation and the sentences put in the correct order, and second and third determined accordingly.

The next section considers some practical considerations for implementing the syllabus.

4.4 Further Considerations

4.4.1 Materials and Equipment

Students will receive copies of the PowerPoint presentations for their own use so a durable plastic folder will be given to each of them to keep their copies together. A computer or lap top, screen and pointer will be required for the Powerpoint presentations as well as a whiteboard and an assortment of coloured board markers. A classroom that can easily accommodate 12 students will be needed.

Appropriate signs or posters for a book store and post office will be needed as well as books, magazines, greeting cards, stationery items and perhaps some chocolates and sweets. Toy phones will be used when ordering food. Some books and magazines will also be required for the grammar exercise in Lesson 6.

For lessons 1, 3 and 5, worksheets with implicit tasks have been devised to hopefully help students understand definiteness, specificity and the two together. Worksheets for lessons 7 and 10 are gap-fill exercises. All these worksheets can be found in the appendix with the exception of lesson 10.

Colourful and interesting pictures will be needed at various times throughout the course. Objects with interesting shapes (e.g. a star-shaped pin cushion, a conch shell, a small pillow shaped like a pig’s head, etc) and pictures of symbols and shapes are needed in Lesson 8. Pictures will feature prominently in Lesson 9 for describing the difference between two pictures and the picture dictation. Ideally, the pictures for describing the
difference need to be the same picture but altered in some way in the second picture. All
the pictures in Lessons 8 and 9 and the sentences for the running dictation in Lesson 10
should be laminated to make them durable for future use. And, of course, some prizes
will be needed for the winners of the running dictation.

4.4.2 Grading, sequencing and assessment

I have justified my syllabus in terms of the conclusions and recommendations of GenSLA
research. As far as grading and sequencing of my syllabus is considered, definiteness is
considered first, then specificity and then the two together based on Sabir’s
recommendations. Within the definiteness section, I consider the definite article first and
then the indefinite article as per section 3.1.

Because explicit instruction did not prove to be effective, I took on board the
recommendation to provide communicative teaching to provide more authentic input.
But I found that communicative teaching is just one aspect of implicit teaching so I have
also included other implicit methods.

The activities overall hopefully contain an element of novelty and variety. The classroom
will be made up to look like a bookstore and post office on role play days. The use of
colour and unusual photographs will be important for those activities requiring objects
and pictures. I endeavour to have at least one activity that each student will enjoy. I
have used a variety of techniques and activities to hopefully keep the students engaged,
stimulated, free from boredom and challenged within their capabilities. According to
Tomlinson (2011), design should make an impact on the learners and I think this syllabus
achieves that.

As regards assessment, one of the aims of the course is to have an anxious-free
environment as possible; “...the less anxious the learner, the better language acquisition
proceeds...” (Dulay, 1982). Someone else at the language centre will be devising an
achievement test for the students to take after they have finished the course in which
their progress can be quantitatively gauged. But during the course, all worksheets that
the learners have completed will be collected and saved. In this way, the teacher can get a general idea of how each student is progressing.

4.4.3 The teacher

The main proviso is if the learners are to receive authentic comprehensible input – which includes the explicit explanation of the rules concerning definiteness and specificity – then a native English speaker must teach this course. Practically speaking, the students could potentially come from diverse countries so it would be quite difficult to cater for all native speakers of different languages anyway. It is also preferred that the teacher has some knowledge of linguistics so they will be acquainted with linguistic terminology. The teacher should also have a good degree of patience and a warm and caring attitude to allay student anxiety.

The next chapter will look at 4 hours’ worth of lessons (a total of 4 lessons) including all written materials for the students as well as the teacher’s guide and lesson notes.
5.0 Guidebook and Sample Units

In this chapter I discuss my chosen 4 hours’ worth of lessons including the teacher’s handbook and lesson guide, materials and instructions on how to use them. They are also all included in the appendix. As this is a course based on GenSLA findings, conclusions and recommendations concerning articles, and this has not ever knowingly been taught before at any school or institution, section 5.1 is particularly important for the teacher. Part One of the teacher’s handbook explains the theory behind the course. Part Two discusses important practical considerations for teaching. Section 5.2 discusses the PowerPoint presentations which can be found in Appendices D. (They correlate with lessons 1, 3 and 5). Sections 5.3, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6 go over the rest of the materials contained in each lesson separately. All the materials – PowerPoint presentations and worksheets, etc, - are considered in terms of their being designed for impact to aid acquisition in section 5.7

5.1 Teacher’s Handbook: Part One and Part Two (Appendix A)

Part One provides vital information that has been discussed throughout this dissertation concerning GenSLA research on articles. I also explain why much of the course incorporates communicative and implicitly-based activities. This has already been discussed in section 3.4.

I have aimed to discuss the theory behind the course as straightforwardly as possible but I think a teacher qualified in Applied Linguistics may find it easier to comprehend.

Part Two considers many practical considerations for this course that I think are important for implementation. A lot of it is based on what I have discussed previously in section 3.4 and also what I consider common sense considering the context of when and where it is going to be taught.

For instance, as this is going to be taught in a language institute with many teachers, it stands to reason that the rest of the staff are also acquainted with the concepts of
definiteness and specificity. For that reason, the chosen teacher for this course will also teach her colleagues the explicit lessons 1, 3 and 5 including all the worksheets before the commencement of the course. Her colleagues will also be involved teaching these students speaking, writing, listening, learning and grammar. This new way of thinking about articles could affect these other classes. For example, in writing class, when the students make errors with articles, if the writing teacher is aware of what the students have learned, they could potentially give corrective feedback in terms of definiteness and specificity therefore maintaining consistency and avoiding confusion.

Constant in-use evaluation is vital for this course. Considerations like what worked, what did not work, what could be improved or added are included in the in-use evaluation for the teacher. Students will also be involved and there are two forms for them. Form one is for explicitly taught lessons that will be handed round at the end of the class. Form two is to be handed round at the end of a communicative/implicit activity. Students are asked things like what they liked about the lesson, what they did not like, was it useful, helpful, fun, too hard, etc. All forms in the handbook are based on McGrath (2002). These evaluations could be vital for post-use evaluation and future design.

Corrective feedback for both oral and written tasks is vital. The important idea about oral feedback is incorporating it into a communicative activity. It does not necessarily have to involve stopping the activity to explain anything. The use of recast or clarification are two techniques that the teacher could employ. But, of course, it is up to the teacher whether or not she will need to explicitly explain any recurring errors but they should be noted and discussed after the task is finished. I also discuss allowing the students to ask questions concerning the grammar that is troubling them as this could possibly help with their acquisition.

Despite not many written activities, I, nevertheless explain written feedback in detail in the handbook. I do this because there is also plenty of research in this area and it is worth considering. There is one written activity in Lesson 1 called Write Me a Story. If the recommendations are followed, providing written corrective feedback and then asking the students to do at least one re-write will make this activity last for five weeks.
I also discuss perception in the handbook (see section 3.4). In the early part of this course, I recommend the teacher slow down her speech and emphasise ‘the’ and ‘a/an’ when she says them. But as the course progresses, I feel that the teacher’s talking speed should be normalised and the articles said in a normal way. The students should also be encouraged to emphasise their articles in the early stages, too. As this was one aspect of research that saw some positive effect, it is worth a try to see what happens. This could be one thing that the teacher can bring up in her evaluations.

Another important consideration is that this course is to be taught in a relaxed environment. Anxiety, according to some researchers, does not make for acquisition or a happy learner. The teacher will have to be upbeat and have a lot of patience as this new way of considering articles could be potentially very confusing.

Part Three of the handbook is the detailed lesson guide for the sample units which can be found in Appendices B (B1-B4).

5.2 The PowerPoint Presentations (Appendices D)

5.2.1. Lesson One: Definiteness

Definiteness is discussed first according to recommendations by Sabir (2015). Recommendations are also followed to first discuss the definite article followed by the indefinite article. The definition I use mainly for definiteness mainly comes from Ionin et al (2004) (see section 2.5). The addition of the word ‘familiar’ comes from Lyons (1999). The explanations for both definiteness and indefiniteness are explained in a simplified way. I only gave a couple of examples of definiteness in section 2.5 but the Lesson One PowerPoint presentation lists many more examples based on Lyons (1999). This section is organised as follows:

- Definiteness: Single count nouns
- Definiteness: Plural count nouns and uncountable nouns (‘the’ only)
- Indefiniteness: Single count nouns
- Indefiniteness: Plural count nouns and uncountable nouns (null article)
I use the word ‘single’ instead of the more linguistically correct ‘singular’ for brevity.

I mention in the lesson guide (Appendices B1 – Lesson 1, section 2) that this course is to enhance what they already know. I understand that Lopez (2015) felt their prior general knowledge of articles could have made the students overthink their responses but what would be the point of casting everything aside that they have already learned? In particular, any prior knowledge of mass nouns could be very helpful for them. I also make a point that the teacher may have to review the difference between countable and mass nouns as I know from experience these are difficult for learners.

5.2.2. Lesson Three: Specificity

Lesson Three is the PowerPoint presentation for specificity. I gave the definition for specificity in section 2.5. However, researchers like Sabir (2015) and Lopez (2015) mention that Ionin et al’s (2004) “noteworthy property” is disputed so I have decided to stick with Ionin et al’s definition without any mention of it. This also helps to keep the explanation simple. In the teacher’s handbook, I also stick with Ionin et al’s explanation that it is possibly the semantic quality of specificity that could be causing the difficulty for students. I do not mention anything about ESK or semantic universals. I also decided not to discuss ‘referential this’ (see section 2.5) as an example of specificity due to its colloquial nature. The students might not be familiar with ‘referential this’ and teaching it is outwith the scope of this syllabus.

