

ENGLISH ARTICLE PRODUCTION IN GUIDED CONVERSATION BY AFGHAN DARI  
EFL LEARNERS

by

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B.A., University of Balkh, 2004

A THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Modern Languages  
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

2010

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## Abstract

The English article system is one of the most difficult and subtle structural elements for EFL learners, and even advanced learners make errors in article use. This research analyzes patterns of use of English articles (*a/an, the, zero*) in guided conversations with Afghan Dari speakers who are intermediate or advanced English learners and who do have an article system in their primary language, Dari. In this research, six intermediate and six advanced learners participated by discussing similar topics (their first impressions of the USA, their life in Manhattan, their classes, and their future plans). These conversations were recorded and transcribed. The collected data were analyzed on the basis of referentiality, information status, and various properties of nouns. The results indicate that the participants were most accurate in their production of the indefinite article '*a/an*' in referential and non-referential contexts with new information, the definite '*the*' in referential contexts with known information, while the zero ' $\emptyset$ ' was difficult for both ELP (intermediate) and Post-ELP (advanced) learners mostly in referential contexts.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my gratitude to a number of people who really supported me in the completion of this thesis. First and foremost is Dr. Mary Copple, my thesis advisor. This research could not have been done without her continuous guidance and thoughtful comments through the planning, writing, and analyzing process. I will always be thankful for her words of encouragement and her words of wisdom. Similarly, I am grateful to Dr. Emma Betz and Dr. Bradley Shaw, my committee members for reading the drafts patiently and providing me with insightful comments and suggestions for writing this paper. I cannot express my thankfulness and appreciation to these professors by writing these words. Their supportive feedback and constant encouragement helped me to complete my thesis and provided me with new information to be an autonomous researcher in my teaching career in the future.

Special thanks to my friend Khan who supported me in finding and collecting Dari materials. I would like to thank Cheryl Rauh for her assistance in terms of the data analysis, and also I would like to thank all the ELP and Post-ELP participants who voluntarily agreed to participate in this research.

Last but not least, I would like very much to thank my parents for their support and encouragement which empowered me to complete my degree at Kansas State University. I also thank all my Afghan friends and colleagues who helped me during my education period at Kansas State University.

# CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 Motivation for conducting the present research

The system of English articles, including *a/an* (indefinite), *the* (definite) and  $\emptyset$  (zero or invisible) is one of the most difficult structural elements for non-native speakers to acquire accurately (Master 2002, Ekiert 2004, Ionin *et al.* 2008, Han *et al.* 2006, Yamada & Matsuura 1982, and Thomas 1989 among others). Based on my experience as an English Foreign Language (EFL) instructor, I have noticed that most Afghan EFL learners have more problems with certain grammatical features, for example, verb inflections (e.g. 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular *-s/-es*, and simple past *-ed*), and functional morphemes (e.g. prepositions and articles) than with other features (e.g. the SVO order of a sentence and adjective position in NPs).

One reason why Dari EFL learners may struggle to acquire these grammatical elements (e.g. verb inflections and functional morphemes) may be due to normal order of acquisition. Gass and Selinker (2001) discuss the order of acquisition of morphemes and show that functional morphemes, including articles, are among the final morphemes to be acquired. Learners master, first, the present progressive (*-ing*), prepositions (*in/on*), plural (*-s*), past irregular (*-ed*), possessive (*- 's*), and copula verbs (*am, is, are*); then, they learn verb inflections and functional morphemes.

Apart from my students' problems with English articles use, I have noticed similar problems during my own course work at Kansas State University (KSU), including my courses in the English Language Program (ELP). A recurring problem I had was the accurate use of articles in English, even though Dari, my L1, has an article system. After taking an English proficiency test, the result indicated that I should take part-time advanced English courses at the



ELP plus a university class. The first graduate course I took was *Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Theories*. One of the requirements for the course was to write a response paper to each chapter of the text (a total of nine). My professor would give me feedback not only on content and ideas, but also corrected my language mistakes and errors. In every response paper's feedback, I noticed that selection of articles was problematic. Either I overgeneralized the definite article 'the' or used the indefinite article 'a/an' mistakenly where 'the' should be used.

Similarly, when I communicated with my students and friends back home via email, I realized that they have problems with article production also. For example, I noticed that some of them were using the definite article 'the' before proper nouns (e.g. *I did not go to **the** Balkh University/Kodibarq*). They also overused the zero  $\emptyset$  (invisible article).

Many factors affect article choice. One factor is the properties of the noun which follow an article (Quirk *et. al.*, 1985, Cowan, 2008). Singular count nouns (e.g. book) are always marked with either the definite article 'the' or indefinite article 'a/an' depending on a context; while, singular mass nouns (e.g. water) are preceded by either 'the' or the zero ' $\emptyset$ '. Plural count nouns (e.g. classes) will be marked with either 'the' or ' $\emptyset$ ', but not singular 'a/an'. Other factors are more discourse-based, as with the notion of referentiality (Thomas, 1989, and Huebner 1985). For example, when a count noun, for the first time, is deployed in discourse, it should be preceded by 'a/an'; however, for later mentions, it may be marked with 'the'. For example, in the sentence '*I saw **a book** near **the library**. I took **the book** and carried it to **the library***' the speaker indicates that the library has already been previously mentioned and is an established referent while the book is not. However, in the second sentence, the noun 'book' is used with 'the' as it is now a known referent.

The difficulties of myself and my students, as well as the complex factors that affect article choice, inspired me to investigate and analyze this problem in order to determine how Dari EFL speakers use articles. As an EFL instructor, the present research will also help me to conduct similar research on other elements of English (and Dari) and provide Afghan EFL instructors and learners with additional insights on language use in the future. For example, research on assessing EFL learners' production in terms of pronunciation will provide EFL instructors with the understanding of what patterns of sounds or symbols are difficult for a learner so that the instructor can focus on that aspect in his/her teaching.

## 1.2 Overview of the English article system

English articles are generally divided into two categories: definite (*'the'*) and indefinite (*'a'* or *'an'*). These two terms, 'definite' and 'indefinite', as Cowan (2008) explains, add different meaning (i.e. definite, indefinite, and generic) to the nouns that the articles precede. The term *definite* implies that a noun is specifically identifiable. When a speaker uses the definite article *'the'*, it is presupposed that both the speaker and the listener can identify the noun that follows. For example, in the sentence *'please close **the** door,'* the speaker refers to a *door* which is identifiable for the listener. In contrast, the indefinite article *'a'* or *'an'* does not designate a specific object or person. In the sentence *'please give me **a** pen,'* the indefinite article *'a'* indicates to the listener that the speaker refers to *pen* in a general sense (i.e. any pen will do).

A third type of article in English is the 'zero' ( $\emptyset$  or invisible). The zero ' $\emptyset$ ' article is used before plural count nouns, as in *' $\emptyset$  teachers work hard'*, and before singular mass nouns, as in *'there is  $\emptyset$  milk in the bottle'* In addition, the zero ' $\emptyset$ ' article has an idiomatic use, which may occur before some singular count nouns. For example, in the sentence *'it is an agreement*

between  $\emptyset$  father and  $\emptyset$  son' (Cowan 2008, p. 218), the zero ' $\emptyset$ ' article is used before the nouns 'father' and 'son'. The zero ' $\emptyset$ ' article also adds a generic meaning to the noun that follows. For example, in the sentence '*Teachers are kind,*' the speaker refers to all teachers in general.

These three types of articles, indefinite, definite, and zero, are among the most frequently occurring free morphemes in English (Master, 1997). This frequency requires non-native speakers to constantly make article choices and assess the properties of nouns (e.g. count or mass, singular or plural) simultaneously. Further complicating this process is the fact that articles are not generally overly salient in speech. Therefore, it is cognitively a challenging process for most non-native speakers compared to other elements of English (e.g. -ing). Each article's prescriptive use is now described in further detail and a general description of the linguistic environment of each type of article is presented.

### ***1.2.1 The definite article 'the'***

The definite article '*the*' is used before nouns which can be identified in a specific context due to their being active in the discourse or identifiable due to the shared knowledge of both speaker and hearers. The referent can be a person (*the man*), a group of people (*the policemen*), an object (*the table*), a group of objects (*the tables*), an abstraction (*the idea*), or a group of abstractions (*the fears*). Quirk *et al.*, (1985) explains that the referent marked by the definite article '*the*' is known from the immediate situation. For example, in '***The books are in good order,***' if this utterance were said in a library where both the speaker and the listener are present, the books are readily identifiable. However, identifiable referents may be due to a larger situation or due to general knowledge shared between the speaker and listener, (e.g., '***The three decade war caused social and economical problem in Afghanistan***').

The definite article '*the*' implies anaphoric reference. The term *anaphora* implies that reference to a noun preceded by '*the*' is known from the linguistic context (Quirk *et. al.*, 1985). That is, the information given by the speaker earlier in the discourse provides the listener with an understanding of the referent to which '*the*' refers. Anaphoric referents may be either direct or indirect. For example, in the sentence '*I bought a book and a note-book, but I lost **the** book,*' '*the*' expresses direct anaphora because '*the*' directly refer to 'book' (book + book). In contrast, in the sentence '*I bought a new book, but **the** cover is torn,*' '*the*' is used to express indirect anaphor (book + cover). The reference of '*the*' is indirect because '*the*' does not directly refer to the '*book*', but rather makes use of general knowledge that a book has a cover and that it is the previously mentioned book's cover that is under discussion.

