The acquisition of articles (DPs): The story so far

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The acquisition of articles is one of those areas of grammar that seem to cause even advanced learners of English a lot of difficulties. There are different factors that may account for some of these troubles, of which will be discussed. As like most second language acquisition (SLA) research, much interest in the area of acquisition of articles is rooted in L1 acquisition research, and in turn, is of interest to L3 researchers.

An ever-expanding number of studies has examined the acquisition of articles (DPs) over the last 30 years in SLA (e.g., Master, 1985). Typically, authors tended to adopt the speaker referent and hearer knowledge semantic framework set out by Bickerton (1981) and whether or not second language (L2) learners could acquire the functional category Determiner Phrase (DP), if absent from their first language (e.g., Parrish, 1989; Kuribara, 2000). More recently, a number of studies have shifted away from considering the underlying syntactic structure DP, and though there was a proposal by Ionin et al. (2004) for an Article Choice Parameter, most of the discussion centres around the different semantic features associated with articles (e.g., García Mayo & Hawkins, 2009; Ionin & Montrul, 2013; Snape, 2013, Cho & Slabakova, 2014) in relation to the syntax-semantics interface.

This aim of the talk is to provide an outline of the types of studies and research being carried out into the acquisition of articles by L2 learners and the possible implications for pedagogy.