This section is organised as follows:

- Specificity: single count nouns (‘the’, ‘a/an’)
- Non-specificity: single count nouns (‘the’, ‘a/an’)
- Specificity: plural count nouns (‘the’) and mass nouns (‘the’/null article)
- Non-specificity: plural count nouns (‘the’) and mass nouns (‘the’/null article)
5.2.3. Lesson Five: Definiteness and Specificity

The Lesson Five PowerPoint presentation brings the two semantic qualities together. I discuss the four possible combinations: [+def, +spec], [-def, -spec], [+def, -spec] and [-spec, +def] and show examples and provide explanations. I also provide the abbreviation in the above form because the ‘+’ and ‘-’ symbols could help with visualisation. In the last section, the students will have the opportunity to guess the semantic qualities. The lesson notes explain that the last two combinations ([+def, -spec] and [-spec, +def]) gave learners the most problem in research so I suggest to the teacher she notes which combinations give her students the most trouble for her own observations.

Snape and Yusa (2013) recommend emphasising definiteness but after considering their lesson notes I am not sure how they want this is to be achieved. However, the students are going to have opportunities for output where the teacher will be able to judge for herself what the students need in the way of further explanation and practice.

See also the respective lesson guides for more detailed information: Lesson 1 (Appendices B1, section 2), Lesson 3 (Appendices B2, section 3) and Lesson 5 (Appendices B3, section 2).

5.3 Lesson One Materials

Write me a Story! (Start in class and finish as homework) Appendices C1

After the presentation, there is the Write me a Story implicit text-creation activity. I have already discussed text-creation in section 4.3. The instructions are meant to be clear and straight-forward. I have provided writing lines to help with neatness. As the titles suggests, I want them to write a story according their capabilities - not just a sentence or two. The directions for the teacher provides a list of suggestions for the learners to consider to help create their stories.
Definiteness Worksheet (give as homework) Appendices C2

The Definiteness Worksheet is a gap-fill exercise based on what they have learned in the lesson. They are not just sentences but simple conversations that hopefully add more depth to the context.

5.4 Lesson Three Materials

Change the Specificity Worksheet (start in class and finish as homework) Appendices C3

The worksheet for this lesson involves text-manipulation (see section 4.3). They are given a sentence which has an underlined article plus the noun (or a null article). If the article is specific, the student has to make the sentence into a non-specific one and vice versa. They are creating a sentence but manipulating the specificity.

5.5 Lesson Five Materials

True or False Worksheet (start in class and probably finish at home) Appendices C4

I had originally planned to do an implicit grammar activity involving input in which the students would have to figure out the meaning of a sentence by choosing a picture (see section 3.1.1) but my skills as a drawer are sadly lacking. Nevertheless, the worksheet is still concerned with meaning and pragmatics but in a ‘true or false’ format so there is still an element of interpreting input.

5.6 Lesson Seven

‘At the Post Office’ role play hand-out Appendices C5

The hand-out accompanying the activity is a list of useful words and phrases for the customer and post office clerk. Most of the words they will know but there will be some new ones that will need to be explained. These are words and phrases often heard in UK post offices. The phrases are for mainly buying stamps and other items, sending letters and bringing ‘parcels’ to be weighed and sent. But if students have other ideas they are to be encouraged to ask questions about vocabulary and grammar.
Worksheet: review of an/an, the or null article (homework) Appendices C6

The take-home worksheet is a gap-fill exercise. This is lesson seven and the course is well over half-way. Consider this like a take-home test to gauge how they are doing. But the students do not need to know this.

5.7 Designed for Impact

5.7.1. PowerPoint Presentation Design

In line with creating a design for impact, I have endeavoured not to overload the slides with a lot of words and maintain a sense of space. The presentations are colourful and also have plenty of pictures – some of them humorous. I have also used the transition and animation feature of PowerPoint so explanations and answers can be revealed when the teacher decides. This means that students are often encouraged to think for themselves about the answers first.

Also, there should not be any problems with copywrite as all the pictures are free to use.

5.7.2. Worksheets and Hand-outs

Again, not overloading the page with a lot of words has been considered throughout the design and a font is used that is not too large or small (Calibri 11 or 12 most of the time). The instructions are clear with helpful examples at the beginning of most worksheets. The addition of humorous and/or colourful little pictures will hopefully help the students to feel less anxious about completing the worksheets and even enjoy what they are doing.
6.0 Conclusion

I was inspired to do this syllabus design dissertation because GenSLA researchers put forward the idea that their research can be of help to ESL/EFL teachers. I like the idea of taking linguistic research and applying it in a practical way. GenSLA researchers have attempted to find out why certain aspects of learning another language can cause so much difficulty in generative terms and offer a possible solution to make the teaching of specific grammar points more effective.

For instance, in section 2.1, the idea was put forward that the syntax of prepositional modifiers seems to be innately universal so the teacher does not need to waste time teaching them. But the explicit teaching of the semantic notions of them could be more effective. However, adjectival modifiers could require more explicit teaching of certain forms but the traditional way of memorising lists should be replaced with more natural input.

In section 2.2 it was found that neither the implicit nor explicit teaching of the more marked syntax of English adverb word order had much effect on French learners so it was suggested that a learner-centred approach like grammaring be utilised.

Explicit teaching of the difference in the topic and focus structures between English and Spanish was recommended for ESL and SSL students in section 2.3, in particular, for the ESL students for them to understand the specific/non-specific semantic quality of Spanish topicalisation. Plenty of authentic input is also suggested for them to help with acquisition.

Quantifier research into the use of the word ‘any’ in English in section 2.4 showed that advanced learners are able to understand the semantic and syntactic complexities of the word but trying to speed up the process with explicit teaching of the various ways ‘any’ can be used did not help. The suggestion was made that less proficient students receive more authentic input by incorporating a communicative methodology.
Section 2.5 discussed the semantic notions of definiteness and specificity in articles and that the former could be causing English learners to have difficulty acquiring the English article system. However, explicit teaching of definiteness and specificity was not found to be effective.

While researching these studies was very interesting, implementing recommendations could prove problematic because they have not necessarily been proven to work for that specific item of grammar. Also, as a teacher and syllabus designer, I would have liked more information about the recommendations concerning explicit teaching. However, this could have been outwith the intentions of the researchers. I also question the justification of some of these recommendations because the methods of testing involved very little time to explicitly teach certain linguistics items.

My syllabus design wanted to solve a problem: how could I possibly help a group of adult intermediate ESL learners improve their use of articles? I carried on from section 2.5 and looked into the most current research of the subject by Lopez (2015) and Sabir (2005). Although they provided detailed lesson materials, they also came to the conclusion that explicit teaching only has a minor effect.

Nevertheless, I took the recommendations of Gil, Marsden and Whong (2013) and considered other techniques that give learners opportunities to produce both written and spoken output and to receive more authentic input. I also considered the use of grammaring which might enable students to think more about the discoursal and semantic nature of articles. So, I decided to make a syllabus that incorporates both explicit and implicit forms of teaching. I hope the use of colour, space, pictures and a sense of fun are contained in the materials. I also hope the intention of creating an anxiety-free teaching environment will also be effective.

But, of course, the question is will this syllabus really work? The teacher and the students will be constantly evaluating it; the teacher will be keeping track of improvements in handed-in worksheets and during lessons as well as evaluating a number of things including the efficacy of any impromptu adaptations or note if the materials were easy to
follow, etc. The students will also be noting what they found helpful or interesting, etc. So, post-evaluation could ascertain if the teaching staff think this syllabus is useful and/or what needs to be changed. An achievement test could be devised to give further indication of the success of the course. This syllabus could also be piloted by an institution before considering it as part of their curriculum but even so, evaluation by the teacher and students could still be considered a vital component. I am also open to the idea of SLA researchers using this syllabus in some way to quantitatively gauge its effectiveness.

It may be the case that a further syllabus will be needed for teaching definiteness and specificity as it has been suggested that this is an area in which students maybe need more than 10 weeks to learn. Genericity has been mentioned in passing but maybe a syllabus design for teaching it could be investigated.

In the beginning of this paper I mentioned researchers encouraging teachers to investigate SLA theories to solve teaching puzzles. But I know that once I leave university I might be in a teaching position where finding current SLA research could prove very difficult. It would be good if journals and expensive edited works were more accessible to teachers working in the field and there is more sharing of ideas and communication between researchers and teachers.

I hope the syllabus design presented here could be seriously considered as part of the curriculum of an English language teaching institution and be of genuine benefit to its English learners who struggle with some of the most difficult and complex morphemes in the English language.
Bibliography


Appendices

Appendix A: Teacher’s Handbook - Part One and Part Two

Forward
This course has been developed for students who could benefit from more help with their understanding of definite and indefinite articles. Up-to-date second language acquisition theory and research has been considered and incorporated into the design. Hopefully at the end of the 10 week course the students will have shown an improvement in their understanding and usage of articles and that the teacher will have enjoyed teaching it.

Introduction
As this is a special remedial course for the teaching of articles to intermediate ESL adults, this handbook is being provided as part training manual part lesson guide. Materials have been developed for the course and full explanations for their use are also provided.

Part One explains the theory behind this present course. Part Two explains how it is to be taught and generally run. Part Three is the detailed lesson guide. Please read this handbook carefully. This course is a new way to approach the subject of teaching articles and has never been knowingly taught anywhere else before.