In addition to anaphoric reference, cataphoric and sporadic reference are also used. Quirk *et al.*, (1985) define cataphoric use of '*the*' as the opposite of anaphoric use. That is, a modifier is used after the noun, rather than before and this modifier clarifies the reference. For example, in the sentences '***The** book which I bought is new,*' and '***The** boy crossing the street is my brother,*' '*the*' is used cataphorically. In both sentences, the post-modifiers '*which I bought*' and '*crossing the street*' designate the references (*book* and *boy*) uniquely.

In sporadic reference, Quirk *et al.*, (1985) explain that '*the*' is sometimes used to refer to an institution of human society. For example, the sentence "*My sister goes to the theatre every month,*" (Quirk *et. al.*, 1985, p. 269) has two interpretations, as Quirk *et. al.*, (1985) claim. The first interpretation is that '*the theatre*', from a situational reference perspective, means a particular theatre. But the second interpretation is that '*the theatre*' refers to an institution known to a community. In this case, it would be inappropriate to ask the question '*which theatre?*'

Finally, the definite article ‘*the*’ may be used generically. It can be associated with singular nouns and indicates a class as represented by its typical specimen, as in ‘*I play **the** violin.*’ The generic use of ‘*the*’ may also occur with plural noun phrases which indicate people of a nationality or an ethnic group, as seen in “***The Romans defeated the Carthaginians in 202 BC***” (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 283). This is similar, in a sense, to the sporadic use because both refer to people in general. However, the sporadic reference refers to an institution or organization while the generic reference is used with plural nouns referring to characteristics of a group of people in particular (e.g. Pashtons, Romans).

### ***1.2.2 The indefinite article ‘a’ or ‘an’***

The indefinite article ‘*a*’ or ‘*an*’ is used to create a boundary which makes the noun discrete and countable. Indefinite ‘*a/an*’ frequently occurs with singular count nouns which represent a class. For example, in the sentence ‘*I bought **a** book,*’ the indefinite article ‘*a*’ represents the class “books”, but it does not refer to a particular book as use of the definite ‘*the*’ would. Cowan (2008) states that the indefinite article ‘*a*’ may also be used before partitives, which measure quantity for mass nouns, such as ‘*a piece of*’ and ‘*a loaf of*’. He continues to explain that sometimes in everyday speech the partitive (*e.g. cup of, slice of*) is omitted; in these cases, the indefinite article ‘*a*’ or ‘*an*’ appears before a mass noun. For example, in the sentence ‘*I would like to have **a** coffee,*’ the partitive ‘*cup of*’ is omitted from the original sentence ‘*I would like to have a cup of coffee*’.

Quirk *et al.* (1985) discuss that the indefinite article ‘*a*’ or ‘*an*’ does not signal “co-reference with a preceding indefinite noun phrase,” (p. 272). In other words, when ‘*a/an*’ is used with two similar nouns, there is not one common referent. For example, in the sentence, “*Bob*

*lost a gold watch yesterday, and Bill was wearing a gold watch this morning.*” (272), the speaker may not refer to the same ‘gold watch’. However, if the second ‘gold watch’ is marked with the definite article ‘the’, the speaker refers to the first ‘gold watch’ (Bob’s watch) insinuating that ‘Bill’ has found the watch or worse is a thief.

### **1.2.3 The zero article ‘Ø’**

The zero (invisible) article, symbolized as ‘Ø’, is said to appear in instances where a noun or noun phrase is not preceded by an expressed article (*a*, *an*, or *the*). In general, the zero article ‘Ø’ is used with proper nouns and mass nouns where the reference is indefinite (Cowan, 2008). For example, in the sentence, ‘*We import Ø tea from Ø India,*’ the zero article ‘Ø’ occurs before the non-count noun ‘*tea*’ and the proper noun ‘*India*’. The zero article ‘Ø’ is also used with plural count nouns designating generic meaning. For example, in the sentence, ‘*Ø Teachers work hard,*’ the zero article ‘Ø’ preceding the plural count noun ‘*teachers*’ makes reference to all teachers in general.

The zero article’s usage differs from that of definite ‘*the*’ and indefinite ‘*a*’ or ‘*an*’ when it precedes abstract non-count nouns. For example, with abstract nouns such as *education*, *beauty*, *intelligence*, and *consciousness*, the zero article ‘Ø’ refers to the “general concept, state, or field expressed by the noun” (Cowan, 2008, p. 215). In contrast, if these same nouns are followed by the definite article ‘*the*’, it refers to a particular and identifiable referent, and with indefinite article ‘*a*’ or ‘*an*’, it often means ‘*type/kind of*’. Consider the following examples from Cowan (2008, p. 219).

**Ø Beauty** is ephemeral, but character is definable and recognizable.

**The beauty** of her smile was legendary.

She has **a beauty** that I find elusive but nevertheless compelling.

In sentence **a**, the use of zero before the abstract noun ‘*beauty*’ signals the general concept of beauty; in sentence **b**, the definite article ‘the’ is used before the noun ‘beauty’ referring to a definite referent ‘*her smile*’. However, in sentence **c**, the use of ‘a’ before the abstract noun ‘beauty’ carries similar meaning to ‘a type or kind of beauty’. Table 1.1 below summarizes the use of the three types of articles according to semantic properties of the noun.

features		Articles	Count nouns	Mass nouns
Singular	definite	The	the book	the fruit
	Indefinite	a, $\emptyset$	a book	fruit
Plural	Definite	The	the books	
	Indefinite	$\emptyset$	books	

**Table 1.1: Prescriptive article use**

### 1.3 Referentiality, information status and article use<sup>1</sup>

In analyzing first language acquisition of English articles, researchers (Chodorow *et al.*, 2006, Ekiert, 2004, Thomas, 1989, and Huebner, 1985 among many) attempt to identify different linguistic contexts of use for articles in order to investigate learners’ production of articles in those environments. Quirk *et al.* (1985) and Cowan (2008) describe the use and function of articles in terms of the nouns they precede.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, in Huebner’s (1985) classification, the use of English articles is determined by the semantic function of the noun phrase in discourse (referentiality) in order to identify the context for the appearance of articles.

Huebner (1985) represents a common classification system (referential/non-referential, identifiable/non-identifiable for a listener) which characterizes the environment for an article’s use. This system determines whether a noun preceded by an article has been mentioned

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<sup>1</sup> In the present study, the concepts of referentiality and information status are applied only to article use in English.

<sup>2</sup> For example, proper nouns (e.g. names) are specific and zero (or invisible) is used in English, but in some cases it can be marked with ‘the’ to distinguish between two or three names.

previously and whether that noun is identifiable by the listener. Distinguishing these features results in four environments for article use; in each environment use of one or more articles is possible. The choice of which article to use before a noun in a particular context depends on the lexical properties of the noun (singular or plural, mass or count).

Table 1.2 below (from Thomas, 1989, p. 337) presents this type of classification of English articles and examples for each environment.

Features	Environment	Articles	Example
[-SR+HK]	Generic nouns	<i>a, the, Ø</i>	<i>Ø Fruit</i> flourishes in the valley <i>The Grenomian</i> is an excitable person <i>A paper clip</i> comes in handy
[-SR-HK]	Nonreferential nouns attributive nonspecific indefinites	<i>a, Ø</i>	Alice is <i>an accountant</i> I guess I should buy <i>a new car</i>
[+SR-HK]	Referential indefinites first-mention nouns	<i>a, Ø</i>	Chris approached me carrying <i>a dog</i> (The dog jumped down...)
[+SR+HK]	Referential definite previous mention specified by entailment specified by definition unique in all contexts unique in a given context (etc...)	<i>the</i>	(Chris approached me carrying a dog) <i>The dog</i> jumped down and started barking I approached his front door and rang <i>the bell</i> <i>The latest crisis; the top drawer</i> <i>The moon</i> will be full tomorrow Among employees: <i>the boos</i> ; among classmates: <i>the midterm exam</i>

**Table 1.2: Environments for the appearance of articles**

This classification from Thomas (1989) considers (a) whether a noun is a specific referent (+SR) or non-specific (-SR) and (b) whether a noun is assumed to be known to the hearer (+HK) or unknown (-HK). For example, in the sentence, ‘I bought a book,’ the speaker knows what book it is, and the reference is specific (+SR), but it is not known to the hearer (-HK). It becomes known to the hearer when reference to it is made again (+HK), for example with pronominal ‘it’ in ‘I bought a book. *It’s* really interesting. Would you like to see *it*?’ In



contrast, if the speaker says the sentence, 'Books are important in teaching a language,' the speaker does not refer to a particular 'book' or 'language', rather, the speaker refers to 'books' and 'language' in general (-SR); therefore, they are also unknown to the hearer (-HK).

These two binary classifications of referentiality [-/+SR] and [-/+HK], thus, give rise to four basic noun phrase contexts that determine article use. Nouns classified as [-SR +HK] are generic, so 'a', 'the', and zero 'Ø' may be used to mark them. The classification [-SR -HK] represents *non-referential* nouns. It includes nouns which represent a class or an unspecified member of a class, so 'a' and zero 'Ø' may be appropriately used. Nouns which are classified as [+SR -HK] represent first mention nouns for which the referent is identifiable to the speaker, but not identifiable to the listener; therefore, 'a' or zero 'Ø' is used to mark such nouns. Lastly, nouns are referential and definite [+SR +HK] once they have been used in a discourse. Such nouns are marked with the definite article 'the'. The indefinite article 'a' can be alternated with zero 'Ø' before mass or plural count nouns in [-SP -HK] and [+SR -HK] environments. Table 1.3 summarizes the use of articles according to their referentiality.