Part One: Theory behind the course
Generative Second Language Acquisition (GenSLA) theory and research has been the basis for the design of this course. GenSLA researchers assume that language is an innate ability within the brain that is controlled by universal grammar (UG). Children have the ability to acquire language from an early age almost effortlessly and without the same amount of negative and positive evidence that adult learners seem to need. Because of this phenomena, GenSLA researchers maintain the existence of an in-built UG. However, GenSLA researchers argue that UG can still exist in adults but other factors have to be taken into consideration like the influence from the first language and how syntax can mix with the morphology, semantics, phonology and/or pragmatics between the two languages.
With regard to articles, GenSLA researchers have acknowledged the difficulties learners face when acquiring the correct use of articles and have looked into why this is the case. Researchers have pinpointed four different qualities of articles.

- Definiteness
- Specificity
- Genericity
- Perception

Ionin et al, (2004) investigated learners who have no articles in their native language – Korean and Russian. According to their theory, because these languages do not contain articles, when learning another language that does contain articles, UG can only inform learners of the possibilities of what the articles could be in the other language. In other words, there is no transfer of their native language (L1).

Ionin et al also maintained that specificity could be a factor that causes students a lot of the difficulty. They maintained their research found that specificity caused the learners to fluctuate between definiteness and specificity. When sentences had a definite and specific semantic meaning [+def, +spec] or an indefinite and non-specific meaning [-def, -spec], the learners scored relatively higher than with sentences that had a mixed meaning [+def, -spec] or [-def, +spec].

From this research, the idea was put forward of explicitly teaching the semantic qualities of both definiteness and specificity. Would explicit instruction of articles help the students and decrease this fluctuating phenomena? Ionin et al as well as other researchers like Snape and Yusa (2013), Lopez (2015) and Sabir (2015) have all had similar results to the point that explicit instruction has not proven to be totally effective. However, some say there are slight benefits.

Therefore, this is why three of the lessons contain explicit instruction of definiteness and specificity and follows the suggested order of definiteness first (Lesson 1) followed by

---

10In 2008, Ionin et al also conducted more research this time with Spanish speakers. Spanish already has a two-article system so the students were able to successfully transfer the semantic meaning of their articles into English. However, other studies suggest that students with other L1s that also have a two-article system may fluctuate in [+def, -spec] or [-def, +spec] contexts, too. (Sabir 2015).
specificity (Lesson 3) and then putting them together (Lesson 5). As well as this, Lesson 1 also starts with the definite article and then the indefinite as research suggests learners tend to get to grips with the definite article first.

This course is mainly going to deal with the semantic notions of definiteness and specificity as these two ideas are challenging enough. It is hoped in the future to also consider a remedial course that will include genericity. As for perception, this will be discussed shortly in Part Two.

Consideration has also been given to the fact that research has not proven explicit instruction alone is effective so other avenues needed to be investigated.

Explicit instruction did not prove effective in another piece of GenSLA research by Gil, Marsden and Whong (2013). They also found explicitly teaching English learners about the word ‘any’ to be ineffective. The researchers suggested employing an approach whereby the students receive plenty of authentic input which also focusses on meaning; in other words a more communicative and task-based approach. Therefore, this course employs explicit and implicit techniques giving the students plenty of output opportunities which is said to aid acquisition. More background knowledge about the techniques and why they are used will be discussed in the lesson guide.

This is also a course for intermediate learners. Practically speaking, at an earlier level, the students are not linguistically ready. And some of the research suggests that the intermediate level (both lower and higher) is a recommended stage for teaching articles.

The students will be taught by you, a native English speaker, so that they will receive authentic input at all times. It is hoped that the consideration of up-to-date SLA research about articles and the attempt to combine it in a teaching syllabus will make this remedial course effective and truly aid acquisition.

It is hoped that both you and the students will also enjoy the course.
Part Two: Practical considerations

A. Teaching the teachers

Before this course commences, you will be required to teach Lessons 1, 3 and 5 to the rest of the teaching staff. This includes presenting all the PowerPoint presentations and having the teachers complete all the hand-outs associated with these lessons. The students attend the institute full-time so they will be having standard reading, writing, listening, speaking and grammar lessons alongside this remedial course with the other members of staff.

There are practical reasons for doing this. Their writing teachers, for instance, will be able to explain any article errors these students make in their classes in terms of definiteness and specificity thereby keeping instruction consistent and hopefully free of confusion. Also, it’s a new approach in the institute and your colleagues need to be made aware of it.

B. Teaching the students

This class will have up to 12 students who mainly have no articles in their L1s. This is so that the teacher can devote more attention to those students who need this extra help.

It will be held one day a week for 10 weeks on a Tuesday morning from 11 am – 12 pm. The timing is important. On a Friday, it would be too close to the weekend. On a Monday, it would be too soon after! And it is to be held before lunch just in case they feel tired after eating.

The classroom should easily accommodate 12 students but with additional space. You are going to need it!

During the explicit instruction, (Lessons 1, 3 and 5), students will be required to view a PowerPoint presentation so ensure that they are seated looking straight at the screen and their view is not blocked. There is also a lot of pair work activity so students should try to sit in pairs during these kinds of activities. There are also role plays where it will be a good idea to put the tables and chairs in a corner of the room.
C. Your role as the teacher

During the explicit instruction, more teacher talk time (TTT) will be required. However, during the role plays and other kinds of implicit learning, your role will be that of a helper and facilitator.

Research suggests that in order to aid acquisition, a relaxed environment is vital. You have been chosen because the institute believes you have the best qualities to teach this course. Always endeavour to smile and maintain your warm and friendly personality. The learners are going to make mistakes. It is inevitable. They could be anxious about this. Patience is vital. Reassure them that you are there to help them. Mistakes are good things. They let the teacher know where the problems lie and they can be corrected.

Also, the learners will not be tested during the course. It is hoped that this will allay their fears somewhat. However, there will be an achievement test after the course has been finished. In the meantime, every worksheet and writing assignment is to be handed-in and kept for evaluation purposes both for yourself and the institute.

There are two important aspects of the course that need to be explained as they will be important in every lesson: perception and giving feedback (both oral and written).

D. Perception

It was found in research (Snape and Yusa, 2013) that the explicit teaching of perception proved effective. Perception has to do with the ability of a student to hear *a, an or the* being spoken. Articles are only one syllable and are often unstressed ending up with the ‘schwa’ sound. This could be partly why learners find articles so difficult to learn. Explicit teaching of perception involved transcription and listening to a spoken passage being heard over and over again as long as the student needed to hear it to get it right. This is beyond the scope of this present course. However, the communicative task, Picture Dictation (Lesson 9) has a transcription aspect to it.

You can help your students with their perception by:
• Speaking clearly and slowing down your speech, if necessary
• Emphasizing the articles that you speak
• Getting your students to do the same

In the early lessons of this course, especially, consider it a vital tool in the classroom to speak slower and give more emphasis to the articles when speaking.

This may sound odd to you but it could be what your students need to help with acquisition. As the course proceeds, it is up to you to decide how much you wish to speed up your speech and say the articles like you would normally.

E. Giving Oral Feedback

A teacher employs the use of feedback because a student either lacks the necessary grammar or a teacher considers a grammar point needs to be discussed at some stage.

However, the idea of traditional correction whereby the teacher explicitly corrects a learner’s mistakes has been questioned by the likes of researchers like Krashen (1982); Krashen and Terrell (1983) when considering what will aid acquisition. Krashen suggests using techniques that parents naturally use when talking with their young children like repeating, prompting and expanding. And these techniques certainly have their merit.

So, what are the suggested ways to correct the learners taking this course? Before answering this question, let’s look at two types of feedback, implicit and explicit, and also the idea of uptake.

Implicit feedback involves disguising your response to a student’s error. This could be in the form of clarification or recast. For example:

*Clarification*

Student: I like to play the tennis.
Teacher: Pardon...what?
Student: I like to uhhh play tennis.
Teacher: Yes, good.
Recast

Student: I like to play the tennis.
Teacher: I like to play tennis.
Student: Uhh, yeah, I like to play tennis

The above examples can be used during a communicative task without breaking the flow of the conversation and become part of the communicative process.

Explicit feedback involves discussing the grammar rules along with direct correction. This form of feedback can often stop the flow but need not be totally disregarded as a way to correct student error.

The term ‘uptake’ has been discussed by various researchers to mean how the student reacts to the teacher’s feedback. The uptake is considered successful if the student can use the grammar form correctly after being corrected. Uptake can occur due to the teacher considering that a student error needs to be corrected. There is also the uptake that occurs if a student stops the flow of communication to ask about a particular grammar point. According to researchers like Ellis et al (2001) and Lyster and Ranta (1997), there is the suggestion that allowing a student to stop the activity and ask the teacher questions could help with their acquisition.

The suggested method for correction, particularly with communicative tasks, is to first try to incorporate implicit correction so that it becomes part of the activity itself. However, if it is felt that the students just aren’t getting a grammar point, a more explicit form of correction can be used – perhaps jotting down the error so that it can be discussed later. However, as it seems that allowing students to stop the flow of an activity to ask questions can be of benefit to them, they should be allowed to do so.

F. Giving Written Feedback

There are not as many written tasks on this course as there are spoken ones. Nevertheless, written correction needs to be considered, in particular, with Write Me a
I include a discussion about giving written feedback because extensive research has been done concerning the subject. It is recommended that you try and implement some of the suggestions as best you can and find out what will work best for your students.

Truscott (1996) maintains that correction of written grammar errors is not efficacious. One of the reasons mentioned is that students simply continue to make the same errors over and over again. Instead, the teacher should rather concentrate on form (presentation, style, ideas, etc). However, other researchers like Ferris (1995; 1999; 2003) have actively promoted the correction of written grammar errors and investigated ways to make them effective. The rest of this section is mainly based on Ferris’ research.

Written feedback can also be explicit and implicit. Explicit correction involves direct correction of errors, for example the traditional view of using a red pen to cross out errors and give the correct form immediately above the error or in the margin. This also seems to be, in general, the students’ preferred manner of correction.

However, implicit error correction indicates only that an error has been made. This could involve simply underlining the error and have the student work out for themselves what it could be. Or, underlining the error and giving a hint in the margin what kind of error it is (e.g. verb choice, article, word choice, etc). In research, this indirect form of correction proved effective for university-level students.

Teachers also employ the use of hedging language as in ‘you might consider using...’ or ‘you could do this instead’ or asking a question ‘does this verb tense sound right to you?’.

But students often do not always understand the subtlety of this form of correction and end up not correcting the error.

Also, the idea of ‘sugaring the pill’ (Hyland and Hyland, 2001) also has to be used with care. For example: “This is good but...”, “I liked what you did here but...” This can be
okay to use with some students but other students might take this negatively.

So, to answer the question, what form or correction will best serve our students, let’s consider the context. These are intermediate level ESL adult students. Even though the indirect method worked for the learners in the studies does not mean this method will work for all students all the time. The students on this course have a problem with articles and may require an explicit form of correction for them to understand why they have made an error.

It is recommended, especially for the Write me a Story activity in Lesson One, to explicitly/directly correct any errors to do with articles with a short explanation either in the margin or on a separate sheet of paper.

As regards other types of errors (verb endings, word choice, etc), use your discretion. You are advised to speak to their writing teachers to ascertain your students’ abilities. There is the possibility that some students may require explicit correction in these areas, too. However, some students may be proficient enough to be corrected indirectly. But be aware that if you introduce the implicit approach at any time, you must give a full explanation of any terms or symbols that you use.

It is advised to directly correct any form of idiomatic speech.

Avoid the use of hedging language.

Be direct, but polite, when correcting. If you must sugar the pill, do so only if you feel they will take this style of constructive criticism well. Again, refer to their writing teachers to get an idea of your students’ attitude towards writing and any previous negative reaction to receiving feedback.

And, of course, as the course progresses you are going to get to know your students and so you will be able to make your own assessment of their abilities and attitudes to a number of things, including how they take criticism.
It is strongly recommended that you ask them to re-write Write Me a Story one time.

It is advised when correcting any work, to make photocopies of it and hand them back their original work. A copy of their work is to be retained for evaluation purposes.

G. Evaluation: In-use

You are also to maintain in-use evaluation as we need to know what has worked, what has not and how we can improve the course to make it better. This is to be done after each lesson as soon as possible.

Please use the following suggested list of questions although feel free to add any other information that you consider important:

**In terms of the lesson plan itself:**

1. Did you have to change the order of the lesson plan?
2. What did you change and why?
3. And did your changes work?

**In terms of the materials used during a lesson:**

4. What did you leave unchanged?
5. Did these materials work well for you and the students? Give specific examples:
6. Did you have to adapt any of the materials spontaneously?
7. Did your adaptation(s) work?
8. If it/they did not work, what do you think would work the next time the material(s) is/are used?

H. Evaluation: Learners

The learners are another valuable source of information to determine what has and has not worked. There are two types of forms you can use here.

- Form One is for their opinion of a lesson overall.
- Form Two is for their opinion of a specific task or activity.
Form One is suggested for those lessons like 1, 3 and 5 that are more explicitly-taught. Form Two can be used the rest of the time handed-out immediately after completing an activity. At this early stage of implementation, every communicative activity has to be evaluated.

Form One

Please answer the following questions. Please do not write your name on this form!

1. Overall, did you enjoy the lesson today? (circle one)

   IT WAS                           IT WAS                                  IT WAS                     I DID NOT ENJOY
   GREAT                            GOOD                             OK                           THE LESSON

2. How much do you think this lesson will help you use articles correctly? (circle one)

   IT WILL HELP                 IT WILL HELP                      IT WONT HELP                  I DON’T KNOW
   A LOT                              A LITTLE BIT                       AT ALL

3. Was there anything you liked about the lesson?

4. Was there anything that you did not like about the lesson?

Form Two

Please answer the following questions about the activity that we have just finished. Please do not write your name on this form!

1. How easy was it for you to do the activity? (Circle one)

   VERY                          QUITE                              A BIT                               VERY
   EASY                                 EASY                              HARD                               HARD

2. How much did you enjoy doing this activity? (circle one)

   ENJOYED IT                     ENJOYED IT                        DID NOT ENJOY                    I HATED IT
   A LOT                              A LITTLE BIT                       IT

3. How much will the activity help you improve your English and use articles correctly?

   VERY                          A LITTLE                            NOT VERY                          I DON’T KNOW
   MUCH                        BIT                              MUCH

4. Is there anything you liked about the activity?

5. Is there anything you did not like about the activity?
Both teacher in-use evaluations and learner evaluations are a vital component of our post-use evaluation of the course. Please ensure evaluations are all completed.

Good luck and happy teaching!

References:

Appendices B: Part Three – Lesson Guide

In this part, we go through the lesson plans one by one giving background information and instructions for use. It is important to adhere to the instructions as much as possible. If you have had to adapt anything, this is to be mentioned in your lesson evaluation.

Appendices B1: Lesson One Lesson Plan

1. A Warm Welcome
2. Definiteness PowerPoint Presentation
3. Write me a Story! (Start in class and finish as homework)
4. Definiteness Worksheet (give as homework)

1. A Warm Welcome (8-10 minutes)

Remember you are creating a friendly environment so the students will not feel undue anxiety. Welcome them with a smile and speak to them by their name. Introduce yourself briefly (because some or all of the students might not know you) and perhaps ask them all a simple question like “Where do you come from?” or “What is your favourite British food?” (remember, this class is just before lunch so the students might be feeling hungry!).

Remember to slow down your speech and when you say the, a or an that you emphasise these words.

They should already know why they have been chosen for this class, nevertheless, explain briefly that this class is to help them use articles correctly, mainly when they talk, but there will also be some written work.

Mention that there will be many activities so there is an element of fun.

And there is to be no testing during the course. The achievement test is after the course is completed. You only ask that during the course they complete any hand-outs and written tasks and hand them in. (Remember to make copies of their work and hand them back their originals).
Let them know how and when you can be contacted if they have any concerns or questions.
Most of the above can also be included in an information hand-out if you so choose to create one.

2. *Definiteness Powerpoint Presentation (25-30 minutes)*

a. We’ve already explained the theory behind this course in Part One so now it is time to present the first explicit lesson. Let’s have a look at the semantic idea of definiteness first. Teachers often use the words ‘definite’ and ‘specific’ interchangeably but semantically they are quite different, in particular, when it comes to articles. However, it is important to point out that even though this is a new way of thinking about articles, the knowledge that the students already have about articles need not be cast aside. It can still be useful. Think of this new approach of enhancing what they already know.

There are four categories that will be discussed:

- Definiteness: Singular count nouns
- Definiteness: Plural count nouns and mass/uncountable nouns
- Indefiniteness: Singular count nouns
- Indefiniteness: Plural count nouns and mass/uncountable nouns

All examples in these four categories are provided with semantic meanings in brackets: [ ].

The main semantic idea behind definiteness is that *both* the speaker and listener are aware of the noun in some way. It could be because the noun has been mentioned before so the next time ‘the’ can be used. Or there is an element of common knowledge (e.g. the sun or the president). There is a sense of the noun being familiar or identifiable to both parties. There is also a sense of the speaker creating a familiarity for the listener as in “You know *the movie* about a boy who finds an alien in the cupboard, don’t you?”
However, definiteness for plural count nouns and mass nouns is semantically different. Here, the semantic meaning involves inclusiveness; a sense of ‘all of them’.

The opposite is indefiniteness; in that both the speaker and the listener do not share knowledge of the noun phrase or the noun phrase lacks uniqueness. To illustrate this, three of the sentences in the definiteness: singular count noun category have been turned into an indefinite context. Make sure the learners can see the semantic difference.

Indefiniteness for plural count nouns and mass nouns take the null article Ø.

Most of the explanations for definiteness comes from Lyons (1999).

b. This lesson is in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. There are quite a few slides but this is for a good reason. The rules, examples and semantic meanings are not all crammed together. There is plenty of space and the presentation will make an impact with the use of colour and illustrations. Humour is never far behind either. All of these points are said to help with acquisition.

c. The transition and animation features on PowerPoint have been used on each slide so please go through the presentation yourself a few times.

d. Make copies of the presentation for the students but it is suggested that you hand them out after the presentation. As each example is animated, you can wait to reveal the semantic meaning in brackets. This can be an opportunity for students to try and think for themselves what the semantic meaning is before you reveal it.

e. Make sure you speak clearly, slowly, maintain eye contact as much as possible and emphasise your articles! Encourage them to ask questions and be ready to answer them.

f. Certain slides need your close attention:
Slide 2 (What is Definiteness 2): Point out to the students that the response of the wife is favourable because they both share this knowledge. (In a later example she will be angry).
Slide 3: Why does whipped cream have no article. Why is it ‘a cherry’?

Slide 5: What other nouns require ‘the’? (the moon, the milky way, the universe, etc)

Slide 6: What other kinds of special people require ‘the’? (the Queen, the prime minister, the Pope, etc). And what other countries have ‘the’ before them?

Slide 13: Now the wife is angry because she did not know anything about her husband buying a car.