Features		articles	examples
Situational reference	Immediate situation	the	<i>The</i> roses are very beautiful. (said in a garden)
	Larger situation	the	The universe is big.
Anaphoric reference	Direct	the	I bought a book and a pen, but I lost <i>the</i> book.
	Indirect	the	I bought a car. When I drove it, one of <i>the</i> tires was punctured.
Cataphoric reference		the	<i>The</i> man sitting there is my brother.
Sporadic reference		the	John goes to <i>the</i> theater.
Referential Unknown to speaker and hearer		a, $\emptyset$	A robber stole my car last night.
Non-referential		a, $\emptyset$	I found Kansas City <i>a</i> nice city.
Generic use		a/an	She is interested in learning <i>a</i> language.
		$\emptyset$	<i>Cigarettes</i> are bad for one's health.
		the	I can play <i>the</i> violin.

**Table 1.3: The use of articles with different references**

## 1.4 Purpose of the research

That the use of articles, considering these many factors, is a challenge for many intermediate and advanced ESL or EFL learners is not surprising. This research analyzes learners' production of the English articles 'a' or 'an,' 'the,' and zero ' $\emptyset$ ,' in order to discover if patterns of use differ between intermediate and advanced learners. This was done by analyzing guided conversations with the participants (Afghan EFL learners currently studying in the ELP program or at KSU in Master's degree programs). The following are research questions addressed in this research:

What patterned errors in article use occur in the online production of Dari-speaking EFL learners?

How does article production differ between intermediate and advanced EFL Dari learners?

It is significant that the participants are Dari speakers as Dari has an article system. As in English, the use of Dari articles is a complicated structural elements.

## 1.5 Articles in Dari

Dari is an official language of Afghanistan and is also spoken in neighboring countries, like Iran and Tajikistan. It is a variety of Persian and has an article system. According to Yameen (2005), articles in Dari are specific (definite) or non-specific (indefinite); however, the system of article use is quite different from English. The post-position morpheme ‘ra’, a bound morpheme, is used in Dari to indicate specificity, as in (1.1).

1.1.	<i>Tom</i>	<i>ketab</i>	<i>ra</i>	<i>award.</i>
	3s.subj	noun[direct object]	spec.ref	bring[3s.past]
	<i>Tom</i>	<i>book</i>	<i>the</i>	<i>brought.</i>
	<i>Tom brought the book.</i>			

In example (1.1), the morpheme ‘ra’ is used after the direct object ‘ketab’ which is a noun. Dari ‘ra’ has the same function as English ‘the’ as it denotes specific reference. The English definite article ‘the’ can occur with grammatical subjects or in prepositional phrases. In contrast, the definite article ‘ra’ in Dari is used solely with direct objects. If a speaker wants to refer to a definite person or thing that is not a direct object, then, a determiner (e.g. *hman* “that one”, *on* “that”) is used before the noun (pre-position) to indicate specificity, as in (1.2) and 1.3).

1.2.	<i>Tom</i>	<i>dr</i>	<i>hman</i>	<i>awz</i>	<i>abbazy kard.</i>
	3s.subj	prep.	det.	noun	swim[past]
	<i>Tomin</i>	<i>that</i>	<i>pool</i>	<i>swam.</i>	
	<i>Tom swam in the pool.</i>				

1.3. *Tom dr on awz abbazy kard.*  
 3s.subj prepdet. noun swim[past]  
*Tomin that pool swam.*  
*Tom swam in that/the pool.*

The zero article is used when the noun is used for non-specific reference, as in 1.4.

1.4. *Tom dr awz abbazy kard.*  
 3s.subj prep. noun[object of prep.] swim[past]  
*Tomin pool swam.*  
*Tom swam in a pool.*

In example (1.4), the definite Dari article ‘ra’, cannot be used after the noun ‘awz’ (pool) because ‘awz’ (pool) is not a direct object, rather it is the object of a preposition ‘dr’.

Additionally, the noun is not specific. If the noun were specific, ‘on’ or ‘human’ would to be used, as in (1.2) and (1.3) above.

Considering these examples, several differences from English are apparent. Dari noun phrases are head-initial and the Dari definite article ‘ra’ occurs after the noun if the noun is a direct object. However, ‘ra’ is only used with direct objects. If a noun is not a direct object, then, other determiners (e.g. ‘human’, ‘on’) are used before the noun to communicate specificity. This may help determine if language transfer is occurring, as the data may be analyzed to determine if the participants use the English definite article ‘the’ in appropriate contexts or substitute ‘that’ which is considered an equivalent of ‘the’ in Dari.

Non-specific (indefinite) articles in Dari are the morphemes ‘yak’ and ‘ee’. The morpheme ‘yak’ (‘one’) comes before the noun, while ‘ee’ is attached as a suffix to the noun.

The reason for placement of the morpheme ‘yak’ before a noun is that all numbers are obligatorily pre-posed to count nouns (see 1.5) while the indefinite ‘ee’ is post-posed (see 1.6).

1.5. *Man yak ketab daram.*  
 1s ind.art noun have[present]  
*I one/a book have.*  
*I have a book.*

1.6. *Man ketabee daram.*  
 1s noun+ind.art have[present]  
*I book+suffix have.*  
*I have a book.*

Both ‘yak’ and ‘ee’ are used to show non-specificity (indefiniteness) and genericness. These two morphemes have not been studied in order to document detailed patterns of when to use the morpheme ‘yak’ (one) or the suffix ‘ee’ with a noun in order to show non-specificity (indefiniteness). However, ‘yak’ is used before count nouns while the suffix ‘ee’ may be added to both count and mass nouns. Comparing the English indefinite article with the Dari, both represent a class or have a non-referential (–SR) function.

The Dari article system is relevant to consider as differences between English and Dari may impact acquisition. In other words, one’s primary language (in this case, Dari) may facilitate learning the English article system, or it may prohibit this process. According to Markedness Theory (MT), if a feature in the first language (L1) is ‘marked’ and the same feature is ‘unmarked’ in the second language (L2), that particular feature is easier to acquire. In other words, the L1 facilitates learning the feature in L2. However, if a particular feature is ‘unmarked’ in the L1 while it is ‘marked’ in L2, the result is that the feature is not as easily learned in the L2 (Eckman, 1977).

For example, the English sound /ð/ is a ‘marked’ feature for Dari learners because Dari does not have /ð/. Therefore, production of the /ð/ sound is more difficult for Dari speakers. On the other hand, English subject pronouns (I, you, we, they, he, she, it) are ‘unmarked’ features for Dari learners because Dari has subject pronouns, so it is easier for Dari learners to acquire this feature. In contrast, Dari subject pronouns are ‘marked’ for English speakers because there are two kinds of subject pronouns in Dari (separable and inseparable). Therefore, for an English speaker, it is more difficult to acquire subject pronouns in Dari because English subject pronouns are ‘unmarked’ compared to those in Dari. Considering MT, it might be easier for Dari EFL learners to acquire the article ‘*a/an*’, ‘*the*’, and the zero ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ in English because the two systems are similar in their distinctions for specificity. However, their positions in sentences differ. The bound morpheme ‘*ra*’ which indicates specificity in Dari is used in post-position only if the noun is an object while ‘*the*’ is used before a noun in English. Furthermore, ‘*the*’ may be difficult for Dari learners compared to ‘*a/an*’ and ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ because it is marked on the basis of discourse (e.g. information status) while ‘*ra*’ is marked on the basis of grammatical role.

## **1.6 Outline of thesis**

This thesis focuses on EFL Afghan learner’s production of English articles and consists of five chapters. Chapter two reviews previous research about the acquisition of English articles by second language learners. Chapter three explains the data collection process for this study and the methodology used for analyzing the data. Chapter four discusses the results of that analysis. Chapter five summarizes the main findings and recommends possible avenues for further research in terms of articles.

## CHAPTER 2 - Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to review past research concerning the acquisition of English articles by second language learners. The findings of these studies helped shape the hypotheses for this study.

### 2.2 Acquisition of Articles by L2 learners

English article use by second language learners has been researched by many scholars (Hawkins, 1991; Master, 1997, 2002; Yamada & Matsuura, 1982; Thomas, 1989; Ekiert, 2004; Ionina *et al.* 2008; Cholorow, 2006; and Trenkic, 2008 among others). These researchers focus on native speakers of languages that do not have article systems similar to English. That is, the main focus of these scholars was languages in which an article system does not exist such as Chinese, Polish, Japanese, Russian, or Korean, compared to English and Dari which do have an article system.

Master (2002) outlines three principal facts that help explain why acquiring English articles are difficult for non-native speakers:

- (a) *a/an, the*, and zero  $\emptyset$  (invisible) articles are the most frequent function words occurring in discourse,
- (b) function words are unstressed in speech (i.e. less salient) which affects the ability of non-native speakers to notice them in conversation; and
- (c) selecting the correct article requires the consideration of various factors, including definiteness, countability, and number (as discussed in Chapter 1).