Slides 14-15: Point out the difference in meaning between these slides and slides 7 and 8.

g. Other points to consider:
   • You may have to review the difference between countable and mass nouns.
   • Questions about genericity may come up (e.g. What about ‘Cows have horns; a cow has horns’, etc). By all means answer the questions but tell them that is another quality of articles for another time.

h. At the end of the presentation, reassure them that it is okay if they are feeling confused. It is still early in the course and they will be given the opportunity to have plenty of practice.

3. Write Me a Story! (start in class and finish as homework), Appendices C1

a. This is an implicit output task that Rod Ellis (1997) calls ‘text creation’. The learners can practice what they have learned and be creative at the same time.

b. I have given them a context of writing about an interesting conversation between someone they know. This will, hopefully, create a situation in which both people will either have a shared knowledge or not, as the case may be, naturally giving way to the use of ‘the’ and ‘a/an’.
c. If the question is asked how long/how many sentences the story should be, the answer is simple: it needs to be as long as it takes to make it a story with something resembling a beginning, middle and an end. They can consider things like (you can write these questions on the board):

Who were you talking to? Where and why?
What were you talking about?
Give some examples of the conversation.
How did you react? Did you laugh or cry? Were you surprised or something else?
After the conversation, did anything happen? Were you happy or angry?
Was your life better because of it? Or, did it become worse?

d. While they are writing, make a point of going up to each student. Have a look at what they are writing, point out something they have done right or wrong. If something is wrong, it is okay to correct them maybe first trying an implicit approach to help them sort out the answer themselves as best they can. Answer any questions they might have. And just generally offer words of encouragement.

e. Also, because these conversations could be of a personal nature, mention that the conversation will between you and the student. The story is not going to be read in class or shared with the other students.

f. This is a task to work on until the end of the hour. Make sure they do not rush this activity. It is ok for them to take it home and complete it as homework.

g. Refer to Part Two: Giving Written Feedback for suggestions about what to correct, how to correct and making comments.
h. This is a suggested schedule for this task:

- Week One: Students are given the task.
- Week Two: Hand-in so teacher can correct it and makes copies to keep.
- Week Three: Corrected work handed back and students asked to re-write it.
- Week Four: Rewrite handed-in and teacher makes final corrections/comments.
- Week Five: Copies are made to keep and the originals are handed back.

4. Definiteness Worksheet (homework), Appendices C2

This is a gap-fill exercise acting as a kind of review of what they have learned today. Question 6 and 7 may prove challenging as they are mass nouns and learners can often find these difficult. Question 6 requires ‘the’ whereas 7 does not. In question 6 there is extra information that there are two loaves of bread in the oven so all the bread (inclusiveness) will be burnt.

The worksheet is designed so that there is plenty of space hence requiring two sheets. And there is a silly illustration at the end to keep things light-hearted.

Be sure to bring the appropriate amount of worksheets to class so you can hand them out. And have the class evaluation ready. Have a word with the receptionist so they can hand the evaluation forms to her.

References:

Appendices B2: Lesson Three Lesson Plan

1. Hand-out corrected papers from Lesson One (Write Me a Story!)
2. Warm-up: Quick Review of Definiteness Game
3. Specificity Powerpoint Presentation
4. Change the Specificity Worksheet (start in class and finish as homework)
1. *Hand-out corrected papers from Lesson One - Write Me a Story! (3 minutes)*

Referring back to Part Two: Giving Written Feedback, it is recommended that the students do at least one rewrite. The re-write is to be done as homework and handed-in at the beginning of next week. If anybody wishes to meet with you to discuss your comments, let them know when you are available.

2. *Warm-up: Quick Review of Definiteness Game (8-10 minutes)*

After greeting the students warmly, asking how everybody is and maybe talking about last week’s communicative activity (At the Bookstore), you can have a quick review of definiteness in the form of a short game. Give each student a noun (no article...just the noun) and ask them to create either a definite or indefinite example.

The noun can be either a singular or plural count noun or a mass noun. Without giving the article, they will not only have to think carefully about whether they should use *a/an, the* or no article but also a definite/indefinite context as well. You can add another dimension to this game by writing the nouns on slips of paper and putting them into a hat or a box. Each student draws their noun out of the hat or box, etc. This also saves you having to spend time thinking about a noun during class time.

3. *Specificity PowerPoint Presentation (25-30 minutes)*

a. This is the second explicitly-taught lesson. It’s time to now have a look at the semantic notion of specificity. Semantically, definiteness and specificity are very different from each other and yet teachers often use these words synonymously. Whereas definiteness is about the shared knowledge of the noun between speaker and listener, specificity is only concerned with what the speaker is saying. If the noun is given a certain reference then the semantic meaning is specific. If the noun receives no certain reference then it is non-specific. Also remember that some research has suggested that the semantic discoursal quality of specificity could be causing students the most difficulty especially for students who have no article system in the native language.
b. In the Powerpoint presentation, these are the four categories that will be discussed in this order:

- Specificity: Singular count nouns
- Non-specificity: Singular count nouns
- Specificity: Plural count nouns and mass/uncountable nouns
- Non-specificity: Plural count nouns and mass/uncountable nouns

As specificity could potentially cause more confusion, the first two categories just stay with singular count nouns. In fact, in slide 11 (What is Specificity 11), you have the opportunity to go back and review them. Perhaps the most important idea to put across right from the start is that either the definite article or the indefinite article (and later the null article) can convey both specificity and non-specificity. The students need to get used to the idea of looking at the whole context of the sentence and sometimes beyond to ascertain whether the noun is specific or non-specific.

c. As in the first PowerPoint presentation, the explanations have been well spaced-out, the font is large, and there are illustrations, colour and humour. The transition and animation features on PowerPoint have been used on each slide so please go through the presentation yourself to get acquainted with it.

d. Again, prepare copies of the presentation but wait to give them to the students until after you have given the presentation. The transition and animation features of Powerpoint have been employed as before.

e. As always, make sure you speak clearly, slowly, maintain eye contact as much as possible and emphasise your articles! Encourage them to ask questions and be ready to answer them.

f. Depending on how the students are coping with the information, you could try asking them to take a specific example from the slide, for example, slide 6 (What is Specificity? 6) and make it non-specific.
   - On the slide it reads: I’m meeting a guy at the airport who owns his own plane.
The students could try and turn it into a non-specific sentence, for example:

- I’m meeting a guy at the airport but I’m not sure who he is.
- Or, I’m supposed to be meeting a guy at the airport but I’m feeling so sick that I probably won’t go tomorrow.

Conversely, you could take a non-specific example from slide 10 and turn it into a specific example:

- On the slide an example reads: I’m looking for the most expensive dress that I can find.

Possible specific examples could be:

- I’m looking for the most expensive long-sleeved black dress that I can find.
- Or, I’m looking for the most expensive dress that looks like the one Jane was wearing at the party last week.

You might want to do this after going through the whole presentation first. Making the students do this gives them a chance to produce output of their own which, again, is said to aid acquisition. And it will also be a good way to prepare them for the next exercise which they may have to finish at home.

g. There may be some puzzled-looking faces at the end of the presentation. Give them plenty of encouragement and reassurance. It is still early days yet and there is more practice to come.

4. Change the Specificity Worksheet (start in class and finish as homework), Appendices C3

This is another implicit activity involving text manipulation. The students are given a sentence and then asked to change or manipulate it in a certain way. If you have been able to do something similar during the presentation then they will be acquainted with the idea. However, I have provided instructions and samples of what to do.
They are to do this until the end of the hour so they will most likely need to finish it as homework. This is not to be completed in a hurry. If you feel the students may benefit, you can suggest they do this in pairs.

In the remaining time, go around the room offering help and advice.

Again, the font is big so the pages are not cluttered with words. And another silly picture also keeps things light-hearted.

Make sure you have copies of the worksheet before class begins and you have the evaluation sheets ready for the students.

Appendices B3: Lesson Five Lesson Plan

- Warm-up: Quick Review of Definiteness and Specificity
- Putting Definiteness and Specificity Together PowerPoint Presentation
- True or False Worksheet (start in class and probably finish at home)

1. Warm-up: Quick Review of Definiteness and Specificity (8-10 minutes)

After exchanging general chit-chat and maybe talking about last week’s communicative activity (Ordering Food by Phone), have a review of both definiteness and specificity. Today they are going to tell you what they know so far as best they can. You can help the process along with questions like:

1) What does definiteness mean? (E.g. shared knowledge between talker and listener about the noun; familiarity of the noun between talker and listener...)
2) What are some examples of single count nouns? (ask them to explain their answers)
3) What is the special quality of definiteness in plural count nouns and mass nouns? (‘all’; inclusiveness)
4) What does indefiniteness mean? (E.g. knowledge not shared between listener and speaker, the noun is not considered unique...)
5) What is special about an indefinite plural count noun and mass noun? (no article)

6) What does specificity mean? (E.g. only to do with the speaker, making some kind of particular reference to the noun ....)

7) Can both indefinite and definite articles be specific? (Yes!)

8) What is non-specificity? (E.g. The speaker is not making a particular reference to the noun)

9) Can specificity/non-specificity apply to plural count nouns and mass nouns, too? (Yes!)

This review is recommended to refresh their memories because they will need to remember the above information for the PowerPoint presentation.

2. Putting Definiteness and Specificity Together PowerPoint Presentation (25-30 minutes)

a. This is the third and final explicitly-taught lesson. Every noun contains both semantic discoursal elements of definiteness and specificity so now it is time to put the two together.

b. In the PowerPoint presentation, the four combinations of definiteness and specificity are discussed along with the abbreviated forms of each:

definite, specific (+def, +spec)

indefinite, non-specific (-def, -spec)

definite, non-specific (+def, -spec)

indefinite, specific (-def, +spec)

And, incidentally, it is the last two that in research tended to be more problematic for learners. Note which combinations (any of the 4) seem to cause your students the most difficulty.