Master (2002) showed that knowledge of information structure was effective in teaching articles to L2 English speakers. According to information structure, given information is canonically replaced with a pronoun or marked with the articles ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ or ‘*the*’ or another central determiner (e.g. some, this, any). By contrast, new information is canonically marked with the article ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ or ‘*a*’ or another central determiner (e.g. my, her, each, either, this) His study included 48 native Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Spanish, Arabic, Thai, and Vietnamese students that were divided in three groups. Each group was exposed to three different treatments: (a) instruction of article use based on information structure, (b), a traditional prescriptive explanation, and (c) no instruction. The two groups (a & b) were each taught from two different perspectives for three hours over a three-week period. The first group was taught on the basis of information structure, and the second group was taught a traditional explanation of the article system focusing on the count/non-count distinction, the definite/indefinite distinction, the effect of post-modification on article choice, and the generic/specific distinction.

A month later, the participants completed a cloze exercise in which they were supposed to fill the blank spaces of a given text with the correct article using the guidance to which they were exposed during the three-week period. Below is a sample of the exercise taken from Master (2002).

**Direction:** fill the blanks with *a*, *the*,  $\emptyset$

- a. Hilda visited \_1\_ small town in Italy.
- b. \_2\_ children are studying \_3\_ Arabic.
- c. \_4\_ patient made \_5\_ remarkable recovery.
- d. \_6\_ watermelon cost \_7\_ five dollars.
- e. \_8\_ dog chased \_9\_ rat into a tree.

Answers: 1.a; 2. the; 3.  $\emptyset$ ; 4. the; 5. a; 6. the; 7.  $\emptyset$ ; 8. the; 9. a



His findings showed that group (a) who was taught information structure as overarching guiding principles showed greater improvement (a mean score of 1.933) than the two other groups ('b' averaged a 1.235 and 'c' a 0.668). Master (2002) suggests that applying information structure framework to selecting the correct article helps non-native speakers to gain control of the English article system.

Ekiert (2004) studied the order of acquisition of articles by twenty Polish adult learners, including ten learners of ESL, ten learners of EFL, and five native English speakers as a control group. The non-native participants were in three levels in each group: three of low ability, three of intermediate ability, and four of high ability. She used a cloze test consisting of seventy-five deleted obligatory uses of 'a/an', 'the', or zero, and based on referentiality distinctions made by Huebner (1983) and Thomas (1989), she found that Polish ESL/EFL learners make errors even in more advanced stages of acquisition. Her subjects at both higher levels of proficiency (intermediate-ability and high-ability) overused the zero 'Ø' (invisible) article while the definite article 'the' and the indefinite article 'a' were overgeneralized by intermediate speakers more than by the advanced participants in the contexts of (-SR+HK), [+SR+HK], [+SR-HK], and [-SR-HK]. According to the Markedness Differential Hypothesis, articles are marked features in Polish compared to English because Polish lacks an article system while articles exist in English; therefore, it is difficult for Polish learners to acquire the system of articles in English.

In a comparable study, Thomas (1989) describes similarities and differences between first language (L1) learners and second/foreign language (L2) learners in terms of acquiring English articles. His participants were thirty adult [Japanese (N=13), Chinese (N=6), Korean (N=3), Spanish (N=2), Italian (N=2), German (N=1), French (N=1), and Greek (N=1)] ESL learners

who had lived in the USA for 2-30 months and completed an English language program. In his experiment, he used a picture description task in pairs. One participant described one of four pictures and the other participant listened to the description and determined which picture was described. Thomas analyzed his data based on the referentiality of the nouns and compared his findings to Cziko's (1986) research concerning L1 acquisition of English articles. Thomas (1989) found that his adult L2 learners used the indefinite article 'a' or 'an' in referential indefinite contexts (+SR-HK), while child L1 learners frequently use the definite article 'the' (and which is considered the "incorrect" choice). In addition, adult L2 learners overused the definite article 'the' in referential indefinite context (+SR-HK). Thomas, furthermore, compared acquisition of the English articles between learners whose languages have an article system (+Art), and learners whose languages lack an article system (-Art). His findings showed that both (-Art) and (+Art) learners used 'the' 81% and 97% appropriate in (+SR+HK) environments. The use of 'a' was less accurate for both (-Art) and (+Art), while (-Art) learners produced 'Ø' more frequently in *indefinite* and *definite* contexts than (+Art) learners did. Both (-Art) and (+Art) learners employed 'the' in (-SR-HK) more than in (+SR-HK) contexts. Since Dari has an article system, this study has a relation with Thomas' study because some of his participants were EFL learners whose L1 has an article system (e.g. Spanish, Italian). Therefore, it will be possible to compare the order of acquiring English articles occurred by EFL (+Art) learners in his research with the Dari (+Art) learners and helped to create the hypotheses in the present research.

In other research, Master (1997) discusses the acquisition, frequency, and function of English articles and suggests that successful learning depends on the learners' first language as predicted by markedness theory (MT). From a MT perspective, articles are marked features for

ESL/EFL learners whose first languages lack an article system such as Chinese or Russian. Therefore, it is more difficult for native speakers of these languages to acquire the English article system than perhaps other features of English, like nouns and pronouns. Master (1997) found that learners whose language lacks an article system (-Art), like Japanese, acquire the zero 'Ø' article early. He adds that acquisition of the 'Ø' article may happen by default because there is no evidence that learners' successful production of zero 'Ø' results from the fact that the learners have control over the form; they may simply be unaware of zero 'Ø' use. Master also found that the acquisition of the zero 'Ø' article occurs in a U shape in languages which have an article system (+Art), like Spanish. That is, learners, at the first stage, produce the zero 'Ø' article correctly; in the second stage, they over-generalize it; and finally, they control it. Learners whose first language is (-Art) over-generalize the use of 'the' once they realize zero 'Ø' is not correct all the time. However, ESL learners whose native language has an article system (+Art) overuse definite article 'the' from the very beginning; and they produce zero 'Ø' less than ESL (-Art) learners do. As Master (1997) also discusses languages which have article systems, this has a direct relation to the present research as the participants in the present research have an article system in their L1, Dari.

When comparing zero 'Ø' and 'the' with 'a', the acquisition of 'a' has been found to occur later and is independent of 'Ø' and 'the'. According to Chaudron and Parker's (1990) research on noun phrases (NPs), examining NPs forms in the three universal discourse contexts (current topic, known referent, and new referent) by a free production task in which the participants (40 Japanese) described a series of pictures. They found that (-Art) learners acquire the indefinite 'a' after they master the definite marker 'the'. They further suggest that learners' early correct production of definite article 'the' may interfere with acquiring 'a'. This appears to

be true even for learners whose native language has an article system. Master's (1987) study supports the idea that early correct production of the definite article '*the*' interferes with acquiring the indefinite article '*a*'. That is, learners already acquired 'the', but after learning '*a*', they employ '*a*' in the contexts where '*the*' should be used. The following example from Master shows the overgeneralization of '*a*' in an ESL Spanish (+Art) learner's production (p. 218).

2.1. *I live on a four floor.*

2.2. *We are having laundry in a same building.*

2.3. *I think in a day is better.*

As examples (2.1), (2.2), and (2.3) indicate, the Spanish learner overused the indefinite article '*a*' in the context where '*the*' is appropriate; However, Master (1987) and Chaudron and Parker (1990) claim that learners gain control on producing the definite article 'the' at the first stage; then, they acquire '*a*'. Thus, learners lose control of 'the' as soon as they acquire '*a*'.

It is clear that EFL/ESL learners make errors at different stages of proficiency until they master the English articles system. For example, beginning, intermediate and even advanced learners overuse the zero ' $\emptyset$ ' and the definite article '*the*', while the indefinite article '*a*' is overgeneralized by intermediate learners. It is also suggested by Master (1987) and Chaudron and Parker (1990) that the acquisition of the indefinite article '*a*', for non-native speakers, occurs after learners master '*the*' and zero ' $\emptyset$ '. Learners who lack an article system (-Art) in their first language like Japanese, Chinese, or Polish acquire the zero ' $\emptyset$ ' article early and overgeneralize '*the*' once they realize zero ' $\emptyset$ ' is not correct all the time. However, learners whose native language have an article system (+Art) overuse '*the*' from the beginning and acquire zero ' $\emptyset$ ' in a U shape. (-Art) learners are approximately one level behind (+Art) learners because they need to gradually recognize that English is different in this regard from their native language.

### 2.3 Goals of the present study

Considering what is known about the acquisition of English articles, it is safe to say that learning the system of English articles is very difficult for EFL learners whose first languages lack an article system. It may also be difficult for EFL learners whose L1s have an article system. Dari EFL learners have an article system in their first language, yet many have problems acquiring English articles. The Dari article system does differ from English in the factors determining correct selection of an article, so perhaps that difference contributes to learners' difficulties.

This research investigates the production of English articles by Dari EFL learners in semi-guided conversation. These conversations were related to the participants' lives, their teaching and learning experiences at KSU and Balkh or Kabul University. These conversations between the researcher and the participants were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to determine whether the following hypotheses were supported:

1. Both intermediate & advanced EFL Afghan Dari learners will overuse the zero ' $\emptyset$ ' article.
2. Both intermediate & advanced EFL Afghan Dari learners will produce the definite article '*the*' more accurately than they produce the indefinite article '*a*' or '*an*'.

A secondary goal of this research is to suggest some pedagogical strategies for EFL Afghan teachers in teaching English articles. As a TEFL professional, I hope to benefit from this research through gaining a better understanding of my Afghan students' learning processes, not

only of the acquisition of articles, but of various language acquisition processes. I also hope that this project will prepare me to conduct further research later in my career.

## **CHAPTER 3 - Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides information about the participants, the design of the study, as well as the procedures for collecting data, and how the data were coded for analysis.

### **3.2 Participants in this study**

The participants in this study are male and female Afghan adult learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) who are currently studying at Kansas State University (KSU). The female participants (N=2) and male participants (N=10) are between 18 and 35 years old. These participants were divided into two groups: group A (N=6) are students who have completed their English Language Program requirements (they tested as “advanced” learners) and have been approved to enroll fulltime in graduate coursework in the university; group B (N=6) are students currently studying English in the English Language Program (ELP) and are considered “intermediate” speakers (determined by English placement tests). The placement test is a requirement for every non-native English speaker who studies at KSU. It is administered by the ELP program and tests students’ English proficiency level. All participants were exposed to English in classrooms and private courses prior to coming to the USA. These experiences ranged from one year to more than four years, primarily, in Afghanistan.

Five of the participants are pursuing their Master’s degree in engineering; two are pursuing their M.A. degree in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language); five are undergraduate English majors. They are all native speakers of Dari and literate in Dari. The

seven graduate students currently pursuing their Master's degrees graduated with a Bachelor's degree from either Kabul or Balkh University in Afghanistan. Those students who have not yet completed their Bachelor's degrees are in either the junior or senior year of their English undergraduate major program at Balkh University.

The length of stay in the United States for these participants varies. Group B students average only one month in Kansas while Group A (those who have exited the ELP program) have been in Kansas for 8-18 months. While in the United States, Group B are living in residence halls (they are primarily under graduate students, except one of them who is a graduate student living off-campus) while all of Group A live off-campus in apartments.

### **3.3 Study Design**

Each participant met with the researcher and participated in a semi-guided conversation with him for ten to twenty minutes, with an average length of seventeen minutes. All of the participants discussed similar topics, including their first impressions of the United States, their life in Manhattan, and their plans for how they may use their experiences in the U.S. when they return to Afghanistan. For the purpose of facilitating conversation, the following prompt questions were asked during the conversation:

1. What were your first impressions of the United States?
2. What did you find most difficult when you arrived in Manhattan?
3. What is your life like in Manhattan?
4. Are there any differences in your lifestyle?
5. Do you have any problems living in Manhattan?
6. How are your classes going?



7. What classes have you taken so far?
8. How do you compare the instruction at Kansas State University with Kabul or Balkh University in Afghanistan?
9. Do you notice other differences between the educational system at KSU and Kabul or Balkh University?
10. What challenges have you had in your courses at KSU?
11. What challenges did you have in your courses at Balkh University or Kabul University?
12. What will you do after you graduate from KSU?
13. How will you use your experiences in the US when you return to Afghanistan?
14. When you go back to Afghanistan, what changes will you bring to your university for improvement?
15. What changes will you make in your teaching?

The reasons, on one hand, for discussing similar topics with each participant were to be consistent in the type of data collected because it might be significant if these data will be used in other research (e.g. their perceptions of cultural issues); more importantly, these topics relate to the personal experiences of the participants and, therefore, they were more talkative.

### ***3.3.1 Procedure for collection and transcription of sample***

The data collection process was begun after gaining approval to work with human subjects from the Institutional Review Board at Kansas State University. The complete IRB application was submitted to the IRB office in September, 2009. All research protocol for human subjects was followed in the design and implementation. Participation was voluntary and the learners were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants gave their informed consent prior to the recording of the data and were told about the general purpose of the project and their rights as participants.

All conversations between the researcher and the participants were recorded for later transcription and analysis. Seven to ten consecutive minutes of each participant’s speech were transcribed. These minutes were excerpted from the conversation, excluding the first two minutes which usually consisted of formulaic greetings and introductory speech. A very few unfamiliar and unidentified sounds uttered by one or two participants were not transcribed. Some backchannel cues (e.g. hum, yes, uh) used by the researcher to keep the participants speaking were not transcribed since they do not affect the participants’ production. Similarly, coughing and laughing of the participants and the researcher in a few instances were not transcribed due to the fact that these issues are not the focus of the present study.

### ***3.3.2 Extraction of the data***

A total of 599 noun phrases were extracted for analysis; this included approximately 50 from each participant. The number of tokens collected from the two groups (ELP and Post-ELP) is displayed in Table 3.1

<b>Participants’ group</b>	<b>Tokens</b>
ELP	315
Post-ELP	284
Total	599

**Table 3.1: Total number of tokens**

#### ***3.3.2.1 Exceptions***

Some tokens where the identification of an article was not certain, or where it was unclear whether a given sound represented an article or a hesitation/clearer morpheme were

excluded (e.g. *that makes um ah kind of um kind of like misunderstanding*). Nouns followed by possessive adjectives, such as ‘my’, ‘your’, ‘our’, ‘their’, ‘his’, ‘her’, or ‘its’, and determiners such as ‘some’ and ‘any’ were not extracted. Furthermore, some partitives that indicate lack of specificity (e.g. a few, a bit) were excluded from this research. The reason for the exclusion of partitives, possessive adjectives and determiners is due to the fact that they cannot occur with articles.

### ***3.3.3 Coding of the data***

The data for this study were analyzed on the basis of previous research about acquisition of English articles. Therefore, the coding described here includes discourse factors (referentiality and information status), and various properties of noun phrases as well as the L2 participants’ English proficiency level. It also includes two measures determined by a native English-speaking consultant (whether an article should be used and what type)

#### ***3.3.3.1 Referentiality***

One of the factor groups according to which the data were coded is referentiality as discussed in section 1.3. Referentiality is a discourse-based factor which influences the choice of article use. It refers to whether a noun has specific or non-specific reference. Examples (3.1), (3.2), (3.3) display different types of referentiality.

- 3.1. I was not familiar **with the campus**.
- 3.2. I live **with Afghan roommate** and didn’t have any difference like others.
- 3.3. Nowadays, they are trying to teach **students** how to learn by their own.

There are two types of referential NPs. In (3.1), the speaker is referring to a particular campus, the one which both participants attend (+SR+HK). Earlier in the conversation, the speaker talked about the university and the place where the university is located. Therefore, the phrase ‘*with the campus*’ is considered referential. Likewise, in (3.2), the reference ‘Afghan roommate’ is specific and known to the speaker, although not known to the hearer (+SRHK). However, in (3.3), the noun ‘students’ is non-referential (–SR) as it makes a generic reference rather than a specific reference. All tokens were coded as either referential or non-referential as information status (+/–HK) was considered separately.

### **3.3.3.3 Information status**

Information status is another discourse-related factor which influences the choice of article use. In this study, information status deals with three types of information in discourse: known information, brand new information, and anchored new (adapted from Prince 1981). This is a departure from previous studies where “anchored new” were included in the “known to hearer” category.

Information which is known can be recognized by the speaker from general shared knowledge or because it has already been mentioned in the discourse. In (3.4), the speaker refers to a university class. Since both the interviewer and the participant are university students, the idea of a class is shared general knowledge. Therefore, this reference is considered to be known information.

- 3.4. We need **a university class** not for credit just we want to know the method of listening,
- 3.5. There were some kind of questions in the book. We had to answer **the questions** from our own country.
- 3.6. I need it some classes for more give experience to know **the method of listening**, how to teach English, how to improve English.

In a similar fashion, ‘questions’ in (3.5) is also considered known information. Since the questions were mentioned in the first part of the utterance, the second reference to questions (the NP extracted) is known to both speakers as the reference has already been established. In (3.6) an anchored new reference is made. The participant is discussing his classes and then introduces the topic of teaching methodologies. Since the participant is relating the ‘method of listening’ to his classes, this is considered an ‘anchored new’ reference as he anchors his new topic, ‘the method of listening’ to the previous topic, his classes. The last information status factor, brand new, refers to new topics introduced into the discourse that are not known to the interlocutors and are not connected to previous topics in the discourse.

#### ***3.3.3.4 Semantic properties of noun***

The data were also coded for two semantic properties of the noun in the noun phrase. Mass nouns are generally marked by ‘the’ or ‘∅’ while count nouns are marked by ‘a/an’, ‘the’, or ‘∅’. Some examples from the data are displayed in Table 3.2.

Properties of noun		Articles	Examples
mass		the, Ø	United State is hum more had more different culture and the <b>people</b> is not different. it's difficult for me to get used to these system because there we didn't have Ø <b>homework</b> .
count	Singular	a/an, the, Ø	The other one was also technical communication which was a writing <b>class</b> . last semester also it was fine especially in Ø <b>spring semester</b> I had four classes I will go back Afghanistan, and there I will be again Ø <b>faculty</b> and I will work outside. Of course I will return home, and continue working in the <b>university</b> again
	plural	the, Ø	Actually we cannot get along with the <b>people</b> who are mu: who have many difference with our culture. we have Ø food <b>problems</b> and so far we are still struggling

Table 3.2: Examples of mass and count nouns

Additionally, each extracted noun was coded for grammatical number (plural or singular).

### 3.3.3.5 Type of noun phrase

Since English articles precede nouns, the nouns in the data were coded based on the type of NP in which the nouns occurred. The first type of NP is a bare noun (N), that is, it appeared without any accompanying modifier, as in (3.7). Other types of NPs are nouns with noun phrase (NP) as a modifier (as in 3.8) nouns as the object of a Prepositional Phrases (PP) as in (3.9), and nouns that were modified by adjectives (ANP), as in (3.10)

3.7. It was not suitable for me, but day by day I get **habit**. (N)

3.8. **The system of teaching** is not not more different. (NP)

3.9. I live **with Afghan roommate**. (PP)

3.10. I come to the library it is **a relaxed place** I study here. (ANP)

### ***3.3.3.6 Native-speaker use***

The decision of whether or not to use an article and the type of article that should be used in each extracted case was judged by an English native speaker. This native speaking consultant is a graduate teaching assistant in Rhetoric and Composition (English department, KSU).