The PowerPoint presentation then goes through the four combinations one by one. Both the implied semantic meaning of both definiteness and specificity are explained in brackets. And this goes for all the examples.
The last part of the presentation makes the students try and figure out for themselves the definite and specific examples for the last 5 sentences.

c. As with the other two PowerPoint presentations, the explanations have been well spaced-out, the font is large, and there are illustrations, colour and humour. The transition and animation features on PowerPoint have been used on each slide so please go through the presentation yourself first.

d. Again, prepare copies of the presentation but wait to give them to the students until after you have given the presentation. The transition and animation features have been employed extensively in this presentation. This will give the students the opportunity to have a go at all the semantic meanings and guess what the combinations are in the last 5 sentences.

e. As always, make sure you speak clearly. How is your talking speed now? Have you started to speed up and say articles in a more natural way? It is up to you when/if you want to do this.

f. This is the most difficult part of the course. No doubt this new information is going to puzzle and perhaps even frustrate them. Stay calm and patient. Answer all questions. Keep giving encouragement and reassurance.

3. True or False Worksheet (start in class and probably finish at home), Appendices C4

This is an implicit meaning-focused worksheet in the form of true and false questions. They are to do this until the end of the hour so they will most likely need to finish it as homework. This is not to be completed in a hurry. If you think it will help them, they can work in pairs to do this.

In the remaining time, go around the room asking questions and/or offering help and advice.
The students may be put off that it is three pages long but there is plenty of space between each question (especially because if an answer is false they have to write and explain why) and the font is relatively large to give a feeling of space.

Make sure you have copies of the worksheet before class begins and you have the evaluation sheets ready for the students.

Appendices B4: Lesson Seven Lesson Plan

- Warm-up
- ‘At the Post Office’ role play
- Worksheet: review of an/an, the or null article (homework)

1. Warm-up (5 minutes)

Spend time having a chit-chat with the students and ask for their grammar homework. You can also hand their corrected work from Lesson Five (the Meaning Focused Worksheet). Make sure you keep copies of their work.

2. ‘At the Post Office’ role play (remainder of class time)

Suggestions have been put forward that novel activities that are attractively presented, engaging and within the capabilities of the learners but at the same time challenging can aid acquisition. This is a role play/communicative/information gap activity and, as such, fits the criteria. The students can identify with the theme of ‘At the Post Office’ because post offices are practically universal. But they get to learn some of the phrases and terms associated with a UK post office.

To give this activity even more impact, you will need to do some planning and prepare the classroom. Basically, when the students walk into the classroom, it will be turned into a mini post office. Unnecessary tables can be put to one end of the room or taken out completely but keep the chairs.
You will need to obtain or make posters – the kinds one would find in a UK post office – and create a counter or two. Remember, you will need to be up on your feet listening, watching and possibly engaging with the students so two counters is the maximum.

Other items that would be very useful for this activity are books/sheets of stamps (real or pretend), a set of scales, envelopes, jiffy bags, parcels, letters and other items of stationery (e.g. cards, pencils, notebooks, rulers, etc). Some post offices in the UK also sell sweets, crisps and drinks. Also use the laminated money that you made for ‘At the Bookstore’ for this activity. Feel free to add more appropriate props. Maybe even some forms to fill out.

**Pre-activity:** Pass around the Useful Words and Phrases for the Post Office hand-out (Appendices C5). Some of the words they will probably know. Find out which words they do not know and give simple explanations.

The phrases are separated. One side are phrases that a customer might say. The other side are what they clerk might say. Point out that the language is polite (‘please’ and the use of would and could). As for articles, there will be plenty of occurrences in which information is not shared so the indefinite article is used at first, for example:

- How much is a first class stamp?
- Do you sell jiffy bags?
- Could I have an envelope, please?

Feel free to add other useful words or phrases and also allow the students to ask questions about any other words or grammar.

Put people into pairs. Try to pair people who have not been paired before. Each pair decides who will be the customer and who will be the clerk. Give them a couple minutes to decide what they would like to do (e.g. mailing a parcel to another country, sending a letter special delivery, buying a stamp and then deciding they need to buy an envelope and want a packet of crisps as well...). Give the customer some money and there should
be some money behind the counter, too. As this is a UK post office and the UK is famous for its queues, you could make the waiting pairs wait in the queue!

**During the activity:** If you have two windows you can have two pairs engage in the activity at once. Please refer to Giving Oral Feedback in Part Two of the handbook. You can engage with a student who has made a mistake by using the recast or clarification method without stopping the flow of communication. Avoid the temptation to correct every error they make.

Also allow a student to stop the flow of conversation to ask about a grammar point or a vocabulary word. If a student can ask for information that they need instead of what you think they need, there is evidence that this helps them with their acquisition.

Write down any points that you might want to discuss at the end or in another lesson. Give each pair roughly 8 minutes each. You may want each pair to change places. Encourage creativity and suggest ideas if they are struggling (like a parent would!). Some learners will love this activity but others might not be so keen.

After the activity, hand round student evaluation form 2 and ask them to hand it to the receptionist. Any food they have ‘bought’ they can keep and take with them.

**3. Worksheet: review of an/an, the or null article (homework), Appendices C6**

Have Review Worksheet 1 ready to hand out to the students as they leave. This is a gap-fill exercise in which they have to put a ‘the’, ‘a/an’ or Ø in the spaces. You can consider this like a take-home test to gauge how well or not they are doing. It is to be corrected but not given a grade. The students do not need to know this is a form of a test.
Appendices C: Worksheets and Hand-outs

Appendices C1: Lesson 1 – Write me a Story

Name: __________________________________

Write Me a Story!

Instructions: Think of an interesting conversation that you have had between your friend(s), parent(s), child(ren) or partner. What did you talk about? Why was it interesting? **Try to be accurate when you use articles (a/an, the or Ø)**. Try to write as much detail as you can - that will make the story more interesting!

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Appendices C2: Lesson One – Definiteness Worksheet

Name:________________________________

Lesson One – Definiteness
This worksheet reviews what we learned in class today.

Instructions: Fill in the spaces with the correct article.
  • If it is definite, write the
  • If it is indefinite, write a or an
  • If it does not need an article leave it blank

Example:
Yesterday, I found the ring I was telling you about last week.

1. Tom: So, what did you buy at the shop?
   Hank: I bought new hammer and some more nails.

2. Marge: So, what did you buy at the shop?
   Homer: I bought cheapest beer I could find.

3. Robin: Hi, William! What a surprise. I didn’t know that you were in London.
   William: I am here for a week. I am visiting friend from university.
   His name is Gordon Bennett and he works at Harrods.

4. Fred: Pass me newspaper, Barney.
   Barney: I can’t see it Fred.
   Fred: It’s over there by the bookshelf.

5. Mother: Can you put these groceries in kitchen, please?
   Son: Aw, do I have to?
   Mother: Yes, you do or else there will be no dinner!

6. Wife: Oh no!
   Husband: What’s wrong?
   Wife: I’ve left bread baking in the oven. We better go back home quickly! Those two loaves of bread are going to be burnt by now!

7. Teacher: What do you like to do at the weekend, Sally?
   Sally: I like to play tennis.
8. Gary: Sorry, I’m late.
    Robbie: That’s okay. What happened?
    Gary: I waited and waited for a bus but in the end I had to get a taxi from
    the train station. On the way ________ driver told me there was a bus strike.

9. Grandma: Pass me ________ spoons, Johnny, so I can wash them.
    Johnny: Okay, Grandma.

10. Trevor: _____ friend of mine told me last night that you’ve been learning
    how to dance.
    Howard: Which friend is that? I thought my dancing lessons were _____
    secret!
Appendices C3: Lesson 3 – Change the Specificity Worksheet

Name: ____________________________________________

Change the Specificity

Instructions
If the sentence has a specific meaning, make it into a sentence with a non-specific meaning.
Example:
I have a meeting with my teacher tomorrow to discuss my bad exam results. (specific)
Turn a meeting into a sentence with a non-specific meaning →
Let’s arrange a meeting. When are you available? (non-specific)

OR

If the sentence has a non-specific meaning, make it into a sentence with a specific meaning.
Example:
I like chocolate, don’t you? (non-specific)
Turn chocolate into a sentence with a specific meaning →
I like fruit and nut chocolate. Yum! (specific)

Ok, now it’s your turn!

1. I will have the salad. (non-specific) Make it a specific sentence →

____________________________________________________________________________________

–

2. I like the roses in the purple vase. (specific) Make it a non-specific sentence →

____________________________________________________________________________________

–

3. There’s a mountain. Can you see it? (non-specific) Make it a specific sentence →

____________________________________________________________________________________

–

4. Where is the book that I bought today? (specific) Make it a non-specific sentence →

____________________________________________________________________________________
5. Oh no, someone has eaten all the fruit! (non-specific) Make it a specific sentence

6. I want to go to a store that sells cheap shoes. (specific) Make it a non-specific sentence

7. Ice cream is good. (non-specific) Make it a specific sentence

8. That’s the university that my mother attended. (specific) Make it a non-specific sentence

9. Please put the groceries away for me. (non-specific) Make it a specific sentence

10. Find the biggest bouquet of flowers that has a lot of yellow and white flowers. (specific) Make it a non-specific sentence
Appendices C4: Lesson 5 – True or False? Worksheet

Name: _________________________________

True or False?