## **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter presented information on the methodology including the participants, the design of the study, the procedure for extracting the data, and the way how the data was coded. Results from the analysis based on the above coding system are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4 - Discussion of Results

### 4.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to describe the patterns of use of English articles ‘*a*’, ‘*the*’, and zero ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ by Afghan EFL learners. It will describe when the participants in this study used articles with noun phrases in terms of their accurate or inaccurate production of English articles.

### 4.2 Overall Accuracy

The native English-speaking consultant reviewed all (N=599) instances of article use. In 76% (N=458) of them, she judged that an article should be used while in 21% (N=126) of them, no article was required. In the remaining 3% (N=15), use of an article was optional. In a similar fashion, the participants (both Group A and Group B) used an article in 73% (N=436) of the noun phrases while 27% (N=163) appeared with the zero article. Table 4.1 shows that the participants used articles at comparable rates to the English native speaker. However, on closer inspection, the patterns of use differ. This finding suggests that having an article system in their first language (Dari), encourages use of articles in the L2, but differences between the L1 and L2 article systems lead to problems in the use of articles in their L2, in this case, English. Articles in Dari are marked on the basis of grammatical role (as discussed in Chapter One), while in English the choice of article depends more on referentiality, information status and various properties of nouns.



<b>Total</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Used</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Not required</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Optional</b>	<b>%</b>
599	Native	458	76	126	21	15	3
	ELP/Post-ELP	436	73	163	27	N/A	N/A

**Table 4.1: Overall rates of article use (judgment of native English-speaking consultant and Participants)**

#### ***4.2.1 Accuracy in article selection***

By comparing the participants' use of articles with that preferred by the native speaker, it was possible to determine "accuracy" rates for each type of article. The results indicate that the participants were most accurate in their production of the indefinite article 'a/an', followed closely by the definite 'the', and then the zero 'Ø'. These results displayed in Table 4.2 indicate that the participants accurately selected the indefinite article 'a/an' 88% (N=89/101) of the time, while they produced the definite article 'the' accurately 78% (N=255/337) of the time, but zero 'Ø' only 47% (N=77/161) of the time. The general accuracy results for the selection of articles were submitted to a Chi Square analysis in order to determine whether the distribution of the participants' use was significant. The result of the test indicates that the distribution was significant (p=0, Chi Square 58.938).

<b>Types of Articles</b>	<b>Right</b>	<b>Wrong</b>	<b>Accuracy %</b>
Definite	255	82	78
Indefinite	89	12	88
Zero	77	84	47

**Table 4.2: Overall accuracy in production of articles (p=0, Chi Square=58.938)**

Comparing the two groups of participants, both Group A (Post-ELP) and Group B (ELP) showed similar orders in their rates of accuracy (Indefinite => Definite => Zero) in producing English articles. Table 4.3 compares the production of English articles between the two groups.

Participants	Articles	Right	Wrong	Accuracy %
ELP	Definite	125	42	74
	Indefinite	45	8	84
	Zero	43	52	45
Post-ELP	Definite	130	40	76
	Indefinite	44	4	91
	Zero	34	32	51

**Table 4.3: Accuracy by participant group (ELP and Post-ELP)**

These results indicate that the Post-ELP participants show slightly higher mastery of all three article types than the ELP students. Both the ELP and Post-ELP groups show greatest control of the definite and indefinite articles, but they struggle in using the zero ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ article appropriately. The distributions for choice of article use by each group, ELP and Post-ELP, were also submitted to independent Chi Square tests to determine if the overall significant result was caused by one or the other group. However, the distribution for each group remained significant: Post-ELP, ( $p=0.0000035$ , Chi Square 25.114), and ELP ( $p=0.00000007$ , Chi Square 32.906).

### 4.3 Properties of nouns in article selection

In order to further determine what motivated the participants’ article choice, the data was analyzed according to the type of noun phrase. Table 4.4 indicates the accuracy rate of each article with the three types of phrases (NP, PP, and ANP)

Types of Articles	Types of Phrases	Right	Wrong	Accuracy %
Definite	Adjective	56	17	76
	Noun	137	35	79
	Preposition	62	30	67
Indefinite	Adjective	32	1	96
	Noun	41	7	85
	Preposition	16	4	80
Zero	Adjective	16	16	50
	Noun	40	38	51
	Preposition	21	30	41

**Table 4.4: Production of articles with types of phrases**

The type of noun phrase does not appear to affect accuracy in article production. As Table 4.3 shows, the participants were slightly less successful in producing each article type with prepositional phrases. But overall, the percentages for zero ‘Ø’ remain very low. This might be due to the invisibility of the zero ‘Ø’ article in discourse. From a perceptual saliency perspective, learners grasp the beginning and end of utterances faster than elements within a sentence (Slobin 1979). They also tend to focus on content words rather than functional words. Therefore, the zero ‘Ø’ which does not “exist” in sentences would be very subtle for learners to notice, remember and manipulate.

The participants’ successful production of indefinite articles is perhaps helped by the fact that they distinguish singular count nouns and mass nouns, understanding that ‘a/an’ is not possible with plural or mass nouns, only with singular count nouns. Table 4.5 shows the learners’ production with count and mass nouns.

Countability		Articles	Right	Wrong	Accuracy
Count	Singular	the	146	50	74
		a/an	84	9	90
		Ø	13	61	17
	Plural	the	84	16	84
		Ø	46	13	77
Mass	Singular	the	18	14	56
		Ø	14	7	64

**Table 4.5: Production of articles with count nouns**

Table 4.5 indicates that learners were accurate in 84 of 93 instances of ‘a/an’ when used with singular count nouns. Comparing their production of the zero ‘Ø’ article with count nouns, learners were much more accurate with plural count nouns (77%) than with singular (17%). This

may result from the choices of selecting an article (as Table 4.5 shows) being narrower with plurals (either ‘*the*’ or ‘ $\emptyset$ ’) than with singular nouns (‘*the*’, ‘*a/an*’, or ‘ $\emptyset$ ’).

#### 4.4 Referentiality and information status in article selection

An analysis of the data, on the basis of referentiality, reveals marked tendencies in the accurate selection of articles. Table 4.6 indicates that in referential contexts learners produced the definite article ‘*the*’ and the indefinite article ‘*a/an*’ at high rates of accuracy (89% (N=244/272) and 90% (N=39/43) respectively), but employed the zero ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ correctly only 20% (N=14/67) of the time. In non-referential contexts, ‘*a/an*’ (86%, N=50/58) and zero ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ (67%, N=63/94) were more often accurately employed than the definite ‘*the*’ (17%, N=11/54).

Referentiality	Articles	Right	Wrong	Accuracy %
Referential	Definite	244	28	89
	Indefinite	39	4	90
	$\emptyset$	14	53	20
Non-referential	Indefinite	50	8	86
	$\emptyset$	63	31	67
	Definite	11	54	17

Table 4.6: Accuracy of articles in terms of referentiality

The overall distribution of the articles’ production, from a referentiality stand point, was significant (referential:  $p=0$ , Chi Square=151.827 and non-referential:  $p=0$ , Chi Square=66.686 respectively). This result shows that the low accuracy rate with the zero ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ article is due to non-use in referential contexts (20%) rather than use in non-referential contexts (67%). The data showed that the participants overused ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ both in definite (58%, N=39/67) and indefinite (20%, N=14/67) referential contexts. Although they were quite successful with definite and indefinite in referential contexts, the underuse of ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ in referential contexts indicates that ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ is not salient.

In contrast, the participants overused *'the'* in non-referential contexts, as in (4.1). The data show that learners, in most instances, used the definite article *'the'* where zero was appropriate. They used *'the'* having a reference in mind, but the reference is neither established, nor is it specified. In other cases, like (4.2), they use the definite *'the'* before a proper noun (Kabul University) which is specific (in which case zero is always used). For example:

4.1. when I was **in the school** I was in **the dorm** and with friends and I didn't live any more with my family just when I got married and lived with her about four months and came here

4.2. It's obvious **at the Kabul University** the education level is not too much high, here is high.

In each of these examples, the speaker has a specific referent for *'school'*, and *'Kabul University'*, but the reference has not been established in discourse. The speaker may assume that the hearer knows what references are meant. This is true only in sentence (4.3) because *'Kabul University'* is a proper noun and unique in that sentence; thus,  $\emptyset$  is appropriate whether or not the reference is established in discourse.

Comparing the language production of the two groups of learners (ELP and Post-ELP) on the basis of referentiality, it is evident that they are almost comparable in production of the definite article *'the'* regardless of their proficiency level. Table 4.7 below compares the learners according to their proficiency level.

Referentiality	Proficiency level	Articles	Right	Wrong	Accuracy %
Referential	ELP	the	118	15	88
		a/an	14	2	87
		Ø	8	29	21
	Post-ELP	the	126	13	90
		a/an	25	2	92
		Ø	6	24	20
Non-referential	ELP	the	7	27	21
		a/an	31	6	83
		Ø	35	23	60
	Post-ELP	the	4	27	15
		a/an	19	2	90
		Ø	28	8	77

**Table 4.7: Comparing production of ELP vs. Post-ELP on the basis of referentiality**

As Table 4.7 indicates, both ELP and Post-ELP learners are comparable in referential contexts while the Post-ELP learners are generally stronger in the non-referential contexts than the ELP learners. This suggests that learners first gain control of referential contexts, then non-referential contexts.