Instructions:

After each conversation, there is a statement. You have to decide, based on the conversation, if the statement is true (T) or false (F). If it is false, briefly explain why.

Example:
Butcher: Hello, what would you like today?
Customer: I would like the chicken that’s hanging in the window.
Statement: The customer does not care which chicken the butcher gives him. ➔ F
[The customer wants a specific chicken – the one hanging in the window.]
Are you ready?? Let’s go………………..

1. Husband: Have you seen my golf balls?
   Wife: Well, I saw a golf ball on the table next to the front door.
   Statement: The wife has seen only one of the golf balls. ➔

2. Boyfriend: I’ve decided to buy a puppy.
   Girlfriend: Oh, that’s great! I hope you are going to get the black puppy with floppy ears.
   Statement: The girlfriend did not know that her boyfriend wanted a puppy. ➔
3. Sales assistant: Can I help you with anything?
   Woman: Yes, I’m looking for a book about flower arranging.
   Statement: The woman has come to the book shop knowing the title of the book she wants. →

4. Girl: What have you got there?
   Boy: It’s a bar of chocolate for my snack.
   Girl: Oh, can I have the chocolate?
   Boy? No! Go away!!
   Statement: The girl is asking for the whole bar of chocolate. →

5. Sheila: The milk that Gary bought yesterday has gone off already.
   Suzanne: Gee, and he bought a large bottle, too! Take it back to the shop and get a replacement.
   Statement: Only a small amount of the milk has gone off. →

6. Grandmother: How did Alice do at the school sport’s day?
   Mother: She did really well. She won a prize in the egg and spoon race.
   Statement: There were a number of prizes to be won in the egg and spoon race – not just one. →

7. Son: What did you buy at the shop?
   Mom: I bought the salad dressing but I forgot to buy lettuce.
   Statement: The son did not know that his mother was going to buy salad dressing. →
8. Man at a hotel in Korea: Can you phone for a taxi for me, please? I’d like a taxi that has an English translation service.
   Receptionist: Certainly, sir.
   Statement: Not all taxi firms in Korea have a translation service. →

9. Ray: Do you have any idea what you are going to do after you graduate?
   Sam: Hopefully I will get a good job. That’s all I ask for, really.
   Statement: Sam has a specific job in mind after he graduates. →

10. Anne: Hello my name is Anne Smith. I need to make an appointment with the doctor.
    Receptionist: I’m sorry, your doctor is on holiday. But you can see another one in the practice instead.
    Statement: Anne can see a doctor but not the one she normally sees. →

The End! Good job!
Useful Words and Phrases for the Post Office

Useful words:

1. stamp                              7. airmail                                                         13.  send (verb)
2. envelope                         8. surface mail                                                        14. sell (verb)
3. jiffy bag                           9. scales                                                           15.  weigh (verb)
4. first class                   10. stationery                                                        11.  recorded delivery (someone has to sign for it when delivered)
5, second class                   12. special delivery (next day delivery)
6. parcel

Useful Phrases: Customer

Clerk

I’d like buy ___________, please.

Could I have ___________, please?
(a first class stamp, a book of first class stamps)

How much is __________?

How much are _________?

Do you sell___________?

Do you have___________?

I’d like to send it by ____________, please.

I’d like to send this to ____ (country), please.

How many would you like?

Can you put it on the scales, please?

They’re a pound.

It costs 50p.

It’s £2.50 for a book of 5 stamps.

Your parcel weight 750 grams.

Special delivery is more expensive.

Fill out this form and hand it back to me.

Do you want to send it by air or surface?
Appendices C6: Lesson 7 – Review Worksheet 1

Name:_______________________________________

Review Worksheet 1

Instructions:
In the spaces, put the correct form of article:
• a/an
• the
• Ø (no article)

Example:
As I was driving to work this morning I saw a police car at the side of the road. There were two young children inside ___the_____ police car with ___the___police officers.

1. Father: Please pass me ______ hammer, son.
   Son: Where is it, Dad? I can’t see it.
   Father: It’s over there on _____ dining room table next to the vase.

2. Oh no, I’ve spilled _____ rice all over the floor! I’m glad there wasn’t much left in the bag but it still makes a mess.

3. Shop Assistant: Hello, sir, can I help you?
   Man: Yes, I’m looking for _____ book about telescopes. Can you recommend any books for me?

   Hank: ______ cup of tea would suit me fine, thanks.

5. Teacher: How would you describe yourself, Anna?
   Anna: Ummm, I have ______ long black hair and ______ brown eyes. And I’m 157 cm tall and I wear ______ glasses.
6. Bill: I like to play _____ football especially when it’s warm outside and _____ sun is shining. What about you?
Tina: I don’t like to play _____ football. Instead I prefer to read _____ good book in _____ shade when it’s warm.

7. Mr Rodgers: I really need to speak with Ted. Is he available?
Secretary: I’m sorry, Mr Simms is talking to _____ important client who has just flown in from Manchester. Try phoning back in _____ hour or so.

8. I went to _____ wedding last week. _____ bride arrived late and _____ groom looked like he was having _____ heart attack. It was very entertaining.

9. I want to talk to _____ winner of this race after it’s over. I’m going to interview him for _____ Sports Illustrated magazine.

10. Sophie: Did you hear about Frank?
Gayle: No! Do tell. What’s he been doing while he’s been away?
Sophie: He’s married _____ girl he met in Chicago. Her name is Janice and she’s lovely. They’ve come back now to London so I had _____ dinner with them last week. (HINT: Gayle knows nothing about Frank meeting Janice!)
Appendices D: PowerPoint Presentations

Appendices D1-D10: Lesson 1 (Definiteness)

Appendices D1-D10: Lesson 1 (Definiteness)

DEFINITENESS

WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 1

Definiteness: Single Count Nouns

• Both the talker and the listener know about the noun. They both can identify it.
• Or, the noun is familiar to them in some way.
• We use ‘the’ to show definiteness in English.

Let’s look at some examples in detail:
WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 2

Definite Single Count Noun 1
Husband: Hey, Honey, I bought the car today!
Wife: Oh, that’s great, dear!
[Meaning: Both the husband and the wife know about the car already.]

WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 3

Definite Single Count Noun 2
Sheila: I had a delicious chocolate milkshake at Ed’s Café.
Suzanne: Mmmmmm, sounds good!
Sheila: Yes, the chocolate milkshake had lots of whipped cream and a cherry on the top.
[At first, only Sheila knows about the milkshake, so she uses ‘a’. But once she tells Suzanne then it is shared knowledge between both of them. So the second time it is mentioned, she uses ‘the’.]

100
WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 4

Definite Single Count Noun 3

Walter: Good afternoon, Madam, what would you like to order?
Customer: I would like the mushroom soup and the spicy sausage pasta, please.
   [Both the waiter and the customer know that the mushroom soup and spicy sausage pasta are on the menu.]

WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 5

Definite Single Count Noun 4

Woman talking to her friend: Oh, the sun is so warm and bright today!
   [The sun is the only one in our solar system; it is general knowledge that we only have one. General knowledge = familiar]
WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 6

Definite Single Count Noun 5

Matt: Are you going to see the President of the United States?
John: Yes, I am. Next Tuesday.
    [It is shared knowledge that the United States has a president. General knowledge = familiar]

WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 7

Definite Single Count Noun 6

I bought some apples at the supermarket today. The check-out operator told me they were on sale so I saved some money.
    [The check-out operator is not mentioned in the first sentence but it is general knowledge that you have to give your money to a check-out operator to pay for your groceries.]
WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 8

Definite Single Count Noun 7
Tom: The steak that Steve bought yesterday has gone off already!
Hank: Oh right, yeah, I thought I smelled something bad in the fridge this morning.

[This can be considered two ways:
1. Both Tom and Hank both know about Steve buying the steak or
2. Hank did not know about the steak but ‘The steak that Steve bought’ creates a familiarity for both Tom and Hank.]

WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 9

Definiteness: Plural Count Nouns and Uncountable Nouns

• You can use ‘the’ for plural count nouns and mass nouns, too.
• Using ‘the’ has a similar meaning to ‘all’.

Let’s have a look...
WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 10

Definite Uncountable Noun

Harry: I think I put the milk in the fridge.

[Harry thinks he put all the milk in the fridge.]

WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 11

Definite Plural Count Noun

Little Girl: Why can’t I have the puppies, Daddy?

[Why can’t I have ALL the puppies, Daddy?]
WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 12

Indefiniteness: Single Count Nouns

- Both the talker and the listener do not share knowledge about the noun.
- Or, something about the noun is not unique.
- In English we use ‘a’ or ‘an’ to mark the indefinite article.

Here come some examples!

WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 13

Indefinite Single Count Noun 1

Husband: Hey, Honey, I bought a car today!
Wife: You WHAT?

[The wife had no prior knowledge of the husband planning to buy a car. The information had not been shared between them until now.]
WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 14

Indefinite Single Count Noun 3

I bought some apples at the supermarket today. A check-out operator told me they were on sale so I saved some money.

[This was not the check-out operator the customer went to in order to pay for the apples. The check-out operator was not considered unique. Maybe it was a check-out operator the customer met in the store in passing.]

WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 15

Indefinite Single Count Noun 2

Tom: A steak that Steve bought yesterday has gone off!

Hank: Oh right, yeah, I thought I smelled something bad in the fridge this morning.

... [Hank did not know about the steak until Tom told him. And there is no sense of familiarity]
WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 16

Indefiniteness: Plural Count Nouns and Mass Nouns

- When a plural count noun or mass noun is not shared knowledge between talker and speaker, they do not have an article.
- When there is no article, this is sometimes referred as a null article or Ø.

Okay, let's see some examples.

WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 17

Indefinite Plural Count Noun

Teacher: What kind of animals do you like, Richard?
Richard: I like kangaroos.

[When the teacher asks the question, she does not know what kind of animal Richard likes.]
Appendices D1-D10: Lesson 1 (Definiteness)

WHAT IS DEFINITENESS? 18

Indefinite Uncountable Noun

Teacher: What kind of animals do you like, Chris?
Chris: I like fish.

[When the teacher asks the question, she does not know what kind of animal Chris likes.]
Appendices D11-D18: Lesson 3 (Specificity)

Appendices D11-D18: Lesson 3 (Specificity)

SPECIFICITY

WHAT IS SPECIFICITY? 1

Specificity

• Maybe you have already been taught that a definite article refers to something specific.
• Actually definiteness does not equal specificity!
• When talking about articles, they mean two different things!
WHAT IS SPECIFICITY? 2

Specificity

- Has to do with only what the speaker is saying.
- It has nothing to do with the listener.
- If the noun said by the speaker is referring to a certain person, place or thing then the reference is specific.

Huh?
Ok, let’s look at some examples....

WHAT IS SPECIFICITY? 3

A sentence with a specific meaning

Mary: Tomorrow, I’m going to see that play in London about cats.

Richard: Oh really? That’s interesting. Tomorrow, I’m going to have dinner with the writer of that play – he is a good friend of mine.

[The writer is specific because Richard refers to him as a good friend.]
Appendices D11-D18: Lesson 3 (Specificity)

WHAT IS SPECIFICITY 4

Another sentence with a specific meaning

Child: Mummy, what is it?
Mother: Oh, it's a golden bracelet! Grandma gave it to me for my sixteenth birthday so I will give it to you when you turn sixteen.

[The mother is referring to a specific bracelet that was given to her when she was sixteen.]

WHAT IS SPECIFICITY? 5

Did you see it?

- A specific sentence can have either a definite or an indefinite article.
- A specific sentence can have either 'the' or 'a/an'.
- In order to find out if the sentence is specific, you have to look at the whole context of the sentence and determine if the speaker is giving the noun a specific reference. Sometimes, you may have to read the next sentence as well to get the specific reference.
WHAT IS SPECIFICITY 6

Some more examples of sentences with specific meaning

Robbie: What are you doing tomorrow, Gary?
Gary: I’m meeting a guy at the airport who owns his own plane.

Sheila: Do you know which restaurant we are going to on Saturday?
Suzanne: Yes, it’s the Chinese restaurant on the corner of the High Street next to Primark.

WHAT IS SPECIFICITY 7

Non-specificity

- Also, has to do with only what the speaker is saying.
- But the noun said by the speaker is not referring to a specific or certain person, place or thing.

“Huh? Teacher, I need to see some examples, please...”
WHAT IS SPECIFICITY? 8

A sentence with a non-specific meaning

Policeman: We are looking for Terry Jones. Does he live here?
Man: Yes, he does but he's not here right now. He's staying with a friend but he didn't tell me which one.

[Terry is staying with a friend but there is no specific reference about the friend.]

WHAT IS SPECIFICITY 9

Another sentence with a non-specific meaning

Lady: Is your mother at home?
Little girl: Yes, she is but she is talking to someone on the phone. I don't know who she's talking to.

[The little girl doesn't know who is on the phone. She can't refer to anybody specifically...it's just someone.]
WHAT IS SPECIFICITY? 10

Some more examples of sentences with non-specific meaning

Shirley: What do you want to eat tonight?
Lucy: Hmmm, I want a spicy meal but I can’t decide what I want exactly.

Anna: What are you looking for in this shop?
Amy: I’m looking for the most expensive dress that I can find.

WHAT IS SPECIFICITY? 11

Have you noticed something?

- All the nouns so far have been single count nouns. (Really? Let’s see them again...)
- But specificity and non-specificity applies to plural countable nouns and uncountable nouns, too.

Teacher! Help! We need examples, please!
WHAT IS SPECIFICITY? 12

Specific sentences – Plural Count Nouns

- Husband: I bought the pizzas for dinner tonight. One is pepperoni and the other is garlic and mushroom – just as you requested.

- Mother: Please dust the chairs in the dining room for me when you get home from school.

WHAT IS SPECIFICITY 13

Specific sentences – Uncountable Nouns

- Mother-in-law: I like the furniture you bought from Homebase better than ones you bought from IKEA.

- Mr Mouse: I want to eat cheese that has a strong flavour.
WHAT IS SPECIFICITY? 14

Non-specific sentences – Plural Count Nouns

- Husband: I bought the pizzas. Let’s eat!

- Mother: Please dust the chairs for me when you get home from school.

WHAT IS SPECIFICITY? 15

Non-specific sentences – Uncountable Noun

- Mother-in-law: I like the furniture and the carpet. But I don’t like the colour of the room.

- Mr Mouse: I want to eat cheese. I’m hungry.
APPLEDICES D19-D25: LESSON 5 (DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY COMBINED)

PUTTING DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY TOGETHER

PUTTING DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY TOGETHER 1

- We have looked at definiteness and specificity separately but actually a noun has both qualities at the same time.
- It does not matter if the noun is a single count noun, plural count noun or a uncountable noun – each noun contains these qualities at the same time.
PUTTING DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY TOGETHER 2

Four Different Combinations
There are four different combinations of definiteness and specificity.

Can you think what they are?

PUTTING DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY TOGETHER 3

definite, specific
(+def, +spec)

indefinite, non-specific
(-def, -spec)

definite, non-specific
(+def, -spec)

indefinite, specific
(-def, +spec)

Teacher: examples please!
PUTTING DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY TOGETHER 4

Definite, Specific Example
[+def, +spec]

Bill: Which chair did you decide to buy?
Ted: I decided to buy the black leather chair that you recommended.
   [Both Bill and Ted share knowledge about the chair = definite]
   [Ted says it was a certain chair that Bill had recommended = specific]

PUTTING DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY TOGETHER 5

Indefinite, Non-specific Example
[-def, -spec]

Marie: Why don’t you come shopping with me? We can have lunch together.
Peter: Yeah, I need to buy beer mugs but I just don’t have the time right now. Sorry. Phone me next week.
   [Marie did not know that Peter needs beer mugs = indefinite]
   [Peter does not make any specific reference to the beer mugs = non-specific]
PUTTING DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY TOGETHER 6

Definite, Non-specific Example

[+def, -spec]

Sally: Is your daughter getting married next month?

May: Yes, she is. She bought the wedding dress today but I haven’t seen it yet.

[It is general knowledge that the bride wears a wedding dress when she gets married = definite]

[But there is no particular reference to the wedding dress itself = non-specific]

PUTTING DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY TOGETHER 7

Indefinite, Specific Examples

[-def, +spec]

Shop assistant: Can I help you anything, madam?

Woman: Yes, I’m looking for a backpack that is very sturdy but lightweight. Oh, and under £100.

[The shop assistant does not know what the woman is looking for = indefinite]

[The woman is looking for a backpack that is sturdy, lightweight and under £100 = specific]
PUTTING DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY TOGETHER 8

Now it is your turn!
- I’ll give you some examples now and you have to guess what they are.
- Don’t forget the rules about definiteness and specificity!
- And you will have to explain the reasons why you have chosen a combination.

Are you ready?  No.....
Are you ready now?  Ummmm, yes, ok...
Okay, here we go.

PUTTING DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY TOGETHER 9

At the Zoo

Mother: What can you see over there, Brian?

Brian: I think I see a donkey but I’m not really sure what it is.

What definite, specific combination is the above?

[The mother does not know what Brian is looking at so it is not shared knowledge = indefinite]

[Brian thinks it’s a donkey but he can’t be certain. This is not a particular reference. = non-specific]

So, it’s indefinite, non-specific [-def, -spec]
PUTTING DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY TOGETHER 10

Helping mum put away the groceries
Sharon: Where do you want me to put this?
Mum: Oh, put the rice over by the sink for now.

What definite, specific combination is the above?
[Rice is a mass noun and with ‘the’, it means all the rice = definite]
[Mum does not mention anything specifically about the rice = non-specific]

So, it's definite, non-specific [+def, -spec]

PUTTING DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY TOGETHER 11

Watching a racing competition
Bobby: I can see Tom getting ready to run the 50 meter dash.
Stan: I hope he wins. The winner gets £250 and Tom owes me a pint.

What definite, specific combination is the above?
[It's general knowledge that a race will have a winner = definite]
[Stan is not mentioning anything specifically about the winner = non-specific]

So, it's definite, non-specific [+def, -spec]
Appendices D19-D25: Lesson 5 (Definiteness and Specificity Combined)

PUTTING DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY TOGETHER 12

Conversation between two friends
Carol: Have you seen the parrot on You Tube that swears?
Gregg: No, I haven’t.
Carol: Oh, you must. I couldn’t stop laughing. The bird was so funny!

What definite, specific combination is the above?
['The parrot' creates a familiarity between Carol and Gregg = definite]
[Carol refers specifically to the parrot...that it is on You Tube and swears = specific]
So, it’s definite, specific [+def, +spec]

PUTTING DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY TOGETHER 13

Talking about sport
Lisa: What’s your favourite sport?
Donald: I like tennis, particularly lawn tennis, because I prefer playing on grass.

What definite, specific combination is the above?
[Tennis is a mass noun and without an article = indefinite]
[Donald refers to a certain kind of tennis = specific]
So, it’s indefinite, specific [-def, +spec]