In order to further define the learners' patterns of article use, the data were analyzed for both referentiality and information status, first for the English native speaker and then comparing that use with that of the participants. Table 4.8 indicates article distribution by the English native speaker in terms of referentiality and information status which are discourse-based factors influencing the choice of article. Table 4.8 shows that, for the native speaker, the definite article '*the*' would be used very rarely in Non-referential Anchored (NA) contexts (only 6%), Non-referential Brand new (NB) (2%), and Referential Brand new (RB) (12%) of the time. However, '*the*' would be used very frequently in Referential Anchored (RA) (87%) and Referential Known (RK) (86%) contexts. The indefinite article '*a/an*' would be rarely used in RA (9%) and RK

(9%) contexts, but fairly frequent in RB (63%), NA (58%) and NB (48%) contexts while the zero ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ occurs in RA (4%) and RK (5%) contexts rarely and is most favored in NK (52%), NB (50%), and NA (36%) contexts.

Information Status	Referentiality	Definite		Indefinite		$\emptyset$	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Anchored	Non-referential	3/53	6	31/53	58	19/53	36
	Referential	119/137	87	12/137	9	6/137	4
Brand New	Non-referential	3/135	2	65/135	48	67/135	50
	Referential	7/57	12	36/57	63	14/57	25
Known	Non-referential	8/29	28	6/29	21	15/29	52
	Referential	161/188	86	17/188	9	10/188	5

Table 4.8: Representation of article use with information status and referentiality by a native English speaker

Information Status	Referentiality	Definite		Indefinite		$\emptyset$	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Anchored	Non-referential	21/53	40	11/53	20	21/53	40
	Referential	100/137	73	8/137	6	29/137	21
Brand New	Non-referential	30/135	22	41/135	30	64/135	47
	Referential	18/57	32	22/57	39	17/57	30
Known	Non-referential	14/29	48	6/29	21	9/29	31
	Referential	154/188	82	13/188	7	21/188	11

Table 4.9: Production of articles by the participants according to information status and referentiality

A comparison of this representation of article use with information status and referentiality by the native English speaker (Table 4.8) with the actual distribution of the article use by the participants (see Table 4.9) shows that the participants used the definite article ‘*the*’ in RK (82%) and RA (73%) at comparable rates to the native speaker. The same is true for use of the indefinite ‘*a/an*’ in RA (6%), NK (21%), and RK (7%), and the zero ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ in NA (40%), NB (47%), and RB (30%) contexts. However, the participants overused ‘*the*’ in NA (34%), in NB

(16%), and in RB (20%). This problem is mostly results of the ELP learners' use since the Post-ELP learners were much stronger in non-referential contexts (as compared in Table 4.7). In a similar fashion, '∅' in NK (21%) and 'a/an' in NA (38%) were underused suggesting that non-referentiality influenced the rate of accuracy primarily for the ELP group. Since referentiality and information status are discourse-based factors, one would assume that the more learners are exposed to language (the Post-ELP students averaged a much longer time of study), the more successful their production may be.

This comparison shows that the participants have control in producing 'the' with anchored and known information in referential contexts as known and anchored information tend to be marked with 'the', but they struggled mostly with non-referentiality. That is, they overused 'the' in NA and NB and underused 'a/an' and '∅' in NA and NK. Therefore, non-referentiality with known and anchored referents makes article selection more difficult.

Brand new information would be marked with 'a/an' or zero by the native-speaker. As Table 4.10 below indicates, the participants were most successful in production of 'a/an' or zero with brand new information.

Information Status	Definite		Indefinite		∅	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Anchored</b>	99/121	81	16/19	84	15/50	30
<b>Brand new</b>	9/48	19	58/63	92	52/81	64
<b>Known</b>	147/168	88	15/19	79	10/30	33

**Table 4.10: Participant's overall accuracy of articles according to information status**

As Table 4.10 indicates, the participants applied 'the' successfully with anchored and known information where 'the' tends to be used, but they overused it with brand new



information where the indefinite 'a/an' tend to be used. This suggests that learners have a developed pattern of used of the definite article 'the' with anchored and known information, but have overused it. They also have a developed pattern of use of the indefinite 'a/an' with brand new information, and, in particular with singular count nouns (as Table 4.5 shows).

In terms of the order of acquisition of English articles, the findings of the present study are slightly different regarding indefinite 'a/an' and 'the' compared to previous research (e.g. Kubota, 1994; Thomas, 1989; Yamada and Matsuura, 1982) in which the definite article was produced successfully compared to the indefinite article. In the present study, learners' overall accuracy rates show the indefinite article 'a/an' was produced more appropriately than 'the' and 'Ø'. This difference may be related to the participants' L1. For example, in Thomas' (1989) study, only a few participants (N=7) were from languages which have an article system, as most of her participants (N=23) were from languages with no article system. Similarly, the participants in Kubota (1994) and Yamada and Matsuura's (1982) study were Japanese which also lacks an article system.

This difference in order of accuracy in production may also be due to the type of data used in this study. This study analyzed data from guided conversations while the previous studies used cloze paragraphs (Ekiert 2004) and picture description tasks (Thomas 1998). More accurate production of indefinite articles may have occurred in the guided conversations used here because learners were free in their production and contexts for using an article were not obligatory, as it is in most research (e.g. Ionina et al., 2008; Yamada and Matsuura, 1982).

Lastly, the overall accuracy rate of the zero 'Ø' article, as the present study indicates, is the lowest compared to 'a/an' and 'the'. This is supported by Thomas (1998), Ekiert (2004),

Yamada and Matsuura (1982). The problem with 'Ø', as the present study suggests, is mostly in referential and non-referential contexts and with singular count nouns, but it was produced more appropriately with mass nouns and plural nouns compared to 'the'. Successful use of 'a/an' in non-referential and unknown to a hearer (-SR-HK) contexts and 'the' in referential and known to a hearer (+SR+HK) contexts also supported by Ekiert (2004) and Thomas (1982).

## CHAPTER 5 - Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary of Findings

The present research investigated Afghan EFL learners' production of English articles in guided conversation. It aimed to discover how these learners use articles to designate definiteness or indefiniteness in different noun phrase environments. The data were also analyzed according to the participants' proficiency level – those studying at the English Language Program ELP (group B) and those pursuing graduate studies Post-ELP (group A).

The findings indicated that Group A was slightly more successful than Group B, suggesting that length of time leads to greater accuracy in article production (this difference could also be due to longer length of exposure to native speaker input as Group A averages one month in the U.S. while Group B only 8-18 months). The participants, in general, were most successful in their production of English articles 'the' (78% accuracy) and 'a/an' (88%), but struggled with the zero 'Ø' (47%). Upon comparing the two groups, both showed the order 'a/an' => 'the' => 'Ø' from most accurate to least accurate in almost all categories except in non-referential contexts where 'the' was produced less accurately compared to 'a/an' and 'Ø' (Table 4.6).

Additionally, other factors were shown to influence accuracy in article selection. These included information status (known, brand new and anchored), referentiality and number with count nouns. As discussed in the results, learners were more successful using 'the' with known information (88%) and with anchored information (81%) while using 'a/an' with brand new information (92%) and with singular count nouns (90%). The use of the zero 'Ø' showed low

rates of accuracy with anchored and known information, and singular count nouns. In terms of referentiality, both Group A and Group B used the definite article ‘the’ (A 88%, B 90%) comparably in referential contexts, but the rate of accuracy for the zero ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ (A 21%, B 20%) article was very low regardless of the groups’ proficiency level.

Comparing the previous research (Kubota, 1994; Ekiert, 2004; Yamada and Matsuura, 1982; Trenkic, 2008 among others) in which the focus was on (-Art) languages, the present study contributes some findings to L2 article acquisition. The findings of the previous research in which (-Art) learners have more problems with ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ is also supported by the present study with (+Art) learners. That is, acquisition of ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ is not only the most problematic feature for (-Art) learners but also for (+Art) learners. The previous research claimed that the difficulty with ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ is due to L1 transfer. However, the present study suggests that this difficulty relates to invisibility or non-existence of the ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ article in discourse: ‘ $\emptyset$ ’ is not salient to learners in order to process and internalize it. Thus, learners even in advanced stages of learning cannot easily gain control of this feature.

## **5.2 Future Research**

The present research categorized the participants into two levels (a) learners who study at the English Language Program (ELP) and (b) learners who completed the English Language Program (Post ELP). To conduct similar research in the future, it would be of interest to have participants at three levels (beginner, intermediate, and advanced). These levels could be distinguished by taking a standard English language proficiency test, or choosing learners from a language institution where learners will be studying in different proficiency levels (e.g. freshman, sophomore, junior and senior in an English department). In such a study, a clear

distinction of developmental stages of English article acquisition could be made. As of now, in terms of the English article production, it is not clear what patterned errors beginning students may have compared to intermediate and advanced learners.

The participants in this study as discussed in Chapter Three are Dari EFL learners whose first language has an article system. It would be interesting to expand the scope of the research by having participants from other languages (e.g. Chinese, Korean, Japanese, or Russian) that lack an article system. Such cross linguistic research that considers the factors discussed here utilizing natural conversation data would indicate differences between languages with an article system and languages without an article system. Since the data in previous research was mostly collected through cloze test or picture description tasks, it would be useful to collect data through free production in which participants will be discussing different topics of their interests and information status and referentiality are fully needed in order to frame discourse. A cloze test exercise compared to free production is artificial and may not demonstrate natural production of articles. Similarly, quantitative research on article use should be conducted on Dari because this topic has not yet been investigated. If this investigation were to include information status and referentiality as has been done in English, it would provide us with similarities and differences between the two systems. It would give a picture of how Dari learners mark noun phrases in terms of referentiality and information status comparing their production in English.

In the present study, indefinite article use was limited to singular nouns due to the many options for expressing plural indefinites (e.g. ‘some’, ‘any’, as well as ‘a few’ or ‘a bit’). Future research could examine these different ways of expressing indefinite reference in English and among EFL speakers.

Articles are intertwined with nouns, it is sometimes difficult to decide whether the error is due to the choice of an article, or the error is due to countability or grammatical number. For example, in the sentence '*They record a CDs*' the speaker used the indefinite article 'a' with a plural noun '*CDs*'. Thus, the article 'a' is used incorrectly; however, if the noun '*CDs*' were used in its singular form, the article 'a' would be correct. So, further study on the use of articles with these noun features should be done to disentangle these features.

### **5.3 Pedagogical Implications**

This research suggests that English articles are complex features for non-native speakers to master, especially for those speakers whose first language lacks an article system. There are different factors which influence article use. For example, the properties of nouns (singular, plural, count, non-count, proper, common) influence the correct choice of article. Referentiality and information status are other factors which contribute to the choice of an article. Additionally, English articles are among the most frequently occurring morphemes in discourse, but are some of the least salient, which requires non-native speakers to concentrate and process each article on the basis of those factors which influence them while often not actively noticing their use.

Therefore, EFL/ESL teachers should consider the fact that teaching the system of English articles at the beginning levels of instruction is less useful than providing learners with extensive authentic language input. At this stage, the focus on countability of specific vocabulary is of great importance since articles and nouns are intertwined, and the properties of nouns influence the choice of article use. Once learners become familiar with basic structures and vocabulary, they will be ready to be consciously focused on more elaborate features of grammar, in this case, the article system.

This study, further, suggests that teaching about information status (known, brand new, and anchored) will also provide learners with an understanding of article choice within discourse. Since information status is a discourse-based feature, instructors should teach information status to students who are in higher proficiency levels (e.g. upper intermediate, advanced). This strategy will help students to determine the choice of article use between definiteness and indefiniteness once they differentiate known vs. brand new information in discourse.

#### **5.4 Personal Impact**

The present research provided me with much information about second language acquisition processes; that is, how L2 learners acquire English articles. Having done this research, I realized that EFL teachers must have knowledge of second language acquisition theories. By having that knowledge, EFL instructors are able to consider different issues (e.g. L1 transfer, critical period, processing, input, or output), in their teaching processes. This knowledge will also help teachers to analyze and investigate students' language problems or other topics related to second language acquisition. As the present study shows, the invisibility or lack of saliency of the zero 'Ø' article is one reason behind unsuccessful production of the learners. Thus, the more the article is made salient the better the result might be. For example, in a reading exercise, it will be very significant to use the symbol 'Ø' before nouns and bold 'a/an' and 'the' so that learners should notice them and compare the use of each article with one another in a text.

This study has had a great influence on my professional and academic career. As a result of working through this process, I will be able to conduct similar research in the future. It further provided me with a new perspective on supervising and advising my students' monographs (a single authored-book or research paper) as a requirement for their BA degrees in the English

Department at Balkh University. For example, if my students have problem in a certain area of the language (e.g. control of plurality, subject verb agreement, prepositions), I will pinpoint and specify the problem; then, investigate the previous research and findings and choose my participants in different proficiency levels (e.g. beginner, intermediate, advanced) and collect data according to the topic of the research. Once I record and transcribe the data, I will analyze it on the basis of the previous research framework and compare my findings with previous research and try to find out why or why not learners are successful in their production of feature. Finally, I will be able to suggest possible remedies for the problem.

Similarly, I see myself able to advise my students concerning their research paper and apply this process with all its details so that my students become able to conduct research autonomously. For example, how to choose a topic? How to create hypotheses? How to collect data? How to do a literature review? How to choose participants? How to analyze data? How to report findings? How to use Microsoft Excel program to analyze the data? How to transcribe? The present study, indeed, empowered me to assimilate the answers to all these questions and to be able to conduct similar research in the future.



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## APPENDIX A - Informed Consent Form

### Foreign Language Use and Production

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT:                      EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT:

You are invited to participate in a project that looks at how people from Afghanistan learn English as a foreign language. My name is Ahmad Nasim Khoshgowar, graduate student at Kansas State University. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are from Afghanistan and have learned English as a foreign language.

If you decide to participate in this study, I will converse with you for 15 to 20 minutes. The conversation will be recorded, but your name will not be used in any way for my research. I will also ask you to complete a brief questionnaire providing information about yourself and your background studying English. Completing these tasks will take thirty minutes.

Any **risks** (i.e. physical, psychological, social, or legal) involved in this study are minimal and are comparable to risks in everyday life.

There is **no cost** to you for participating **nor** will you receive **any payment** for your participation in this study. However, this project hopes to provide you with an indirect benefit by contributing to knowledge of how people learn English.

Please note that any information obtained by this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. More specifically, all written or recorded computer files will be coded so that no personally identifying information is on the label or the file name. Any analysis of the written or recorded documents will use code

names and numbers. No personally identifying information will be included in the analysis of your answers, thus your anonymity will be ensured. All materials will be kept in a secure place such as a locked file cabinet; all data files will be stored on a computer that requires password access. All of your written answers and recorded conversation in this research project and any photocopies will be used for research and data analysis purposes only. The data files will not be released to anyone, including other researchers, without your written permission (you can give your consent to this below).

Following analysis, **the data will be kept in a secure place for possible further research purposes or destroyed if no longer needed for research**. In the future, very brief excerpts of the data and might be used for research publications if you give your consent to this below. All data used for these purposes will be coded to ensure the protection of your identity.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with me or Kansas State University. **You are under no obligation to participate in this study**. You are free to (a) discontinue participation in the study at any time, and (b) request that already written answers or recorded conversation be destroyed and thus excluded from the study.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described. You understand that this project is for research. You also understand that you are free to withdraw your consent at any time and stop participating at any time after signing this form without explanation and without consequences (without penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which you may otherwise be entitled).

If you have any **questions about this study** now, please ask me. If you need additional information later, please do not hesitate to contact **Ahmad Nasim Khoshgowar** or **Mary T. Copple**, my thesis advisor. You can reach Ahmad Nasim Khoshgowar at 785 304 0716, e-mail: [nasimkho@k-state.edu](mailto:nasimkho@k-state.edu), and Dr. Copple at: 785-532-1924, e-mail: [mcopple@ksu.edu](mailto:mcopple@ksu.edu). Should

you have any **questions regarding your rights as a research subject**, you can contact: Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224 *or* Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice Provost for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

You may keep a copy of this same form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Please answer the following questions by checking a response and by signing your initials:**

I grant the investigator permission to **share with students (researchers in training)** in the field excerpts of the data in the classroom.

yes       no      \_\_\_\_\_

Initials

I grant the investigator permission to **share with other researchers** in the field excerpts of the transcribed data.

yes       no      \_\_\_\_\_

Initials

I grant the investigators permission to use the written excerpts and recorded conversation at professional meetings and in professional publications. Any name or place references will be changed.

yes       no      \_\_\_\_\_

Initials

## **APPENDIX B - Debriefing**

Dear Participant,

I appreciate your participation in this research project. Please remember that you may withdraw your participation in this research at any time. This research project, in general, focuses on students learning English as a foreign/second language. Particularly, it examines the production of English articles by Afghan Dari EFL learners.

Your contribution to this research project has provided me with data for completion of my research project. Please do not hesitate to ask me any questions about this research project or your participation.

## **APPENDIX C - Discussion Prompt Questions**

1. What were your first impressions of the United States?
2. What did you find most difficult when you arrived in Manhattan?
3. What is your life like in Manhattan?
4. Are there any differences in your lifestyle?
5. Do you have any problems living in Manhattan?
6. How are your classes going?
7. What classes have you taken so far?
8. How do you compare the instruction at Kansas State University with Kabul or Balkh University in Afghanistan?
9. Do you notice other differences between the educational system at KSU and Kabul or Balkh University?
10. What challenges have you had in your courses at KSU?
11. What challenges did you have in your courses at Balkh University or Kabul University?
12. What will you do after you graduate from KSU?
13. How will you use your experiences in the US when you return to Afghanistan?
14. When you go back to Afghanistan, what changes will you bring to your university for improvement?  
What changes will you make in your teaching?



## **APPENDIX D - Afghan EFL Learners Background Questionnaire**

**Participant #** \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Gender**

- a. Male            b. Female

**2. Age**

- a. 18-25        b. 25-35        c. 35-45        d. 45-55

**3. University level**

- a. Sophomore        b. Junior        c. Senior        d. Graduate student

**4. What is your native language?**

- a. Dari        b. Pashto        c. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**5. How long have you been studying English?**

- a. Six months to one year  
b. One year to three years  
c. Three years to five years  
d. More than five years

**6. How long have you been in the United States?**

- a. One month to five months  
b. Five months to one year  
c. One year to one and half year  
d. One and half year to two and half year  
e. More than three years

**7. How long did you study English before you came to the United States?**

- a. Six months to one year  
b. One year to two years  
c. Two years to four years  
d. More than four years